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The Theology of Liberation in Latin America

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IN ROMAN CATHOLIC as well as in Protestant circles, theology in Latin America has historically been simply a repetition of what has been said in Europe and the United States. The Latin American churches have only echoed the theology formed in other cultures, rather than contributing to the development of Christian thought. But this situation has begun to change, especially since the 1960s. For the first time in the history of Christianity, a theological movement is coming out of Latin America which has awakened the interest of the experts in those countries which seemed to have a monopoly on the science of theology.

That the so-called "Latin American theology" is not totally original is obvious. What theology could be original after nearly twenty centuries of Christian thought? If the Latin American theologians have anything original, it is their effort to relate their concept of Christianity to the Latin culture.

The Latin American theological current best known outside this continent is no doubt the already-famous "theology of liberation." Simply stated, the theology of liberation is an effort on the part of Catholic and liberal Protestant theologians in Latin America to provide a theology which they trust will serve as the base for the "liberation" of oppressed peoples. It has become popular because it proposes to relate theology to the Latin American scene and to speak theologically to socio-political needs. Because of the widespread influence of this theological position and because of its implications for missionary endeavors and churches throughout Latin American countries, it is imperative that the so-called theology of liberation be examined carefully by p. 38 evangelicals. Evangelicals in North America who are interested in and involved in missionary endeavors in the Latin sector of the Western Hemisphere will benefit from an awareness of this pervasive system of theological thought.

I. CHURCH AND SOCIETY IN LATIN AMERICA (ISAL)

Although ISAL (Ilesia y Sociedad en la America Latina) has basically the same emphasis as the Roman Catholic theology of liberation, it began as a Protestant movement offering a liberating option to the Latin American people. ISAL proposes not only theological reflection but also a plan of action to help in the economic, political, and social transformation of underdeveloped nations in Latin America.

The History of the Movement

The roots of ISAL are in the youth movements that sought to promote the social work of the church during the 1940s. These movements included the MEC (Christian Student Movement) and the ULAJE (Latin American Unity of Evangelical Youth). The magazine *Iglesia y Sociedad en la America Latina*, published since 1959, has been one of the principal exponents of the movement.

The first continent-wide consultation of ISAL was held in Huampani, Peru in July, 1961 under the auspices of the World Council of Churches. One of the main purposes of the

consultation was to find "the meaning that social changes have from a Christian viewpoint, and our common responsibility toward them."[1]

In the meeting sponsored by the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Switzerland in 1966 on the theme "Church and Society," the representatives of ISAL had ample opportunity to express their point of view before the delegates from many different countries. The ideas of ISAL continued to take shape in the international consultations held in EI Tabo, Chile (January, 1966), Piriapolis, Uruguay (December, 1967) and Nana, Peru (July, 1971). After the fall of the Allende government in Chile, ISAL seems to have p. 39 been losing strength as an organization, although its ideas continue to form a part of Latin American liberation theology.[2]

The Emphasis of the Movement

An important key to understanding the thinking of ISAL is the document published after the fourth continental assembly, held in Peru in 1971.[3] A major preoccupation of the ISAL people is the economic dependence in which the Latin American nations live. This dependence, according to the leaders of ISAL, is the cause of a whole series of dependences which afflict Latins today: political, cultural, technological, military.

How can this dependence be overcome? According to ISAL, the answer is found in the conscientization of those exploited by the dominant social classes and by imperialism.[4] They define the process of liberation as "breaking with the system of economic dependence and exploitation under which our people suffer, due to the action of imperialism in alliance with the dominant national classes."[5] The purpose of liberation is to create a more just society in which class distinctions will disappear.[6]

Those in ISAL ask what has been and what is the participation of Christians in the process of national liberation, and they answer that there have been three tendencies: (1) that of the Catholics who try to put into practice the "social doctrine of the church"; (2) that of the "developmentalists", members of the Christian Democrat parties; and (3) that of the radicals who identify themselves with the revolutionary movements of the continent. An example of this last group is Camilo Torres, the guerrilla priest who died along with a group of revolutionaries in Colombia in 1966.[7]

The leaders of ISAL say that those Christians who have identified themselves with the revolution have discovered "Marxist analysis as the most appropriate for understanding the Latin p. 40 American situation and for projecting an effective action of radical change in it."[8] They then point out that this discovery may lead Christian revolutionaries to work together with Marxists in the liberation of Latin America: "Working together on the foundation level makes the division between Christians and Marxists disappear, thus

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[1] *Encuentro y Desafio* (Montevideo: ISAL, 1961), p. 12.

