Religion, Politics, and the Challenge of Political Hermeneutics

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Religion and Politics

Today, a quiet, religious revolution appears to be under way in Latin America. Massive conversions of believers from the dominant and traditional Catholic faith to various forms of charismatic and evangelical Protestant denominations have become daily occurrences (Hallum 1996). Furthermore, these conversions have hardly caused a ripple in terms of social upheaval, at least when compared to the volatile mix of religion and politics in Central America during the 1980s. Yet appearances can be deceiving, in at least two ways. First, growing curiosity about Protestant activity in Latin America has clearly overshadowed diminishing interest in *liberation theology*, removing the latter from center stage of public attention. For many critics, however, this lack of interest has permitted liberation theology's radical methodology, *political hermeneutics*, to slip virtually unnoticed into mainstream theological and policy circles in North America and Europe, where it has gained undeserved acceptance with potentially disastrous consequences (McGlasson 1994). Secondly, and related, not all social changes today in Latin America are in fact so peaceful.

Since January 1994, for example, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (*Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*, EZLN) has sought to bring to the world's attention the plight of indigenous peoples in the Mexican state of Chiapas (Collier 1994; EZLN Directorate 1994a, 1994b).[1] Through violent and non-violent means, the EZLN has focused public attention on the impoverished social conditions and oppressive political situation in southern Mexico. With assistance from the Catholic Church and other participants, the Mexican government entered into negotiations with the EZLN early on, and promised appropriations for social programs in impoverished areas (Department of Economic Research of the Banco Nacional de México 1995; Editorial Collective 1994; MacEoin 1996). During the past

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two-and-a-half years, negotiations have frequently been broken off by one side or the other, only to be reinstated under threat of political violence by the EZLN (EZLN Directorate 1997). Indeed, the Mexican government's own good faith has been seriously questioned with the increase of military and police repression in Chiapas, including the arrest, jailing, and torture of a Catholic priest who serves as an advisor to the EZLN.

Although scarce, some reports suggest that the EZLN's political ethics is influenced by liberation theology, a religious orientation that advocates the need for radical social change to end poverty and oppression. According to early accounts, the leaders of the EZLN often refer to themselves as "catechists," a term generally reserved for lay religious teachers (Golden 1994a). The Mexican government claims that some of the leaders are "radical Catholics" with connections to other Mexican and Central American rebel groups (Golden 1994b; cf. EZLN Directorate, 1994c). Such identification is not unusual. The critical perspectives of radical religious groups, especially those attuned to liberation theology, have certainly been influential throughout Latin America in recent decades.

In 1971 the Peruvian priest Gustavo Gutiérrez wrote *Teología de la liberación* (*A Theology of Liberation*), the path-breaking treatise that launched liberation theology as a political force. Gutiérrez argues in this and other writings for the need to change most existing social, economic, and political structures in Latin America (Pottenger 1989a). He blames authoritarian political regimes, elitist industrial economies, and the international market economy dominated by multinational corporations for providing the conditions, impetus, and structural support that instigate and augment mass suffering. These structures are judged as sinful and violent because they hurt the vast majority of the world's population with policies of terror and deprivation characterized by human rights violations and massive poverty (Gutiérrez 1983). Thus Gutiérrez asserts that his and the Church's religious obligation is to side *morally* and *actively* with the poor and oppressed.

The public pronouncements and writings of Gutiérrez and subsequently other like-minded Latin American theologians, both Catholic and Protestant, had an epidemic impact on religious teachings and practices throughout Latin America. By the late 1970s and into the 1980s their ideas spread even more quickly, increasing the number of publications dealing with themes of social justice and liberation, the radical transformation of local liturgies and rituals, and the political activities of religiously-motivated individuals.[2] References to biblical accounts of Old Testament prophets denouncing social injustice as well as to the traditional social teachings of the Church abounded, and criticized the moral anomalies of modern economies. The economic and political critique as well as the moral judgment of Gutiérrez

and other liberation theologians appealed to the sentiments of many revolutionary movements, such as the Sandinistas in Nicaragua in the 1970s, the Indians in Guatemala in the 1980s, and the EZLN in Mexico in the 1990s, to name a few. In fact, their writings set the tone for the emergence, activism, and influence of liberation theology on domestic politics, not only in Latin America, but in Asia, Africa, and North America as well. Thus, liberation theology's influence extended beyond Christianity to include Judaism, Buddhism and other religions (Cohn-Sherbok 1992; Ellis 1989; Elwood 1980). However, not all observers have welcomed the emergence of this unique confluence of religion and politics.

