

LIBERATIONIST READING THE BIBLE

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Abstract

Teologi Pembebasan pada beberapa dekade yang silam sangat berpengaruh bukan hanya di Amerika Latin sebagai tempat asalnya namun juga di pelbagai bagian benua lain termasuk Asia. Teologi Pembebasan berangkat dari refleksi tentang situasi konkrit Amerika Latin dan pelbagai bagian dunia lain tentang pengalaman masyarakat akan penindasan dari pelbagai kekuatan politik, sosial dan ekonomi dengan sasaran untuk membebaskan masyarakat dari pelbagai kekuasaan yang menekan dan memperbudak masyarakat banyak yang tidak berdaya dalam cahaya biblis.

Hanya persoalan yang muncul adalah cara para teolog dari Teologi Pembebasan menafsirkan teks-teks Kitab Suci untuk mendukung pandangan teologis mereka. Bagi mereka, Tuhan menghendaki agar para penindas “diturunkan dari takhta mereka” seperti yang dikumandangkan oleh Magnificat Maria dalam Lu 1:46-55 bila perlu dengan cara kekerasan.

Hal ini mengakibatkan tanggapan serius dari Vatikan, yang pada intinya tetap menghargai usaha para teolog dari teologi Pembebasan namun serentak mengevaluasi metode interpretasi Kitab Suci yang mereka pakai.

Keywords: The Liberation Theology

Introduction

The Liberation Theology has appeared in various forms throughout the world, particularly in the third world. It appears in Latin America with the focus on social injustice, in Africa with the focus on apartheid and in Asia with the focus on the relationship with other major religions.

The Inspiration for Liberation theology came from the 1969 Medellin Conference¹ which discussed about “The Church of Latin America at the present day” follows up the second Vatican Council which opened itself to the world and its problem of the human race. In *Gaudium et Spes*, the Vatica Council stated that the Church sought to unite itself with the human race particularly in its struggle.

¹ Medellin conference is the second Latin American Bishops conference held in Medellin in 1968.

“The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.”²

Liberation theology is a new way of doing theology. It is based on the concrete reality of the society, which covered by poverty, injustice and oppression. Based on this reality, liberation theologians reflect the word of God to illuminate their pastoral action in praxis level. The way they read the scriptures is also unique. They read the bible from the point of view of the poor. Therefore Ratzinger said that theology of liberation is a complex phenomenon, which ought not to be oversimplified.³

1. Liberation theology

According to Gustavo Gutierrez, OP, as its founder, the liberation theology is “a theological reflection born of experience of a shared effort to abolish the current unjust situation and to build a different society, freer and more human.”⁴

1.1. The background of Liberation theology

The starting point and fundamental concern of Liberation theology is the Latin American reality pervaded by poverty, injustice and dependence to the other society (North America and Europe)⁵ as a “new form of imperialism.”⁶ Therefore the Liberation Theology wants to be the prophetic voice of the poor and the oppressed ones.

Liberation theology came to existence because of the inspiration which came from the 1968 Medellin conference. The conference saw that the Latin American situation was pervaded with dehumanizing poverty, social injustice and

² Vatican II, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes, no 1)*, in Documents of Vatican Council, ed. by James H. Kroeger, (Pasay City: Paulines Publihsing House, 2011), 227.

³ Pontifical Biblical Commission, *Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, Rome, April 23, 1993, I.E.1.

⁴ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation, History, Politics and Salvation*, trans and ed. by Caridad Inda and John Eagleson, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1973), ix.

⁵ Segundo Galilea, *The Theology of Liberation, A General Survey*, trans. Olga Prendergast and Alberto Rossa, CMF., (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1984), 13-14

⁶ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation, History, Politics and Salvation*, 27.

oppression caused by new colonization: “the oppressive political regimes and economic dependence on powerful neighbor from the North America.” Therefore Medellin condemned neocolonialism, recommended social change and political reformation, while the Church committed itself to the preferential option for the poor.⁷

1.2. The goal of Liberation Theology.

The goal of the Liberation theology is to make every efforts in order to enable the “integral development” that is to lead people from less human to more human in their real condition.⁸ This goal is well formulated in the *Populorum Progression* no 47 by Paul VI, “To build a world where every man, no matter what his race, religion, or nationality, can live a fully human life, free from servitude imposed on him by other man or by natural forces over which he has not sufficient control.”⁹

For liberationist it is not enough to give economic “aid” to the poor through “*caritative*” action. This *caritative* action will maintain their dependence to other group as the giver of donation; because the fundamental need of the “less human people” is to enable them (the poor) to achieve an authentic humanity as human being requires. Therefore the social unjust, poverty and oppression must be exterminated. The root of the cause itself must be expelled.¹⁰

1.3. The source of Liberation Theology

The sources of the Liberation theology are **the reality** (poverty, oppression, dependence and underdevelopment) in which the Church is living and **the faith of the Church**. The theology of liberation connects dialectically these two sources, from praxis to the verification provided by the faith of the Church,

⁷ Jacques Dupuis, “Liberation Theology,” in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, ed. by Rene Latourelle and Rino Fisichella, (New York: St. Paul, 1990), 1091.

