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The Third Wave of Liberation Theology From the Catholic *Enfant Terrible* to Vehicle of Ecumenism, Interreligious and Social Dialog?

Abstract

The past decade has seen a radical shift in the Church's stance toward liberation theology. At the same time, the complexity of its description has greatly increased. The issue has grown beyond South America and intra-ecclesiastical affairs. The multicultural and multireligious nature of liberation theology presents, on the one hand, a methodological difficulty and, on the other hand, an opportunity to look at faith and religion in different cultures and denominations through a new unifying key. According to the author, we are dealing with the "third wave" of liberation theology nowadays. Efforts are needed to utilize it more productive than the better known South American "infant terrible" of the Church.

Keywords: Dariusz Gardocki, Liberation Theology, Ole Jakob Løland, Marxism, Craig L. Nesson, Pope Francis, Sodepax, World Council of Churches.

Trzecia fala teologii wyzwolenia. Od katolickiego *enfant terrible* do wehikułu ekumenizmu oraz dialogu międzyreligijnego i społecznego?

Abstrakt

W ciągu ostatniej dekady dokonał się radykalny zwrot w stosunku Kościoła do teologii wyzwolenia. Jednocześnie znacznie wzrósł stopień komplikacji jej opisu. Zagadnienie wyrosło poza Amerykę Południową i problematykę wewnątrzkościelną. Wielokulturowość i wieloreligijność teologii wyzwolenia stanowi z jednej strony metodologiczną trudność, a z drugiej strony szansę, by spojrzeć na religijność w różnych kulturach i denominacjach przez nowy klucz jednoczący. Zdaniem autora mamy dzisiaj do czynienia z „trzecią falą” teologii wyzwolenia. Konieczne są wysiłki, by wykorzystać ją lepiej niż w przypadku bardziej znanej fali południowoamerykańskiej.

Słowa kluczowe: Dariusz Gardocki, teologia wyzwolenia, Ole Jakob Løland, marksizm, Craig L. Nesson, papież Franciszek, Sodepax, Światowa Rada Kościołów.

1. Introduction

According to Craig L. Nesson liberation theology is being characterized by five principle factors: identification with the oppressed; prophetic criticism; reflection over causes of the misery; biblical and theological engagement, and advocacy for structural change.¹ An apt contextual definition of liberation theology is given by the author of the study “Józef Tischner and Leszek Kołakowski on Liberation Theology”²: “Liberation theology is one of the phenomena following the so-called Third World awakening in the 1960s in Latin America. It was then that in 1971 the Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez published a book «A Theology of Liberation». Its ideas quickly resonated with theologians in Asia and Africa. Surprisingly, liberation theology is defined as theology across denominations, practiced not only by Catholics but also Protestants. It starts from the experience of poverty and underdevelopment in Third World countries. From the perspective of this experience and its social-scientific (i.e. sociological) analysis, impulses for liberation practice have been sought in the Bible and in the tradition of the Church in an attempt to change reality in such a way as to accentuate the interests of the poor and oppressed”.³ However, further and closer pre-history of this type of theology cannot be lost from one’s radar. The work of Gerd-Rainer Horn indicates the cornerstone European “prototypes” of what then has been crystalized in the most iconic expositions of Peruvian writer, to mention a few: Catholic Action in the second and third decades of the 20th Century, Catholic struggles with Fascism, Communism and the 2nd World War, attempts of Catholic-Socialist synthesis and Worker Priests movement before the 2nd Vatican Council.⁴ Horn concludes his analysis with the statement, which allows for classification of “waves” of liberation theology, with an obvious inspirational effect on this paper: “Vatican II did more than ‘merely’ bestow the official imprimatur on the ideologies and practices of left Catholicism of the preceding thirty-five years. Vatican II also became the launching pad for an even more powerful ‘second wave’ of experi-

¹ Translations of Polish texts in this paper have been made by the author, assisted by DeepL.com free online machine interpretation tool. Craig L. Nesson. 2017. *Liberation Theologies in America* (25.08.2021). <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.493>; Craig L. Nesson. 2012. *The Vitality of Liberation Theology*. Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications.

² Przemysław Zientkowski. 2021. „Józef Tischner i Leszek Kołakowski wobec teologii wyzwolenia”. *Logos i Ethos* 57: 139–152.

³ Zientkowski. 2021. „Józef Tischner i Leszek Kołakowski wobec teologii wyzwolenia”, 141; Francis Schüssler Fiorenza. 2000. *Liberation Theology*. In *New Catholic Encyclopedia. Second Edition*. Vol. 8. Washington: The Catholic University of America, 544–546; Dariusz Gardocki. 2014. *Wyzwolenia teologia*. In *Encyklopedia Katolicka*. Vol. 20. Lublin: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego Jana Pawła II, 1107–1109.