During the height of the Central American wars in the 1980s, liberation theology was blamed by some and given credit by others for developing a political ethic that provided religious justification for social change, resulting in political activism by peasants, merchants, lay religious, and priests alike (Falcoff 1987; Novak 1986; Pottenger 1982). Critics claimed this activism, influenced by both Marxism and liberation theology, frequently contributed to the destabilization of political regimes friendly to Western political establishments and economic interests (Lacey 1992; Lynch 1991; Nash 1984; O'Brien 1992; Sigmund 1990; Smith 1991). The social criticism of liberation theology, then, became the focus of intense debate.

Social Criticism

Social criticism occupies only one part of a much broader panorama of intellectual, spiritual, and other theological concerns and issues dealt with by liberation theology (Bingemer 1992; Brown 1993); nevertheless, it is indeed a major part. Many liberation theologians have argued for the centrality of social criticism and the incorporation of Marxist analysis into their theologies in order to create a better understanding of the origins and dynamics of poverty and oppression (Ellacuría 1990; Pottenger 1989b). For example, one of the most widely known and celebrated theologians of liberation is Leonardo Boff of Brazil, who defends the use of Marxist class analysis.

Boff (1989) frequently cites papal encyclicals that support his position, including Pope Paul VI's *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), which defends the possibility of religious individuals using Marxism to discover the inner workings of the secular world. He relies on Paul's classification of four categories of competing approaches within the Marxist tradition to discuss the merits of Marxist analysis. Boff notes that the two categories of *Marxism as an historical practice of class struggle* and *Marxism as an economic and political practice* (74) have limited utility, particularly with regard to the

problem of violence in the actual implementation of socialism. While the first Christians were socialist in their communal practices, Boff does not believe that this Christian heritage justifies all contemporary regimes that refer to themselves as "socialist"; instead, he argues that it is the Christian's responsibility to care for a more just socioeconomic arrangement than capitalism. In addition, Boff argues that liberation theology completely rejects the category of *Marxism as a theoretical (philosophical) practice* (74-75), which grows out of a commitment to radical philosophical materialism. This form of materialism denies any transcendent existence beyond that of the socioeconomic experience of the human condition, and thus is antithetical to Christianity's philosophy of spirit. Boff, however, defends the fourth category of *scientific Marxism* (75-77). Given its commitment to the poor and oppressed, liberation theology requires a scientific understanding of the sources and causes of poverty and oppression. In Latin America, Boff finds this category of Marxism as "imminently valid in its criticism of capitalism and its proposition of socialism," to the extent that Marxism as science yields insights into the dynamics of present-day economics and politics. Boff concludes, "Today we are gradually coming to understand that Marxism and theology not only do not contradict each other, they require each other (79)."

In theory, then, liberation theologians can accept, and frequently do incorporate into their analytical and normative assessments of society, a particular form of Marxism understood as critical social science (McLellan 1993). But given the popular perception that a causal connection exists between Marx and his ideas and the failure of late-twentieth century Marxist regimes, many critics have faulted liberation theology for its openness to Marxist social science.

Critic Paul E. Sigmund (1990), for example, maintains that liberation theologians have simply and naively extolled the virtues of the Cuban revolution and the promise of socialism to end the obvious abuses of capitalism and imperialism in Latin America. With their initial assessments of developmental practices in Latin America in the 1960s based on the empirical findings of dependency and Marxist theories of imperialism, the theologians chastised First World capitalism for failing to fulfill its promise to eradicate Third World poverty. They then praised the potential of other socialist revolutions, such as that in Nicaragua, in the late 1970s and early 1980s to effect liberation from poverty and oppression and to establish social justice. According to Sigmund, the liberation theologians' incorporation of Marxist social analysis has been historically uncritical and politically unwise.

