

Hermeneutic of the Theology of Liberation: *Community and Freedom*

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Introduction

The Theology of Liberation, which appeared in South America in the second half of the twentieth century, was called to existence by specifics of the current situation in that place and time. Nevertheless, extension of Liberation Theology and development of its teaching came into the notice of other parts of the world. Strong convictions and expressions, which Liberation Theology theologians use to carry their points, motivate investigation of their convictions.

The goal of this essay is to analyze the way of interpretation of the Bible which Liberation Theology steers. What are the Biblical foundations of such a theological school? What is its purpose? And what role does a community have in interpretation of the Bible?

Ways of Biblical interpretation and the role of community are the main interest for this research. The reason is that Liberation Theology reached a significant number of people in local churches that would be impossible for a theological system which was based only on speculation. It seems that the role of the Bible was changed in the local churches and among ordinary believers in Latin America. Because of this we should research and understand this movement.

The research starts with the historical background of Liberation Theology. This brief review can help us understand why and in what circumstances it appeared.

The main part of the research describes the Liberation hermeneutic. There is a description of the understanding of the place of the Bible and tradition in the Theology of Liberation. Then we speak about the way of doing



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hermeneutics among the followers of Liberation Theology and about the role of a community in this process. After a description of the key Bible passages, there is discussion about the strengths and weaknesses of the Liberation hermeneutic.

In doing this research I have used books of the theologians of Liberation which discovered their approach to hermeneutics. The most significant and helpful of them for the topic were the books *Defenseless flower* by Carlos Mesters and *Theology and Praxis* by Clodovis Boff. These books were helpful in understanding more about the hermeneutic of Liberation. The other books used for research on this paper helped to follow the direction of thought and method and see that this approach is common for Liberation theologians.

1. The story of the Theology of Liberation

1.1 Historical background

The historical background of the appearance of Liberation Theology lays deep in socio-political relations or rather confrontation between different classes of Latin American society. Such confrontation was laid in the fundamentals of society years ago at the time of the colonization of Central and South America by the Spanish and, a little bit later in Brazil, by the Portuguese conquistadors.

Followers of Liberation Theology often call *Bartolomé de Las Casas* the father of Liberation Theology.^[1] Bartolomé, whose father and brother participated in the first expedition with Columbus, came to the New World in 1502. In 1512 he was ordained as a priest and became the first priest who was consecrated in the colonies.^[2] In Cuba Bartolomé received as a gift Indian slaves but gave them their freedom, after seeing that the Spanish were cruel toward Indians.

In his report to the Spanish government Bartolomé described the hard situation existing in the colonies. Also in the report he mentioned that Indians are not good for hard work in plantations and it was better to use Africans for this purpose. Later he was sorry for making such a recommendation, insisting that he meant Africans should be free workers, not slaves, but the government had already accepted his advice in their understanding of it, and acted upon it.^[3]

During the ages controversy has remained between people who have followed the way of Las Casas in his desire to change a situation and give freedom for everyone on one hand and governments and capitalists on the other hand. Even after movements for independence came on the scene, the situation did not create much change and oppression from overseas became oppression from local and foreign (mainly American) capital.

^[1] See book *Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ*, Maryknoll: Orbis book, 1993, by Gustavo Gutierrez.

^[2] *Bartolome de Las Casas: Father of Liberation Theology (1474–1566)*. http://www.mexconnect.com/mex_/history/jtuck/jtbartolome.html

^[3] *Ibid.*

Many priests of the Catholic Church, following Bartolome de Las Casas, have participated in this controversy. Quite often local priests, especially from the countryside, have come out as leaders of popular and revolutionary movements. Sometimes even bishops have participated in such movements less directly than indirectly, but not too frequently. Although officially the Vatican has been in opposition to revolutionary movements and the Marxists who have urged for it, quite a few priests have supported people who have participated in such movements or even have struggled against govern regimes with weapons in their hands. Even political organizations in Latin America which were established with the agreement of official Church (such as Christian Democratic parties (CDP) and the more liberal New Catholic Left (NCL)) quite frequently have held the opinion that situations can be changed only in a revolutionary way.^[4] In such conditions the Catholic Church in Latin America came to the Second Latin American Bishops' Conference.

