



**NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA**

**FACULTY OF ARTS**

**DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES**

**COURSE CODE: CRS845**

**COURSE TITLE: LIBERATION AND FEMINIST THEOLOGIES**



# **COURSE GUIDE**

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## INTRODUCTION

**CRS845 'Liberation and Feminist Theologies'** is a three unit course. Presently, it is a requirement for those who wish to obtain an MA in Christian theology. In this course you will be introduced to liberation theology as an academic discipline, beginning from an extensive survey of its background, which is from the perspective and approach of Latin American liberation theology. You will also be specially introduced to liberation theology from a feminist perspective, to render more complete the picture of liberation theology, which has often been perceived as being done from a male perspective.

The course, which is basically an introductory course, consists of fourteen units, divided into three modules. Module one discusses Meaning, definitions, Latin American background and approaches. Module two discusses Biblical basis of a theology of liberation, while Module three discusses Impacts, Issues and Challenges. The materials have been developed to suit a Nigerian studying at a distance.

This course guide tells you briefly what the course is about, what course materials you will be using and how you are to use them. It provides general guidelines for the amount of time you might be spending in order to successfully complete each unit of the course. It also gives you some guidance on your tutor-marked assignments, details of which are to be found in a separate 'Assignment file'. The course involves regular tutorials and you are advised to attend the sessions.

### **What You Will Learn In This Course**

This course does not presume that you have a pre-knowledge of liberation and feminist theologies. As a result, you are going to be assisted to build up a repertoire of knowledge on what these theologies

are all about. You will come to realize that liberation and feminist theologies are not just academic disciplines, but necessary for one's practical life. Everyone desires or needs to be liberated from one thing or the other, and being in a state of liberation, is one of the most prized values in life. The course will initially take you through aspects of the struggle for liberation as exemplified by two remarkable groups, Latin American and Feminist theologians. These two groups, sharing certain similarities and differences of oppression in their historical, social, cultural, economic, political and religious backgrounds, have come to formulate liberation theologies that have made and continue to make a lot of impact in the world. Their methods and approaches, largely based on social analysis and theological reflections on biblical revelation, have been helpful in bringing people, including theologians in other geographical locations including Africa, to an awareness that working on behalf of the poor and oppressed for justice and liberation is a legitimate and necessary task of theology. As a result of the course therefore, your understanding of how contemporary theology is done will be greatly enhanced.

## ***Course Aims***

The general aim of the course is to acquaint you with an academic understanding of what liberation theology is, and what impact this way of doing theology has created worldwide. The aim will be achieved by:

1. Introducing you to the history of Latin American and feminist liberation theologies.
2. Guiding you through the factors that influence Latin American and feminist liberation theologies.
3. Explaining to you the practice of Latin American and feminist liberation theologies.
4. Making a survey of the methods and approaches in Latin American and feminist liberation theologies.
5. Analyzing the biblical basis of all liberation theologies.
6. Showing you the impact of liberation theology among North American Blacks, and in Asia, South Africa and Black Africa.
7. Highlighting the overall theological issues that emerge from liberation and feminist theologies.
8. Reflecting on the challenges of liberation theology.

## ***Course Objectives***

In order to achieve the aims listed above, the course sets overall objectives. In addition, each unit has its own specific objectives, which are always outlined at the beginning of that unit. You should read them before you start working through the unit. It is necessary to refer to them during your study of the unit, to check on your progress. Also, after completing a unit, you should glance through the unit objectives. This will enable you to be sure that you have done what was required of you by the unit.

Listed below are the wider objectives of the course as a whole. By meeting these objectives, you will have achieved the aims of the course as a whole. On successful completion of the course, you should be able to:

1. Know the meaning and definitions of liberation theology.
2. Have a general knowledge of what feminism is about.
3. State the history and background influences of Latin American and feminist liberation theologies.
4. Explain the theoretical methods and practical approaches used in Latin American and feminist liberation theologies.
5. Appreciate the biblical basis of all liberation theologies, from the perspectives of the Jewish exodus experience, prophetic utterances and the ministry of Jesus, among others.
6. Assess the impact of liberation and feminist theologies in different contexts, such as North American Black, Asian, South African Black and African.
7. Discuss major theological issues that emerge in liberation theology.
8. Identify some of the major challenges of liberation and feminist theologies.

## ***Working through This Course***

To complete this course, you are required to read the study units, read the recommended books, and read other materials which will help you achieve the objectives of the course. Each unit contains some self- assessment exercises, and at points in the course, you are required to submit assignments for assessment purposes. At the end of this course there is a final examination. Stated below are the components of the course and what you have to do. The course should take about fifteen weeks to cover.

## ***Course Materials***

The major components of the course are:

1. Course guide.
2. Three Modules of content, with a total of 14 units.
3. Recommended textbooks.
4. Assignment file

## ***Study Units***

Module 1	Meaning, Definitions, Latin American Background and Approaches
Unit 1	Meaning and Definitions of Liberation Theology
Unit 2	A brief history of Latin American and feminist liberation Theologies
Unit 3	Factors Necessitating the Emergence of Latin American and Feminist Liberation Theologies
Unit 4	The Practice of Latin American and Feminist Liberation Theologies
Unit 5	Methods and Approaches in Latin American and Feminist Liberation Theologies

## **Module 2 Biblical Basis of a Theology of Liberation** Unit 1 Israel and Liberation:

The Exodus Experience Unit 2 Israelite Prophets and Liberation

Unit 3 Jesus Christ and Liberation

Unit 4 Liberation and the Proclamation of the Kingdom of God

Unit 5 Liberation, Justice and Salvation

## **Module 3 Impacts, Themes and Challenges**

Unit 1 North American Black and Asian liberation theologies Unit 2 South African

Black and African liberation theologies Unit 3 Major issues in liberation and feminist theologies

Unit 4 Major challenges of liberation and feminist theologies

Each unit includes a table of contents, introduction, specific objectives, recommended textbooks and summaries of key issues and ideas. At intervals in each unit, you will be provided with a number of exercises or Self-Assessment questions. These are to help you test yourself on the material you have just covered or to apply it in some way. The value of these self-tests is to help you gauge your progress and to reinforce your understanding of the material. At least one tutor-marked assignment will be provided at the end of each unit. The exercises and the tutor-marked assignments will help you in achieving the stated learning objectives of the individual units and of the course.

## ***References***

Boff, L. & Boff, C. (1987). *Introducing Liberation Theology*. New York, Orbis Books

Fiorenza, E. S. & Copeland, M. S. eds. (1996). *Feminist Theology in Different Contexts*. (Concilium) New York, Orbis Books

Hennelly, A. T. (1995). *Liberation Theologies: The Global Pursuit of Justice*. Connecticut, Twenty-third Publications

## ***Assignment File***

The assignment file will be posted to you in due course. In this file, you will find all the details of the work you must submit to your tutor for marking. The marks you obtain for these assignments will count towards the final mark you obtain for this course. Further information on assignment will be found in the Assignment file itself, and later in this Course Guide in the section on assessment.

## ***Presentation Schedule***

The dates for submission of all assignments will be communicated to you in due course. To be communicated to you are dates of completing the study units and dates for examinations.

## ***Assessment***

There are two aspects to the assessment of the course. First are the tutor- marked assignments: second, there is a written examination. In tackling these assignments, you are expected to apply information, knowledge and experience gathered during the course. The assignments must be submitted to your tutor for formal assessment in accordance with the deadlines stated in the Assignment file. The work you submit to your tutor for assessment will count for 30% of your total course mark.

At the end of the course, you will need to sit for a final written examination of three hours duration. This examination will also count for 70% of your total course mark.

### **Tutor-Marked Assignments (TMA)**

There are fourteen tutor-marked assignments in this course. You are required to attempt all the assignments. You will be assessed on all of them but the best four performances will be used for assessment. Each of the four selected will come from the four areas covered in the course namely: the general introduction to literature covering Units 1 and 3; the introduction to drama covering Units 4 to 11; the introduction to prose covering Units 11 to 14 and finally the introduction to poetry covering Units 15 to 21. The assignments carry 10% each.

When you have completed each assignment, send it together with a (tutor-marked assignment) form, to your tutor. Make sure that each assignment reaches your tutor on or before the deadline. If for any reason you cannot complete your work on time, contact your tutor before the assignment is due to discuss the possibility of an extension. Extensions will not be granted after the due date unless under exceptional circumstances.

### **Final Examination and Grading**

The final examination for this course will be of three hours duration and have a value of 70% of the total course grade. The examination will consist of questions, which reflect the kinds of Self-Assessment exercise and the tutor-marked problems you have previously encountered. All aspects of the course will be assessed. You should use the time between completing the last unit, and taking the examination to revise the entire course. You may find it useful to review your Self-Assessment exercises and tutor marked assignments before the examination.

### **Course Marking Scheme**

The following table lays out how the actual course marking is broken down.

Assessment	Marks
Assignments 1 – 4 (The best four of all the assignments submitted)	Four assignments, best three marks of the four count at 30% of course marks.

Final Examination	70% of overall course score
Total	100% of course score

### **Course Overview and Presentation Schedule**

This table brings together the units, the number of weeks you should take to complete them, and the assignments that follow them.

Unit	Title of Work	Weeks Activity	Assessment (End of Unit)
<b>Module 1</b>	Meaning, Definitions, Latin American Background and Approaches	1	
Unit 1	Meaning and Definitions of Liberation Theology	1	Assignment 1

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<b>Module 2</b>	Biblical Basis of a Theology of Liberation		
Unit 1	Israel and Liberation: The Exodus Experience	1	Assignment 1
Unit 2	Israelite Prophets and Liberation	1	Assignment 2
Unit 3	Jesus Christ and Liberation	1	Assignment 3
Unit 4	Liberation and the Proclamation of the Kingdom of God	1	Assignment 4
Unit 5	Liberation, Justice and Salvation	1	Assignment 5
<b>Module 3</b>	Impacts, Issues and Challenges		
Unit 1	North American Black and Asian Liberation Theologies	1	Assignment 1
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Unit 3	Major Issues in Liberation and Feminist Theologies	1	Assignment 3
Unit 4	Major Challenges of Liberation and Feminist	1	Assignment 4

	Theologies		
	Revision	1	
	Examination	1	
	Total	16	

### ***How to Get the Most from this Course***

In distance learning, the study units replace the university lecturer. Thus one of the advantages of distance learning is that you can read the course materials at your own pace, at any time and anywhere. Exercises to test your understanding of the materials are provided in each unit. There is a common format for all the units. The first item is the introduction to the unit. The introduction also shows you how a particular unit is related with other units and to the course as a whole. After the introduction, you will see the objectives. The objectives indicate what you are expected to achieve after studying the unit. So you should keep it handy so as to constantly check or monitor yourself in terms of achieving those objectives.

The main body of the unit guides you through the required readings from other sources. Exercises, as was mentioned before, are provided at intervals throughout the reading materials. Answers to those exercises are provided at the end of each unit. Do not try to skip any of the exercises. Try to do them as you meet them while reading. This will help you to do your tutor-marked assignments and also prepare you for your examinations.

The following is a practical strategy for working through the course. If you encounter any problem, do not worry. Contact your tutor and he/she will happily help you out.

1. Read this Course Guide thoroughly
2. Provide a timetable for yourself, and take note of the time you are required to spend on each unit and always stick to the timetable.
3. Once you have created your own study schedule, do everything you can to stick to it. The major reason that students fail is that they get behind with their course work. If you get into difficulties with your schedule, please let your tutor know before it is too late for help.
4. Turn to Unit 1 and read the introduction and the objectives for the unit.
5. Assemble the study materials. Information about what you need for a unit is given in the 'overview' at the beginning of each unit. You will almost always need both the study unit you are working on and one of your set books on your desk at the same time.
6. Work through the unit. The content of the unit itself has been arranged to provide a sequence for you to follow. As you work through the unit you will be instructed to read from your set books.
7. Review the objectives for each study unit to confirm that you have achieved them. If you feel unsure about any of the objectives, review the study materials or consult your tutor.
8. When you are confident that you have achieved a unit's objective, you can then start on the next unit. Keep to your schedule. When the assignment is returned, pay particular attention to your tutor's comments, both on the tutor-marked assignment form and also written on the assignment. Consult your tutor as soon as possible if you have any questions or problems.
9. After completing the last unit, review the course and prepare yourself for the final examination. Check that you have achieved the unit objectives (listed at the beginning of each unit) and the course objectives (listed in this Course Guide).

### ***Tutors and Tutorials***

There are 30 hours of tutorials (15 of 2 hours sessions) provided in support of this course. You will be notified of the dates, times and location of these tutorials, together with the name and phone number of your tutor, as soon as you are allocated a tutorial group.

Your tutor will mark and comment on your assignments, keep a close watch on your progress and

on any difficulties you might encounter and provide assistance to you during the course. You must mail your tutor- marked assignments to your tutor well before the due date (at least two working days are required). They will be marked by your tutor and returned to you as soon as possible.

Do not hesitate to contact your tutor if you need help. Contact your tutor if: you do not understand any part of the study units or the assigned readings; you have difficulty with the exercises; you have a question or problem with an assignment, with your tutor's comments on an assignment or with the grading of an assignment.

You should try your best to attend the tutorials. This is the only chance to have face-to-face contact with your tutor and ask questions which are answered instantly. You can raise any problem encountered in the course of your study. To gain the maximum benefit from course tutorials, prepare a question list before attending them. You will learn a lot from participating in discussion actively.

### ***Summary***

This course guide has introduced you to every aspect of your course on Liberation and Feminist Theologies.

Hopefully, you will not miss this opportunity to get to understand what liberation theology is all about. I wish

you success and God's blessings as you go through the course.



# MAIN COURSE

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**MODULE 1****MEANING, DEFINITIONS, LATIN-AMERICAN  
BACKGROUND AND APPROACHES**

- Unit 1 Meaning and Definitions of Liberation Theology
- Unit 2 A Brief History of Latin American and Feminist Liberation Theologies
- Unit 3 Factors Necessitating the Emergence of Latin American and Feminist Liberation Theologies
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**UNIT 1 MEANING AND DEFINITIONS OF  
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- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-marked assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References and further reading

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

What is it that comes to your mind when the word ‘liberation’ is mentioned? You may have had an experience of being liberated from something. For example, you may feel that your opinion, ideas or talents were suppressed, and this left you feeling angry, unappreciated and unwanted. Then someone appreciated your opinion and talent and you felt liberated from your anger and loss of self-esteem. You may also have experienced being made to suffer unjustly or being treated less than a human being on account of your social status, religious affiliation, race, tribe, sex, educational standard, economic status or political leaning.

Then someone spoke on your behalf and you got your right and human dignity back. You felt liberated! You may have lost hope that you would attain or achieve something in your life, or that things would get better for you. Then someone or something enkindled your hope once again. You felt liberated!

Your experience may be that human beings everywhere do need liberation, because they feel that an external aggressor oppresses them. Lack of liberation could lead to anger, inner and outer conflicts, pretence, disunity, violence, apathy, guilt, fear, insecurity, terrorism, killings and other evils. The question is, what answer has Christianity to offer to a world wherein people treat one another unjustly and oppressively? And specifically, what answer has Christianity to offer to a world wherein women do feel unjustly treated and oppressed? Liberation theologies seek answers to these questions. To be liberated means different things to different

people, depending on what their experiences are. There are also different ways which liberation theologians understand what liberation theology is. This unit will bring to your awareness the various definitions of liberation theology. It will also give you a general overview of what feminism is.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

It is hoped that your study of this unit will enable you to: Understand the

meaning and definitions of liberation theology

Explain the biblical meaning of liberation

Have a general understanding of feminism

Understand feminist liberation theology as an aspect of liberation theology

## **3.0 MAIN BODY**

### **3.1 Meaning of Liberation Theology**

By now you may have come to some understanding of the concept of liberation than when you began this course. Now we want to look at the subject matter at hand – liberation theology. Theology as you know, can be understood as an academic discipline, which reflects on divine realities and the human response to them, seeking to understand them better through the use of social, historical and scientific resources, and applying them to contemporary life.

Liberation theology, therefore, is a fairly recent way of doing theology, which seeks to understand God's acts of liberation according to the scriptures, and the contemporary human response to them. It uses social, historical and scientific resources to interpret contemporary realities, and relate these to the scriptures. In a way, liberation theology is Christianity engaging the society in which we live. It relates the study and doing of theology to practical Christian living. This means that liberation theology is basically an approach to theology. It is the study of theology from the perspective of liberation. It is an approach to the study of theology that is generally employed by different theological interest groups, such as *Latin American theologians*, *Feminist theologians*, *North American Black theologians*, *South African Black theologians*, *Asian theologians* and *Sub Saharan African theologians*. In this course you will be introduced to liberation theology, beginning from an extensive survey of its background, which is from the perspective and approach of Latin American liberation theology. You will also be specially introduced to liberation theology from a feminist perspective, to render more complete the picture of liberation theology, which has often been perceived to be male oriented. Following are descriptions and definitions of liberation theology by some scholars.

#### **3.1.1 Some Descriptions and Definitions**

##### **a. A Radical Engagement of Christianity with the World**

Chopp (1986) describes liberation theology as a radical engagement of Christianity with the world, with the intent to represent human freedom and God's gratuitous activity in the questions and issues of the day. As a radically new paradigm and departure from modern theology, liberation theology reflects and guides a Christianity that is identified with those who suffer, that represents a freedom of

transformation, and that proclaims a God whose love frees us for justice and faith.

**b. A Criticism of Oppression**

Hardon (1985) defines liberation theology as “a movement...that makes criticism of oppression essential to the task of theology”.

**c. Portraying God’s Relevance to the Oppressed**

Desmond Tutu (1983) defines it as “a theodicy. It seeks to justify God and the ways of God to a down trodden and perplexed people so that they can be inspired to do something about their lot”.

**d. Struggle to Build A Freer and More Human Society**

Gustavo Gutierrez (1990) defines it as “a theological reflection born of the experience of shared efforts to abolish the current unjust situation and to build a different society, freer and more human”.

**e. An Expression of the Church’s Preference For And Solidarity With The Poor**

For Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff (1993), “Liberation theology can be understood as the reflection in faith of the church that has taken to heart the clear and prophetic option expressing preference for, and solidarity with the poor. It is for them, and with them, that the church seeks to act in a liberative manner”.

**f. A Theology Inclusive of Women’s Experiences Of Oppression**

Fiorenza (1996) describes liberation theology done from a feminist perspective as an effort “to anchor feminist theological analyses and spiritual visions in diverse women’s experiences of dehumanization and survival rather than measure and evaluate them with traditional theological criteria and standards”.

**Self-Assessment Exercise 1.1**

Fill in the blanks by choosing the correct word or phrase

1. Theology can be understood as-----  
 -----  
 -----

2. List six ways in which liberation theology is understood by liberation theologians.
- a. -----
  - b. -----
  - c. -----
  - d. -----
  - e. -----
  - f. -----

### 3.2 Biblical Notion of Liberation

The word “liberty” in the bible refers generally to a state of freedom from slavery. One who is a slave to someone or something has no freedom. Therefore, when one is *set free from a condition of slavery*, one attains *liberation*. An example of the use of the word in this way, found in the Old Testament, is in Isaiah 61:1, which is quoted by Jesus in the New Testament, in Luke 4:18. But the word ‘slavery’ is also used as a metaphor for different forms of oppression, from which the Christian is set free or liberated by Christ (Gal 5:1).

#### Self-Assessment Exercise 1.2

1. What does the word ‘liberty’ refer to in the Bible?
2. Mention two passages in the Bible where the notion of liberation is expressed.
3. Name a biblical passage in which the word ‘slavery’ is used as a metaphor for oppression.

### 3.3 General Understanding of Feminism

Feminism is basically an emerging understanding of life in the light of the experiences and insights of women. Those who consider themselves feminists today are women who belong to feminist movements, and are motivated by an ideology termed “*feminist consciousness*” which was coined about the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century AD., in the United States of America. By feminist consciousness is meant awareness that the oppression of women is systemic and structural in nature. Feminists identify the oppressive system as *patriarchy*. They make a total commitment to actively redress the oppression of women in any form, especially that of changing the structures of patriarchy in the society. Patriarchy is meant the general socio-cultural belief that the male sex is the norm of humanity, while the female sex is secondary, inferior to the male, and must be kept subservient to the male. Patriarchy, it is believed, ensures that every aspect of human history, philosophy, religion, etc., is understood and expressed in the light of the experiences and insights of men. In being conscious of the role of patriarchy, feminists insist that women are oppressed because they are in a system, which is being subtly or overtly controlled and manipulated by men for their own advantage. Feminists thus strongly advocate for the recognition and inclusion of the feminine perspective in all spheres of life, so as to checkmate patriarchy, and thus liberate women from its clutches.