Throughout Latin America the social basis of support for liberation theology has been undermined by neo-liberal economic policies, the replace-

ment of military dictatorships with democratic governments, and extensive in-roads of Protestant evangelical and charismatic groups among the poor (Levine 1995). Coupled with the apparent triumph of capitalism and the renewal of tribal, ethnic, and nationalist conflicts in many areas of the former Soviet Union and its Eastern European allies, the social irrelevance, and thus moral impotence, of relying on Marxist analyses of economy, state, and society has occurred (Manuel 1992; White, McAllister, and Kryshtanovskaya 1994). Furthermore, critics maintain, reliance on Marxist critiques of present economic conditions in Latin America demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding of the proper approach to the production and distribution of national wealth (Novak 1986; Falcoff 1987; Worland 1987). They argue that continued use of Marxist analytical techniques by liberation theology dooms prospects for any success in attempting to bring about social justice.[3]

Forced to reconsider more seriously the failings and limitations of recent and existing socialist regimes, as well as the intricacies of international and domestic economic and political development, Sigmund argues that liberation theologians are today in a position to reaffirm their moral and spiritual concerns and to leave analyses of economics and politics to the secular world (1990, 175). He maintains that liberation theology is now at an ethical crossroads: for the 1990s and beyond, theologians must choose whether to continue to guide their social criticisms down a torturous path poorly illuminated by Marxist social analysis with its attendant and requisite calls for class conflict, revolution, and authoritarianism; or, to abandon reliance on any aspect of Marxism and thus embark on the moral high-road toward cooperative democracy (177-81).

Yet others now question if this debate on social criticism, Marxism, and liberation theology has been too narrowly focused. While the decision of pathways is being quietly contemplated outside the spotlight of public opinion, for many critics, the presence of liberation theology poses an even more dangerous threat to Western society and its values. In fact, the threat is greater than the danger of using Marxist analyses or other discredited approaches to social criticism. The inclusion of any radical social science in liberation theology's methodology is merely a symptom of a deeper problem: development of a theory that permits such use in the first place. This methodology, they argue, is now succeeding in challenging dominant approaches to traditional theological development and biblical scholarship in North America and Europe. Liberation theology's success is undermining the authority of religious training, ultimately resulting in unsettling civic piety in the very areas of the world formerly singled-out for scathing social criticism. The key to this pernicious methodology, say critics, is its science of scriptural interpretation, or *hermeneutics*.

Political Hermeneutics

Religions venerate sacred writings or scriptures that express the will of God and other transcendent truths. Consequently, scriptures carry with them the crucial question of how to determine a proper interpretation, that is, how are scriptural passages to be understood? What set of protocols or rules must be used to gain the proper insight and meaning of God's word? How are present-day readers to interpret scriptures written by finite and fallible human beings from diverse cultures who nevertheless must mediate the will of God through their writings? By the nineteenth century, a particular science of biblical higher criticism had developed to deal with these questions. Known as *hermeneutics*, this science attempted to delineate the rules of speech, translation, and interpretation by commentary and explanation, as applied to scriptural texts. To develop a theory and practice of interpretation, hermeneutics required skill in several technical fields, including history, philology, and manucriptology (Howard 1982). By the late twentieth century, several versions of this science had developed in other disciplines, including literary criticism, philosophy, and the social sciences (Gadamer 1994; Hoy 1982; Rosen 1987).

The important role of hermeneutics for liberation theology's methodology was influenced by arguments of twentieth century European theologians. For example, German theologian Rudolf Bultmann (1988) argued that a process of *demythologization* must occur to get at the existential meaning of ancient texts. That is, centuries of official, religious embellishment must be stripped away before the reader can accurately decipher and understand the text's true meaning. Furthermore, the reader must refrain, as far as possible, from bringing his or her own religious values and cultural biases to the reading of the text, so as not to contaminate the proper interpretation. In this way, according to Bultmann, a process of objective and value-free interpretation will then be able to render the most accurate reading of the text as originally intended by the text's author.

While they agree that continual reinterpretations have indeed obscured the original meaning of ancient authors, liberation theologians depart in a significant manner from Bultmann's approach. They reject the desirability of, and need for, objectivity on the part of the reader, finding contextual reinterpretation itself also to be desirable (Croatto 1981 and 1987). Indeed, they recognize and encourage the reader to interpret the meaning of the text from his or her own experiences and perspective. In liberation theology, the religious individual who is committed to the liberation of fellow citizens from social injustice, is expected to study and interpret Scripture from the perspective of the poor and oppressed (Croatto 1992). Nevertheless,

demythologization in scriptural study as suggested by the European theologians has been useful in revealing the serious political shortcomings of the institutional Church. Now liberation theologians want to go a step further by using these new revelations to battle social injustice.

