

# What is the role of the church in liberation?

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Andy - A lot of grammatical work since your last copy. Big changes in intro, ch 3, and conclusion.

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# I

## The Development of Liberation Theology

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What is the role of the church in liberation? I will be comparing liberation theology in Latin America and India, looking at the interaction between praxis and the theory of these two areas. From the basis of their common hermeneutic theory, I will discuss the similarities and differences in these two countries through social analysis and how these results affect the role of the church. I will not be looking into the theology specifically; there will be no time spent simply studying the perspective of a certain theologian. I will be exploring the role does church plays in Latin America and India. Is the church open to criticism and self-reflection? How does the society affect the church?

The Christian, predominately the Catholic, church in Latin America is the dominant, what I refer to as the majority, religion, which has a large influence on the society. Change within the church makes a difference in the society. The church in India, on the other hand, has little influence on its society because of its minority status. The Indian church is unable to make a large change alone; it must work together with its society to produce change. Criticism and self-reflection keep the church accountable for its actions, helping it learn from its past, and reminding the church to keep adapting to the constant change within its society. The social location of the church determines if it can make change alone, or if it needs help from outside of the church. Each church has its own history, both within and outside of the church, which will affect its evolution.

Chapter one discusses liberation theology<sup>1</sup>, starting with its hermeneutic. As part of the hermeneutic, I reflect on scripture that is often used in liberation theology. The life of Jesus is important to all Christian theologies, especially liberation theology, because of his life and teachings. To be liberative, churches may rely on concepts and people outside of the church. Marxism is important to both Latin American Liberation Theology and Indian Dalit<sup>2</sup> Theology, but not to all liberation theologies. Babasaheb Ambedkar is an important person for Indian Dalit Theology, and is not a Christian.

*big changes*

A common connection between Liberation Theology and Dalit Theology is the use of the same theologians: all of the common theologians are Latin American theologians, because Latin American Liberation Theology developed before liberation theology was introduced into India. Indian theologians use Latin American Liberation Theology as a starting point for Dalit Theology, but adapt their theology to the Indian context.<sup>3</sup> Chapter One explains the common hermeneutic between Latin American Liberation Theology and Indian Dalit Theology.

In chapter two the "pastoral circle"<sup>4</sup> helps to explain the significance and use of social analysis to understanding the social context of the church. Social analysis is one of the most important tools for the church to be liberating in many contexts. The discussion on the class and caste systems give a better idea of the contexts I am using as my examples. The idea of multi-class/caste movements is introduced because of their importance to bringing about change. If only one class/caste is working towards

<sup>1</sup> When I use lower case 'liberation theology' I mean both Latin American and Indian, and when I use capital letters, 'Liberation Theology' I am referring to just Latin American theology.

<sup>2</sup> Dalits are also known as Untouchables. They are considered outside the caste system and are the lowest group of people in their society.

<sup>3</sup> Some Indian theologians are M.M. Thomas, Sebastian Kappen, James Massey, and Michael Amalados.

<sup>4</sup> Joe Holland and Peter Henroit, *Social Analysis* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Concern, 1980) 7.

liberation, the best result possible will only be partial liberation. Also, the idea of minority and majority Christian societies, in reference to India and Latin America respectively, is examined to reflect on the place of the church in those societies. Chapter two introduced the idea of how praxis is important to bringing about liberation.

Chapter three focuses on the church. The discussion begins with parts of the "pastoral circle", with a deeper look into theological reflection and pastoral planning. Both theological reflection and pastoral planning help to adapt the mission of the church to its context. To work with the church in detail we need to know what defines a church. The church must fulfill three characteristics to be considered a Christian church: a striving to live like Jesus, the scriptural foundation on the Word of God, and a striving for the Kingdom of God on earth and in heaven. Once we have the church established we can move onto the work of the church. The community aspect of the church is also important for the church to be liberating. People are able to gain trust and feel cared for in a community of believers. Base Christian communities are very important for the church in majority Christian societies, such as Latin America, but not for minority societies like India and other Asian societies. To be able to continue the liberating movements, the church also needs to be a structured institution, which helps to keep a system of accountability. By being self-critical and reflective, the church will also strengthen its accountability and will be aware of its role in liberation and/or oppression.

To understand liberation theology and the role of the church in this theology, the context, Third World countries, and its history need to be understood. Latin America and India are both considered to be part of the Third World, or simply underdeveloped. A basic reason for this underdevelopment is explained by Boff in this way:

The well being of the advanced societies of the First World is based on a massive exploitation, through multinational corporations, the inequality of terms of trade, the high cost of technology, the burden of foreign debt, of the countries of the Third World.<sup>5</sup>

At an economic level these countries are seen as technologically backwards and have a high level of external debt, helped by the decrease in the quality of the terms of trade. Socially there are extreme differences between the wealthy and the poor, as the rich oppress the large portion of the population that is poor due to starvation, malnutrition, and the consequences of the lack of adequate medical care.<sup>6</sup> Also, there is a high infant mortality rate.<sup>7</sup> There are often highly repressive governments in third world countries that overlook human rights violations. The governments are usually supported and operated by the rich. They do not enforce many violations, and when they do they often are for the benefit of the rich.<sup>8</sup> The acts of the government cause the people to lose hope in their ability to make change. The people feel that they are not listened to or taken seriously. Many of them do not have a good education because of the inadequate education programs within their community; therefore, people are not motivated to participate in the greater society and many struggle with illiteracy.

In India many of the battles for human rights involve the treatment of the Dalits<sup>9</sup>.

The Dalits live on the periphery of the caste village; there is usually a road dividing the

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<sup>5</sup> Leonardo Boff, "What are Third World Theologies? Boff, Leonardo and Elizondo, Virgil, ed., *Theologies of the Third World: Convergences and Differences* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark Ltd, 1988) 6.

<sup>6</sup> Tessa Cubitt, *Latin American Society* (Essex, England: Longman Scientific and Technical, 1995) 9-10.

<sup>7</sup> People Facts and Figures: [www.os-connect.com/pop/](http://www.os-connect.com/pop/) Last updated December 30, 2001.

Infant mortality rates- Canada: 5.08, United Kingdom: 5.63, United States: 6.82, El Salvador: 29.22, Bolivia: 60.44. India: 64.90 (per 100,000 births)

<sup>8</sup> Phillip Berryman, *Liberation Theology: Essential Facts About the Revolutionary Movement in Latin America and Beyond* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1987) 115. "Focusing on the worse cases —torture and death squads—might support the notion that these were the 'abuses' of perverse individuals or groups and hence obscure the fact that they were carried out to protect the interests of local privileged elites, and ultimately U.S. hegemony."

two communities. The Dalits are not allowed to use the same water well or temple as the caste people. The treatment of the Dalits is similar to the former segregation in the Southern part of the United States. Dalits have separate cups at the tea stand and are given the worst jobs for the least pay. Still today you can find signs throughout affluent Indian cities that state their rights to admission.

Most Third World countries have been colonized by European powers. A foreign power took away their traditional system of life and replaced it with what the European nation-state thought would be best. This keeps the Third World countries from being able to become a developed country. The people feel they are in an unfamiliar place and do not have the strength or knowledge of the new system to make changes. In order to confront these issues both the Protestant and Catholic churches have gone through some changes.