This general ideological standpoint of feminism finds expression in different forms or strands of feminism that have emerged. Thus there have emerged: *liberal feminists*, who are primarily concerned with the political and legal situation of women in society, and how to achieve equal rights for women in socio-political contexts; *cultural feminists*, who struggle for the equal and mutual influence of men and women in cultural transformation. They engage in social reforms in society, seeking for a better and more human system by injecting the voice of women into society; *socialist feminists*, who are influenced by Marxism, and so they see the economic class structure, whereby the male controls the public means of production, as the fundamental structure of oppression and domination of women, leaving women in the private sphere of production. Socialist feminists would maintain that class oppression of women is more powerful than oppression on



account of sex; radical feminists see patriarchy not merely as bringing about male domination of female, but the domination of both sexes, since everyone and everything in a family comes under the head of the family, a man; *religious feminists*, among whom are theologians, focus on the place of patriarchy in the religious system, such as Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. They seek to liberate the religious system from patriarchy by identifying relationships and distinctions between God and humanity, religion and church, theology and spirituality, liturgy and ritual, the word of God and literature.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise 1.3**

1. What is feminist consciousness?
2. Name four forms of feminist movements.
3. Describe patriarchy.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

In this unit there was a discussion of different definitions of liberation theology, the biblical meaning of liberation, and a discussion on what feminism is. From these discussions you should now be able to give a general description of what liberation theology is all about, as well as have a general understanding of what feminism is.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

A summary of the major points in this unit is that:

1. Liberation is necessitated by the existence of injustice, oppression and situations which make one feel treated as less than human. Indeed one needs liberation when one is in a condition of slavery.
2. Following upon the above understanding of liberation, Liberation theology thus involves an intellectual, faith and practical engagement of Christian theologians with the world in their doing of theology. They do this through their criticism of oppression, portrayal of the relevance of God to the oppressed, a commitment to the struggle to build a freer and more human society, and a constant expression of the church's preference for and solidarity with the poor and the oppressed of every class, race and sex.
3. Feminism arose out of "feminist consciousness", and takes different forms, such as the liberal, the cultural, the socialist, and the religious.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT (TMA)**

1. What do you understand as liberation theology?
2. Identify the ideological standpoint of feminism.

## **7.0 REFERENCES / FURTHER READINGS**

- Boff, Leonardo and Clodovis Boff (1993) *Introducing Liberation Theology*, Maryknoll, Orbis, pp. 43-44.
- Chopp, Rebecca S. (1986), *The Praxis of Suffering: An Interpretation of Liberation and Political Theologies*, Orbis Books, p.153.
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- Gutierrez, Gustavo (1990) "Introduction to the Original Edition" in *A Theology of Liberation*, 15<sup>th</sup> University Edition, Maryknoll, Orbis, p.xiii.
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Tutu, Desmond (1983) "The Theology of Liberation In Africa" in Koffi Appia Kubi and Sergio Torres, eds. *African Theology En Route*, Maryknoll, Orbis, p.163.

## **UNIT 2     A BRIEF HISTORY OF LATIN AMERICAN AND FEMINIST LIBERATION THEOLOGIES**

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- 1.0 Introduction
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- 3.0 Main Body
- 3.1 A Brief History of Latin American Liberation Theology
- 3.2 A Brief History of Feminist Liberation Theology
- 4.0 Conclusion
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- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References / Further Readings

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In the previous unit, you learnt about the meaning of liberation. You also learnt different definitions of liberation theology. In this unit, you will be taken through a brief history of liberation theology. It will be of great value to you because it will bring you face to face with the story of how certain theologians, church authorities and civil leaders have contributed to gradually build up a theology of liberation. Liberation theology grew out of a new consciousness that theology could not be adequately done without an attention paid to the concerns of the oppressed. How was that consciousness born in different oppressed groups, and how did it develop and become nurtured? You will learn that in this unit, with regard to Latin American liberation theology and feminist liberation theology.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

Describe briefly the history of the origin and development of liberation theology in Latin America and among feminist theologians. Identify important dates, events and names of people and places that are associated with the origin and development of Latin American liberation theology.

### **3.0 MAIN BODY**

#### **3.1 A Brief History of Latin American Liberation Theology**

Latin American liberation theology was born out of a process whereby some theologians including Catholics (namely, Gustavo Gutierrez, Segundo Galilea, Jun Luis Segundo, Lucio Gera, etc) and Protestants (namely, Emilio Castro, Julie de Santa Ana, Ruben Alves, Jose Miguez Bonino), met frequently with the group, Church and Society in Latin America (ISAL). These began to commit themselves to an intensified reflection on the relationship between faith and poverty, the gospel and social justice, etc., as it affected the Latin American countries. The decisive moment came in March 1964 at a meeting of Latin American theologians held in Petrópolis (Rio de Janeiro) when one leading Latin American theologian, Gustavo Gutiérrez, in a lecture, gave a description of theology as *a critical reflection on praxis*. He further gave a series of other lectures in other places on issues that bordered on poverty and liberation. In one such lecture held in July 1968 at Chimbote, Peru, Gustavo Gutierrez made proposals “*Towards a theology of liberation*”. The position of the theologians was taken up by the institutional church

when, in 1968, during the second general assembly of the Catholic Bishops of Latin America at Medellín, Colombia, the bishops openly condemned what they called the ‘institutionalized’ violence and injustice of much of Latin America, and pledged to work for the liberation of the continent from such oppressive structures. Indeed, the bishops observed that working for such liberation was ‘already an anticipation of full redemption in Christ’. The bishops underlined that the condition of misery, in which many Latin Americans found themselves, was as a result of an “injustice that cries to the heavens”. God, they insisted, intended that all should share in the goods of the earth, and God sent the Son “that he might come to liberate ‘all peoples from the slavery which sin had subjected them: hunger, misery, oppression and ignorance.

The radical position of the bishops then opened the way for further reflection on issues of liberation. At a theological congress held at Cartigny, Switzerland, in 1969, a group of theologians put forward an outline for a Theology of Liberation. Many subsequent congresses on the issue were held by both Catholic and Protestant theologians. Finally, in December 1971, Gustavo Gutiérrez published his *Theology of Liberation*, a book that brought to the fore, Latin American liberation theology. Many other works on liberation theology have been produced ever since, and on a variety of theological issues related to liberation in the Latin American context.

Latin American Liberation theology and the works produced by their theologians have had a lot of impact not only in Latin America but also all over the world, leaving in their trail, support and opposition. In all these and many other cases, liberation theology, with its focus on issues concerning the liberation of the poor and oppressed, has led to changes in the way theology is done. There are many books, journals, conferences and other academic media devoted to discussions on liberation theology. Liberation theology is also being taught as a theological discipline in many theological institutes, and a growing number of people are defending doctoral dissertations on different aspects of liberation theology.

Liberation theology has become a source of pastoral ministry in Christian churches, especially in Latin American countries. Its spirit has penetrated Christian preaching, liturgy, spirituality and arts. Its influence and impact is highly felt at the base level in thousands of Christian communities scattered around Latin America. It has been the subject of discussion among many bishops and other church leaders. In particular, the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in the Vatican reacted to the Latin American liberation theological current in several ways, including the issue of a document, *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation* (1986). According to the document,

The church is firmly determined to respond to the anxiety of contemporary man as he endures oppression and yearns for freedom. The political and economic running of society is not a direct part of her mission. But the Lord Jesus has entrusted to her the word of truth, which is capable of enlightening consciences. Divine love, which is her life, impels her to a true solidarity with everyone who suffers. If her members remain faithful to this mission, the Holy Spirit, the source of

freedom, will dwell in them, and they will bring forth fruits of justice and peace in their families and in the places where they work and live (No.61).

At the political sphere, Latin American liberation theology drew the attention of world leaders of government. In 1969, U.S. President Nixon asked Nelson Rockefeller to go to Latin America and investigate the situation. Rockefeller reported that liberation theology was “a force devoted to change, by revolutionary means of necessary”. Also worried by the growing impact of liberation theology, U.S. President Ronald Reagan’s advisers produced the Santa Fe Document, in which they advised Reagan to counterattack liberation theology. This he did, by instituting an institute for Religion and Democracy, (IRD), with the primary aim of mounting an ideological campaign against liberation theology.

Nowhere else, however, has liberation theology had a greater political impact than in Latin America itself. In El-Salvador, for example, influenced by liberation theology, an agrarian reform program that would aid in alleviating poverty resulting from land ownership structure was initiated in 1970. As a result of their participation in this program, many church leaders, including fifteen catholic priests were assassinated. Many others were beaten and exited. The spate of killings in reaction to the influence of liberation theology further led to the massive killing of many others including six Jesuit priests and Archbishop Oscar Romero of the Archdiocese of Santiago. Owing to the commitment of the people in clamoring for a change however, events led later to the overthrow of the repressive military government of the day, and the new President, José Napoleon Duarte, restored democracy and instituted some land reforms.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise 2.1**

1. Name the Latin American Catholic and Protestant theologians who initiated the reflection that later led to the emergence of liberation theology.
2. Name the Latin American theologian who spearheaded discussions at Petrópolis on liberation theology?
3. In which year and where did Catholic Bishops of Latin America openly condemn the institutionalized violence and injustice in Latin America?

### **3.2 Feminist Liberation Theology**

The theology of liberation as practiced in Latin America brought to the fore a new consciousness among women, who realized that although many issues on oppression were tackled by these liberation theologians, there was one area of oppression that was left out – that of the oppression of women. This issue had been the subject of occasional writings by women in the past, even as far back as the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For example, Elizabeth Cady Stanton had, towards the end of the nineteenth century, gathered a group of educated women as part of the Women’s Revising Committee, charged with the responsibility of doing a systematic critique of patriarchy or the belief that maleness is the norm for humanity in the bible. This resulted in the publication of *The Women’s Bible* in 1896 –1898. Another influential nineteenth century feminist was Matilda Joselyn Gage. Furthermore, in the early twentieth century, Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote *His Religion and Hers: A Study of the Faith of our Fathers and the Work of our Mothers* (1923).

These contributions, however, remained unknown and were only rediscovered in the wake of the liberation theology movement.

Modern feminist theology is said to have begun in 1968 with the work of Kari Borresen, a Norwegian, who critiqued the masculinist bias of classical theology. The same year, Mary Daly exposed the sexist bias of the entire Christian tradition in *The Church and the Second Sex*. These and many other writings which followed have sought to establish that in the past, theology had been done to the exclusion of the concerns of women, and that the bible was traditionally interpreted in ways that did not consider the positive contributions of women. All these had to be addressed by expanding the Christian tradition to include women's contribution.

Besides the above considerations, feminist liberation theologians discuss all forms of sexist oppression, subordination and degradation of women, evaluating and challenging them in the light of the liberating message of the gospel. A major advancement in Feminist liberation theology was recorded in the publication, in 1988, of Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's book, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, as well as the publication of other works by Rosemary Radford Ruether and Elizabeth Johnson, Letty Russell, Shannon Clarkson and Mercy Oduyoye.

Feminist liberation theology has gained lots of adherents all over the world, and is currently beginning to exercise a major effect in the way theology is done. Heightened feminist consciousness in religious matters arising from feminist liberation theology has had a great impact, beginning with feminist theologians themselves. According to Schneiders (1991:97), "Feminist consciousness, once raised, can only deepen. Consciousness raising makes it impossible to ever 'go home again'. Once sensitized to the reality and the effects of patriarchy, one can only become ever more aware of its pervasiveness, more convinced of its destructiveness, more resistant to its influence on oneself and one's world".

As a result of this personal impact on the women themselves, feminist theologians have bonded themselves into different theological associations and networks that meet across the globe, thereby narrowing social, regional, ethnic, racial, linguistic and religious boundaries, to search and find ways of confronting patriarchy in the society and church.

They have also raised numerous movements, organized many seminars, workshops and lectures at different levels in order to promote and uphold the cause of the liberation of women, using biblical and theological tools. Accordingly, many important pioneer studies on liberation from a feminist theological perspective have emerged over the years. These studies have become a rally source for many other emerging studies on the theme. In all, such studies have taken on a wide variety of issues such as patriarchy, biblical interpretation, image of God, Christology, women in ecclesial ministry, women in Christian tradition, inclusive language, inclusive theology, gender equality, justice to oppressed women, sexism, feminist spirituality and women in society. These issues have been discussed from a feminist theological perspective in a way that such studies can no longer be ignored.

The impact of the results of these studies is already being experienced in many

theological institutes and Christian ministerial circles around the world. Already, more women are being admitted to theological studies, many projects and dissertations are exploring new areas of feminist theology, and an increasing number of women theologians are occupying influential positions in theological circles as professors and administrators. Even in ministerial circles, the necessity of greater inclusion of women in different levels of ecclesial leadership and decision-making is beginning to be appreciated, especially based on the performance of certain female role models. Moreover, women are playing greater roles in many based Christian communities found in Latin America and parts of Africa.

There are also many emerging ecclesial women associations and movements that are concerned with creating, developing and promoting new ways of being church. Feminist liberation theology is not directly concerned with politics, but some feminist liberation theologians especially those in Latin America have, given the context of the social and political struggle for liberation in the continent, themselves become “militant, in the sense of taking part in the totality of our peoples’ struggles for liberation at local and global levels”.

Feminist liberation theology has also made some inroads into political life in the First World. According to Boff and Boff (1993:81-82), The influence of feminist liberation theology— produced, naturally, by women theologians is widespread throughout the First World. This theology sees women’s liberation as an integral dimension of overall liberation, and is taking ever-increasing account of the close links that exist between sexual and economic oppression, and therefore of the political power of a feminist movement based on majority classes.

One can thus affirm that feminist liberation theology is beginning to have an impact in ecclesial and socio-political traditions around the world. As a result of this impact, women’s value is gradually being acknowledged. Pope John Paul II did this much, and apologized to women: Women’s dignity has often been unacknowledged and their prerogatives misrepresented; they have often been relegated to the margins of society and even reduced to servitude. This has prevented women from truly being themselves and it has resulted in a spiritual impoverishment of humanity. Certainly it is no easy task to assign the blame for this, considering the many kinds of cultural conditioning, which down the centuries have shaped ways of thinking and acting. And if objective blame, especially in particular historical contexts, has belonged to not just a few members of the church, for this I am truly sorry. May this regret be transformed, on the part of the whole church, into a renewed commitment of fidelity to the Gospel vision.

The future of the ongoing history of feminist liberation theology continues to evolve, especially in the wake of an increasing number of men and women being “converted” to stand alongside the feminist theologians in their search for the liberation, not only of women, but also of the entire humanity.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise 2.2**

1. What major issue did women feel was left out in discussions on oppression by Latin American liberation theologians?
2. In which year did modern feminist liberation theology begin?
3. Name three feminist liberation theologians that have brought a major advancement to feminist liberation theology through their publications.

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, you have learnt about how Latin American and feminist liberation theologies began. Although having different emphasis, the two perspectives of liberation theology are linked together, and are concerned with one issue: promoting the liberation of oppressed and unjustly treated peoples in the light of the liberating message of the scriptures.

#### 5.0 SUMMARY

The main points in this unit are:

1. A brief history of Latin American liberation theology:
  - a. Latin American liberation theology was born as a consequence of frequent meetings between theologians of different faiths, reflecting on the relationship between faith and poverty, the gospel and social justice in the Latin American context.
  - b. The Catholic bishops of Latin America, meeting in 1968 at Medellín, Colombia, underscored the reflection of the theologians by openly condemning the oppression in Latin America at the time, and pledging to work towards the liberation of the continent.
  - c. The radical position of the bishops paved the way for further and more serious reflections on the principles and methods of liberation theology, spearheaded by Gustavo Gutiérrez in his book, *Theology of Liberation*, published in December 1971.
2. A brief history of feminist liberation theology:
  - a. The practice of Latin American liberation theology brought a new consciousness to feminists concerning the oppression of women, and the unpublicized contributions of some women to liberation beginning from the nineteenth century A.D.
  - b. Modern feminist liberation theology, beginning in 1968 with the work of Kari Borresen, and including works by Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Rosemary Radford Ruether and Elizabeth Johnson, have sought to make women's experiences, especially of oppression, part of theological discourse.

#### 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT (TMA)

1. Identify two important perspectives of liberation theology.
2. Discuss briefly the beginning and development of Latin American and feminist liberation theology, naming important events and characters that contributed to their beginnings and development.

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## **UNIT 3 FACTORS NECESSITATING THE EMERGENCE OF LATIN AMERICAN AND FEMINIST LIBERATION THEOLOGIES**

### **CONTENT**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Body
- 3.1 Factors Necessitating the Emergence of Latin American Liberation Theology
- 3.2 Factors Necessitating the Emergence of Feminist Liberation Theology
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References / Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In the last unit, the history of Latin American and feminist liberation theologies was discussed. From what you already studied in Unit 1, you can understand that liberation theology is necessitated as a result of the presence of negative factors. You do not need liberation when all goes well with you. In this unit, therefore, attention will be paid to examining those contextual factors, which have necessitated Latin American and feminist theologians to develop and practice liberation theology.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

Identify clearly the socio-economic and political factors that led to the emergence of liberation theology in different parts of Latin America.

Discuss the oppressive structures which feminist liberation theologians challenge as unjust to women.

### **3.0 MAIN BODY**

#### **3.1 Factors Necessitating the Emergence of Latin American Liberation Theology**

Latin American liberation theology emerged from a sub-continent, which has over twenty countries of varying size, geography, racial mixture, level of education and standard of living. In many of these countries, there is a high level of poverty. Many large cities exist, but on their outskirts live millions of peoples in slums under extreme poverty, trying to eke out a very meager living. In a 1987 World Development Report from a study showing a pattern of wealth and income distribution, carried out in 1972, Brazil had the worst record in disparity of income distribution. Accordingly, it was reported that the lowest 20 percent of the population received only 2 percent of the national income, while the top 10 percent of the population received over 50 percent of the income (*World Development Report*, 1987, pp 252-253).

All these led to a high infant mortality rate, with millions of children in abjectly poor homes being abandoned by their parents to die. The economic injustice practiced in most of Latin America has led to massive urban drift by anxious youths who end up with unemployment, homelessness, malnutrition and illness. Added to these is the fact that

although the few rich and powerful live in areas with well laid out infrastructure, the poor and weak have no basic infrastructure, such as electricity, tarred roads, running and potable water in their slums.

Regarding land, reports showed that an estimated 1.3 percent of the landowners in Latin America control 71.6 percent of all land under cultivation. Access to land is denied to the peasants, such that the rich and powerful landowners can enlarge their plantations where they grow crops for export, largely for the US market. Protests calling for land reforms had always met with violence, including the assassination of churchmen who backed such reforms. Fr. Rutilio Grande of El Salvador, for example, was assassinated in 1977 because he backed the demands of peasants for land reforms.

The practice of economic injustice has been possible because in many of the Latin American countries are found oppressive dictatorial regimes, which have no regard for human life nor human rights. Thousands have been known to have “disappeared” in Argentina. Thousands have been arrested, tortured and summarily executed in Chile and Brazil. These include hundreds of church leaders, men and women. Death squads executed at least sixty thousand people in El Salvador in the early 1980s. Thus, a vast number of Latin Americans have suffered, both from the oppression of poverty, and from the violent repressions of their different governments. It is within this context of structural poverty and oppression that Latin American liberation theology originated and developed.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise 3.1**

(Fill in the blank spaces)

1. In 1987 World Development Report, Brazil had the worst record in \_\_\_\_\_
2. Youths in most countries of Latin America who drift to large cities for a better life usually end up with \_\_\_\_\_
3. In Latin America, protests calling for land reforms had always met with \_\_\_\_\_.
4. In Chile and Brazil, thousands have been \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

### **3.2 Factors Necessitating the Emergence of Feminist Liberation Theology**

From your study of Unit 2, you are already familiar with the fact that modern feminist liberation theology arose in reaction to Latin American liberation theology, which the feminists felt had not focused on the specific problems of women’s oppression. Women increasingly became aware that they were being discriminated against because of their gender, oppressed because of their race or nationality, despised on account of their impoverished class, and within cultures, in churches and other religious organizations, given a second-class status. Feminist liberation theologians see all these as emanating from the belief in sexism, patriarchy and androcentrism - social structures, which regard the male, the world over, as the dominant sex, and which make men the norm of humanity. They challenge these oppressive structures, which relegate women to the background, and which tend to treat women as less than human, as if they were not co-created as equals in the image

and likeness of God.

Because God created men and women as equals, feminists oppose the belief that women are inferior to men. They observe that it is because women are generally regarded as inferior to men, that economic, social, cultural, political and religious power is always in the hands of men, while it is taken for granted that women will play a subordinate role. They also challenge the constant violation of women's God-given political, economic, legal and educational rights. Many women are made to work long hours, but own little or no property. Many suffer from starvation, psychological torture, physical abuses, sexual exploitation and rape. Feminists cite these and many other instances of the horrors that women go through or have to live with in their families and in the society.

Even within the church, women are excluded from leadership roles and decision-making; their experiences are excluded from religious symbols and language; the bible has largely been written and interpreted from male perspectives, and theology is done without an attention to the contributions of women. Feminist liberation theology focuses attention on empowering men and women so that they can be liberated enough to appreciate, respect and treat women as full human beings.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise 3.2**

1. Name three social structures that feminist liberation theologians identify as sources of the belief in the male as the dominant sex.
2. Why do feminist liberation theologians not accept that women are inferior to men?
3. Identify four God-given rights, of which many women are denied.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

In this unit you have been introduced to some of the background factors, which necessitated the emergence of Latin American and Feminist liberation theologies. It is good to be aware that these issues are neither not limited to Latin America nor to women. The issues that liberation theologians discuss are issues that concern all humanity.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

The main points in this unit include the following:

1. Latin American liberation theology emerged from a context of economic injustice, manifested in a great disparity in wealth, income distribution and land ownership.
2. The economic injustice led to many socio-economic problems including high infant mortality, urban drift, unemployment, homelessness, malnutrition, illness and deaths.
3. Attempts to change things for the better always met with stiff opposition from repressive governments.
4. Feminist liberation theology emerged from a context of societal belief in sexism, patriarchy and androcentrism. These have led to a devaluation of the dignity of women as human beings created in the image and likeness of God, with all faculties equal to men. It has also led to the treatment of women as second class, whose contributions do not count.
5. Feminist theologians challenge the oppression of women based on their gender, and work for the empowerment of men and women.

**6.0****TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. How do oppressive and dictatorial regimes in Latin America ensure that the poor and oppressed are not liberated?
2. Narrate your concrete experiences of women being treated as less than human beings.

**7.0****REFERENCES / FURTHER READINGS**

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## UNIT 4 THE PRACTICE OF LATIN AMERICAN AND FEMINIST LIBERATION THEOLOGIES\*

### CONTENT

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Body
  - 3.1 The Practice of Latin American Liberation Theology
    - 3.1.1 Popular Level of Liberation Theology
    - 3.1.2 Pastoral Level of Liberation Theology
    - 3.1.3 Professional Level of Liberation Theology
  - 3.2 The Practice of Feminist Liberation Theology
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References / Further Readings

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit you are going to learn the practical approach to Latin American and feminist liberation theologies. Liberation theologians prefer that their approach to theology be seen primarily as practical, and only secondarily as theoretical. They prefer to interact with the oppressed in order to feel their oppression with them. It is such an experience that can enable them to generate enough energy for their liberating action. This unit will, therefore, expose you to how liberation theologians attempt to make the experience of the oppressed their own practical experience too, and how they seek to liberate the oppressed in a practical way.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

Explain how Latin American and feminist liberation theologians are able to have an experience of what oppression is.

