

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

Assmann: Teologia de la Liberacion

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Philippine Studies vol. 19, no. 3 (1971): 545–548

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Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

Book Reviews

INTRODUCTION TO A THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION

TEOLOGÍA DE LA LIBERACIÓN. By Hugo Assmann. Montevideo, Uruguay
Centro de Documentación. 1970. 56 pp.

Liberation as a value particularly relevant to the contemporary Philippines has yet to emerge in the consciousness of the Filipino. At present, it remains the message contained in the slogans of the radical few. It is consequently viewed by many with no small measure of "fear and trembling." What is needed perhaps is to introduce our people to a notion of liberation the dynamism of which has been derived not from hate but from love. One way to attempt just such a project is to reflect on the task of liberation in the light of the Christian faith: it is, in the last analysis, to elaborate a theology of liberation.

The best introduction to the Theology of Liberation currently available is Hugo Assmann's *Teología de la liberación*. It is a small study, a pamphlet really comprising documents 23-24, series 1, of the publications of the Centro de Documentación, Montevideo, Uruguay. Though unassuming in appearance, it is substantial in content and, in its presentation, thoroughly systematic.

The reason for the insistence on the use of the word *liberation* lies, as is true apropos the use of any other word, in its aptness and precision. It realizes the situation fully. Hugo Assmann writes:

"Liberación", tanto en el sentido de "adquirir", cuanto en el sentido de "recuperar" la libertad, es siempre una noción referida a una ausencia actual de libertad. Ella envuelve pues, un claro juicio sobre la realidad, condenándole en la forma de su "status quo" (p 6).

Latin American theologians seem agreed that "there are three levels of meaning to the term 'liberation': the political liberation of oppressed peoples and social classes; man's liberation in the course of history; and liberation from sin as a condition of a life of communion of all

men with the lord." How the liberation movements are disposed in relation to these levels will determine their character and chances for ultimate success.

Assmann divides his treatise into five parts.

The first part is a historical introduction to the theme of liberation. It points out rather forcefully how the Latin Americans came to the realization that their most urgent need is for liberation, not development. The following sums up this history well:

La década del sesenta fue sucesivas frustraciones para America Latina: el fracaso de la "Alianza para el Progreso", la deformación manipulada de la ALALC, el control creciente, por parte del imperio, de organismos pretendidamente desarrollistas (OEA, CEPAL, CIES, CIAP, BID, AID, etc.), la imposibilidad de ser escuchados aun en los reclamos mas minimos (en los encuentros internacionales de la GATT, de la UNCTAD, en el caso de la CECLA en 1969), la militarización del continente, el montaje de potentes aparatos represivos con el apoyo directo de la CIA, la invasión masiva del capital extranjero y la consecuente desnacionalización y deformación direccional de la industrialización, etc.

Es en este contexto de frustraciones acumuladas que surge la oposición critica a los modelos desarrollistas que, todavia, sean capaces de ablandar o esquivar las contradicciones estructurales del capitalismo—a traves de evidentes victorias sectoriales en modelos selectivos, pero excluyentes de la mayoría de la población...; globalmente, con todo, representan un callejon sin salida. El insoportable precio de las tentativas desarrollistas es la marginalización creciente de amplios sectores del pueblo y la represión a toda forma de protesta (p. 7).

The second part describes a few of the more fundamental elements that constitute the Theology of Liberation. Here Assmann discusses three themes basic to the understanding of the Theology of Liberation: (1) its contextual point of departure, which he says all agree on, is the historical situation of dependence and oppression of the peoples in the "Third World"; (2) its fundamental need to refer to the "human sciences"; and (3) its constant insistence on the authentically historical presence of Christianity and Christians, reiterated in its treatment of various "favorite" topics, e.g., the need for realism among Christians so that they may realize that *this world* (as it is now) is a place of conflict, is "not naturally open to change."