1.2 Appearance and development

In 1968 in Medellin, Colombia, 130 Catholic bishops gathered at a meeting of the Latin American Bishops' Conference, which is known by the abbreviation CELAM II. It was the second such conference in Latin America and its purpose was to discuss ways to apply the results of Vatican II to the Latin American situation. This Conference became a turning point for the entire Latin American Continent. Bishops discussed the economic, social and cultural situation and political life using such words as "liberation", "radical changing", "renovation" and "transformation". There were also phrases which condemned capitalistic systems and imperialism, which pointed to a Marxist influence. Nevertheless, such phrases turned out an appropriate language to express a new view of the Church. Documents, which were accepted by the Conference, were understood by priests and followers of Liberation Theology "as a Magna Carta justifying a whole new pastoral approach."^[5]

The new approach of the church leaders toward the poor and people under oppression generated a new theological, social and political way of relations. The Catholic Church in Latin America started to speak from the side of the poor. It have done it earlier but only in local places and never through the mouths of such high persons in the church hierarchy.

On one hand the position which was expressed at the Conference had no opposition to the official position of the Roman Catholic Church, which have been interested in social transformation. This interest had induced the Church to establish Christian Democratic parties in different countries, and had given support to those who spoke widely about social needs, especially after Vatican II. However, on the other hand, decisions, which were accepted by the Conference and, that is more important, understanding of these decisions among Latin American theologians, priests and ordinary believers were

^[4] Andrew Kirk. *Liberation Theology*, London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1979, 16-17.

^[5] Phillip Berryman. *Liberation Theology*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1987, 24.

quite pro-Marxist. It does not mean that they accepted a Marxist worldview, but they accepted an interpretation of the current situation which was the same as that done by Marx and Marxists. At the same time an understanding of the necessity of revolutionary transformation of society was interpreted in a different way. They usually used the term ‘revolution’ in a positive sense implying by it deep social transformation and equalization of society.^[6]

One of the most important documents for the development of Liberation Theology was the encyclical of the Pope Paul VI “*Populorum progressio*”. In this encyclical the Pope expressed his concern and support for the Third World where the largest number of Catholics live. According to it the Church had to turn toward the poor and oppressed, to work for the structural changing of society in order to create a new Christian society which can be free from the weaknesses of both capitalistic and socialistic systems, defending human life and human rights. The people in the Third World had to receive the possibility to live as worthwhile human beings and the Church had a responsibility to push forward progress which could help them.

Another important thing which influenced the development of the Theology of liberation was the famous Brazilian educator Paulo Freire with his conception of *concientizacion*. With this word, which means ‘*making aware*’, Freire has explained that the problem of oppression of the poor by the rich can be changed through education, changing the system of thinking which was laid deep into the human mind long ago. In order to solve the problem the poor should “liberate themselves from their ‘dominated-conditioned’ mentality^[7] and their passive despair, and the rich must be freed from their ‘dominated-conditioned’ attitude”.^[8]

Further extension and development of Liberation Theology led it to other countries and continents. The voice of liberation was heard not only among the poor in Latin America. Every group of people, who considered themselves as oppressed, took liberation thought as a tool for expressing their own need of liberation. Many new theological movements were shaped by the influence of the Theology of Liberation. Such famous and quite popular contemporary theological movements as Feminist Theology and Black Theology are the children, voluntary or involuntary, of Liberation Theology.

2 Hermeneutic of Liberation Theology

Liberation Theology appeared as a response to the inactivity of the church in a specific social circumstance and to the misuse of existing theology. More important for theologians of Liberation is practice. On this basis, they understand truth as praxis. Theology is not only interpretation of reality but must influence the practice of living out of these truths. In such case of understand-

^[6] A. Kirk, 18.