⁴ Gerd-Rainer Horn. 2008. *Western European Liberation Theology. The First Wave (1924–1959)*. New York: Oxford University Press.

ments in left Catholic politics and culture in the ensuing two decades. And this ‘second wave’ of left Catholic theory and practice affected a far larger geographic terrain than the ‘first wave’ which, for practical purposes, was essentially limited to Western Europe”.⁵

Back to the definition of liberation theology quoted above, although it refers specifically to the “second wave”, it also concerns those characteristics, which place this theology not solely on the South American continent, but worldwide, unlimited to status of the Roman-Catholic Church’s unwanted child, but in a trans-denominational and even trans-religious context. Divine soteriology remains common to Christians, and to some extent also to followers of other religions, because salvation, especially as depicted in the images of Exodus, bears a significant liberational character.⁶ In the Old Testament the confronted realm is being represented by the archetypical slavery of Egypt. In the New Testament Christ’s victory over the bondage of sin, death and Satan – as we sing in the traditional Polish Easter song – constitutes the clue of spiritual and social struggles of the New People of God.⁷ This study is intended to help answer the following questions: In what key is liberation theology, or are liberation theologies, feasible to be framed systematically? Are we not currently dealing with a third, global and trans-religious wave of liberation theology? What can come out of this for Christian Churches and Religious Communities? But first of all: Why liberation theology is still alive and promising? This question is to be answered in the light of very recent history of Catholicism.

2. Intra-ecclesiastical key

Over the last decade the stance of the Roman Catholic Church toward liberation theology, at least in its “second wave”, has undergone a complete and radical change. The shift has been documented by Polish and foreign writers accordingly.

⁵ Horn. 2008. *Western European Liberation Theology*, 291.

⁶ Nicholas Lebish. 2020. The Exodus – Paradigm of Salvation (25.08.2021). <https://sjvlaydivision.org/exodus-salvation/>; Silverio Gonzalez. 2020. Why the Book of Exodus matters for your Life (25.08.2021). <https://corechristianity.com/resource-library/articles/why-the-book-of-exodus-matters-for-your-life/>; Atilio Rene Dupertuis. 1982. Liberation Theology’s use of the Exodus as a Soteriological Model. A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Theology (25.08.2021). <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/dissertations/43/>.

⁷ The following translation has been provided by Polish American Cultural Center in Philadelphia: “Christ conquered death and sin, hell and satan’s power, rising on Easter Morn in that glorious hour. A faithless people looks with fear and trembling, at this prophetic sign, Alleluia” (25.08.2021). http://www.polishamericancenter.org/PolishEasterHymns/Zwyciezca_Smierci.pdf. An example of soteriological analysis in the liberation theology: Konrad Keler. 1983. „Pojęcie Boga w świetle teologii wyzwolenia J.L. Segundo”. *Collectanea Theologica* 53 (2): 29–45.

“Return of the liberation theology to its Catholic roots”⁸ – the title alone may be taken as “*signum temporis*”, as well as co-authorship of “*On the Side of the Poor*” by Gustavo Gutiérrez and 2012–2017 Prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith Card. Gerhard Ludwig Müller.⁹ Jorge A. Aquino, an Associate Professor in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at University of San Francisco, in his review of the book for *Reading Religion* notes, that “one of the most remarkable events attending the papacy of Pope Francis has been the rehabilitation and incorporation of liberation theology into the heart of the pastoral and magisterial engines of the Roman Catholic Church. To speak of the «rehabilitation» and «incorporation» of liberation theology, one comes to grips with two sides of a process that began some three decades before Francis’s election, but that has now consolidated in a decisive way, amid gestures that mark the present Pope, among recent pontiffs, as the one most committed to the option for the poor”.¹⁰

Dariusz Gardocki SJ may be a Polish author of the most say in the given context. His authorship of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin Encyclopedia entry on “liberation theology” is no coincidence.¹¹ In his newest monography “Liberation theology as a response to the epochal challenges of the Times”¹², where many versions of Latin American phenomenon are being analyzed, along with meticulous explanations given in Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, sacramentology and Mariology, he concludes vocally: “Latin American liberation theology, despite some of its limitations and the lack of precision discernible at the level of language, is fully legitimate and necessary in the Church of Latin

⁸ Jarosław Tomaszewski. 2016. “Powrót teologii wyzwolenia w jej katolickim charakterze”. *Nurt SVD* 2: 205–224. The author, Polish missionary in Uruguay, affiliated with Facultad Teológica de Mariano Soler, Montevideo makes “*sensus fidei*” statement: “Until a few years ago, it seemed as if liberation theology had either passed into history or had been reduced to a troublesome ideological trait that characterized the South American continent. For many, so-called liberation theology was first and foremost a certain symbol of change both within the Church and at the frontier of the presence of the Christian community and societies; it was more a political movement than a theological mainstream. Perhaps the basic ideas of liberation theology would, with the sequence of years, be consigned to the archive of certain reflections that had their time but passed away, falling outside the classical understanding of Catholic teaching. However, the Spirit of God can work in the contemporary Church in surprising ways. With the abdication of Pope Benedict XVI and the appointment to the See of Rome of a bishop from Buenos Aires who has radically proclaimed his desire for a poor Church for the poor, the context of liberation theology has suddenly become somewhat current again, alive and therefore in need of revision”. Tomaszewski. 2016. “Powrót teologii wyzwolenia w jej katolickim charakterze”, 205.

