

LIBERATION THEOLOGY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE MINISTRY OF
RECONCILIATION

by

Robert L. Getty

B.A. Simpson University, 1961

A.B. Wheaton College, 1962

M.S.S.M. University of Southern California, 1972

Ph. D. University of Georgia, 1989

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Approval:

Bruce P. Baugus, Ph.D. Thesis Advisor

Andrew J. Peterson, Ph.D.
RTS/Virtual President

ABSTRACT

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The objective of liberation theology to bring justice to the poor and oppressed can be more effectively achieved through the ministry of reconciliation in Christ which is the heart of the gospel. Liberation theology presents the objective of justice as the necessary condition for liberation from every form of exploitation to achieve the possibility of a more humane and dignified life. This thesis will review the various approaches that the liberation theology movement has taken since its beginning, and evaluate both the strengths and weakness of these approaches. The lessons, which we can learn from liberation theology's optimistic goals for justice to the disadvantaged, provide strong challenges. The admonition for justice as stated in Scripture will be delineated. Based on this review of Scripture, recognition is necessary of the distinction between the role of mercy and justice in salvation and the role of these in civil affairs. The challenges given in Scripture will lead to a discussion of how they will integrate into the ministry of reconciliation as a means of obtaining the objectives of liberation theology. Then a comparison will be made with the ministry of reconciliation suggested by Protestants with that described by Roman Catholics. It is clear that these ministries or initiatives are effective when they are integrated. Liberation theology without the ministry of reconciliation is weak and reduced to a political movement. The ministry of reconciliation focuses on the reconciliation between the individual sinner and the living

God through faith in Jesus Christ. This is clearly a different dimension than reconciliation between persons. However in the context of presenting the message of reconciliation to God, the external circumstances of oppression would be a distraction that inhibits the reception of God's reconciliation.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The objective of liberation theology to bring justice to the poor and oppressed can be more effectively achieved through the ministry of reconciliation in Christ which is the heart of the gospel. Liberation theology presents the objective of justice as the necessary condition for liberation from every form of exploitation to achieve the possibility of a more humane¹ and dignified life.² This objective has good motivation to help the poor and disadvantaged but is placed in the context of Christian theology, which many suggest is a theology that focuses on “the acquisition of heaven.”³ This stated focus of the church seems contrary to the church being totally committed to the oppressed classes and dominated peoples.⁴ This thesis will review the various forms that the liberation theology movement has taken since its beginning, and evaluate both the strengths and weakness of these approaches. The lessons, which we can learn from liberation theology’s optimistic goals for justice to the disadvantaged, provide strong challenges. We will then delineate the admonition for justice as stated in Scripture. Based on this review of Scripture,

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Bishops; of Latin America and the Caribbean* (Shrine of Aparecida, May 13, 2007) available from http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2007/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070513_conference-aparecida_en.html; Internet; accessed 23 November 2010.

² Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, Revised Edition (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988), xxi.

³ S. M. Floyd-Thomas, and A. B Pinn, Editors. *Liberation Theologies in the United States: An Introduction* (New York University Press, NY, 2010), 9.

⁴ Gustavo Gutierrez, “Faith as Freedom: Solidarity with the Alienated and Confidence in the Future.” *Horizons*, 2 (1975) : 25.

recognition is necessary of the distinction between the role of mercy and justice in salvation and the role of these in civil affairs. The challenges given in Scripture will lead to a discussion of how they will integrate into the ministry of reconciliation as a means of obtaining the objectives of liberation theology. Then a comparison will be made with the ministry of reconciliation suggested by Protestants with that described by Roman Catholics. The Protestant approach is anchored in the reconciling work of Jesus as the supreme crisis in the life of mankind, which reflects the key perspective of the Reformation that God is a God who saves by grace alone and that reconciliation conveys the full meaning of God's forgiveness.⁵ The Roman Catholic ministry demands an effective witness in the service of one's neighbor, the poor and the oppressed in particular, in an integral theological fashion. This presentation of Christianity entails the essentials of God and his relationship to man; the sovereignty of grace; and the true nature of the means of salvation.⁶ These perspectives have unique features, but will be synthesized into a more effective approach to achieve justice objectives when ministering to the poor and disadvantaged worldwide. The study will show that the premises of liberation theology are best achieved in the context of the ministry of reconciliation as described in this study. Specifically, the human needs of justice are met through the reconciliation ministry of Christ.

It is necessary that one does not attempt to select either liberation theology or the ministry of reconciliation since they go hand in hand:

⁵ "The Confession of 1967" *PC(USA) Book of Confession: Study Edition* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1999), 320.

⁶ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology Of Liberation"* (Published by direction of Holiness Pope John Paul II, 1984), XI-17.

We do not call for liberation in order to bring about reconciliation. Not liberation *or* reconciliation. Rather, no reconciliation without liberation. Reconciliation can only come about if the nature of the violence perpetrated is acknowledged, and its conditions for continuing or reappearing are removed. Liberation is not just liberation from the violent situation, but also liberation from the structures and processes that permit and promote violence.⁷

Liberation is integral to the gospel of Christ and touches every dimension of life. God's saving act in history pervades and penetrates all levels of human life. "God is seen here as the God of the living who enters into humanity's history to dispel the forces of death, wherever they are at work, and to call forth the healing and reconciling forces of life."⁸

The inequities in the world are clearly visible and ideally they would call all Christians to action when we consider the mandate of Christ to minister to the "least of these." However, as Nicholas Wolterstorff observes:

There are many explanations of failing to see the faces and hear the voices of those who are wronged, even of those right before one. Sometimes we loathe the victims. Sometimes we are overwhelmed by the fear of what we would have to do if we genuinely saw and heard; so we block out the sight and muffle the sound. And sometimes our frameworks of conviction lead us to discount the significance of what we see and hear. We regard the one before us as a candidate for charity, should we be so inclined; or we insist that his condition is his own fault. We resist acknowledging that the presence of the other before us places a claim on us, issues to us a call to do justice.⁹

Consequently, although there are clear difficulties that burden the gospel of love, a major commitment of the church is needed to overcome natural resistance. We will see in this

⁷ Robert J. Schreiter, *Reconciliation: Mission & Ministry in a Changing Social Order* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1992), 22.

⁸ Henri Nouwen, "Forward," in Gutierrez, Gustavo, *We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2003), ix.

⁹ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), ix.

study that the ministry of the church is challenged to address the needs of the oppressed and poor.

The challenge becomes even more prominent since those who benefit from the disparity in the world resist a change:

It is easy to see why those who oppose social protest movements prefer that the debate not be conducted in terms of rights. The rights of the other place limits on how I treat her. Not even for reasons of great good to be achieved am I permitted to treat her with less than full respect. Those who oppose liberation movements almost always claim that some great good will be maintained and some great evil averted if the status quo is preserved; they do not want to hear about limits on what they are allowed to do to the other in maintaining the status quo.¹⁰

Wolterstorff suggests that the disparity that exists in the world causes some to be oppressed. He declares that liberation theology is correct in their identification with the poor and oppressed:

The sorrows produced by our world-system are many. Among them is the domination of some by others which the system encourages. And, as one would expect, when one party dominates another, it customarily also takes advantage of the other and exploits it. . . . One has to say that one human being is being wronged by another, and to say that is to take sides with the former. It is to declare solidarity with him or her in opposition to the oppressor. . . . And if one's declaration of solidarity is serious, the actions of liberation will flow forth. On all this the liberation theologian is right.¹¹

The objectives of liberation theology have a valid focus which is based on the admonishment of Scripture and in the proclamation of the gospel. However there are mixed feelings regarding the priority that the church should place in this movement. In addition there is the question whether the approach is consistent with the commission of

¹⁰ Ibid., 6.

¹¹ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 67.

the church. This study will explore these aspects and seek to synthesize the focus of Scripture on justice for all people and the spreading of the gospel of Christ to the world.

In the following chapters I will determine the interrelationship of the ministry of reconciliation and the objectives of liberation theology. In chapter two, an overview of liberation theology will be presented in order to better understand the objectives, practices and different observations of this movement. In chapter three, the admonition for justice that is advocated in Scripture will be presented. This presentation will review both the Old and New Testament treatment of justice, mercy and righteousness with a short review of the words used in the Hebrew and Greek. Following this review, ministry challenges that apply this admonition will be described. In chapter four the description and practices of the ministry of reconciliation from both the Roman Catholic and Protestant perspectives will be delineated. The focus of chapter five will be an evaluation of the effectiveness of the ministry of reconciliation in meeting the objectives of liberation theology along with a consideration of resulting applications. Finally, in chapter six, I will reflect on the relationship of liberation theology to the ministry of reconciliation. It is clear that these ministries or initiatives are effective when they are integrated. Liberation theology without the ministry of reconciliation is weak and reduced to a political movement. The ministry of reconciliation focuses on the reconciliation between the individual sinner and the living God through faith in Jesus Christ. This is clearly a different dimension than reconciliation between persons. However in the context of presenting the message of reconciliation to God, the external circumstances of oppression would be a distraction that inhibits the reception of God's reconciliation.

CHAPTER II

LIBERATION THEOLOGY OBJECTIVES

Rationale & Situational

The rationale behind liberation theology is in the context of those who have their dignity denied due to various factors. Within this context of denied dignity and worth, there is an accompanying identification with the causes for this situation. In the words of Daniel Migliore who uses the term contextual Christologies as a parallel term for liberation theology:

There are both external and internal factors prompting the development of contextual Christologies. Some of the external factors are easily identified. Many Christians in Asia, Africa, and Latin America are convinced that their theological reflection must attend to their own distinctive non-Western cultures and forms of thought.¹

He goes on to suggest that in North America and Europe, many black and Asian Christians and women of all races feel their histories and struggles have been ignored by traditional theologies. Based on these felt discrepancies, which he feels are valid Migliore makes the case that the developments of contextual Christologies are both possible and necessary:

Christ lived, was crucified, and was raised from the dead “for all.” God’s way to universality is through the particular. This has profound implications for the church’s witness to Jesus Christ throughout the world. Just as God’s decisive self-communication is through incarnation in a particular human life, so the transmission of the gospel message by the

¹ Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 198.

church makes use of concrete and diverse languages, experiences, philosophical conceptualities, and cultural practices.²

It behooves one that is presenting the gospel message, to be completely aware of the circumstances and culture of the audience in order for the message to be better received.

Liberation theology focuses on all people who are oppressed and dehumanized. Every person seeks a sense of dignity, which according to the sociologist Max Weber is associated with a positively privileged status. But this may need to be questioned, if it is a positive self-acceptance, then it is fine and proper. “However, if it is obtained at the expense of other groups and of their being kept down, then it becomes an object of false pride.”³ Gutierrez sees this oppression that affects primarily the poor as death itself:

The world of the poor is a universe in which the socio-economic aspect is basic but not all-inclusive. In the final analysis, poverty means death: lack of food and housing, the inability to attend properly to health and education needs, the exploitation of workers, permanent unemployment, the lack of respect for one’s human dignity, and unjust limitations placed on personal freedom in areas of self-expression, politics, and religion. Poverty is a situation that destroys peoples, families, and individuals; [it was] called “institutionalized violence” to which must be added the equally unacceptable violence of terrorism and repression.⁴

Liberation theology developed to directly address these cases of oppression and it is contrasted with other forms of social change movements since it addresses the movement with a theological perspective. It is “a theology of salvation incarnated in the concrete historical and political conditions of today and reflects the love of the Father and human fraternity, which is salvation operating in time and giving a deep unity to human

² Ibid., 198.

³ Caleb Rosado, “Black and African Theologies of Liberation: Marxian and Weberian Perspectives,” *Journal of Religious Thought* 42 (1985) : 33.

⁴ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, Revised Edition (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988), xxi.

history.”⁵ “Liberation theologies have arisen as intellectual and religious responses to very concrete struggles for justice and love on the part of those committed to overcoming the dehumanizations and depersonalizations resulting from classism, sexism, racism, technocentrism, and militarism.”⁶ In so doing they have “challenged concepts of God, Christ, Salvation, Sacraments, etc. which are judged inadequate or false relative to the values of liberating us from the systemic injustices destroying so many billions of human lives and the very environment in which we live.”⁷

The focus is the liberation of the poor and oppressed, the "marginals" of our world. “While the mainstream looks confidently for God in its situation, the marginals look for a God who will ‘liberate’ them from their situation, and the situation of their oppressor which so determines their own situation.”⁸ This movement addresses “the Biblical revelation of the transcendent God as revealed in the event of liberation in Jesus Christ. For a powerless, marginal, oppressed people caught up in the struggle for their liberation and justice, the Biblical word can become not only viable but necessary.”⁹ It is a “foundational theological locus for responding to issues of oppression.”¹⁰ The oppressors, however, have a different view and feel they are being good to the oppressed. “Oppressors do all they can to prevent use of the category of justice; they do all they can

⁵ Gustavo Gutierrez, “Faith as Freedom: Solidarity with the Alienated and Confidence in the Future,” *Horizons* 2 (1975) : 50.

⁶ Matthew L. Lamb, “Liberation Theology and Social Justice,” *Process Studies* 14 (1985) : 105

⁷ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁸ Robert T. Osborn, “Rise and Fall of the Bible in Recent American Theology,” *Duke Divinity School Review* 41 (1976) : 68.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁰ Chris Barrigar. “The Imperative Inherent in the Gift of Freedom: Karl Barth and Amartya Sen on Human Freedom,” *Asia Journal of Theology* 18 (2004) : 111.

to cast the situation in terms of better and worse rather than justice and injustice, in terms of good behavior and bad behavior; in terms of benevolence.”¹¹

A prevailing problem of the economic system causes structural forms of exploitation and oppression. Many find that the standard social teaching of the church does not address this problem. They called “for reforms within the system, rather than a radical transformation of the political, social, and economic structures that constituted the system.”¹² Development efforts in the Third World focused on the state role to eliminate obstacles to development, “that is to say eradicate, or in the best of cases discipline, all those whose profiles of subjectivity, cultural traditions and ways of knowing would not adjust to the imperatives of industrialization.”¹³ It is suggested that the activities of multinational corporations show that we have not reached the “end of colonialism.” “For that reason, a small number of companies from the richest countries in the world dominate the field, while their ‘object of study’, the biological wealth of the earth, is concentrated in the poor nations of the subtropical and tropical regions of the world.”¹⁴ This economic development has set the stage for “liberation theology’s new and distinctive approach to the socioethical evaluation of Latin American problems. . . . The social doctrine of the Church . . . would retain the benefits and shed the defects of both capitalism and socialism.”¹⁵ Caleb Rosado added, “Liberation theology is reversing the negative

¹¹ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), viii.

¹² Peter Burns, “The Problem of Socialism in Liberation Theology,” *Theological Studies* 53 (1992) : 494.

¹³ Santiago Castro-Gómez, “The Missing Chapter of Empire,” *Cultural Studies* 21(2007) : 436.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 442.

¹⁵ Burns, “The Problem of Socialism,” 497.

ideological role of earlier theology by legitimizing movements and structures for liberation instead of sanctioning oppressive structures.”¹⁶

Methods & Processes

The community is the focus of the liberation movement in order for those who are oppressed to gain ownership of their situation. Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff question, “Where is liberation theology to be found? You will find it at the base. It is linked with a specific community and forms a vital part of it. Its service is one of theological enlightenment of the community on its pilgrim way.”¹⁷ It is at the base where liberation theology is most effective and is lived. They add, “But it has been these communities—leaders and members—that have begun to reflect on their faith in a liberating spirit.”¹⁸ Gustavo Gutierrez adds, “Behind liberation theology are Christian communities, religious groups, and peoples, who are becoming increasingly conscious that the oppression and neglect from which they suffer are incompatible with their faith in Jesus Christ (or, speaking more generally, with their religious faith).”¹⁹ Those who in the past were not active in the transformation are now actively involved. “They have gradually been turning into active agents of their own destiny and beginning a resolute process that is changing the condition of the poor and oppressed of this world.”²⁰

Gutierrez suggests that making those who have been marginalized aware that they are loved is sometimes difficult. “But how does one announce God as Father in a non-

¹⁶ Rosado, “Black and African Theologies,” 37

¹⁷ Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff. *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis. 1987), 19.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹⁹ Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, xix.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, xxi

human world? What are the implications when we tell a non-person that he or she is a son or daughter of God? . . . To be a Church is to be in solidarity with all who suffer but we must remember that the gospel message . . . does not identify with any social form. It hopes against hope.”²¹ The challenge is not with a non-believer, but with the *non-person*:

the poor, the exploited, one who is systematically deprived of being a person, one who scarcely knows that he or she is a person. The non-person questions before anything else, not our religious world, but our *economic, social, political and cultural world*; and thus, a call is made for the revolutionary transformation of the very bases of a dehumanizing society. Our question, therefore, is not how to announce God in an adult world; but rather how to announce him as *Father* in a non-human world. What are the implications when we tell a non-person that he is a son of God?²²

Liberation embraces all of human life since it expresses the saving action of God in history and poverty and “along with its causes and consequences, is *death-dealing* and denies the basic human right to existence and the *reign of life*.”²³ The role of religion in politics needs to be rethought and may require that the ranks of revolutionary groups be filled with clergy and lay Catholics.²⁴ Liberation theologians have at various times and in various ways made explicit a preference for socialism over capitalism.²⁵ A radical approach is necessary and entails “that an authentic Christian faith would necessarily require a definite, concrete sociopolitical option for a more just society.”²⁶ Although liberation theology leans toward socialism, “such a socialism is always provisional,

²¹ Gutierrez, “Faith as Freedom,” 25.

²² *Ibid.*, 43.

²³ Gustavo Gutierrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2003), 2.

²⁴ Anthony Gill, “The Study of Liberation Theology: What Next?” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 41 (2002) : 87

²⁵ Burns, “The Problem of Socialism,” 493.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 494.

always corrigible. It should therefore be flexible and nondogmatic, as well as culturally and historically sensitive.”²⁷

Gutierrez doesn't equate liberation to salvation, but he feels that salvation is communion with God and one another in history. Liberation is sought for the sake of the community to be set free of oppressive situations in order to achieve communion in love. Salvation then centers on the community rather than the individual since the individual is part of a particular community. Gutierrez sees the need for a vital Christian community for the restoration of communion. In his view, “He has laid a solid theological foundation for the recovery of a salvic significance for theology in society and history, something particularly necessary today.”²⁸

Religious Bodies' Views of Liberation Theology

Liberation theology with its grassroots approach led to serious debate, regarding the causes of poverty, with the conservative Catholic hierarchy. It became clear that religion was alive and well and could improve the understanding of social justice.²⁹

Liberation theology has been compared to the Protestant Reformation:

As the Protestant Reformation began as a revolt against corrupt practices in the Roman Catholic Church stressing the personal convictions and was more in tune with the modern age than Roman Catholicism, so the liberation theology is also a manifestation of a new worldwide movement for human emancipation. It constitutes a new, timely phenomenon and strives to implement the full realization of a human being in harmony with

²⁷ Ibid., 500.