*change* The Protestant missionaries overall shifted from being a church-based mission to a mission-based church, was gradual, unlike the abrupt shift within the Roman Catholic Church. Protestant were no longer only based on bringing the church to other nations, but on sending people from their congregations to help those who were oppressed in their own communities.

The Protestant church was brought to India through missionaries from many different social statuses. Because of this, the church was better able to work with different castes and bring them together to form a multi-caste community. They

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<sup>9</sup> To find more information about Dalits I have listed some books and internet sites:

S.M. Michael, ed., *Untouchable: Dalits in Modern India* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1999).

Vasant Moon, *Growing Up Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography* (Lanham, India: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001).

National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights: [www.dalit.org](http://www.dalit.org)

Dalit Rights and Issues Home Page: [www.indiantogether.org/dalit/dalit.htm](http://www.indiantogether.org/dalit/dalit.htm)



condemned the caste system and called Hinduism a false religion. To the Protestant missionaries Christianity was the true religion; they made Christian communities that had a different social stratification than the caste system.<sup>10</sup> The Protestant missionaries moved from merely helping within their established communities to aiding the society as a whole. "Missionaries did stand up for the rights of persecuted Dalit converts, in court when necessary. In addition, the missions began to address themselves to the more enduring and difficult problem of Dalit landlessness."<sup>11</sup>

The Roman Catholic Church implemented Vatican II as it began the process of making theology more liberating. Roman Catholicism was known to be unchangeable, but in 1959 Pope John XXIII started the Vatican II conference that produced its first document in 1963. This conference turned the unchanging church inside out. Before Vatican II, the church's main focus was making sure the church stayed within a state of grace, which would help people get into heaven. The church was seen as the "custodian of grace and truth."<sup>12</sup> After the Vatican II conference the church was seen as journeying with the people and there was recognition of God's work through human history. The people who made up the church were seen more as equals to the parishioners than before due to the de-emphasis Vatican II placed on the hierarchy of the church structure. The language used in the church changed to the language of the culture it is set in, as opposed to the traditional Latin. Vatican II made the church, especially in Latin America, think and question their own church's beliefs and culture.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> John C.B. Webster, *The Dalit Christians: A History* (Delhi, India: ISPCK, 1994) 37.

<sup>11</sup> Webster, *The Dalit Christians: A History*, 62.

<sup>12</sup> Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, 16.

<sup>13</sup> Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, 16.

In August 1968, 130 out of the 600 Latin American bishops attended another conference, which took place in Medellín, Columbia, whose purpose was to work on the implementation of Vatican II's principles. The bishops called the people to help transform their society and denounce "institutionalized violence,"<sup>14</sup> though there was no strong endorsement of the right of the oppressed to struggle for their liberation. Priests, sisters, and lay people took the Medellín documents to start and to justify a new pastoral approach. The documents discussed multi-classes working together, helping their people gain awareness and a realistic perception of the problems within their community and social structures, and to educate the people on their rights and how to use them.

The liberation theology that grew out of these conferences was the start of a new awareness among the people of third world countries.

As they realized that their theology was emerging out of a particular context, they began to see that the same thing was true of any theology, including the theology they had learned in Europe."<sup>15</sup>

This new way of doing theology did not focus on affirming its beliefs as the European theologies did, but it became an endeavor for a more just world. Eventually this theology would spread to other Third World nations and adapt itself to their situation and context, as it did in India.

In the paper that follows I will investigate the theological, hermeneutical, and practical models that have emerged in liberation theology, as I search for an answer to the question, "What is the role of the church in liberation?"

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<sup>14</sup> Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, 23.

<sup>15</sup> Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, 25.

## II

### Theological Framework: Common Ground

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"A theology is valid and efficacious when it helps Christian communities fulfill their mission and bear witness to Jesus Christ before the world, when it enables them to respond to the world's challenges."<sup>16</sup> Theology, as well as the church, should emphasize how to follow the will of God, not just how to follow correct doctrines. Liberation theologies in Latin America and India are responding by seeking interpretive methods to discern the will of God by taking action to help the oppressed in their respective countries.

Hermeneutics is the backbone of theologies. For my purpose, liberation hermeneutics is the common base between my comparison of Latin American Liberation Theology and Indian Dalit Theology. From this shared hermeneutic comes the mutual theology of liberation. People in these countries use important biblical texts to help them relate their faith to their lives. They also incorporated some aspects of Marxism, which they find helpful and easy to relate to their theology. Latin American theologians are incorporated in both countries' theologies. Latin American Liberation Theology and Indian Dalit Theology have similarities and differences in their methods and practice of theology.

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<sup>16</sup> Julio de Santa Ana, "The Situation of Latin American Theology (1982-1987)." Leonardo Boff and Virgil Elizondo, ed., *Theologies of the Third World: Convergences and Differences* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark Ltd, 1988) 48.

Hermeneutics is “the study of the methodological principles of interpretation (as of the Bible).”<sup>17</sup> The purpose of hermeneutics is to be a “starting point containing certain ideological, attitudinal, and methodological components designed to aid the work of interpretation and facilitate maximum understanding.”<sup>18</sup> There are many different hermeneutics, each pertaining in a different way to an interpretation of a text. Some examples of different biblical hermeneutics are feminist and liberation hermeneutics. Within each hermeneutic there is a continuum along which theologians’ interpretations can be placed at different points. The continuum relates the text on one side and to the reader on the other. Interpretations that start with the text and incorporate it into the life of the reader are further towards the text side, while if the context of the reader is more important to the understanding than to the text, it falls more towards the reader side of the continuum.

Hermeneutics do not contain universals for interpreting all texts, but have useful rules. The hermeneutical circle is an example of a rule. The circle is used to explain the continual movement of interpretation, from action to theology to action to theology, etc. The hermeneutical circle is constantly changing and adapting to the continual change in society. The praxis of the audience modifies the social context of the interpretation. Praxis is action with reflection, where theory and practice cannot be separated. Praxis can also be defined as “the fusion of accumulated wisdom of Christian reflection with a program designed to change an unjust society into a just one.”<sup>19</sup> “Committed liberational

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<sup>17</sup> Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. 15 March 2001. Copyright 2002.  
[www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary](http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary)

<sup>18</sup> Duncan S. Ferguson, *Biblical Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1986.) 5.

<sup>19</sup> Emilio A. Nuñez, “The Church in the Liberation Theology of Gutiérrez: Description and Hermeneutical Analysis.” Carson, D.A. ed., *Biblical Interpretation and the Church: Text and Context*. (Carlisle, UK: The Paternoster Press, 1984) 177.

praxis to effect real change in human relations in the direction of greater equality and justice is the first act. Theology follows as fruit of critical reflection on socially transformative praxis.”<sup>20</sup>

Feminist hermeneutics are very important to the way society looks at the Bible. If a text is only seen outside of its time period, women may not be able to get past the patriarchy and be able to apply the text to their lives. Within feminist hermeneutics, the same text that seemed too patriarchal is examined at this time the experience of a woman is considered before looking at and interpreting the text. In light of the experience of women, they may be able to find a once oppressing text liberating. If women do not find a text liberating, they would tend to gravitate towards the reader side of the continuum, focusing more on the woman's experience than on the text itself.