^[7] The phrase “‘dominated-conditioned’ mentality” means such a kind of human’s self-concept when he/she admits to own dependence on dominant social group by virtue of his/her birth, socioeconomic state, or other causes.

Such a kind of self-conception leads to passive contemplative perception of things and events, and complete rejection of struggle for justice, and as the result provokes feeling of impunity among dominating group.

^[8] Ibid 25

ing the theologians (of the Liberation theology) as well as ordinary followers construct the liberation hermeneutic. This should discover the Scripture for contemporary understanding.

2.1 Place of the Scripture and Tradition in the Theology of Liberation

As usual for any Christian theology, Scripture has an important role in the Theology of Liberation. The Scripture was and still is God's word, the revelation of God for people. At the same time the way in which the Bible impressed the followers of Theology of Liberation is similar to what happened in the Reformation. As in the time before the Reformation, the Bible was far from the ordinary believers just so before the liberation movement started in Latin America the Bible was far from the believers.

The Bible and the right to read and interpret Scripture were given back to people by Liberation theologians. According to their approach the Bible was written for the poor and about the poor. This is not just the word of God, but the liberating word of God, which struggles for truth and justice for people and gives hope to the oppressed and support to the poor. Speaking about Biblical authority and the role of the Bible, Frederick Herzog writes:

...authority through the Bible in the struggle for truth makes no sense unless it is in social location centered in the Eucharist – its proper power setting. The Bible is not primary bedtime reading or morning devotional material, and certainly not just literature for scholarly research, but Eucharistic word in connection with breaking the bread and drinking the cup.^[9]

Thereby, the Bible is the word of God which connects all believers and gives them power to struggle for truth and justice in this unjust world. The church which is the living community of believers who live according to God's word and live with God is the interpreter of the Bible message.

On the assumption of such an understanding, liberation theologians rejected the opinion that only the church as institution has the right to interpret the Bible. Ordinary believers who are the living church have this right, especially if they are those to whom the Bible is addressed in the first place – the poor and oppressed. The best and primary way of doing interpretation is interpretation in a community of believers, because God remains to work with people through His word and through His Spirit. Leonardo Boff sees that "it is something that has a positive meaning in the scripture, where we find that the terms 'in the light of faith' and 'in the light of the word of God' have the same meaning."^[10] Gustavo Gutierrez demonstrates the same understanding:

To read the Bible is to begin a dialog between faith and faith, between the believers of the past and the believers of the today: a dialog that is taking place today within the ecclesial community as it pursues its pilgrimage through history.^[11]

^[9] Frederick Herzog, *God-walk: Liberation shaping dogmatics*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988, 40.

ing Liberation Theology, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988, 32

^[10] Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff. *Introduc-*

^[11] Gustavo Gutierrez. *The God of Life*, London: SCM Press Ltd, 1991, xvi.

Such interaction and interdependence between the Bible and faith have to be stated by application of the word of God, by practice, which “is the locus of verification of our faith of God, who liberates by establishing justice and right in favor of the poor... To believe is to practice.”^[12]

At the same time such ‘practical Biblicism’, though it has similarities with the Reformation, pays reference to tradition, which is an inherent part of Christianity. Without following tradition there is the danger that people will start to use the Bible in wrong ways again. Clodovis Boff states that “it is impossible simply to leap with both feet into the original sense of sacred scripture. It is absolutely necessary to go by way of Christian tradition.”^[13] Tradition, as a way of experience of the previous generations of walking with God and understanding, interpretation and living with His word is important, because it is the connection between previous and contemporary generations of the living church, but the word remains to be the dimension of the tradition and experience.^[14]

2.2 The new way of reading

The key of interpretation for Liberation Theology is reading the Bible through the eyes of the poor. The poor and oppressed people and their needs took the main place in their hermeneutic. God has always taken the side of the poor. He led oppressed Jews out from Egypt, He saved them from Babylonian capture, Jesus came to help the poor and oppressed as well. The Liberation Theology hermeneutic looks toward the poor and doing justice for them.

