

Liberation Theology Curriculum

J. Scott Roberts

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Session #1 – Hermeneutics

Introduction to hermeneutics and the grid through which we interpret things.

Exercise 1:

Have students draw a semi-detailed picture of the following things on a sheet of paper:

Cow, Bird, Paradise, Relaxation, Fun, Chair

Discuss these pictures, colors or animals, sizes, understandings of abstract concepts and why things are or aren't similar across the board.

Q1: Where were your concepts for each of these shaped?

Q2: What factors have influenced the prototype that is stored in your mind?

Q3: Do you think your reading of Scripture has been influenced by a certain set of stimuli?

Exercise 2:

Describe the scene at the manger.

Q1: How many magi were there? What did they look like?

Read Mt. 2:1-16

Q2: What types of things have we read into the story? Where do these things come from?

Get info from Dr. Parris on the History of the Magi and the various interpretations that have been offered concerning them throughout history.

Q1: Define the Gospel, salvation message, in the most simplistic form possible. You have ½ sheet of paper and no more than 100 words.

Exercise 3:

Take & Discuss the “Gospel and Culture” Test on pg. 57-8 of Anthropological Insights for Missionaries by Paul Hiebert

Add the following Questions to the test:

39. Christians have a responsibility to care for the poor.

40. Poverty is essential to understanding Salvation.

41. God prefers the poor in Spirit to the worldly poor.

42. God prefers the worldly poor to the poor in Spirit

Q1: Which version of the beatitudes do you prefer – the Matthean or Lukan? Why?

Q2: What things take precedence when you read Scripture?

Q3: What is the hermeneutic/process that you currently use for arriving at the meaning of the text? How might you improve on it?

Closing Lecture NOTES: Strategic Church Planting: Applied Anthropology for Cross-Cultural Missions Pg. 13-25 “Epistemology and Culture Theory” (Exact info. To be worked out still)¹

Session #2 – The Hermeneutics of Liberation Theology

Readings:

- Good News for the Poor²
- Hispanic Women’s Liberation Theology: Beginnings³
- A New Image and a New Faith in Christ⁴
- Theology: A Critical Reflection⁵
- Christology in Latin America⁶

Recalling what we learned about the things that shape our understandings of the world and Scriptural interpretation, let’s begin looking at the Hermeneutic of L.T.

Q1: What did Jesus come to proclaim?

Read Luke 4:18-19

Q2: What do all these people have in common with each other? Poor, prisoners, blind, oppressed

Q3: Why did Jesus begin his ministry with this? How controversial would this be? What would this be like saying today?

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to those who suffer poverty from affliction and oppression like the prostitutes, the migrant workers, and the sweatshop laborers.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners; the people who cant pay their bills, absolution for debtors,

And recovery of sight for the blind. The AIDS patients will no longer be stigmatized, nor the homosexual, they all have a right to life,

To release the oppressed, those who struggle to fit into society’s mold, the Indian who lost his land to encroachment, the slaves of India and America. (my paraphrase)

OR

¹ Richard Lewis D. Miss., *Church Strategic Planting*.

² Elsa Tamez, "Good News for the Poor," in *Third World Liberation Theologies: A Reader*, ed. Deane William Ferm (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986). Pg. 189-196

³ Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Yolanda Tarango, *Hispanic Women: Prophetic Voice in the Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992). Pg. 1-9

⁴ Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological View*, trans. Paul Burns and Francis McDonagh (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993). Pg. 11-22

⁵ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973). Pg. 3-20

⁶ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Christology - a Global Introduction: An Ecumenical, International and Contextual Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003). Pg. 222-236

Hark, the glad sound, the Saviour comes!
 the Saviour promised long;
 Let ev'ry heart exult with joy,
 and ev'ry voice be song!
 On him the Spirit, largely shed,
 exerts its sacred fire;
 Wisdom and might, and zeal and love,
 his holy breast inspire.
 He comes! the pris'ners to relieve,
 in Satan's bondage held;
 The gates of brass before him burst,
 the iron fetters yield.
 He comes! from dark'ning scales of vice
 to clear the inward sight;
 And on the eye-balls of the blind
 to pour celestial light.
 139 He comes! the broken hearts to bind,
 the bleeding souls to cure;
 And with the treasures of his grace
 t' enrich the humble poor.
 The sacred year has now revolved,
 accepted of the Lord,
 When Heav'n's high promise is fulfilled,
 and Isr'el is restored.
 Our glad hosannahs, Prince of Peace!
 thy welcome shall proclaim;
 And heav'n's exalted arches ring
 with thy most honoured name.⁷

