

How Should We Understand Liberation Theologies?

Simply put, liberation, in this context, refers to the process of work that is being done to free oppressed people from oppressive situations and structures as well as what actually needs to happen in the process in order for those efforts not to be futile. The work happens in multiple places that span from deep inside the church structure to the most secular corners of the Earth, and everywhere that it is happening, the process looks similar. There is oppression, then there is conscientization, then comes outrage, and there is revolution. This process contributes a lot to how we envision, verbalize, and conceptualize liberation.

An understanding of liberation can be seen through the different levels—political, social, economic, religious, etc.—on which work needs to be done in working to obtain it. In Gutierrez's text, he states, (31) "To support the social revolution, means to abolish the present status quo and to attempt to replace it with a qualitatively different one; it means to build a just society based on new relationships of production; it means to attempt to put an end to the domination of some countries by others, of some social classes by others, of some persons by others." This quote from Gutierrez's text is important, because it highlights the fact that, in places where there is an issue of the oppression of peoples, the social aspect—in relation to the social and economic sectors—of liberation plays, arguably, the largest role. Laws and legislature can say that

people are “free” and that it is “unlawful” to subject anyone to involuntary servitude or any form of oppression, but if the social status of people in a given region goes unchecked, it can be a worse form of oppression. A form in which the oppressed are likely to be put in a position to be reminded that they have been given freedom legally, so by asking to be accepted socially as well, they are asking for too much. Gutierrez further stresses the importance of a well-rounded liberation, writing, (55) “Be that as it may, the untenable circumstances of poverty, alienation, and exploitation in which the greater part of the people of latin america live urgently demand that we find a path toward economic, social, and political liberation. This is the first step towards a new society.” His idea of a “new society” is essential to making sure that the oppressed aren’t being granted false liberty. Cone supports this idea, saying, (123) “As long as oppressors can be sure that the gospel does not threaten their social, economic, and political security, they can enslave others in the name of Jesus Christ. The history of Christendom, at least from the time of Constantine, is a history of human enslavement; and even today, white “Christians” see little contradiction between wealth and the Christian gospel.” In addition to attempting to gaslight the masses of oppressed people, it’s not uncommon for oppressors to justify their actions through religious interpretation. Historically, the “white Jesus” interpretation of the bible has been used to ensure the understanding of oppressors as being in a place of superiority both in the eyes of the world and the eyes of God. Cone continues his critique of this repressive occurrence when he says, (123) “How is it possible to be rich, seeing others in a state of economic deprivation, and at the same time insist that one has complete trust in God?