²⁸ Joyce Murray, “Liberation for Communion in the Soteriology of Gustavo. . .” *Theological Studies* 59 (1998) : 58.

²⁹ Gill, “The Study of Liberation Theology,” 88.

the Nature and for the believer, in harmony with the original Christian message.³⁰

Reflecting on the theology of liberation invites theologians to deepen their understanding of the essential biblical basis and a concern for the urgent questions regarding the yearning for liberation. Those movements faithfully echo these concerns and so bring attention to the Church. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger declares that “We dare not forget for a single instant the situations of acute distress which issue such a dramatic call to theologians.”³¹ Boff and Boff add, “How are we to be Christians in a world of destitution and injustice? There can be only one answer: we can be followers of Jesus and true Christians only by making common cause with the poor and working out the gospel of liberation.”³² Following the example of Jesus the claim of liberation theologians was that “‘God became poor’ (*Dios hecho pobre*) who lived at the periphery, far removed from the center of world domination, and who called for the transformative praxis of taking up one's cross and following him.”³³

Liberation theology addresses the conditions of persons in entire nations that are suffering from exploitation and misery. In fact they do not enjoy basic elementary rights of persons and may be unaware they are persons:

That is why, the liberating praxis, in the measure that it starts from an authentic solidarity with the poor and the oppressed, will be, in short, *a praxis of love*, of real love, efficacious and historical, towards concrete

³⁰ Marian Hillar, “Liberation Theology: Religious Response to Social Problems. A Survey,” *Humanism and Social Issues. Anthology of Essays* (M. Hillar and H.R. Leuchtag, eds., Houston: American Humanist Association. 1993) : 44.

³¹ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology Of Liberation"* (Published by direction of Holiness Pope John Paul II, 1984), IV-1.

³² Boff & Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 4.

³³ Michael L. Cook, “Jesus from the other side of history: Christology in Latin America” *Theological Studies* 44 (1983) : 267.

men. It will be a praxis of love of neighbor and, in him, of love of Christ who identifies himself with the least of our brothers and sisters. Any attempt to separate the love of God from love of neighbor gives birth to impoverished attitudes in one sense or the other.³⁴

The commitment to liberation is a spiritual experience for many Christians. This conforms to the biblical sense: “a living in the Spirit which makes us recognize ourselves as free and creative children of the Father and brothers of all people (‘God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’”).”³⁵ Gutierrez suggests that as one develops a genuine love and identity with the exploited poor, they find Christ and he applies Jesus saying from Mathew 25:40, “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.” Gutierrez adds that a denial of the poor is a rejection of Christ:

In the final analysis, to liberate is to give life—life in its totality. It is in this framework that distinctions between the material and the spiritual, the temporal and the religious, the personal and the social, and others of the same kind, must be understood (and not suppressed). The study of Paul shows us that in his eyes the basic opposition is between *death* and *life*.³⁶

Charles Kegley suggests that this is not a new concept to Christian theology, but that the message of “liberation from sin and for freedom” has been standard over 2000 years. He feels that the message can now be applied to today’s historical conditions and is an application of theology in new ways and with vigor.³⁷ Marian Hillar adds that it interprets the Bible and key Christian doctrines from the eyes of the poor. Then the poor learn to

³⁴ Gutierrez, “Faith as Freedom,” 37.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

³⁶ Gutierrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, 3.

³⁷ Charles W. Kegley, “Theology: 1939-1979,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 16 (1979) : 125.

read the Scriptures with a sense of their own dignity and self worth along with the right to struggle together for a more decent life.³⁸

Christian actions and theology must go together. Theology and praxis are symbiotic. “Christian praxis without theology ceases to be Christian praxis and, likewise, theology without Christian praxis ceases to be theology, that is, an (active) explication of the divine will. This in turn has a direct effect on liberation theology’s conception of truth.”³⁹ In addition, liberation theology requires that men and women are agents of their own destiny and there is no socially neutral theology. It is further suggested that Gutiérrez asserts that liberation theology is compatible with biblical theology and church teaching and loyalty to God and the Church is evident by solidarity with poor.⁴⁰

The positive nature of Gutiérrez' contribution has been endorsed by prominent Catholic theologians. When they assessed the important contribution of liberation theologies to the church, particularly their message of hope to the poor, and concluded:

As these movements are a sign of hope for the whole church, any premature intervention from higher authorities risks stifling the Spirit, which animates and guides local churches. We express our strong solidarity with these movements of liberation and with their theology. We protest against the suspicious and unjust criticisms registered against them. We firmly believe that the future of the church, the coming of the kingdom, and the judgment of God on the world are tied up with these movements.⁴¹

³⁸ Hillar, “Liberation Theology: Survey,” 35.

³⁹ Richard Gillingham, “Praxis and the Content of Theology in Gustavo Gutiérrez’s Theological Methodology: A Comparative Critique,” *Quodlibet Journal* 7 (2005) [journal on-line]; available from <http://www.quodlibet.net/articles/gillingham-gutierrez.shtml>; Internet; accessed 6 June 2010.

⁴⁰ James B. Nickoloff, “Church of the Poor: The Ecclesiology of Gustavo Gutierrez,” *Theological Studies* 54 (1993) : 532.

⁴¹ Robert Brown, “Spirituality and Liberation: The Case for Gustavo Gutiérrez,” *Worship* 58 (1984) : 403, 404.

It is clear that liberation theology has brought attention to the plight of the poor and oppressed and has influenced the practice as well as the language of how theology is expressed.

Roots and Early Concepts

Many have pointed to Dietrich Bonhoeffer as an early source for the views of liberation theology. “Is Bonhoeffer then also to be counted among the liberationists? Yes, but in the sense that he is a predecessor from a different era and place who remains often a valuable resource for various liberation theologies.”⁴² Bonhoeffer’s vision was one of Christians to live in the context of their environment:

For Christians in both the "underdeveloped" and the "overdeveloped" societies, his distinctive fusion of Christocentrism and contextualization is a challenge to reflect on how Christ comes to form in our respective situations. . . . The most enduring contribution of Bonhoeffer therefore has been the insight and courage to break with such conventionalizing images of reality, including the solitary God of power and apathy, and a static world of helpless isolation. Instead, he offers us a subtly nuanced but revitalizing vision of majesty, compassion, and promise: God and the world taking form in Christ. This is a vision for a new day.⁴³

Bonhoeffer's approach was one that followed Luther’s theology of the cross. He suggested that Christians should follow in the way of the cross to those places of suffering, rejection and scorn. God became vulnerable in Christ and Christ became vulnerable in the world, “and the disciples' vulnerability in the world as they are drawn

⁴² G. Clarke Chapman, Jr. “Bonhoeffer: Resource for Liberation Theology,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 36 (1981) : 239.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

toward the way of the cross. Only by our adoption into this way are we opened to those vulnerable others in our midst.”⁴⁴

In Bonhoeffer’s *Letters and Papers from Prison* he helped Latin American Protestant theologians to overcome the church/world dualism. His “message from prison: the Christian of our time must live in the world ‘as if God did not exist,’ and it is precisely here that his relevance for men and women lies today. If they do not live in this way, they are not able to participate in the processes of this ‘world come of age’.”⁴⁵ In so doing, Bonhoeffer helps to clarify the conscience of Christians regarding their role in the world. “Today, too, we can speak of Latin American Christians who, like him, have tried to follow Christ in a manner which cost them dearly, even losing their lives for this grace.”⁴⁶

Diverse Liberation Theologies

The liberation theology movement has moved beyond its beginnings in Latin America with initiatives occurring in Africa and Asia and various cultures of various religions and ideologies. Some have declared that “the starting point for collaboration between the Christians and non-Christians is liberation.”⁴⁷ The expansion of this movement is about liberating the oppressed and there is oppression that is not purely socio-economic. Other levels of social oppression include: “racist oppression:

⁴⁴ David H. Jensen, “Religionless Christianity and Vulnerable Discipleship: The Interfaith Promise of Bonhoeffer’s Theology,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 38(2001) [journal on-line]; available from http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_hb3236/is_2001_Spring-Summer/ai_n28891537/; Internet; accessed 8 September 2010.

⁴⁵ Julio De Santa Ana, “The Influence of Bonhoeffer on the Theology of Liberation,” *Ecumenical Review* 28 (1976) : 191.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁴⁷ Hillar, “Liberation Theology: Survey,” 44.

discrimination against blacks; ethnic oppression: discrimination against indigenous peoples or other minority groups; sexual oppression: discrimination against women.”⁴⁸

The voices of Blacks, Native Americans and women are also being heard and express the feeling of unmet needs.⁴⁹ Tony Haynes declares that, “Christian theology cannot be ‘Christian’ except it is: feminist theology, gay theology, the theology of those who are oppressed, a theology of emancipation.”⁵⁰ In commenting on liberation of individuals that are not socio-economically oppressed, Boff and Boff suggest a different dynamic which could be resolved through reconciliation between those who feel social oppression (but not in the area of socio-economic oppression) with those that they perceive as oppressors:

A class-divided society, class struggles—which are a fact and an ethical demonstration of the presence of the injustice condemned by God and the church—are the main sort of struggle. They bring antagonistic groups, whose basic interests are irreconcilable, face to face. On the other hand, the struggles of blacks, indigenes, and women bring groups that are not naturally antagonistic into play, whose basic interests can in principle be reconciled. Although exploiting bosses and exploited workers can never finally be reconciled (so long as the former remain exploiters and the latter exploited), blacks can be reconciled with whites, indigenes with nonindigenes, and women with men. We are dealing here with nonantagonistic contradictions mixed in with the basic, antagonist class conflict in our societies. But it must also be noted that noneconomic types of oppression aggravate preexisting socio-economic oppression. The poor are additionally oppressed when, beside being poor, they are also black, indigenous, women, or old.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Boff & Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 29.

⁴⁹ Burton Cooper, “How Does God Act in Our Time : An Invitation to a Dialogue Between Process and Liberation Theologies” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 32 (1976) : 25; S. M. Floyd-Thomas and A. B. Pinn, Editors. *Liberation Theologies in the United States: An Introduction* (New York University Press, NY, 2010) : 8.

⁵⁰ Tony Haynes, “Liberation Theology Does Not Yet Seem to be Easily Applicable in Britain,” *Black Theology: An International Journal* 5 (2007) : 98.

⁵¹ Boff & Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 29, 30.

This approach would require those who feel social oppression to evaluate their status to determine whether there is basis for common interests that will allow them to overcome the antagonistic relationships.

It is suggested that black liberation theology is a counter to racism and rectifying political injustice. The situation for blacks is unique, “for, as Archbishop Tutu comments, Blackness cannot be willed away, but: ‘It is a brute fact of existence as surely as being male or female, only more so’.”⁵² It is also suggested that due to the anger associated with discrimination against blacks there is a means of making Black liberation theology even more liberating for the Black church.⁵³ In referring to Cone’s, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, Kacela further suggests that his six sources of Black theology are in fact sources of anger. “The sources are (1) the Black experience, (2) Black history, (3) Black culture, (4) revelation, (5) scripture, and (6) tradition.”⁵⁴ Rosado declares that Cone asserts that conditions of the blacks that can be traced back to the antebellum days of the church⁵⁵ actually caused them to turn to the gospel. “It is the black experience of oppression that moves the black Christian to be so Jesus-centered and Biblically rooted.”⁵⁶

When the liberation movement is applied to the situation of women it is more difficult to characterize and seems to be more of an anti-Church theology movement.

⁵² Haynes, “Liberation Theology in Britain,” 98.

⁵³ Xolani Kacela, “Towards a More Liberating Black Liberation Theology” *Black Theology: An International Journal* 3 (2005) : 200.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 206.

⁵⁵ Rosado, “Black and African Theologies,” 27.

⁵⁶ Robert T. Osborn, “Rise and Fall of the Bible in Recent American Theology,” *Duke Divinity School Review* 41 (1976) : 70.

Some advocates suggest that the “word itself is in need of the liberating word of women to deliver it from the debilitating sexism that has enthralled it almost from the beginning.”⁵⁷ Mary Streufert declares, “No longer do we need to see the redeemer as one who pays God for us but as the one who brings us God-consciousness.”⁵⁸ Lisa Isherwood moves the discussion to a focus on the body as a starting point of theological reflection. “The body emerges as a place of revelation and moral imperatives. In this way, then, the flesh is speaking and being heard as a site of positive theological significance.”⁵⁹ John Kater addresses the sobering need for liberation of women especially in Latin America in the context of abuse from domestic violence and abandoned mothers.⁶⁰

As a summary of liberation theology being applied to various groups, Paul Jones agrees with Boff and Boff’s view that some special groups can resolve their differences by a reconciliation with each other, when he says the liberation theology is something of a catchall expression. It has been applied to so many theological reflections and political viewpoints that it has become a “dizzying array of forms.” He comments, “Indeed, given that Christian theology has engaged feminism, black power, queer theory, womanism, and unscientific socialism (to name but a few options), and given that these engagements have occurred in various geopolitical contexts, it is probably wise to talk of liberation

⁵⁷ Ibid., 72.

⁵⁸ Mary J. Streufert, “Reclaiming Schleiermacher for Twenty-first Century Atonement Theory: The Human and the Divine in Feminist Christology,” *Feminist Theology: The Journal of the Britain & Ireland School of Feminist Theology* 15 (2006) : 118.

⁵⁹ Lisa Isherwood, “The Embodiment of Feminist Liberation Theology: The Spiraling of Incarnation,” *Feminist Theology: The Journal of the Britain & Ireland School of Feminist Theology* 12 (2004) : 148.

⁶⁰ John L Kater, Jr. “Whatever Happened to Liberation Theology? New directions for theological reflection in Latin America,” *Anglican Theological Review*, (Fall 2001) : 10.

theologies in the plural, not the singular.”⁶¹ It would appear that Jones’ comments are more directed to these various offshoots and applications of liberation theology and does not suggest that all movements fit his criticism. His view would be countered by Migliore when he declares that the developments of contextual Christologies are both possible and necessary.⁶²

Current Concepts and Approaches

Since the beginnings of liberation theology, there has been increasing awareness of the plight of the poor and oppressed. Consequently there has been worldwide attention and the consideration of the solutions involving a worldwide effort. However many of the conditions that prompted the liberation movement are still in place and some suggest just as formidable. Chris Barrigar describes the conditions which promote liberation theology as, “The physical toll of back-breaking labour, for long hours day after day, under dangerous conditions, with no medical attention when needed, at exploitive 'wages'; the relational toll of drunken men who beat their family because 'deep inside' they have neither purpose nor hope for the future.”⁶³ He goes on to report that these conditions have taken their toll with “community fighting community, not only majorities oppressing minorities but also oppressed minorities who oppress other minorities; the toll of *ignorance* that comes from the inability to read or to recognize the lies that keep the exploitation justified. The list, of course, goes endlessly on.”⁶⁴ The return to traditional

⁶¹ Paul D. Jones, “Liberation Theology and ‘Democratic Futures’ (By Way Of Karl *Barth* and Friedrich Schleiermacher),” *Political Theology* 10 (2009) : 261.

⁶² Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 198.

⁶³ Barrigar. “The Imperative Inherent in the Gift of Freedom,” 110.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Christian concepts of economic justice is necessary with a critical examination of how to apply the gospel message.⁶⁵

Liberation theology clearly defines a division between those who act with the oppressed and those who do not. There needs to be a conception of community that pervades the world's pluralistic society.⁶⁶ Christians are aware of how Jesus' life began in poverty, ending in death as a political prisoner clearly shows God's special concern for the poor. This identity is best expressed in Jesus' words, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me [Matt. 25:40]." God is of course concerned for all. "To proclaim God's concern for the poor in no way implies that God is not concerned for middle-income Christians as well. But it does imply that middle-income Christians are called to share in God's concern. . . . Those who have profited from injustice are called to repent and make restitution."⁶⁷

The response to poverty and the oppressed has now become a world concern. Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) criticizes Western theologians for taking an academic approach. Erik Borgman states that since the West has been instrumental in the cause of the conditions the solution should focus on the third world. This is the case since exports from the West have caused the context of conditions that required the third world liberation theology and since the Western influence caused

⁶⁵ Robert T. Hall, "Christian Faith and Economic Justice," Appendix C, Episcopal Church Excerpted from Chapters 2 and 6 of *Organizing for Economic Justice* (Economic Justice Implementation Committee, the Episcopal Church, 1990) : c-7.

⁶⁶ Thomas A. Lewis, "On the Limits of Narrative: Communities in Pluralistic Society," *Journal of Religion* 86 (2006) : 56.

⁶⁷ Rebecca Blank, *Do Justice: Linking Christian Faith and Modern Economic Life* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1992), 19.

oppression suffering and death.⁶⁸ Andrew Dawson points to the worldwide connectedness and suggests that “this connectedness is not underwritten by the necessary spiritual depth that serves to anchor such otherwise superficial developments.”⁶⁹ He continues to describe that in globalization there is the foundation for a holistic paradigm and there can be an assault upon many of the principal views undergirding the modern worldview, which can become the articulation of a “fundamental law” of “panrelationality.”⁷⁰ Dawson cautions that, “Faced with the growing concentration of global resources in the hands of a dwindling minority, the worsening plight of the world’s poor and the escalating assault upon non-human species and their environment, something must be done before it is too late.”⁷¹

Liberation theologians have begun to collaborate among various forms of liberation theologies. From the Third World liberation movement there has emerged “collaboration among the diverse regional perspectives among South American, African, and Asian contexts. There has also been an ongoing collaboration between First and Third World theologians.”⁷² The Catholic Church hierarchy has moved away from the “struggle between liberation theology and the Vatican establishment, with all of its strategic and tactical moves and countermoves – which sociologists like us are keen to

⁶⁸ Erik Borgman, “Theology as the Art of Liberation” *Exchange* 32 (2003) : 107.

⁶⁹ Andrew Dawson, “Mystical Experience as Universal Connectedness: Leonardo Boff’s ‘trans-cultural Phenomenology,’” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 19 (2004) : 156.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁷² Lamb, “Liberation Theology and Social Justice,” 20.

isolate and analyze.”⁷³ They have radically modified their “theology so that it actually promotes, rather than violates, the gospel imperatives of love and evangelization.”⁷⁴ As has been alluded to and will become clearer the hierarchy of the Catholic Church has endorsed the objectives of liberation theology.