Understand the distinction between “aid”, “development reform” and “liberating action” through conscientisation.

Discuss the three levels of doing liberation theology.

Make a distinction between the Latin American liberation theologians’ experience of oppression and that of the feminist liberation theologians.

Explain how feminist liberation theologians handle “oppressive texts” in the Bible.

### 3.0 MAIN BODY

#### 3.1 The Practice of Latin American Liberation Theology

Latin American liberation theologians energetically denounce the contextual situation of injustice which was discussed in Unit 3, no 3.1, on three levels: on the *social level*, it is denounced as oppression, exclusion and marginalization; on the *individual level*, it is denounced as injustice and denial of human rights; on the *religious level*, it is denounced as social sinfulness, which is contrary to God’s plan in creation, and the honour that is due to God. In view of these denunciations, Latin American liberation theologians commit themselves to “suffering with” the oppressed, and a prophetic and comradely commitment to ending the historical

social iniquity.

Liberation theologians speak for the poor. For them, the poor are not to be identified with the “proletariat” of Karl Marx, or only the mendicant. Rather, the poor is a collective term for all who are exploited by the capitalist system: all those who are socially and historically oppressed. In them liberation theologians see the face of the Suffering Servant, Jesus Christ. In them the crucified Christ needs to be raised to life again.

In order to achieve this, Latin American liberation theologians emphasize on *liberating action* as their practice of liberation. They deny the ineffectiveness of merely giving ‘aid’ to the poor, or merely embarking on development reforms. This is because aid to the poor, no matter how well-intentioned and helpful, treats the poor as objects of charity, constantly dependent on the donor and not subjects of their own liberation. It hardly sees that the poor are oppressed and made poor by others.

The same goes for development reforms, which seeks to carry out feats of industrial and technological development in the poorer nations. Such development inevitably ends up in worsening the social conditions of the poor, widening further the gap between them and the rich, and exposing them to greater exploitation, such that the rich become richer, and the poor become poorer.

Liberating action (*liberation*) on the other hand is a strategy, which is able to change the social condition of the poor, by helping them to come to an understanding of their situation through a process of *conscientisation*. In this process, the poor come to discover the causes of their oppression, organize themselves into movements, and act in a harmonized fashion. In this way they resist being exploited or manipulated in any form, and maintain their God-given human dignity. Latin American liberation theologians do not see liberating action as a mere social activity. Rather, it is an action inspired by faith, which includes commitment to one’s neighbour, particularly the poor (Matt 25:31-46), and which is motivated by the proclamation of the kingdom of God, a kingdom that begins in this world and finds fulfillment in eternity.

Following upon the above enumerated principle of liberating action, it is worth noting that Latin American liberation theologians insist that liberation theology is not only done by professionals. Therefore, they have identified three levels where this liberating action can and should take place. These are the *popular*, *pastoral* and *professional* levels. These three levels reflect the same thing: *faith confronted with oppression*. However, each of the levels has its own distinctive way of confronting oppression with faith. Moreover, all the three levels continually interact and interrelate, in order to effect one continual flow of thought, and one’s overall theological process. Following is a discussion of the three levels of the practice of liberation theology, where liberating action takes place.

### **3.1.1 Popular Level of Liberation Theology**

This is the base level, where oral and symbolic liberation theology takes place. This level is made up of Christians in base communities and bible study groups, who, using their everyday speech, with its spontaneity, concreteness and feeling, read the Bible and compare it with the oppression they experience around them, and their longing for liberation in their own lives.

### **3.1.2 Pastoral Level Of Liberation Theology**

This is the intermediate level, where the ministers of the church carry out liberation theology. Through their pastoral assignment in word and deeds, the ministers shed the light of the liberating word of God on the reality of injustice, in a way that inspires the church to struggle for liberation. In their sermons and ministry they bring to the fore the experiences of the people at the base, and they also enrich their ministry with insights from professional theologians. In this and other ways, they practice liberation theology in their own right.

### **3.1.3 Professional Level of Liberation Theology**

This is the “highest” level, where professional liberation theologians pursue liberating action in a more sophisticated way, using systematic logic and socio-analytical and critical hermeneutical methods. This is elaborated in theological and research institutes. However, liberation theology does not emanate from professional theologians as such, but from them in communion with the people. Professional liberation theology is thus not an “ivory tower” theology, but one that articulates the experiences of the oppressed with biblical faith, striving to translate the demands of the gospel in confrontation with the sign of the times which emerge from the poor. Accordingly, the professional liberation theologian has one foot in centers of study, and the other foot in the community.

#### **Self-Assessment Exercise 4.1**

Fill in the blanks

1. Latin American liberation theologians commit themselves to ----- with the oppressed.
2. Liberation theologians deny the ineffectiveness of aid to the poor because no matter how well intentioned and helpful, such aid treats the poor as -----
3. The three levels at which liberation theology is practiced are -----, -----, and -----
4. Professional liberation theologians have one foot in centers of study, and the other foot in the -----.

### **3.2 The Practice Of Feminist Liberation Theology**

Feminist Liberation theology promotes an inclusive liberation theology of women in the light of the liberating message of the scriptures. It does this, also in recognition of the fact that more than half of the oppressed poor and hungry in the world are women, and children who depend on them. Feminist liberation theologians, therefore, practice liberation theology, based on the acknowledgement and analysis of their own experience of oppression as women in sexist, cultural and theological contexts. As a result, they cannot claim to engage in a value-material, detached stance of Latin American liberation theologians, who are themselves not poor or oppressed but “altruistically” make the cause of the poor and oppressed their own. Rather, as women who themselves experience oppression; they do their theology from the actual dimension of their own oppression. They come to theology from their living context as oppressed women.

Furthermore, feminist liberation theologians maintain that the bible and traditional Christian theology through the ages are inherently sexist, and as such, are not helpful to women’s consciousness. It is only when one comprehends how the Bible and traditional Christian theology have been used in the oppression of women that



one can prevent the misuse of the bible for further oppression.

In practicing biblical liberation theology, feminists insist that oppressive and destructive biblical traditions are not authoritative. They seek, rather, to rediscover and use those positive biblical traditions and interpretations that have transcended their oppressive cultural and patriarchal contexts. Furthermore, biblical texts that have been traditionally misinterpreted with a deliberate bias towards fostering the oppression of women are re-interpreted to show instead the truth of their liberating power.

Like their Latin American counterparts, feminist liberation theologians engage in an *option for the poor*, but specifically in an “*option for poor women*”. They see poor women as those excluded among the excluded. Thus women’s poverty and oppression becomes the norm of oppression and poverty. Women groups meet regularly as Christians of base communities, ministers or theologians, in order to discuss liberation in relation to the scriptures, from women’s angle.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise 4.2**

1. What is the specific concern of feminist liberation theologians?
2. How do feminist liberation theologians think that the Bible and traditional Christian theology have been misused?
3. How do feminist liberation theologians try to make sense of biblical texts that are used to foster the oppression of women?

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

In this unit, you learnt how Latin American professional liberation theologians use base groups/communities and pastoral agents to gain practical experience, and foster the practice of liberation theology. Conversely, you learnt that the base groups/communities and pastoral agents are equipped by the work of the professional theologians. Similarly, you learnt that feminist liberation theologians start from their own experiences, and from these experiences, they seek, either as individuals or groups, to liberate themselves from oppression in sexist cultural, biblical and theological contexts.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

The main points in this unit are:

1. Latin American liberation theologians vehemently denounce oppression, and commit themselves to suffering with the oppressed, as a means towards ending oppression.
2. For liberation theologians, the motivation to suffer with the oppressed is that in the oppressed, they see the face of the crucified Suffering Servant, Jesus Christ, who is to be raised to life again.
3. Aid to the poor, no matter how well intentioned and helpful, treats the poor as objects of charity, and not as an oppressed people. Similarly, development reforms largely end up in widening further the gap between the rich and the poor.
4. Liberating action (liberation) is a strategy that is able to change the social condition of the poor, by helping them to come to an understanding of their situation through the process of conscientisation.
5. Latin American liberation theologians have identified three levels where liberating action can take place: the popular (base community) level, the pastoral (church ministers) level and the professional (theologians) level. These three levels interact with one another.

6. Feminist liberation theologians practice liberation theology based on the acknowledgement and analysis of their own oppression as women in sexist, cultural and theological contexts.

7. Feminist liberation theologians maintain that the Bible and traditional Christian theology through the ages have been used in the oppression of women. Therefore theology has to be done in an inclusive way. Also, there have to be re-interpretations of oppressive biblical texts, a rediscovery and use of biblical texts that transcend oppression.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. Explain what liberating action means.
2. Describe the three levels of doing liberation theology
3. What is the approach of feminist liberation theologians to the Bible?

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## **UNIT 5      METHODS AND APPROACHES IN LATIN AMERICAN AND FEMINIST LIBERATION THEOLOGIES**

### **CONTENT**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Body
- 3.1 Methods and Approaches in Latin American Liberation  
Theology
  - 3.1.1 Socio-Analytical Mediation
  - 3.1.2 Hermeneutical Mediation
  - 3.1.3 Practical Mediation
- 3.2 Methods and Approaches in Feminist Liberation Theology
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References / Further Readings

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In the previous unit, we discussed the practice of Latin American and feminist liberation theologies. There we saw the importance of experience and action in the process of liberation. We also saw that liberation theology is not limited to the activities of the professional theologians, but encompasses the work of base communities, women groups and pastoral ministers. Professional liberation theologians, however, adopt certain methods and approaches, which are suitable to their work. You will be introduced to these methods and approaches in this unit. In a latter unit, themes employing the stated methods and approaches will be discussed.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

Explain the three mediations (socio-analytical, hermeneutical and practical) in Latin American liberation theology.

Discuss the three possible explanations (empirical, functional and dialectical) of poverty.

Discuss the feminist deconstruction-reconstruction approach to theology.

### **3.0 MAIN BODY**

#### **3.1 Methods and Approaches in Latin American Liberation Theology**

Latin American liberation theology is theoretically presented in three basic stages based on the pastoral method of *seeing, judging and acting*. This is translated as three mediations (stages): *Socio-analytical mediation, hermeneutical mediation, and practical mediation*.

##### **3.1.1 Socio-Analytical Mediation**

This is also called the historico-analytical mediation. It operates in the world of the oppressed. The major concern of the socio-analytical mediation is to find out why the poor are poor, and why the oppressed are oppressed. It searches for an understanding of the nature and causes of poverty and oppression. Knowledge of the material world of the oppressed is an indispensable stage or mediation in the process of

liberating the oppressed.

In Latin America, the oppressed are found in many strata of society. Accordingly, there are young children, juveniles, indigenous people, labourers, the underemployed and unemployed, the marginalized, persons living in overcrowded urban slums found on the peripheries of cities. The poor and oppressed are denied the infrastructure that would liberate them socio-economically. This denial is the fundamental expression of oppression as socio-economic poverty. But what are the causes? According to liberation theologians, there are three possible answers: *the empirical*, *the functional* and *the dialectical* explanation of poverty.

The *empirical* explanation of poverty sees poverty as vice. This attributes the causes of poverty to laziness, ignorance or human wickedness. The empirical explanation does not look at the collective or structural dimension of the problem. Moreover, it seeks to solve the problem of poverty through giving alms to the poor.

The *functional* explanation to poverty is a liberal explanation, which sees poverty as economic and social backwardness. Here it is believed that a development process, facilitated by foreign loans and technology, will make such poverty disappear. The poor have only to patiently wait and see things happen. This explanation, however, fails to identify the oppressive structure behind poverty, which makes the rich get richer and the poor, poorer.

In the *dialectical* explanation, poverty is seen as oppression, which stems from the way society organizes itself. Here the society structures itself in such a way that some are exploited while some are excluded by others. The only way out of this oppressive situation is to provide an alternative structure, which can bring about a radical transformation of the bases of the economic and social systems. The dialectical explanation is also a historical explanation, for it focuses on poverty as the end product of a long process of plunder and social marginalization. It also focuses on the efforts at liberation. From an awareness of their situation, the poor begin to react, resist and fight oppression. They struggle to get themselves free, and conscious of their history, are determined to effect a change in their history.

It has to be added that in socio-analytical mediation, the poor are not only those who are economically poor. The poor include blacks who are oppressed on the basis of race, indigenous Latin Americas oppressed on the basis of ethnicity and women oppressed on the basis of gender. The poor are the subjected and the discriminated against, on whatever basis. However, a distinction still has to be made between those who are oppressed on the basis of economic infrastructure, and other oppressed groups. The economically poor are all in an oppressed class apart. They cut across race, tribe and gender. Possibilities, however, exist for those in other oppressed groups to become themselves oppressors even within their oppressed group, if they have economic power.

### **3.1.2 Hermeneutical Mediation**

This methodological approach follows upon the socio-analytical mediation. Here the liberation theologian asks: what has the word of God to say about the concrete situation of the poor and oppressed. Here the scriptures become a source of light and inspiration in being and challenging the weight of poverty and oppression. It is a biblical hermeneutics of liberation.

In the biblical hermeneutics of liberation, the interpreter draws meaning and inspiration from many biblical themes that are relevant to the concrete situation of the poor and the oppressed, such as: God as the advocate of the oppressed, the kingdom given to the poor, the church as a community of sharing of goods. In this perspective, liberative hermeneutics searches for textual (biblical) meaning in relation to its practical meaning. In this way, liberative hermeneutics tries to discover and activate the transforming energy of the scriptures, in a way that is completely life giving, and leads to a personal conversion. Liberation hermeneutics takes as very important, the socio-historical context of relevant biblical texts. This is to enable the interpreter appropriately relate the biblical situation to the contemporary situation of the poor and oppressed.

### **3.1.3 Practical Mediation**

The entire process of liberation theology, from the socio-analytical or historical mediation, through the hermeneutical liberation, leads to practical mediation or action: action for justice, transformation, conversion, renewal and love. The action depends on one's level as a liberation theologian, whether popular (base), pastoral or professional. At these different levels, which were discussed in no. 3.1 of the last unit, liberation theology seeks to establish a collective action, which is lawful, reasonable and prudent. A program for action is drawn up after certain considerations, which include strategy and tactics, have been concluded. An action program does not underestimate resistance and opposition. The liberation theologian is well aware of the forces that seek at all costs to maintain the *status quo*. Furthermore, in determining strategy and tactics, liberation theology favours nonviolent methods, which include dialogue, persuasion, moral pressure, public exposure, passive resistance, marches, strikes, and street demonstrations. Recourse to physical force is not recommended, except in extreme and specific cases, after all other options have failed, and having carefully weighed all the consequences. Here, wisdom, prudence and experience are brought to bear on the theologizing process.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise 5.1**

1. Name the three stages of mediation in Latin American liberation theology.
2. In whose world does socio-analytical mediation operate?
3. Which explanation of poverty is most suited to liberation theology?
4. What is the central concern in hermeneutical mediation?

## **3.2 Methods and Approaches in Feminist Liberation Theology**

Feminist liberation theology has as starting point, the specific experience of women in their context as oppressed women. It, therefore, declares that its theological method cannot be based on a supposed objectivity and neutrality of traditional theology. Feminist liberation theology thus adopts a feminist liberation approach. This approach developed by Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza is: *“A feminist hermeneutics that shares in the critical methods and impulses of historical scholarship on the one hand and in the theological goals of liberation theologies on the other hand....Feminist theology as a critical theology of liberation therefore seeks to develop not only a textual-biblical hermeneutics of liberation. It*

*challenges biblical studies as “objective” textual interpretation and reconstruction fundamentally”.*

This feminist liberation method in theology, therefore, is one that is focused on an analysis, change and destruction of patriarchy in theological reflection, within the Christian churches and society, and also on analyzing, rejecting and reinterpreting women’s oppression in the bible. It is believed that by analyzing women’s oppression in society, theology, Christianity in general, as well as in the bible, socio-historical and religious awareness is created. It is this awareness that paves the way for the conversion of the oppressors. Feminist liberation theologians thus generally identify three tasks: first, an *analysis of past oppressions*; second, a *search for women’s contribution and history* which have been suppressed; third, a *reinterpretation of the tradition* in relation to contemporary experiences of women. These three tasks are referred to as a process of *deconstruction–reconstruction*. Feminist theological heritage is, therefore not only concerned with a history of oppression of women, but with a history of liberation. The method is such that highlights women’s struggle for liberation historically, theologically and sociologically. In this way, feminist liberation theology does what other theologies do not do: including women and so liberating women. In liberating and empowering women, feminist liberation theologians believe that they liberate and empower the entire humanity.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise 5.2**

1. What is the starting point in the methodology of feminist liberation theology?
2. What are the three tasks of feminist liberation theology?
3. What do feminists refer to as deconstruction-reconstruction?

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

In this unit you have learnt how Latin American liberation theologians have adapted the pastoral method of seeing, judging and acting to suit their theological method. These have translated into socio-analytic mediation, hermeneutical mediation and practical mediation. You have also learnt how feminist liberation theologians, through their method of social and historical analyses, focus on the liberation of women through a destruction of patriarchy in theological reflections, within the Christian community, and in the larger society. They do this in a bid to reconstruct a more inclusive human heritage.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

The main points in this unit include the following:

1. Latin American liberation theology is done following a process of socio-analytical mediation, hermeneutical mediation and practical mediation.
2. The major concern of the socio-analytical mediation is to explain, using socio-analytical methods, why the poor are poor, and why the oppressed are oppressed.
3. In the hermeneutical mediation, the scriptures become a source of light and inspiration in challenging the weight of poverty and oppression, towards liberation.
4. Practical mediation provides a program of action for attaining liberation, justice, transformation, conversion, renewal and love.
5. The feminist liberation method focuses on three tasks: first, an analysis of past oppressions; second, a search for women’s

contributions and history which have been suppressed; third, a re-interpretation of the tradition in relation to contemporary experiences of women.

6. The three tasks of feminist liberation theology is referred to as a process of deconstruction—reconstruction.

### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. What is socio-analytical mediation?
2. Explain the dialectical explanation of poverty.
3. What is the place of physical force in practical mediation?
4. Why do feminist liberation theologians highlight women's struggle for liberation historically, theologically and sociologically?

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**MODULE 2****BIBLICAL BASIS OF A THEOLOGY LIBERATION**

- Unit 1 Israel and liberation: the exodus experience
- Unit 2 Israelite prophets and liberation
- Unit 3 Jesus Christ and liberation
- Unit 4 Liberation and the proclamation of the Kingdom of God
- Unit 5 Liberation, justice and salvation

**UNIT 1 ISRAEL AND LIBERATION: THE EXODUS EXPERIENCE****CONTENT**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Body
  - 3.1 Key Moments in the Exodus Event
    - 3.1.1 Israel's Cry under Bondage (Exod 2:23-25)
    - 3.1.2 The Call of Moses (Exod 4:1-4:17)
    - 3.1.3 The Ten Plagues (Exod 7:14-11:10; 12:28-42)
    - 3.1.4 The Deliverance at the Red Sea (Exod 13:17-14:31)
  - 3.2 Relevance of the Exodus Event for Liberation Theology
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References / Further Readings

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In the previous module you were introduced to Latin American and feminist liberation theologies. Beginning from the first unit of this second module, you are going to study the biblical basis of liberation theologies. The biblical basis is basically a reflection on biblical texts, which portray the human need for liberation, and the role of God as liberator, directly or through God's agents. In this unit for example, focus will be on the Israelite definitive experience of liberation from slavery in Egypt, and the relevance of that experience for liberation theology today.

**2.0 OBJECTIVES**

- After studying this unit, you should be able to
- Paint a picture of Israel's experience of oppression in Egypt.
- Describe the different stages of interventions towards Israel's liberation.
- Narrate the story of Israel's moment of liberation.
- Explain the relevance of Israel's liberation from Egypt for liberation theology

**3.0 MAIN BODY****3.1 Key Moments in the Exodus Event**

The key moments in the exodus event include the following: Israel's cry under bondage (Exod 2: 23 –25); The call of Moses (Exod 3:1-4:17); The ten plagues (Exod 7:14-11:10; 12:28-42) and the deliverance at the Red Sea (Exod 13:17-14:13)

**3.1.1 Israel's Cry under Bondage (Exod 2:23-25)**

The Israelites had been a privileged and prosperous people in Egypt as a result of the influence of Joseph. But when "a new king arose over Egypt, who did not



know Joseph”, (Exod 1:8), the Israelites became victims of a new form of political oppression from the Egyptians. The new king was afraid that the Israelites would become more numerous and so more powerful than the Egyptians (Exod 1:9). He was also afraid that the Israelites could join forces with other nations to fight against the Egyptians (Exod 1:10). To curb such possibilities, the Israelites were treated to forced labor, ruthlessness, and orders to kill their newborn baby boys (Exod 1:11-22). It was on account of this oppression that the Israelites cried out to God for help, and God heard their cry.

### **3.1.2 The Call of Moses (Exod 4:1-4:17)**

Moses became aware of his vocation as the deliverer of the people of Israel in Egypt through a special encounter he had with God in the burning bush. According to the narrative tradition, it was while Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, priest of Midian, on mount Horeb, that Moses saw a burning bush. He looked more closely, and noticed that while the flame blazed, the bush was not burned up. But from the bush God called Moses, asking him to remove his sandals, because the spot he stood on was holy ground. God then made a self-revelation to Moses as being the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Then God declared to Moses the intention to deliver the people of Israel from slavery through him: I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt. I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey... . The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt (Exod 3:7-10 NRSV).