[2] For more details on the situation of ISAL after Allende's death, see Orlando E. Costas, *Theology of the Crossroads in Contemporary Latin America* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1976), pp. 199–223.

[3] *America Latina: Movilizacion Popular y Fe Cristiana* (Montevideo: ISAL, 1971).

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 143.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 140.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 143.

[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 144–46.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 145.

helping to overcome dogmatisms."[9] According to ISAL, the Christian must identify himself with the proletariat and act as a revolutionary in the churches, among his people, and in political parties and organizations belonging to the popular classes.[10]

The Theology of the Movement

In the opinion of the ISAL theologians, what is needed is not a repetition of the theologies formulated in opulent societies, such as the "theology of the death of God" or the "theology of hope," but rather a theology of the people, which is quite different from a "theology for the people."[11] Theology, they affirm, cannot be made apart from political involvement; it must be made rather in the midst of that involvement. The starting point for theology has to be the concrete situation of Latin America.

The analysts of ISAL have pointed out the names of various theologians who in one way or another have influenced ISAL thinking. They mention, for example, Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Paul Lehmann, J. B. Metz, Jurgen Moltmann, and others, all of whom are studied critically in the ISAL circles. Special mention needs to be made of Richard Shaull, called by some "the father of ISAL," and who confesses having neoorthodoxy as his theological background.[12] The influence of Karl Marx is without question.

Among the Latin American thinkers who have contributed most in giving ISAL its theological orientation is Rubem Alves, a Brazilian Presbyterian and a graduate of Princeton University. Based on his doctoral dissertation, entitled "Toward a Theology of Liberation," he wrote the book *Religion: Opio o Instrumento de* p. 41 *Liberacion*.[13] The English version of this work has been a best-seller in the United States.

Alves begins his focus on the theme of liberation by referring to the search for a language that expresses vision and passion for human liberation. From there he goes on to describe what he calls "political humanism," which is actually a new conception of man, a new anthropological analysis.

According to Aires, there are three elements in this conception of man: (1) One element is *a new consciousness* of oppression, of "colonial domination." As examples of this new consciousness of oppression he mentions the blacks and the students in the United States. Obviously, Alves is writing from the highly developed culture of North America. (2) A second element is *a new language* that expresses this new conception of man. (3) A third element is *a new community*. The appearance of a new language presupposes the presence of a new community, the worldwide proletariat, "an ecumenical phenomenon which joins together people from the Third World with blacks, students, and other groups from the developed nations. This consciousness does not have, therefore, national, economic, social, or racial limits."[14]

Alves goes on to contrast political humanism with technology and theology. Following Marcuse in the description of technological language, Alves says that technological society

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[9] *Ibid.*, p. 146.

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 150.

[12] *America Hoy* (Montevideo: ISAL, 1966), p. 58.

[13] Montevideo: Tierra Nueva, 1970.

[14] *Ibid.*, pp. 8–9.

has converted itself rather into a system that engulfs, conditions, and determines man.[15] It converts him into a buyer of merchandise, making him think that there is no need of a future, that he can be happy in the present by means of the conquests of technology.

Alves finds points of similarity and contrast between political humanism and theology. He rejects existentialism because it reduces liberation to a subjective plane. He goes along with Barth in his radical criticism of the present, but laments the fact that Barthianism does not give enough importance to the future or to the work and creativity of man. For Barth, Alves suggests, man is not the creator of his own future.[16] p. 42

There is also a contrast between "political Messianism," which he espouses, and the theology of hope of Moltmann. Alves admires Moltmann for his emphasis on the future, but does not agree with his idea that the movement toward the future arises in answer to a promise that comes from without and makes it possible. He rejects the concept that man's renovating activity springs not from the present reality, from the present condition of man through his activity in history, but rather from a promise that is transcendent. Alves believes that the future is "an open horizon of possibilities where liberty will be created, introduced by action."[17] Man is the creator of a future that has not yet been determined.