"The Spirit of God is upon me; Because God has anointed ("messiah") me to announce good news to the poor (the "outcasts"). God has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and the recovery of sight to those who cannot see and to set free those who are downtrodden ("kicked" and "stepped on"); to announce the time of God's acceptance of all people."⁸

The word "Christian" meant just what it implied – a people who were living and acting as Christ, who disciplined their lives, who exercised self-control, who continued the work which Christ Jesus had begun to do before He was taken up! The Spirit of the Lord was upon them, as upon Him, Jesus, because He

⁷ Scottish Psalter and Paraphrases, Accessed 5-25-04 at <http://www.ccel.org/a/anonymous/scotpsalter/htm/r39.htm#r39>

⁸ Accessed 5-25-04 from http://www.truluck.com/html/why_this_site.html

appointed them to preach good tidings to the poor; He had sent them to proclaim release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind; to set at liberty them that were bruised, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, that is, the releases, the Jubilees, and the Restoration. (Luke 4:18, 19).⁹

Modern reformulation of the Apostles' Creed from a Latin, modern perspective:
I believe and I live in God the Just One, the Liberator,
who created the world and my neighbor,
and in Christ of Nazareth, his only son,
and my only head,
who was born of a womanlike my mother,
suffered under the oppressor's might,
was despised, marginalized, and crucified.
He descended upon the mechanisms of power,
staged a coup d'état,
and is in command, together with God the Just One, the Liberator,
And soon, when everything is under control,
he will pass judgement on rich, poor, and indifferent.
I believe in the church, which lives in the world and for it,
in liberation from alienation,
in the equality of human being,
in the Prince of Peace,
and in the new life dawning on the horizon of history.¹⁰

** Look for other paraphrases like this that could be used. (Possibly, song 434 "Today We All Are Called to Be Disciples")

Q4: If Jesus set out to proclaim good news to these folks, what would be good news to them?

Q5: Will it be possible to understand that good news unless you are of the same class of people yourself?

It is here that Liberation Theology begins with the "preferential option for the poor." Discuss the concept of viewing everything from the eyes of and for the poor.

Q6: What is the Hermeneutic used by Liberationist, specifically as it relates to their 'understanding of the preferential option for the poor'?

Q7: Does this hermeneutic have benefits? Drawbacks? What new insights might using this hermeneutic reveal?

Linda Peacore, Ph.D. Email 5-17-04

"The preferential option for the poor has more to do with what God says about the poor. LT interprets scripture looking for this and then based on what scripture tells us about how God feels about the poor, then we have certain obligations. Though what you say

⁹ Accessed 5-25-04, pg. 15-16 from

<http://www.associationcovenantpeople.org/articles/archive/tkcarchive/tkc0103.pdf>

¹⁰ *Faces of Jesus: Latin American Christologies*, ed. José Míguez Bonino, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984; reprint, 1985). Pg. 44-5.

about reading scripture with an eye on what it means for the poor is also part of LT and relates to point above. For instance, the story of the Exodus shows us how God approaches the oppressed while also being good news for the poor now because it speaks of their liberation.

It seems that there is always a correlation of sources which factor into our interpretation of scripture. The question becomes one of priority and authority. What is more authoritative and how does it impinge on particular viewpoints?"

Session #3 – Oppression, Oppressed, Oppressor

Readings:

- Universal Declaration on Human Rights¹¹
- Medellín Document on Peace¹²
- Liberation and the Poor: The Puebla Perspective by Gustavo Gutiérrez¹³
- Health, Healing and Social Justice¹⁴

Q1: Define Oppression?

Q2: How does L.T. define oppression?

Q3: Who are the oppressed according to L.T.? Oppressors?

Q4: Are women oppressed? How? Does the preferential option for the poor apply to women? If so, how? Are there other groups/people that are oppressed? Who? How?

Q5: What is the root of oppression?