### **3.1.3 The Ten Plagues (Exod 7:14 – 11:10; 12:28-42)**

Moses and Aaron had one clear message of liberation from God for the Egyptian Pharaoh: “Let my son (Israel) go that he may worship me” (Exod 4:23, also 5:1) Pharaoh, however, refused to let Israel go. He answered: “who is the Lord that I should heed him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and I will not let Israel go” (Exod 5:2). Rather than liberate them, Pharaoh added more burdens on the Israelites: “let heavier work be laid on them; then they will labor at it and pay no attention to deceptive words” (Exod 5:9).

The Israelites complained to Pharaoh: “why do you treat your servants like this? No straw is given to your servants, yet they say to us, ‘make bricks!’ Look how your servants are beaten! You are unjust to your own people” But Pharaoh replied: “You are lazy, lazy; that is why you say ‘Let us go and sacrifice to the Lord’ (Exod 5:15-17).

Despite Pharaoh’s hardening of heart, God assured the Israelites: “I am the Lord, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians” (Exod 6:6-7).

As a result of Pharaoh’s refusal to liberate the Israelites, God struck Egypt with ten plagues. The plagues were intended to persuade or force Pharaoh to change his mind and let Israel go. In the first plague, Moses

used his staff and struck the water in the Nile, and it turned into blood.

In the second plague, everything and everywhere in the whole country of Egypt was swarmed with frogs. In the third plague, all the dust of the land of Egypt turned into gnats, and came on both humans and animals. In the fourth plague, Egypt was filled with a swarm of flies. In the fifth plague, all the livestock of the Egyptians died from a pestilence, while that of the Israelites was not affected. In the sixth plague, soot thrown into the air became fine dust and caused festering boils on humans and animals. In the seventh plague, thunder and hail with flashing fire came upon the entire land of Egypt, except where the Israelites lived. In the eighth plague, there were ravaging locusts all over the land of Egypt. In the ninth plague, there was darkness over the land of Egypt for three days, except where the Israelites lived.

After this ninth plague, Pharaoh conceded to Moses: “Go, worship the Lord. Only your flocks and your herds shall remain behind. Even your children may go with you”. Moses, however, insisted on having their livestock with them but Pharaoh refused to allow them to leave with their livestock (Exod 10:24-26). This hardening of Pharaoh’s heart paved the way for the tenth and final plague. In the tenth plague, all the firstborn, human and livestock in the land of Egypt, including that of the family of Pharaoh, died at midnight. At this, Pharaoh was forced to liberate the Israelites from slavery to the Egyptians. He said to Moses and Aaron: “Rise up, go away from my people, both you and the Israelites! Go, worship the Lord, as you said. Take your flocks and your herds, as you said, and be gone. And bring a blessing on me too!” (Exod 12:31-31).

### **3.1.4 The Deliverance at The Red Sea (Exod 13:17-14 :31)**

The Israelites instituted as “Passover” the event of the night in which the Egyptian firstborn were struck dead while theirs were passed over. It was a night to be remembered forever. In that night, each Israelite family was instructed to slaughter a lamb, and smear the two doorposts and the lintel of their houses with the blood of the lamb. According to Moses and Aaron, “The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt” (Exod 12:13). They were to roast and hurriedly eat the lamb with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, in the same night.

Thereafter, the Israelites left Egypt moving towards the Red Sea. They could not cross the sea. Moreover, they panicked when they realized that Pharaoh’s heart was once more hardened, and he sent out his army to pursue and bring back the Israelites. (Exod 14: 5-12). Moses, however, performed God’s ultimate act of liberation for the Israelites. He stretched out his hand over the sea, and the water was divided into two, turning the sea into dry land, and the Israelites passed through dry land. In the meantime, the Egyptian army went into the divided sea in pursuit of the Israelites. But Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the water returned and drowned the Egyptians. This spectacular act of God's deliverance assured the Israelites of God's perpetual care and love for them, the poor, oppressed, enslaved and unjustly treated. They were led into freedom, through the wilderness, and into the land of Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey!

### **Self-Assessment Exercise 1.1**

1. Why did the Israelites in Egypt become victims of a new form of political oppression?
2. Mention the specific reason why God called Moses.

3. What was the specific message of Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh?
4. Why were the ten plagues on Egypt necessary?
5. Mention God's ultimate act of liberation for the Israelites.

### **3.2 Relevance of the Exodus Event for Liberation Theology**

For liberation theologians, the exodus event is the most important liberative act of God in the Old Testament. According to Segundo (1983) "In no other portion of Scripture does God the liberator reveal himself in such close connection with the political plane of human existence". Similarly, McGovern (1983) notes that, "the exodus, especially, provides liberation theology with a striking paradigm of God's liberating power. The exodus out of Egypt molded the consciousness of the people of Israel and revealed God's power to them. It showed that God's action takes place in history and *as* history, and it showed the political character of this history, for it embraced the total life of the people." Accordingly, McGovern concludes that since in the exodus, God liberated the Israelites physically from the bondage of Egypt, then the exodus speaks to the oppressed today that God still works to liberate the oppressed. Thus, liberation theologians stress that the liberation from Egypt was a political act of God in history. It is an act of God's self-revelation as the God who is on the side of the oppressed. As a historical reality, the exodus event is seen as a model for Christian praxis today, whereby the Christian can talk of God as a liberator. The believer can count on the presence and power of God to come to the aid of the oppressed poor.

The figure of Moses in the exodus event as one through whom God revealed his plan of liberation, through whom God conscientized the people on their need for liberation and through whom God effected his act of liberation of the Israelites, is also an important figure in liberation theology. Through Moses, an Israelite leader, God acted in history and brought liberation to his people. Moses spoke on behalf of God's people to a hardened ruler, Pharaoh. He spoke the mind of God both to Pharaoh and to the Israelites. Pharaoh continued to harden his heart, yet Moses did not give up, until God accomplished through Moses' ministration, the ultimate act of liberation. The figure of Moses reminds liberation theologians that God needs human agents in carrying out his act of liberation.

Furthermore, liberation theologians draw attention to the violence in the exodus event, noting that on account of the plagues and the final drowning of Pharaoh's army in the sea, it is not out of place for God to use violent means to effect the liberation of the oppressed, if that is demanded by the extreme hardness of heart of the oppressor. Liberation theologians, therefore, see the exodus event as a pattern of liberation of all the peoples of the earth. The peoples of all the earth belong to God; all peoples are God's people, and so God seeks to liberate all who are under bondage, who cry to him for deliverance. As the cry of the oppressed Israelites to God for help, (Exod 2:23-25) became a turning point in their fortune, moving God to act on their behalf, so also the cry of today's oppressed to God for help, marks a turning point in their journey to liberation. Liberation theologians are with the poor and oppressed people as they cry out to God against their oppression and unjust treatment. Like Moses, they speak on behalf of the people and guide the people to attain their liberation.

## Self-Assessment Exercise 1.2

(Fill in the blanks)

1. For liberation theologians, the exodus event is -----
2. The exodus event means that even today God still works -----
3. The liberation from Egypt was a political act of God -----
4. Through Moses, an Israelite leader, God -----

### 4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, we have discussed the exodus event from a biblical perspective, noting some key moments in the event. As you now know, these key moments include: Israel's cry under bondage; the call of Moses; the ten plagues and the deliverance at the Red Sea. A theological reflection on all these moments does give liberation theologians reasons to conclude that the message of the exodus event is relevant also to liberation theology today.

### 5.0 SUMMARY

The main points in this unit are as follows:

1. Four key movements are identified in the exodus event:
  - a) Israel's cry under bondage
  - b) The call of Moses
  - c) The ten plagues
  - d) The deliverance at the red sea
2. The Israelites cried out to God for help, because they were victims of a new form of oppression from the Egyptians.
3. God called Moses and sent him to pharaoh, to persuade Pharaoh to let the Israelites leave Egypt.
4. The ten plagues were necessitated by Pharaoh's hardening of heart against the Israelites leaving Egypt.
5. The ten plagues are:
  - a) The Nile water turned into blood
  - b) The swarm of frogs
  - c) The gnats
  - d) The swarm of flies
  - e) The deadly pestilence
  - f) The festering boils
  - g) Thunder and hail with fire
  - h) The ravaging locusts
  - i) Darkness
  - j) The death of the firstborn
6. The Passover night was one in which the Egyptian firstborn were struck dead, while those of the Israelites were passed over, an account of the blood of the lamb smeared on the two door posts and on the lintel of the houses of the Israelites.
7. God's ultimate act of liberation for the Israelites was performed at the Red Sea with the division of the sea into two such that the Israelites passed through it, but the Egyptian army was drowned in it.
8. The exodus event shows that since through Moses, God liberated his oppressed people in history from bondage, God still works today to liberate the oppressed through the liberative acts of liberation theologians.

**6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT (TMA)**

1. Mention the reasons why Pharaoh oppressed the Israelites in Egypt.
2. Enumerate the ten plagues of Egypt.
3. How was the Israelite frustration at their inability to cross the Red Sea overcome?
4. How relevant is the figure of Moses to liberation theologians?

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**UNIT 2 ISRAELITE PROPHETS AND LIBERATION****CONTENT**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Body
  - 3.1 Prophetic Utterances on Liberation
    - 3.1.1 Amos
    - 3.1.2 Hosea
    - 3.1.3 Isaiah
    - 3.1.4 Jeremiah
    - 3.1.5 Ezekiel
  - 3.2 Significance of the Prophetic Utterances for Liberation Theology
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References / Further Readings

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

You may be aware that in popular parlance, the word “prophet” is usually associated primarily with something like clairvoyance, that is the ability to predict future events and happenings. While the function of clairvoyance was associated with prophecy in the old testament, as is evident in the use of the word ‘seer’ (I Sam 9:9) for the prophet, the most common Old Testament term for the prophet is *nabi*, a word which is related to an Akkadian root with the meaning “to call, to commission”, translated by the Greek Septuagint as *prophētēs* (meaning “spokesperson”. The English word “prophet”, therefore, is from the Greek, with the original meaning of “spokesperson.” This meaning captures the real function of prophets in the Old Testament. They were chosen by God to speak on God’s behalf, or deliver messages in God’s name.

In this unit, the above-stated function of the prophet will be made manifest in the texts which reveal the various utterances of the prophets on issues that ponder on liberation themes. In these texts, the prophets will be rightly seen as people who spoke on behalf of God, urging socio-economic and political justice, etc., for the oppressed and the poor, in order to liberate them from their condition. The utterances of the prophets will, later on, be reflected on in the context of the theology of liberation.

**2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

Identify some of the prophetic utterances of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel on issues of justice and liberation.

Link the prophetic utterances on liberation in the bible to the theology of liberation today.

**3.0 MAIN BODY****3.1 Prophetic Utterances on Social Justice and Liberation**

Israelite prophets based much on their knowledge of God and God’s will on their

knowledge of the *torah* or law, which they regarded as revealed by God through Moses. The *torah* lays a good legal foundation for future prophetic utterances on social justice and liberation of the oppressed. In Exodus 22:21-23, for example, the Israelites law states:

You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry.

Similarly, Deuteronomy 24:14-15 legislates:

You shall not withhold the wages of poor and needy laborers, whether other Israelites or aliens who reside in your land in one of your towns. You shall pay them their wages daily before sunset, because they are poor and their livelihood depends on them; otherwise they might cry to the Lord against you, and you would incur guilt.

In this legislation, God is portrayed as being on the side of the poor and the oppressed. God acts in justice on their behalf, and would surely liberate them when they cry to God. Prophetic utterances on social justice and liberation tow the same line as what is contained in the *torah*. In this unit, the utterances of five prophets (Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel) will be considered. Their utterances, normally set in their contemporary in socio-political contexts, give a clue to prophetic thinking on liberation.

### 3.1.1 Amos

Amos, an eighth century B.C. shepherd turned prophet, was one of the most vocal prophets who had a great impact on the people of the northern kingdom of Israel owing to his preaching on social justice, which was inspired by the suffering and oppression that he saw around him. Seeing the economic injustice meted out to the poor, Amos prophesied:

Thus says the Lord, for three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and push the afflicted out of the way (2:6-7).

In view of the oppression, violence and robbery he witnessed against the people by the mighty, Amos said:

Proclaim to the strongholds in Ashdod, and to the strongholds in the land of Egypt, and say, assemble yourselves on Mount Samaria, and see what great tumults are within it, and what oppressions are in its midst. They do not know how to do right, says the Lord, those who store up violence and robbery in their strongholds. Therefore thus says the Lord God: An adversary shall surround the land, and strip you of your defence; and your stronghold shall be plundered (3:9-11).

Amos prophesied against those who trampled upon justice, oppressed the truthful, and cheated the poor to ensure their own comfort:

Ah, you that turn justice to wormwood, and bring righteousness to the ground.... They hate the one who reprieves in the gate, and they abhor the one who speaks the truth. Therefore because you trample on the poor and take from them levies of grain, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not live in them; you have

planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine” (5:7,10-11).

Against those who received bribes in order to pervert justice and condemn the righteous poor, Amos said:

For I know how many are your transgressions, and how great are your sins. You who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and push aside the needy in the gate (5:12).

Amos castigated the comfortable rich who care no less about the condition of the poor except their luxury:

Alas for those who lie on beds of ivory, and lounge on their couches, and eat lambs from flock, and calves from the stall; who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp, and like David improvise on instruments of music; who drink wine from bowls, and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruins of Joseph! Therefore they shall now be the first to go into exile, and the revelry of the loungers shall pass away (6:4-7).

He affirms that God is aware of the greedy, extortionist activities of those who ruin the poor and exploit the needy:

Hear this you that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land, saying, ‘when will the new moon be over so that we may sell grain; and the Sabbath, so that we may offer wheat for sale? We will make the ephah small and the shekel great, and practice deceit with false balances, buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling the sweepings of the wheat? The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob: Surely I will never forget any of their deeds” (8:4-7).

### **3.1.2 Hosea**

Hosea was another prophet of the Israelite northern kingdom, and a younger contemporary of Amos in the mid –8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Hosea preached in a context of political turmoil in the Northern Kingdom, marked by self-interest among the ruling class, and disillusionment among the people. Hosea, like Amos, spoke out against the injustice and oppression in the land, but with a message of hope if there was repentance, in view of God’s forgiving love. Thus Hosea takes a stand against those who indulge in doing all kinds of evil, including incessant bloodshed:

Hear the word of the Lord, O people of Israel; for the Lord has an indictment against the inhabitants of the land. There is not faithfulness or loyalty, and no knowledge of God in the land. Swearing, lying, and murder, and stealing and adultery break out; bloodshed follows bloodshed. Therefore the land mourns, and all who live in it languish; together with the wild animals and the birds of the air, even the fish of the sea are perishing” (4:1-3).

He pronounces a judgment against all those who collude in doing evil, and are caught up in immoral revelry.

But they do not consider that I remember all their wickedness. Now their deeds surround them, they are before my face. By their wickedness they make the king glad, and the officials by their treachery. They are all adulterers; they are like a heated oven, whose baker does not need to stir the fire, from the kneading of their dough until it is leavened. On the day of our king the officials became sick with the heat of wine; he stretched out his hand with mockers. For they are kindled like an oven, their



heart burns within them; all night their anger smolders; in the morning it blazes like a flaming fire. All of them are hot as an oven, and they devour their rulers. All their kings have fallen; none of them calls upon me (7:2-7).

Yet Hosea pleads that the unjust oppressors should repent and so experience God's forgiveness and love:

Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. Take words with you and return to the Lord; say to him, 'Take away our guilt; accept that which is good, and we will offer the fruit of our lips. Assyria shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses; we will say no more, 'our God', to the work of our hands. In you the orphan finds mercy. I will heal their disloyalty; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them (14:1-4).

### **3.1.3 Isaiah**

Isaiah's figure as a prophet was so imposing, that although he carried out his prophetic activity between 740-701 BC, he inspired a tradition of prophetic reflection, preaching and writing in a school which was associated with his spirit and name that spanned for about two hundred years. Isaiah preached to the leaders and peoples of both the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel, especially at a time when power politics with its inherent pride, greed, selfishness and lust for wealth was at its peak, resulting in the exploitation and oppression of the poor. He proclaimed a message of doom for such people, although with the hope that a repentant remnant would be saved. It is from this remnant, Isaiah prophesied, that the ideal figure of a righteous ruler would emerge and restore Israel's fortune, liberating Israel from her ugly and oppressive past.

Thus, Isaiah chides oppressive rulers who take delight in religious ceremonies, but engage in evil and murder:

Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom! Listen to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah! What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls; or of lambs, or of goats. When you come to appear before me, who asked this from your hand? Trample my courts no more; bringing offerings is futile; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and calling of convocation – I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity. Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them. When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow (1:10-17).

Isaiah lays further accusations on the doorsteps of the rulers of the people, for their unwonted acts against the poor.

The Lord rises to argue his case; he stands to judge the peoples. The Lord enters into judgment with the elders and princes of his people: It is you who have devoured the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your

houses. What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor? Says the Lord God of hosts (3:13-15).

He expresses God's disappointment over those who pervert justice:

For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the

people of Judah are his pleasant planting; he expected justice, but

saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry! (5:7).

He warns the oppressors of an impending day of punishment:

Ah, you who make iniquitous decrees, who write oppressive statutes, to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right, that widows may be your spoil, and that you may make the orphans your prey! What will you do on the day of punishment, in the calamity that will come from far away? To whom will you flee for help, and where will you leave your wealth, so as not to crouch among the prisoners or fall among the slain? (10:1-4).

In contrast to his contemporary oppressive rulers, Isaiah preaches on the emergence of a messianic ruler, who would be a model of justice and righteousness. This he does, providing the ruling class of his time with the figure of a divinely accepted ideal king.

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named wonderful Counselor, mighty God; everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this (9:6-7).

Again, about the ideal messianic ruler, Isaiah proclaims:

A shoot shall come out of the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins" (11:1-5).

Isaiah looks forward to a time of liberation for the oppressed, the poor and the suffering:

Thus says the Lord: In a time of favor I have answered you, on a day of salvation I have helped you; I have kept you and given you as a covenant to the people, to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritage; saying to the prisoners, 'Come out', to those who are in darkness, 'Show yourselves'. They shall feed along the ways, on all the bare heights shall be their pasture; they shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them down, for he who has pity on

them will guide them (49:8-10).

He knows that such liberation is good news to the oppressed. Thus: The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me, he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn (61:1-2).

### **3.1.4 Jeremiah**

Jeremiah, from the northern tribe of Benjamin, was another influential Israelite prophet, whose ministry in Jerusalem in the southern kingdom, extended to about forty or more years (ca. 627-587/582 BC). His influence extended to later generations, who collected, reworked and expanded his prophetic oracles. Jeremiah prophesied beginning from the period of the political reforms of Josiah, king of Judah, and also during the reign of his successors, which witnessed the revolt of these successive Israelite kings (Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiakin, Zedekiah) against the dominating neighboring powers of Egypt and Babylon. This led to the fall of the southern kingdom of Judah in the hands of the Babylonians in July 587 BC, when Jerusalem was destroyed and the people taken into exile. This happened 135 years after Assyria's captivity of the northern kingdom in 722 BC.

Jeremiah's prophetic messages during the period of Judah's political crises were unheeded by the rulers. The rulers refused to heed the prophetic messages and warnings because they falsely believed strongly that under no condition would God's promises concerning the permanence of the throne of David and temple of Jerusalem (see 7:1-4, 8-11) be affected. This false belief led them to lots of imprudent, oppressive acts against the people, in their search for independence from

Babylon. Such independence was regarded as necessary so that the rulers would continue to enjoy their luxurious lifestyle even at the expense of the people. Jeremiah thus upbraids the people for acting unjustly, and refusing to repent:

Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, look around and take note! Search its squares and see if you can find one person who acts justly and seeks truth, so that I may pardon Jerusalem. Although they say, 'As the Lord lives,' yet they swear falsely. O Lord, do your eyes not look for truth? You have struck them, but they felt no anguish; you have consumed them, but they refused to take correction. They have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to turn back (5: 1-3).

But if they repent and act justly, God will dwell with them:

For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors forever and ever (7:5-7).

They should strive to act justly, like God:

Thus says the Lord: Do not let the wise boast in their wisdom, do not let the mighty boast in their might, do not let the wealthy boast in their wealth; but let them boast in this, that they understand and know me, that I am the Lord; I act with steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, says the Lord (11:23-24).

Jeremiah continues to warn that the king should do justice:

To the house of the king of Judah say: Hear the word of the Lord, O house of David! Thus says the Lord: Execute justice in the morning, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed, or else my wrath will go forth like fire, and burn, with no one to quench it, because of your evil doings (21:11-12).

He lampoons rulers who are unjust, do not imitate those who work for justice, do not know God as God of the poor, but compete with rulers of other nations in luxurious living:

Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice; who makes his neighbors work for nothing, and does not give their wages; who says; 'I will build myself a spacious house with large upper rooms', and who cuts out windows for it, paneling it with cedar, and painting it with vermilion. Are you king because you compete in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me? Says the Lord. But your eyes and heart are only on your dishonest gain, for shedding innocent blood, and for practicing oppression and violence (22:13-17).

It was Jeremiah's concern that all Hebrew slaves be liberated. But after this happened, those who were set free were once more enslaved. Jeremiah, therefore, prophesied doom for those who enslaved others:

Therefore, thus says the Lord; You have not obeyed me by granting a release to your neighbors and friends; I am going to grant a release to you, says the Lord - a release to the sword, to pestilence, and to famine. I will make you a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth (34:17).

### **3.1.5 Ezekiel**

The people who were once liberated from slavery in Egypt by God were again taken into slavery in exile in Babylon, owing to the stubbornness and greed of their leaders, who would not listen to the voice of God, but continued to act unjustly and oppressively, in a spirit of revolt and with a hunger for independence. Not only were the people captured and exiled, some were killed, and Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed and burnt by fire (2 Kings 25:8-11, 18-21; Jer 52:12-14; 24-27). It was in this context that Ezekiel, a priest captured to Babylon in 597 BC, uttered his prophecies of doom, and later of liberation from doom.

