

# The political- economic ideologies in latin american theology



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Over the past 50 years, theology in Latin America has oscillated between liberation and prosperity theology. This movement reflects a polarization between the "option for the poor", that began with liberation theology in the 1960s; and the "option for the rich" during the early 1990s, which supported a neoliberal model after the collapse of the communist alternative. Theology in Latin America has been vulnerable to the political and economic agendas of Latin American government.

The thesis of his paper is that Latin American theology has aligned itself to either the Marxist or neoliberal capitalist political and economic ideologies of the past fifty years, and as such has lost its orthodox biblical foundations. The first reason for the substantial influence of economic and political agendas on Latin American theology is historical. Since the sixteenth century the Spanish and Portuguese colonizers have been served by the state and the Catholic Church.

The economic and political colonialism that turned the land's resources over to the Europeans was supported by a spiritual colonialism, in this sense they that carried the sword also carried the cross. Meanwhile the indigenous received a message of a passive and suffering Christ. He is represented as the one who surrendered himself without complaint, took on suffering and did not fight for social change. In the words of one indigenous leader, We the Indians from the Andes and from the Americas, decide to take this opportunity to return to you your Bible.

For the last five centuries this Bible has given neither love, peace or justice. From the arrival of Columbus, there was imposed on us, by force, a culture. a

language, and a religion with European characteristics. The Bible came to us as a part of the imposed cultural change. It was the ideological weapon of this colonial assault. The Spanish sword that attacked and killed the Indians during the day, became at night the cross that killed the Indian soul. [ Over many centuries the church emphasized and taught passivity during oppression, a spiritual message that was corrupted by the political agenda of silencing the masses. [2]

After the independence of the colonies the catholic church became increasingly associated with the powerful and serviced the rich Indigenous leaders regardless of the needs of the wider majority. This lucrative partnership benefited the church and the rich, who together controlled the political powers and enforced the status quo. ] The second reason for the influence of political and economical ideologies on Latin American theology is social injustice.

Many Latin American nations have had tremendous economic vulnerability and social inequality, a perfect scenario for a theology that gives hope for a better future without necessarily being grounded in orthodox Biblical theology. Despite their differences, Liberation Theology and Prosperity Theology have a similar theme in Latin America: the message for a better life for the poor. The council of Vatican II In the 1960's exhibited a new openness to the modern world.

The consequences of this openness in Latin America meant discussing themes such as poverty and social injustice. This culminated in the 1968 Latin American Episcopal Conference in Medellin, Colombia which redefined

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the lines of liberation theology and favored the position of the poor. Gustavo Gutierrez defines this theology as "faith based on the commitment to abolish injustice and to build a new society; this theology must be verified by the practice of that commitment, by active, effective participation in the struggle which the exploited social classes have undertaken against their oppressors.

The Bible condemns systems of oppression and societies that do not take care of their poor as sinful. However despite being founded upon biblical teaching regarding social justice, some liberation theologians themselves ended up with the Marxist interpretation of history. Leonardo Boff, a Brazilian liberation theologian, asserts that all theology has a social dimension and in a political and social context should be used in the support of the liberation process. [5] For Boff, the theologian has a social position, and a role to play alongside the poor.

It is both an ethical option and a political decision and only after these is it an evangelical definition. [6] Boff's theology comes via the Marxist dialectical analysis of social reality, "Marxist science without its philosophical presuppositions." [7] The official Catholic Church understood liberation theology as false theology due to its political connections: "liberation theology, you know, is a genuine theology. But it can perhaps be a false theology. If theology begins to be politicized, it begins to make use of systems or means of analysis that are not Christian, then it is no longer theology. [8]

In a world polarized between capitalists and Marxists the Catholic Church had to deal with political agendas that were added to its theology. After the collapse of the Soviet Socialist Union in 1988 and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, liberation theology lost its influence. Paul Freston, wrote directly after the Cold War in 1990, in a book called " F Biblica and Crise Brasileira", (Biblical Faith and Brazilian Crises), on the great opportunity for a Christian social vision and a Christian critique of capitalism. ]

Regardless of the opportunities after the Cold War, Freston also pointed out the possibility of losing the significant opportunity for change in that historical moment: either emphasizing the added beliefs to Christian faith, such as those who incorporated a Marxist view; or aligning to the victor's side of Cold War, capitalism. [10] Twenty years after Freston's analyses, the option for capitalism has prevailed. It produced churches sold out to the consumerist style of the neoliberal capitalist system.