⁸ Segundo Galilea, *The Theology of Liberation, A General Survey*, 16.

⁹ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation, History, Politics and Salvation*, ix. Cfr. Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* (1967), no 47.

¹⁰ Jacques Dupuis, “Liberation Theology,” in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, 1092.

and from that faith of the Church goes back to Christian praxis. It makes the synthesis between “orthodoxy” and “orthopraxis.”¹¹

1.4. The promoters of the Liberation Theology.

Father Gustavo Gutierrez (Peru) is well known as the founder of the Liberation theology. He was followed by Leonardo Boff (Brazil), Oscar Romero and John Sobrino (El Salvador), Juan Luis Segundo (Uruguay), Albert Nolan (Africa) and Aloysius Pieris (Asia).

1.5. The process of doing liberation theology

There are three steps in the process of doing liberation theology namely: **social analysis** which aimed to find the cause of the oppressive situation of the poor, the **biblical hermeneutic**, in which the theologian strive to find the plan of God for the poor and the oppressed as long as it contained in the bible, and **the practical efforts** which seek to determine the proper action for overcoming the oppressive situation in accord with the divine plan found in the second step.¹²

In their social analysis, liberation theology borrows the Marxist method of social research (only) for finding the social reality as Marxist method can assist to it. In this process, the theologians want to know what happens and its reason.¹³ And from this research they found that the main cause of the social injustice, poverty and oppression is the unjust social structures of the society.

In the second stage Liberation theologians reflect the situation in the light of faith. They strive to find the nourishment in the bible as its spiritual inspiration. Therefore the liberation theologians read the bible from the point of view of the oppressed and the poor.¹⁴ In reading the bible, the liberation theologians, do not only seek the spiritual meaning but also seek its practical meaning in the concrete situation. This is because the liberation hermeneutic seeks to unleash the

¹¹ Segundo Galilea, *The Theology of Liberation, A General Survey*, 19-20.

¹² Jacques Dupuis, “Liberation Theology,” in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, 1093.

¹³ It must be noticed that even though they borrow the Marxist method of social-political research, but according to Jacques Dupuis, Liberation theology does not succumb to Marxist because it also keeps a critical attitude to Marxist as a materialistic and atheistic ideology.

¹⁴ Jacques Dupuis, “Liberation Theology,” in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, 1094.

transformative energy of the biblical text to which the foundational word historically refers.

The third process is pastoral action. In this step the theologians implement the Christian faith in the economic, cultural and socio-political sphere.¹⁵ In its action liberation theologians favor the non-violence methods: dialogue, persuasion and moral pressure. Physical force is possibly used as the last resort.¹⁶

2. The way the liberationists interpret the bible: Bible is read from the angle of the oppressed and the poor¹⁷

The goal of liberation theology is to liberate the “new people of God from their slavery, oppression, poverty and social unjust caused by social-political structure. Therefore, in reading the bible the liberationists give more stressing point at the social-political aspect of the bible in order to find the spiritual nourishment for the basis on which their pastoral activity stands.

Consequently, liberation theologians give a different sight of interpreting the Bible. As it has been stated above, in reading the bible, the liberation theologians, do not only seek the spiritual meaning but also seek its practical meaning in the concrete situation. Here is an example of the way interpreting the scripture given by Albert Nolan. In Luke 1: 52-53 it is written: “He has shown might with his arm, dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart. He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly.”

This is a part of the Magnificat of Mary. In it Mary says that God pulls down the mighty from their thrones and exalts the lowly, God fills the hungry with good things and sends the rich away empty. This does not mean that God hates the rich and the powerful and that he wants to destroy them. It simply means that he wants to pull the rich and powerful from their thrones, from their position in society, because the structures of that society are unjust and oppressive. This is the sense in which we must be on the side of the poor if we want to be on God’s side. We must take an option for the poor, for the sake of both the poor and the

¹⁵ Segundo Galilea, *The Theology of Liberation, A General Survey*, 26.

¹⁶ Jacques Dupuis, “Liberation Theology,” in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, 1095.