Ezekiel prophesied individual retribution: life for the righteous, but death for the unrighteous and oppressors. He discerned what righteousness really means:

If a man is righteous and does what is lawful and right ... does not oppress anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge, commits no robbery, gives his bread to the hungry and does not take advance or accrued interest, withholds his hands

from iniquity, executes true justice between contending parties, follows my statutes, and is careful to observe my ordinances, acting faithfully – such a one is righteous; he shall surely live, says the Lord God.

If he has a son who is violent, a shedder of blood, who does any of these things (though his father does none of them), who eats upon the mountains, defiles his neighbor's wife, oppresses the poor and needy, commits robbery, does not restore the pledge, lifts up his eyes to the idols, commits abomination, takes advance or accrued interest; shall he then live? He shall not. He has done all these abominable things; he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon himself (18:5-13).

Ezekiel predicts doom for corrupt officials who defile the city with their iniquities: In you, they take bribes to shed blood; you take both advance interest and accrued interest, and make gain of your neighbors by extortion; and you have forgotten me, says the Lord God. See I strike my hands together at the dishonest gain you have made, and at the blood that has been shed within you. Can your courage endure or can your hands remain strong in the days when I shall deal with you? I the Lord have spoken, and I will do it. I will scatter you among the nations and disperse you through the countries and I will purge your filthiness out of you. (22:12 – 15).

Ezekiel blames the exile on the oppressive attitude of the people: The people of the land have practiced extortion and committed robbery; they have oppressed the poor and the needy, and have extorted from the alien without redress. And I sought for anyone among them who would repair the wall and stand in the breach before me on behalf of the land, so that I will not destroy it but I found no one. Therefore I have poured out my indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath; I have returned their conduct upon their heads, says the Lord (22:29 – 31).

Yet Ezekiel prophesies that God will relent, change things around, and make them return from exile, liberating them, for the sake of his holy name:

I will sanctify my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them; and the nations shall know that I am the Lord, says the Lord God, when through you I display my holiness before their eyes. I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. Then you shall live in the land that I

gave to your ancestors; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God (36:23 – 28).

### **Self-Assessment Exercise 2.1**

1. Mention the word that captures the real function of prophets in the Old Testament.
2. What inspired Amos to preach on social justice in the northern kingdom of Israel?
3. What did Isaiah prophesy as being the role of the ideal righteous ruler, who would emerge in Israel?
4. Why did the rulers refuse to heed the prophetic messages and warnings of Jeremiah?
5. On what account, according to Ezekiel, will God relent, change things around, and bring the Israelites back from exile?

### **3.2 Relevance of Israelite Prophetic Utterances on Justice and Liberation, to Liberation Theology**

The prophetic utterances on justice and liberation for the poor and the oppressed, have been a source of inspiration to liberation theologians. The prophets urged a break from Israel's past sins which were unacceptable to God, and whose consequence was leading the people to doom. Liberation means that the oppressors and the unjust should be converted, stop their evil acts, and so liberate the oppressed. Consequently, they too and the whole land will experience God's liberative action from doom.

The prophets were concerned for the present. They were concerned about the history that was evolving before them. Their liberative message, set therefore in a historical context, was realizable also within history. It is this that characterizes the prophetic message as eschatological, tending towards, and "opening to the future". According to Gutierrez, (1990:15) "the action of Yahweh in history, and at the end of history, are inseparable". Therefore, God is the liberator in history, and God's future salvation/liberation is already in course. Knowing God, therefore, is to know him as the God of salvation. God's liberation leads to peace and wellbeing.

To arrive at authentic peace and wellbeing, however, the prophets insisted on the practice of righteousness. One cannot be righteous if one does not practice justice, and thus act like God. According to Gutierrez (1990:97), righteousness, which leads to peace "presupposes the defense of the rights of the poor, punishment of the oppressors, a life free from the fear of being enslaved by others, the liberation of the oppressed". Thus one cannot act justly in the view of the prophets, if one is oppressing the poor. This prophetic message goes down to the core of liberation theology today. In the spirit of the prophets, liberation theologians, according to Boff and Boff (1993:93), "denounce mechanisms that generate oppression. They seek out hidden interests sheltering behind the plans of ruling powers. They proclaim the ideal of a society of equals through words and deeds. They never compromise with the truth". Like the prophets, Liberation theologians deal with issues that affect the whole of society.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise 2.2**

(Fill in the blanks)

1. In order to arrive at authentic peace and well being, the prophets

2. In the spirit of the prophets, liberation theologians:

a. -----

b. -----

c. -----

d. -----

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit you have entered into the world of prophets Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. You have seen how these prophets reacted to the oppression in their socio-political and religious contexts; how they sought to liberate the oppressed, and how they remained as the conscience of the people. They spoke fearlessly on behalf of God, in a bid to ensure a more just society. Liberation theologians doing liberation theology from different perspectives are inspired by the writings of the prophets, and like them, seek to bring about the liberation of the oppressed by insisting on God's word of salvation for all.

#### 5.0 SUMMARY

The major points in this unit are:

1. Amos was inspired in his preaching on account of the suffering and oppression, which he saw around him.
2. Hosea spoke out against the injustice and oppression in the land, with a message of hope if there was repentance.
3. Isaiah preached to the leaders and peoples of both the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel, especially at a time when power politics with its inherent pride, greed, selfishness and lust for wealth was at its peak, resulting in the exploitation and oppression of the majority poor. He proclaimed a message of doom for such people, although with the hope that a repentant remnant would be saved.
4. Jeremiah's prophetic messages during the period of Judah's political crises were unheeded by the rulers. This was because they falsely believed strongly that under no condition would God's promises concerning the permanence of the throne of David and the temple of Jerusalem be affected.
5. Ezekiel prophesied individual retribution; life for the righteous, but death for the unrighteous and oppressors.
6. The prophetic utterances on justice and liberation for the poor and the oppressed have been a source of inspiration for liberation theologians.

#### 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT (TMA)

1. How can you summarize the message of the Old Testament prophets regarding liberation?
2. What is the relevance of the prophets to liberation theology today?

#### 7.0 REFERENCES / FURTHER READINGS

- Boff, Leonardo and Boff, Clodovis (1993) *Introducing Liberation Theology*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books.
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**UNIT 3****JESUS CHRIST AND LIBERATION**

## CONTENT

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Body
  - 3.1 The Liberative Mission of Jesus
    - 3.1.1 Jesus Liberates from Sin
    - 3.1.2 Jesus Liberates the Poor and Oppressed
    - 3.1.3 The Resurrection as God's Ultimate Liberative Act
  - 3.2 Relevance of the Liberative Mission of Jesus to Liberation Theology
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References / Further Readings

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

You are probably aware that Jesus' mission was not only a religious one, but had social and political implications. From the birth to the death of Jesus, God's message of liberation is proclaimed in and through Jesus. This liberation is from the powers of the kingdom of evil and the human agents of these powers. It is the human agent of the powers of evil that oppress and act unjustly. Jesus came in order to announce the coming of God's kingdom in the world. He made the poor and the oppressed the principal members of that kingdom. In this unit, you will come to a greater awareness of how the mission of Jesus was liberative in nature, and how liberation theologians today seek to imitate the liberative action of Jesus.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

Explain how Jesus' mission on earth was a liberative mission. Describe how Jesus liberated people from sin, sickness, hunger, fear, injustice, hatred, oppression, demonic powers, death, etc.

Relate the liberative activities of Jesus to the activities of liberation theologians today.

### 3.0 MAIN BODY

#### CONTENT

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Body
  - 3.1 The Liberative Mission of Jesus
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#### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

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Relate the liberative activities of Jesus to the activities of liberation theologians today.

### 3.0 MAIN BODY

#### 3.1 The Liberative Mission of Jesus

The gospel of Matthew describes very clearly the mission of Jesus as a liberator or savior. This mission was already foretold before the birth of Jesus. Thus, addressing Joseph, the angel of the Lord said that Mary "will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Matt 1:21).

Similarly, Luke's gospel records Jesus' inaugural sermon in his hometown as liberative in focus:

The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Luke 4:18-19).

Much of the rest of the gospels seem to be concerned therefore about how Jesus carried out his liberative mission, first among his own people, the Jews, and second, how that liberative mission gradually assumed a universal dimension. Jesus' liberative mission was principally targeted at sinners, the poor and the oppressed. His resurrection from the dead became the ultimate proof of God's liberation of the world manifested in Jesus.

### **3.1.1 Jesus Liberates from Sin**

Mark's gospel records that Jesus' first statement, upon beginning his mission, was: The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news (Mark 1:15).

Jesus preached the good news of repentance as part of his mission of liberation from sin and evil. Since sin is found in the human heart, Jesus urged a change of heart from evil in order that one would attain liberation from within. Thus, It is what comes out of a person that defiles. For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person (Mark 7:20-23).

By this, Jesus sought to liberate the entire person from within. By liberating the individual from vices, Jesus liberates the entire society.

Jesus backed up his activity of liberation from sin with the exercise of his authority to forgive sins. He announced that he came to call sinners (Matt 9:10-13). By forgiving sins, Jesus took away the sins, and replaced one's guilt with a new experience of wholeness and inner freedom, thus liberating the sinner not only from the sin, but also granting total healing. Thus, he said to the paralytic: "son, your sins are forgiven", and not only was the paralytics' sins forgiven, but he was healed (Mark 2:5-12).

Jesus did not only forgive the sins of others as part of his liberative action (e.g. John 8:1-11), he also urged his followers to forgive one another, thus continuing his mission of liberation from sin. Thus, when Peter asked him if he should forgive one who offended him as many as seven times, Jesus replied: "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times (or seventy times seven)" (Matt 18:21-22; see also Matt 18:23-35). He thus shared his authority to forgive sins with his disciples. So important was this liberative activity to Jesus that after his resurrection he appeared to his disciples and empowered them: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained: (John 20: 22-23).

### **3.1.2 Jesus Liberates the Poor and the Oppressed**

The Jewish community had little love for the poor and oppressed, because it was believed that poverty and suffering were as a result of sins committed, and so a punishment from God. Jesus liberates the poor and

the oppressed from this way of thinking. They are, rather, blessed. The poor are blessed because there is good news for them (Luke 4:18; 7:22), and theirs is the kingdom of God (Luke 6: 20-21; Matt 5: 3-4). The oppressed are blessed because their reward is great in heaven (Luke 6:22-23; Matt 5; 11-12). Jesus thus challenges the religious thinking of the people that the poor and oppressed are doomed. Based on this new liberative way of thinking, Jesus performs many liberative acts on behalf of the poor and the oppressed, and exhorts his disciple to do the same. The poor here does not only refer to the materially poor, but includes the weak, the sick widows, orphans, women, etc.

Thus Jesus healed the sick, the deaf, the dumb and the blind, liberating them from their illness (Matt 9: 1-8; 15: 29-31; 20: 29-34; Luke 6: 6-11; Mark 9: 14-29). He healed lepers, even by touching them, thus liberating lepers from the stigma of the society (Matt 8: 1-4; Mark 1: 40-45). He cast out demons from those who were oppressed, thus liberating them from the power and influence of Satan (Matt 9: 32-34; Mark 5; 1-20; Luke 4:31-37).

He liberated women from the social prejudices of his time by associating freely with them, and making them his companions (Luke 7: 36-50; 8: 1-3; John 4: 1-42; John 10: 38-42). Accordingly, Jesus was at ease with the Samaritan woman, and taught her in a way that made her to become his witness as a disciple (John 4:1-42); he had an affectionate compassion on the widow of Nain, saying to her, 'Do not weep', in a way that would have appeared unmanly in his culture (Luke 7:13). He extolled the great faith of a Canaanite woman (Matt 14:28); he liberated the woman caught in adultery (John 8: 1-11); he extolled Mary for sitting with him, and listening to the word of God, and not merely fulfilling the traditional role of housekeeping (Luke 10: 38-42); he showed love to Martha and Mary, a fact admitted in Scripture (John 11:5); he allowed Susanna and other women who could provide financially for him and his disciples do so freely, without him feeling degraded (Luke 8: 1-3); he praised a widow for her great generosity (Luke 21: 1-4); he gave women the mission of breaking the good news of his resurrection to the apostles, who were too timid and afraid on account of his death (Matt 28:1-10; Luke 24: 8-11; John 20: 16 –18).

Jesus sought to liberate his followers from hatred and selfishness. To achieve this, he exhorted his followers to love one another, as well as their enemies (Luke 6: 27-36). They should share their food and possessions with the hungry and those who do not have (Mark 10; 2-22; Luke 14: 12-14; Matt 2: 3-46), just as he fed the hungry (Matt 14:13-21). Jesus did not act this way out of a sense of "God-fatherism". Rather, he himself was poor (Luke 9:58), and had to be cared for by some women disciples (Luke 8:1-3). Jesus, thus, transformed the state of being poor and oppressed from the Old Testament understanding (See Lev 26:14-26), into a Godly state (See Phil 2:6-11), whereby the poor, the hungry, the weeping, the persecuted (Luke 6:20-26; Matt 5:3-12) are blessed by God and become heirs of the kingdom of heaven, just as Jesus himself, unjustly crucified, was raised up by God. The poor and the oppressed thus have a special dignity. The rich and the powerful are bound to assist and share with the poor if they also want to inherit the kingdom of heaven (Luke 12:32-34). Such appears to be the focus of the stories of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16:19-31; Zaccheus in Luke 19:1-10, and the rich ruler in Luke 18:18-30 (See also Matt 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-31). Failure to share with the poor brings eternal damnation to the rich (Luke 6:24-26), since riches can hinder the rich from accepting the good news (Luke 18:18-25), which the poor

readily accept (Matt 11:1-5). Moreover, there will certainly be a reversal of fortunes in the eschatological kingdom of God, when the rich who neglected the poor will find themselves frustratingly dependent on the poor for help (Luke 16:25; also 2:51-53).

Jesus also preached liberation from fear, especially the fear of persecutors. He exhorted his disciples:

Have no fear of them: for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell (Matt 10: 26-28).

Like the prophets, Jesus rained down woes on unjust and oppressive Scribes and Pharisees:

Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe the mint, dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others. You blind guides! (Matt 23: 23-24).

Jesus thus denounced the rulers for their blindness (Matt 15:14) and insensitivity to the needs of the people. He exhorted his disciples not to behave like them, lording it over others (Matt 20:24-28).

### **3.1.3 The Resurrection as God's Ultimate Liberative Act**

Through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, God instituted a new act of liberation from death to life. By his resurrection, Christ brings to fulfillment a new exodus, a final passage of God's children from slavery to liberation. He gives meaning to suffering and death, and gives hope of life to all. Thus, with the resurrection of Christ as a beacon of hope, the poor and the oppressed of this world can look up too to their own resurrection, just as Jesus was raised from the dead.

Such hope in itself is liberative. It elevates one from the thought that with death, all is over. Just as God vindicated Jesus through the resurrection, the poor and oppressed are hopeful on God's vindication through their own resurrection, in whatever form it takes. So the resurrection of Jesus was a historical event with a liberative significance for all peoples and for all times. Through Christ's resurrection, God has liberated humanity from all evil, and from death to life.

#### **Self-Assessment Exercise 3.1**

1. Why did Jesus urge a change of heart from within?
2. How does Jesus liberate through his death and resurrection?

### **3.2 Relevance of the Liberative Mission of Jesus to Liberation Theology**

The liberative mission of Jesus in the world is no doubt one major source of inspiration for liberation theologians today. Liberation theologians seek to be like Jesus, who was sent by the spirit "...to bring good news to the poor... to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19). As a result, liberation theologians insist that they "can be followers of Jesus and true Christians only by making common cause with the poor and working out the gospel of liberation".

Liberation theologians see Jesus as the one who liberates all classes of unfortunates. Through Jesus' liberative acts, his mission becomes history among the poor and oppressed. However, liberation theologians are conscious that Jesus' radical demand for a change of heart brought him into many serious conflicts with the leaders of his time. He was defamed, demoralized, persecuted, threatened, captured, tortured and killed. Jesus was killed primarily because he spoke out against the ills of the society, and challenged all, especially the leaders to be just. It was as a result of his liberative acts that the human powers of the time focused attention on him, and destroyed him. God, however, raised him up, and by this, God confirmed Jesus' liberative mission. Through the resurrection, God liberates all the suffering and oppressed poor.

Liberation theologians see the life of Jesus as a challenge to them. According to Boff and Boff (1993), following Jesus means taking up his cause, being ready to bear the persecution it brings and brave enough to share his fate in the hope of inheriting the full liberation that the resurrection offers us. Jesus' resurrection offers liberation theologians a sure hope that those who like Jesus, are oppressed and unjustly treated, shall have life and be raised up.

Feminist liberation theologians in particular look to Jesus' liberative acts towards women as specifically challenging the patriarchal culture of his time. As a result of that, Claire Colette (1994:39) affirms that: "With Jesus, women had the experience of being included, of being equal and trusted".

### **Self-Assessment Exercise 3.2**

(Fill in the blanks)

1. Liberation theologians believe that they can be followers of Jesus and true Christians only .....
2. Feminist liberation theologians affirm that with Jesus .....

### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

From the above, you have seen that Jesus' mission was liberative in nature. He came to liberate those oppressed in different ways. He was consistent in offering God's liberation to all, and in the process, he incurred the anger of the leaders of the people, who put him to death. Yet God raised him from the dead, thus liberating him, and making him a source of eternal salvation/liberation for all. Like Jesus, therefore, liberation theologians are challenged to take up the cause of liberating the oppressed, and to bear all the suffering that come their way in the course of their mission of liberation.

### **5.0 SUMMARY**

The main points in this unit are:

1. Jesus indicated that his mission on earth was a liberative one during his inaugural sermon in his hometown, Nazareth.
2. It was the liberative activities of Jesus on behalf of the poor and the oppressed that ultimately led to his crucifixion and death.
3. Theologians of liberation today are highly inspired and challenged by the liberating activities of Jesus, which they seek to imitate.

### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT (TMA)**

1. How did Jesus liberate the women of his time, oppressed by patriarchy?
2. Explain how the resurrection of Jesus is the final liberative act of God, which brings about the liberation of the oppressed.

3. What have liberation theologians today learnt, concerning the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus?

**7.0****REFERENCES / FURTHER READINGS**

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## UNIT 4 LIBERATION AND THE PROCLAMATION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

### CONTENT

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Body
  - 3.1 Meaning and Nature of the Kingdom of God
    - 3.1.1 Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God
    - 3.1.2 Early Christian Proclamation of the Kingdom of God
  - 3.2 Relevance of the Proclamation of the Kingdom of God to Liberation Theology
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 Reference / Further Readings

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

You are already aware that the mission of Jesus in the world was a liberation mission. In order to ensure that this liberation was achieved, Jesus announced or proclaimed the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth. The importance of a kingdom for liberation lies in the fact that much depends on rulers, for the oppressed to be liberated. It is also noteworthy that most instances of injustice and oppression emanate from the rulers. By proclaiming the kingdom of God, Jesus presented a model of kingship or ruling and leadership, which is according to the salvific nature and will of God. He urged his followers to foster this kingdom.

In this unit, therefore, you will learn about the biblical background, meaning and nature of the kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus, and learn about how the early church proclaimed that kingdom. You will also discover the liberation effects of the proclamation of the kingdom of God in the scriptures, and how the proclamation of the kingdom of God is relevant to liberation theology today.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

Explain the meaning of “the Kingdom of God”.

Give the Old Testament background to the kingdom of God.

Explain how Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God.

Explain how the early Christians continued Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God.

Assess the importance of the biblical teaching on the kingdom of God for liberation theology.

### 3.0 MAIN BODY

#### 3.1 Background Meaning and Nature of the Kingdom of God

The phrase “*kingdom of God*” (sometimes referred to in Matthew's gospel as “*kingdom of heaven*”) is a typically New Testament phrase found mostly in the



synoptic gospels. As a phrase, it does not appear in the Old Testament, although the word “kingdom” is used many times in reference to God (e.g. Pss 45:6; 103: 19; 145:12; 1 Chr 28:5; 29:11).

The idea of God’s kingdom thus has roots in the Old Testament. Israel regarded God as king. It was God who ruled over them, because God made a covenant with them to be their God, while they would be God’s people. In this theocratic state of Israel, the human king who reigned were appointed by God and ruled on behalf of God, and had to follow strictly God’s commands. When such human kings or rulers failed to rule according to the will of God, God rejected them. When, however, David ruled Israel according to God’s will, his rule was acclaimed as God’s rule, and God promised that David’s kingdom will last for ever (2 Sam 7:16).

At his conception, Jesus was linked to the Davidic kingdom: “He will be great, and will be called the son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and for his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1: 32- 33). He was therefore the anointed one, the Messiah (John 4: 25 –26). It seemed, therefore, natural for Jesus to come proclaiming the kingdom of God as his central message. The Greek term used in the New Testament for kingdom of God is *basileia tou theou*. The word *basileia* refers to the dignity, power and dominion or kingdom of the king. It indicates, therefore, a rule, an act of governance, not a realm or territory. So the Kingdom of God refers, according to Ukpong (1993 :151), to “a rule which is by divine intervention, that is, God’s salvific rule among human beings experienced in human relations and concrete societal structures” .

### **3.1.1 Jesus’ Proclamation of the Kingdom of God**

The Jews were expecting a political messiah who would overthrow the Roman imperial power, and establish an Israelite kingdom devoid of an external colonial power. But Jesus made a distinction between such a kingdom and his own: “My kingdom is not from this world” (John 18:36), he stressed. He affirmed, however, his kingly rule: “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice” (John 18: 37). Jesus’ kingdom is the kingdom of God. He rules in justice like God and saves all on behalf of God; and he invites all into that kingdom, to have a share in his kingship. Jesus’ kingdom stands in direct opposition to the “kingdom” or rule of Satan. The works of the kingdom of God destroy the activities of the Kingdom of Satan and the agents of Satan (see Matt 12: 22 – 32; Luke 11: 14 – 23).