In the third part, Assmann describes certain characteristics of the Theology of Liberation. He develops here the essential role of praxis in authentic faith, praxis, however, not in the sense merely of "applying"

the truth to a particular situation, but of "doing" or "creating" the truth in a given historical situation. He writes:

Se inaugura pues un lenguaje, en el cual la tarea de transformación del mundo se conjuga tan intimamente a la de su interpretación, que esta ultima es vista como imposible sin la primera. Se declara el fin de toda "logia" que no sea "logia" de la praxis. Se rompe el hechizo verbal de la palabra eficaz. Se denuncia la "gratificación substitutiva" del "decir la verdad", en la medida en que no se apoya en el "hacer la verdad." (p. 23.)

Hablar de 'Liberación' significa, por fuerza de la propia palabra que tiene su eje semantico en el proceso de la articulación humana en la historia, referirse a la *acción eficaz*. (p. 24.)

With this understanding, he notes: "La verdad es el nombre dado por la comunidad historica a aquellos actos historicos que fueron, son y seran eficaces para la liberación del hombre", a quotation Assmann borrows from R. Alves, *A Theology of Human Hope*.

Part Four is very useful in that here Assmann compares and contrasts the Theology of Liberation with other contemporary theological trends, e.g., the Theology of Revolution, Political Theology, the Theology of Hope, etc. For those interested chiefly in seeing how in fact the Theology of Liberation confronts certain problems in Latin America today, the fifth part will be the more instructive. Here, for example, he tries to understand the specific response of theologians of liberation to the special primacy of politics in Latin American life.

In his concluding remarks, Assmann points at a few of the more important lacunae in the Theology of Liberation. The most significant here is its need to develop as a fruit of reflection on the Latin American experience of faith an authentic Christology.

Among the peoples of Latin America today, the decade of the seventies represents an era of hope, a hope more realistically grounded than the optimism generated by the Alliance for Progress in the early sixties. This new Latin American mood is probably most clearly manifest in the *Conclusions* of the Medellin Conference in 1968. We read there of a sense of being "on the threshold of a new epoch in the history of our continent... a time full of zeal for total emancipation, of liberation from every form of servitude, of personal maturity and of collective integration. In these signs we perceive the first indications of the painful birth of a new civilization." It is a hope, however, borne of despair and the frustration that accompanied the realization that the development decade of the sixties, with its programs of massive aid in technology and money, had failed, had in fact aggravated both the poverty and the dependency of the Latin American masses. It is a hope, therefore, grounded in the insight that development in Latin

America is unattainable apart from liberation, and, more significantly, confirmed and nurtured among the Christian peoples of the continent by a Theology of Liberation.

The experience of Latin America holds much that is of value to the Philippines. Our similar problems, set starkly against our similar historical backgrounds and often closely scrutinized in terms of similar North American standards of progress, render their responses to their situation relevant to us. The Philippines too finds itself today at a critical threshold. For most Filipinos, however, the preoccupation of the moment remains development or modernization. But the lesson of Latin America consists of the insight that the dream of development cannot be realized within the context of dependency and domination that still prevails among us. Liberation is necessary.

Toward the Christian Filipinos' understanding of their real situation, and its demand upon them indeed Hugo Assmann's small book is a big help.

ANTONIO V. ROMUALDEZ

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS: A DIPLOMAT'S VIEW

AUSTRALIAN AMBASSADOR: *International Relations at First Hand*. By W. R. Crocker. Melbourne University Press. Melbourne. 1971. Pp. viii, 211.

What kind of a man was Trygve Lie? What went on behind the scenes at Lake Success during the formative years of the United Nations? What were the intrigues that attended the formation of Palestine? What kind of a man was Nehru? Is it possible for India, with its great variety of lands, peoples, and languages, to be governed as one country? What sort of a man was Sukarno, and what of his campaign to take over West Irian? How were the Indians treated in East Africa? How did Belgium and Holland survive the loss of their respective empires? What effect did American Occupation have upon Italy? What is the effect of foreign Aid upon Asian countries? How much of this Aid comes from Australia? What are the drawbacks to diplomacy that the modern ambassador has to overcome?

These are some of the topics discussed in this perceptive, and in some respects important, book. The author is Walter Crocker who for almost two decades was Australia's representative in lands as diverse as India, Indonesia, Nepal and East Africa on the one hand, and Canada, Belgium, Holland and Italy on the other.