In John 4, Jesus encounters a Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus talks with the woman in this public place, which is not appropriate for a rabbi. She is also a Samaritan, a people who the Jews think of as the un-chosen people. By breaking these two barriers, gender and race, Jesus demonstrates that his message is for everyone, not just the Jews. “Jesus and his ministry will not be bound by social conventions.”<sup>21</sup> This text displays how liberation hermeneutics is not isolated by topic or changing texts, but finds texts that will be liberative to the audience, in this case, both women and the oppressed.

The perspective of the poor and oppressed — those who have dealt with poverty, hunger and genocide — are the basis of liberation theology. The theology focuses on

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<sup>20</sup> Samuel Rayan, “Third World Theology: Where do we go from here?” Leonardo Boff and Virgil Elizondo, ed., *Theologies of the Third World: Convergences and Differences* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd, 1988) 129.

<sup>21</sup> Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, *Women's Bible Commentary: Extended Edition with Apocrypha* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998) 384.

both the oppression in a present day context and the oppression faced throughout history. These are people longing for dignity and liberation.

"Liberation theology leads to action: action for justice, the work of love, conversion, renewal of the church, and transformation of the society."<sup>22</sup> This is the ideal goal of liberation theology. Liberation Theology seeks to change the social system in such a way as to foster justice, love, renewal and transformation. To be able to bring about this change, there needs to be an understanding of the factors that bring about oppression. Social analysis is a good way to look at the societal mechanisms causing the oppression. In chapter two, I will elaborate on social analysis and how it pertains to liberation theology in Latin America and India. Social analysis will help to give a framework of the context for the theology and the role of the church.

The scripture is approached with the knowledge of the situation of the people, their problems, sorrow, and hope. In liberation theology the interpretation of the text is not as important as the interpretation of life according to the text. When the Exodus story is looked at from the viewpoint of someone who has never been seriously oppressed, it is understood differently than those people who can relate to the feelings of the Israelites and are striving for the same liberation. We all have pharaohs in our lives we need liberation from, some more literally comparable to the Exodus texts than others, but that does not make one better than the other. And as in any theology, certain events of the Bible are favored over others to find help or comfort.

Exodus is very important because of its message of liberation that comes from God working through a human, Moses.

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<sup>22</sup> Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997) 39.

The Lord said, 'I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, for I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey.'<sup>23</sup>

God brings about the liberation of his people through a political act. They were oppressed because of their place within their society. In both Latin America and India the people who are the audience of liberation theology are oppressed because of their place within the class or caste system.

Besides the message of liberation, the Exodus text shows that God is listening to the pleas of his people and responds. Many of the people in Latin America and India are never heard; their cries for help are not taken seriously. To have a god that will listen to them and help them because of their oppression gives the people hope for liberation and a better future.

The prophets were perceived by the people of their time as defenders of God's will. They denounced the acts against the rights of the poor and other injustices of their time. The apocalyptic prophets described the coming messianic world, such as in Revelation 21:1, with the proclamation of a new heaven and a new earth. These texts give the people a sense of God's promises for the future. They believe that God will fulfill these promises and that there is a partial and continual realization of these promises in the world today.

In 2 Samuel 12 the prophet Nathan confronts King David about his actions towards Bathsheba and Uriah. Nathan helps David to see that what he did was wrong and lets David know that God will punish him for his actions. Nathan speaks against the king who is not being compassionate to his people, resulting in a change in David's ways.

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<sup>23</sup> Exodus: 7-8 New International Version

Liberation theologies are looking for a way to speak to those who are not being compassionate to all people and to help the oppressors to change their ways. In addition to Nathan, prophets Amos and Hosea were not afraid to confront kings and rulers about the needs of their people.

Amos is striving for social justice within his community. He saw the consequences of the affluence of those in power; there were a comfortable few and many oppressed in his community. Amos also spoke of the destruction that God will bring as judgment.<sup>24</sup> Both Latin America and India have problems with social justice and have an imbalance in the number of comfortable people to the number of oppressed, so the words of Amos would be appropriate for their present context.

The book of Hosea is an analogy of Hosea's life in reference to God's feelings towards the people. God tells Hosea to marry a prostitute, which he does. This helps to show that God's love is for all, even the most oppressed people in the community. Because of Hosea's wife Gomer's unfaithfulness, God is able to explain to the people that he will forgive them time and again because of his devotion to his people.

The Acts of the Apostles<sup>25</sup> show an idealized Christian community. Because of the work of the Holy Spirit, all people are seen as equal. No one lives in need, because everyone shares what he or she has. No one is discriminated against because of their social status, for those titles had been done away with. From chapter 2 to chapter 5, the community that is described is a goal for which the people strive. Starting in chapter 5 it is shown that the implementation of this ideal community does not match. In Acts 5 a man and his wife do not sell all of their possessions to share equally with the others in the

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<sup>24</sup> Newsom and Ringe, *Women's Bible Commentary*, 218.

<sup>25</sup> Acts 2:42-6:7



community. "Then Peter said, 'Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept back some of the money you received for the land?'"<sup>26</sup> Peter was trying to convey a message that to be part of the community you need to be willing to give everything up to help those in need, and not to lie or withhold. In Acts 6, the issue of the Gentile widows was brought to light. They had been overlooked in the distribution of the goods. The twelve prophets then appointed seven others to take care of the widows so the prophets could spend their time focusing on the ministry of the Word. The church today also needs to rely on others to take care of the needs of their people. They cannot do it all.

Jesus is the overriding component to liberation theologies and to the basis of Christianity. Jesus is the Son of God sent to dwell with the outcasts of his time, the very audience of these theologies. Jesus underwent the same rejection, suffering and death as the outcasts, yet still preached a message to love and serve both your neighbor and your enemy. He exposed the problems within the temple of his time and brought about change that was pleasing to God. Jesus is a good model for the people of God in how to respond to the less fortunate. He shows that the less fortunate are to be embraced and helped, not shunned and forgotten.

In Luke 14:7-14, Jesus addresses the issue of humbleness using the analogy of a wedding feast. Jesus tells the people at the Pharisee's house that when invited to the wedding feast one should not take the chair of honor, because if someone of higher honor arrives you will be moved to the least honorable seat to make room for them. But if you take a seat of least honor you will not be moved down, but up to a seat that fits you. The

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<sup>26</sup> Acts 5:3 NIV

high will be humbled and the low will be honored. Jesus also tells people that when inviting people to this feast one should not invite those that could repay you.

But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.<sup>27</sup>

Jesus spent his life proclaiming the Kingdom of God. In Mark 4:30–32, Jesus compares the Kingdom of God to a mustard seed, the smallest of seeds. A mustard seed grows into a large bush, overtaking all the plants that live near it. It is a weed that the farmer would want to rid his property of. The Kingdom of God is not going to conform to this world, but transform it. People will want to get stop the work towards bringing about the Kingdom on earth, while God will continue to work through his people to make it come to be.

The Bible and Marxism come together with the messages of God's actions in Israel and with the life of Jesus; in both of these messages God aims to bring about justice between humans. Another point of connection between Marxism and Christianity is with the concepts of the utopian society and the idea of a transcendent God.