Jesus proclaimed his kingdom both as a historically present reality, and an eschatologically future reality. Thus, the kingdom is “yet” and “not yet”. He also proclaimed his kingdom of God as both a material and a spiritual reality. The kingdom of God is a historical present reality because the kingdom is to be realized in history, in the present world. People are to experience God’s rule while they are in the world. God’s rule is to be experienced as a transformative power in the world. In order to express this nature of the kingdom of God, Jesus uses parables such as the parable of the weed (Matt 13:24 – 30), the parable of the mustard seed (Matt 13: 31 – 32), and the parable of the yeast (Matt 13:33). In these parables, Jesus shows that God’s rule is like a transformative

element. It leads to a positive growth. It is the experience of that positive growth that indicates the presence of the kingdom of God. Jesus makes the experience of the kingdom become manifested not only at the spiritual level of spiritual growth, made possible through a change of heart (*metanoia*); he also makes it to become manifested in the material transformation experienced through his healing of the sick, love and care for the hungry and the poor, attention to justice and liberation for the oppressed, etc. Thus, Jesus addressed the messengers of John the Baptist: “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them” (Luke 7:22).

The kingdom of God, on the other hand, is not yet realized. Jesus proclaimed it also as a futuristic reality which one looks forward to (see Mark 9:1). In order to prepare for its coming, Jesus urged repentance: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Matt 4:17). This futuristic kingdom is to come “with power” (see Mark 9:1; 13:26). It is a kingdom of abundance, symbolized by eating and drinking at a banquet (see Luke 22:29-30; Matt 8:11; Luke 13:28-29). The picture of the kingdom of God here is eschatological, referring to a state of an eternal bliss, which is possible at the end of time.

The interplay between the kingdom of God as a present reality and as a future reality is brought out in the prayer addressed to the Father, which Jesus taught his disciples: “... Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread...” (Matt 6:9-13; Luke 11: 2-4). The kingdom of God is thus related to the will of God, which is expected to be done *on earth*, just as it is in heaven.

Experiencing the will of God done on earth is a historical reality, while experiencing it in heaven is a futuristic, eschatological reality. But it is the people on earth who are to make God’s rule become realizable today. This was Jesus’ key message in his proclamation of the kingdom of God. By acting in justice and righteousness like God, one makes the kingdom or reign of God becomes realizable.

### **3.1.2 Early Christian Proclamation of the Kingdom of God**

Jesus commanded his disciples to “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to all creation” (Mark 16: 15). Although there isn’t much evidence of an early Christian use of the term “kingdom of God” in their preaching and ministry, the proclamation of God’s reign in Jesus was their central concern. In Acts 8:12, the author notes that Philip “was proclaiming the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ”. The same is said about Paul in Ephesus who “for three months spoke out boldly, and argued persuasively about the kingdom of God” (Acts 19: 8).

Such was the centrality of Paul’s proclamation of the kingdom of God that Paul himself, addressing the leaders of the church in Ephesus, states “And now I know that none of you, among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom, will ever see my face again” (Acts 20: 25). Even as a prisoner in Rome, it is said of Paul that: “From morning till evening he explained the matter to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the law of Moses and from the prophets” (Act 28: 23). Furthermore, Paul: “lived there two whole years at his own expense and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness

and without hindrance” (Act 28: 30-31).

The early Christian understanding of the kingdom of God is brought to very clear focus when Paul, in Romans 14:17 stresses that: “The kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”. Moreover there are moral demands, without which the kingdom of God is unattainable (see 1 Cor 6:9-11; Gal 5:19-21; Eph 5:5). The inheritors of the kingdom of God, according to James 2:5, are those who are poor in the way of the world, but whom God has chosen to be rich in faith. Furthermore, they were convinced that God’s rule was with them: “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his messiah, for the accuser of our comrades has been thrown down (Rev 12:10). Thus, like Jesus, the early Christians made the proclamation of the kingdom of God their main focus, and even sought to live the demands of that kingdom, especially through practicing justice, love, sharing and care for one another (see Acts 3:1-10; 4: 32-37; 5:12-16; 6:1-7).

### **Self-Assessment Exercise 4.1**

(Fill in the blanks)

1. Israel was a theocracy, and so regarded God as -----
2. Jesus proclaimed his kingdom both as a ----- and an -----
3. The inheritors of the kingdom of God, according to James 2:5, are -----

### **3.2 Relevance of the Proclamation of the Kingdom of God to Liberation Theology**

The starting point of liberation theology is the perception of the word of God by the poor and the oppressed as liberative. When the poor and the oppressed hear about the kingdom of God, the coming of that kingdom becomes a deep yearning for them, in the face of their concrete oppressive situation, which clearly mirrors an opposite of God’s rule. Surely, God cannot be unjust or oppressive to people, men and women alike! And surely, those who truly claim to rule on God’s authority (see Rom 13: 1-7) cannot go against God’s will of salvation for God’s people! But when the people of God experience something different, then like Jesus and the early Christians, they genuinely proclaim and pray for God’s kingdom to come on earth.

Liberation theologians take up this deep yearning of the people for the coming of the kingdom of God. And so, they ask: “Is the kingdom of God preached by Jesus good news for the poor today?” The answer lies in the extent of the commitment of political and other leaders today to the liberation values of the kingdom of God. The ugly past in Christian history when some Christian missionaries accompanied and legitimized colonizers and imperialists in their oppressive rules notwithstanding, liberation theologians today take a different stance, and question acts of rulers, which do not culminate in an experience of the liberation of the kingdom of God.

Liberation theologians also undertake, in the words of Pixley (1989: 117), “the necessary task of unmasking religion that conceals and justifies domination”. It is thus of importance and great relevance to the cause of the proclamation of the good news, that theologians ask

themselves: how good is the good news, and to whom is the good news good? If the good news is not *good news* to the poor and oppressed, the primary targets of Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God (Luke 4:16-19; 7: 22), then there is need for a change of heart.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise 4.2**

1. What is the deep yearning of the people of God, which liberation theologians take up?
2. What kind of religion do liberation theologians undertake to unmask?

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

In this unit, you have been introduced to the biblical understanding of kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus. The O.T. background of kingdom of God revealed that the liberation mission of Jesus as Messiah was in agreement with the Old Testament expectation of an anointed one, who would rule according to God's will. Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God emphasized change of heart and participation by all in God's rule. He made God's sovereignty become present to his hearers, but he also showed that it was something to be eschatologically desired. The importance of Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom lies, therefore, in the fact that those who claim they have God's authority to rule, should strive to rule in justice, according to the will of God.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

The major points in this unit are:

1. The New Testament phrase "kingdom of God" has antecedents in the Old Testament description of Israel's regal institution as theocratic.
2. The Greek expression *basileia tou theou* (kingdom of God) properly refers to the rule or reign of God, not a realm or territory.
3. Jesus proclaimed his kingdom of God both as a historically present reality, and an eschatologically future reality.
4. Jesus also proclaimed the kingdom of God as both a material and a spiritual reality.
5. The early church continued in the proclamation of the kingdom of God.
6. Oppressed and poor Christians today who read the bible are yearning to experience the good news of the kingdom of God, and liberation theologians are taking up their cause in their theologizing.

## **6.0 TUTOR – MARKED ASSIGNMENT (TMA)**

1. Describe David's kingship and its relationship to Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God.
2. How did Jesus proclaim the kingdom of God as a historically present reality?
3. How did Jesus proclaim the kingdom of God as an eschatologically future reality?

## **7.0 REFERENCES / FURTHER READINGS**

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**UNIT 5 LIBERATION, JUSTICE AND SALVATION****CONTENT**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Body
  - 3.1 Liberation and Justice
  - 3.2 Liberation and Salvation
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-marked assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 Reference / Further Readings

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

You have read much about justice and about salvation in the previous unit. Justice and salvation are two biblical themes, which are at the heart of the liberation theology movement. What constitutes justice, and what constitutes salvation, from the biblical perspective? How are these two concepts concretely related to liberation? Answers to these questions will dominate this last unit of the second module of this study.

**2.0 OBJECTIVES**

It is hoped that at the end of this unit, you should be able to:

Give an explanation of what the biblical authors understood as justice.

Explain what salvation means, from a biblical perspective. Relate justice and salvation to liberation.

**3.0 MAIN BODY****3.1 Liberation and Justice**

There would be no need for liberation in a situation where justice and peace prevailed. But where injustice exists, or is perceived to exist, peace is disturbed, oppression sets in, and there is a cry for justice. The cry for justice is thus a cry for liberation from oppression. And the cry for liberation is a cry for peace. Peace reigns where things are done in the right way, to everyone's satisfaction. It is probably the idea of doing things right that informed the Old Testament understanding of the Hebrew word *sedek*, translated as "righteousness", but which is used in the Old Testament to refer to "justice". Justice and righteousness go hand in hand, and refer to the same thing. Thus to be just means to act righteously. This Old Testament understanding of justice is oftentimes directed primarily at God, who is just because he is righteous. God is a just (righteous) judge (Pss 7:11; 11:7; Job 8:3; Jer 11:20), who makes justice (righteousness) the hallmark of his reign (Psa 97:2; 119:137; Deut 32:4; Isa 5:16).

God's justice has a liberative attribute, for by God's justice, God vindicates his oppressed people, fulfils promises made, and shows faithfulness. Thus, in speaking of God's liberation, the Psalmist prays:

Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him that his glory may dwell in our hand. Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other; faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from sky. The Lord will give what is good,

and our land will yield its increase. Righteousness will go before him, and will make a path for his steps (Ps 85:9-13).

Accordingly, God's justice is made evident in God's acts of liberation: "The Lord works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed. He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel" (Ps35:24).

God's attribute of justice (righteousness) is specifically expected to be found in the king. Thus the Psalmist prays for the king:

Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son. May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice. May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness. May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor (Ps 72:1-4).

The New Testament also uses the Greek word *dikaiosyne* (righteousness) to refer to justice. Jesus is the just (righteous) one (Acts 3:13-14; 7:52; 1Pet 3:8), who teaches his followers the way of justice (righteousness). One who lives justly or righteously has been liberated from sin (1 Pet 2:24). Such a Christian is like Jesus (I John 3:7), and is liberated by God's grace on account of death and resurrection of Jesus (I Cor 1:30; Rom 5:1). Having been so liberated with God's attribute of justice (righteousness) in Jesus Christ, the Christian is exhorted to bear the fruits of righteousness (Phil 1:9-11).

### **Self-Assessment Exercise 5.1**

1. How is God's justice liberative?
2. In whom is God's attribute of justice expected to be found?

### **3.2 Liberation and Salvation**

In the Old Testament, God is commonly invoked as one's savior, one's salvation, or called to save (See Pss 18:47; 24:5; 25:5; 27:9; 65:6). God is often acknowledged as "my saving God", "my saving rock", "my salvation" (see Ps 27:1; 2 Sam 22:3; Deut 32:15). In this understanding, salvation is usually from something bad, evil or oppressive. Thus, salvation has as cognate, deliverance and liberation. God saves, delivers or liberates by his power. This saving or liberating power of God was particularly experienced by the Israelites in the exodus event (Exod 14:13; 15:2; Ps 78:22). God's special delight is in saving or liberating the poor, the helpless and the oppressed (Ps 76:7-9; 109:31). In this regard, the king, who has been himself a special beneficiary of God's salvation (See Ps 20:6-9; 21:1-7; 2 Sam 8:6), is expected to be the savior or liberator of his people, especially of the poor and the oppressed, by acting in justice (see Ps 72:4,13).

In the New Testament, the name "Jesus", meaning "Savior" is given to the newborn son of Mary (Luke 1:31), who is the long expected Savior or Liberator of God's people. (Luke 1:68-79; 2:29-32). Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection formed one continuous act or event of salvation. Jesus thus embodies and administers God's salvation, which is yearned for by the people. Through his preaching, his healing (cf. Matt 9:21; Mark 3:44; Luke 6:9) activities, forgiveness of sins, challenge of the unjust Jewish religious and socio-cultural traditions (e.g. Matt 5:21-48), encouragement not to fear (Matt 10:26-31), etc., Jesus administers God's salvation or liberation to those oppressed in different ways. His love and command to love even ones' enemies, seeks to liberate humanity from hatred and

selfishness, granting salvation to all on the basis of righteousness and not social or other distinctions (see Matt 5:43-48). Jesus' salvation is, however not fully attained in this life, since full salvation is attained eschatologically in eternal life (see 2Tim 1: 8-10), where there will be no need for liberation, since there would be no occasion for groaning under oppression or subjection (see 1 Cor 15:24-28; 2 Cor 5:1-10). That would be the final liberation of which the present, this worldly liberation or salvation is a foretaste (Rom 8:18-25; Phil 3:20-21).

### **Self-Assessment Exercise 5.2**

1. In whose salvation does God take special delight?
2. What is the meaning of the name "Jesus"?

### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

From the above you have come to understand that from the biblical perspective, liberation, justice and salvation are interrelated. To be just means to act righteously just like God. A ruler who acts in justice vindicates the oppressed and so liberates him or her. Similarly, to save is to liberate. One who is saved from evil is liberated. From the study too, you have come to understand that Jesus Christ is the model of justice (righteousness), through whom God's salvation (liberation) is given to all. Therefore, those who are followers of Jesus must practice justice in order to attain salvific liberation.

### **5.0 SUMMARY**

The main points in this unit include the following:

1. Justice and righteousness go hand in hand, and refer to the same reality in the Old Testament.
2. God's justice has a liberative attribute, because God's justice vindicates the oppressed.
3. The king is specifically expected to have God's attribute of justice.
4. God is a savior, whose special delight attribute is in liberating the poor and the oppressed.
5. Jesus the savior embodies God's salvation, and through him the just attain salvation both in this life and eschatologically.
6. Liberation, justice and salvation are interrelated, for justice and salvation are liberative acts.

### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT (TMA)**

1. How does God's act of liberation demonstrate God's justice?
2. In what ways did Jesus embody and administer God's salvation?

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**MODULE 3****IMPACTS, THEMES AND CHALLENGES**

- Unit 1 North American Black and Asian liberation theologies
- Unit 2 South African Black and African liberation theologies
- Unit 3 Major issues in liberation and feminist theologies
- Unit 4 Major challenges of liberation and feminist theologies

**UNIT 1 NORTH AMERICAN BLACK AND ASIAN LIBERATION THEOLOGIES****CONTENT**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Body
  - 3.1 North American Black Liberation Theology
  - 3.2 Asian Liberation Theology
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References / Further Readings

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

You are about to begin the concluding module of this study. In the last module, you spent adequate time on studying the biblical basis of a theology of liberation. This biblical basis acts as a springboard, which lends credence to the theological claims and practices of all liberation theologians. This is because the bottom line of the biblical message is that God abhors any form of oppression, and God wants the liberation of the oppressed, an act God continues to carry out today through Jesus Christ. All the strands of liberation theology would identify with this message of the scripture.

The question now is: has liberation theology made any impact? You will certainly agree that liberation theology has been one of the most important and influential theological currents of our time. From religious and socio-political perspectives, liberation theology has attracted a lot of attention, and its impact felt. Primarily, it has led to the perfection or emergence of liberation theology from many other contextual perspectives, such as North American Black, Asian, South African Black and African. In this and the next unit, we will make a survey of how liberation theology is practiced in other contexts. The North American Black and the Asian contexts will first be treated.

**2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

Explain the practice of liberation theology in the North American Black context.

Explain the practice of liberation theology in the Asian context.

**3.0 MAIN BODY****3.1 North American Black Liberation Theology**

Although older than Latin American liberation theology, North American Black theology became more perfected owing to the influence of Latin American liberation theology. Black churchmen and women in North America, had, even



before the emergence of Latin American liberation theology, begun to reflect on their experience of oppression and segregation as blacks in the light of the liberating message of the gospel. This experience they called *Black theology of liberation*, in line with the liberating message of the gospel.

The founder and major leader of black liberation theology was Martin Luther King, Jr. Authors date the beginning of contemporary black theology to December 1, 1955, when a lady, Rosa Parks, sat down in a bus seat reserved for whites in Montgomery, Alabama. She refused to give up the seat to a white, and as a result was arrested. Thus began a bus boycott by blacks, and the formation of the ‘Civil Rights Movement,’ led by Martin Luther King, Jr., and other church ministers. The Civil Rights Movement strove, during the 1950s and early 1960s to relate the Christian gospel to the struggle for justice in the American society, but a great majority of white churches and their theologians opposed this stand.

Black liberation theology was however launched on July 31, 1966 on the pages of the New York Times, by the National Committee of Negro churchmen, who decided to endorse the philosophy of the black power movement earlier campaigned by the black nationalist, Malcolm X (assassinated in 1966). The overwhelming endorsement of the black power philosophy was one of the influences that inspired a black theologian James H. Cone, to develop and publish *Black Theology and Black Power* in 1969, and *A Black Theology of Liberation* in 1970, a year before Gustavo Gutierrez of Latin America published *A Theology of Liberation*.

Cone’s work has remained the major groundwork of black liberation theology today wherever it is practiced, such as in the United States, in South Africa and other parts of Africa, and in various nations in Asia and the Caribbean. From 1977, however, Black theology began to dialogue with Latin American liberation theology, under the aegis of Theology in the Americas (TIA), led by Chilean Sergio Torres and Filipino, Virginia Fabella. United in a common front, North American blacks and Latin American liberation theologians have together continued to collaborate to search for strategies to combat structures of injustice in their regions.

Using the principles of “critical reflection on praxis in the light of the Bible” and the “hermeneutic circle”, Black liberation theology, as developed by Cone, adopts a four-steps methodology:

1. Reflection on the meaning of God being in solidarity with the poor and oppressed who are seeking to overcome their domination;
2. An employment of social analysis to expose systems of domination. Among these systems are racism, sexism, colonialism, capitalism and militarism;
3. Creating a new hermeneutic from the above, in such a way as to interpret the biblical message as God’s living and empowering word;
4. Using stories, songs, dances, sermons, paintings and sayings of the blacks to formulate theological language, instead of the concepts used by European and North American theologians.

Black liberation theology should lead to the attainment of the vision of a new social order for the black community. Such a social order includes:

- (i) Black unity, which can be achieved by affirming the achievements

- of black history and culture;
- (ii) A community of love, whereby each person respects the humanity of all;
- (iii) Anti-sexism, whereby liberated men do not dominate over women;
- (iv) Socialist and democratic principles, whereby the individual liberty is protected, and the individual is involved in the community;
- (v) The poor, who must become free within the community,
- (vi) Affirmation of the best in black religion.

These methods and visions of Black liberation theology are enunciated by Cone in his 1970 monumental work, *A Black Theology of Liberation*. For him, Black liberation theology is a survival theology. In doing theology from this perspective, the blacks in North America strive to rethink the fundamental concepts and issues of modern theology, in a way that is different from a white, American point of view. The black theologian has to use passionate language in talking about human evil, oppression and racism, in view of the black theologian's personal experience. Thus, such a theology should use as sources: black experience, black history, black culture, revelation, scripture and tradition. These sources should be used as complements of each other, because according to Cone, if revelation is not manifested in the black experience, black history and black culture, then it is incomprehensible. The Bible, which can be said to be inspired only in so far as a reading community can encounter Christ in it, should point beyond itself to the reality of God's revelation, which is liberation. The reader of the Bible should attain a state of freedom.

To concretize its hermeneutical principles, Black liberation theology asserts that God is black, and Jesus is manifested as the Black Christ. God is black because black people can only know God in the way God has revealed self to blacks – as Black. Jesus is black because he is the Oppressed One, who identified with the poor and oppressed in his historical person. Jesus is, therefore, referred to as the Black Messiah. In their situation of suffering and segregation, North American blacks do find hope in Jesus' stance against institutionalized injustice and oppression. They also find hope in Jesus' compassion and love for the poor and marginalized, especially when they hear stories of his eating and dealings with tax collectors, sinners and women, against customary expectations. Jesus' call to friendship with him provides inner healing to the isolated and those with low self-esteem and self-hatred. It is in this way that the blacks do concretely experience Jesus today.

North American Black liberation theology has an emerging, strong women's voice. Spearheaded by theologians such as Alice Walker and Delores Williams, Black women liberation theologians choose to refer to themselves as "womanist theologians", and their theology as "womanist theology", to distinguish it from feminist liberation theology, which they consider as bourgeois and white in orientation. Although based upon the principles of feminist liberation theology, womanist liberation (or black feminist) theology is one that affirms women as black. It seeks to link women's liberation to issues that have to do with the black woman's history and culture, and seeks to struggle for liberation alongside the black men, unlike the exclusiveness of feminism.

Black womanist liberation theologians use black female-centered

“cultural codes”, such as mother-daughter advice, female slave narratives, folk tales, black poetry, black prose, black autobiographies, testimonies of black churchwomen, etc., to express their theology. In this way, womanist theologians bring black women’s social, religious and cultural experiences into theological discourse. Furthermore, in their theologizing, womanist theologians advocate for and participate in dialogue with other groups that are concerned with the liberation of the oppressed. Such groups would especially focus upon issues concerning the slow genocide of poor black women, children, and men, being subtly or overtly carried out by exploitative systems which deny black women and men productive jobs, education, health care and accommodation. Again, womanist theologians seek to challenge the church with the prophetic message of the bible, and teach new moral insights that support justice for women, using female imagery, metaphor and story.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise 1.1**

1. In what year did North American Black theology begin to dialogue with Latin American liberation theology?
2. Identify the six elements of a new social order which Black liberation theology should lead to.
3. Name the black female-centered cultural codes used by Black womanist theologians in their theologizing.