Battling social injustice suggests that the role of hermeneutics in liberation theology's methodology has a political function as well as an interpretive function. In fact, liberation theology's political hermeneutics manifests itself as a *hermeneutic circle*, emphasizing the relationship between interpretation of Scripture and political action guided by a particular understanding of social justice. According to liberation theologian Juan Luís Segundo (1976), the circle begins when the religious individual makes a commitment to the liberation of the marginalized members of society. Respect for the dignity and rights of others in the face of massive poverty and political oppression motivates the individual to search for explanations of and solutions to problems of social injustice (81-90, 104-6).

As critical observer, the religious individual assesses the ideological arguments promulgated by the elites of the economic and political establishment who attempt to justify poverty and oppression. This assessment requires an understanding of the structure and dynamics of current social conditions. As mentioned above, liberation theologians may use Marxist analysis as an analytical tool for describing and explaining Latin American social conditions (Ellacuría 1990; Maduro 1988; Míguez Bonino 1991; Pottenger 1989b; Segundo 1976, 47-62; Spickard 1992; Zweig 1991). The religious individual is now in a strong position to unmask prevailing political ideologies and hence reveal the morally unacceptable and thus unjust character of current political and economic practices, including the role of the Church and its supporting theologies (Segundo 1976, 126-38). These ideologies and theologies are then scrutinized as to their credibility given the individual's moral commitments and the new social scientific understanding of contemporary economic and political institutions and processes.

Liberation theology claims that critical analyses of the dominant exegetical interpretations of Christian social dogma reveal the ideological infiltration of those interpretations by the distorted values and priorities of a corrupt and unjust society. Furthermore, these analyses reveal the great disparity between the original commitment of early Christianity to human liberation and the ideological arguments supported by the contemporary Church's exegetical interpretations defending conditions of social injustice. With newly found insights about church and society, the religious individual can now develop a new hermeneutic on how to determine the proper meaning of Scripture and its application to contemporary settings (Segundo 1976, 75-81, 106-22, 165-70).

Liberation theologians argue that a proper interpretation of Scripture using the hermeneutic circle will reveal a God who promotes respect for human integrity and dignity, and who rejects intransigent restrictions on legitimate human behavior and goals (Ellacuría 1976). Consequently, with a sophisticated understanding of contemporary economic and political processes, relations, and dynamics, according to liberation theologian José Severino Croatto (1981), the committed individual will find that an event depicted in Scripture has a meaning that extends from the past to the present. Furthermore, that meaning may not have been intended or even perceived as a possible alternate reading by the original author. According to Croatto (1981, 11),

> . . . I do not first carry out an exegesis of the biblical passages and *subsequently* relate it to the facts of our world or our oppressed continent. Rather, the facts must be, and are, *prior* to my interpretation of the biblical Word.

That is, the socioeconomic facts of human existence precede any interpretation of an ancient writer's intention. The meaning of a biblical passage does not present itself whole and complete apart from the social context, within which that meaning either originated or has recently been discovered.

What becomes clear in liberation theology from a committed reading of Scripture, then, is awareness of a God constantly and actively engaged in ameliorating human suffering, and encouraging other humans to do the same. In fact, since salvation itself is premised upon knowledge of God, liberation theologians argue that the only way to know God is to do justice, that is, working for the social liberation of the poor and oppressed (Míguez Bonino 1974; Segundo 1984; Tamez 1992). With this use of the hermeneutic circle, then, liberation theology incorporates modern social sciences for radical critiques and justifies engagement in reformist or revolutionary activities (Pottenger 1996; Roelofs 1988).

Critique of Political Hermeneutics

Liberation theology's commitment to political hermeneutics, however, troubles other North American and European critics. German theologian Eta Linnemann (1990), for one, challenges theological methodologies that use political hermeneutics. She argues that such use is engaging in *pseudomorphosis*.

> *Pseudomorphosis* occurs when concepts are emptied of their original meaning and then filled with a new content which has no more in common with the

> original meaning than the name itself. This confusion of meanings is encountered at every turn in theological science (100).

The result is that "increasingly the younger generation of theologians is being infiltrated by socialism (92)."

Evangelical theologian Paul C. McGlasson (1994), however, argues that the more serious threat today to contemporary theological development is not the consequences of relying on radical social sciences, but the methodology of the hermeneutic circle itself. According to McGlasson, this methodology, which "has combined the Bible with the alien egalitarian ideology of the Enlightenment (54)," has insidiously infiltrated North American theological seminaries, contributing to false and blasphemous teachings that erroneously reinterpret the major beliefs and doctrines of Christianity.

