**Definition: Liberation theology** from *Brewer's Dictionary of Modern Phrase and Fable*

The theory originating among Roman Catholic theologians in South America that liberation from social, political, and economic oppression is a vital constituent of the Christian message. The term translates Spanish *teología de la liberación*, coined by the Peruvian Gustavo Gutierrez in 1968 and used for the title of his book published in 1971. 'Liberation' expresses a dislike of 'development', meaning an imposed solution to South America's problems, determined by the industrialized nations and involving little initiative on the part of the people.

**Summary Article: liberation theology**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Christian theory of Jesus' prime role as the 'Liberator', a representative of the poor and devoted to freeing them from oppression. Enthusiastically adopted by Christians (mainly Roman Catholic) in Latin America, it embraces the struggle towards a classless society, and has often led to violence. It has been criticized by some Roman Catholic authorities, including Pope John Paul II. The movement has also spread to other nations in the developing world.


Liberation theology focuses on the belief that the teaching of Jesus demands action against poverty, social injustice, and the misuse of political power, in order to free the poor from oppression. In St Luke's Gospel (Luke 4:18), Jesus says: ‘He has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind; to set free the oppressed.’ As a 'Liberator', Jesus is often pictured as a freedom fighter.

In the past the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America did little to help the deprived and oppressed; now many priests have accepted liberation theology, and believe that it is a Christian's duty to act against the problems of poverty and injustice rather than standing by. Liberation theologians want to see a church with no differences between rich and poor, and emphasize the doctrine of Christian love (*agape*). They want a church that is more committed to action and believe that they are serving Jesus by helping the underprivileged. Conversion to Christianity is not their only aim.

Vocal opposition to government policy has resulted in fierce repression of the movement. Many church workers, priests, and nuns have been imprisoned, tortured, and killed. In El Salvador, Archbishop Oscar Romero spoke out continually against the oppressive actions of the military government, and in 1980 was assassinated during Mass. In 1989, six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper, and her daughter were gunned down. Intimidation of those who speak out for the poor has also occurred in Nicaragua. Although most members of the movement believe that violence is wrong, some Christians now believe that peaceful protest does not work and have taken up arms.

Liberation theology has been of influence around the world and has encouraged priests to become involved in politics in the fight against injustice.

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