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## **Theologies of Liberation and the Philippine Context**

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## Review Article

### Theologies of Liberation and the Philippine Context

VITALIANO R. GOROSPE, S.J.

**SALVATION AND LIBERATION: IN SEARCH OF A BALANCE BETWEEN FAITH AND POLITICS.** By Leonardo & Clodovis Boff. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1984. viii, 119 pages.

**A GHANDIAN THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION.** By Ignatius Jesudasan, S.J. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1984. xi, 179 pages.

**CHANGING THE WORLD: AN AGENDA FOR THE CHURCHES.** By Vincent Cosmao. Trans. by John Drury. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1984.

These three books on LIBERATION THEOLOGY (LT) from three different contexts—Latin American, Indian, French—with varying accents and emphases, all published by Orbis Books in 1984, provide not only a comparative study of current Liberation Theologies but also suggest relevant insights and practical imperatives for an emerging indigenous theology of liberation in a Philippine context. Here it must be pointed out that a contextualized Filipino LT must ultimately be drawn from the life experience of the Filipino Christian people, especially the poor and oppressed, in the light of their Christian faith. This truth is very well expressed by the title of Gustavo Gutierrez's new book—*We Drink From Our Own Wells* [PS 32 (1984): 519-22]

#### SALVATION AND LIBERATION: A BALANCE BETWEEN FAITH AND POLITICS

The 1984 Vatican document on LT warned against forms of LT which identify salvation in Jesus Christ with the historical human liberation process and reduce the Kingdom of God to an earthly or temporal kingdom. This

deviant form of LT "leads to an essentially *political* re-reading of the scriptures" (p. 27). Two famous Latin American theologians of liberation who are brothers—Frs. Leonardo and Clodovis Boff—have been suspected of, if not charged with, reducing God's supernatural gift of salvation to political movements of liberation, Christian faith to Marxist ideology, theology to sociology. Their joint book, however, as the title suggests, is an honest search, in the light of Medellín, Pope Paul VI's Encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, and Puebla, for a balance between faith and politics, between evangelization and human development, between historical struggles for liberation and salvation in Jesus Christ. This book is a vindication of the position of the Boff brothers on the relationship between salvation and liberation.

Chapter I introduces the reader to the fundamentals of liberation theology. The author spells out in a fresh manner the role of the Christian faith, the Church, theology, and pastoral practice in the messianic task of liberation: how can we become authentic Christians in an unjust world of peoples in misery? The reader will easily recognize in Leonardo Boff's three efficacious means to liberation: socioanalytic (seeing), hermeneutic (judging), and pastoral practice (acting), the standard methodology of liberation theology; namely, scientific social analysis, theological reflection, and orthopraxis.

Chapter 2 is the central chapter of the book, in which Leonardo Boff clarifies theologically, with the help of four analogical models, the *identification* and at the same time the *differentiation* of salvation and liberation. The main thesis of the Boff brothers is that salvation in Jesus Christ is not identified *with* political, economic, and social liberation but it is historically identified *in* political, economic, and social liberation. To demonstrate the intimate relationship (identification) of the mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ and historical liberations and at the same time reveal their differentiation (non-identity), the authors employ four analogical models which are quite illuminating—(1) Jesus is one person with two natures, human and divine (Chalcedonian model); (2) historical events are signs of grace or sin; justice and love are signs of the kingdom (Sacramental model); (3) the unity of love of God and neighbor (Agapic model); (4) unity of body and soul (Anthropological model).

The third and last Chapter of the book is done by Clodovis Boff, and brings down to earth in a lively imaginary "dialogue" among a parish priest, a theologian, and a Christian activist not only the ongoing debate on salvation and liberation, faith and politics, but the many positions and counterpositions on LT which are being presented, refuted, or endorsed within the Philippine context by Maoists and Christians, leftists, moderates, and rightists or 'NDs', 'SDs' and 'LDs'. This imaginary conversation is a novel attempt to bring the dialogue from the level of theological abstraction to the language of ordinary lay people. Still it is theologically dense, and does not make for easy reading. In the Philippine situation, the real and rich faith and life experiences of ordinary Filipino Christians would provide a better source of Christian

inspiration and motivation for a Filipino LT than any imaginary "conversation".

The main points of the position of the Boff brothers in searching for a balance between faith and politics at the end of the chapter (p.116) are worth summarizing.