On one side is an absolute humanism striving toward such a utopia through realizations that are always only relatively better than what exists and, on the other, there is a yearning for a God who is always beyond human achievements and hence demanding more.<sup>28</sup>

The church cannot become the religion that Marx sees it to be. Marx believes that religion is the opiate of the people. By this, he means a religion that focuses only on the future and otherworldly goals, such as the Kingdom of God, and in doing so, the people do not try to change their current situation; they continue to be oppressed. Liberation

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<sup>27</sup> Luke 14:13–14 NIV

<sup>28</sup> Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, 28.

theology believes that God will fulfill his promises in the future and there will be a partial and continual realization of those promises in the world. We act on the belief that there will be realization of God's promise. The church strives to not sedate the people and become an opiate.

Liberation theologies freely borrow from Marxism certain "methodological pointers" that are helpful in understanding the world of the oppressed.<sup>29</sup> Those pointers include the importance of economic factors and paying attention to the class/caste struggles. Basic concepts of Marxism help the poor to realize their oppression and exploitation by others. Marxism influences the analysis of poverty and emphasizes the need for a radical change in social structures.

Marxism works in Latin American Liberation Theology, because the church can affect the majority of the population. When the church has a strong influence in its context and does not stand up for what is wrong, the society deems the wrong as acceptable, whether for good or bad. The church of Latin America could become an opiate, suppressing its people from making social change, because of its influence as the majority religion. It needs to keep this aspect of Marxism always in their thoughts so it does not become oppressive. India's battle in becoming an opiate is important for the people of the church, but does not influence the greater society because of its religion's minority status. I will explain the influence of being a religion minority in chapter two.

Bhimrao Ranjio, also known as Babasaheb Ambedkar, is an important person to Dalits of to all faiths. Himself a Dalit by birth, the people could easily relate to him and felt he truly understood their oppression. Ambedkar defied the boundaries placed on the Dalits. He wore a suit and tie, as well as acquired a good education. Ambedkar's actions

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<sup>29</sup> Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, 28.

gave the people a glimpse of what they are capable of by demonstrating their capabilities and helping them to realize that they could be freed from their oppression.

Ambedkar was not a Christian, but did admire Jesus and his teachings; he referred to himself as the Moses of his people, leading them to liberation. Ambedkar knew that his people, the Dalits, needed to be freed from their continual oppression and believed that one way to do that was through conversion. Ambedkar defines conversion as, "the change of heart and mind, a reversal of one's attitudes, giving up the old ways of living and starting a new life with a new frame of mind and spirit."<sup>30</sup>

Ambedkar did see positive things within Christianity. The part of Christianity that most affected Ambedkar was the teachings of Jesus and his solidarity with the poor and oppressed of his time. Ambedkar also admired the equality, fraternity, and selfless service of Christians and within theoretical Christianity. Part of the selfless service of the church was the implementation of services for education and health care within India. The problem with the services at the time of Ambedkar, around the 1940s, was that the Dalits and tribals<sup>31</sup> were unable to benefit from the programs because of their lack of money and ambition. Therefore, these programs were helping the upper caste Hindus and Christians instead those who needed them most.<sup>32</sup> There was also, and still continues to be in some parts of India, segregation within the church that is evidenced through the separate seating within the church and different times for communion for the different castes. Ambedkar recognized the oppressive caste system within the church; because of this oppression the church could not free the people in Ambedkar's mind. He also did

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<sup>30</sup> Anthoniraj Thumma, *Dalit Liberation Theology: Ambedkarian Perspective* (Dehli, India: ISPCK, 2000) 82-83.

<sup>31</sup> Tribal is one of the names given to the indigenous people of India.

<sup>32</sup> Thumma. *Dalit Liberation Theology: Ambedkarian Perspective*, e 84.

not want to embrace a Western religion that did not relate to the Indian culture; consequently he converted to Buddhism, encouraging other Dalits to do the same.

Ambedkar had mixed feelings about Marxism being involved within the Indian society. He did not agree with Marxist ideas regarding government issues and democratic procedures. Ambedkar believed that there was a need for religious basis for social and human reconstruction, with which Liberation Theology would also agree.<sup>33</sup>

Other Asian religions concur with Ambedkar is reservations about Marxism, including Aloysius Pieris of Sri Lanka. Pieris sees Marx as a man of his time in nineteenth century Europe. Pieris believes that by embracing Marxism, the East would be embracing Western ideas and be enforcing Latinism.<sup>34</sup>

George Soares-Prabhu, and Indian biblical scholar perceives Marxism this way:

Poverty in the Bible is indeed primarily a sociological category but it is not to be defined in purely economic, much less in Marxist, terms (non-ownership of the means of production). Biblical poverty has a broader sociological and even a religious meaning. The poor in the Bible are an oppressed group in conflict, but it is doubtful whether their conflict can be usefully described as a class struggle. Factors other than the need to control the means of production or to secure economic betterment enter into it, and give it a different colour. The poor in the Bible aspire after a free, fraternal, non-exploitative community which does indeed call to mind the classless society of Karl Marx. But the Bible goes beyond justice. The 'new heaven and new earth' will be 'full of knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea' (Isa. 11:9; 65:25); and in the New Jerusalem God Himself will dwell with humankind and they will be His people and He will be with them (Rev. 21:3-4).<sup>35</sup>

There were also positive aspects of Marxism for Ambedkar. He agreed that time should not be wasted on explaining the origin of the world, but working with philosophy

<sup>33</sup> Thumma, *Dalit Liberation Theology: Ambedkarian Perspective*, 61-67.

<sup>34</sup> Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988) 92.

<sup>35</sup> Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, 123. George M. Soares-Prabhu, "Class in the Bible: The Biblical Poor, a Social Class?" *Vidyajyoti*, 49 (1985) 320-46.

to reconstruct that world. Ambedkar saw the conflict of interest between classes and the consequences of private property ownership and the power it gives to the landholders.<sup>36</sup>

Liberation Theology and Dalit Theology share some of the same theologians. Since Latin America was the first to develop a liberation theology, the most common theologians are all from Latin American countries: Gustavo Gutierrez (Peru), Jon Sobrino (El Salvador), Leonardo and Clodovis Boff (Brazil), and Juan Luis Segundo (Uruguay). From the basis of their work, Dalit Theology has the starting point for its theology.

With an understanding of the importance of hermeneutics to theology, we are able to see the place of experiences in the interpretation, and in turn the necessity of a liberating hermeneutic. Scripture helps to remind us all of God's preference for the poor and how it is our obligation to carry this out in our societies. Given all the influences in people's lives, the theologians draw some aspects of Marxism into liberation theology.

Now that we have a common theology established, we can move onto exploring the source of the oppression in Latin America and India. By using social analysis we can compare the two social contexts and how those situations can either foster oppression or fight against it.

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<sup>36</sup> Thumma, *Dalit Liberation Theology: Ambedkarian Perspective*, 61-67.

# III

## Praxis: Social Location

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The social context of a church is important to the way the church functions. "Evangelization takes place always within or against, but never outside a given political system."<sup>37</sup> Currently most poverty is caused by capitalist systems that derive cheap labor from developing nations, preventing development of a region or its people.<sup>38</sup> The church must become involved in the struggle against these political systems and help work towards a class/casteless society. To do this the church needs to understand its social location through social analysis, learning what will be best for their community. The social location of Latin America and India include the class and caste systems, respectively. Though there are definite differences between these organizational systems, the caste system does contain some of the elements of the class system. The church plays a different role in these two areas, both in their theologies and the impact they have in their context and because of their social location.