The collapse of historical socialism marks the ends of utopias and the rise of the neoliberal market mentality: The only alternative left to people is to believe undoubtedly in the " invisible hand" of the market the free-market economic system with its neo-liberal policy declares itself not responsible for the fate of the excluded and marginalized. These are the social costs that the vast majority of people have to endure, and have to offer as sacrifices to the market idol. [1 1] This shift is reflected in theology aswell.

Since the 1990's the message of prosperity has monopolized Latin American theology, especially among Pentecostal churches. In a neoliberal age, the prosperity message resonates because it links God's blessing to individual

economic prosperity. One of the most important voices in the Latin American context is Edir Macedo, the bishop of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God. He argues: The Catholic Church spread onto people's minds that richness is an evil thing and poverty is good. Do they want me to preach " Misery Theology?

The objective (of building cathedrals) is to open the minds of the poor that give the offerings. In his house, he sits on a ripped couch or on the floor. In the church he is honored. He has the right to sit on a comfortable chair, the church has air-conditioning, he uses a clean restroom. He receives an exemplary service. I want to show that he is capable of achieving great things, a better life. It is like saying: 'See the greatness of God. Your house is a barraco (hut). See what God can do. The Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus also started in a barraco, but look at how it is today.

You have to invest in this God". [12] The health and wealth gospel that was born in North America found its best reception in Latin America, where millions of poor go to church in order to receive what the state has not provided. Ironically though it is so attractive as Fee points out in North America, prosperity theology fits the American Dream. According to Fee, it is a man centered theology, a false theology of giving, an Americanized perversion of the gospel that reinforces the oppression of the poor in an unjust economic system.

The health and wealth gospel has a curtailed view of the whole scripture, and is sub-Christian at many crucial points; the solution is Biblical theology that does not fall into subjective interpretation, or a free association based

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on a prior commitment that is not actually just. [14] In Latin America, the message of prosperity reaches the desperate poor, who go to church to receive a message that negates the teaching of Him " who had nowhere to lay his 5] In a context of poverty, prosperity gospel offers the hope of reaching a higher social class.

The cost of discipleship is substituted by giving to the church and receiving back with Divine interest. Stanley Jones maintains that the economic always changes the spiritual; the spiritual cannot be isolated from the whole of life. [16] Christianity believes the spiritual can affect the economic, political and social aspects of life, that it is not separated. Unfortunately Latin American theology while seeking to use theology to impact economic realities continually reinforces the unjust economic system.

Unless Latin American theology begins with biblical theology and not political or economical agendas, Christianity will always be in service of ideology. Latin American theology should neither choose Marxism or capitalism; neither liberation nor prosperity theologies. Theologians in Latin America need a biblical perspective on " renunciation ethics", centered on the cost of discipleship and on the coming of God's kingdom that radically changes reality. [17] According to Padilla, the gospel is the proclamation of an event that affects reality in its totality; in Christ his kingdom has invaded history.

The kingdom is expression of God's lordship over all life, it is both a present reality and future hope. [18] The kingdom of God is not a " system out of the system" and it is not experienced outside the reality of the world. The challenge for Latin American theologians is to fight for a church that lives the

way of the kingdom of God in the "kingdom of man", as incarnate body of Christ, living as the word of God in a broken world. In Jesus and through his kingdom, the social structures of injustice are transformed. People are invited to participate in the reality of God that enters and changes the reality of the world. 9]

The church should both listen to reality around and listen to the Bible: taking seriously the interpretation of Scripture and also with an interest in what light it would shed on the realities of injustice and the suffering of others. The true church is not the place where economical and political ideologies find their space, but where the rule and Justice of God are proclaimed. It is a church that produces theology and does not bow down to the economic system, but rather effects in the very system the invasion of the kingdom of God.

The church can only live this way through a biblical understanding of Jesus and his incarnation in the very messiness of life. This Latin American biblical model is reflected in a hymn by the Methodist bishop, Federico Pagura, during the years of the Dirty War in Argentina. Because He entered the world and history; because He broke the silence and the agony; because he filled the earth with His glory; because He was light in our cold night therefore we have hope, therefore we struggle with persistence, herefore we look toward the future with confidence.