Political humanism includes the rejection of what is inhuman in the present, the concern for the transformation of this present by means of political action, and an openness to the future, based on history itself and not on a promise that is transcendent.[18]

An Evaluation of the Movement

Alves's emphasis is definitely anthropocentric. His work deals with liberation by man and for man himself. It may be said that Alves abandons the oppressed to his own resources, facing a present that needs to be rejected and a future that will always be relative and uncertain. He has no set norms for determining whether man in his efforts to create the future is going in the right direction. Of the content of his book, Alves affirms that "Since these reflections are a product of my historical situation, which is relative and temporary, they share that same temporary and relative character. They must remain therefore unfinished and open. Another, in a different historical situation, might have a different interpretation. I cannot say that my historical experience is more than his."[19]

Alves's work reveals lamentable luck of biblical exegesis. The text of Scripture seems to be used only as a pretext to defend political humanism. In his search for "a new language," Alves falls under the influence of the "new hermeneutics" and exalts history over words, without taking into account that "the Bible always gives preeminence to the word over history, in the sense that p. 43 history remains silent without revelatory interpretation, and this interpretation depends on the initiative of God."[20]

Having moved away from the authority of the Scriptures, those in ISAL remain totally at the mercy of relativism in their theology and their praxis.

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[15] *Ibid.*, pp. 32–39.

[16] *Ibid.*, pp. 65–82.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 113.

[18] *Ibid.*, pp. 82–101.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 1.

[20] Andre's Kirk, "La Biblia y Su Hermeneutica en Relacion con la Teologia Protestante en America Latina," *El Debate Contemporaneo Sobre la Biblia* (Barcelona: Ediciones Evangelicas Europeas, 1972), p. 180.

II. ROMAN CATHOLIC THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION

When theology of liberation is mentioned today, one thinks not so much of ISAL as of the Roman Catholic expression of liberation theology. However, the Catholic and the Protestant aspects of this movement are closely related. For example, Hugo Assmann, a Brazilian Catholic, works in cooperation with ISAL. And from a purely theological point of view, it is not surprising that in their analysis of the theology of liberation, writers such as J. J. Gonzalez Faus from Spain should study Hugo Assmann (a Catholic) and Rubem Alves (a Protestant) together[21].

Besides Assmann, other Catholic liberationists include Gustavo Gutierrez and Juan Luis Segundoú According to Faus, "The first work to which one should refer in approaching the themes included under the title of Liberation Theology is perhaps Assmann's book,"[22] that is, *Opresion-Liberacion: Desafio a los Cristianos*.[23] For Jose Miguez-Bonino, an Argentine theologian, the work of Gutierrez is more systematic and inclusive, while that of Assmann is more critical.[24] It has also been said that if Gutierrez is the systematizer, Assmann is the apologist for the theology of liberation. The now well-known book of Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*,[25] has been called "the Bible of the liberationist movement." p. 44

Historical Context

In a sense the theology of liberation is a result of the upheavals that have occurred within the Roman Catholic Church, especially since World War II. The proclamation of democracy in opposition to the dictatorial powers of the Axis helped to strengthen the desire for liberty among millions of Latin Americans who were living under oppressive powers on this continent.

The Catholic Church had been serving the dominant classes, and the masses were turning their back on it politically and socially. Catholicism was losing ground in the minds and hearts of the Latin American people. Leftist ideologies had found here a well-fertilized field for their propagation. At the same time, some ecclesiastical leaders began to realize that the so-called "Christianization" of Latin America was an unfinished task. The Roman Catholic Church was facing one of its most critical hours in these countries and in the whole world.

It was in that crucial moment that the kindly figure of Pope John XXIII appeared, with his decision to convene the Second Vatican Council in order to bring about the eccelesiastical transformations that the postwar world demanded. Without producing fundamental theological changes, the Council has introduced currents of renewal to Roman Catholicism. Two examples of this renewal are the openness of the Catholic Church toward other churches and religions and its new attitude toward socio-economic problems.

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[21] J. J. Gonzales Faus, "La Teologia Latinoamericana de la Liberacion," *Actualidad Bibliografica de Filosofia y Teologia* (Barcelona: Facultades de Filosofia y Teologia de San Francisco de Borja, 1973), pp. 359–448.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 413.

[23] Montevideo: Tierra Nueva, 1971.

[24] Jose Miguez-Bonino, "El Nuevo Catolicismo," *Fe Cristiana y Latinoamerica Hoy*, comp. Reno Padilla (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Certeza, 1974), p. 108.

[25] Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973).

A sequel to Vatican II was the Conference of Latin American Bishops, held in Medellin, Colombia in 1968. It focused on the theme, "The transformation of Latin America in the light of the Council," and established guidelines for new action by the Church in Latin America.[26] In contrast to the Catholic conservatism of the preconciliar period, Medellin seems to be a turn toward the left in regard to the problems of underdevelopment in the Latin American countries. Consciously or unconsciously, the bishops were opening the door for a free expression of liberationist theology in the heart of Latin American Catholicism.