To help understand the context, as well as the implementation of liberation theology within Latin America and India, I will be using Holland and Henroit's "pastoral circle."<sup>39</sup> This is another model used to understand the hermeneutical circle, discussed in chapter one, with the continuous cycle of understanding, but is more directed towards the church setting. I find this model easier to use for my purpose than the more general

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<sup>37</sup> Peiris, *An Asian Liberation Theology*, 43.

<sup>38</sup> Boff and Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 47.

<sup>39</sup> Holland and Henroit, *Social Analysis*, 7.

hermeneutical circle; therefore, I will use it to better explain the importance of social analysis in relation to the church and its ministry.

The "pastoral circle" is used to place social analysis within the church. The circle includes four elements: insertion, social analysis, theological reflection, and pastoral planning, each following the next in a continual movement. Insertion involves both the geographical location and the emotional location of the church. Examples of emotional location are people's feelings and responses to their social location. Social analysis looks at the whole experience at hand, including the causes and the consequences, as well as the contributors and links to other experiences. Theological reflection looks more deeply at the experience with respect to "living faith, scripture, the church's social teachings, and the resources of the tradition,"<sup>40</sup> in search of new questions, responses and insights. Pastoral planning tries to figure out what the communities' reaction to the experience is, and what would be the most effective response to attain both short and long term goals. "A response of action in a particular situation brings about a situation of new experiences," which leads the process back around to the insertion of the new experience.<sup>41</sup> All of these elements help to put the experience into the larger framework and help find connections between those experiences.

Insertion is the basis for any pastoral action. Insertion is used to gain insight into the feelings and responses of people. "We gain access to these by inserting our approach close to the experiences of ordinary people."<sup>42</sup> The information received from insertion is helpful to begin the process of social analysis.

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<sup>40</sup> Holland and Henroit, *Social Analysis*, 9.

<sup>41</sup> Holland and Henroit, *Social Analysis*, 9.

<sup>42</sup> Holland and Henroit, *Social Analysis*, 8.



Social analysis is a good tool to understand the reality in which we participate. This is analysis that is adapted to the change that is around us, constantly affecting us. In social analysis, certain elements of society need to be considered. They include the history, structure, and the multiple levels of the issues, as well as the divisions in society. By looking at the past and gaining insights into the future, history helps us to place our analysis into context. Latin American history is defined by its colonization and independence through this century, while India's are within the last 60 years. This is helpful to understanding why the church will reside in different social locations.

"With the aid of social analysis, we can identify the key operative structures in a given situation and move beyond personal consideration toward specific structural changes."<sup>43</sup> There are four types of structures within a society: economic, political, cultural, and institutional alliances. The economic structure deals with business issues such as production, distribution, exchange, and consumption. The political structure defines the power within a community, in both formal government and informal non-governmental organizations. The cultural structure encompasses the myths and symbols, which are the traditions, of a society. They provide the people with a sense of stability. The myths and symbols need to remain unchanged and become part of the new society as they are, while the political and economic structures need to change. Institutional alliances pertain to how these three structures interact. The economic and political structures form the class system, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Divisions within a society usually exist according to race, gender, age, class/caste, ethnicity, religion, location, etc. Because of these divisions, people react differently to events in a given social situation. People in a similar division of society react more alike

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<sup>43</sup> Holland and Henroit, *Social Analysis*, 26.

than people from a different division. "Social analysis is not the *answer* to social problems, but a *tool* for dealing with them."<sup>44</sup>

The insertions of the pastoral circle for my example are Latin America, with a class system, and India, with both class and caste systems. The social analysis will include both the class and caste systems of Latin America and India respectively, as well as comparing a Christian and a religiously pluralistic society. Theological reflection and pastoral planning will be discussed in chapter three.

Theology is political language. "What people think about God, Jesus Christ and the church cannot be separated from their own social and political status in a given society."<sup>45</sup> When building a theological system that strives to be relevant to the contemporary world, theologians must give priority to their own social context. Just as India's form of practiced Hinduism could not be taken and placed into the American society expecting it to help the people, liberation theology should expect the same results. Liberation theology needs to work with the social location of its community. An example of this from India is the difference between Christianity within an upper caste and a lower caste church. The upper castes live much more like a Western society, so Western theology could work, but the lower castes would not relate to a Western culture's way of thinking.

Latin America has sharply divided societies with little meaningful contact across class lines, though church personnel are usually able to cross class and cultural lines.<sup>46</sup> Latin American society is class based. To better understand class boundaries and structures there needs to be a model by which to analyze the society.

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<sup>44</sup> Holland and Henroit, *Social Analysis*, 89.

<sup>45</sup> James Massy, ed., *Indigenous People: Dalits* (Delhi, India: ISPCK, 1994) 211.

<sup>46</sup> Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, 82.

In a model of class structure by Portes<sup>47</sup>, he divides the society into classes by the following three criteria for class membership: "position of individuals in the process of production and their mode of sharing in the distribution of the product; secondly, control over the labor power of others; and thirdly, mode of remuneration."<sup>48</sup> There are five classes in this model: dominant, bureaucratic-technical, formal proletariat, informal petty bourgeoisie, and the informal proletariat.

The dominant class, including land owners and large business owners, benefits from all three criteria. They hold the power over the means of production and labor. Profits, salaries, and bonuses related to profits are their remuneration.

The bureaucratic-technical class controls the labor power, but not the means of production. They are the "white collared" workers whose earnings are based on their skills and qualifications. Their remuneration is in the form of salaries and fees.

The formal proletariat, or "blue collared workers" have no control over production or labor power. They earn a regular salary, which gives them security of equal daily pay unlike the informal petty bourgeoisie.

The informal petty bourgeoisie class maintains its own small businesses, such as street vendors, often resulting in irregular profits. They are able to control the production and the labor power, but because of the shifting income from day to day, the informal petty bourgeoisie are considered only slightly subsistent.

The last class in Portes' model is the informal proletariat. The informal proletariat has no control. They survive on casual wages that vary, as with the informal

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<sup>47</sup> All references from A. Portes' model of class structure comes from, Latin American class structures: their composition and change during the last decades," *Latin American Research Review* (20) 3; from *Latin American Society* by Tessa Cubitt, 177-178.

<sup>48</sup> Cubitt, *Latin American Society*, 177.

petty bourgeoisie. In both Latin America and India the people of the informal proletariat class are often seasonal agricultural laborers. The landowner does not fully employ them, providing him with cheaper labor. In Naganahalli, a small Dalit village in the state of Karnataka, India, the people no longer control their land, because the local large landowner has overtaken it. They are now forced to tend the fields for their meager wages. The Naganahalli people also pluck jasmine flowers for two rupees<sup>49</sup> a day on Sundays when they do not work in the fields. This informal proletariat class is the main people the church is trying to liberate.

In many Latin American countries less than half of the population is working. On average, the underemployment is increasing in Latin America. People are living on wages from part-time seasonal work or as part of the informal sector.<sup>50</sup>

In the world, the gap between the rich and the poor is widening. Latin America and India are experiencing this gap phenomenon. To help the people in these countries, as well as many others, escape their oppression and be able to subsist in the constantly changing world, changes need to be made within the class and caste structure to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor. Social movements need to be multi-class and start within the affected neighborhoods and communities. Social movements only made up of one caste can work in a certain area, but to be able to effect more people and move outside of the immediate community, the movements must involve people of all different backgrounds. They need to draw from their shared experience and history to work towards specific demands.