⁹ Gustavo Gutiérrez, Gerhard Müller. 2015. *On the Side of the Poor: The Theology of Liberation*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.

¹⁰ Jorge A. Aquino. 2016. *On the Side of the Poor. The Theology of Liberation*. Gustavo Gutiérrez, Gerhard Ludwig Müller. Review (25.08.2021). <https://readingreligion.org/books/side-poor>.

¹¹ Gardocki. 2014. *Wyzwolenia teologia*, 1107–1109; Dariusz Gardocki. 1999. *Łaska i wyzwolenie. Łaska podstawą wyzwolenia w teologii Leonarda Boffá*. Łódź: Archidiecezjalne Wydawnictwo Łódzkie; Dariusz Gardocki. 2006. *Jezus z Nazaretu. Mesjasz Królestwa, Syn Boży i Droga do Ojca. Studium analityczno-krytyczne chrystologii Jona Sobrino*. Warszawa: Rhetos.

¹² Dariusz Gardocki. 2019. *Teologia wyzwolenia jako odpowiedź na epokowe wyzwania czasu*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM.

America and the Third World. Moreover: its main intuitions enrich the theological thought of the whole Church”.¹³

Comprehensive study on the present transition of Roman-Catholic stance towards liberation theology has been provided most recently by Ole Jakob Løland from the University of Oslo Faculty of Theology.¹⁴ In his opinion Pope Francis shares some of theological concerns of liberation theology, but rather represents popular piety, faith of the people over elitism¹⁵: “Nonetheless, breaking protocols or incarnating the Second Vatican Council can hardly be said to be fruits of liberation theology or examples of the movement’s peculiarities. A popular or charismatic pope is not the same as a liberationist pope”.¹⁶ What encourages most in Løland’s exposition is his weighted approach to the history of the Church. Rationale behind John Paul II distance to the Marxist influences on South American theologians and Francis’ ambivalence between political left and right are being taken into consideration. Moreover, after the fall of the communism a new context is arising, as accurately presented by the author: “In the post-cold war era, Jorge Mario Bergoglio is confronted by the overwhelming reality of poverty and dominance of capitalism in a world where Communism is no longer a threat and Marxism no more attractive to intellectuals in the church. But interestingly, Pope Francis absorbs elements from new directions taken within liberation theology in the 1990s, such as the theological criticism of neoliberal market ideology and the ecotheology. This new approximation to the figures and the thought of liberation theology takes place after substantial self-criticism has been made on part of liberation theologians such as Gustavo Gutiérrez, attuned to the 1984 Instruction and other forms of criticisms of liberation theology in the church, in particular in relation to Marxism”.¹⁷

¹³ Gardocki. 2019. *Teologia wyzwolenia jako odpowiedź na epokowe wyzwania czasu*, 313.

¹⁴ Ole Jakob Løland. 2021. *The Solved Conflict: Pope Francis and Liberation Theology* (25.08.2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41603-021-00137-3>.

¹⁵ Dedicated study on relationship between popular piety and liberation theology has been provided by Michael R. Candelaria. 1990. *Popular Religion and Liberation. The Dilemma of Liberation Theology*. New York: State University of New York Press.

¹⁶ Løland. 2021. “The Solved Conflict: Pope Francis and Liberation Theology”. This statement is being supported by quoted above Tomaszewski’s article, where in the first footnote he declares: “It is, of course, difficult to say that Pope Francis is a promoter or even a supporter of liberation theology. Certainly, however, the emphasis in papal teaching on the virtue of poverty and the radical turn of the Petrine ministry towards social, political or ecological issues, establishes a new relationship between the Vatican world and the liberation theology community, who also see in the figure of the Argentine pope and in his charism a new light for their work. A significant point of connection between these two realities that were previously far apart – the hierarchical one and the one that forms the context of liberation theology – is undoubtedly the papal intuition of the Church’s move towards the periphery, towards the marginalized environments and persons – an intuition that is fundamental for the assumptions and actions of liberation theology”. Tomaszewski. 2016. “Powrót teologii wyzwolenia w jej katolickim charakterze”, 205.

¹⁷ Løland. 2021. “The Solved Conflict: Pope Francis and Liberation Theology”.

