

Thank God that Luther and Gutierrez are right: One liberating act(ion) is worth all the liberationist speculation. What, then, is the action on which "liberation theology" is reflection, and what's to be the next action?

Today (18Jan79) I read the latest batch of "liberation theology" books and my mind boggles at the use of the word "theology" in connection with these pastiches of placard slogans. My heart is so much with "the movements" and against entrenched, insensitive, systemic and procedural injustices, inequities of access and opportunity, consciously and unconsciously concealed oppressions, piously paraded "advantages," cruelly inappropriate hurdles called "testing," faceless aggression called "competition"--my heart is so sick with all this fraud, all these inauthentic "privileges" and bad-faith "rights," and with my own daily struggle for ethical clarity (cleanness being impossible) on personal and public issues of rights/responsibilities....I "go" with the liberationist rhetoric, for it authentically tries to conscientize power and ennerve powerlessness ("authentically," for rhetoric *is, should be*, that two-edged sword). This thinksheet is *pro*-liberation, *pro*-liberationist rhetoric, and *anti*-"liberation theology" which is no more than cleverly developed sloganeering, so slithery as to pass for theologizing. This substituting of descants on slogans for the sweat of substantial composing (1) fails to serve the basic function of theology, which is to make the Message plausible to the mind of a time and people, and (2) trains up "theologians" who can't distinguish sloganeering (which aims to persuade by revealing, distorting, and concealing) from thinking (which aims to persuade by seeking truth and displaying, in the form of heuristic models, such truth as one has been grasped by)....Here are some of the slithery slogans I found especially irritating and distressing in this latest batch of books:

*God is on the side of the poor.* Now, I well understand that the moralistic mentality (such as the Marxist, with whom the best of our "liberation theologians" are in living confrontation) has no gray scale: are you with the good guys ("oppressed") or the bad guys ("oppressors")? Even God is dragooned into this game! Christians on this account commit stupidities of "engagement" and crimes of "confrontation" out of the ideological necessity of choosing sides; and since deciding on the worse guys (as all guys are bad) is so tough in this complex world, simple-minded Christians usually settle for the notion that the better guy is the underguy, and ram it home with the divine sanction (viz., I am with the underguy because I want to be where God is; a dangerous notion which, given a slight upturn, becomes "I am where God is, so where does that put *you*?"). Surely this slogan does not present us with observable historical or present fact: the evidence is the other way, is it not? Is it, then, an eschatological-present use of the verb, stating as *is* what *should be* and *will be*, viz. the shalom of justice in truth and peace in love? I like that, but users of the slogan mean more than that; they mean to threaten the principalities and powers *here and now*, identifying with "the poor" and in danger of becoming identical with (and therefore without witness-tension to) the Marxist nonChristian engaged. Further, and mainly, they mean to encourage the Christian troops among "the poor" and also "the poor" who are not Christian. But this "on the side of" will not pass biblical scrutiny, and should therefore not pass itself off as "liberation [Christian] *theology*."

*Black Jesus.* The fancier the gymnastics have gotten on this one, the less believable it is. Cleage and I were the main speakers at the first "black Jesus" conference in Wash., DC, and he was straightforward-literal about it. But now we have slithery adverbs like "simply" and (tropically used) "literally" to deal with. Ugh.

*Contextualization.* This bookish term (from "text") attempts (1) to evade the issue of the irrelevance of the word it's replaced, viz. "relevance," and (2) to get "with" the Marxist scientific-historical notion of "praxis"--theoretically, the hypothesis-improvement loop (but in Marxist action, only the strategy-improvement loop). This basically me-too posture leads to such nonsense as "there is no possibility of extracting the text and projecting it objectively as a norm"--precisely what good king Josiah did in 621BC, to adduce only one biblical instance.