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<sup>49</sup> Rupee is the type of money used in India. Upon my visit in fall 2001 the exchange rate was 48 rupees per US dollar.

<sup>50</sup> Samuel A. Morley, *Poverty and Inequality in Latin America* (Baltimore, MY: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995) 41-46.

Both class and caste have a basic five-leveled system for organizing a society. The Indian society is considered a caste system with elements of class within it. The informal proletariat class has a similar societal position as the Dalit caste. The other four castes also fit with their comparable class: dominant and Brahmin (priestly caste), bureaucratic-technical and Kshatriya (warrior caste), formal proletariat and Vaisya (tradesmen caste), and lastly, informal petty bourgeoisie and Shudras (menial laborer caste).

Caste is endogamous, meaning a marriage partner is from the same caste. A caste placement is hereditarily based; one is born into it. Today people are starting to marry between castes. When an inter-caste marriage occurs, the person of the upper caste is demoted to the lower caste. Occupation is determined by the caste to which one belongs. As a result,, it is utterly impossible to break free from a caste. Although with the increased movement into cities and the birth of reservation<sup>51</sup> in place, people are beginning to gain better education and jobs.

Caste is a hierarchical system based on ritual purity. Dalits are seen as fully polluted, and are considered to be outside of the caste system. Dalits are given the jobs that cause extreme pollution, such as dealing with the dead, working with leather and cleaning. Because of their high level of pollution, Dalits are not allowed equal access to common resources, such as water or places of worship, and are forced to live on the perimeter of the village. Many current disputes in India revolve around these inequalities. The caste system started within the Hindu tradition, but has spread into others, such as Christianity, which will be discussed in chapter three. As I stated earlier

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<sup>51</sup> Reservation is similar to Affirmative Action in the United States. It is laws that hold a certain amount of jobs for Dalits and indigenous tribal people that fit into set categories.

in this chapter, myths and symbols are very important to a society. The founders of Hinduism took advantage of the people's dependence of myth. "At some stage the Brahmins, priests and scholars, assured their own social domination by evolving an ideology and legitimizing it with a creational myth."<sup>52</sup>

Christian Dalits do not receive special benefits or reservation in jobs or political positions, which are granted to Hindu Dalits, because in theory caste is only Hindu. Legislation has been attempted to change this policy, but only Sikh Dalits have been successful in receiving the same rights as Hindu Dalits. Many Hindu Dalits hope to escape the discrimination of the caste system through religious conversion, but "realize the gap between a religious rhetoric of equality and a social praxis of discrimination."<sup>53</sup> Their conditions do not always change with conversion because the rest of their life, work and social context do not change. A converted Dalit still lives in the same village where he or she denied their basic rights. They are still restricted to specific jobs for their Dalit caste. The surrounding community has not gained any more respect for the converted Dalit. They are now treated the same or worse than before their conversion, without the legal status of a caste identity.

Catholicism is deeply embedded into the Latin American society and cannot be removed. The morals of the society are based on the doctrines of the church. The church has enough influence to change the society because of its strong Christian base. Movements initiated by the church will move into the community and promote change for all. Taking a stand against the oppression started the movement towards social change, and changes within the church, to liberate the poor and oppressed.

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<sup>52</sup> Michael Amalados, *Life in Freedom: Liberation Theologies from Asia* (Maryknoll: NY: Orbis Books., 1997) 22.

<sup>53</sup> Amalados, *Life in Freedom*, 23.

India is not a Christian society; it is pluralistic and secular. Hindus comprise the majority of the population, with Muslims the next largest religion with about 10% of the population; Christians only account for 2.5% of the population.<sup>54</sup> This means that the Christian church is a small part of the oppression, and those movements and developments from within the church would not be powerful enough to bring about change in the surrounding community. The church in India needs to seek out surrounding groups for support of the change they want to see, and to develop its liberation theology. When all Dalits unite, it will create a stronger force and they will make change for themselves. As stated earlier, groups with different backgrounds will have different connections and focuses to make change more widespread in the hopes of affecting the whole community. I will go into more detail about the place of the church in chapter three.

Dalit Theology needs to maintain a great consciousness of the impact of the other religions in their society, and of the need to articulate liberative thought concerning poverty in the context of these religions.

God need not be limited to the Bible in his/her revelation to humanity. The sacred texts of other religions can be source of divine revelation. At the same time both these and the Bible need to be studied critically to exclude elements, which cannot be from God, such as an excessive ethnocentrism.<sup>55</sup>

The incorporation of aspects of other religions that affect their society will help Dalit Theology, especially Christian Dalits, to be liberating to all. There is a fine line between adapting a religion to its social context and making a new religion. Creating a new

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<sup>54</sup> P. Mohan Larbeer, "The Spirit of Truth and Dalit Liberation," *Ecumenical Review* 42 (July 1990): 230.

<sup>55</sup> Tissa Balasuriya, "Emerging Theologies of Asian Liberation," Boff, Leonardo and Elizondo, Virgil, ed., *Theologies of the Third World: Convergences and Difference* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark Ltd, 1988) 42.

religion is not the focus of Dalit Theology; they are merely looking for a new method of understanding theology.

Liberation theology longs and fights for a new society, an alternative to the present dominant capitalist society, which will go beyond the socialism that exists today. This would be a society that embodies the hopes and needs of the least of all peoples and their intrinsic potential. "We have to oppose systems that do not conform to the ethical criteria of Jesus' message."<sup>56</sup> To be able to accomplish these goals the church needs to realize its social location and how to work within its given context. The class and caste systems effect the people who are oppressed in Latin America and India. The church has to be flexible, to a given extent, about adapting to their culture and society if they want it to be truly liberating to the people, especially when it involves a Christian versus religiously pluralistic society. "One cannot be *for* the poor/oppressed if one is not *against* all that gives rise to man's exploitation by man."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Boff and Boff. *Introduction to Liberation Theology*, 62.

<sup>57</sup> Nuñez, "The Church in the Liberation Theology of Gutiérrez" *Biblical Interpretation*, 181.



# IV

whole  
chapter changed

## What is the church and how does the society affect it?

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"Liberation theology does not ask what the church *is*, but what it means *to be* the church in the context of extreme poverty, social injustice and revolution."<sup>58</sup> Part of being a church involves the theological reflection and pastoral planning aspects of the "pastoral circle"<sup>59</sup> I discussed in chapter two. To be able to ask what it means "*to be*" the church we need to define what constitutes a church. The church needs to fulfill three requirements: follow Jesus' example and teachings; believe and live the teachings of the Bible as God's word to His people; and work towards the Kingdom of God in the present and believe in its future fulfillment. The church should always function as a community and a structured institution. To bring all of this together within the church's social context, the church needs to analyze its theology and praxis in relation to its society.

In chapter two I discussed the importance of social analysis in understanding the church. To discuss social analysis I used Holland and Henroit's "pastoral circle." I worked mainly with the first two elements of the "pastoral circle", insertion and social analysis, but did not refer to the last two elements, theological reflection and pastoral planning.

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<sup>58</sup> Nuñez, "The Church in the Liberation Theology of Gutiérrez." *Biblical Interpretation*, 174.