### **3.2 Asian Liberation Theology**

In his work, *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (1988), Aloysius Pieris, one of Asia’s foremost theologians, outlines what may be considered as representative of Asian liberation theology. Asian liberation theology rests on both the experience of poverty in the continent, and on the peculiar religious background of Asia. Furthermore, Asia has seven major linguistic zones, with each language representing a distinctively different way of experiencing religious reality. There is a cosmic religion often referred to as ‘animism’, but whose major concern is the understanding of the mysteries and forces of life such as heat, fire, winds, cyclones, earthquakes, oceans, rains and floods. But there is also a metacosmic religion, which finds an expression in Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism. These seek the highest good through knowledge and wisdom, not in an abstract or textual manner, but in a form that integrates or contextualizes the cosmic experience. It is the dominating presence of these non-Christian religious worldviews, especially that of Buddhism, that influences Asian theology of liberation, given the fact that all of Asia is only about three percent Christian. Asian theology of liberation hinges largely on the concept of salvation in Buddhism. According to this concept, the metacosmic goal of perfection (arahatta), consists in the absence of acquisitiveness and greed, the absence of oppressiveness and hate, and the presence of perfect knowledge. In order to arrive at this goal, therefore, one has to renounce wealth and family to embrace poverty. The opposite of wealth, however, is not poverty, but greed or acquisitiveness. Therefore, one’s religious concern, as typified by the religious practices in Buddhist monasteries (sangha), does not lie in overcoming poverty, but greed or acquisitiveness, which is regarded as a force within every person and among persons which tends to make material wealth become antihuman, antireligious and oppressive of others. Indeed, it is said that one of the reasons that Christianity failed to take a foothold in Asia was

that it aligned itself with commercialism and big development programs, which in Buddhist worldview are regarded as Mammon and colonialist.

In view of the strong bipolarity of wealth-poverty in Asian religious culture, there is in place an opposition to political authority in relation to the acquisition and use of modern development and technology, which could lead to pollution, consumerism and materialism. These are regarded as secular scientific knowledge, which stands in opposition to spiritual wisdom.

It is within the above religious-cultural context that Asian Christian liberation theology tries to evolve, taking its cue from Latin American liberation theology. The mutuality of Christian praxis and theory in Latin American liberation theology finds resonance with the Asian sense of the integration of the cosmic and metacosmic. Thus, Asian liberation theology uses as well the social sciences, in order to change and not merely use philosophy to explain the world of suffering and injustice. In doing this, Asian liberation theology does not focus on a theology of *development*, but a theology of *liberation*, meaning by that, a theology that promotes an asceticism of renunciation, and poverty that rejects or is liberated from greed in its totality. By this, Asian liberation theology seeks a participation in full, liberated humanity. This in turn involves a dynamic following of Jesus Christ in his poverty, in his own salvific role as servant of God, Word to be heard, Giver of the Spirit and beloved Son of God, and in his struggle against evil or Mammon, which led him to the cross.

Asian liberation theology is finding hope in basic *human* communities, where persons of different religions are coming together in search of a fusion of politics with asceticism, involvement with introspection, class analysis and self-analysis. They do this by *opting to be poor* in their search for the saving truth Christians who opt to be poor, and also struggle for the poor, should not expect to be better treated than Jesus their master.

An aspect of Asian liberation theology is strongly experienced among the Indians in what is called Dalit liberation theology. The Dalits of India are among the earliest settlers or indigenous communities of India. The name Dalit, which refers to a people that is broken, or crushed to the extent of losing original identity, is a name which the Dalits prefer to call themselves. They are people who have been much oppressed socially, culturally and religiously, in a way that has left them with no identity. In a society where the caste social system operates, the Dalits are placed at the bottom of Indian society. They are relegated to a degraded and inferior status, which they even accept. They are regarded as "Untouchables". They are by all means extremely poor economically, politically powerless and ritually debased. Their economic poverty stems from the fact that the Dalits are the most economically exploited people in India. They are assigned the lowest and ritually most "polluted" jobs, and do work that is considered unskilled. Indeed, they are regarded as the economic slaves of India.

It is among these Dalits that there exists a strong movement for the liberation of the Dalits, based on a principle that is termed Dalit Consciousness. They are conscious that their oppression and poverty is structural, based primarily on the Hindu social caste system. As a result of this consciousness, many Dalits have abandoned Hinduism as a

religion, and embraced Christianity or other religions. Dalit Christians, however, see current Christian systematic theology as meant for the rich, and so irrelevant for them, since it does not address their daily needs and experiences. They need, rather, a theology that addresses their needs, helps them to earn their living, enables them to overcome their oppression, poverty, suffering, injustice, illiteracy, and helps them to regain their human dignity and identity.

Based on these liberative aspirations, Dalit liberation theology emerges from a historical consciousness of the struggle of the Dalits, into a solidarity, which is seen as a bonding and liberative factor for them. Solidarity is a total commitment to the other in love and unity. It is a sign of God's presence with them. It envisions an encounter with God who is biased towards the poor and the oppressed. With God on their side, the Dalits are empowered to become agents of their own history, and to discard the history constructed by their opponents. Jesus Christ, who is God become human, identifies with and partakes too with the Dalits in their struggle, in view of his own suffering and oppression. He continues to empower them daily through the Holy Spirit.

Asian liberation theology is not complete without an appraisal of the Asian women's perspective, with strong voices like that of Virginia Fabella of the Philippines and Chung Hyun Kyung of Korea. Bonded together as part of the Women's Commission of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), church women from Hong Kong, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka met in Manila, Philippines in November 1985 to delineate their liberation theology tagged "Total Liberation from Asian Women's Perspective". In their final statement, the women noted sadly that "in all spheres of Asian society, women are dominated, dehumanized, and dewomanized; they are discriminated against, exploited, harassed, sexually used, abused, and viewed as inferior beings who must always subordinate themselves to the so-called male supremacy".

In particular, the women noted that the Indian dowry system, bride burning, forced sterilization, sex determination tests all devalue women. Also degrading and oppressive are Hindu depiction of the woman as a seductress, Filipino job discrimination against women which has forced many into prostitution, and the Japanese male oriented emperor system. All these are re-enforced by an all-pervading patriarchal system, and aggravated by unjust structures perpetuated by the rich and the powerful, who collude with dominating foreign forces. It is from within this context that Asian women carry out their theology of Total Liberation.

Asian women's liberation theology, being in strong solidarity with all the oppressed in Asia, envisions a discovery of Christ's liberating and salvific mission, an encounter with the Christ of the poor, who has power over sinful structures and situations, and who made radical breakthroughs in support of the cause of women during his time. The women see Mary the mother of Jesus as "a strong woman who can identify and be with today's grieving mothers, wives, daughters in the bitter fight for freedom". They also crave for new symbols, church renewal and an inclusive language for the creation of a more contextual and liberating theology.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise 1.2**

1. Which of the Asian religions has exerted a greater influence on Asian

liberation theology?

2. What is the effect of the Asian religio-cultural bipolarity of wealth-poverty on Asian theology of liberation?
3. On what principle is the Dalit liberation movement based?
4. Name the umbrella association under which Asian women's liberation theology is being developed.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

In this unit you have been introduced to liberation theology from the perspectives of North American Black, and Asian theologians. There is here an indication of the impact of Latin American liberation theology, especially in terms of the use of the social sciences in their methodology, and their focus on liberation from poverty and oppression. You have also seen the impact of liberation theology done from a feminist perspective, on North American Black and Asian women. Women theologians from these regions are becoming more and more conscious of the need to bring into theological reflections, issues that concern the life and oppressive conditions of women.

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

The main points in this unit include the following:

1. Black theology of liberation, as a reflection on the experience of oppression and segregation of blacks in North America in the light of the liberating message of the gospel, existed even before the emergence of Latin American liberation theology.
2. Black liberation theologians began to collaborate with Latin American liberation theologians from 1977, under the aegis of Theology in the Americas (TIA), in order to combat structures of injustice.
3. Black womanist liberation theologians use black female-centered "cultural codes", such as mother-daughter advice, female slave narratives, folk tales, black poetry, black prose, black autobiographies, testimonies of black church women, etc., to express their theology.
4. Asian theology of liberation hinges largely on the concept of salvation as perfection, arising from the absence of acquisitiveness and greed, the absence of oppressiveness and hate, and the presence of perfect knowledge, which is found in Buddhism.
5. Dalit liberation theology in India seeks to address the needs of the Dalits, helps them to earn their living, enables them to overcome their oppression, poverty, suffering, injustice, illiteracy, and helps them to regain their human dignity and identity.
6. Asian women's liberation theology, being in strong solidarity with all the oppressed in Asia, envisions a discovery of Christ's liberating and salvific mission, an encounter with the Christ of the poor, who has power over sinful structures and situations, and who made radical breakthroughs in support of the cause of women during his time.

#### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. Identify the sources of North American Black liberation theology, and explain how they should be used.

2. What is the distinction between feminist liberation theology and North American Black womanist liberation theology?
3. What does it mean for Asian liberation theology to focus on total liberation, and not on a theology of development?
4. What is the overriding Christological vision of Asian women's liberation theology?

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## **UNIT 2 SOUTH AFRICAN BLACK AND AFRICAN LIBERATION THEOLOGIES**

### **CONTENT**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Body
  - 3.1 South African Black Liberation Theology
  - 3.2 African Liberation Theology
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References / Further Readings

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Liberation theology has had its impact too on the African continent. Primarily, it has had an enormous impact in South Africa, which had witnessed, over a long period of time, liberation movements against apartheid. Secondly, although not yet with dramatic effects, voices of liberation, especially from unjust post-independence political, social and economic structures, are also being heard from theologians in other parts of Africa, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. This unit will discuss these two approaches to liberation theology in Africa.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Give an explanation of liberation theology in South Africa.

- Understand the approach to major issues in African liberation theology.

### **3.0 MAIN BODY**

#### **3.1 South African Black liberation theology**

South African Black liberation theology was developed during the apartheid era in South Africa. In the apartheid system, introduced officially in 1948 by the Afrikaner white Nationalist government, racism was institutionalized as a state ideology, ultimately intended for the self-preservation of the white race in South Africa. In it the white race claimed superiority over the black race (and other non-white races), and the black race was seen as inferior to the white race. As a result, white-black segregation was legalized. Thus, there were laws that made it impossible for blacks to obtain certain jobs, own land and other property, or have access to certain facilities reserved only for whites. Furthermore, even the church was divided into two racial lines – a White church and a Black church, in a way that made it difficult to trespass color bar. Sir Godfrey Higgins, the then Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia (Malawi), spelt out the principles of apartheid more clearly:

While there is yet time and space, the country should be divided into separate areas for black and for white. In the native areas, the black man should be allowed to rise to any position to which he is capable of climbing. Every step in the industrial and social pyramid must be open to him excepting only and always the very top. The native may be his own lawyer, doctor, builder, journalist, or priest and he must be protected from white competition in his area. In the European area, the black man will be welcomed when, tempted by



wages, he offers his services as a labourer, but it will be on the understanding that he shall merely assist and not compete with the white man.

All these led to the exploitation, oppression, discrimination, suffering and impoverishment of the majority blacks by a minority white who had all access to political and economic power. While apartheid lasted, the ruling white Nationalist government worked very hard to maintain total white domination, supremacy and control of all spheres of South African society, whether technological, economic, educational, social or cultural, at the expense of the well being of the majority blacks.

Black movements and protests against apartheid were brutally and unjustly crushed. International sanctions were ignored, while the lives of the black masses became more and more endangered, as innocent, unarmed civilians were constantly massacred. The numerous white government violent reactions to black peaceful protests soon outraged the blacks, who also took to violent protests, and saw the emergence of leaders such as Nelson Mandela and Steve Biko, and the emergence of liberation movements such as the African National Congress and the Black Consciousness Movement. It is in this context of apartheid that South African Black liberation theology was developed. Two prominent figures, Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Catholic Archbishop Denis Hurley played important roles in the emergence and development of this theology, and so have Allan Boesak and S. S. Maimela. In his work, "Black Theology of Liberation", Maimela (1994) notes that a major highlight of this theology among South Africans is that God is a liberator God, a God of mercy who delivers the oppressed and the suffering, and whose prophets denounced injustice and exploitation. In a special way, God advocated for the powerless and oppressed in Christ, who, through the poverty, oppression, rejection and suffering he experienced, has become the source of new life and hope of liberation of the racially downtrodden and oppressed blacks of South Africa.

South African Black liberation theologians came to the above realization as they began to study the scriptures from their own perspective and in the light of their social experience. The result was their discovery that there is a fundamental contradiction between the proclamation of the biblical message and what their white masters and theologians taught them about God and Jesus Christ. They discovered further that theology from a white perspective had been unashamedly used to give tacit support to the injustice and oppression suffered by the blacks, and encourage the privileged status of whites over non-whites. These discoveries led South African Black liberation theologians to proclaim, on September 13<sup>th</sup> 1985, their KAIROS or moment of truth.

The moment of truth had indeed come in South Africa, not only for apartheid, but also for the church. Presented in a document entitled *Challenge to the Church: A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa (The Kairos Document)*, South African theologians declared: "The moment of truth has compelled us to analyze more carefully the different theologies in our Churches and to speak out more clearly and boldly about the real significance of these theologies". The document went on to identify and analyze three conflicting theologies operative in South African Christianity: 'State Theology', 'Church Theology' and 'Prophetic Theology', offering a critique of the first two theologies in the light of a biblical

theology of liberation.

'State Theology' is a theology created out of a misuse of theological concepts and biblical texts by the South African apartheid government, to give theological justification to racism, and back its oppressive and unjust attitudes towards the blacks. Here for example, Romans 13: 1-7 is interpreted as giving an absolute and 'divine' authority to the State, while the people are to have an attitude of blind obedience and absolute servility to the State. Such an interpretation is, however, blind to the fact that in the Bible, God does not order obedience to unjust and oppressive rulers. God rather disapproved of their actions and liberated the people from such rulers, as God did in Egypt between Pharaoh and the Israelites.

South African 'Church Theology' on the other hand is a theological position, which is found to run through occasional speeches, statements and pronouncements by church leaders about apartheid and the South African crisis. The general theological position taken against apartheid is identified as reconciliation (or peace), justice and non-violence. The leaders use these concepts, according to the liberation theologians, superficially and counter-productively, without evidence of an in-depth social analysis of the actual situation. An in-depth social analysis of the South African situation would reveal rather, that it would be totally unchristian for example, for blacks to plead for reconciliation and peace while they were still being oppressed, since that would be tantamount to their accepting the crimes committed against them. Such reconciliation, if it were to exist, would be equivalent to reconciling evil and good, or God and the devil, when one is supposed to oppose, confront, reject and do away with evil and the devil.

Furthermore, the liberation theologians note that 'Church Theology' presumes that it is the whites that should give justice to the blacks. This is seen as a near impossibility. Rather than appeal to the whites for justice, 'Church Theology' should talk to the blacks to claim their justice. They should also be encouraged to use even physical force to resist, and to defend themselves against the unjust aggression on their lives and property, in the clear absence of any other authority that defends them. Thus, acting in self-defense should not be equated to acts of violence, as 'Church Theology' tends to assume.

A prophetic theology, in contrast to 'State Theology' and 'Church Theology', is at the core of South African Black liberation theology. Like Latin American liberation theology, its first task is an attempt at social analysis of the concrete situation. A search in the Bible is then carried out, to identify God's liberative acts. These acts of God are then associated with the result of the social analysis. This leads to an offer of hope to the oppressed, and a challenge to action. In the South African context, the liberation theologians note that the challenge to action means that Christians should all realize that God sides with the oppressed, and so all Christians should participate in the struggle against oppression by transforming church activities into liberating acts, identifying with special campaigns against oppression, and teaching the people about their moral duty to resist oppression and struggle for liberation and justice. South African Black feminist liberation theologians, however, berate the practice of liberation theology in South Africa as male oriented. According to Ramodibe (1988), South African feminist liberation theology "aims to challenge men about their views of women, about their treatment of women, and also to question whether that treatment does not

thereby make them oppressors. It is in this respect that black theology has come to realize that there can be no liberation from oppression by whites while women's oppression is not addressed". South African black feminists observe that the oppressive patriarchal system was already entrenched in South Africa even before apartheid, and has continued because some people see culture as static and not dynamic. With apartheid, black women experienced a double oppression and exploitation, first as blacks, then as women. They also were the worse off in churches, where women felt wanted merely for their services such as cleaning, cooking and fund-raising, but did not feel needed in these churches as people.

In view of their experiences, therefore, South African black feminist theologians advocate for a black theology of liberation that makes the liberation of women a fundamental part of the theology. Based on Jesus' teaching and example in treating all human beings with equal dignity, the feminist theologians have sued for equal representation and involvement of black women and men in all facets of human endeavor in South Africa.

### **Exercise 2.1**

1. What was the ultimate reason for the introduction of apartheid as a state ideology in South Africa?
2. How was white theology employed during the apartheid era?
3. In what way did South African black women feel they were doubly oppressed?

### **3.2 African Liberation Theology**

African (excluding South African) liberation theology is one out of two major approaches to African theology, the other being African Inculturation theology. As an approach to African theology, African liberation theology reflects on the multiple social, cultural, religious, political and economic issues affecting the African continent, in the light of the liberating message of the scriptures. Some of these issues are, Debt Reduction, Land Ownership, Racism, Ethnicity, Tribalism, Slavery, Colonialism, Neo-Colonialism, Political Mismanagement, Corruption, Injustice, Poverty, Globalization, Democratization, Human Rights Abuses, Media, Youth, and Leadership. Others include, Underdevelopment, Marginalization, Privatization, Wars, Insecurity, Refugees, Environmental Degradation, HIV/AIDS, Diseases, Unemployment, Poor Infrastructure, Urban Drift, Religious Intolerance, Natural Disasters, and High Infant Mortality.

African liberation theology parades names such as J.N.K. Mugambi, B. Bujo, J. Marc-Ela, J. M. Waliggo and J. Odey. Borrowing from Latin American liberation theology, it generally relies in its approach, first on an analysis of a problem within a particular context, to bring to the fore, the root causes and the effects of the problem under discussion. It then applies biblical and theological tools to evaluate, challenge or critique how the problem has been handled. Lastly, it suggests to the problem a liberative solution, an action, a response, or a way out. An analysis of the work of J. M. Waliggo (1999) entitled "The External Debt in the Continued Marginalization of Africa: What Action by Christian Theologians?" could serve to illustrate the method and concerns of African liberation theology.

Waliggo underlines the necessity of doing theology with attention to the

needs of Africa:

Doing theology in Africa demands identification of the aspirations, hopes and joys of the African people on one hand, and their anguishes, sufferings, problems and needs on the other....Africa does not require mere pity or mercy or so-called charity. Africa wants justice, understanding and solidarity to put past injustices and wrongs right. It demands equal partnership in the struggle for total liberation. It demands sincere confession for all the injustices done to it throughout the centuries. It demands freedom to think, plan and implement its vision for the future, in the church and in society as a whole. It demands all right-thinking people to join it in its struggle to throw off the chains that enslave it.

One of the many cries of Africans yearning for justice and liberation identified by Waliggo, is the cry for the cancellation of unjust external debts. He believes that it is only God's impatience with injustice and evil, and the radical 'Holy Anger' of Jesus that can overturn the tables. For Waliggo, before Africa's current debt to rich countries is discussed, it is important to remember the colossal debt owed to Africa as a result of slavery and colonialism. Historically, black Africans were used to construct the 'civilizations' of Ancient Egypt, the Islamic Middle East Empire and the Roman Empire. Again, during about four hundred years of slave trade, Africans were shipped to Europe and the Americas for the production of commercial coffee, tea, cotton, sugar and tobacco, while millions died in related circumstances. The adverse effects of slavery and colonization on Africa merit some consideration with regards to Africa's debt today, in view of the fact that Africa, the cradle of human life, was self-reliant before slavery and colonialism.

Waliggo's social analysis of the debt situation in Africa reveals that African governments owe three kinds of debts: Domestic debts to local banks, insurance companies and individuals; Bilateral debt owed to specific rich countries, and Multilateral debt owed to international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF, or regional development banks. Out of these, African countries spend four times more on repayment of bilateral and multilateral debts than they spend on providing some social services to their citizens. The irony of the external loans scheme is that it depends on governments implementing certain poverty generating policies such as *Structural Adjustment Program* (SAP) and *Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility* (ESAF), including currency devaluation and high interest rates. It is largely on account of such policies (other causes include state of world economy, unethical banking, corruption, dictatorship), that many indebted African countries end up with bad debts that cannot be repaid without having to "sell off" its citizens into slavery.

Waliggo's call for debt cancellation for debtor African countries is in response to a prescript in scripture for the cancellation of debts on the occasion of the celebration of a year of jubilee (Deut 15:1; Lev 25:8). He notes that since African debts cannot be repaid without placing a greater burden on an already impoverished people, and since the creditor countries and organizations are already swimming in wealth, it is morally unacceptable to insist that the bad debts incurred by Africa are repaid. Insisting on debt repayment is a clear indication of the insensitivity of the

creditors to the plight of Africans. Some of these debts were incurred by corrupt and dictatorial regimes that had no intention of improving the lot of African citizens. Moreover, even individuals and companies are sometimes declared insolvent or bankrupt, and their creditors cancel their debts. The same principle should be applied to indebted African countries. There is need, therefore, to liberate Africa of the debt burden, so that Africa can embark on developmental and people-oriented programs on the continent. The call for debt cancellation in a Jubilee spirit includes also a call for an end to all unjust lending structures and policies that have been found to generate rather than abate poverty in borrowing countries. This is one way of ensuring total liberation for Africa, according to Waliggo.

African women theologians, while identifying with the African reality and the overall liberation theological concerns canvassed mostly by their male counterparts, note that sadly, it is African women that ultimately bear the brunt of the exploitation of Africa by outsiders, although the oppression of women also has roots in Africa's patriarchal cultural structures. The major liberation theological task for African women lies in reclaiming their theological heritage, which has been overtaken by men, given the fact that in traditional Africa, women were theologians in their own right, and were deeply involved in traditional spirituality and religious rites. They aspire to use their theological endowments for the liberation of women and men in Africa.