Read Luke 18:1-8 Parable of Widow and unjust Judge

Q6: Who are your opponents? Do you have any opponents like the widow? Who do you identify with more, the widow or the Judge or the opponent? Might it be possible that we don't identify with the widow because we are the opponent? How many of your daily actions contribute to the oppression of others?

Get some current statistics on Poverty, Medical Access, etc... and discuss how these relate to oppression.

Additional Watch John Q Documentary *Fighting for Care*¹⁵ and discuss how this relates to Oppression and what L.T. would have to say about it.

¹¹ United Nations, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*(1948, accessed April 27 2004); available from <http://www.unhchr.ch/udhr/lang/eng.htm>.

¹² Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM), "Medellín Document on Peace," in *Third World Liberation Theologies: A Reader*, ed. Deane William Ferm (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986). Pg. 3-11

¹³ *Third World Liberation Theologies: A Reader*, ed. Deane William Ferm (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986). Pg. 22-63

¹⁴ Paul Farmer, *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor*, ed. Robert Borofsky, 4 vols., California Series in Public Anthropology, vol. 4 (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2003). Pg. 139-159

¹⁵ Nick Cassavetes, "John Q," (USA: New Line Home Entertainment, Inc., 2002).

Closing Lecture NOTES: Part 1 – Oppression of my LT Independent Study Paper

Session #4 – Hermeneutics 2

Readings:

- Jesus and the Liberation of His People – by Segundo Galilea¹⁶
- Christians for Socialism: Declaration of the 80¹⁷
- The Meaning of the term *Liberation* – Gustavo Gutiérrez¹⁸
- A Spirituality of Liberation - Gustavo Gutiérrez¹⁹

Q1: How is the hermeneutic of L.T. and specifically its ‘preferential option for the poor’ integral to the methodology?

Q2: What is the final part of the L.T. Hermeneutic? Orthopraxis

Q3: Define orthopraxis vs. orthodoxy?

Q4: Which is Jesus more concerned with? Why?

Q5: Is classical theology concerned with orthopraxis? How? Why?

Q6: Where does orthopraxis come from in classical theology?

Q7: Where does orthodoxy come from in L.T.?

Q8: Will the two necessarily yield the same result? Why or why not?

Q9: How is Scripture viewed in L.T.? Does L.T. esteem scripture as highly as the reformation tradition of *Sola Scriptura*? Is Scripture authoritative, positive, negative, literal, metaphorical, allegorical in L.T.? How is it used?

Exercise 1:

Analyzing Matt 25:31-46 or the entire book of Nehemiah and apply the L.T. Hermeneutic as you understand it in order to interpret the passage in a 4-page paper. Be sure to construct the proper orthopraxic action that one should take from the passage. In a separate 4-page paper, identify the strengths/weaknesses of this approach to the passage, things gained or lost using this approach and give me an alternative hermeneutic you would prefer to use and why.

Closing Lecture NOTES: Part 2 – Hermeneutics of my LT Independent Study Paper

Session #5 – Salvation

Readings:

- Liberation and Salvation²⁰
- Jesus and the Kingdom of God²¹

¹⁶ *Third World Liberation Theologies: A Reader*. Pg. 176-183

¹⁷ *Ibid.* Pg. 12-14

¹⁸ *Ibid.* Pg. 15-16

¹⁹ *Ibid.* Pg. 17-21

²⁰ Gutiérrez. Pg. 149-187

²¹ Sobrino. Pg. 67-104

- Jesus and God (2): Jesus' Prophetic Praxis as Upholding the True God²²

Q1: How is salvation understood within L.T.? Removal of oppression, lack of domination

Q2: Is this comforting or uncomfortable for you?

Q3: What categories are part of Salvation? Past, present, future. Economic, Social, Political,

Q4: Is L.T. more eschatological than Christological?

Q5: Is L.T. concerned with equality or something different? What does equality assume? That the present system is fine.

Q6: What are the role of Christ and the role of the Kingdom within L.T.?

Q7: How does one's view of the Kingdom of God affect their action in this world?

Q8: Why have the wealthy relegated Salvation to the spiritual realm and not to the physical?

Q9: Does the protestant work ethic support or detract from the Kingdom of God being available to all people? Does it encourage present day salvation? Is it a real possibility for the masses of people around the world?

Q10: Taking the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the fact that the USA ratified it in order to join the UN in 1948, along with L.T.'s idea of Salvation – where, what is needed for the USA to truly uphold Articles 23 & 25?