These considerations support beforementioned concept of the “third wave” of liberation theology. From Catholic Action and Catholic Social Teaching, through the reception of Vatican II and some of its stipulations, to the “rehabilitation” and “incorporation” of liberation theology, a picture of a “returning wave” is emerging – purified and, perhaps, invigorating for theology and for the life of the Church. In the following paragraphs the attempt will be made to locate this wave in ethno-geographical, ecumenical, and interreligious keys.

3. Ethno-Geographical key¹⁸

Politically charged reality of the swollen problems of Latin America’s oppressed poor masses, as obvious representatives of the “poor south”, can easily deceive the observer with simple appeals to Marxism. The source of these misunderstandings was identified in an interview by Andrzej Pietrzak, an expert in Latin American theology: “It is true that some theologians and pastors have been imprudent in their Marxist analysis, and have even been fooled by the «achievements» of «Land of the Councils» and Cuba (...) But it is also true that the local oligarchies and the official media have taken care to label all grassroots movements of national liberation, especially those which strove for systemic changes for the benefit of socially excluded groups. Liberation theology has also been similarly labeled”.¹⁹ In wider context of what has been said about Løland’s article cited above, authors like Rafael Luciani point to a more nuanced typology of theological genres: the current followed by Pope Francis should be described more as “theology of the people”, originating from 1966 inception of COEPAL (Comisión Episcopal de Pastoral), “which coined the term ‘people’ as the existence of a common culture, rooted in a common history, and one committed to the common good”.²⁰

¹⁸ The following work (especially Chapters II and III) sets an example of this kind of approach: Ed. Thia Cooper. 2013. *The reemergence of liberation theologies. Models for the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

¹⁹ Andrzej Pietrzak. 2013. Pietrzak: Czarna legenda czerwonej teologii (28.10.2021). <https://magazynkontakt.pl/ks-pietrzak-czarna-legenda-czerwonej-teologii/>.

²⁰ Rafael Luciani. 2019. Pope Francis and the theology of the people. In *The Routledge Handbook of Postsecularity*. Ed. Justin Beaumont, 212–222. Oxon – New York: Routledge. The author concludes: “Francis assumes these efforts by supporting social and civil movements, because these movements collaborate to build a more inclusive and just society. His Papacy, inspired by a Latin American ecclesial and theological identity, is a testimony of how secular society and religious institutions can join forces for the common good of all people, based on an ethics of democratic citizenship, ecclesial sinodality and social participation”. Luciani. 2019. Pope Francis and the theology of the people, 221. See also: Juan Carlos Scannone. 2017. *La teología del pueblo: raíces teológicas del papa Francisco*. Cantabria: SalTerrae.

Simultaneously, Latin American theology itself is a much more ancient and extensive phenomenon, now already 500 years old, which has been explored by the research of the aforementioned Andrzej Pietrzak, who identifies specific and rich models within it.²¹ This being said, it can be argued that a specific combination of political and cultural factors may have provided “further preparation” for liberation theology on the South American continent. The relationship between Latin American theology and liberation theology has been analyzed by Dominik Smyrgała. In the conclusion of his dissertation he states that: “The very tradition of liberation and freedom thinking has a very long history in Latin America, dating back to the early days of colonization. Issues of civil liberties and semi-slave (in the case of Indians) or full-slave (in the case of Africans) status have stimulated human sensibilities long before the advent of Marx and communism. Catholic missionaries and religious raised the issue of the debasement and enslavement of indigenous peoples and immigrant slaves in their works from the dawn of the European presence in the New World. This has worked with varying degrees of success”.²² However, regardless of the time-varying assessments of the Church’s activities in the mission territories, one empirical indicator remains indisputable: “In Latin America, unlike in the Anglo-Saxon part of the hemisphere, the local population survived, the colonizers mixed with them, and they were not completely destroyed and confined to reservations. This would not have been possible were it not for the (admittedly imperfect in practice) recognition of the inherent rights of Indians by the legal system of the Spanish and Portuguese colonial empires”.²³ According to Smyrgała, the specific phenomenon of liberation theology saw the daylight due to a combination of factors, which he cites after Juan José Tamatyó. These included: postwar decolonization; the weakness of United Nations policies, especially with regard to South America

²¹ Andrzej Pietrzak. 2003. *Modele ewangelizacji kultur i inkulturacji wiary w teologii latynoamerykańskiej*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 81–91.

²² Dominik Smyrgała. 2014. *Latynoamerykańska teologia wyzwolenia – wiara, rewolucja państwowa, nacjonalizm antykolonialny*. Warszawa: Collegium Civitas, 111. Among Catholic authors, for example, Horst Rzepkowski SVD does not hesitate to write about the cultural obviousness of slavery in Latin America, especially with regard to African slaves: “Many believed that slavery was necessary to maintain the colonial economy. Bartolome de Las Casas (1474–1566) was, and still is today, held responsible for a disastrous decision. From him came the proposal to import the «stronger» blacks as slaves to work on plantations in America and replace the dying out Indians (...) Later he greatly regretted his proposal and committed himself to the side of the Africans. Thus he declared that the enslavement of the Africans was as unjust as the enslavement of the Indians. Buying slaves is as much a sin as catching them in Africa”. Horst Rzepkowski. 1990. „Misje i niewolnictwo Murzynów. Stulecie Aktu Antyniewolniczego”. *Nurt SVD* 3–4 (54–55): 96–109.