The way of interpretation, usually used by followers of the Theology of Liberation, both the theologians as well as ordinary believers, refuses exegesis and applies a Bible text directly to a contemporary situation, to people’s life and needs. Rather it is not a refusing of exegesis at all but reevaluating of exegesis as science in the light of praxis of the Christian life. In the words of Leonardo Boff:

Hermeneutics cannot be taken to mean simply the art of understanding ancient texts; it also means comprehending all manifestations of life and knowing how to relate them to the evangelical message...^[15]

The believers in the Basic Communities^[16] started to read the Bible to find liberation from the ‘captivity’ of their usual life, and, in this process of read-

^[12] Gustavo Gutierrez. *The Power of the Poor in History*, London: SCM Press Ltd, 1983, 17.

^[13] Clodovis Boff, *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1987, 139.

^[14] See Herzog, 40.

^[15] Leonardo Boff. *Jesus Christ Liberator*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1979, 4.

^[16] *Basic Ecclesial Communities (Comunidades eclesiales de base)* are the basic local communities of believers which construct the basis in the structure of Liberation Move-

ment. The processes which were going on in these communities made common composition of the movement, its practical content. Mostly these communities under influence of liberation theology existed among Catholics in Latin America in the second half of 20th century. Previously Base Ecclesial Communities were brought to existence as the result of Vatican II and their purpose were to help lay-faithful to be closer in their relationship with Christ and confess their faith in day-by-day life.

ing and interpretation they also liberated the Bible from the ‘captivity’ of exegetical frames, which are used by teachers and preachers who live in different circumstance and often do not understand, in fact cannot understand ordinary believers.^[17]

For Liberation Theology a “right place” of understanding and interpretation is important. Mesters, using Mt. 11:25-26, says the science of exegesis is good but not enough.^[18] By virtue of exegesis we can know a previous meaning of biblical texts, meaning which the author put in a text. However, doing homage to exegesis and scientists who research the Bible and give to the church the meaning of the ancient text, we should recognize God reveals the meaning of the Bible for us today through the Holy Spirit. Both the exegesis, “study of the ‘letter’” and the Holy Spirit, who reveals meaning and value of a text for us and show a way of application are necessary for understanding the Bible.^[19] Interpretation, which is based on scientific methods of research is not completely valid, because the “hermeneutic alone, with its own tools, however perfected these may be, is incapable of deciding what the ‘right’ meaning is.”^[20] The Gospel of the Kingdom has always been proclaimed not in words only, but in the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 4:20). In other words, in the Bible we have met not only words, God-talk, but practice as well, God-walk, as Frederick Herzog called it.^[21]

The conception of doing the truth, or walking in truth (or in light) which John speaks about (1 Jn. 1:6; 2 Jn. 4; 3 Jn. 3-4), took primary place in the liberation hermeneutic. Orthodoxy is not discarded but rather it has yielded primacy to orthopraxy. Faith is expressed in deeds. The purpose of Liberation Theology is orthopraxy the main expression of which is social justice. For the Theology of Liberation church mission is more important than church nature. The church exists rather *for other* than *for oneself*. In such a case it is possible to call the Theology of Liberation practical theology, the theology of doing. Gustavo Gutierrez stated this thought in such words:

...only from deed can the proclamation by word be understood. In the deed our faith becomes truth, not only for others, but for ourselves as well. We become Christians by acting as Christians. Proclamation in word only means taking account of this fact and proclaiming it. Without the deed, proclamation of the word is something empty, something without substance.^[22]

Theologians of Theology of Liberation wish to make hermeneutics more practical, closer to real life, to situations in which people live. The present reading and interpretation of the Bible seem to them as “the refrigerator, the museum, and the cemetery”^[23] where no move is made to the reality of today’s people. The hermeneutic which prefers to discover the historical meaning of Bible text, meaning of “then and there” but not “here and now”, is, for them, a “hellish” hermeneutic.^[24] It is because such a hermeneutic kills the life of

^[17] See Mesters, 17-18.

^[18] Mesters, 18-19.