Reflection:

Q1: Based on your understanding of LT, so far, “Are you the oppressor?” If yes, then what does your understanding of human nature, sin, the fall, etc. have to do with that? How can you be saved from this sin of being the oppressor? Where is redemption for the oppressor?

Closing Lecture NOTES: Part 3 – Salvation & Liberation, Salvation in LT, Shared Ideas of Salvation, and Differences in Salvation of my LT Independent Study Paper

Session #6 – Social Justice

Readings:

- What if you Got involved?²³
- Castrating Culture²⁴

Exercise 1:

Play Manipulated Monopoly and Debrief

Q1: half ways through stop and ask this question: What would need to be changed in order to make this just by the end of the game?

²² Ibid. Pg. 160-179

²³ Graham Gordon, *What If You Got Involved? Taking a Stand against Social Injustice* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2003).

²⁴ Dewi Hughes, *Castrating Culture: A Christian Perspective on Ethnic Identity from the Margins* (Glasgow: Paternoster Press, 2001).

Q2: At the End of the game: If we were to start playing the game from this point, brand new, but everyone starts with what is in their hands now, what would need to be done in order to make this game just?

Q3: How does this game relate to the USA? Western Hemisphere? World?

Watch IV clip *The Facts – Statistics on Racism*²⁵

Q4: Define Social Justice. How does it make you feel? Why?

Q5: Is it a fair statement that within L.T. Salvation = Lib. From Oppression = Social Justice?

Q6: What would liberation theology say is the response to Sweatshop labor in the world?

Closing Lecture NOTES: Part 3 – Oppression, Salvation & Social Justice of my LT Independent Study Paper

Session #7-9 – Practicum

Spend time in each of the following places over the next weeks:

1. Talking with a homeless person about their life, experiences, why they are on the streets, how hard it is to get off the streets, etc...
2. Volunteering in a Food Bank\Shelter\After-school program
3. With a person of a minority status in your neighborhood asking them about their experiences of racism, affirmative action, equality, etc...

Discuss these experiences in a 4-page paper about how it confirmed or shattered your paradigm of the poor, needy, minorities, etc...

What are your responses to this?

Session #10 – Conclusion

Q1: List the things that come to mind when the term “the poor” is said

Q2: Analyze these, are they positive or negative?

Read various Scripture verses, like Ps. 113:7, 138:6; 140:12, Pr 14:31; Is 57:15; Eze 21:26 Lk 6:20; 2 Cor 8:9; Jam 2:5-6;

Q3: How does the Scripture view the poor?

Q4: If you have a negative view of the poor, will they have anything to teach you? Will you hang out with them?

Q5: Does taking a preferential option for the poor, change the way you would read and understand Scripture?

Q6: Does it seem in line with the intent of Scripture?

Q7: How does the First World see the preferential option for the poor?

Q8: Who are the “poor” in your neighborhood? City? State? Nation?

Q9: How would reading Scripture, giving a ‘preferential option’ to the Single Minority Mother of 3 children affect your orthopraxis? Other groups?

²⁵ InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, *Picture This* (Madison, WI: Twenty One Hundred Productions). Track 11. 4 min 5 sec.

Q10: How can the values/lessons of LT translate into a privileged context? Do we view only those in our society, those within our nation, those within our socio-economic sphere, or ethnicity? Or do we translate it to the worldwide system we live in? Both?

Q11: What has this introduction to L.T. taught you? How has it affected you, your way of life?

Q12: Develop a new Hermeneutic that you will use for the next year, that you feel is true to God and then rewrite the Lukan Beatitudes using this hermeneutic to interpret what Jesus is saying.

Closing Lecture NOTES: Conclusion of my LT Independent Study Paper

- Cassavetes, Nick. "John Q." 112 min. USA: New Line Home Entertainment, Inc., 2002.
- (CELAM), Latin American Episcopal Council. "Medellín Document on Peace." In *Third World Liberation Theologies: A Reader*, ed. Deane William Ferm, 3-12. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986.
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- Third World Liberation Theologies: A Reader*. ed. Deane William Ferm. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986.
- United Nations. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. 1948. Accessed April 27 2004. Available from <http://www.unhcr.ch/udhr/lang/eng.htm>.