²³ Smyrgała. 2014. *Latynoamerykańska teologia wyzwolenia*, 111. Vittorio Messori. 1998. *Czarne karty Kościoła*. Katowice: Księgarnia Świętego Jacka, 8: “Indeed, the numbers speak for themselves: while only a few thousand red faces survived in North America, in former Spanish and Portuguese America the majority of the population is either Indians, descendants of pre-Columbian natives and Europeans, or (especially in Brazil) Africans”.

and the Caribbean Islands; the socially conflicting security doctrine of South American countries expressed in military dictatorships; the local awakening of cultural identity, supported through the theories of the social sciences; the pontificate of John XXIII and the pastoral renewal of the Church; and conferences of Roman-Catholic Latin American Episcopal Council (Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano – CELAM).²⁴ Examples of geographically-bound liberation theologies out of Southern America may be given as of South Asia, Africa, and Near East, where poverty and post-colonialism have created similar issues to those addressed by South American bishops.²⁵

Comparing to the “Poor South”, liberation theologies in the United States of America or Great Britain²⁶ might have been a surprise, if shameful and excruciating colonial heritage of slave trade, extinction of the First Nations and racism has not been taken into consideration. According to Nesson, South-American liberation theology resounded in North America among Christians of different denominations: Protestants opposed the clash between “justification by grace through faith” with “good news for the poor”. Catholics following instructions of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith criticized liberation theology for closeness to Marxism and provisions for violence in public life.²⁷ As for Black Liberation Theology in North America author notes its deep spiritual dimension: “The working of salvation by the Black Christ is a provocative formulation to assert the solidarity of Jesus Christ with endangered black people. Jesus Christ reveals the God of the oppressed, who sides with black people in their struggles for liberation. In his teaching and ministry, Jesus Christ revealed God’s partiality to suffering, endangered, and subjugated black people throughout their history and in their contemporary experiences of oppression. The cross of Jesus Christ reveals that he suffers with and for black people in their experiences of being a crucified people over past generations to the present”.²⁸ The testimony of North

²⁴ Smyrgała. 2014. *Latynoamerykańska teologia wyzwolenia*, 58–59; Juan José Tamayo. 2009. *La teología de la liberación. En el nuevo escenario político y religioso*. Valencia: Tirant Lo Blanch, 35–64.

²⁵ Kathleen M. Nadeau. 2002. *Liberation Theology in the Philippines. Faith in a Revolution*. Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group; Agnes M. Brazal. 2019. *A theology of Southeast Asia. Liberation-Postcolonial ethics in the Philippines*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books; Zoe C. Sherinian. 2014. *Tamil Folk Music as Dalit Liberation Theology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press; Peniel Rajkumar. 2010. *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation. Problems, Paradigms and Possibilities*. Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Limited; Nur Masalha, Lisa Isherwood. Ed. 2014. *Theologies of Liberation in Palestine-Israel. Indigenous, Contextual, and Postcolonial Perspectives*. Cambridge: James Clarke & Co and The Lutterworth Press; Jonathan Gichaara. 2005. “Issues in African Liberation Theology”. *Black Theology* 3 (1): 75–85.

²⁶ Mark Corner. 1988. “Liberation theology for Britain”. *New Blackfriars* 69 (813): 62–71 (Special Issue: The Church’s Option for the Poor in Britain).

²⁷ Nesson. 2017. *Liberation Theologies in America*, 3.

²⁸ Nesson. 2017. *Liberation Theologies in America*, 4.

America's experience of liberation theologies rich diversity is being exposed by editors of "Liberation theologies in the United States" volume.²⁹ The authors cover ten representations of liberation theologies present in "the Land of the Free".³⁰ Notable, that analyzed theologies have been exposed in a mixed key: given geographical or ethnic factor has been taken into consideration solely or in combination with other characterizing agent. This complexity will be discussed later, as for now let several of these theologies be mentioned: Black, Latina, Hispanic/Latino, Asian American and American Indian.³¹