^[19] Ibid 20-21.

^[20] C. Boff, *Theology*, 138.

^[21] Herzog, 39.

^[22] Gutierrez, *Power*, 17.

^[23] C. Boff, *Theology*, 136.

^[24] Ibid 296 note 26.

Scripture in a contemporary community. They do not reject historical and literal meanings at all, but they keep struggling against servitude by the ‘letter’ of the Bible. The Biblical message, the inner sense, the ‘spirit’ (rather the Spirit) of the Scripture only can capture us, because in such captivity we have liberation.^[25]

The Bible should be read in interaction, in *relationship* between text and community. And this relationship, which is understood as *communication*, is persuasion to acceptance, to response, to application into life. In such a way, “hermeneutics flowers into ethics,”^[26] and indwells into a community as a way of interaction between community and the text and between people in the community. “Riding the Gospel in the context of life”^[27] becomes a dominant way of reading and interpretation in the result of which “life and Bible mix.”^[28]

2.3 Community as determinative factor of interpretation

According to theologians of Liberation Theology, local communities have the key role for Liberation hermeneutics. Partly this concept is shown in the previous section. Interpretation of the Bible in the Basic Ecclesial Communities is defined by simplicity and practice. Mesters points to three elements which are important for understanding of such a way of interpretation: freedom, familiarity and fidelity.^[29]

Freedom, the first element, appears as a result of the experience of communal life in the church. The most important thing in Bible study in the communities is that people who do it are not in the prison of the ‘letter’, because the meaning of the Bible for their current life prevails upon “narrow fundamentalism” of the ‘digging into depth.’^[30] The scripture should discover life, how to live, for people who long to it. For this reason the first questions, which appear among people, are not questions of historicity or significance of the text, but questions about life, about meaning of the text to current situations. The most important is how a person should act with his/her family, neighbor, or administrative supervisor, what job or college he/she should choose, finally how he/she should walk with God.^[31]

^[25] See Mesters, 85.

^[26] C. Boff, *Theology*, 138.

^[27] Mesters, 90.

^[28] *Ibid* 2.

^[29] *Ibid* 5.

^[30] *Ibid* 6.

The phrase “digging into depth” is ironic phrase common for believers in Ukrainian Baptist churches with regard to people who try to find deep meaning of the Bible passage (irrespective historical or metaphorical) without any meaning for life.

^[31] Quite interesting is a fact that such way of interpretation is quite common for Eastern Baptists, who usually consider themselves as

fundamentalists. My own experience of participation and leading of the Bible study groups and participation in services in many Ukrainian and Russian churches confirms this fact. The main questions which people ask in the Bible study groups and in the Bible study services (which are extended among Ukrainian Baptist churches) are following: “What does this text mean for me today? What can I know about God and relations with Him? How can I act in such and such situation according to the Bible?” Practice of such groups often is the same or almost the same as the Base Communities have according to describing which Mesters gave in *Defenseless flower*, 87-8 and other.

Familiarity, the next element, does not mean that people in communities “know the Bible from the beginning to the end”, but that the Bible has deep meaning for their lives. The scripture, which before was on the side of those who have taught and preached it, often for the oppressors and against the oppressed, became the word, which liberates, a part of life for freed people. Those, who were struggling, or suffering, or in sorrow found the story about themselves in “the book of God’s *family*.”^[32]

Fidelity, finally, is the third element which Mesters mentions. The people in the communities received the Bible which earlier was hidden from them. Now they started to interact with the text as with the word of God directed to them. They applied the word into the practice of their lives, because “the people’s main interest is not to interpret the Bible, but to interpret life with the help of the Bible.”^[33] The Bible is a real inherent part of life for these people; as real as they themselves, as their village or town, as their work and their community; and as inherent as their lives, as their families, as bread for living. Frederick Herzog expresses it in following words:

We indwell the scriptures as home and as roots. They do not straitjacket us in literalism. They are a living environment or part of a living organism like roots are part of a tree. What brings us into being as disciples is not a normative understanding of every word of scripture, but the Eucharistic event constituting us in God-walk.^[34]

These three elements discover the attitude of people in these Communities to the Bible. Mesters explains that “the method used in the groups is free association. One idea brings up another.”^[35] Thereby, we can see that method of free association, as well as the allegorical method and the method called reader response, are quite widespread among believers in the Base Communities and is accepted by them as the most suitable for their situation.