With regard to religious social ethics, McGlasson argues, liberation theologians claim that a proper reading of Scripture will demonstrate the existence of a "partnership" between humankind and God, a "joint venture for liberation (34)." This claim stems from faulty interpretations suggesting that "Jesus empowers" individuals to develop confidence in their ability to overcome social conditions of oppression and poverty. These social conditions are themselves understood as "evil structures of society" exhibiting hierarchical and oppressive social relations of sexism, racism, and classism (33, 34). Consequently, says McGlasson, inasmuch as Scripture demonstrates God's "preferential option for the poor" with divine condemnation of how the poor are treated by economic and political elites, liberation theologians maintain that common men and women find they are in partnership with God to overthrow oppressive social arrangements and to build the Kingdom, or Reign, of God on earth.[4]

McGlasson maintains that such "false teachings," "counterfeit gospel," "anti-Christ" message, and "theological fascism" result from liberation theology's peculiar and unacceptable methodology of the hermeneutic circle (73, cf. 23, 24, 45, 70, 80). The hermeneutic circle is unacceptable because it uses for political purposes the historical-critical method of European biblical scholarship. This method places biblical truths in the context of an egalitarian ideology, resulting in the reversal of the gospel message's original intent (21).[5]

> We are told that the theologian is to 'construe' the Bible based on its 'use' within the 'community.' We are also often told, as if it is self-evident, that the historical-critical method mandates this 'hermeneutic' (55).

Using the historical-critical method initially to "contextualize" their interpretation, says McGlasson, liberation theologians then evaluate the meaning of Scripture from indefensible normative biases of political egalitarianism. Consequently:

> Because of the nature of egalitarian ideology, each group within liberation theology has to have its own version of the Jesus of the reign of God. And so there are feminist Christologies, and black Christologies, and native American Christologies, and Hispanic Christologies, and so forth. And while there are some differences, each claims to find in Jesus the one who will empower them to full partnership in the coming reign of God (25).

Yet, says McGlasson, the scriptures are in fact silent on any practical need to dismantle social hierarchies, they simply admonish the faithful to care for the poor (51). Hence liberation theologians misunderstand the true prophetic character and meaning of Scripture. According to McGlasson, "we were not the innocent, in need of a liberator, but the guilty, in need of a savior (88; cf. Arens 1995; Croatto 1984)."

Consequences

Ironically, in the 1990s the permanent imprint of liberation theology's political hermeneutics, in attempting to reveal a "decaying First World," has had less impact at the social, economic, and political levels, than at the methodological level. And it is less controversial in Latin America than in North America and Europe (Frei 1992, 95). As discussed earlier, the irony finds its origins two decades earlier. According to political scientist Kenneth D. Wald (1997), "Another influence that propelled the American Catholic elite in new directions during the 1970s was the movement known as 'liberation theology'" (274). With a rejuvenated call for social justice emanating from the Vatican, Catholic clergy in Latin America embarked on a path of social criticism and political activism in the name of the poor and oppressed. They used the hermeneutic circle to challenge the arguments justifying oppression by the military, political, and economic status quo. In Wald's assessment,

> Liberation theology imparted a willingness to challenge the power of the state in pursuit of the prophetic mission of the church. This example stimulated many American Catholics (and Protestants) similarly to reconsider the role of their church in struggles between rich and poor.

Furthermore, according to theologian Ronald F. Thiemann (1996), liberation theology's social analysis has today shifted its focus from the effects

of oppression experienced in Latin America to the causes of oppression originating in "the dominant traditions of American Protestantism" (35-36). According to Thiemann,

> American civic piety, so its critics [i.e., liberation theologians] argued, could provide the symbols for our common culture only by systematically silencing the voices of minority communities.

Liberation theology's critique of American civic piety from the vantage point of minority or marginalized communities, says Thiemann, has contributed to the rise of political and religious pluralism and has "shattered any illusion of political and religious unity within the American populace."

Entering the North American debate and relying on theologian David Tracy's (1988) own understanding and support of liberation theology's contribution to American pluralism, theologian Gregory Baum (1994) maintains that in fact there exist "ideological distortions in the public discourse" (46) that deflect claims made by marginalized groups, by treating each group as one more special-interest among many. According to Baum, in order to clarify these distortions and thus to resolve conflicts and eliminate oppression, liberation theology rightly insists that "it is the task of the trusting conversation between traditions to analyze the historical conditions that feed their respective ideological distortions." Thus, in the view of liberation theology, American pluralism must trust "the critical concepts derived from the Enlightenment that could help us to make sense of the society in which we live" (47). To this end, the theologians claim, political hermeneutics makes an important contribution.