However exotic would it sound, even Eastern Christianity has something to do with liberation theology in a very early stage of the first Slavic Christian communities established in Balkans by St. Cyril (Constantine) and Methodius. In his paper "Evangelization of Culture according to Cyril and Methodius"³² Leonard Górká recalls the dialogue from "The Life of Constantine" (*Vita Constantini*) between him and bishops gathered at the synod of Venice. Their accusations were based on non-apostolic and non-ecclesiastical origins of the languages of locals, in which Cyril decided to express the Holy Scripture. His reply, to what George Corm will later call "cultural narcissism"³³ was brilliant: "How then are you not ashamed to acknowledge only three languages, and to order all other peoples and languages to be blind and deaf? Tell me, do you regard God as so weak that he cannot give it, or as so envious that he will not?"³⁴ As Górká elaborates on the topic: "The chronicles of the national awakening of the Eastern Churches of the Cyrillo-Methodian region tell much about this dark face of Byzantinism. The new Slavic peoples were the first to take advantage of the work of liberation and, through the broken door, boldly embarked on the millennia-long path of developing their own Slavic spirituality and culture. (...) This kind of thinking can even be called a kind of (ante litteram) Slavic liberation theology. The concept of liberation theology is most often associated with South America, and more specifically with its contemporary

²⁹ Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, Anthony B. Pinn. Ed. 2010. *Liberation Theologies in the United States. An Introduction*. New York: New York University Press.

³⁰ This reference of the US National Anthem finds its sarcastic development in the columns of public writers, like this one: "While there are a great many brave people here, not everyone in America is free. It is, and always has been, a very unequal society". Lisa Tierney-Keogh. 2018. America is home to many brave people, but it's no longer the land of the free (25.08.2021). <https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/abroad/america-is-home-to-many-brave-people-but-it-s-no-longer-the-land-of-the-free-1.3369612>.

³¹ Floyd-Thomas, Pinn. 2010. *Liberation Theologies in the United States*, vii. Those North-American theologies, which do not follow strictly ethno-geographical key in the quoted array are: Womanist, Asian American Feminist, Native Feminist, Gay and Lesbian, Feminist.

³² Leonard Górká. 2016. „Cyrilo-metodiańska ewangelizacja kultury”. *Nurt SVD* 2: 26–39.

³³ Georges Corm. 1989. *L'Europe et l'Orient. De la balkanisation à la libanisation. Histoire d'une modernité inaccomplie*. Paris: La Découverte.

³⁴ *Vita Constantini*, XVI, 5–8.

socio-religious character. However, when one listens to the assumptions of the co-founder of Latin American liberation theology, Gustavo Gutiérrez, it is not difficult to point to common elements in the actions and thoughts of the Slavic apostles and teachers of faith³⁵.

In the light of the above considerations, it becomes clear that the phenomenon of liberation theology cannot be narrowed down to a particular culture or geographical area. In the next paragraph feasibility of liberation theology's identification with Catholic and Christian theology is to be analyzed.

4. Ecumenical and Interreligious key

In the Catholic consciousness, "liberation theology" refers primarily to its Latin American version, developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the jurisdictional area of CELAM under the influence of the reforms of the Second Vatican Council and in response to current pastoral challenges.³⁶ This is how it is defined in the sources and referred to in the fundamental documents of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith.³⁷ At the same time, from the beginning we can speak of its conciliar and ecumenical dimensions.³⁸ One of the achievements of the Second Vatican Council was a new understanding of the Church's mission and identity in the world, a particular expression of which was the "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" (*Gaudium et Spes*)³⁹, as well as establishment of "Iustitia et Pax" Commission by Paul VI in 1967.⁴⁰

³⁵ Górka. 2016. „Cyrilo-metodiańska ewangelizacja kultury”, 31–32.

³⁶ Gardocki. 2019. *Teologia wyzwolenia jako odpowiedź na epokowe wyzwania czasu*, 21–43.

³⁷ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. 1984. Instruction on Certain Aspects of the „Theology of Liberation” (25.08.2021). https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19840806_theology-liberation_en.html; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. 1986. Instruction on Christian freedom and liberation (25.08.2021). https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19860322_freedom-liberation_en.html.

³⁸ “Latin American liberation theology originated as a response to extreme poverty at the confluence of two movements: 1) Protestant writings and activities related to the World Council of Churches, particularly those associated with the organization called Church and Society in Latin America” (ISAL – Iglesia y Sociedad en la America Latina); and 2) Roman Catholic writings and activities in Latin America following Vatican II, particularly those associated with the National Office of Social Information (ONIS – Oficina Nacional de Información Social) in Peru.” Nessian. 2017. *Liberation Theologies in America*, 2.

³⁹ Second Vatican Council. 1965. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World “*Gaudium et Spes*” (25.08.2021). https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

⁴⁰ A comprehensive study on the topic may be found in the doctoral dissertation by Andrew Small. 2010. The Theological Justification for the Establishment of the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace (*Iustitia et pax*), (25.08.2021). <https://cuislandora.wrlc.org/islandora/object/et-d%3A6/datastream/PDF/view>.