⁷³ Christian Smith, “Las Casas as Theological Counteroffensive: An Interpretation of Gustavo Gutiérrez’s Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 41 (2002) : 72.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 70.

CHAPTER III

ADMONITION FOR JUSTICE

In the context of Liberation Theology Boff and Boff have delineated the Scriptures that they look to:

The books most appreciated by liberation theology are:

- *Exodus*, because it recounts the epic of the politico-religious liberation of a mass of slaves who, through the power of the covenant with God, became the people of God;
- the *Prophets*, for their uncompromising defense of the liberator God, their vigorous denunciation of injustices, their revindication of the rights of the poor, and their proclamation of the messianic world;
- the *Gospels*, obviously, for the centrality of the divine person of Jesus, with his announcement of the kingdom, his liberating actions, and his death and resurrection—the final meaning of history;
- the *Acts of the Apostles*, because they portray the ideal of a free and liberating Christian community;
- *Revelation*, because in collective and symbolic terms it describes the immense struggles of the people of God against all the monsters of history.¹

Overview of Justice in the Biblical Perspective

The concept of what constitutes justice is indeed varied. The definition that John Frame gives is “Justice is the integrity of society’s legal system. That includes especially the fairness of the courts, as they render verdicts and determine penalties.”² Frame goes

¹ Leonardo Boff, & Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis. 1987), 35.

² John Frame, *Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2008), 18.

on to say that there are differences in the concepts of justice or fairness. And when considered politically in the area of economics conservatives would say justice is equal opportunity and liberals focus on equality of wealth. In the discussion by Brian McLaren, he suggests that justice is considered as acting right in our relationships, which begs the question of the definition of right. Then he points to others that say justice is power and authority between people which conforms to God's standards of moral excellence, which requires us to acknowledge that God's thoughts are above our thoughts. He then declares that justice is "the right use of power in our relationships with others."³ The relationship of justice to power parallels the message of Old Testament prophets.

John Chrysostom declared that an impoverished person is due the means of sustenance simply because he is human. In that view he was applying Scripture. Wolterstorff adds to the legal context that Frame alludes to and the relationship perspective of McLaren when he states that he thinks "of justice as grounded ultimately on inherent rights."⁴ He further points to the divine source of justice, "Once one has said that God has worth, that that worth grounds God's right to worship and obedience, and that human beings likewise have worth, it proves impossible not to continue in this line of thought and hold that human beings have rights on account of their worth."⁵ Every human being has worth and Jesus appeals to our worth "to explain God's care for each and every one of us, and to the sick person's worth as a human being to explain why he

³ Brian McLaren, "Introduction: A Conversation about Justice." in Brian McLaren and others, eds., *The Justice Project*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books. 2009), 22.

⁴ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), .

⁵ *Ibid.*, 95.

himself heals on the Sabbath. . . . We have an echo here of the Old Testament's celebration of the worth of human beings."⁶

Justice should permeate all of the society and is the responsibility of all, but according to Jeremiah 5:1-9, no one in Jerusalem, rich or poor, had a concern for justice. Jeremiah declared that God's demand was for all persons whether they were rich and poor, common citizen or monarch alike they were to adhere to God's demands for justice. But since not "a single person could be found in Jerusalem who acts justly (v. 1), the prophet warns that God will effect judgment instead of pardon (v. 6)."⁷ Jeremiah made two charges of injustice (5:20-31), first that the people "do not judge with justice the cause of the orphan . . . and they do not defend the rights of the needy" (5:28). The kings failed to take care of those on the social margins. The second form of injustice was that the gain of wealth and opulence was at the expense of others.⁸

While we might hope for greater specificity about what is implied by the admonition to deliver from oppressors those that are robbed, it seems likely that the issue is not street crime but some form of economic exploitation. The substance of justice is to protect the weak member of society from oppression by the powerful. Those who are not considered to have social or economic status are to be protected by the leaders of society. Those on the margins of society are the most in need of protection and it is the leaders that are charged with the responsibility to administer justice.⁹

⁶ Ibid., 131.

⁷ John M. Bracke, "Justice in the Book of Jeremiah," *Word & World* 22 (2002) : 390.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 388.

Israel's history included God's redemptive act of delivering them from the bonds of slavery. The delivering God declared that the people be treated with justice and equality (Ex. 5:1-3; 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; 10:3). "Redemption, then, comes from the understanding of a God who acts now, through his children. It is born in the upheaval of economic dependence and political exploitation. True worship is made possible in the deliverance from oppression."¹⁰ Later when considering justice from God's viewpoint the prophets point out that rather than God being unjust because of the people's condition, they were the ones who were unjust. "When the contemporaries of Ezekiel thought Yahweh unjust, he reversed the charge and accused the people of injustice (Ezek. 33:17-20; 18:25-29). His justice was due to his unchallengeable sovereignty (Isa. 45:9-13; 55:6-11), his overwhelming power as creator (Isa. 40:27-31) and was in harmony with his enduring love for his people (Isa. 49:14-18)."¹¹

The prophet Amos called on witnesses to see the violence and robbery and the spoil stored unjustly for the purpose of supporting public or military functions.¹² The prophets' message was an appeal to the covenant that God had provided to be followed as the expectations for the people of God. Their message was clearly "radical" and their message was "liberating," but to draw conclusions beyond the fragmentary or edited evidence is reaching past their focus to the people of Israel. "Scholars and laity must not read the prophets uncritically through the eyes of current social problems assuming that

¹⁰ Hilquias Cavalcanti-Filho, "Redemption: How Far?" *International Review of Mission* 72 (1983) : 103.

¹¹ Victor J. Eldridge, "Jeremiah, Prophet of Judgment," *Review & Expositor* 78 (1981) : 319.

¹² J. Andrew Dearman, "Hebrew Prophecy and Social Criticism: Some Observations for Perspective," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 9 (1982) : 139.

they (prophets) meant what we (reformers) now mean.”¹³ There is societal conflict at the core of biblical prophecy with the political centralization and social stratification which clearly disrupts the possibility for a cohesive community.¹⁴ The issue raised was not one of common crime but economic exploitation.

One of the promises stated by the prophets is that although the people could not fulfill the requirement for justice there is a coming servant who would achieve his purpose of bringing justice to the nations, only by Yahweh's intervention, who reversed the judgment of the nations and elevated him to a place of rule (Is. 49:4; 52:13-15; 53:11-12). “This function of the servant is stated emphatically in 42:1-4: In verse one it states that he shall bring forth justice (*mispat*) to the nations. In verse three, he will faithfully bring forth justice and in verse four, he will not fail until he has established justice in the earth.”¹⁵

Not only did God's attributes of justice pattern the message of justice, the prophets appealed to the Mosaic period and reminded them of YHWH's past providential acts (Amos 2:9-10; Hos. 12:13; Mic. 6:3-5; Jer. 2:1-13). They contrasted the former period with their current condition which was an indictment of the people for ignoring YHWH's righteous will in their present behavior.¹⁶ The prophets witnessed the nation's failure and played an important role in the moral and social awakening of the people and they personified the struggle for human restoration. They told of:

¹³ Ibid., 140.

¹⁴ Norman K. Gottwald, “Tragedy and Comedy in the Latter Prophets,” *Semeia* 32 (1984) : 94.

¹⁵ Millard C. Lind, “Monotheism, Power, and Justice: a Study in Isaiah 40-55,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 46 (1984) : 443, 445.

¹⁶ Dearman, “Hebrew Prophecy and Social Criticism,” 142.

a God who cannot be bribed (as judges and legal aids can) by sacrifices and rituals presented by priests who are deeply compromised with the ruling elite (Amos 5:21-24; Micah 3:9-12). Commercial dishonesty, profiteering and oppression of the poor are severely condemned (Amos 8:4-6, Micah 6: 1 Off.). Redemption is connected with the overthrowing of the values that support the amassing of riches and legalized exploitation.¹⁷

Jesus would eventually establish justice, Isaiah 11:3, 4, 12 (ESV):

3. And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, 4. but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. 12. He will raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.

During his ministry, Jesus challenged the powers of this world and underlined their corrupt moral nature by his identification with the victims of the powerful and mighty. “He spent most of his time among the poor in the cultural and economic backwater of Galilee. Hungry, thirsty, naked, strangers, prisoners, harlots and publicans are the prototype of the heirs of God's kingdom (Luke 6: 20-22; Matt. 5:3; Luke 4: 18-19).”¹⁸

Overview of Justice in the Literature with Reference to the Prophets

The prophets turn to God as the pattern for justice. “God is a lover of justice (Ps 99:4) who finds in justice his delight (Jer. 9:23). God's holiness is manifested in terms of God's justice (Isa. 5:16). Justice is the holiness with which God would want us to be holy”¹⁹ Justice in the image of God is complete without the human priorities of selfish interest. Justice from the biblical perspective is like “a mighty mountain

¹⁷ Cavalcanti-Filho, “Redemption: How Far?” 105.

¹⁸ Ibid., 107.

¹⁹ Daniel C. Maguire, “The Primacy of Justice in Moral Theology,” *Horizons* 10 (1983) : 74.

stream, roaring down a ravine with enormous power, taking with it all it touches (Amos 5:23). And what is the goal of this torrent of boundless divine energy? Quite simply it is the utter elimination of poverty.”²⁰

By the authority and pattern of God, the prophets demanded changes in society and they demanded these changes in the name of God. The message referred to holy covenant language, and was supported by the authority of God with the intent to meet the aspirations and hopes of the downtrodden. The message was not new but traditional values were reaffirmed. The prophets were “a conservative voice in a society undergoing rapid social change. They rejected the recent innovations and the new gods. They hoped for a return to the older ways, to the older religious, moral and social values.”²¹

The leaders failed to see any crisis or any absence of justice but instead profited from injustice and may have designed it. “For the prophet, the government's attitude toward social ethics was the indicator of whether it was headed for Yahweh's judgment or vindication. . . . A key verse in this regard is 5:16: *‘Yahweh of Hosts is exalted in justice, and the Holy God shows himself holy in righteousness.’*”²² The prophets brought charges against the people of Israel and against their leaders in the **רִיב** (covenant lawsuit) speeches.

²⁰ Ibid., 76.

²¹ Rabbi Benjamin Scolnic, “The Prophets and Social Justice,” *Walking with Justice* (Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies, 2008), 28. available from http://www.ajula.edu/Media/PDF/Walking_With_Justice-The_Prophets_and_Social_Justice.pdf; Internet; accessed 22 March 2010.

²² James A. Rimbach, “Those Lively Prophets: Isaiah Ben Amoz,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 5 (1978) : 49.

The activity that the verb **רִיב** signifies may be described as falling into two patterns: (1) "A" makes a **רִיב** against opponent "B," and (2) "C" makes a **רִיב** against "B" on behalf of "A." The latter pattern best represents the biblical situation as the prophet (C) brings a complaint against Israel (B) on behalf of Yahweh (A). The significance and implication of the **רִיב** motif is most clearly seen as one studies the role of the prophet in God's lawsuit against Israel.²³

The prophets represented Yahweh in their lawsuit message against the injustice of the leaders of Israel.

“The prophets may be viewed as calling the people of Israel to account for their breach of covenant relationship with the Lord, as exemplified in the **רִיב** (covenant lawsuit) speeches.”²⁴ The prophets first accused Israel of breaking God’s law and then they predicted the result would be judgment according to their own covenant background. “This is quite apparent in the **רִיב** (rib) motif, or the prophetic lawsuit speech, where the prophet, as a representative of Yahweh, indicts the people Israel for breaking the law—the stipulations of the covenant.”²⁵ The people of Israel moved into forbidden and dangerous territory by their plunder when they would even dispose of the property and the lives of the weak:

The initial collection of the Hebrew Bible, the Torah, to which the Prophets stands as a supplement, enshrines this tangible knowledge which Israelite leaders elected not to recognize as operative in their values and conduct: cut off from God and people. . . . So sustained was this attack upon the foundations of community that anti-social self-seeking and fatalistic demoralization spread through the whole populace. Seeing few who cared, a prophet like Jeremiah was tempted

²³ J Carl Laney, “The Role of the Prophets in God’s Case against Israel.” *Bibliotheca sacra* 138 (1981) : 318.

²⁴ Harold P. Scanlin, “Emergence of the Writing Prophets in Israel in the Mid-Eighth Century,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 21 (1978) : 305.

²⁵ Laney, “The Role of the Prophets,” 318.

no longer to risk caring. The tragic declension was nearly the last and only word.²⁶

The standard by which the prophets based their accusation was the Torah, the law that Israel disobeyed and that included the warning for their disobedience.

Amos went so far as to charge that the people's sinfulness was one of robbery with violence (Amos 3:10) and they even commenced in human life (Amos 2:6). They were so anxious to make money; they would "take bribes, subvert justice, steal clothes and use unbalanced scales."²⁷ Some might think that these admonitions for ethical practices are boring when they seem to be repeated to such a great extent, but ethical behavior requires constant reminders. So the prophets:

exhort the people to be charitable and merciful to the poor and to help those who were defenseless and needy, widows and orphans, oppressed people, strangers and those without legal rights. They stipulate impartiality in justice, and fairness. They insist on respecting the property of others. They demand respect for every human life.²⁸

Gutierrez applies the prophets' concept of justice to the treatment of the oppressed and exploited when he admonishes the fair treatment of the disadvantaged:

The God of the Bible manifests fidelity and mercy in a permanent disposition to pardon: "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end" (Lam. 3:22, 23). This attitude of God must serve as a model for the people of God. As Micah puts it, "He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (6:8). Pardon is an inherent characteristic of the Christian community. To pardon means not to fixate the past, but to create possibilities for persons to change and to realign the course of their lives. The Lord does not want us to have an "evil eye," trying to ossify

²⁶ Gottwald, "Tragedy and Comedy," 92.

²⁷ Scolnic, "The Prophets and Social Justice," 22

²⁸ Ibid., 23.

persons and situations in movement; the Lord is good, merciful, and open to what is new (Matt. 20:15). Pardon forges community.²⁹

The prophets directed the leaders of Israel to exercise justice based on the Torah and this message applies to the treatment of the poor and oppressed today.

Hebrew Words for Justice

צְדָקָה is translated righteousness, justice, rightness, the state of doing what is required according to a standard (Ps. 31:2) and justice, the state or condition of fairly deciding what is right in a legal case, without prejudice (Isa. 5:23). Other concepts are innocence, the state of not having any sin or its associated guilt, according to a standard (1Ki. 8:32) or prosperity, the state of having an abundant amount of goods and wealth (Pr. 8:18).³⁰ The reference in Isaiah 5:23 has the sense of a legal right and in other references in the prophets where this word appears it is translated in the ESV by *vindication*, but mostly as *righteousness*. In Isaiah 59:14 צְדָקָה is mentioned with מִשְׁפָּט as that which has been turned away. In Jeremiah 22:3, these words are used together to tell the reader “to do justice and righteousness.”

The words most often translated *justice* in the ESV in the prophets are שָׁפַט and מִשְׁפָּט. שָׁפַט is the verb and when in the *qal* it has a sense of exercising justice, see that justice is accomplished or even to judge those whose actions are wrong. When in the *nifal* as a passive it has the sense of litigate or to argue one’s cause. When the word is in the

²⁹ Gustavo Gutierrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2003), 100.

³⁰ J. Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)* (electronic ed.) (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

form of participle, infinite or construct, it is generally treated as a noun with the meaning of judge or judgment.³¹ For this study the passages will be considered that have the verb in the *qal* and refer to exercising justice or seeing that justice is accomplished, as well as those *qal* passages that judge actions of those not exercising justice. **משפט** is the noun that is translated judgment, the act of deciding a legal dispute or case, court, a place where a legal case is decided, decision, sentence, an official proclamation in a legal verdict, justice, a state or condition of fairness in disputes, law, regulation, prescription, specification, a spoken or written command which is to be obeyed, often with penalties for non-compliance, plan, formally, prescription, a graphic or verbal description of how to build something, share, what is a just amount of a whole, or custom, practice, a behavior which is more or less fixed and accepted as a normal practice.³² When considering this noun, it will apply to this study when used with an action such as, “to do justice.”

The verb and the noun are used together in Jeremiah 5:28, where it reads, “do not *defend* (**שפט**) the *rights* (**משפט**) of the needy.” In Isaiah 11:3-5 as mentioned above in the ESV *righteousness* (**צדק**) describes how **שפט** is performed. In Ezekiel 34, **שפט** is used frequently to convey the thought, “I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep.” Here it addresses the message of judgment on the unjust practices. In Zechariah 7:9 it reads, “Render (**שפט**) true judgments (**משפט**), show kindness and mercy

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

to one another,” and conveys the positive side of justice. This same positive message is conveyed in Zechariah 8:16. In Isaiah 56:1; 58:2 there is the admonishment for righteous (צדק) judgments (משפט), but in Isaiah 59:8, 9, 11, 14, 15, righteousness (צדקה) and judgment (משפט) has been turned away. Ezekiel admonishes to maintain *justice* through following the *rules* set down with both concepts conveyed by משפט. Finally in Micah 6:8 there is a clear admonition “to do justice (משפט), and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.”

The foregoing discussion will be compared with Wolterstorff’s observations, which emphasizes the concept of primary justice which is the backdrop of justice addressed by liberation theology:

The Hebrew word in the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible that is standardly translated into English as *justice* is משפט. The term is often paired with צדקה standardly translated as *righteousness*, “justice and righteousness.” My own sense, for what it is worth, is that when the rhetorical context permits, צדקה is better rendered into present-day English as *the right thing*, or *going right*, or *doing right*—even, now and then, as *rectitude*. The word “righteous” is seldom used any more in ordinary speech. When it is, it suggests a person intensely preoccupied with his own moral character who has few “sins” to his debit; the connotation is of *self-righteousness*. צדקה has no such connotation. It is suggested that the pair “justice and righteousness,” משפט and צדקה, can be understood as *correct justice*. Even better might be *true justice*.

Going beyond words, it also seems possible that there should be a community that recognized primary justice but betrayed no recognition of rectifying justice. Evidence for this possibility is the fact that a good many people in the contemporary world react against the very idea of rectifying justice, insisting that we should not think of the judicial system as called to render justice to victims and offenders but to secure some good or other—the good of reforming the offender, the good of protecting society,

whatever. . . . I see no inconsistency in recognizing the existence of primary justice and denying the existence of rectifying justice.³³

The message is thorough and clear. God admonishes His people to be just to those who are needy. Further, they are admonished to practice justice with righteousness, with love and kindness. In addition there are both promises and warnings associated with doing justice. On the one hand there are blessings for doing justice and on the other curses for not doing justice. This clearly makes the practice of justice a major requirement for pleasing God and conforming to His will. The message that is prevalent throughout the prophets was integral to prosperity and remaining in the land of promise and avoiding exile. In the progressive revelation of God's requirements in the Old Testament we see an emphasis on the performance of justice. But, when we look at the Greek words for justice, we will see a shift in emphasis as we compare justice in the New Testament. This shift does not change the admonition for justice, but is based on one's commitment to Jesus rather than the Torah, but both are based on God's desire for the motivation to come from a changed life.