The people, who received the possibility to read the Bible in their communities started to understand that their lot is not the will of God. God called them to liberty, to peace, to justice. The Tree of Life (Gen.2:9), though it was eclipsed, remains to be the Tree of hope for those who are suffering.^[36]

2.4 Key passages of Scripture for the Theology of Liberation

The passages which theologians of Liberation prefer to use in the first instance are the passages which contain stories about liberation from oppression, superiority of poor people and those which express God’s support to such classes of people. There are a number of such stories in the Old Testament.

The book of Exodus is worthy to be named as the most important book or the very first book which is preferred by theologians of Liberation. The story of Jews who were oppressed by the Egyptian Pharaoh and had to do hard work

^[32] Mesters, 8.

^[33] *Ibid.* 9.

^[34] Herzog. 38.

^[35] Mesters, 10.

^[36] Gordon Spykman, Guillermo Cook and others. *Let My People Live: Faith and Struggle in Central America*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 21-22.

for him is the symbolic description of every people, of every person who is oppressed and calls to God for help. At the same time there is a new hope in the book of Exodus, the hope of God's answer, the hope of God's action on the side of oppressed, the hope of liberation.

Such an understanding of the story of the Exodus of Jews from Egypt was criticized by Amerindian scholar Robert Allen Warrior and the Palestinian Naim Stifan Ateek. They, in identifying themselves with the Canaanites, see in the story of Exodus and the conquering of Palestine a new way of oppression, when people, who were under oppression, become oppressors by stealing the land which has been possessed by someone else before and they do it "under sacred mandate".^[37]

Ateek, enlightening the problem from the Palestinian side, says:

Liberation theologians have seen the Bible as a dynamic source for their understanding of liberation, but if some parts of it are applied literally to our situation today the Bible appears to offer to the Palestinians slavery rather than freedom, injustice rather than justice, and death to the national and political life.^[38]

He affirms that contemporary Zionism, which notes the biblical story of exodus and conquest of Canaan, is actually a continuation of European politics of colonialism.^[39] Nevertheless, this book remains to be one of the most important books for Liberation theologians.

The other important books for the Theology of Liberation are The Prophets. They are symbols of struggling for truth and justice even if it was dangerous for their own lives. The prophets were uncompromised messengers, who proclaimed the liberating word from the God-Liberator.^[40] The prophetic task, which belongs to the Church, cannot be ignored in contemporary days as well. The Church, according the Liberation Theologians, should be active in social sphere, revealing and condemning injustice and transforming society.

The Gospels and the book of Acts have quite an important role for the Theology of Liberation. Particularly there are the Sermon on the Mount and all the texts about the Kingdom of God in the Gospels, and the texts about the life of the first community of believers in Acts. Such texts, which speak of justice, community and the poor, are preferable in Liberation Theology.

3 Strengths and weaknesses of the Liberation Hermeneutic

Summarizing the approach of the Liberation Theology to hermeneutics it is necessary to talk about the strengths and weaknesses of this approach. It should help us understand the Theology of Liberation and its hermeneutic more clearly and in greater depth. This evaluation cannot be absolutely free from my own preferences but it is possible to try to do it as objectively as possible.

^[37] William D. Spencer. 'Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation,' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, March 1999, 170.

^[38] Naim S. Ateek. *Justice, and Only Justice*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1989, 75

^[39] *Ibid* 22.

^[40] Boff, *Introducing*, 35.

Among the strengths of the Liberation hermeneutic the following must be stated. First, returning to the Bible and interest in reading it to ordinary believers. This right to read and interpret the Bible by oneself made the connection between the biblical text and real life. Thanks to their hermeneutics the Bible became more vital and more real for believers. It became a part of day-to-day activities.