- (1) Liberation is the social emancipation of the oppressed. The capitalist system must be replaced by a new society of the socialistic type.
- (2) Social liberation is not merely social; it is open to transcendence and involves a transhistorical reference which Christian revelation calls salvation or the Kingdom of God.
- (3) This salvation or Kingdom is to be found within the process of liberation but only when it is morally good or humanizing.
- (4) It is through the Christian faith that one "sees" the mystery of salvation within liberation. Theology is critical reflection on this faith experience.
- (5) Salvation is not to be found only in liberation but liberation is the most important locus of its concretization and in Latin America, liberation is its dominant dimension.
- (6) The Christian faith as professed in the Church and lived out in practice is necessary to guarantee that liberation will move in the direction of the Kingdom and salvation.

Filipino Christians committed to social justice and to the liberation of the Filipino poor and oppressed will not find it difficult to agree with the main points of this summary, which is theologically sound and authentically Christian but some may have a few reservations or modifications with regard to Nos. (1) and (5). Although this scholarly and theological book on the relation between salvation and liberation does not make for easy reading, it is relevant to the Philippine context to the extent that it touches such controversial questions as the relation between religion and development, church-state relations, and the Church's involvement in "politics".

#### A GHANDIAN THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION

Those who are accustomed to Western and Christian thought patterns at first glance may have objections to the title and content of this book. In his Preface, Jesudasan, a native Indian, rids us of any such initial prejudices against "A Ghandian Theology of Liberation":

This work is an exposition of Ghandi's theology of liberation. Although Ghandi did not produce a formal, systematic theology of liberation, he worked for the cause of liberation and laid down his life in that process, and he wrote and spoke about liberation, as about everything else, from a religious and theological perspective. (p. ix)

Jesudasen in Ch. 3 shows that Ghandi's theology of liberation (*Swaraj* is his Indian term for liberation) was effectively a political theology that is from first to last God-oriented and is rooted in his theo-political theory of action or *satyagraha* (truth-force). The means towards the full realization of liberation in God-realization are Ghandi's theology of noncooperation (exemplified by the dramatic civil disobedience of the famous Salt march) and his theology of constructive program (exemplified by the liberation of the untouchables, the *harijans* or 'the poor children of God'). This chapter also investigates Ghandi's various concepts of God and his theological anthropology that underlie *satyagraha*.

What can be said about Jesudasen's thesis that there can be an Asian and Ghandian home grown brand of LT which is neither Christian nor imported from Latin America?

First, Jesudasen's fine study is a happy bridge between Eastern and Western thought, Christian and non-Christian religions, in the area of social justice. Ghandi's LT, though not Christian, is an authentic theology that shares with Christian LTs the following liberation themes—faith in the Hindu Christ, a preferential option for the poor, the centrality of nonviolent suffering love as the way to liberation, the reality of social sin, and the primacy of correct practice over doctrine. The heart of Ghandi's Christology is not orthodoxy but orthopraxis.

Secondly, there is a close affinity between Indian and Filipino thought and therefore the discovery of Ghandi's Indian term *Swaraj* provides the needed impetus to continue the search for a parallel Filipino concept and term for liberation. With regard to the ongoing task of indigenizing or contextualizing the Christian faith within the Philippine context and culture, mention must be made of one pioneer effort by Dr. Jose de Mesa in exploring the possibilities of the Filipino experience of *ginhawa* or total well-being as the most apt Filipino concept and term for liberation instead of the traditional term *kaligtasan* or salvation.

Thirdly, Ghandi's strategy of active nonviolence (*ahimsa*) based on the force of truth (*satyagraha*) finds fresh relevance to the current revolutionary Philippine situation. Today when the Philippine Church is caught in the dilemma between nonviolence and violence, Ghandi's nonviolent LT shows that active nonviolence is not only Christian but Asian.

Finally, without the risk of Christian extrapolation, we discover in Ghandi's LT three significant Christian themes of the theology of liberation: (1) the Christic presence of God in the poor and untouchables—the *harijans* or people of God; (2) the reinterpretation of *karma* as a social and communal expression of sin, rather than the privatized or individualized notion of sin; (3) the necessity of the cross or suffering love for the liberation and God-realization of all people. (p. 136); in short, the centrality of the Paschal Mystery.

## CHANGING THE WORLD: AN AGENDA FOR THE CHURCHES

The first two books reviewed are from the Third World. This third book is from the First World. The author, Vincent Cosmao, is Director of the Lebrecht Faith and Development Center in Paris. Among other initial prejudices I had against this book (for instance, the author, though a scholar, appeared to lack Third World exposure and the content of the book in scholastic format of closely interlinked theses seemed too analytical)—the principal one can be put in the form of a question: What practical LT applicable to the Third World (in particular the Philippine situation) could possibly come from a First World European perspective? As it turned out all this was clearly unfounded bias.