Justice in the New Testament

There are not as many words for justice in the Greek LXX as in the Hebrew text. A short review of how each of the above Hebrew words was translated will be made and then a few cases of these words used in the New Testament will be considered to show continuity on the message of practicing justice between the two testaments. דָּקָה is δίκαιος, δικαιοσύνη; שָׁפַט is κρίνω; and שָׁפַט is κρίσις.

³³ Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs*, 69, 71.

Again, looking at Wolterstorff's treatment of these words in the New Testament will strengthen the argument for the presence of justice in the New Testament:

One of the challenges facing the Septuagint translators was how to catch, in the Greek of their day, the combination of טָרָטָר with הַקָּדָשׁ that we find so often in the Old Testament, standardly translated in to English as *justice* and *righteousness*. The solution they settled on was to translate הַקָּדָשׁ as δικαιοσύνη , and to use a term whose home use was in legal situations, namely, κρίσις to translate טָרָטָר . טָרָטָר and הַקָּדָשׁ became κρίσις and δικαιοσύνη .

In most English translations, the word justice occurs relatively infrequently. It is no surprise, then that most English speaking people think the New Testament does not say much about justice. . . . The Greek noun in Plato's text that is standardly translated as *justice* is δικαιοσύνη ; the adjective standardly translated as *just* is δίκαιος . This δικ-stem occurs around three hundred times in the New Testament, in a wide variety of grammatical variants.

The great bulk of δικ-stem words are translated with grammatical variants on our word *right*. The noun for example, is usually translated as *righteousness*, not as *justice*. . . . It goes almost without saying that the meaning and connotations of *righteousness* are very different in present-day idiomatic English from those of *justice*. *Righteousness* names primarily if not exclusively a certain trait of personal character. . . . One seldom any more describes someone as *righteous*, if one does, the suggestion is that he is *self-righteous*. *Justice* by contrast, refers to an interpersonal situation; justice is present when persons are related to each other in a certain way.³⁴

Realizing how the readers of the New Testament understood δικαιοσύνη gives insight into the concept of justice that shows more consistency to the concept of justice between the Old and New Testaments.

A comparison of these words in the New Testament will help illuminate the admonition of the exercise of justice. The words considered were: δικαιοσύνη , δίκαιος , κρίσις , and κρίνω . When considering δικαιοσύνη , it is clear from passages such as Romans 10:3, 4 that Christ is our righteousness. A similar sense of doing justice is

³⁴ Ibid., 112, 110, 111.

reflected in Hebrews 1:9 where it speaks of Christ loving righteousness and hating wickedness. Referring to the faithfulness of the Old Testament, Hebrews 11:33 tells how individuals enforced justice. Those who do righteousness are born of God according to 1 John 2:29 and 3:7, 10 which further declares that those who practice righteousness are righteous. Referring to passages that include δίκαιος, there is a similar message. Particularly in Matthew 25:37-39 Jesus reports that the righteous will feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, visit the sick and those in prison. In Romans 2:13 the doers of the law are justified. Just and fair treatment is admonished in Colossians 4:1.

Reviewing the passages with κρίσις, it is noted in Matthew 23:23 that Jesus told the Pharisees that they neglected the weightier matters of the law of justice, mercy and faithfulness, with a similar admonition in Luke 11:42. In James 2:13 it states that judgment must be exercised in the context of mercy. With respect to κρίνω, Matthew states that one who judges will be judged by the same criterion with which he uses. Roman 14:13 admonishes that one should not judge, but be sure not to put a stumbling block in front of another, and a similar message is found in 1 Cor. 10:29, where it states that one should be sensitive to another's conscience. James 4:11, 12 expands on this view to not speak evil of another or judge him. Finally, Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan was an application of how to live out the great commandment. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself (Luke 10:27)."

After reviewing the message of the Old Testament, the message was clear that the people of God were admonished to practice justice. The model for justice came from the character of God himself. The precedence for justice was the Mosaic

covenant made with the people of Israel. When the prophets declared the preeminent place of justice as the standard for social, political and economic relationships, they presented a clear case by comparing both the character of God and the standards of God's law. When the various Hebrew words for *justice* and *righteousness* are reviewed in the context of the prophets, the focus is on the leaders and the affluent people mistreating those who are powerless. The failure to follow justice was the same as being disobedient to the covenant itself, which brought the curses of the covenant. It became evident that the people of God were unable to keep this covenant and practice justice. Included in the prophetic message was a promise that a Servant of God would come who would be able to provide the means to do justice and keep the covenant.

When the translation of the Hebrew in the Greek of the LXX are compared it is clear that justice is alive and well in the New Testament. In Deuteronomy 10:16 and Leviticus 26:41, the circumcision of the heart refers to opening oneself to God. The New Testament message turns the attention to the Servant of God who provides the means to practice justice. In both the Old and New Testament emphasis is that the one who does not practice justice and mercy faces judgment. In fact God's people are not made righteousness by practicing justice or the law, but when they are reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ the Son of God, they are declared righteous and through the process of sanctification they become righteous.

There are those who would emphasize the message of the prophets to do justice to the extent that justice becomes their focus. Liberation theology is such a movement and would suggest that one can gain acceptance with God through their activity to bring

justice. In this approach taking care of the needy, poor and abused becomes the primary effort as an expression of their commitment to God. Jesus made it clear that those who follow him will feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, and visit the sick and those in prison. After experiencing the changed life in Christ this is a result rather than the means to become right with God. Consequently the practice of justice becomes the evidence of the changed life rather than the means of reconciliation to God. In the final analysis, practicing justice still must be a major focus of the Church, but now it is the result of the love that God has extended to the Church. The Church is under a mandate to extend the love of God to all they come in contact with, and especially the needy, hungry, poor and powerless.

This Admonition Applies to Various Ministries

The contrast regarding God's actions favoring those in need to those who have taken advantage of the weak is dealt with at length in the theme of reversal. Luke reported in Mary's hymn that Jesus' coming was a great reversal of the world's value system. "Indeed with Jesus' coming the humble poor and outcasts become first, i.e., they are receiving salvation, whereas the proud and arrogant become last, i.e., they are rejecting salvation and receiving divine judgment."³⁵ The Magnificat expresses the spirituality of liberation which is centered on God and the poor. "The future of history belongs to the poor and exploited. True liberation will be the work of the oppressed themselves; in them the Lord saves history."³⁶ Through Mary the underclass has found

³⁵ R. H. Stein, *Vol. 24: Luke, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001, c1992), 94.

³⁶ Gustavo Gutierrez, "Faith as Freedom: Solidarity with the Alienated and Confidence in the Future," *Horizons* 2 (1975) : 41.

their voice as she speaks about her soon to be born Son. “Mary says that he will bring down the powerful from their thrones and lift up the lowly.³⁷ Mary’s Son will undo injustice and bring about justice.”³⁸ This rectifying of injustice must not only lift up the lowly but also cast down the high ones so the coming of justice requires a social inversion. “The arrogant must be cured of their arrogance; the rich and powerful must be cured of their attachment to wealth and power. Only then is justice for all possible.”³⁹

We live in a divided world and suffer as the struggle for power rages on and we must defend the poor, the weak, and the victims of violence when their situation is the result of injustices. “The liberation of the oppressed is the first option and includes as the second option also the healing of the oppressors. For overcoming the power of sin and evil we need liberation on both sides.”⁴⁰ In Mary’s song there was both joy and surprise, a peasant woman was noticed by God. “This sense of reversal continues as Mary sees the proud being scattered, the powerful being put down, and the humble being raised – the language of social upheaval and transformation.”⁴¹

The objective of bringing *shalom* to the world is directly linked to the exercise of justice. In Proverbs and in Matthew 25 one finds the same message, “If you do it to the poor, you do it to me.” In Proverbs and Matt 25, God identifies with the poor symbolically. Both in the incarnation and death of Jesus it is clear that God literally

³⁷ Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs*, 113.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 114.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁴⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, “The Final Judgment: Sunrise of Christ’s Liberating Justice,” *Anglican Theological Review* 89 (2007) : 575.

⁴¹ Brian McLaren, *Everything Must Change: When the World’s Biggest Problems and Jesus’ Good News Collide* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 102.

identifies with the poor and marginal. The message is clear in the question, “Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or naked or in prison?” Timothy Keller declares that the answer is loud and clear – “*on the cross*, where he died amidst the thieves, among the marginalized.”⁴² Consequently, the Christian is called to a life of love. Gutierrez, sees the application of justice in relationship to God’s holiness:

That is then the fundamental hermeneutical circle: from man to God and from God to man; from history to faith and from faith to history; from the human word to the Word of the Lord and from the Word of the Lord to the human word; from fraternal love to the love of the Father and from the love of the Father to fraternal love; from human justice to the holiness of God and from the holiness of God to human justice; from poor to God and from God to poor.⁴³

Living the life of love entails addressing the injustices that occur in the world to the poor and marginalized.

Liberation fits the term evangelical in the original sense of the word which stands for a life-giving word, good news and a joyful announcement. When the prophets spoke of *shalom*, they meant security, reconciliation, fullness, and peace. “*Liberation* should have the same power to touch, enchant, and fascinate us as Jesus’ original good news. It seeks to rekindle his flame, to fan the fire he brought to earth (Luke 12:49).”⁴⁴ For those who engage in liberation it is the “activity of ‘peacemakers’ – that is, those who are forging shalom. . . . Shalom in fact refers to the whole of life and, as part of this, to the need of establishing justice.”⁴⁵ *Shalom – peace* was first articulated in the Old Testament and then came to the New Testament as well. This term is intertwined with justice in

⁴² Timothy Keller, “The Gospel and the Poor,” *Themelios* 33.3 (2008) : 20, 21.

⁴³ Gutierrez, “Faith as Freedom,” 47, 48.

⁴⁴ Boff, & Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 90.

⁴⁵ Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, xxx.

which each individual enjoys justice and without justice there is no shalom. Wolterstorff expands on the relation of shalom to justice, “But shalom goes beyond justice. Shalom is the human being dwelling at peace in all his or her relationships: with God, with self, with fellows, with nature.”⁴⁶ Even if all the blacks in South Africa under apartheid were happy, there would be no shalom, since:

shalom is an ethical community that it is wounded when justice is absent. . . . Shalom is the *responsible* community in which God’s laws for the multifaceted existence of his creatures are obeyed.

Can the conclusion be avoided that not only is shalom God’s cause in the world but that all who believe in Jesus will, along with him, engage in the works of shalom? Shalom is both God’s cause in the world and our human calling. . . . We are not to stand around, hands folded, waiting for shalom to arrive. We are workers in God’s cause, his peace-workers.⁴⁷

Seeking shalom in the world is a challenge that creates a call to action when injustices are apparent.

Civil society is a mediating sphere between the individual and society. It provides a context for belonging to a group and avoids crushing the social whole. As a voluntary member of society, the church would be a servant of society. Society however has the ability to serve its own purposes and “has the capacity to offer a critique of society rooted in its own priorities and ideals.”⁴⁸ Referring to the view of justice as in the context of fairness in the courts there are various indications that many consider justice in a broader context. Justice is essentially linked to the image of God, who is a lover of justice (Ps 99:4) and finds in justice his delight (Jer 9:23). God's holiness and God's justice are linked in Isaiah 5:16. Our practicing justice is the holiness that God would want for

⁴⁶ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 69.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 71, 72.

⁴⁸ Scott R. Paeth, “Jürgen Moltmann's Public Theology,” *Political Theology* 6 (2005) : 229.

us. Daniel Maguire equates doing justice with a sacrament, “It is the sacrament of encounter with God since ‘the decision of justice belongs to God’ (Deut 1:17). This means that in doing justice we are the conduit of God's justice and thus become holy with God's holiness.”⁴⁹

The discussion of justice as regards to inequality in the world is discussed by various authors in Brian McLaren, Elisa Padilla, and Ashley Seeber (Editors) *The Justice Project*.⁵⁰ Rene Padilla suggests, “Because God is a God of Justice, *in any situation in which power is misused and the powerful take advantage of the weak, God takes the side of the weak.*”⁵¹ He supports this argument by citing Psalm 11:5, 6: “The Lord tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence. Let him rain coals on the wicked; fire and sulfur and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup.” Sara Breuer cites Amos 5:24, “But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” Then she suggests that the Scriptures depict God’s mission in the world as justice and reconciliation.⁵² She further cites Walter Brueggemann’s two kinds of justice. “First, there is *retributive justice*: being sure those who harm others and do evil get what they deserve. Then there’s *distributive justice*: God making the world a more just place by bringing justice for the oppressed.”⁵³ Adam Taylor references the mercy of Jesus as extending to the weak. “Echoing the biblical prophets,

⁴⁹ Maguire, “The Primacy of Justice in Moral Theology,” 74.

⁵⁰ Brian McLaren and others, eds., *The Justice Project* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books. 2009).

⁵¹ C. Rene Padilla, “God’s Call to Do Justice,” in Brian McLaren and others, eds., *The Justice Project* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books. 2009) : 24.

⁵² Sara D. Breuer, “God’s Justice: A Biblical View,” in Brian McLaren and others, eds., *The Justice Project* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books. 2009), 32.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 34.

Christ showed a particular concern for the poor, the weak, and the marginalized. While Christ's love, grace, and mercy are equally available to everyone, Christ is continually seen siding with the least, the last, and the lost."⁵⁴ A further description of God's justice is reflected in his name according to Peter Heltzel, "God's justice is a social form of God's holiness. The revelation of God's holiness is a revelation of an ancient 'unsaid' name (Isa. 6:3)."⁵⁵

In 1974 a group of Christian Leaders from around the world convened and composed the Lausanne Covenant. Among these leaders were John Stott, Billy Graham and Rene Padilla.⁵⁶ It is suggested that evangelicals who "often minimized social justice as an element of mission . . . reaffirmed a more healthy integration of social justice in evangelical identity."⁵⁷ The section called Christian Social Responsibility follows:

We affirm that God is both the Creator and the Judge of all people. We therefore should share his concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of men and women from every kind of oppression. Because men and women are made in the image of God, every person, regardless of race, religion, colour, culture, class, sex or age, has an intrinsic dignity because of which he or she should be respected and served, not exploited. Here too we express penitence both for our neglect and for having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive. Although reconciliation with other people is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty. For both are necessary expressions of our doctrines of God and man, our love for

⁵⁴ Adam Taylor, "Just Son: What Does Jesus' Message of the Kingdom Have to Do with Justice?" in Brian McLaren and others, eds., *The Justice Project* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books. 2009), 39.

⁵⁵ Peter G. Heltzel, "The Holy Spirit of justice," in Brian McLaren and others, eds., *The Justice Project* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books. 2009), 46.

⁵⁶ Brian McLaren, "Introduction: A Conversation about Justice," in Brian McLaren and others, eds., *The Justice Project* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books. 2009), 14.

⁵⁷ Jenell W. Paris, "A Tradition of Justice: Snapshots of the Church Pursuing Justice Across the Major Periods of Church History," in Brian McLaren and others, eds., *The Justice Project* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books. 2009), 54.

our neighbour and our obedience to Jesus Christ. The message of salvation implies also a message of judgment upon every form of alienation, oppression and discrimination, and we should not be afraid to denounce evil and injustice wherever they exist. When people receive Christ they are born again into his kingdom and must seek not only to exhibit but also to spread its righteousness in the midst of an unrighteous world. The salvation we claim should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities. Faith without works is dead.⁵⁸

In the context of justice in civil laws Frame indicated reference to “general equity”

according to Deut. 4:5, 6:

See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.”⁵⁹

This is “general equity” which in some civil laws is based on simple justice, not on anything unique to Israel. Consequently they are appropriate to other nations. It certainly is not unusual for God to judge wickedness, “Indeed, nothing is more typical of him. If anything, it is God’s grace to undeserving sinners that is hard to understand.”⁶⁰ Judges should make their decisions according to God’s justice. Exodus 23:2, 3 presents the balance, “You shall not fall in with the many to do evil, nor shall you bear witness in a lawsuit, siding with the any, so as to pervert justice, nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his lawsuit.”

A truly unbiased judicial system, however, is the best ally of the poor. The poor of society are unfairly treated more often than the rich, as the prophets indicate. A court system that welcomes their petitions on an equal basis is one of the most

⁵⁸ Lausanne Covenant (1974). available from <http://www.lausanne.org/covenant>; Internet; accessed 23 June 23 2010.

⁵⁹ John Frame, *Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2008), 216.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 613.

powerful tools that society has to remedy this injustice. . . . So one way that society can show compassion to the poor is through a just legal system.⁶¹

Although in liberation theology there is a desire to extend justice to the poor. The left says that the poor has a claim on the rich. Frame's response is that this is compassion or mercy rather than justice. Justice should have no bias for one or the other. Courts should be able to deal with fraud and protect those who are trying to minister to the needs of the poor.⁶² He further states that Christians must extend love in all of their human associations whether in business, education, charity, worship, art, recreation, study, government or whatever. Non-Christians societies are not committed to the God of Scripture, but justice still extends "the righteousness of God in the earth (Matt. 6:10). When the state acquits the innocent and punishes the guilty, it is a ministry of God (Rom. 13:1-7). As states come more and more under the influence of God's word, their judgments will become more and more righteous."⁶³ Maguire would add that this would conform to biblical justice. "Biblical justice is preemptive benevolence. The biblically just are friends to the poor. They seek out the cause of those whom they do not even know (Job 29:14, 16). If your brother is weak, go find him and 'make him strong (Lev 25:35)."⁶⁴

Jesus calls us to the ministry of justice but unfortunately many churches do not have practice and are seldom successful. "Effective justice ministry today calls church people to take power and confrontation seriously. Mostly, the church falls short at doing

⁶¹ Ibid., 816.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ John M. Frame, "Toward a Theology of the State," *Westminster Theological Journal* 51 (1989) : 212.