<sup>59</sup> Holland and Henroit, *Social Analysis*, 7.

main  
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Theological reflection is important for questioning and responding to the "living faith, scripture, the church's social teachings and the resources of the tradition."<sup>60</sup> If churches do not take into consideration the history of their congregation and its setting, they cannot know how to truly liberate them. Ultimately, it will not understand the place of the scripture or tradition in its own context.

Pastoral planning works on determining the communities' reaction to a certain experience and tries to come to an effective response in both the short and long term. A response in one community may not be relevant to another community that has not experienced the same history. Pastors, or community leaders, are better able to deal with a situation if they are prepared to confront it from the context in which it is located.

The social analysis of each of these steps is invaluable to the ability of the church to be not just for the people, but also of the people. The church's foundation will be strong enough to make the necessary changes to liberate their community when theological reflection and pastoral planning are considered. The church community will have a better understanding of their mission when they can see how it relates to their lives and social location.

Jesus is central to both Christianity and the church, as was discussed in chapter one. He is the Son of God sent to earth to dwell with the people. Jesus spent most of his time with the outcasts in his society. The church must follow his example when relating to their community, and its members are called to do the same with their fellow human beings. Jesus preached the Kingdom of God. "The Kingdom proclaimed by Jesus shows that the Father loves everyone unconditionally, leads all people to *new liberating*

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<sup>60</sup> Holland and Henroit, *Social Analysis*, 9.

*relationships with God and with human beings and also leads all concretely to new liberating structures in the society.*"<sup>61</sup>

Scripture is our tie to the past, both of God's promises and the life of Jesus. It gives us examples of how to live our lives and how to work towards the Kingdom in the present. In chapter one I gave examples of some texts that are important, especially for liberation theology. The Exodus text is an example of how God listened to his people and freed them from their oppressors. The prophets spoke to their community about what God's will was for them, and the consequences if they did not listen to what God desires. The Acts of the Apostles gives us an insight as to what an ideal community would look like, and possibly what the Kingdom of God will be like. God's word is applicable at all times in history and in the future. The church needs to make sure it has a strong scriptural basis so it knows that it is following the will of God and striving for the Kingdom.

Leonardo Boff describes the Kingdom of God in *Ecclesiogenesis*, as "the utopia that is realized in the world, the final good of the whole of creation in God, completely liberated from all imperfection and penetrated by the Divine."<sup>62</sup> The Kingdom can only be partially realized on earth and should be strived for because it fosters equality and liberation. The Kingdom of God will provide

the oneness of all humanity, particularly the suffering humanity, and their fellowship without the boundaries of religion... and Christ-centered fellowship without barriers in which churches, (social) activists and the oppressed people participate together<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> L. Stanislaus, *The Liberative Mission of the Church Among Dalit Christians* (Dehli: India: ISPCK, 1999) 230.

<sup>62</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986) 1.

<sup>63</sup> Massey, *Indigenous People Dalits*, 212.

for their total liberation. The mission of the church is one that is striving to achieve the realization of the Kingdom of God on earth.

The oneness of humanity found in the Kingdom of God is seen in the current church through the community aspect of the congregation, which is especially apparent in the Latin American base Christian communities. The church in its true sense is its people, "who are the heart of the church's search for a meaningful, relevant self-understanding and role in society and the world."<sup>64</sup> Because of this, the church must work towards the betterment of these people. When the church truly identifies itself with its people, it will feel the persecution of its people as self-persecution and better understand the need for action and change.

Archbishop Oscar Romero in El Salvador felt the pain of his community when he was enabled to see the true goings-on. Romero became involved in the struggle of the people after the martyrdom of Father Rutillo Grande opened his eyes to what was happening.<sup>65</sup> He changed the mission of the church to help stop the death squad violence within the country and started living and working with the poor.

My brothers, they are part of our very own people. You are killing your own fellow peasants. God's law, "Thou shalt not kill!" takes precedence over a human being's order to kill. No soldier is obliged to obey an order that is against God's law. No one has to obey an immoral law.<sup>66</sup>

Romero was martyred in March of 1980 because of his strong stand on the issues of the government and the oppressed.

Having a community helps the congregation's members see they are not alone in their struggles and that they have someone with power (the amount and type of power

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<sup>64</sup> Massey, *Indigenous People Dalits*, 212.

<sup>65</sup> This was around the time the civil war in El Salvador began. It lasted till 1992 and caused many innocent deaths and much oppression.

<sup>66</sup> Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, 2.

differs from social context), which is working on their behalf. The Latin American church has much greater societal effect than the Indian church, which I talked about in chapter two.

The base Christian communities are part of the Latin American church. Base Christian communities are similar to the first Christian communities found in the Acts of the Apostles and discussed previously in chapter two. They function without a priest's constant contact. The people who make up the community share the responsibility of all tasks that accompany being a church. They take part in and lead Bible studies, as well as take care of the needy in their community when necessary. Within this context, the members of the community do the theological reflection and pastoral planning. Base Christian communities are successful in Latin America because of the Christian foundation to the society. They are not alienated from all civilization, living as a separate *culture* from the surrounding community. They are people coming together for support and fellowship. The actions of the church in Latin America can have an impact on the surrounding society. The equality of these communities is a good example for the people of Latin America as to what life could be like if the oppression ended and people were treated like the equal human beings that they are.

Nueva Esperanza, El Salvador is my closest experience to a base Christian community. It is a resettlement community that was displaced to Nicaragua during the civil war, having had to start over in this new location. Now that it has made itself into a strong community it helps the surrounding communities start their own resettlement process. Once they gain good relations with the new community, they introduce the Bible and teach the people about how it pertains to their lives. Although there are no

priests within the community, several nuns reside there. Nueva Esperanza and eighteen surrounding communities have set up an insurance fund. Each month people put money into the fund; there is a suggested donation amount, but whatever people can give is welcomed. When someone needs to use part of the money, they appear before a board of community members to state their case and ask for help. The board has to decide which cases are most urgent or life threatening when dispersing their funds. The communities have learned how to take care of themselves and help each other. They do not rely on missionaries or priests to talk to the people, but proceed themselves when they feel the people are ready to hear what they have to say.

"In Asia, base Christian communities would be a concept that is narrow and limiting in relation to the reality of a plural and even secular society,"<sup>67</sup> according to Julio de Santa Ana. The church in India, and most of Asia, cannot separate itself from the society and still be truly liberating. The church needs to work with the surrounding secular community, because of its minority status, to bring about the needed change. There are Christian villages in India, but they are still often separated by caste and affected by the Hindu majority and upper caste authority. The pastoral planning in India should bring to light the need for outside help to develop a strong community committed to bringing about liberation. The theological reflection in India will take into consideration the Hindu influence on the culture and the way the people understand religion.

Latin America includes small Christian communities working to bring about liberation; the community in India includes a large group of both Christian and non-

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<sup>67</sup> Santa Ana, "The Situation of Latin American Theology (1982-1987)." *Theologies of the Third World*, 41.

Christians that are working towards liberation of all people, especially the Dalits. Whether the society can foster small Christian communities or not, the church must work beyond them to be able to reach new people and continue their mission.

Members of the church are compared to the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians. Every member of the church has a role in the function of the church, because each person is given a gift from the Holy Spirit. Though each person has a different task and is a different part of the body in Paul's analogy, they are all equal and necessary. When all are working together, using their gifts, universal change is possible. Through working together, the people of the community are able to gain trust in one another. "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoice with it."<sup>68</sup> Empathy is important within the church to foster understanding of the need to help others. Paul also talks about caring for others in Galatians 6:2, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."<sup>69</sup> The community aspect of the church must also recognize the structurally institutional aspect of it also.