The author develops his main thesis—Changing the World: Agenda for the Churches—in eight chapters through thirty-three theses. The book is divided into two main parts. The first part is on the need for a revolutionary change in the unjust international relationship of dominance and dependency between the developed nations and the underdeveloped countries. The second and main part deals with the role of the Church of Jesus Christ in bringing about this new international economic order.

Chapters 1-3 (Th. 1-12) point out the pressing need for a new international economic order, analyze the causes and problems of underdevelopment and development, and show how societies today have been structured and sacralized according to gross inequality. What is necessary is the transformation of mental structures—wrong ways of thinking that underdevelopment is due to technological backwardness rather than the unjust exploitation of underdeveloped countries by developed nations. What therefore is needed for global transformation is both the conscientization of underdeveloped peoples and the education of public opinion in developed nations.

Chapters 4-8 (Th. 13-33) present the several roles of the Church in the social transformation of the world. The task of liberation and development incumbent on the Church in the modern world comes from the Church's mission to proclaim the gospel to the poor. The author gives a brief history of the Church in its discontinuous efforts to change societies structured in terms of inequality. The Church can proclaim anew the gospel to the poor only if she remains faithful to her rich Judaeo-Christian tradition. Thus the author shows the struggle for justice in both Old and New Testaments by expounding the social message of the prophets, the practice and teaching of Jesus Christ on the side of the poor, and the hitherto untapped social doctrine of the Fathers of the early Church.

The author is at his prophetic best in exposing what happens to Christianity when it becomes the "civil religion" of the West. It loses its credibility and effectivity. Only by refusing to become the tool of the State will the Church regain its chance to represent the poor and their hopes. Only if the

Church remains faithful to what Christ intended it to be—a “Church of the poor”—only then can the Church become once again a proclamation of good news to the poor and a divine force for the social transformation of the world. Chapter 7 presents the heart of the Christian faith-vision of liberation and development: a world that is structured in sin needs the liberating grace of Jesus Christ and the final goal of development is the transformation of individuals and nations to the image and likeness of God (a parallel of Ghandi’s self-realization through God-realization).

The book concludes (Chapter 8) with the demands of both Christian faith and Christian theology today. The political requirement of the practice of the Christian faith is commitment to justice. According to the author, involvement in the struggle of justice in behalf of the poor is one modern approach to the experience of the true God—only the God of justice is God. One of the tasks of theology today is to show the connection between the building of a just and more fraternal international society and the witness of the Christian faith.

When we reflect on the Philippine situation of dependency in terms of Neo-Colonialism through Monopoly Capitalism (IMF, World Bank, and TNCs), of the local situation of internal and external colonialism maintained and supported by a totalitarian form of government which keeps the people in a state of oppression and exploitation, we cannot help but ask a disturbing but very pertinent question: What is the Catholic Church in the Philippines doing in all this? Or rather, what are the majority of Filipino Christians doing in the face of the deteriorating national crisis? Is the Philippine Church a preserver of the status quo or does it promise to be a political force for radical social change? This is what Cosmao’s book is saying to us, if it is not saying anything new with regard to LT.

Reading this book in the light of the crucial and indispensable role of the Philippine Church at this critical time in our history gives this book a new relevance and value for those committed to justice and poor among us. The crucial role of the Philippine Church in the face of an uncertain future spawned by the present socio-economic and political crisis is precisely the main theme of a study by John J. Carroll, S.J. (*Human Society* series no. 37, Manila: Human Development Research and Documentation, 1985). According to Carroll the Philippine Bishops as a result of Martial Law have evolved and staked out a position which shows that their priorities are pastoral and religious rather than political. They wish to promote an *activist* religion in which the activist’s Christian faith is the main source and motivation of his commitment to justice through nonviolent means. Likewise, Cosmao’s book finds the ultimate framework and motivation for the commitment to social justice in the Christian faith.

Some may find the critically and finely reasoned LT position in this book so clear and logical as almost to appear contrived. Be that as it may, the three positive features of the book as far as this reviewer is concerned are: first,

it deals with international justice from a *global* perspective; secondly, it provides an intellectually rigorous *theological* grounding of LT; and thirdly, it proposes a LT whose main source of motivation for socio-economic political involvement is the Christian faith and praxis.

To sum up, the three books under review are relevant to the Philippine context to the extent that they address themselves to LT questions of the hour such as (1) the Church's mission of salvation and its relation to socio-economic, political development; (2) the option of non-violence in national liberation; and (3) the Church's role in the social transformation of Philippine society.