Church's teaching on social issues and promotion of peace and justice may be named as its primary tasks.⁴¹ Parallel to the work of the Council "Geneva Conference on Church and Society" summoned by the World Council of Churches took place in 1966. The WCC organ equivalent to Catholic "Iustitia et pax" has been established as "Programme Unit Justice and Service".⁴² Joint social action of the World Council of Churches and the Holy See, has been expressed by the 1968 inception of the Committee on Society, Development and Peace, named SODEPAX (Société, Développement, Paix) as of French acronym.⁴³ Especially between 1968 and 1971 Sodepax organized numerous international conferences, dedicated to development and peace, as well as several local initiatives. Odair Pedroso Mateus recalls one of the first such meetings, held in November 1969 in Cartigny, near Geneva, where one of the keynote speakers was Gustavo Gutiérrez.⁴⁴ These encounters could not be left without echo in other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, like the Church of England. In obituary of the Rt Revd Dr David Jenkins, latter Bishop of Durham, UK published right 5 years ago on the 9th of September 2016 we read: "As Adrian Hastings observed, Jenkins combined the academic liberal theology of Dennis Nineham with the prophetic liberation theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez, and the impact was felt all the way from the rarefied atmosphere of the WCC HQ in Geneva to the militant minefields of County Durham. His theology was difficult to systemize, but might be summarized as bottom up, freed up, joined up, and down to earth".⁴⁵ No coincidence, that Jenkins' stay in Geneva spanned between 1969 and 1973,

⁴¹ This commission was elevated to the status of Pontifical Council by Pope John Paul II in 1988, and Pope Francis transferred its authority to the new Dicastery for Integral Human Development (along with the Dicastery Cor Unum) on January 1, 2017. Pope Francis. 2016. Apostolic Letter instituting the Dicastery for promoting Integral Human development (25.08.2021). https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio_20160817_humanam-progressionem.html.

⁴² World Council of Churches. 1967. *Christians in the technical and social revolutions of our time. World Conference on Church and Society. Geneva, July 12–26, 1966*. Geneva: World Council of Churches.

⁴³ John Lucal. 2003. Sodepax. In *New Catholic Encyclopedia, Second Edition*. Vol. 13. Washington: The Catholic University of America, 296.

⁴⁴ Odair Pedroso Mateus. 2020. On Moltmann, Sodepax and the Ecumenical Origins of Liberation Theology (25.08.2021). <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/on-moltmann-sodepax-and-the-ecumenical-origins-of-liberation-theology>. "The organisers of the 1969 conference on theology of development (...) invited the contribution of two relatively young theologians from South America. The Peruvian Roman Catholic Gustavo Gutiérrez, a late comer to theology after studies of medicine, was 41; the Brazilian Protestant Rubem Alves, then 36, had just published the remarkable A Theology of Human Hope, his Princeton doctoral thesis. (...) The four sections of Gutiérrez's Sodepax paper correspond exactly to the four sections of A Theology of Liberation, first published in Spanish two years later, in 1971". Rev. Dr Odair Pedroso Mateus acts ad Director of Faith and Order, World Council of Churches.

⁴⁵ The Rt Revd Dr David Jenkins [Obituary], (25.08.2021). <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2016/9-september/gazette/obituaries/the-rt-revd-dr-david-jenkins>.

right in the time of Gutiérrez's presence at the beforementioned Sodepax conference.⁴⁶

These contexts may be taken even to greater widths, as phenomenon of "post-Christian interreligious liberation theology" is being described in the literature.⁴⁷ Indeed, in the volume of the same title authors explore "the ideals of liberation theology from the perspectives of major religious traditions, in particular Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, and the neo-Vedanta and Advaita Hindu traditions".⁴⁸ Such phenomena as globalization, migrations, cultural clashes have been taken into consideration. The editors manifest self-awareness of the novelty of concept they bring into the public: "The goal of this volume is not to explain the Christian liberation theology tradition and then assess whether the non-Christian liberation theologies meet the Christian standards. The goal from our comparative/interreligious methodology is to offer new insights on liberation theology and begin a dialogue on how to build interreligious liberation theologies".⁴⁹ Although similar studies have been emerging for a while⁵⁰, the mentioned volume intends to synthesize not only traditional questions of social justice, but, also: "human rights and dignity with respect to sexual identity and gender equity; environmental justice and climate change; mass migrations and immigration policies; increasingly authoritarian governance models and the retreat of liberal democracies; the eclipse of personal privacy and civil rights in the wake of security threats and religious violence; and the rise of the ethical challenges generated by exponential technology, particularly genetic bioengineering, cloning, automation and robotics, and synthetic digital super intelligence".⁵¹

Analogous to the above-quoted work, a vivid example of the multi-textuality and ambiguity of the interpretation of the phenomenon of liberation theology in Polish literature is one of the issues of the periodical "Theoretical Praxis" published at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, entitled "Theologies of Emancipation".⁵² The volume's sections have been divided in the interdiscipli-

⁴⁶ An expression of contemporary Christian interest in liberation theology can be seen in such works as: Mae Elise Cannon, Andrea Smith. 2019. *Evangelical theologies of liberation and justice*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic; Joerg Rieger. Ed. 2003. *Opting for the Margins: Postmodernity and Liberation in Christian Theology*. New York: Oxford University Press.