⁶⁴ Maguire, "The Primacy of Justice in Moral Theology," 76.

justice ministry.”⁶⁵ A definition of κρίσις as ‘justice’ rather than ‘judgment’ may clarify the role of Isa. 42.1-4 in Mt. 12.18-21. In the Old Testament context, κρίσις is linked to concepts of mercy, and salvation. In Matthew, justice is key to the servant’s ministry, and Jesus’ compassionate approach to people and the Law. “As messiah, Jesus provides justice for the oppressed and down-trodden through miracles and teaching in a non-confrontational fashion.”⁶⁶ Christ’s ministry was and is one of justice – a figure representing struggle, death, and vindication – in short – liberation: “The spirit of the Lord is upon me; therefore, he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the Lord (Luke 4:18-19).” Marian Hillar comments that this passage, “reads like a social manifesto! Jesus himself lived like a poor individual, in real material poverty, not a spiritual one. His criterion of a just life was practical material aid for one's neighbor!”⁶⁷ Keller relates caring for the poor to the gospel, “The gospel of justification has the priority; it is what saves us. But just as good works are inseparable from faith in the life of the believer, so caring for the poor is inseparable from the work of evangelism and the ministry of the Word.”⁶⁸

The conviction that the Christian faith is rooted in God’s involvement with the world requires responsibilities of Christians. “Yet, the cross does not stand by itself. If

⁶⁵ John Aeschbury, “The Weightier Matters: Building a Strong Justice Ministry,” *Clergy Journal* 82 (2006) : 15.

⁶⁶ Richard Beaton, “Messiah and Justice: a Key to Matthew's Use of Isaiah 42.1-4?” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 22 (2000) : 23.

⁶⁷ Marian Hillar, “Liberation Theology: Religious Response to Social Problems. A Survey.” *Humanism and Social Issues. Anthology of Essays* (M. Hillar and H.R. Leuchtag, eds., Houston: American Humanist Association. 1993) : 41.

⁶⁸ Keller, “The Gospel and the Poor,” 17.

‘God is the power of the future’ as Moltmann has it, then the community of Christ’s followers needs to understand its mission as oriented toward the coming of Christ’s Kingdom.”⁶⁹ There are many elements within fallen society which require Christians to be liberated. There are the circles of *poverty*, of *force* of racial and cultural *alienation*, even industrial *pollution* of nature, within an atmosphere of *senselessness* and *godforsakenness*. “Moltmann also refers to liberation in the cultural dimension of life, which he sees embodied in a growing regard of human beings for one another, and a growing respect reflected in their behavior. This is rooted in human fellowship and the overcoming of alienation.”⁷⁰ Jesus requires choice where seemingly no choice is possible and he speaks of the necessity of enriching relationships.⁷¹

Tim Keller in *Ministries of Mercy: The Call of the Jericho Road*,⁷² challenges all Christians to be involved in the ministry of mercy. A call for the ministry of mercy is evident wherever one looks, from the urban centers to Third World countries. Nowhere does it appear that the world is safe, but then it never has been. “War, injustice, oppression, famine, natural disaster, family breakdown, disease, mental illness, physical disability, racism, crime, scarcity of resources, class struggle – these ‘social problems’ are the results of our alienation from God.”⁷³ The church is called on to follow the Bible’s admonition to express love through word and deed (1 John 3:17). “Only the

⁶⁹ Paeth, “Jürgen Moltmann's Public Theology,” 217.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 218.

⁷¹ Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, xxxiv.

⁷² Timothy Keller, *Ministries of Mercy: The Call of the Jericho Road*, Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing (1997).

⁷³ Ibid., 13.

church can minister to the whole person. Only the gospel understands that sin has ruined us both individually and socially.”⁷⁴ All are called to the ministry of mercy. “Most of us have not come to grips with the clear directive of Scripture that *all* Christians must have their own ministry of mercy. We must each be actively engaged in it ourselves.”⁷⁵ This ministry may meet physical needs but it is clearly a spiritual ministry. “It has a spiritual motive in the givers as well as a spiritual impact on the recipients.”⁷⁶

The ministry of mercy is a lifestyle in which one is called to live moderately in order to give sacrificially to the poor. “God calls some people to more extensive ministries by giving them desire, ability, and opportunity.”⁷⁷ The Christian must go into the world and it is dangerous to make the mistake of the Pharisee and ask, “Who is my neighbor? Any brother, any neighbor, any stranger, any enemy. Our job is nothing less than seeking out and meeting their basic human needs.”⁷⁸ The three causes of poverty often occur at the same time: the person may have sinned, and have been sinned against, and have been the victim of natural calamity. But our love cannot be mere sentiment. “It is active, and it longs to bring about healing and change in the lives of the recipient under the kingship of Jesus. Nothing less will satisfy it.”⁷⁹ Mercy and evangelism must occur together. “If we fail to provide for both the ministry of mercy and the ministry of the

⁷⁴ Keller, *Ministries of Mercy*, 26.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 102.

word, . . . growth of the kingdom of God will not be occurring.”⁸⁰ The needy will not always have energy or capability to tell us their troubles even if this is what we normally demand. “Are you an active, full-time Christian minister or only a reactive, part-time one? Stop. Look. Listen. Give. Act.”⁸¹ It is necessary to get outside the walls of the church and avoid expecting the needy to come to us. “Every member has kingdom power to destroy strongholds. Through us Jesus continues to immerse himself in the needs of the world.”⁸² The church mission is to minister to all, its members and those in the world. “The church is both the community of the kingdom and the agent for the spread of the kingdom of God.”⁸³ Even new members can be involved in the ministry of mercy. “That is part of the beauty of mercy ministry. It so easily mirrors the truth of the priesthood of *all* believers.”⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Keller, *Ministries of Mercy*, 116.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 172.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 205.

CHAPTER IV

THE THEOLOGY OF RECONCILIATION

In this discussion of the ministry of reconciliation a comparison will be made between the views of Roman Catholics to that of the Protestants. The Roman Catholic ministry of reconciliation resides in the Church and demands an effective witness in the service of one's neighbor, the poor and the oppressed in particular, in an integral theological fashion. The Protestant approach to the ministry of reconciliation is anchored in the reconciling work of Jesus as the supreme crisis in the life of mankind and involves presenting the gospel as a means for experiencing peace with God and meeting the needs of oppressed becomes an outworking of one's personal faith.

Roman Catholic View of Reconciliation

Reconciliation is the primary ministry of the church and according to Robert Schreiter “involves a fundamental repair to human lives, especially to the lives of those who have suffered. That repair takes time – time that can make the participants feel insecure, but necessary time nonetheless for beginning a new life.”¹ In fact, reconciliation may be considered superior to liberation since it points to what we are destined to rather than what we are rescued from. “Reconciliation has connotations of that blessed state to which we all are called. It also seems to enshrine the Christian belief in love of enemies

¹ Robert. J. Schreiter, *Reconciliation: Mission & Ministry in a Changing Social Order* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1992), 21.

that lies close to the heart of the Christian message.”² Reconciliation and liberation go hand in hand and can only come about when the violence perpetrated is addressed and when the conditions that caused it are removed.³

Pope Benedict XVI presented a document that “invites all to overcome grave social inequalities and the enormous differences in access to goods. These peoples are yearning, above all, for the fullness of life that Christ brought us: ‘I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly’ (Jn 10:10).”⁴ In addition the role of the Church was delineated, “The Church is the advocate of justice and of the poor, precisely because she does not identify with politicians nor with partisan interests.”⁵ Although this may appear as a caution to avoid the political approach, the Pope emphasized the relationship and influence of God in the lives of the people. “In other words, the presence of God, friendship with the incarnate Son of God, the light of his word: these are always fundamental conditions for the presence and efficacy of justice and love in our societies.”⁶ Pope Benedict XVI specifically addressed those working in Latin America:

I now want to address the religious men and women and consecrated members of the lay faithful. Latin American and Caribbean society needs your witness: in a world that so often gives priority to seeking well-being, wealth and pleasure as the goal of life, exalting freedom to the point where it takes the place of the truth of man created by God, you are witnesses that there is another meaningful way to live; remind your brothers and sisters that the Kingdom of God has already arrived; that justice and truth

² Ibid., 22.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Bishops; of Latin America and the Caribbean* (Shrine of Aparecida, May 13, 2007), 4. available from http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2007/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070513_conference-aparecida_en.html; Internet; accessed 24 November 2010.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

are possible if we open ourselves to the loving presence of God our Father, of Christ our brother and Lord, and of the Holy Spirit, our Comforter. With generosity and with heroism, you must continue working to ensure that society is ruled by love, justice, goodness, service and solidarity in conformity with the charism of your founders. With profound joy, embrace your consecration, which is an instrument of sanctification for you and of redemption for your brothers and sisters.⁷

Cardinal Ratzinger, prior to his elevation to Pope Benedict XVI, presented the position of the Church regarding liberation theology. In the *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation"* there were both aspects of focus on the Church's role in the ministry of reconciliation as well as specific criticism of the areas where Ratzinger felt liberation theology was off the mark. He first stressed the focus of the Church in that:

liberation has as its indispensable pillars: "the truth about Jesus the Savior"; "the truth about the Church"; and "the truth about man and his dignity." . . . She addresses each person, and for that reason, every person. She is the "universal Church. The Church of the Incarnation. She is not the Church of one class or another. And she speaks of the name of truth itself. This truth is realistic." It leads to a recognition "of every human reality, every injustice, every tension and every struggle."⁸

The emphasis in the *Instruction* was on the relationship with Christ and points to the source of Christian liberty and the primary source of slavery:

The radical experience of "Christian liberty" is our first point of reference. Christ, our Liberator, has freed us from sin and from slavery to the Law and to the flesh, which is the mark of the condition of sinful mankind. Thus it is the new life of grace, fruit of justification, which makes us free. This means that the most radical form of slavery is slavery to sin. Other forms of slavery find their deepest root in slavery to sin. That is why freedom in the full Christian sense, characterized by the life in the Spirit,

⁷ Ibid., 5.

⁸ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology Of Liberation"* (Given at Rome, at the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, on August 6, 1984, the Feast of the Transfiguration of Our Lord. Published by direction of Holiness Pope John Paul II, 1984), XI-5.

cannot be confused with a license to give in to the desires of the flesh. Freedom is a new life in love.⁹

In addition to the focus on the source of reconciliation, Ratzinger criticized the liberation theologian as exclusionary and focused on class. He used rather tough language in his criticism:

Because of this classist presupposition, it becomes very difficult, not to say impossible, to engage in a real dialogue with some “theologians of liberation.” . . . Theological criteria for truth are thus relativized and subordinated to the imperatives of the class struggle. In this perspective, “orthodoxy” or the right rule of faith, is substituted by the notion of “orthopraxy” as the criterion of the truth. In this connection it is important not to confuse practical orientation, which is proper to traditional theology in the same way that speculative orientation is, with the recognized and privileged priority given to a certain type of “praxis”. For them, this praxis is the revolutionary “praxis” which thus becomes the supreme criterion for theological truth. A healthy theological method no doubt will always take the 'praxis' of the Church into account and will find there one of its foundations, but that is because that praxis comes from the faith and is a lived expression of it. . . . Any attempt to satisfy the material needs of persons, while ignoring their spiritual nature, such as encouraging people to despise the rich, to steal from them or to use violence against them, will only lead people deeper into the slavery of sin. Only a thoroughly materialistic culture can perceive this as progress. For traditional Catholics, “Redemption is liberation in the strongest sense of the word, since it is liberation from sin.”¹⁰

Along with his disagreement with the liberation theologians view of the division of classes, Cardinal Ratzinger had strong criticism regarding the support that was based on their reading of Scripture:

The new 'hermeneutic' inherent in the “theologies of liberation” leads to an essentially “political” re-reading of the Scriptures. Thus, a major importance is given to the Exodus event inasmuch as it is a liberation from political servitude. Likewise, a political reading of the “Magnificat” is proposed. The mistake here is not in bringing attention to a political dimension of the readings of Scripture, but in making of this one

⁹ Ibid., IV-2.

¹⁰ Ibid., X-3.

dimension the principal or exclusive component. This leads to a reductionist reading of the Bible.¹¹

However, other Catholic writers expanded more on the message of reconciliation, which is the ultimate road to lead away from suffering and alienation. The grace of reconciliation transforms, allowing one to forgive enemies and recover their humanity. “Reconciliation is indeed the work of God, to which we are invited. We enter into that work and discover in a new way our own humanity.”¹² Schreiter addresses the church in Chile as earning the right to exercise a ministry of reconciliation. He describes how the church “stood by the people against the government throughout the struggle and now can be an agent to reconciliation, an ambassador of the wounded and suffering Christ to a people coming out of the nightmare.”¹³ Schreiter presents a picture of reconciliation that addresses both the relationship to Christ and the realities of human society:

In the process of reconciliation we are called into faith and invited to touch the wounds of Christ. In that faith we rediscover our own humanity, expressed most poignantly in that reaching out in trust. By restoring trust we restore the ability to live in human society. In touching those wounds we encounter a God who has suffered with us and who continues to bear the marks of his torture even in his resurrection from the dead . . . To make an instrument of torture the very emblem of its self-understanding as the bearer of God’s good news is a bold act. The cross stands starkly on the landscape, at once instrument of torture and throne of God, as John’s gospel so clearly depicts it. The cross sums up the paradox of our world and of the God who relates to that world. Our world is wracked by violence, but it can also bring forth incredible beauty.¹⁴

The ministry of reconciliation is an intimate identity with the character of Christ and his suffering.

¹¹ Ibid., X-5.

¹² Schreiter, *Reconciliation: Mission & Ministry*, 59.

¹³ Ibid., 66.

¹⁴ Ibid., 78,

The Catholic Church does emphasize the role of the poor in the ministry of the church. There are strong similarities between place of the poor in liberation theology and in the stated Church position regarding the poor. There is a unity when one compares the plight of the poor with that of Jesus himself. “It entails a movement from above to below, what St. Paul calls *kenosis* in Phil 2:6, where he says that ‘Jesus emptied himself and took upon himself the form of a slave.’”¹⁵ Lynch makes a contrast between faithful and traditional Catholics. “Faithful Catholics must aid the poor and must try to relieve their suffering. Traditional Catholics believe that they must not sacrifice their souls, nor destroy societal unity, by undertaking sinful, divisive actions to make economic conditions less terrible.”¹⁶ At the same time he criticizes liberationist due to their view that those societies that are unliberated are so divided that revolution may be necessary to purge the ruling class. This is in contrast to reconciliation. “Reconciliation theology, however, insists that Christianity requires openness, and even love, for people of all social classes, and all classes of sinfulness.”¹⁷

Pope Benedict XVI’s view is that “the preferential option for the poor is implicit in the Christological faith in the God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty,” (cf. 2 Cor 8:9).¹⁸ This implies the Church’s involvement with the rights of those in need. This role entails acting to address the problems of the disadvantaged and at the same time not neglect the concerns of individual Christians. At the same time the

¹⁵ George M. Anderson, “Salvation among the Poor,” *America* 196 (2007) : 16.

¹⁶ Edward A. Lynch, “The Retreat of Liberation Theology,” *The Homiletic & Pastoral Review* (Feb. 1994) : 5. [journal on-line]; available from http://liberationtheology.org/library/the_retreat_of_liberation_theology.pdf; Internet; accessed 6 June 2010.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁸ Pope Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness*, 3.

vocation of the Church is to denounce injustice and suppression. “This inevitably places her into the arena of political conflict – even within her own membership. The church thus realizes that in a socially torn and divided world no politically neutral position is possible.”¹⁹ Along with the poor and oppressed there are many who suffer widespread afflictions. These conditions can be attributed to the inequality of the distribution of wealth. “It is unconscionable that we live in a world order (in fact, a form of disorder) with two-thirds of the global population living in very poor conditions, while a fifth lives comfortably.”²⁰

In May 2007 in Aparecida, Brazil, Pope Benedict XVI clearly addressed the priority of the poor:

We can ask ourselves a further question: what does faith in this God give us? The first response is: it gives us a family, the universal family of God in the Catholic Church. Faith releases us from the isolation of the “I”, because it leads us to communion: the encounter with God is, in itself and as such, an encounter with our brothers and sisters, an act of convocation, of unification, of responsibility towards the other and towards others.²¹

This is “the vision of Christian life manifested in this statement and in the practice of this commitment is, in fact, the most substantial part of the contribution from the life and theological reflection of the Church in Latin America to the universal church.”²²

Communion ecclesiology emphasizes community bonded by the love of God and focuses more on images and symbols rather than giving specific definitions. “The Trinity

¹⁹ Norbert Mette, “Love as Evidence for the Truth and the Humanity of Faith: A Roman Catholic Perspective on the Significance of ‘Caritas’ in the Life of the Church,” *Christian Bioethics: Non-ecumenical Studies in Medical Morality* 15 (2009) : 114.

²⁰ Anderson, “Salvation among the Poor,” 18.

²¹ Pope Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness*, 3.

²² Gustavo Gutiérrez, “The Option for the Poor Arises from Faith in Christ,” *Theological Studies* 70 (2009) : 318.

bonds together the three persons in one God; the body of Christ bonds together members of the church with God; the communion of saints bonds together those who have died in God's mercy with those now on earth."²³ It is felt that the Catholic Church provides more than other churches and that, "other churches are thus not in full communion with the Catholic Church. On a practical level the Catholic Church may be lacking, but in an ideal sense it has the fullest possible set of tools for salvation."²⁴ This ecclesial communion focuses on the spiritual and on human learning and addresses concerns regarding "contemporary thought, both philosophical and scientific, without which it is impossible, today, to elaborate a theological process."²⁵

A major aspect of the Catholic Church's felt strength is in the Eucharist as a means to find inspiration:

Every Sunday and every Eucharist is a personal encounter with Christ. Listening to God's word, our hearts burn because it is he who is explaining and proclaiming it. When we break the bread at the Eucharist, it is he whom we receive personally. The Eucharist is indispensable nourishment for the life of the disciple and missionary of Christ. . . . The encounter with Christ in the Eucharist calls forth a commitment to evangelization and an impulse towards solidarity; it awakens in the Christian a strong desire to proclaim the Gospel and to bear witness to it in the world so as to build a more just and humane society. From the Eucharist, in the course of the centuries, an immense wealth of charity has sprung forth, of sharing in the difficulties of others, of love and of justice.²⁶

Again in the words of Pope Benedict XVI, "In this effort to come to know the message of Christ and to make it a guide for our own lives, we must remember that evangelization

²³ Dennis M. Doyle, "Communion Ecclesiology and the Silencing of Boff," *America* 167 (1992) : 139.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 142.

²⁵ Gustavo Gutierrez, "Faith as Freedom: Solidarity with the Alienated and Confidence in the Future," *Horizons* 2 (1975) : 45.

²⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness*, 4.

has always developed alongside the promotion of the human person and authentic Christian liberation.”²⁷ Evangelization then is a major contribution to the promotion of justice. Proclamation of the good news is an essential part of the proclamation of the kingdom. “The road has been long, but its current formulation clearly avoids impoverishing separations.”²⁸

Liberation and the Christian message are inseparable and there has been a renewed emphasis on spirituality. “There is a sense in which all Orthodox Christian theology is ‘liberation theology’ because the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are at the centre, and are fundamentally liberating.”²⁹ The emphasis on spirituality is in part a due to the reaction to the traditional Church, which liberationists felt was too other worldly, and it may also be a turnaround prompted by the Vatican's successful cultural effort.”³⁰ The resulting effort is more local spiritual communities. “The church is declericalised as the emphasis switches to the whole people of God. The result is not a global alternative for the entire church, but a leaven of renewal.”³¹

Protestants Views of the Ministry of Reconciliation

The primary difference in the ministry of reconciliation between Protestant and the Catholic Church is that Protestants are more oriented toward individual responsibility and the Catholics toward the responsibility of the Church. Although individuals come

²⁷ Ibid., 3.

²⁸ Gustavo Gutiérrez, “The Option for the Poor Arises from Faith in Christ,” *Theological Studies* 70 (2009) : 324.

²⁹ Stephen Hayes, “Orthodoxy and Liberation Theology,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 73 (1990) : 18.

³⁰ Lynch, “The Retreat of Liberation Theology,” 10.

³¹ Gerard Mannion, “New Wine and New Wineskins: Laity and a Liberative Future for the Church,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 11 (2007) : 201.

together for a collective effort each individual has a commitment to the ministry. In the words of Keller when he indicates that every member is involved in the ministry of mercy, “That is part of the beauty of mercy ministry. It so easily mirrors the truth of the priesthood of *all* believers.”³² A concise synopsis of the ministry of reconciliation is stated in answer to a question in the Presbyterian Church (USA) (hereafter PC[USA]) study catechism:

Does resurrection hope mean that we don't have to take action to relieve the suffering of this world?

No. When the great hope is truly alive, small hopes arise even now for alleviating the sufferings of the present time. Reconciliation – with God, with one another, and with oneself – is the great hope God has given to the world. While we commit to God the needs of the whole world in our prayers, we also know that we are commissioned to be instruments of God's peace. When hostility, injustice and suffering are overcome here and now, we anticipate the end of all things—the life that God brings out of death, which is the meaning of resurrection hope.³³

The ministry of reconciliation is centered on the ministry and cross of Christ.

“God does something decisive on behalf of oppressed humanity, liberating us from evil forces that enslave us, freeing us from our burden of guilt, restoring moral order in a disordered world, setting us free from the illusions and self-deceptions that bring destruction on our neighbors.”³⁴ The work of Jesus Christ on the cross and his resurrection has made an indelible mark on history. “God’s compassion is greater than the murderous passions of our world, that God’s glory can and does shine even in the deepest night of human savagery, that God’s forgiving love is greater than our often

³² Timothy Keller, *Ministries of Mercy: The Call of the Jericho Road* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1997), 205.

³³ Presbyterian Church (USA), *The Study Catechism: Full Version with Biblical References* (Louisville, Geneva Press, 1999), 86. (Bold original)

³⁴ Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 186.

paralyzing awareness of our guilt, that God's way of life is greater than our way of death."³⁵

In the PC(USA) Confession of 1967 (C67) there is the admonition for the church to examine itself continually and when necessary reform its structures. This evaluation is called on in order that God's good news in Jesus Christ can more effectively be proclaimed in the larger social context. C67 demonstrates how "reconciliation, can speak powerfully to specific social needs and ills. At its best, C67 invites us to look for God's active presence in the world, and to respond to God's coming kingdom through concrete acts of love and justice."³⁶ Some highlights of the C67 include addressing man's inhumanity in light of the "promise of God's renewal of man's life in society and of God's victory over all wrong."³⁷ God's reconciling love overcomes the barriers between people and discrimination based on racial or ethnic difference, real or imaginary. The reconciliation of Jesus Christ makes the enslaving poverty in a world of abundance intolerable and a violation of God's good creation. Jesus identified himself with the needy and exploited and the cause of the world's poor has become the cause of his disciples.³⁸ In *A Brief Statement of Faith PC(USA)* the following statement delineates the call for the ministry of reconciliation in the words:

In a broken and fearful world
the Spirit gives us courage
to pray without ceasing,
to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior,
to unmask idolatries in Church and culture,

³⁵ Ibid., 191.

³⁶ "The Confession of 1967" *PC(USA) Book of Confession: Study Edition* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1999), 320.

³⁷ Ibid., 326.

³⁸ Ibid., 327, 328.

to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,
and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.³⁹

The emphasis of these PC(USA) confessions are for Christians to identify with the plight of the poor as demonstrated by Christ's reconciling love.

Barth felt that poverty and oppression are limitations of God's gift of freedom to humanity and are severe, sinful and unjust. The church under the command of God is called "to proclaim the sinfulness of such injustice, to proclaim true freedom in God to the poor and oppressed, and to proclaim both judgment and redemption to the oppressor."⁴⁰ The love of God in Jesus Christ is a message of hope and should open the eyes and ears of the church to the presence of the poor, needy and suffering. "By its words and deeds, the church must make men and women capable of love, the love without which the world can only perish."⁴¹ As recipients of the hope in Christ, "Moltmann emphasizes the Christian mission of taking an active part in the positive change of this world. God's grace enables us to commit ourselves to the transformation work of the world."⁴²

Timothy Keller has demonstrated the ministry of Christian reconciliation in New York and has made a major impact. He has inspired the leaders of New York to look at their responsibility and raise the level of awareness.⁴³ Keller explains the commitment to

³⁹ "A Brief Statement of Faith," *PC(USA) Book of Confession: Study Edition* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1998), 342.

⁴⁰ Chris Barrigar, "The Imperative Inherent in the Gift of Freedom: Karl Barth and Amartya Sen on Human Freedom," *Asia Journal of Theology* 18 (2004) : 131.

⁴¹ Gottfried Brakemeier, "Justification by Grace and Liberation Theology: a Comparison," *Ecumenical Review* 40 (1988) : 222.

⁴² Ki Seong Lee, "A Response to Jürgen Moltmann's 'Blessing of Hope,'" *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 13 (2005) : 222.

⁴³ Tony Carnes, "Manhattan Ministry a Year Later," *Christianity Today* 46 (2002) : 30.

the *primacy* of the gospel reflected in a loving Christian community. The primacy of the gospel is the mainspring for Christian practice. The message of the gospel is “teaching and shepherding believers with it so that it shapes the entirety of their lives, so that they can ‘live it out.’ And one of the most prominent areas that the gospel effects is our relationship to the poor.”⁴⁴ Ministering to the poor is integral to Christian practice. When Paul asks for financial generosity in 2 Cor. 8:8, 9, he implies “that all sinners saved by grace will look at the poor of this world and feel that in some way they are looking in the mirror. The superiority will be gone.”⁴⁵ Keller declares that social action is a partner of evangelism and suggests that Jesus “calls his disciples *both* to “gospel-messaging” (urging everyone to believe the gospel) *and* to “gospel-neighboring” (sacrificially meeting the needs of those around them whether they believe or not!”⁴⁶

Reconciliation of All Parties Involved

Reconciliation involves both the offended and the offender. “It is a measure of how far we have strayed from the Bible that we prefer to avoid the person we have offended, or who has offended us, rather than to confront them, and that for many Christians today ‘confrontation’ has become a dirty word.”⁴⁷ Reconciliation needs to employ a restorative model of justice rather than a retributive model. “The restorative model is based on the offenders’ acknowledgement of wrongdoing and restitution to the

⁴⁴ Timothy Keller, “The Gospel and the Poor,” *Themelios* 33.3 (2008) : 9.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴⁷ Hayes, “Orthodoxy and Liberation Theology,” 17.

victim in order to mend – or weave anew – the social fabric of the community.”⁴⁸ Both parties do not have the same moral responsibility, but “one of the necessary moves in an adequate theology of reconciliation is the recognition that all the parties involved are complicit – to some extent – in the cycle of violence.”⁴⁹ In the reconciliation, the risen Lord vindicates all victims but at the same time saves the oppressors. One cannot place the victim over the oppressor which just reverses the dynamic. “Through graced confrontation and absolution, the past is somehow redeemed, making a new future possible.”⁵⁰ This “vision of reconciliation begins with a reconciled identity created out of our own specific encounter with the risen Lord, it ends with the resolve to live in a new land of community.”⁵¹

Ministry to the rich goes hand in hand with the ministry to the poor. The rich “are meant to change and seek liberating community with the poor if they are to be included as citizens of the kingdom.”⁵² Moltmann formulated a doctrine of the Trinity which “rested on his bold claim that Trinitarian fellowship not only describes divine community but also prescribes the nature of true human community.”⁵³ The Trinity offers an invitation “to share in this dynamic communion of love by offering to them its very

⁴⁸ William Danaher, “Towards a Paschal Theology of Restorative Justice,” *Anglican Theological Review* 89 (2007) : 360.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 368.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 370.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 372.

⁵² Timothy Harvie, “Living the Future: The Kingdom of God in the Theologies of Jürgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 10 (2008) : 152.

⁵³ Joy McDougall, “The Return of Trinitarian Praxis? Moltmann on the Trinity and the Christian Life,” *Journal of Religion* 83 (2003) : 179.

essence—the creative capacity to love others.”⁵⁴ Moltmann visualizes “open friendship” which:

might mean resistance against unjust structures and relationships that create social exclusion in the first place; it may mean risking spiritual or physical suffering on behalf of another. Finally, self-giving love of the other may take the form of a restorative forgiveness that heals broken relationships and welcomes the person who is isolated through personal or collective guilt back into community with others.⁵⁵

Forgiveness recognizes the action did cause harm but cannot undermine God’s justice. “It would be wrong to think of forgiveness as something completely ‘free’ and without cost, for God’s forgiveness is most potently revealed in the cross. At the cross God in Christ bears the sins against him in his own being.”⁵⁶ Forgiveness has the power to judge through love which awakens one to the evil and calls for the guilty to repent. It:

calls the evildoer into that light, to participate in the love and grace offered and thereby to renounce evil, hatred, and violence. Forgiveness is the goodness of God which leads to repentance (Rom. 2:44).

Forgiveness enables reconciliation and reconciliation transforms sinners into saints, establishing a renewal of divine-human justice, peace, and dignity. Ultimately, however, reconciliation is a two-way street. It can occur only if the offender receives forgiveness and repents. Those who scorn and reject forgiveness reject not only the restoration of the relationship and their responsibility in evildoing, but also the opportunity to be transformed and reconciled.⁵⁷

Whether one is rich or poor, exercising forgiveness provides the means for reconciliation between individuals. The strength for this forgiveness ultimately is based on the reconciling love of Christ.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 188.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 199.

⁵⁶ James R. A. Merrick, “Justice, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation: The Reconciliatory Cross as Forgiving Justice.” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 30 (2006), 301.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 303, 304.

Death occurs when people are oppressed, exploited, sick and alienated. The scenes of these experiences are visible daily from reports around the world. “The Taliban-leader Mullah Omar said to a western journalist: ‘Your young people love life, our young people love death.’ Christians love life, not death, and we love also the life of those terrorists, not their death.”⁵⁸ When one considers the justice of Christ, there is confidence that victims will receive justice and perpetrators will be put right. Perpetrators will be redeemed together with their victims:

As long as this world endures, God bears not only the world’s history of suffering but its history of human wrong and injustice too. In the crucified Christ, God himself is the victim among victims. So it is the victims who testify to the reconciliation of the perpetrators.

Through his passion and his death on the cross, Christ put himself on the side of the victims and became their brother. But he did more. He also became the one who atones for the guilty. “Thou who bearest the sins of the world, have mercy upon us.” It is this prayer which brings us together with the evildoers and within the divine compassion. Compassion is love that overcomes its own hurt, love that bears the suffering which guilt has caused, and yet holds fast to the beloved.⁵⁹

God’s grace extends to both the perpetrator and the victim, to both the oppressor and the oppressed, to both the rich and the poor. When the compassion that Christ showed on the cross can be assimilated by the Christian then the ministry of reconciliation can be realized.

Globalization

There is a tremendous process of globalization, which includes advanced communication, world scope of economics and scientific progress. Problems arise not from globalization itself and not even from advances in science and technology. The

⁵⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, “The Presence of God’s Future: The Risen Christ,” *Anglican Theological Review* 89 (2007) : 583.

⁵⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, *Jesus Christ for Today’s World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 41, 68.

problem comes from the *spirit* within the process, specifically its rational basis, the logic, ethic, ideology, culture and spiritually. The question arises whether this process is contrary to human universalism or the interests of particular countries.⁶⁰ In the view of Pope Benedict XVI, the church-based charities are some of the humanitarian help that is given to the suffering of the world. “Globalization today, so he argues, on the one hand, reveals the true extent of the drama of human need across the whole world. But on the other hand, globalization offers entirely new possibilities for effectively meeting that need.”⁶¹

Liberation theologians in various parts of the world represented in the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) have compared their various movements. The dialogue has extended to Jewish liberation theology and Palestinian liberation theology. This dialogue has even encompassed Hinduism and Buddhism. The theme of these inter-religious dialogues, “will be the God of life and the life of nature and of the poor and oppressed of the Third World. This is not the end of liberation theology, as many might wish, but rather the historical opportunity – the *kairos* – of a new knowledge.”⁶² Since globalization seems to augment social fragmentation and exclusion, then the counter to this fragmentation is through the practice of solidarity. The members of EATWOT tend to see that the market system is abused by the rich communities and feel they should join to resist this influence. They feel solidarity can construct a cultural,

⁶⁰ Pablo Richard, “Word of God – Source of Life and Hope for the New Millennium,” *PASOS*, 78 (1998). [journal on-line]; available from <http://www.sedos.org/english/richard.html>; Internet; accessed 15 January 2010.

⁶¹ Mette, “Love as Evidence for the Truth and the Humanity of Faith,” 110.

⁶² Richard, Pablo., *Liberation Theology Today: Crisis or Challenge?* *Revista Envío* Number 133, Agosto (1992) : 8. [journal on-line]; available from <http://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/2541>; Internet; accessed 15 January 2010.

ethical and spiritual resistance to the market system itself. This is centered in the logic of respect for life and “can be lived at the very heart of society. These include, the family, the human community, the neighborhood, the workshop, centers of labor, the local market.”⁶³

In the face of globalization Pablo Richard, a Chilean theologian who teaches liberation theology at the Department of Ecumenical Investigations (DEI) in San Jose, Costa Rica, sees the need for a new style of pastoral ministry that goes beyond the base community of the past.⁶⁴ The emphasis is on the development of a biblically based spirituality following the tradition of *lectio divina* with renewed attention to the biblical foundations of Christian theology, Christian ethics and the Church's social ministry, which they feel will result in a renewed Church. This energetic call of Pablo Richard and his colleagues is like a vision of a new reformation that inspired the earliest theologians of liberation. “If its contours are no longer as vivid and broad as they were a generation ago, they remain nevertheless shaped by the reality of a crucified continent and the biblical witness of the God of life.”⁶⁵

Achievement of a united liberation effort which stands as an alternative to the prevailing system of capitalism, will then maintain “its reason d’etre—that doing of justice which is knowledge of God.”⁶⁶ This focus on the gospel is the only realism that will maintain the true concern for Christian unity and will give ecumenism relevance to

⁶³ John L. Kater, Jr. “Whatever happened to liberation theology? New directions for theological reflection in Latin America,” *Anglican Theological Review* Fall (2001) : 19.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 22.

⁶⁶ Peter Burns, “The Problem of Socialism in Liberation Theology,” *Theological Studies* 53(1992) : 515.

the world. Reflection on Jesus' prayer "that they may all be one So that the world may believe that thou hast sent me (John 17:21)" dictates that "our concern must be for world evangelism and not simply for the kind of ecumenism which may turn out to be more of a hindrance to world evangelism rather than a compelling impetus to evangelize the world."⁶⁷ With no universal theology the relations between bodies of churches becomes difficult. Consequently, the reason "churches participate in the ecumenical movement is their hope that it might be able to discover a 'universal' theology that could possibly form the basis of Christian unity."⁶⁸ At the same time Christian theology must have a universal horizon. "Moltmann notes that 'the ecumenical solidarity of the Christian Church is for me higher than national loyalty or cultural, class or racial associations.'"⁶⁹

The development of a theology of reconciliation needs to be formulated from the theological principles that committed churchmen have always held. The aspiration of ecumenism is unity according to the will of God with the real goal of organic unity. The communion of the early church was based on agreement of faith. "Communion, agreement in faith, the mutual recognition of each other's ministry and sacraments and the admission of members of another Church to Holy Communion, is unity."⁷⁰ The aim of a theology of reconciliation would find unity on the basis of scriptural revelation. "Speculative theology would have to be accepted as a matter of opinion and preference, and prejudices would have to be abandoned."⁷¹ Jesus' challenge for us today would be

⁶⁷ Charles Cameron, "Tensions in Modern Theology," *Evangel 23* (2005) : 9.

⁶⁸ Hayes, "Orthodoxy and Liberation Theology," 13.

⁶⁹ Scott R. Paeth, "Jürgen Moltmann's Public Theology" *Political Theology* 6 (2005) : 226.

⁷⁰ Willfrid Stibbs, "Towards a Theology of Reconciliation," *Modern Churchman* 18 (1974) : 68.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 72.

for us to see a new global love economy of God. This would be in contrast to an industrial economy, an information economy, or an experience economy, but it would be:

a wise relational economy that measures success in terms of gross national affection and global community that seeks to amass the appreciating capital of wise judgment, profound forethought, and deepening virtue for the sake of rich relationships.

To be a follower of Jesus in this light is a far different affair than many of us were taught: it means to join Jesus' peace insurgency, to see through every regime that promises peace through violence, peace through domination, peace through genocide, peace through exclusion and intimidation. Following Jesus instead means forming communities that seek peace through justice, generosity, and mutual concern, and a willingness to suffer persecution but a refusal to inflict it on others. To follow Jesus is to become a believer in the living God of grace and peace who, in Christ, sheds God's own blood in a manifestation of amnesty and reconciliation.⁷²

The theology of reconciliation calls for spiritual reconciliation within the Christian community in order to have influence for rectifying the injustices in the world. The basis for this unity comes from a return to the principle that Jesus advocated – to love our neighbor as ourselves.

⁷² Brian McLaren, *Everything Must Change: When the World's Biggest Problems and Jesus' Good News Collide* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 131, 159.