For its part, the World Council of Churches continued to encourage p. 45 churches and individuals around the world to identify themselves with a Christianity deeply concerned for social issues. The Council's attack against social injustice was felt in a special way in the third world countries.

This was the historical-cultural scene in which the theology of liberation made its appearance.

General Characteristics

The following are some of the distinctives of Roman Catholic liberation theology.

Foundation. As in the case of ISAL, the emphasis of Catholic liberationism is more sociological than theological. Its starting point and frame of reference is, of course, the socio-economic reality of the underdeveloped nations. Assmann declares, "There is near unanimity in the texts which have circulated until now: the contextual starting point for a 'theology of liberation' is the historical situation of dependence and domination in which the peoples of the third world find themselves."[27] He also writes, "The 'text,' we repeat, is our situation. It is the 'first theological reference point'.... The usual perspectives of the exegetes that 'work from the sacred text' no longer satisfy us, since we want to 'work from the reality of today.' "[28]

What Assmann proposes is not an analysis of the social scene in the light of the Scriptures in order to formulate an eminently biblical theology. Rather than a movement from theology to society, it is a movement from society to theology. The means for understanding the reality of Latin America is provided by the social sciences, without excluding the postulates of Marxism.

But if someone asks if that is *theology*, Assmann answers that it is, although not in the traditional sense in which the term is understood. As he states it, "In order for critical reflection on praxis to be theology, it should have the distinct mark or reference to the faith and to the historical mediations of this faith (Bible and Church History)."[29] p. 46

Nevertheless, he hurries to add that for this process, "purely theological" criteria are not enough, "if by this we understand criteria taken only from the supposedly exclusive sources of theology."[30] The reasons for this deficiency are obvious to Assmann: (1) The sources do not speak clearly for themselves; even as a "text," they must be "made to speak" through the human sciences. (2) The sources are inadequate "to tie in the 'Word' with the

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[26] *La Iglesia en la Actual Transformacion de America Latina a la Luz del Concilio*, 2 vols. (Bogota: Secretariado General de la Conferencia Episcopal Latinoamericana, 1969).

[27] Hugo Assmann, *Opresion-Liberacion: Desafio a los Cristianos* (Montevideo: Tierra Nueva, 1971), p. 50. The content of this book is also found in *Teologia desde la Praxis de la Liberacion* (Salamanca: Sigueme, 1973).

[28] Assmann, *Opresion-Liberacion*, p. 141.

[29] *Ibid.*, pp. 67–68.

[30] *Ibid.*

present events of human history."[31] Definitely, human sciences and the outcome of history are what determine the meaning of the text. In other words, his hermeneutic is existential.

Assmann recognizes that even the means of analysis provided by the human science "easily hide ideological presuppositions."[32] This leaves him without any reliable criterion; and yet he does not look for the solution in a submission to the written revelation of God, but rather in the effort to liberate the available criteria from their ideological presuppositions by means of the praxis to which he feels called. In the final analysis it is his socio-political action that determines the kind of theology he will proclaim.

It is not strange that the liberationist theologians should speak of a theology that is becoming forged along the way of liberation, and that theology comes afterward, and within praxis, "as a critical reflection on action."[33] "Some chapters of theology," says Gutierrez, "can be written only afterwards."[34]

In the area of hermeneutics the conflict between conservative evangelical theology and the theology of liberation becomes sharper. The liberationists,Catholic as well as Protestant, also use the Scriptures to support their presuppositions. They make an effort to hang biblical clothing on the sociological framework that they themselves have erected, and they speak constantly of the Exodus, the new man, the kingdom of God, and other biblical themes, as "paradigms of liberation." It is in the interpretation and application of the sacred text that the discrepancy between liberationism and conservative Protestantism becomes more and more evident. The difference that evangelicals have traditionally made between p. 47 interpretation and application is not taken into account, and application becomes interpretation. Segundo believes that when it comes to the Word of God a "hermeneutical circle" is needed in order to relate the past to the present. He states that the church needs a

> … continual change in our interpretation of the Bible in the light of the continual changes in our present society, both individual and social. Hermeneutics means interpretation. And the circular character of that interpretation consists in the fact that each new reality obligates us to interpret anew the revelation of God, to change that reality with it, and in turn, to interpret again … and so on.[35]

Costas has good reason to warn against the danger of being carried toward theological syncretism by situational hermeneutics.[36] Latin American theologians are left with the task of giving careful study to the hermeneutical problem that these new currents of thought have brought to the theological scene.[37]

Theological Themes

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[31] *Ibid.*

[32] *Ibid.*, pp. 141–42.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 272.