African women's liberation theology has many frontline proponents, who include Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Teresa Okure, Rose Uchem, Louise Tappa, Rose Zoe-Obianga and Bette Ekeya. To these theologians, although the African woman is in many ways the soul of the African society, African women are often treated as less than human. Their role is dominantly that of mother and wife. They are regarded as the property of men, and kept out of important decision-making. Women are exploited economically even though they generate and save a lot of family income. They are marginalized in some Christian assemblies, and schemed out of political relevance. They are victims of gender stereotyping, such that women are always expected to perform tasks that are reserved to women, such as cooking and other household chores. They are often blamed for the evils in the society and particularly of the family, even when they are innocent. With impunity, many African women are denied certain fundamental human rights, such as the right to education, freedom of movement, freedom of association, choice of a life partner, inheritance, and ownership of some property.

African women liberation theologians point at patriarchy as the most oppressive structure being used against the full realization of womanhood in Africa. Moreover, centuries of negative biblical interpretation against women, especially of the story of creation and fall, have created a socio-religious bias against women today, and have been used to justify an inferior role and status assigned to women. African women liberation theologians seek out and amplify liberative elements in the scriptures, while discounting the humanly oppressive elements in it. According to Okure (1988): "The liberative elements emphasize the woman's equality with the man, her being made conjointly with him in the image and likeness of God, of equal dignity and honor, and her being given the special privilege, akin to God's, of bearing, mothering, and fostering life". Moreover, the African woman, finding herself hemmed in

from all sides, finds liberative hope in the practices, teaching and suffering of Jesus Christ. In his condition, he bears the conditions of the weak and oppressed, hence that of women. He shows a great interest in the condition of women, and therefore, African women are very interested in Jesus as a personal friend, a companion, the voice of the voiceless, the power of the powerless, and a critic of the status quo.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise 2.2**

1. Enumerate ten among the issues affecting the African continent, which are of interest to African liberation theologians.
2. What do African women theologians point to as the most oppressive structure against women in Africa?

### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

From the above, you have come to a better understanding of South African Black and African liberation theologies. These theologies focus on, and seek to address the peculiar problems that confront Africa. So far, South African liberation theology has had a lot of impact, contributing to the end of apartheid in South Africa. African liberation theology is still gathering momentum, in the hope of creating some impact on the continent in due time.

### **5.0 SUMMARY**

The main points in this unit include:

1. In the South African apartheid system, racism was institutionalized as a state ideology, ultimately intended for the self-preservation of the white race in South Africa.
2. In their study of the scriptures, South African liberation theologians discovered that there was a fundamental contradiction between the proclamation of the biblical message and what white theologians had taught them about God and Jesus Christ.
3. The core of South African Black liberation theology is prophetic theology, as against 'state theology' and 'church theology'.
4. South African feminist theologians, insisting that there can be no liberation from oppression by whites while women's oppression in South Africa is not addressed, sue for the treatment of all human beings with equal dignity, following the example of Jesus.
5. African liberation theology reflects on the multiple social, cultural, religious, political and economic issues affecting the African continent, in the light of the liberating message of the scriptures.
6. African liberation theology analyzes a problem in context, applies biblical and theological tools to evaluate, challenge or critique the problem, and proposes a liberation response to it.
7. African women liberation theologians seek to reclaim their theological heritage, which has been overtaken by men, since the fact that in traditional Africa, women were theologians in their own right, and were deeply involved in traditional spirituality and religious rites.
8. African women liberation theologians seek out and amplify divinely liberative elements, which emphasize equality with the men in the scriptures, while discounting the humanly oppressive elements in it.

### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT (TMA)**

1. What is the idea of God in South African Black liberation theology?

2. What lessons have emerged from South African feminist understanding of Jesus?
3. What is the methodological approach of African liberation theology?
4. What liberative elements do African women theologians find in the scriptures?

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## **UNIT 3 MAJOR ISSUES IN LIBERATION AND FEMINIST THEOLOGIES**

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### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

You are well aware by now, that the bottom line of the theology of liberation is the biblical truth that God abhors any form of oppression, and God wants the liberation of the oppressed. Through Jesus Christ, God has carried out the ultimate act of liberation in the world, and in his name, the followers of Jesus participate today in God’s act of liberation. All the strands of liberation theology would identify with this message of the scripture. Armed with the above biblical truth, liberation and feminist theologians have evolved certain major issues, which are peculiar to their strands of liberation theology. This unit will discuss some of these briefly.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

Identify and explain some major issues that emerge in Liberation theology.

Identify and explain some major issues that emerge in feminist liberation theology.

### **3.0 MAIN BODY**

#### **3.1 Major issues in Liberation Theology**

Inspired by the biblical story of the Israelite experience of God’s liberation at the Exodus, the different prophetic utterances against oppression, and the liberative mission and ministry of Jesus Christ, liberation theologians have developed certain theological issues around which many of their reflections center. A discussion of a selection of these issues follows:

##### **3.1.1 “Rediscovery” of the Bible**

Liberation theologians have “rediscovered” the bible. According to Kirby (1981:66), the bible is now read “as the history of an oppressed people and of



their hope for liberation”. When read in this new way, the bible assumes a new meaning. Also, the message of the prophets, the prayers in the Psalter, the wisdom and other writings all come alive. The same goes for the entire New Testament, which focus on the Christian hope for salvation through Jesus Christ. Reading the bible this way is part and parcel of the activities of the base communities. The Scripture, therefore, speak to the people in their experience, and make meaning to them, giving them new vigor, grace and hope. In this new way of reading the scriptures, everyone has a contribution to make, because the concerns of the scriptures touch deeply on the concerns of every reader.

### **3.1.2 A New Knowledge of God**

Through their reflections on the scriptures from the perspective of liberation, liberation theologians have developed a new understanding of God, and developed a new relationship with God. According to Gutierrez, “the God of the Bible is not just a God who governs history, but he orients history towards the establishment of justice and right. He is more than a provident God. He is a God who takes the side of his people; and who liberates them from slavery and oppression This new knowledge of God generates a new assurance of God’s presence, grace and love. The oppressed are not simply told of it, but they know that God is with them in their struggles, and they experience God’s actual presence with them. God is in their midst, walking with them. This new knowledge of God finds an ultimate fulfillment in the knowledge that in Jesus, God’s presence and action on behalf of the oppressed is assured. Jesus is not just a heavenly king, but also one whose kingdom is primarily concerned with the liberation of the oppressed, and who brings to the poor and the oppressed the good news of liberation. Jesus’ experience of all human pains and suffering, including a violent and shameful death gives an assurance of God who identifies fully with the human situation. The resurrection of Jesus offers to the poor and oppressed a rekindling of hope in the God who transforms everything, and who can change the negative human condition. Indeed, the new knowledge of God is that God is God of the poor and oppressed.

### **3.1.3 Faith: A Commitment to Building the Kingdom of God:**

For liberation theologians, their faith convictions, which arise out of reflections on the scriptures, bring them to a new level of commitment to faith. Faith is seen as a way of life, not just a system of beliefs. Therefore, to have faith is to commit oneself to act like God. One has to accompany *orthodoxy* with *orthopraxis*. Faith propels one to actively love, hunger and thirst for justice, towards building the kingdom of God. Faith makes one not waver in one’s commitment, even if it brings about suffering and death. Indeed, Latin American liberation theologians are aware that just as in the case of Jesus, their commitment to building a kingdom of justice, truth and love will necessarily bring them persecution. Yet, their faith gives them an unwavering hope that change is possible; that after suffering and death comes the resurrection, and that without suffering and death, there can be no resurrection either now or in the future.

### **3.1.4 Preferential Option for the Poor**

This is a favorite phrase among liberation theologians. Arising out of prophetic and gospel mandates that the gap between the rich and the poor must be bridged, this term offers a guide on how to achieve this result.

The term does not refer to “an *exclusive* option for the poor,” as if the rich have no part in God’s plan of salvation. Rather, like God who is just to the oppressed, liberation theologians prefer to make an option on behalf of the poor, in a situation where the poor are unjustly treated in society. They ask questions such as: “will this social program improve the situation of the poor or not?” Thus, they opt to stand by the poor in the name of God, and speak/act on their behalf.

Who are the poor? One may ask. Liberation theologians look on to the scriptures for an answer. According to Dorr (1983:5) In the Old Testament, the term “the poor” refers especially to those groups of people who are economically deprived, who have no social status, who are treated unjustly by foreign rulers or by the authorities in their own land. These people are oppressed because they are poor, and therefore at the mercy of the unscrupulous. Furthermore, they are poor because they are oppressed: they have been further impoverished by being cheated and deprived of their rights. Some groups of ‘the poor’ are doubly oppressed. They are the people who are at risk not only because they are economically poor but also because they happen to be widows, orphans, or resident aliens – categories of people who have nobody to defend them against exploitation.

Gutiérrez (1990: xxi –xxii) gives a further insight to poverty in the contemporary context:

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 employment, the lack of respect for one’s human dignity, and unjust limitations placed on personal freedom in the areas of self-expression, politics and religion. Poverty is a situation that destroys peoples, families and individuals; Medellín and Puebla called it ‘institutionalized violence’, to which must be added the equally unacceptable violence of terrorism and repression. At the same time, it is important to realize that being poor is a way of living, thinking, loving, praying, believing, and hoping, spending leisure time, and struggling for a livelihood. Being poor today is also increasingly coming to mean being involved in the struggle for justice and peace, defending one’s life and freedom, seeking a more democratic participation in the decisions made by the society, organizing to live their faith in an integral way, and being committed to the liberation of every human being.

With such an expanded understanding of the ‘poor’ and ‘poverty’, the Preferential Option for the Poor can be said to be a preferential option for humanity and for life, because in a sense, everybody is poor before God.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise 3.1**

1. How do liberation theologians now understand the bible to be?
2. What is the new understanding of God among liberation theologians?
3. In what kind of situation would liberation theologians make an option for the poor?

### **3.2 Major Issues in Feminist Liberation Theology**

Feminist liberation theology shares the basic view that in the bible, God abhors any form of oppression, and God seeks to liberate the oppressed, an act that God carries out definitively through Jesus Christ. However, feminist liberation theologians note that the same bible, written and traditionally interpreted from the perspective of patriarchy, has become a major source of women's oppression and subjugation. In order that the bible would adequately fulfill its liberative role, the authentic word of God must be liberated of its patriarchal traditional bias, and a more inclusive theology that takes cognizance of, and incorporates the concerns of women, developed from it. The following are, therefore, some of the major themes that emerge from feminist liberation theology.

#### **3.2.1 Biblical Interpretation from a Feminist Perspective**

Can the Bible still be regarded as an inspired and authoritative word of God despite its sexist bias? This concern has led to the development of creative approaches to biblical interpretation from a feminist perspective. Thus, feminists look for positive biblical texts about women, in order to counteract famous texts "against" women. They reinterpret famous biblical texts against women from the perspective of women's experiences, and they look at biblical texts about women, to learn from the intersection of the stories of ancient and modern women living in patriarchal cultures, and they look at texts that promote liberation.

Biblical interpretations carried out from these perspectives would usually revolve around contextual theological, socio-cultural and ecclesial issues. The idea is to liberate the scriptures and its interpretation from the predominantly male grip that it has been, over the centuries, and give it a new meaning, which includes the concerns of women.

#### **3.2.2 Rejection of Patriarchy**

Of all the feminist liberation theological issues, the rejection of patriarchy is the most dominant. Patriarchy is a social system whereby the male is regarded as the dominant sex while the female is regarded as secondary, subordinate and inferior. Within the patriarchal system, women are expected to be of complete service to men. Patriarchy leads to androcentrism (male-centeredness) sexism (male oppression) and gender stereotyping. This is because besides the rightful assumption of male or female biological roles, the male is socialized into conformity with perceived "masculine" standards, and the woman is expected to act in conformity with what society identifies as "feminine".

In rejecting patriarchy, feminists seek liberation from patriarchal oppression, which devalues the female. They see such oppression as not being in consonance with the liberative acts of God and of Jesus. They see the oppression of women in any form as not being in consonance with the liberating message of the scriptures. Therefore, patriarchy has to be rejected where it is found in the scriptures, in order that the true word of God may be experienced. Thus, feminist liberation theologians advocate for gender equality, as opposed to either patriarchy or matriarchy. This position is inspired by the creation account, where God created humanity equal as male and female (Gen. 1:27), and by the Pauline passage which declares the equality of peoples in Christ: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28).

### 3.2.3 A New Image of God

Feminist liberation theologians seek liberation from the presumption that God is male, rather than pure spirit. As Spirit, God is neither male nor female. However, images that are characteristically both male and female are used of God (see Job 38:29; Isa 42:14; Deut 32:18; Isa 66:13). Feminist liberation theologians, therefore, seek out new and inclusive images of God. One cannot have one sex as the image of God since such an image would be incomplete. It is as both male and female that humanity is the image of God (Gen 1:27).

### 3.2.4 Inclusiveness

This is the overall guiding principle of feminist liberation theology. Inclusiveness involves: inclusive theology, inclusive language, inclusive ecclesial ministry, and inclusive responsibilities. Inclusiveness takes both men and women into account in every life context, and promotes the equality of men and women. Through inclusive theology, women are liberated from academic exclusiveness, whereby the experiences, contributions and concerns of women did not feature as part of theological heritage. Through the use of inclusive language, women do not feel discriminated against whether in the church or society at large. With such sensitivity in language, women are liberated from the alienation that exclusive language has always forced them into. Feminist liberation theology seeks to develop an inclusive English language vocabulary, and other languages that will encourage inclusiveness in the use of gender language. Through inclusive ecclesial ministry, women seek liberation from exclusive male leadership in those ecclesial communities where this is operative. They also seek inclusion in decision making, especially in issues that affect their lives. Such inclusiveness would facilitate co-responsibility in all things.

### Self-Assessment Exercise 3.2

1. Why do feminist liberation theologians think that the bible has become a major source of women's oppression and subjugation?
2. What is the image of God envisioned by feminist liberation theologians?

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

The above-mentioned major themes contain some of the issues that generate discussions among liberation and feminist theologians. Although these theologians all draw their inspiration from the scriptures, it is obvious that it is their specific contexts that determine their interpretation of the Scriptures.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

The major points in this unit include:

1. Some issues that emerge from liberation theology are:
  - a) Rediscovery of the bible as the history of an oppressed people and of their hope of liberation
  - b) A new knowledge of God as one who orients history towards the establishment of justice and right.
  - c) Faith is a commitment to building the kingdom of God, such that orthodoxy is accompanied by orthopraxis.
  - d) Preferential option for the poor is in keeping with prophetic and gospel teachings.
2. Some issues that emerge from feminist liberation theology include:

- a) Biblical interpretation is carried out from a feminist perspective, in order to divest it of sexist bias.
- b) Rejection of patriarchy as an oppressive social system, which regards the male as the dominant sex.
- c) Development of a new image of God, which takes cognizance also of the female characteristics as God, and describes God in non-sexist terms as a divine and pure spirit.
- d) Inclusion of women in theology, language, ecclesial ministry, decision-making, etc., would facilitate co-responsibility.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT (TMA)

1. What is the biblical understanding of “poor”?
2. Why do feminist liberation theologians reject patriarchy?

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## UNIT 4 CHALLENGES OF LIBERATION AND FEMINIST THEOLOGIES

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### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Despite the impacts of liberation and feminist theologies, there are some challenges that face these theologies. There are, in this regard, many critics of these theologies, who have pointed out certain lapses and drawn attention to a number of issues that would make the exposition of these theologies less than wholesome. In this unit you will be introduced to some of these major challenges facing these theologies.

#### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

Identify and discuss some of the major challenges facing liberation theology.

Identify and discuss some of the major challenges facing feminist liberation theology.

### 3.0 MAIN BODY

#### 3.1 Major Challenges of Liberation Theology

The major challenges to liberation theology have come from Latin America, first world theologians and church authorities. The most outspoken Latin American critic of liberation theology is Cardinal Alfonso Lopez Trujillo. He condemns liberation theology as Marxist in orientation, in view of its stress on class conflict, and the poor as an oppressed class. This, he insists, is a danger to the Christian faith, which stresses reconciliation. He indicts the liberation theologians for using Marxist social analysis method to evaluate society.

Another Latin American critic, Roger Vekemans, accused the theologians of trying to entrench the principles of socialism. He further criticizes the theologians on their use of the term “praxis” as central to their theology. Who decides, he queries, what praxis to follow and on what basis?

European theologians’ challenge to liberation theology, formulated in a document titled, “Human Development and Christian Salvation”, notes that praxis should not be the focus of theology, rather it should be seeking to understand God’s word. They also challenged the interpretation of the Exodus event by liberation theologians. It was God not the people who decided to initiate the liberation of the Israelites from Egypt. Moreover, the goal of the liberation from Egypt was the worship of God, solemnized in the covenant worship at Mount Sinai. Furthermore, the European theologians remark that although the Old Testament prophets lashed out against oppression and injustice, they did

not propose any revolt of the people against the oppressors.

On its part, official Catholic challenge to liberation theology contained in *Instruction on Human Liberation and Freedom* (1984), lies mainly in numerous criticisms of the political use of theology and certain biblical passages, and the implied use of Marxist principles to interpret the scriptures.

North American critics led by Thomas Sanders, view liberation theology as mere utopia. It offers a non-existent and a non-realizable hope. The advocates of liberation theology, it is said, do not think about human sinfulness, which is what really creates conflicts within every society. Indeed, all political systems remain imperfect and ambiguous, so it is naïve to hope for a perfect society.

Evangelical protestant critique of liberation theology, spearheaded by C. Peter Wagner, accused liberation theology of being “syncretistic”, far removed from the true mission of the Church, which is that of reconciling all peoples to God through Christ. Thus, Christianity should not find itself pitched against any political system. The distinction between the Church and the world should be strictly maintained.

A more radical rejection of liberation theology from an evangelical protestant perspective is found in the writings of G. Berghoef, and L. Dekoster, who accuse liberation theologians of denying certain Christian beliefs such as the fall, the atonement, the last judgment and Christian love. These have been substituted for Marxist principles such as class struggle, the rejection of private ownership of the means of production, and the promotion of revolution. They assert that liberation theologians only “masquerade a concern for the poor and the oppressed.”

### **Self-Assessment Exercise 4.1**

*(Fill in the blanks)*

1. Trujillo condemns liberation theology as being -----
2. North American critics, led by Sanders, view liberation theology as mere -----
3. Evangelical Protestant critique led by Wagner, accuses liberation theology as being -----

### **3.2 Major Challenges of Feminist Liberation Theology**

One of the most serious challenges to feminist liberation theology is that is elitist and separatist. As a result, some women theologians have distanced themselves from it, and preferred a ‘*womanist*’ theology. These women theologians, drawn largely among North American Black and Hispanic minority women felt, according to Okure (1993:76), “that the white women’s approach addressed the issue of sex but not sufficiently those of class and race”.

Although the issues focused on are basically the same, African women theologians tend towards using a womanist approach to liberation theology rather than a feminist approach. According to Okure, (1993:77), the womanist approach: Has the distinctive characteristic of inclusiveness. It describes the efforts of women and men to interpret the scriptures as they relate to women, in a common search for new inclusive meanings. In this respect, it differs from the strictly feminist approach, which excludes the possibility of men being able to offer a valid interpretation of scripture as it relates to women. The... approach is inclusive of scholars and non

scholars, the rich and the poor, it is inclusive of the ‘scientific’, the creative, and the popular methods.

The critique is thus made by African women theologians that feminist liberation theology is too far rooted in gender and sex issues, without being sufficiently concerned about other issues that affect women, especially in third world contexts, such as “underdevelopment”, hunger, diseases; political, economic and religious exploitation; the effects of colonialism and neo-colonialism. Accordingly, African women liberation theologians insist that they cannot afford to divorce their legitimate quest for a liberating theology from the wider quest of liberation for the African peoples.

Based on a rejection of patriarchy, the feminist biblical “hermeneutics of suspicion” approach to biblical interpretation has also come under challenge by ecclesiastical scholars. Accordingly, a Vatican document, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (1994:63), states:

Feminist exegesis, to the extent that it proceeds from a pre-conceived judgment, runs the risk of interpreting the biblical texts in a tendentious and thus debatable manner. To establish its positions, it must often, for want of something better, have recourse to arguments “ex silentio”. As is well known, this type of argument is generally viewed with much reserve: it can never suffice to establish a conclusion on a solid basis. On the other hand, the attempt made, on the basis of fleeting indications in the texts, to reconstitute on historical situation, which these same texts are considered to have been designed to hide – this does not correspond to the work of exegesis so called. It entails rejecting the content of the inspired texts in preference for a hypothetical construction, quite different in nature.

### Self-Assessment Exercise 4.2

(Fill in the blanks)

1. One of the most serious challenges to feminist liberation theology is that it is -----  
and -----
2. African women liberation theologians prefer a ----- approach.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

The above challenges which are posed to both liberation and feminist theologians have undoubtedly, been responded to by the theologians themselves, at various occasions. Some of the criticisms also have been shown to be a total misrepresentation of the actual positions taken by the theologians. They have, however, been cited in this unit to give you a picture of the kind of challenges faced by liberation and feminist theology.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

The main points in this unit include:

1. Liberation theology has been accused of: being Marxist in orientation; wrongly using “praxis” as the center of their theology; using the Bible and theology for political ends not in keeping with Christian tradition; being utopian; being syncretistic; and denying certain age-old Christian beliefs.



2. Feminist liberation theology has been challenged as being elitist and separatist, especially excluding men and non-scholars from participating in its theologizing. It has also been accused of coming to biblical interpretation with pre-conceived suspicions and judgments regarding patriarchy, which could lead the interpreter to hypothetical results.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT (TMA)

1. What is it that Trujillo specifically finds obnoxious in Marxism, that he declares to be a danger to Christian faith?
2. What risk does pre-conceived judgment run in biblical interpretation?

## 7.0 REFERENCES / FURTHER READINGS

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