

**Globalization, Human Rights, Latin America, Religious Witness**  
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Introduction to Liberation Theology

Major Elements in the development of Liberation Theology

- The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Meeting of all the Catholic bishops in the world.
  - Purpose: to develop a Christian response to the modern world
  - Theme: open up to the world
  - Flatten the vision of the Church. The Church is not the clerical hierarchy (bishops, clergy, religious), but rather the Church is the entire People of God.
  - The Christian must be open to the realities and problem of the people, especially the poor.
  - The Church has the responsibility to work with the poor.
- The Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops at Medellín, Colombia (1968)
  - officially supported "base ecclesiastic communities" in which the poor peasants would share the gospel
  - Liberation Theology, which held that the Bible taught the dignity of the poor.
  - Important thinkers and theologians who developed Liberation Theology:
    - Gustavo Gutiérrez, priest from Peru (Dominican)
    - Leonardo Boff of Brazil (Franciscan)
    - Jon Sobrino, (Jesuit) priest of El Salvador
    - Juan Luis Segundo of Uruguay (Jesuit)
  - Liberation Theology has been described by proponents as "an interpretation of Christian faith through the poor's suffering, their struggle and hope, and a critique of society and the Catholic faith and Christianity through the eyes of the poor", and by detractors as Christianized Marxism.
- Emphasis in Latin America is on:
  - "Awakening" the conscience to the reality of the situation of the poor
  - This is called "concientización"
  - Demonstration that the suffering poor are a vehicle of God's grace.
  - Liberation from injustice is conceived as the message of the Bible
  - In the Bible, the poor are the preferred subjects for the Revelation of the Word of God.
- The Church hierarchy and religious conservatives have
  - Declared Liberation Theology to be flawed because it puts the primacy of focus on political action rather than God
  - Called for liberation from sin by all classes, an evangelization of social justice, and reconciliation between factions.
  - Nevertheless the hierarchy has endorsed some central tenets of Liberation Theology, without using that phrase. Examples are the "preferential option for the poor" and the notion that in addition to personal sin there exists social sin, sometimes called "structural sin."
  - Structural sin refers to political, legal, social, and economic structures which oppress the poor.

- In 2007, when archbishop in Argentina, Pope Francis addressed the Latin American episcopate with a stark statement of the need for economic change on the continent: “We live in the most unequal part of the world, which has grown the most yet reduced misery the least.” He added “The unjust distribution of goods persists, creating a situation of social sin that cries out to Heaven and limits the possibilities of a fuller life for so many of our brothers.”
- Bartolomé de las Casas and Liberation Theology Today
  - Liberation Theology calls for two things:
    - Solidarity: to enter into the reality of the poor
    - Political Discernment: discern and analyze a situation of injustice, to make sure we are not unconsciously colluding.
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  - Bartolomé de las Casas:
    - Was a “gentleman cleric.” He participated in the *encomienda* system and owned slaves.
    - He underwent a conversion and acknowledged that he was colluding with the crimes of the conquistadores.
- What does the Church today instruct with respect to justice and peace?

The Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace (Fall 2011) has called for major reform of the global and economic system. Today economic growth comes first at the expense of the masses and the environment. This must be reversed so the economic growth becomes the servant of people and the environment. (a) We cannot have a healthy and productive life if we are not in harmony with the web of life (environmental sustainability). (b) The diversion of resources to militarism and the concentration of resources among the wealthy minority result in poverty and misery for the masses.

The Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace asserts that  
*To be faithful to our ethical and religious vocations, we must work for the global common good (and not for domination of some nations over others in which people live in extreme hunger and poverty).*

In his homily during the inaugural Mass as pope, on March 19, 2013, Pope Francis said the duty of the Church is to protect creation (the environment) and to protect each person, *especially the poorest, the weakest, the least important, those whom Matthew lists in the final judgment on love: the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and those in prison.*