

## Liberation Theology in the Latin American Context: An Introductory Case Study

### What Is Liberation?

(K.C. Abraham, DEcM, p. 604)

Broadly defined, liberation is a process by which a subjugated or marginalized section of people, having gained an awareness of their condition of oppression, take control of their destiny and fight to overthrow all the fetters of bondage.

## What Is Praxis?

- Of Greek origin, it essentially means to work or execute.
- Praxis is more than just "good deeds"; it is good work toward the objective of transforming oppressive and unjust political, social, and economic structures wherever they may be found (e.g., infant mortality, worker's rights, land rights; etc.)
- Although 'theology' can be useful as a 'second act', as critical reflection on praxis in order to 'break down resistance', it is not a motivation for this fight, nor does it need to be.

## Challenges from Liberation Theologies

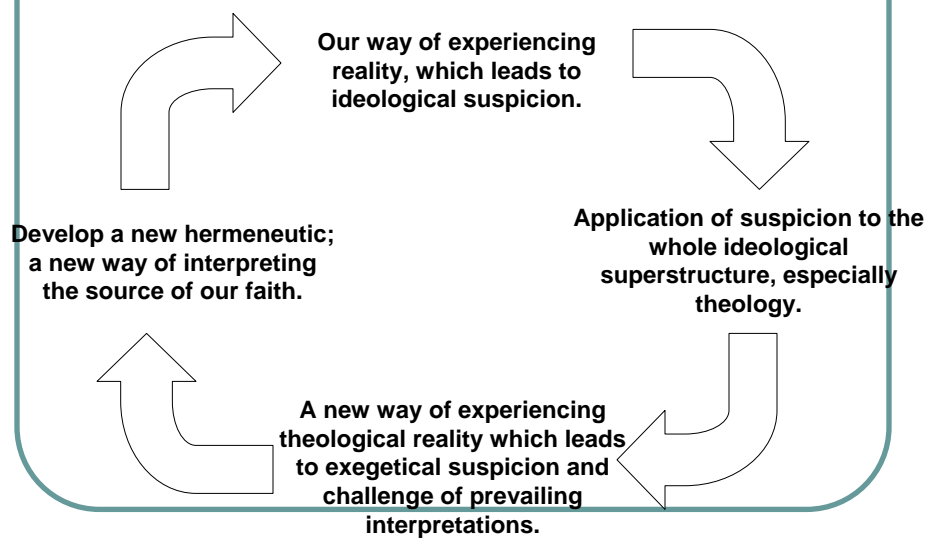
(Taylor and Nuñez, *Crisis in Latin America*, pp. 261-3)

- Latin American liberation theology challenges us to . . .
  - . . . return to the Bible seeking guidance on meeting the desperate social needs of our context;
  - . . . recover elements of revelation which have been missing from our theology;
  - . . . announce the whole purpose of God, including how it relates not only to the individual, but also to the family, the church, and the society;
  - . . . consider the role of social responsibility in the mission of the church;
  - . . . evaluate our own life and commitment to Christ, especially through the focus of how we minister to others around us.

## Foundations of Liberation Theology

- The basic elements:
  - Latin American social context
  - Liberating praxis as the starting point
- The Word of God (or “the sources of revelation”)
- A new way to do theology
- A new set of criteria for defining “good” theology
- Tools: socio-economic analysis (initially Marxist; focused on class conflict and ideological suspicion)
- The hermeneutical circle

## Hermeneutical Circle



## Evangelical Theology's Response

"We Confess" section from CLADE IV (9/2-9/8/01; Quito)

- That many times we have neglected the prophetic task, as well as failing to create communities of the Kingdom which will search for alternative and fair social structures.
- We have been silent accomplices of corrupt governments that have condemned millions of human beings to poverty and absolute misery which violates their human dignity.
- Many times we have given way to the temptation to value other sources of authority as if they were the supreme standard in place of the Holy Scriptures.
- Too often we have restricted the message of the Bible to 'spiritual' and church matters, and so distorted its message, its wholeness, its liberating power and effectiveness.
- We have allowed an intellectual- emotional dualism, instead of looking for minds and hearts that are enlightened and renewed by the Holy Spirit.

## Evangelical Theology's Response

"We Confess" section from CLADE IV (9/2-9/8/01; Quito)

- Many times we have adopted a form of pastoral leadership which has been modeled on the business world in our consumer society, so forgetting the example of our Lord who did not come to be served, but to serve.
- In our excessive activism we have neglected to keep prayer as an integral part of the study of the Word, which is the fountain of genuine Christian spirituality.
- On repeated occasions we have fostered division and intolerance instead of unity and mutual support.
- We have allowed discrimination and marginalization against women, indigenous and black people, young people, the elderly, the disabled, immigrants, and other groups within the life of the Church. We have forgotten that they are made in the image and likeness of God, and that we are disregarding the enormous human and missionary potential.