[34] Gutierrez, p. 272.

[35] Juan Luis Segundo, *Liberacion de la Teologia* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Carlos Lohle, 1975), p. 12.

[36] Orlando E. Costas, *The Church and Its Mission* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1974), p. 252.

[37] For a discussion of the hermeneutical problem in relation to liberation theology, see J. M. Breneman, "El Exodo como Tema de Interpretation Teologica," *Liberacion, Exodo y Biblia* (Miami: Editorial Caribe, 1975), pp. 11–52; and Andres Kirk, "La Biblia y Su Hermeneutica en Relacion con la Teologia Protestante en America Latina," *El Debate Contemporaneo Sobre la Biblia* (Barcelona: Ediciones Evangelicas Europeas, 1972), pp. 155–213.

The kingdom of God. This is one of the most important themes in the theology of liberation. The kingdom of God is viewed as a reality that finds itself in the eschatological tension of the "now" and the "not yet." This kingdom does not belong only to the future, nor is it simply other-wordly. God's kingdom is here and now as "a process which becomes closely related to the constant dynamic of the historical process,"[38] and is moving toward its consummation. Gutierrez affirms:

> The growth of the Kingdom is a process which occurs historically *in* liberation, insofar as liberation means a greater fulfillment of man. Liberation is a precondition for the new society, but p. 48 this is not all it is. While liberation is implemented in liberating historical events, it also denounces their limitation and ambiguities, proclaims their fulfillment, and impels them effectively towards total communion. This is not an identification. Without liberating historical events, there would be no growth of the Kingdom. But the process of liberation will not have conquered the very roots of oppression and the exploitation of man by man without the coming of the Kingdom, which is above all a gift. Moreover, we can say that the historical, political liberating event *is* the growth of the Kingdom and *is* a salvific event; but it is not *the* coming of the Kingdom, not *all* of salvation.[39]

According to Gutierrez the kingdom is a gift of God and a work of man; socio-political liberation is a human achievement and a manifestation of the kingdom. Without the liberation that man attains by himself there is no growth of the kingdom. Gutierrez wants to avoid fully identifying the kingdom with a particular political system. Assmann does the same, when he says that the kingdom is always open to what is ahead, in "constant futurization, even in its conquests."[40] Nevertheless, the total panorama of liberationist theology is that of a commitment to leftist ideologies, although the liberationists would resist admitting that their option might be equivalent to a "sanctifying" of the socio-political system that they have chosen as the most adequate in this historical moment for the liberation of the Latin American man.

Soteriology. The liberationist view on the kingdom of God suggests that salvation does not pertain merely to the life beyond. The dualism of the "religious" and the "temporal" has been overcome. Salvation consists also in the progress of the kingdom, a fact that implies in turn the search for a radical break with the status quo, in order to begin the formation of a new society that one day will have completely suppressed the class system and produced a totally new man. This hope is not based on archaic messianism, but rather on scientific rationality, on a historical, scientific analysis of reality. It is liberation carried out by and for p. 49 the oppressed masses. It is not a case of mere humanitarianism but of humanism in the strictest sense of the term. The idea that the Christian should be called to cooperate in the work of salvation goes along closely with the traditional synergism of the Roman Catholic Church.

In this view, the Christian, in order to fulfill his liberating mission, must act in the economic, political, and social arena. The Christian faith has a political dimension. This dimension is not simply a complementary aspect of the faith; it is "the act of faith as such in its concrete context of historical praxis."[41] Gutierrez affirms that just as Pius XII said that the church civilizes by evangelizing, so now in the Latin American context "it would

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[38] Assmann, *Opresion-Liberacion*, pp. 163–64.

[39] Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, p. 177.

[40] Assmann, *Opresion-Liberacion*, pp. 164.

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 20.

be necessary to say that the Church should politicize by evangelizing,"[42] in the sense that it should manifest the political dimension of the gospel. The emphasis of the church's mission falls definitely on social action. "In Latin America to be Church today means to take a clear position regarding both the present state of social injustice and the revolutionary process which is attempting to abolish that injustice and build a more human order."[43] And Assmann says: "Now that the merely 'salvationist' meaning of the mission of the Church has been surpassed, the open affirmation of the universal possibility of salvation has radically changed the concept of the Church's mission in the world …. the Church orients itself toward a new and radical service to mankind."[44]

Liberation theology is a humanist theology, with strong universalist tendencies, a fact that is not surprising in a theological system characterized also by liberal ecumenism, and by relativism in regard to its sources of authority.