CHAPTER V
COMPARISON OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY AND MINISTRY OF
RECONCILIATION

Do the Ministries of the Church Support Liberation Theology Objectives?

Following the discussions of liberation theology and the ministry of reconciliation, it is appropriate to compare various considerations of how each approach may be meeting the same objectives. There is the same concern whether the movements are directed toward conflicting purposes. At the outset it would appear there is a different orientation in the approach to the liberation theology movement by Protestants and Catholics. On the one hand there is the question whether the movements represent the Christian's individual challenge to further the gospel and on the other hand whether the Church's Magisterium is maintaining oversight of the Church's mission in the world. It becomes a question of whether the movements are effective at the grassroots level or are properly controlled by the hierarchy of the Church.

Each Christian has received grace from God and this prompts the responsibility that this grace be passed on and lived out. This faith pervades one's entire life to include political responsibility to love ones neighbor and to cooperate with the state. "The modern state cannot function without the active cooperation of its citizens. Liberation theology reminds the church of this task."¹ In addition Christians see the necessity to

¹ Gottfried Brakemeier, "Justification by Grace and Liberation Theology: a Comparison," *Ecumenical Review* 40(1988) : 218.

oppose lovelessness in society and to stand against injustice done to the poor and defenseless. “They have an obligation to identify and condemn sin and to champion the victims of society. What is required of those who have been justified by grace and faith is . . . the works of love.”² In his article regarding Timothy Keller’s ministry in Manhattan, Stafford quotes him as follows, “When you say the ultimate sin is to put things in the place of God, you take that argument away. You find that they say, ‘Hmm, I don’t know if there is a God.’ When I describe sin in such a way that people wish there were a God, I’m making progress.”³ With this approach it is not a matter of showing that the Redeemer does not participate in culture wars but is the one who died for us. Consequently, “the gospel DNA of grace is crucial to Redeemer’s embrace of center-city culture. . . . Keller likes to describe Redeemer’s stance as ‘cultural presence,’ which enhances flavor but doesn’t take over.”⁴ Keller’s approach then is centered in the gospel as it applies to the lives of those to whom he ministers.

In the same vein, Moltmann when he focuses on the liberation of the poor directs one to the presence of the Holy Spirit in order to recognize the experiences of liberative self-transcendence. He sees this moment of self-transcendence as one coming to himself, as one coming out of a pigsty as in the parable of the prodigal son, and thus Moltmann directs our understanding of God *in* the world and history as a sacrament. Self transcendence, is indeed a gracious gift of God as part of our being human, which “is not left to be self-referential, but an individual need not be aware of the Spirit of God in

² Ibid., 219.

³ Tim Stafford, “How Tim Keller Found Manhattan,” *Christianity Today* 53 (2009) : 25.

⁴ Ibid., 25.

Christ who is drawing all creation toward completion in God.”⁵ This approach directs one’s effort of improving life’s situation to the individual’s spiritual condition and individual empowerment:

Where Social Quality raises the socioeconomic in normative expectations of social inclusion and empowerment, spirituality talks of the liberating action of the Spirit of the Christ of God and history as a sacramental venue for God's actions. In other words, what Social Quality renders in socioeconomic and political terms, spirituality can articulate as events that might bear the hallmarks of the Spirit's action toward the horizon of creation being brought to completion to the glory of God.⁶

As individuals are wrestling with their condition, whether it is depression or oppression, questions arise regarding the place of God in their circumstances. In Keller’s view one needs to point to Jesus as the answer. He feels that one needs to go past the questions to all that Christianity has to offer and then it meets the need and is the truth. If this is not the approach then “you’re just scratching where they itch.” It is important to meet one’s rational side without focusing only on an intellectual argument, but at the same time not fail to answer questions. “Don’t get the impression that I think that the rational aspect takes you all the way there. But there’s too much emphasis on just the personal now.”⁷

In summary, the Protestant view of liberation theology in meeting the social problems of the poor and oppressed is to give individuals a faith that strengthens and empowers them to regain their dignity. This approach then is two-fold addressing the conditions that cause injustice done to the poor and defenseless and at the same time

⁵ Eric Stoddart, “Spirituality and Citizenship: Sacramentality in a Parable,” *Theological Studies* 68 (2007) : 765.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 777.

⁷ Susan Wunderink, “Tim Keller Reasons with America,” *Christianity Today* 52 (2008) : 39.

turning those who are suffering to Jesus as the source of the ultimate help. With a strong faith the oppressed can become active in the solution of their circumstances and form communities of faith to take appropriate steps to improve their situation. Liberation theology provides a methodology when integrated with the strong witness of a church community.

Since liberation theology has its roots in the efforts of the local Catholic clergy in Latin America, the effectiveness of the movement was measured differently. The priests in Latin American communities came face to face with the poverty suffered by the people. A factor that was stated by some of these priests was that the hierarchy of the church was insensitive to their plight. Consequently, the place of liberation theology had a different emphasis within the Catholic Church. The stated position of the Church was that the movement was a desire to twist the political and economic system into something that could be just as oppressive. “Any event of liberation now will be but partial and incomplete, and is a type of the greater liberation, when Christ returns and the kingdom of God is revealed in its fullness.”⁸ In August 1984 Cardinal Ratzinger published a document, approved by his Holiness Pope John Paul II, who ordered its publication, and was entitled *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the “Theology of Liberation.”* The instruction was intended to inform all the pastors and theologians about “the deviations, and risks of deviation, damaging to the faith and to Christian living, that are brought about by certain forms of liberation theology, which use, in an insufficiently critical manner, concepts borrowed from various currents of Marxist thought.” Ratzinger went on

⁸ Stephen Hayes, “Orthodoxy and Liberation Theology,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 73 (1990) : 23.

to declare that the Church's Magisterium has already expressed the desire to awaken Christian consciences of “a sense of justice, social responsibility, and solidarity with the poor and the oppressed.”⁹ The “theologies of liberation” misunderstand the full presentation of Christianity which is “the true nature of the means of salvation, especially of the Church and the sacraments.” In so doing, liberation theology “begins to sacralize politics and betray the religion of the people in favor of the projects of the revolution.”¹⁰

To counter this position the liberation theologians declared that due to the suffering and struggle of the poor the evangelization of the church urges all Christians to live their faith. In so doing, they will transform society to move in the direction of greater justice and fellowship. “All need to make the option for the poor: the rich with generosity and no regard for reward, the poor for their fellow poor and those who are even poorer than they.”¹¹ In 1996 Ratzinger expressed only a slightly different observation when he indicated that liberation theology presented a challenge with a new, plausible and practical response to the fundamental question of Christianity, which is the problem of redemption. “It was transformed into a task which people themselves could and even had to take into their own hands, and at the same time it became a totally practical hope: Faith, in theory, became praxis, concrete redeeming action, in the process of liberation.”¹²

⁹ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology Of Liberation"* (Given at Rome, at the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, on August 6, 1984, the Feast of the Transfiguration of Our Lord. Published by direction of Holiness Pope John Paul II, 1984), V-1.

¹⁰ Ibid., XI-17.

¹¹ Leonardo Boff, & Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis. 1987), 46.

¹² Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Relativism: The Central Problem for Faith Today* (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Guadalajara, Mexico in May 1996, Irondale, AL, Eternal Word Television Network, 1996), 1.

The interest of Rome was that the theology of liberation, if it is here to stay, must be controlled. Consequently, it was now understood that true liberation theology has been part of the teaching of the church and has always been held everywhere by everyone. Even the term liberation belongs to the Church. “The scandal of the shocking inequality between the rich and poor – whether between rich and poor countries, or between social classes in a single nation – is no longer tolerated.”¹³ The church felt that the liberation theologians put politics before religion and material conditions before the spiritual. However Ratzinger emphasized the spiritual relationship to Christ rather than the political approach that he felt was the orientation of liberation theologians. He declared that “Christ, our Liberator, has freed us from sin and from slavery to the Law and to the flesh, which is the mark of the condition of sinful mankind.”¹⁴ The “scientific” analysis which led to the concept of class conflict was criticized by the Church since it could lead to conflict and violence. “Gradualism, reformism, amelioration only further entrench the power of the ruling class: liberation entails violence.”¹⁵ Boff, a leading liberation theologian did criticize the church when he contrasted the efforts of the base communities developed in the liberation movement with the treatment of lay people by the Church:

In these base communities consciousness is being raised. Lay people are adults, often with their own training and expertise, who in their daily lives show initiative and take responsibility. By contrast the institutional Church – if we can so refer to the body centered on Rome – treats lay people as children to be guided and taken care of. Lay people are not involved in appointments of priests, bishops or popes. They are marginalized by the Church just as they are by society in many cases. Discrimination against

¹³ Ratzinger, *Instruction*, I-7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, IV-2.

¹⁵ Alistair Kee, “Authority and Liberation: Conflict between Rome and Latin America,” *Modern Churchman* 28 (1985) : 30.

women, the majority of Christians, is practiced and was again reasserted by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.¹⁶

On the one hand, the Church felt that the liberation theology movement was oriented to a political approach and the disparity between classes. On the other hand the liberation theologians criticized the Church for neglecting their oppression and showing disrespect for their ability to extend the ministry of the Church to their communities.

The liberation theology movement has made changes and has moved away from strictly a political and economic orientation that has caused much of the disagreement with the Church. They are moving to an articulation of the gospel that goes beyond the physical situations and emphasizes a broader understanding of spirituality which includes human reality in relationship to God. In addition as they have moved toward emphasis of spirituality and Scripture and away from political activism, they have revised their approach to the Church and renewed ties.¹⁷ In *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, Gutiérrez argued that in the process of liberation, people must draw upon their unique cultural experience. By drawing on their experiences the laity can make their voices heard and so contribute to the church's vision. In so doing they can move away from adhering "to the past when it is no longer relevant and life-giving. The past may be draining vitality from the church; thus, the church has the important task to discern what is life-giving and what is destructive."¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid., 34.

¹⁷ John L. Jr. Kater, "Whatever happened to liberation theology? New directions for theological reflection in Latin America," *Anglican Theological Review* Fall (2001) : 8.

¹⁸ Gerard Mannion, "New Wine and New Wineskins: Laity and a Liberative Future for the Church," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 11 (2007) : 194.

In the connection between divine love and justice, Ratzinger, writing now as Pope Benedict XVI seemed to separate them when he indicated that Church's area of competence is not politics, which belongs to the state. However, both areas are intimately interwoven and as the theology of liberation declares, must always be tackled together. In the Pope's view, however, this does "not preclude faithful laypersons' active participation in the establishment of a just world order. But even in a perfectly just political system, there will always be a need for love."¹⁹ In 2007 Pope Benedict XVI recognized the maturity of the laity in Latin America:

In the ecclesial communities of Latin America there is a notable degree of maturity in faith among the many active lay men and women devoted to the Lord, and there are also many generous catechists, many young people, new ecclesial movements and recently established Institutes of consecrated life. Many Catholic educational, charitable or housing initiatives have proved essential.²⁰

There has been a gain in recognition by the Church of the liberation theology movement. A cooperation between the hierarchy and the local parishes creates more of an atmosphere of mutual respect.

Comparison of Meeting Liberation Theology Objectives

When comparing the Protestant and Roman Catholic assessments of liberation theology and the associated movements, there seems to be commonality. In both cases the responsibility of all members of the church is emphasized or at least encouraged. The

¹⁹ Norbert Mette, "Love as Evidence for the Truth and the Humanity of Faith: A Roman Catholic Perspective on the Significance of "Caritas" in the Life of the Church," *Christian Bioethics: Non-ecumenical Studies in Medical Morality* 15 (2009) : 112

²⁰ Pope Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Bishops; of Latin America and the Caribbean* (Shrine of Aparecida, May 13, 2007), 2. available from http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2007/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070513_conference-aparecida_en.html; Internet; accessed 24 November 2010.

motivation between individuals may be based on different reasoning. Conservatives are motivated by compassion to help the poor. This view fails to realize that those that have more may be wealthier due to an unjust distribution of opportunities. Consequently, if one fails to share then one is unjust due to a lack of compassion. However, the liberal sees the problem as one of aborted justice. Consequently, they give out of indignation in the face of mishandled justice. For them the failure is in recognizing that individual responsibility and transformation are instrumental to escape from poverty. Both views are due to self-righteousness. “One tends to blame the poor for everything, the other to blame the rich for everything. One over-emphasizes individual responsibility, the other under-emphasizes it.”²¹

Balance is required to avoid the feelings of superiority to any class of people. The gospel motivates us to act *both* in mercy *and* in justice. In Lev. 19:34 the Israelites were challenged to love the aliens as themselves being sensitive to the status that they experienced in Egypt. Now they were to treat the less fortunate with love and justice:

So the basis for “doing justice” is salvation by grace! We said at the beginning of this section that this balance of mercy and justice – of seeing both the personal and social aspects and causes of poverty – is necessary for a church’s ministry to the poor to be *wise*. A conservative ideology will be far too impatient and probably harsh with a poor family and won’t be cognizant of the more invisible social-cultural factors contributing to the problems. A liberal ideology will not put enough emphasis on repentance and personal change.²²

One may observe a strong similarity between liberation and the social gospel, proponents of which feel that time is on their side and their view will prevail. They both share:

the rejection of a spiritualized understanding of the gospel, a rejection of excessive individualism, a conviction that salvation is necessarily a social matter

²¹ Timothy Keller, “The Gospel and the Poor,” *Themelios* 33.3 (2008) : 119.

²² *Ibid.*, 120.

and to be achieved in and through human history, and that the kingdom of God, though not identical with any particular political or economic strategy, is continuous with the pursuit of social justice and can only be brought about by striving for righteousness in this world.²³

Both liberation theology and the social gospel are conditioned by and they reflect the social context in which they emerge. But then as we have reviewed for the various applications and off shoots of liberation theology and for that matter the origin of various religious sects, it could be said that all theologies are contextual.²⁴

Religious organizations do provide many services such as soup kitchens and homeless shelters. And most members of the congregations are involved in addition to pastors and church leaders. The church and individual Christians try to be involved in this world and look to the next world at the same time. They endeavor to present Christ and the gospel in a holistic way that will be meaningful to politics and the community. They also look to meet the spiritual struggles of people and so engage in the world rather than separating from the world. This effort of trying to avoid a particular social agenda may result in “struggling for cooperation with people of other or no faith.”²⁵ But there may be difficulties, since it may seem that salvation is not secular enough and the message is unclear when the dynamics of sin are interpreted as a political dynamic. There may not be sufficient attention given to Christological-social aspect of salvation.²⁶

²³ T. Howland Sanks, “Liberation Theology and the Social Gospel: Variations on a Theme,” *Theological Studies* 41 (1980) : 680.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 682.

²⁵ Stephen Hart, *What does the Lord Require? How American Christians Think about Economic Justice* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 206.

²⁶ Peter Scott, “‘Global Capitalism’ Vs ‘End Of Socialism’: Crux Theologica? Engaging Liberation Theology And Theological Postliberalism,” *Political Theology* 2 (2001) : 46.

Mercy, justice and forgiveness go together. The application of forgiveness that is called for in the ministry of reconciliation may seem to be in conflict to justice. Since mercy can be shown without forgiveness, one can punish someone less than what is deserved so compassionate leniency is insufficient for forgiveness. Although mercy may not be sufficient for forgiveness, forgiveness could be a way of being merciful – forgiveness is mercy in a personal context.²⁷ Mercy involves less than what justice calls for and may alleviate suffering that is considered deserved. Consequently mercy may treat some differently than others who have equally broken the law. The wrongs that warrant punishment make mercy and forgiveness relevant. Mercy is required due to human frailty and the giving of deserved punishment is hard. Forgiveness allows a renewal of relationships that can create feelings that are not fixed by wrongdoing. When one has relationships with flawed people and when one is also flawed, this enables attitudes that are not fixed on the basis of one's worst acts, without condoning wrongdoing.²⁸ Nicholas Wolterstorff adds:

One cannot preserve the thought and reality of forgiveness while abolishing the thought and reality of justice. If justice were a bad idea for Christians, forgiveness would have to be a bad idea for Christians. But forgiveness is at the heart of the moral vision of Christianity, so justice has to be there too.²⁹

Mercy and justice in civil affairs can be exercised as one realizes that all parties concerned are flawed. Forgiveness preserves and restores relationships and can bring one another together.

²⁷ Lucy Allais, "Forgiveness and Mercy," *South African Journal of Philosophy* 27 (2008) : 3.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁹ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 107.

The virtue of mercy promotes a humanizing and civilizing effect in the face of an environment that is surrounded by violence. Mercy reveals our vulnerability to the power of others. Mercy helps break the cycle of revenge and promotes harmony and reconciliation to the community. A retributive response is blind to causes and looks only at actions and narrow definition of responsibility. “Mercy, however, reveals the whole story, diluting the power that people have over others; and allows them to see others clearly.”³⁰ Mercy, in relation to justice, coincides with God’s preferential love for the poor and in this sense liberation theology seeks to change the situation in which the poor are despised and relegated to the background.³¹ Liberation theology asks all to be courageous and sensitive to the environment in which they live. Does this mean they should drop everything else and risk all and engage in activist movements to alleviate all oppression and injustice? It is clear from the liberation message that the church as a whole is responsible to preach and teach and practice what it preaches and teaches. “For if talk about a ‘preferential option for the poor’ means anything at all, it must imply at the very least that the Church itself will take up a position alongside the poor and other victims of injustice, and give top priority to championing their cause.”³²

The achievement of peace among people is an underlying theme in liberation theology. However this peace has more than one dimension, one that gives freedom from oppression and poverty and one that looks to the coming judgment when justice and peace will prevail. Articulated in the Barmen confession is the declaration that no human

³⁰ Andrew Brien, “Mercy within legal justice,” *Social Theory & Practice* 24 (1998) : 106.

³¹ Christian O. Uchegbue, “Liberation Theology as a Double Polarity,” *Asia Journal of Theology* 22 (2008) : 22.

