

Liberation Theology, Economic Inequality, and Social Justice

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

This lesson covers liberation theology. It's a movement within Roman Catholicism in which the teachings of Jesus are held to demand or at least to strongly incline one towards social action of a fairly particular sort. It's usually associated with a Peruvian priest named Gustavo Gutiérrez Merino. There was a lot of political and economic oppression in Latin and Central America during much of the 20th century, and this is a response to that. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. [Liberation Theology](#)
2. [Critics](#)
3. [Social Justice](#)

1. Liberation Theology

The force behind **liberation theology** is really the words and the teachings of Jesus as a means to peacefully combat inequality in the social realm. This was primarily economic inequality. Jesus' model of giving to the poor and helping those in need is used as inspiration for political protest and lobbying for redistribution of land resources to those who are disenfranchised.



TERM TO KNOW

Liberation Theology

A movement within Roman Catholicism in which Jesus' teachings are held to demand, or at least strongly incline one toward, social action of a fairly particular sort.

2. Critics

Although it's a movement within Roman Catholicism, some branches of liberation theology were criticized by the Vatican for spending too much energy applying standards of moral and ethical conduct to institutions instead of individuals. Other religious critics suggest that liberation theology is using religion as a mask for strictly economic and political motivations, calling it Marxist redistributionism.

These critics argue that Jesus' model of giving was more in the line of selfless giving and offering of love without expectation nor desiring compensation. Critics have called some of the activities of liberation theology political, economic, and state-sanctioned theft.

3. Social Justice

Nevertheless, the work of liberation theology is to initiate and achieve a greater degree of **social justice** and equality. Coming from an outcome-based perspective, some theories of social justice understand that the social realities of inequality really stem from economic inequalities and injustices. Social justice then stands on the side of liberation theology, because it offers solid moral ground for many of the seemingly radical actions that surround the work of **redistribution of wealth** to the disenfranchised.



TERMS TO KNOW

Social Justice

The belief that groups should be held to the same standards of justice as individuals, especially with respect to economic and social inequality.

Redistribution of Wealth

The taking of wealth, usually in the form of money, from one party to another, generally in the form of taxation of land redistribution.



SUMMARY

Liberation theology was associated with the Peruvian priest, Gustavo Gutiérrez Merino. It is the movement within Roman Catholicism in which the teachings of Jesus are held to demand or at least move one towards social action of a particular sort. **Critics** say that Jesus was speaking to people on an individual level and that this is using religion as a mask for theft. Some theories of **social justice** say that inequality is linked to economic equality and distribution of land.

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