¹⁷ Jacques Dupuis, “Liberation Theology,” in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, 1094.

rich as individual people. In the situation of structural conflict, we have to be in the side of the poor and the oppressed.¹⁸

2.1. The stressing point of liberation theology:

According to Segundo Galilea, “The theology of liberation stresses the inseparable value of **efficacious love**, of praxis, in Christianity.” Therefore it criticizes the Christian’s theology which according to the liberation theology is too “ideological,” because it is doctrinally true but it is not embodied in reality and does not effectively become historical. Christianity is more “**orthodoxy**” than “**orthopraxis**.”¹⁹ St. James and St. John said in their letters. St. James said that to love the poor (Ideal: faith) must be put into practice, otherwise the faith will bear no fruit (Ja 2:14-26). Also St. John stresses the same point when he says: “Let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth” (1 Jn 3:18).

2.2. God is the liberator of the poor and the oppressed

The consequence of the way they interpret the bible, Liberationists come to the image of God. From the history of Israel, they see that God is always in the side of the lowly ones. He opposed the unjust kings and nations on behalf of the lowly, the poor and the oppressed. This action of God was not only directed to the alien nations of the Israelite but was also directed to Israel and their Kings if they practiced injustice in their society. God refused their offerings if they oppressed their fellow men. The prophets demanded justice to the right of the poor and the oppressed.

Therefore, in liberation theology God is seen as the father of the Oppressed and the poor. In the entire bible, particularly in Exodus and the book of the prophets, God always hears the cry of the oppressed and determines to liberate them from the oppressor. He always takes the side of the poor and the oppressed because they were treated unjustly.

In the New Testament, in the context of the relationship between the sinners and the Pharisees, Jesus sided with the sinners. In the conflict between the

¹⁸ Albert Nolan, “Taking Aside,” In *Liberation Theology and The Vatican Document, Perspective from the Third world*, Vol. III, (Question City: Claretian Publications, 1987), 55-56.

¹⁹ Segundo Galilea, *The Theology of Liberation, A General Survey*, 35-36.

rich and the poor, he sided with the poor. He condemned the rich but he forgives the sinners. Therefore, for Liberation theologians, Christ (God) is liberator. He came to liberate human being from sin as the ultimate cause of poverty, injustice and oppression in human society. Because, sin is to refuse to love one's neighbor and therefore refuse to love God himself (Mt 25:30-40). But it can not be denied the structural reason for the situation takes place. It is because, behind the unjust social structure there is a personal or collective willingness to reject God and neighbor. Christ has come to liberate us so that we can be free. According to Bonhoffer, this freedom means to be free for others.²⁰ For Gutierrez, this freedom presupposes that one must go out of oneself, break down one's selfishness and structures which support the selfishness.²¹ Jesus is a liberator. He never forgets those who suffer and those most forsaken.²²

2.3. The saving power of God has social-political aspect

For Liberation's theologian, the exodus event has a double meaning: political and religious as well. It is a political fact because the Israelites were led out of the land of oppression and slavery. The exodus also has religious meaning: they experience of the saving power of God.²³ Therefore, as Medellin conference asserted, "if the Israel as the first people of God has been liberated from the slavery because the saving power of God in the days past, then we are now the new people of God, must also be liberated from less human to more human condition."²⁴

3. The Response of Magisterium

Regarding the way liberationists reading the bible, Pontifical Biblical commission gave some important remarks:²⁵

²⁰ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation, History, Politics and Salvation*, 36.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Segundo Galilea, *The Theology of Liberation, A General Survey*, 37.

²³ Ibid, 38.

²⁴ This is the summary of Medellin Conference. Cfr. Segundo Galilea, *The Theology of Liberation, A General Survey*, 38.

²⁵ Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, Rome, 1993. I.E.1

1. It is true that God is present in the history of his people, bringing them salvation. He is the God of the poor and cannot tolerate oppression or injustice. It is also true that exegesis cannot be neutral, but must, in imitation of God, take sides on behalf of the poor and be engaged in the struggle to liberate the oppressed. Liberation theology includes elements of undoubted value: the deep awareness of the presence of God who saves; the insistence on the communal dimension of faith; the pressing sense of need for a liberating praxis rooted in justice and love; a fresh reading of the Bible which seeks to make of the word of God the light and the nourishment of the people of God in the midst of its struggles and hopes. In all these ways it underlines the capacity of the inspired text to speak to the world of today.
2. But a reading of the Bible from a stance of such commitment also involves some risks, because it does not give enough attention to other texts of the Bible.²⁶ It is true that exegesis cannot be neutral, but it must also take care not to become one-sided. Moreover, social and political action is not the direct task of the exegete.²⁷ Further more Joseph Ratzinger adds, "To some it even seems that the necessary struggle for human justice and freedom in the economic and political sense constitutes the whole essence of salvation. For them, **the Gospel is reduced to a purely earthly gospel.**"²⁸
3. "The new 'hermeneutic' inherent in the 'theologies of liberation' leads to an essentially **'political' re-reading of the Scriptures.** Thus, a major importance is given to the Exodus event inasmuch as it is a liberation from political servitude. Likewise, a political reading of the "Magnificat" is proposed. The mistake here is not in bringing attention to a political dimension of the readings of Scripture, but in making of this one dimension the principal or exclusive component. This leads to **a reductionist** reading of the Bible."²⁹ "An exclusively political interpretation is thus given to the death