³² Bernard J. Verkamp, “On Doing the Truth: Orthopraxis and the Theologian,” *Theological Studies* 49 (1988) : 18.

being or institution can take the place of the living God. Whenever the doctrinal, ethical or political witness is at stake, the church is obligated to take a stand. “In the freedom of the gospel, the church must confess its faith in Jesus Christ, and do so against all odds and no matter what the cost.”³³ The use of the term people in liberation theology is defined in two ways. On the one hand the term, people, means the mass of the marginalized, exploited and the poor. On the other the term, people, is a synonym for the church. In the first instance the term is sociological and in the second it is theological. Faith is required of the poor and this allows liberation theology to transfer all attributes of the church to the people. “The people is the church and solidarity with the poor is evidence of belonging to the church.”³⁴

Since the righteousness of God is the foundation for the eternal world in which justice will be established in everything and everybody, the great world judgment is a consoling idea. Jurgen Moltmann in his concept of hope sees an end to suffering that is experienced in the world. “The final judgment of God is therefore good news and something to look forward to. It is the beginning of the great transformation of the world that ends in the final transfiguration of everything.”³⁵ Consequently, he sees that the final judgment is not a punitive one, because Jesus comes as judge who will restore justice. At that time God’s righteousness will come over the world and justice will be brought to those who suffered violence and justice to those who have committed injustice. “He overcomes the suffering of some and the burden of others and brings both into the

³³ “The Theological Declaration of Barmen,” *PC(USA) Book of Confession: Study Edition* (Louisville: Geneva Press. 1999), 308.

³⁴ Brakemeier, “Justification by Grace and Liberation Theology,” 220.

³⁵ Jurgen Moltmann, “In the End is my Beginning: A Hope for Life --A Life for Hope,” *International Congregational Journal* 3(2003) : 154.

community of God's kingdom."³⁶ The gospel of Advent is the expectation of the last judgment which is a message of joy and not a threat. Jesus, the Son of Man, as Judge will bring victory over the powers of darkness. Moltmann's view of hope and the final message of joy provides an encouraging message, however it is counter to the justice that Jesus describes in Matthew 25:32, where he describes the separation of the sheep and the goats. Moltmann goes on to see the launch of justice and righteousness, "Because the new creation can endure eternally only on the foundation of God's righteousness and justice, that righteousness and justice must first of all be made to prevail everywhere."³⁷ Christian theologians showed passion for the liberation of the oppressed and the rights of those humiliated. "The 'theology of hope' and the 'theology of liberation' arose from a cooperative-critical engagement. . . . 'Political theology' shaped greater frameworks for the deepest solidarity of the church 'with the entire human family,'"³⁸ Moltmann considered that the various forms and offshoots of liberation theology have prompted global scale research of the common structures of oppression which led to a concrete starting point for both global and local theologies. "Another challenge for theology, the alternative Christian 'mission' for a more tolerant pluralistic interreligious 'dialogue' is formulated against a new style of mission."³⁹

³⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, "The Hope for the Kingdom of God and Signs of Hope in the World: The Relevance of Blumhardt's Theology Today," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 26 (2004) : 15.

³⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, "The Blessing of Hope: The Theology of Hope and the Full Gospel of Life," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 13 (2005) : 160.

³⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, "Horizons of Hope," *Christian Century* 125 (2008) : 32.

³⁹ Susanne Hennecke, "Related by Freedom, the Impact of Third-World Theologians on the Thinking of Jürgen Moltmann," *Exchange* 32(2003) : 308.

There is equality between any person who fails to grant another total human dignity and acceptance and that person who is enslaved and dominated either by someone else or due to one's own distorted self-image. "The oppressor, then, needs liberation just as much as the oppressed. . . . However, the means used to bring about this liberation must not be in itself dehumanizing."⁴⁰ According to liberation theology understanding comes through action and priority is given to the inner prompting of God which is derived from the experience of poverty and vulnerability. This experience offers a glimpse of the mind of God which leads to the interpretation of God's will for peace among people that is revealed in the Scriptures.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Caleb Rosado, "Black and African Theologies of Liberation: Marxian and Weberian Perspectives," *Journal of Religious Thought* 42 (1985) : 32.

⁴¹ Christopher Rowland, "'Rouzing the Faculties to Act': William Blake, Merkabah Mysticism, the Theology of Liberation and the Exegetical Importance of Experience," *Biblical Interpretation* 11 (2003) : 549.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS

Liberation Theology and the Ministry of Reconciliation Synchronized

There clearly have been criticisms of liberation theology that have been warranted. These criticisms have addressed their political and sometimes revolutionary agenda. In addition they have used questionable sources in their analyses of social dynamics, namely, the Marxist view of the conflict between social classes. Other criticisms have come from various bodies of the church. The Roman Catholics initially feared that the liberation theology movement moved from the controlling hierarchy of the Church to an autonomous local effort. Protestants criticize the movement as focused on their political approach which seemed to sidestep the grace of God for one's salvation. They questioned the equal emphasis on orthopraxis, the actions of helping the poor and oppressed out of their condition, with orthodoxy, the gospel message centered on one's confession of Jesus as Lord and Savior who died for mankind's sin and victoriously rose from the dead conquering death itself. The question that has been considered in this study has been whether the objectives of the liberation theology movement are best met by the ministry of reconciliation.

If one were to consider the liberation movement isolated from any other Christian evangelistic effort, one would focus perhaps only on the political side and the controversy with other Christian ministries that do not have the same zeal. The effort to teach the oppressed and poor how to come together to stand up against injustice and their

oppressors seems to parallel a revolutionary mentality. On the other hand if one were to consider the ministry of reconciliation in which the gospel is presented and the hope in Christ is given as a way for individual to find peace with their circumstances, one may well see disillusionment when the conditions of poverty do not change. It becomes clear then that liberation theology and the ministry of reconciliation must work together and each effort cannot stand alone.

Faith leads to a life of good works and so we live according to the Word of God. When considering liberation theology, it must be committed to liberation grounded in the Lord Jesus Christ – the Liberator who said “I am the truth (John 14:6)” and “the truth will set you free (John 8:32).” In the case of liberation theology, when it “is grounded in faith in Christ the Liberator (not just a model for man's political and social activism) there will be a true unity of spiritual Christianity and social concern.”¹ When classical theological stances come together with contemporary options there are greater possibilities. In fact “the ‘turn to the theological’ in theory, politics, and culture has been underway for many years in Christian liberationist thought.”² When liberation theology finds hope from the cross and resurrection optimism is generated. “From this vantage point it hopes for, and struggles to bring about, what often appears to be impossible: a new heaven and a new earth.”³

The power to begin a new life comes from Christian hope. However the disparity between the first and third worlds is widening. Homelessness and child mortality are on

¹ Charles Cameron, “Tensions in Modern Theology,” *Evangel* 23 (2005) : 9.

² Paul D. Jones, “Liberation Theology and ‘Democratic Futures’ (By Way Of Karl Barth And Friedrich Schleiermacher),” *Political Theology* 10 (2009) : 279.

³ *Ibid.*, 282.

the rise—the result to a great deal of the globalization of the modern world. “We must, I believe, start *a new globalization*: a global action against poverty and hunger, a global liberation from oppression and a global respect for cultural identity. . . Dialogue between world religions is necessary.”⁴ A dialogue needs to occur even in the face of the variety of contextual or liberation theologies with their particular views of Christ and salvation. This polymorphic witness to Christ may seem both bewildering and threatening. Daniel Migliore declares that one cannot choose to remain in their comfort zone of the familiar:

The particular witness of contextual or local Christologies and the common Christological confession of the whole church need each other if effective translation of the gospel is to occur in our pluralistic world. If the contextual and ecumenical concerns of Christology are to be held together, if they are to correct and enrich each other, then at least two principles suggest themselves: First, *every effort at ecumenical theology must be genuinely open to the voices of contextual theologies*. It must want to “hear the voices of people long silenced.” [From A Brief Statement of Faith, Presbyterian Church (USA)] . . . Ecumenical theology must test itself by its capacity to hear and integrate all that Word and Spirit of the living Christ is saying through the local churches. . . . Second, *local theologies must be genuinely concerned to speak not only in and to their own context but from that context to the worldwide community of Christian believers*. . . . It would be a short-circuiting of the talk of local theology if it remained insular and in-house rather than contributing the insights it has won to all the people of God.⁵

It is clear that the Body of Christ in the world needs to have both a local and a ecumenical perspective. Viewing the worldwide interconnectedness is essential to determining how to address the disparity between people in different parts of the world. The effectiveness and personal approach of the local church ministering in its unique context can teach the ecumenical church and share the lessons that are working in one area to others areas that have similar context.

⁴ Jurgen Moltmann, “Hope in a Time of Arrogance and Terror,” *International Congregational Journal* 3 (2003) : 166.

⁵ Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 220, 221.

When the focus of liberation theology is somehow a theological justification for a class struggle between the poor trying to break the power of their oppressors, the main thrust and purpose of the struggle for freedom is missed. Henri Nouwen emphasizes this distinction:

Jesus is the center. Jesus the Lord loves the oppressor as well as the oppressed and entered into history to set all men and women free. Knowing Jesus in the way the disciples knew him does not allow for a cool and calculated strategy aimed at the overthrow of the oppressor and acquisition of power by the poor. The good news that Jesus announces is the news that love is stronger than death and that the evils of hatred, destruction, exploitation, and oppression can only be overcome by the power of love that comes from God.⁶

Brian McLaren's recollection of the final message given by Martin Luther King, Jr. provides a sobering commentary when one realizes that there has not been a great deal of change in the violence and poverty that exists in the world:

At the end of March 1968, Martin Luther King Jr. preached in Washington, DC, at the National Cathedral. He displayed this better and saner reading of the Apocalypse. John, he said, "caught a vision of a New Jerusalem descending out of heaven from God." . . . Then John "heard a voice saying, 'Behold, I make all things new, former things are passed away.' God grant that we will be participants in this newness and this magnificent development. If we will but do it, we will bring about a new day of justice and brotherhood and peace. And that day the morning stars will sing together and the sons of God will shout for joy." Four days later Dr. King was assassinated, a martyr for peace in a world still working by violence.⁷

The message of reconciliation and liberation go hand in hand. There are areas in the world that are suffering although the oppression and exploitation is well publicized. The

⁶ Henri Nouwen, "Forward." in Gutierrez, Gustavo, *We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2003), xi.

⁷ Brian McLaren, *Everything Must Change: When the World's Biggest Problems and Jesus' Good News Collide* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 145,146.

prevalent condition should challenge the church to be vigilant in addressing the injustices by promoting the gospel worldwide.

The Justice Challenge for the Christian Church

A major theme in Scripture can be found by studying terms like poor, needy, widow, orphans, oppressed. Such a study would reveal the exhortations to God's people to care for the poor and show compassion to them. The Psalms have numerous references of God's saving the poor from wicked oppressors. Although the poor can refer to both spiritual and material poverty, their condition can be addressed by a similar message of reconciliation. Injustice is also a chief concern of the prophets when they brought the covenant lawsuit against Israel. Much of the critique of the wealthy is for lack of compassion to the poor. "Jesus asks the rich young man in Matthew 19 not only to give away his wealth, but to give it to the poor."⁸ True religion is described in James 1:26, "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world." Jesus admonished that the ministry to poor Christians is the same as ministering to Jesus himself (Matt. 25:31-46).⁹

In today's environment, James Rimbach suggests that the message of the Hebrew prophets should be applied today since many conditions are similar to theirs:

To the degree that we too live under that word, the prophet asks us, in the religious community of today: what is the character of your leadership? How does it treat the vulnerable? How is justice doing? He will not let us propagandize with false criteria: the trampling of the courts and the

⁸ John Frame, *Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2008), 813.

⁹ Ibid.

multiplying of sacrifices. He will not be sidetracked with the status of either the Gross National Product *or* the Church Extension Fund.¹⁰

As one reads the prophets, there is a clear message that extends beyond their time.

Regardless whether one has liberal political views or if one engages in interpretation of the prophets' social criticisms, there are lessons to be learned. "The prophetic critique of society by its very nature provided a good paradigm for challenge of the status quo by concerned Jews and Christians"¹¹ Isaiah delivers a word "*from faith to faith*" and we are challenged to reflect on his message.

The concern then is whether we feel the message of the prophets applies today with the same intensity as when it was presented to Israel. At the same time one must be cautioned to avoid "selective and arbitrary use of Hebrew prophecy in an effort to bridge the gap between ancient prophecies and the current situation. The enthusiasm to modernize the prophets entails some risks and the danger of misleading interpretation to buttress theological positions."¹² We definitely want to be completely free of the sins that the prophets delineated. There was clearly a gap between what the Israelite community was and what it should have been. The message was a strong one and we desire not to be challenged as the leaders of Israel were. They received a "frontal condemnation of social oppressions, political stupidities, and self-justifying religious maneuvers. . . Their leaders who bear the main responsibility, are made to look ludicrous and ridiculous, as well as

¹⁰ James A. Rimbach, "Those Lively Prophets: Isaiah Ben Amoz," *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 5 (1978) : 48.

¹¹ J. Andrew Dearman, "Hebrew Prophecy and Social Criticism: Some Observations for Perspective," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 9 (1982) : 135.

¹²Ibid., 136.

culpable and guilty.”¹³ Today the question must be asked regarding how relevant the message of the prophets applies to the injustices in the world and whether the church is alleviating or contributing to removing the injustices.

The Gift of Mercy Applied to the Practice of Justice

It is suggested that the state developed from the family. “The picture to this point, then, is that as Israel developed from nuclear family to extended family to clan to nation, family authority became more elaborate and complicated.”¹⁴ Extending the mercy regarding justice as depicted in the parable of the prodigal son to the state, it is clear that the father definitely showed mercy when the son could have been put to death for his disobedience. Could this application of mercy be applied to civil justice? Justice certainly needs to be tempered with mercy, and is concerned with externals rather than the inner reformation of persons and society. Daniel C. Maguire reports, “Thus Pius XI could write: ‘Charity, which is the bond of perfection,’ (Col 3:14) must always take a leading role. For justice alone can, if faithfully observed, remove the causes of social conflicts, but can never bring about union of minds and hearts.”¹⁵ Maguire then suggests that the talk of love is “unavailing, naive, and ultra-conservative in effect. Ironically, love-talk in the social-political sphere provides an ideological veil for injustice and inures one to the needs of the poor for whom justice is life blood. . . . In the Bible, justice and love are hyphenated in a way that is ‘good news to the poor (Lk 4:18).’”¹⁶

¹³ Norman K. Gottwald, “Tragedy and Comedy in the Latter Prophets,” *Semeia* 32 (1984) : 87.

¹⁴ John M. Frame, “Toward a Theology of the State,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 51 (1989) : 7.

¹⁵ Daniel C. Maguire, “The Primacy of Justice in Moral Theology,” *Horizons* 10 (1983) : 73.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 74.

Injustice that occurred in the Old Testament was considered as “characteristics of social dysfunction, i.e., social disequilibrium.”¹⁷ This “disruption of social equilibrium meant simply that it had to be restored.”¹⁸ God’s justice did not only apply to property rights and legal entitlements and in the process of redistribution there was not always equality. “He has filled the hungry with good things and has sent the rich away empty (Luke 1:53).” Maguire expands on this view:

Need outranks juridical claim. . . . Biblical justice is richly seasoned with mercy and full of grace. Here, justice and love are coordinates. “Sow for yourselves justice, reap the fruit of steadfast love” (Hosea 10:12). The dichotomy between justice and love is spurious. The two are naturally related. Justice goes before love, insisting on the minimal prerequisites for survival. But then it makes common cause with love upon discovering that surviving without some thriving is not surviving at all. “Justice without mercy is cruelty,” said Thomas Aquinas in commenting on the Gospel of Matthew.

Justice leads into love, and together they issue into Shalom. The wounded man who deserves a bandage also deserves oil and wine and “any extra expense” (Lk 10:29-37).¹⁹

The early Church met the needs of the hungry and poor, as discussed the book of Acts. The suffering of want, hunger, or exploitation is not a Biblical virtue. The promise of God, also in Jesus Christ, has a material dimension. “For as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and distribution was made to each as any had need (Acts 4:34-35).” “If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be to him as a creditor (Ex. 22:25).” Throughout Scripture the poor are described as the special objects of God’s compassion, and the cheating or oppression of the poor or defenseless as the

¹⁷ Michael S. Moore, “Haggo’el: the Cultural Gyroscope of Ancient Hebrew Society,” *Restoration Quarterly* 23 (1980) : 30.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁹ Maguire, “The Primacy of Justice,” 77, 78.

major sin coupled with idolatry. “Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you that hunger now, for you shall be satisfied (Luke 6:20-21).” “To ‘spiritualize’ the exegesis of passages like this is to miss the earthiness of the Gospel and the meaning of the incarnation. The material needs of the poor are God's special concern – at the cost, if need be, of the rich.”²⁰

The “first world church” should question and organize against inhuman structures of dominion, and should bear witness to her Savior, align with the poor, and invite them back into full humanity with his incarnation. “The First World church missionary outreach should be an instrument for its own education. It should serve as a tool to help it learn from those who are heavy laden, to teach it how to interpret God’s grace in the midst of the forgotten.”²¹ Cavalcanti-Filho goes on to admonish the church by delineating challenges from Scripture as he asks, “How far is the church willing to be sent back into the world to announce the Day of the Lord, that “the kingdom of God is at hand? (Mark 1:14)” God will certainly redeem humanity. He will bring about his salvation (Isa. 9:1-7). As Christ warned the religious leadership of his time, so he warns his church's leadership today of the danger of becoming false stewards (Matt. 23), “traversing sea and land to make a single proselyte, [to] make him twice as much a child of hell itself” (Matt. 23:15) and, tithing “mint and dill and cummin, . . . have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice, mercy and faith (Matt. 23:23).”²²

²⁰ Charles C. West, “Justice within the Limits of the Created World,” *Ecumenical Review* 27 (1975) : 58.

²¹ Hilquias Cavalcanti-Filho, “Redemption: How Far?” *International Review of Mission* 72 (1983) : 110.

²² *Ibid.*, 111.

During this discussion of the relationship of mercy and justice, there are clear differences of opinion. The differences come from the variations in applying the admonitions of Scripture to justice and mercy. One may wonder if the exegesis of Scripture is tempered with one's individual view of justice and confusion between compassion and mercy. Those who are disturbed by the extreme disparity of the rich and poor have a difficult time seeing Christ's love being applied by the rich nations, which seem to them to be the center of the Christian gospel over the years. On the other hand one must be careful not to read into the Scripture message more than what is there. For example, does the Old Testament prophets' condemnation of Israel's injustice to the poor apply to the Christian church today? Does Christ's admonition to minister to "the least of these" apply to the inequality of economic status? What is clear is that the Christian church has the message of love that is the gospel of Jesus Christ's salvation. Returning to the last lines of the Lausanne Covenant section called Christian Social Responsibility, there is a clear challenge that requires the Christian church to determine if the gospel they preach conforms to the true religion as described in James 1:26, "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world."

When people receive Christ they are born again into his kingdom and must seek not only to exhibit but also to spread its righteousness in the midst of an unrighteous world. The salvation we claim should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities. Faith without works is dead.²³

²³ Lausanne Covenant (1974). available from <http://www.lausanne.org/covenant>; Internet; accessed 23 June 2010.

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