For liberation theology, the religious individual who is committed to the liberation of fellow citizens from social injustice will and should study and interpret Scripture from the perspective of the present-day poor and oppressed. In terms of theological development, this approach has been useful in demonstrating and assessing the social consequences of religious beliefs. Furthermore, political hermeneutics reveals frequently overlooked possibilities and implications of utilizing radical social science critiques. This revelation suggests that the open possibilities of social criticism is hardly a temporary phase of liberation theology's evolution during the 1970s and 1980s, as suggested by critics, but nonetheless appropriated in the 1990s by the EZLN.

At the threshold of the twenty-first century, the appeal of social criticism will increase as industrializing, industrial, and postindustrial societies grapple with problems of economic development, political stability, and ethnic diversity (Parker 1992). Leonardo Boff (1994) maintains that on the verge of the new millennium the world is facing a "crisis of

civilization," causing it to question its own existence (1). This crisis results from excessive reliance on science and technology, such that they have become "the major weapons for the domination of peoples and of nature" (5). As a result he has identified three major problems for the future: "a reduction in the concept of what it means to be human; a negation of the value of what is feminine; and a lack of respect for the other and nature" (5-6). To address these problems, Boff believes that a synthesis of the best characteristics of capitalism and socialism, that is *participatory social democracy*, will provide the cultural basis for a healthy balance of the just needs of the individual and the community (7). Nevertheless, his political hermeneutics reveals a central core to the synthesis:

> Slowly we are seeing a new idea of development, a social development that has as its center the poor and marginalized. These are the signs of a new dream and they are found at the four corners of the globe (9-10).

Boff's political hermeneutics, while still focusing on the poor, has noticeably broadened the definition of the marginalized to include feminist and ecological concerns. This is a welcomed development for many supporters who have argued that the "future of liberation theology is down the road to ecumenism" (Ruether 1993). But for critics, again, the consequences of using this method will ultimately undermine belief in divine absolutes, the moral foundation of a stable and good society—the very objective of liberation theology.

When religion moves from the private to the public sphere, the political consequences can be disturbing or liberating and often unforeseen. Once public, religious movements themselves, including liberation theology, may contribute to oppression as well as liberation, thus posing additional dilemmas (Candelaria 1990; Cavanaugh 1994). Nevertheless, according to sociologist José Casanova (1994), the *deprivatization* of religion, particularly with the emergence of prophetic movements like liberation theology, has become a permanent feature of the modern world (134; cf. Riemer 1984). And permanence leaves a legacy. The legacy of liberation theology's political hermeneutics may well be nourished in the shadows of its activist past—where it is making a more lasting contribution to general theology, political philosophy, and cultural criticism in industrial and postindustrial societies alike. Such a legacy, then, will overshadow the importance of using radical social science to fight social injustice in the Third World.

NOTES

[1]Also, cf. Cook and Joo (1995) for a critical look at how to assess and discuss the social context of indigenous peoples in Mexico, including the response of neo-Zapatismo, in light of the world-wide, economic restructuring of capitalism.

[2]Examples of the early writings of many of the most prominent theologians can be found in Torres and Eagleson (1976) and Gibellini (1979). Also, see Hennelly (1990) for a documentary history of liberation theology. Perhaps the most recent and comprehensive collection of writings from liberation theologians can be found in Ellacuría and Sobrino (1993).

[3]However, others insist that liberation theology was correct to incorporate Marxist analytical techniques into its methodology, but it did so ineffectively. It is for this reason that liberation theology has failed to achieve its objectives. Thus poor theoretical reasoning through the misapplication of Marxian insights has caused liberation theology to miss opportunities to effect meaningful social change. See, for example, Kee (1986, 1990).

[4]McGlasson even accuses liberation theologians of "re-naming God" as they shift to the use of non-exclusivist language when reading, and thus reinterpreting, Scripture.

[5]For McGlasson, when used properly, i.e., independent of any particular ideology, the historical-critical method will support the direct authority of Scripture to lay claim on the truth and to reveal it to all as a call to repentance and faith in the salvific effect of Jesus' sacrifice (55). But in liberation theology, "the historical-critical method has been placed into the service of the egalitarian ideology of the Enlightenment (58)."

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