The church must function structurally as an institution for it to continue to exist. An example of the benefit of an institutional part of a church is having a system of checks and balances. The congregation is able to make sure that the priests or pastors are qualified, and doing a good job of working for God and their congregation. Structure provided by the institutional aspect of the church helps maintain the records of baptisms and marriages, as well as things such as account records. The institution gives the church a strong foundation of trust and confidence on which to stand and helps the church remember its focus on its mission of liberation.

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<sup>68</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:26 NIV

<sup>69</sup> Galatians 6:2 NIV

When working towards liberation the church needs to remember it is working within the constraints of both its community and institutional structure, which effect the pastoral planning. Context is still very important to successfully liberate anyone and everyone. The church is liberating when it can help the society to understand the people and their oppression. When the church is able to aid the upper class/caste in recognizing their oppressing techniques, it can help them to learn how to change their ways. The church can help them to try and see all as equals as Christ does through theology and praxis. This is not an easy task, but it is very important to the future unity of the people.

The church needs to be self-critical to realize whether they are able to make the changes they desire with their current techniques, or if they need to look to other methods for success. The church also needs to be self-critical about its past. The churches in both Latin America and India have been a source of oppression for some of their members. Latin America was not giving to the needy or helping them stand up to their oppressors. In India the caste system had seeped into the church, causing oppression within the church structures. By noticing the mistakes of the past, the church can see what has not worked, and is able to be more empathetic to those who are also struggling to stop their oppressing ways. If the church is not willing to examine the impact of its decisions, it can never truly be liberating. The church will not know when a change that is made is doing more harm than good.

When the church contains the three characteristics: Jesus, scripture, and a striving for the Kingdom of God, it needs to focus on how to function as a community and structural institution, as well as be liberating. The church needs to focus on the social context. It should use pastoral planning and theological reflection as tools to learn more



about its social context. The church can never be complacent and liberating; it must always be self-critical and reflecting, adapting as needed.

## V

*new  
conclusion*

## What is the role of the church in liberation?

“What is the role of the church in liberation?” I have now compared Latin American Liberation Theology and Indian Dalit Theology in my search to find how the church can be liberating in many contexts. By using a common hermeneutic, I did not need to go deep into the theology at hand or into what any one theologian thinks about liberation theology. I placed an emphasis on the importance of a model, such as the “pastoral circle”, to assist working within varying contexts.

Chapter one begins with discussion about what is liberation theology as a result of the cases of Latin America and India. Then a basic definition of hermeneutics is given to form a common ground on which to compare Latin American Liberation Theology and Indian Dalit Theology. Because of the scriptural use in liberation theologies, I examined a few biblical passages that are important to the people of many third world countries. Some of the passages discussed include the Exodus story, the prophets, and the early Christian communities. Jesus also has a very important role in any Christian theology, but especially liberation theologies because of his lifestyle and messages about the poor of his time. Also discussed in chapter one is Marxism because some Marxian ideas are used in both Liberation Theology and Dalit Theology, but are not used in all liberation theologies. Another non-Christian influence that is important for Dalit liberation is Babasheb Ambedkar, who critiqued Marxism and taught the Dalits to be aware of their rights and to work towards their liberation.

Chapter two centers on the social context of the church. Starting with a basic model of social analysis and the "pastoral circle", I look into the importance of context to the role of the church in liberation. The "pastoral circle" includes four elements: insertion, social analysis, theological reflection, and pastoral planning, the latter two being discussed in more detail in chapter three. Social analysis deals with four different structures found within a society: economic, political, cultural, and institutional alliances. It is a good tool for dealing with social problems in a given social location. Theology is always linked to the society in which it is implemented. To understand the use of theology in a given society, analysis needs to be done on the society by the leaders of a church. To give a model of the Latin American society I use Portes' model for a class society, with the five classes: dominant, bureaucratic-technical, formal proletariat, informal petty bourgeoisie, and the informal proletariat. The caste system in India is also a five level system, which correspond well with the five classes in Portes' model. The caste system has some class elements in it also. The caste system is something you are born into and remain a part of until death. It is not something that can be normally escaped, as can be done in the class system. The setting of these two theologies differs in the religious aspect. Latin America is a Christian majority society, while India is a pluralistic society. Liberation theology is trying to help all oppressed societies become an alternative society that would be liberating to the people.

Chapter three discusses what it means to be a church. I continue my use of the "pastoral circle", with more information about theological reflection and pastoral planning. Both theological reflection and pastoral planning bring out important elements for social analysis and for implementation of positive changes in the church's social

location. Some basic characteristics of the church, such as its vision of the Kingdom of God, its sense of community, and its structure — both as the body of Christ and as a structural institution — are similar in varying contexts. Latin American base Christian communities are very important to the church of Latin America, but would not be effective in India because of the social location of these two areas. The church needs to be self critical about its past, present, and future to help the process of liberation continue and to learn from the victories and failures that have already happened.

A church may want to look at existing liberation theologies as a starting point for their church, as with India learning from Latin America and vice versa. By using a hermeneutic that is working in another part of the world, the church can gain insight as to how parts of scripture are liberating and how to work outside their community to bring about complete liberation for their people. The church must always remember its unique social location. The church needs to use a model, like the “pastoral circle” in chapter two, to help them with the social analysis of their context. Without analysis of the past and present context, the church will not understand what is and is not liberating to its community. If either the liberating or non-liberating actions are overlooked, there will be oppression.

The work towards liberation cannot be composed of one class or caste, as I discussed in chapter two. People from all parts of the society must work together to make a complete change. If the group is only composed of the oppressed, how will the oppressors understand their impact? In areas where Christianity is a minority religion, the church also needs to collaborate with non-Christians to make a difference. The

church cannot be afraid to receive help and guidance from non-Christians. In chapter one I gave insight as to how Ambedkar, a non-Christian, made big strides in Dalit liberation.

When the church continuously adapts to its context, it cannot be oppressive. There are aspects of this in all three chapters. In chapter one, scripture needs to be looked at from different perspectives in different contexts. Chapter two discusses the majority/minority duality, which shows the importance of adapting to give the people complete liberation, not just liberation within the church. The "pastoral circle" is used as an example of a tool used to bring about continuous adaptation that is right for a given context. Chapter three emphasizes adaptation best in the idea of base Christian communities; as I discussed earlier, they work in majority Christian societies, but do not work in minority societies. Adaptation is the key to liberation of the church in varying contexts.

The church that continuously adapts to its social location is a church I can be a part of and stand behind. When a church is willing to adapt it shows, from my point of view, that it is more interested in helping the people than just saving souls. Jesus loved and helped all whether they believed or not. This church gives me hope that missionaries will not be oppressive by bringing their Western idea of what is a church into a non-Western community, and that the missionaries will not be spreading globalization along with the Gospel. They will simply come to the people with the Word of God, the message of Jesus, and the message about the Kingdom of God; the rest will be allowed to form around the community they enter. When the missionaries proceed in this way they

will then be true disciples of Jesus in my mind. I want to end with the words of Aloysius Pieris, "no one is liberated unless everyone is."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, 166.

# VI

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