In other words, believers in basic communities found the value of the Scripture for their day-to-day life. The Bible from the book which served to be a 'choke' became the 'word of hope' which can transform their life today. The purpose of the Bible reading is in the way of doing truth, not only speaking about it. Gustavo Gutierrez said: "Theology of Liberation offers us not so much a new theme for reflection as a new way to do theology."^[41] This concentration on praxis is the main strength of Liberation theology, for which "Theo-praxis has to be the starting point and ultimate court of appeal."^[42]

The next strength flows from the previous and tight to it closely. The issue of justice and the right attitude to the poor and oppressed, to poverty and human rights provokes believers to read bible with the purpose to find the answers to the hard question. And people wait not for the speculative answers but for practical ones, which every believer at the basic communities would be able to practice in own routine life.

The appearance of the Theology of Liberation, as the reaction on social injustice in Latin America, raised interest of Christian society, and especially theological reflection on it, in the other continents. This interest concerns not only the issue of social life and interaction between the Christian faith and society and social needs, but also the issue of spiritual life and communal unity among Christians. The new way of reading the Bible invited believers to make same kind of Communities for reading and living the Bible message together.

Nevertheless, the Theology of Liberation and its hermeneutic is not too brilliant in every way as it could seem. There are some weaknesses as well as strengths. It is possible to list the following weaknesses. The first, free interpretation of the Bible can provoke free treatment with the text and, as a result, generate doubt not only in interpretation but in the text itself; this is what happened with Warrior and Ateek, whom we mentioned earlier.^[43] Misusing and/or rejecting exegesis can bring one to a wrong interpretation of the text. Nevertheless, such danger is always present even if the Bible is not interpreted freely by ordinary believers.

Then, there is always the danger that stress on social justice can draw people into political struggles or fights. The prophetic task of the Church surely motivates church to be active in social life and struggle for justice. Neverthe-

^[41] Gustavo Gutierrez. *A Liberation Theology: history, politics, and salvation*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1973, 15.

^[42] Herzog, 46-47.

^[43] We have seen already how Ateek reinterprets the biblical story about conquering Canaan by Israelites in the light of contemporary relations between Israel and Palestinian Arabs. For more information see Spencer, 170.

less, in such a case there is a danger for the church to transform into one of political movements, which just prevent her from the realization of her prophetic task. She should be above becoming involved in overt political struggles as an institution but still be interested in people and their circumstances.

Finally, the idea of liberation in its extreme expression can become (and actually has already become in some of varieties) very radical. Quite representative examples of this are Liberation Theologians such as Leonardo Boff, who has vindicated the rights of homosexuals, radical feminist theology and some other radical theological movements. Thus, we can say that from one theological idea different theological movements can appear independently using or misusing the same idea.

Conclusion

This essay cannot pretend to give a deep evaluation of the hermeneutic of Liberation. It is rather a brief summary observation of the reasons and content of the hermeneutic, which already exists. The importance of the Bible and using it in ordinary life which was lifted up by Liberation theologians is worthy to be researched more deeply than is possible for the length of this essay. Nevertheless, for us as Baptists this way of hermeneutics is quite familiar. As I have already stated, Eastern Baptists use a similar way of interpretation of the Bible as Base Communities do. Other Baptist communities in different parts of the world have also such an experience, to a greater or a lesser degree.

Summarizing this essay on the Liberation hermeneutic it is necessary to say that the original idea of the Theology of Liberation was called to appearance by a current situation which existed in Latin America in the middle of the 20th century. When it appeared, it was an adequate response to that situation and gave direction for people who had a need for a real God who could participate in their lives, not only watch over them and do nothing. Liberation Theology and its way of reading the Bible, the way of theo-praxis, walking with God was the way of people living with God here on the earth and having a live relationship with God in their day-to-day activities. Though it has some complicated aspects we cannot reject it, because it showed that it has answers to particular needs of believers.

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