Anthropology. According to the theologians of liberation, man is enslaved, but not to the extent that he cannot become aware of his slavery and free himself from the forces that oppress him. Gutierrez says that man knows he is entering a new era, a world fashioned by his own hands. "We live on the verge of man's epiphany…."[45] In contrast to conservative Protestants who p. 50 expect a theophany—the return of the Lord, Gutierrez expects an "anthropophany."[46]

And yet the interest of the liberationist theologians in the "new man" indicates that for them man is not what he could and should be. This theme is not new for the diligent reader of the Bible. But it is to be regretted that Latin American evangelicals have not proclaimed more forcefully and perseveringly that the promise of a totally transformed "new man" comes from the gospel, and that this promise can become a reality only in the ideal Man, "the man Christ Jesus."

Liberation theology speaks of sin; but it emphasizes not so much personal sin as the sin of the "oppressive structures."[47] One is left at times with the impression that the poor are not sinners, due to the fact that they are poor, and that the rich are sinners simply because they are rich. Gutierrez quotes the following words of J. Girardi: "We must love everyone, but it is not possible to love everyone in the same way: we love the oppressed by liberating them; we love the oppressors by fighting them. We love the oppressed by liberating them from their misery, and the oppressors by liberating them from their sin."[48]

The concept of the total depravity of man does not enter into the picture in liberation theology. The reality of the supernatural, demonic forces in the universe that war against the purposes of God is not taken into account either.

Christology. The doctrine of Christ is treated very deficiently in the liberationist system. The main interest seems to be in the earthly ministry of the Son of God, in order to emphasize His "relation to the political world."[49] The liberationists insist that Christians

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[42] Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, p. 269.

[43] *Ibid.*, p. 265.

[44] Assmann, *Opresion-Liberacion*, pp. 73–74.

[45] Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, p. 213.

[46] *Ibid*

[47] *Ibid.*, p. 175.

[48] *Ibid.*, p. 285, n. 56.

[49] *Ibid.*, pp. 225–32.

find Jesus Christ in their fellowman, especially in the poor and the oppressed.[50] This idea is starting to become popular in Latin America. Assmann points out that Christology is "one of the most neglected themes in theology today."[51] This is certainly the case in liberation theology, and the same thing could be said of its pneumatology. p. 51

CONCLUSION

This overview of the theology of liberation shows that this theological movement is far from being, strictly speaking, a *biblical* theology, and is therefore not satisfactory for those who have the Scriptures as their supreme rule of faith. It is a relativist theology, because it takes lightly the firm foundation of biblical authority, because its contextual starting point is the changing reality of Latin America, and because its proponents opt for the insecurity of a future that is always open.

If theological liberationism has brought any benefit to evangelicals in these countries, it has been that of prompting them to rediscover in their faith certain elements they have not incorporated as they should have in their message to the Latin American people. In answer to the liberationist challenge, some members of the Latin American Theological Fraternity have dedicated themselves to serious reflection on the biblical text, taking into account the reality in which evangelicals live here.[52] It is hoped that their efforts will contribute to the formation of an *evangelical* answer to the serious problems which face believers in this continent.

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Evangelism in a Latin American Context

by ORLANDO E. COSTAS

ALL OVER contemporary Christianity we find a growing awareness of "context" as a fundamental concept in the church's understanding of its mission in the world. This growing preoccupation with "contextualization" is linked to the focus on the "now of history" in contemporary theories of biblical and theological interpretation.[1] Not that the

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[50] *Ibid.*, pp. 196–203.

[51] Assmann, *Opresion-Liberacion*, p. 76.

[52] The Latin American Theological Fraternity has published in Spanish and English some of the articles written by its members. See also the Latin American papers presented at the Lausanne Congress on Evangelism, *Let the Earth Hear His Voice* (1974).

[1] Cf., among others, H. M. Kuitert, *The Reality of Faith: A Way Between Protestant Orthodoxy and Existentialist Theology*. Translated from Dutch by Lewis B. Smedes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968); E. Schillebeeckx, *Interpretacion de la fe: Aportaciones a una teologia hermeneutica y critica*. Translated from the German edition, with the author's revision and approval, by Jose M. Mauleon (Salamanca: Ediciones Sigueme, 1973); Emilio Castro, "La creciente presencia de criterios de interpretacion historica en la evolucion de la