



# Responses to Poverty and Injustice

## Eduqas A level R.S. G1A Christianity Theme 4F

### Key Concepts:

- Latin American Liberation Theology (LT) claims as its basis Jesus' sermon in **Luke 4** where he announces physical, material and spiritual liberation in his time.
- The political basis of this theology is as a response to centuries of colonial economic exploitation in general and, in particular, the **post-war expansion of capitalism** in Latin America through **cheap labour**.
- Gutiérrez was alarmed that workers were kept in poverty by the capitalistic status quo, finding truth in **Marx's** vision of a classless society and recognition that those benefitting most economically would resist change.
- The ethical basis of LT comes from its recognition that the Church has all too often elevated orthodoxy ('right thinking') above **orthopraxy** ('right practice'), focusing on meditation, theology and intellectual discussion.
- When faith is applied to life, this will result in humanitarian efforts that will focus on the whole person/society, not just its 'spiritual' side.
- The religious basis of LT is the recognition that God is concerned for every dimension of human life as reflected in the **Exodus**, Jesus' ministry, the communal practices of the early Church (Acts 2:43-47) and the fact that love of God cannot be separated from the love of humanity (1 John 4:20-21).
- Leonardo Boff seeks to re-envision the Church as a network of **base ecclesial communities**, made up of 15-20 families dedicated to supporting one another financially and spiritually. This will counteract the **ecclesiocentrism** of the too-powerful Church. This is also truer to the **Trinitarian** vision of equality.
- Many Latin American Bishops have supported Liberation theology, using the phrase '**preferential option for the poor**', indicating that God considers the poor to have the most urgent moral claims.
- The Vatican has also used this phrase but has rejected the political and economic analyses of Gutierrez and others. The Vatican is wary of any association with Marx due to the oppression of religion in the **Soviet Union**.
- It is also suspicious of an atheist ideology bringing 'salvation' without the spiritual change that is always needed to avoid violence and hatred.
- Cardinal Joseph **Ratzinger** (Pope Benedict XVI) has been especially critical of Liberation Theology for being delusional in thinking that a '**golden age**' can be brought about through political means. A perfect future is only created by God.
- Boff has responded that a socialist society has the potential to be more human than the capitalism experienced in Latin America
- As a young priest in Argentina, **Pope Francis** was a harsh critic of Liberation Theology
- Recently, however, the Pope has written against the evils of capitalism and has invited Gutiérrez to the Vatican as a guest of honour.

### Key arguments/debates:

The Vatican charges Liberation Theology with turning to Marx, proposing sweeping social change and being ignorant of how they may unwittingly create an oppressive atheist society like the USSR. However, Boff defines LT as 'faith confronted by oppression' and insists that it is about Christians not divorcing spirituality from the real world. Liberation Theology insists resistance to an inhumane status quo must be a part of Christian practice.

It could be argued that Liberation Theology has not made many inroads into the RCC; the Vatican silenced Boff in 1985, formally investigated Gutiérrez, discourages priests from political action and engages in the pomp of ecclesiocentric rituals in ornate structures. However, many bishops have welcomed Liberation Theology. Base communities continue to offer an alternative model to a top down approach to Church leadership. Pope Francis has not used the term Liberation Theology but shares similar criticisms over the implications of some forms of capitalism.

### Key questions:

- Does a focus on 'praxis' entail that politics is more important than religion?
- Have liberation theologians politicised the Bible?
- Are Marxist ideas necessarily atheistic?
- What language and Biblical motifs characterise Liberation Theology?
- How do Base Communities both challenge and nurture the Church?

### Key quotes:

*"The Kingdom and social injustice are incompatible." (G. Gutiérrez)*

*"Marxist historical materialism is eminently valid in its criticism of capitalism and its proposition of socialism." (L. Boff)*

*"...the management of forces in the soul determine the fate of the community more than the management of economic means..." (Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger)*

### Key words:

Luke 4:16-21 | post-war capitalism | cheap labour | Karl Marx | orthopraxy | Exodus | base ecclesial communities | ecclesiocentrism | Trinitarianism | preferential option for the poor | Soviet Union | Ratzinger | golden age | Pope Francis