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, "Instruction on Certain aspect of the Theology of Liberation," in Segundo Galilea, *The Theology of Liberation, A General Survey*, trans. Olga Prendergast and Alberto Rossa, CMF., (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1984), 68.

²⁹ Joseph Ratzinger, "Instruction on Certain aspect of the Theology of Liberation," 81.

of Christ. In this way, its value for salvation and the whole economy of redemption is denied.”³⁰ On the contrary the new interpretation of the bible must touch the whole Christian mystery.³¹

4. The Liberationist’s Contra Response

To respond these critics, Segundo Galilea asserted, “Many people assume that the liberation theology is exclusively concerned with political commitment and even with its most radical form (violent). Now this is the narrow view. It is true that Liberation theology gives stressing point at socio-political aspect, but the total liberation of the oppressed is not reduced to political and economical problems. It encompasses the whole human slaveries.”³² The liberation theology does not tie itself to any ideology. Gutierrez asserted that theology (western theology) seems to avoid for a long time reflecting on the conflictual character of human history, the confrontation among men, social classes and countries.³³

Evaluation

Liberation theology refers to the theology which gives a special concern for the poor and the victim of oppression. This special concern will beget a commitment to justice. Liberation theologians have shown that in interpreting the bible they do not stop in finding the literal sense of the scripture but they try to find meaning of biblical text for the present day. They make bible still alive since they strive to find its meaning for the life of the Church here and now. However, it must be noticed that if one too emphasizes on a certain aspect of the bible, it will be unbalance in bring forth the richness of the bible. Liberation theology has given the more accentuation of the social and political of the biblical message. If this aspect is too be emphasized on, it will bring an impression that the focus of theology is the earthly matters. Therefore, in interpreting the bible text, one must stand on the three fundamental criteria, namely attention must be given to the unity of the whole scripture (Canonical exegesis), the living tradition of the

³⁰ *Ibid*, 82.

³¹ *Ibid*.

³² Segundo Galilea, *The Theology of Liberation, A General Survey*, 20.

³³ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation, History, Politics and Salvation*, 35.

Church and the analogy of faith.³⁴ It must be noticed that interpretation of the bible must touch the whole Christian mystery.³⁵

The Vatican document: "Instruction on Certain Aspect of the Theology of Liberation is a guideline for retrospection so that those who involve in applying the liberation theology do not fall in wrong direction. It is not a condemnation of the liberation theology but it is a very strong warning about the deviation of its theology since it gives stressing point on social-political sphere.³⁶ The instruction gives a warning of the influence of the Marxist ideology because it does not compatible to the Christian vision of humanity.³⁷

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³⁴ Verbum Domine, 34

³⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, "Instruction on Certain aspect of the Theology of Liberation," 82.

³⁶ Segundo Galilea, "The Theology of Liberation, A General Survey, 97.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 98.

6. Vatican II, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (*Gaudium et Spes*, no 1), in *Documents of Vatican Council*, ed. by James H. Kroeger, Pasay City: Paulines Publihsing House, 2011
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AGAMA YANG TERUS BERGERAK

Tantangan bagi Pembinaan Calon Imam

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Abstrak

Berbekal analisis Danièle Hervieu-Léger dalam bukunya *Le pèlerin et le converti* (peziarah dan pertobatan), tulisan ini adalah sebuah usaha untuk menjelaskan latarbelakang kehidupan keagamaan di Eropa yang dilanda globalisasi dan individualiasi dalam kehidupan keagamaan. Atas dasar uraian tersebut, coba dipahami kenyataan keagamaan di Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: Agama, globalisasi, individualisasi

Situasi keagamaan telah mengalami perubahan. Kenyataan ini tidak lepas dari kehidupan dan mentalitas masyarakat modern, yang ditandai dengan individualisasi. Dari perpektif hidup keagamaan, masyarakat modern cenderung mempraktekkan kehidupan religiusnya secara bebas, bersifat personal dan tanpa ikatan yang kuat dengan lembaga keagamaan tertentu. Mereka cenderung masuk dalam individualisasi religius, yang ditandai dengan munculnya sekte-sekte baru, kelompok-kelompok kategorial baru atau minimal mempraktekkan bentuk-bentuk