⁴⁷ Hussam S. Timani, Loye Sekihata Ashton. Ed. 2019. *Post-Christian Interreligious Liberation Theology*. Switzerland: Palgrave-MacMillan.

⁴⁸ Timani, Ashton. 2019. *Post-Christian Interreligious Liberation Theology*, 1.

⁴⁹ Timani, Ashton. 2019. *Post-Christian Interreligious Liberation Theology*, 1.

⁵⁰ Marc A. Hellis. 2004. *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation. The Challenge of the 21st Century*. Forewords by Gustavo Gutiérrez and Desmond Tutu. Waco: Baylor University Press; Hamid Dabashi. 2008. *Islamic Liberation Theology. Resisting the Empire*. London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

⁵¹ Hellis. 2004. *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation*, 3.

⁵² 2013. *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 2 (8).

nary, though arguable manner (especially two last combinations, from the biblical standpoint of several Churches, including Catholicism): Theology and Marxism, Theology and Colonialism, Theology and Queer and Theology and Gender. Especially the second section of the volume brings us closer to the context of what has been discussed here as geographical and cultural diversity of liberation theology: “Islamic Liberation Theology: Resisting the Empire” by Hamid Dabashi⁵³; “Black God and white devil in the urban ghettos of America: Religion and black nationalism of the Nation of Islam” by Zbigniew Marcin Kowalewski and “Liberation or Inculturation?” – convergent or divergent trends of African Theology?” by Stanisław Grodź.⁵⁴ In her introductory article Monika Bobako, the editor of the volume under review, succinctly illuminates the complexity of contextualizing liberation theology in the broadest sense: “Religion (...) on the one hand plays its traditional role in legitimizing old social hierarchies and political hegemonies, while often entering into a symbiotic relationship with neoliberal economic strategies, favoring the dismantling of the state, military policies, or the management of social fear. On the other hand, it becomes a language of political protest and an undoubtedly ambivalent and controversial medium for the emancipation of the excluded and exploited. (...) An additional factor of particular interest to us in this issue of “Theoretical Practice” is the rapid development of various “theologies of liberation” created by social groups whose subordination was (and still is) often religiously sanctioned. Struggling for their own empowerment, these groups (women – white and colored – LGBT people, “racial”, ethnic or class minorities) often try to find in religion, read anew, a basis for criticizing existing injustices and fighting for respect and change in social relations, not only within their own religious communities”.⁵⁵

⁵³ Dabashi’s work has been recalled earlier in the text. Stephen Schwartz from the Center for Islamic Pluralism notes, that the author regardless of historical and cultural contexts attempts to present Christian and Muslim political “turn left” (namely Muslim revolution in Iran) as identical. In reviewer’s opinion Dabashi’s work has more to proselytism than theology at all. Stephen Schwartz. 2009. *Islamic Liberation Theology. Resisting the Empire* by Hamid Dabashi. Reviewed by Stephen Schwartz (25.08.2021). <https://www.meforum.org/2079/islamic-liberation-theology>.

⁵⁴ Grodź takes up an important thread of explaining the relationship between faith and liberation in a social context, at least in African reality: “Many today do not want to remember that as late as the middle of the twentieth century, Christianization activities were considered an important element of European influence on Africans, and not only by church circles, but also by politicians, scholars and various social groups supporting Christian missionary activities. When, in the second half of the twentieth century, as a result of the changes taking place, public sentiment began to take on a different hue, Christianizing activities began to be seen as something shameful or even evil. The thesis of the rapid «extinction» of Christianity (the religion of the colonialists) in Africa after Africans were freed from colonial dependence was also promoted. However, from the perspective of half a century one can see that the opposite happened – Christianity in Africa began to experience its fastest development in the post-colonial period”. Stanisław Grodź. 2013. „Wyzwolenie czy inkultuacja? – zbieżne czy rozbieżne nurty afrykańskiej teologii?”. *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 2 (8): 122.

⁵⁵ Monika Bobako. 2013. „Teologie oporu”. *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 2 (8): 9–10.

Bobako's diagnose carries a genuine call for Christian participation and action, as imperative of Christ-like identification with the last of the least has never been waved. On the other hand, pharisees towing the poor prostitute freshly caught red-handed before Jesus Christ had no good intentions.⁵⁶ Their goal was far from moral sensitivity, rather primarily to undermine the mission of this Messiah, by proving his divorce with Tradition either lack of Mercy (as well as liberational power and willingness) – both false, but much desired for political death of the opponent. Even Francis' pontificate is not free of this kind of "roasting".⁵⁷

5. How much theology in theology?

Already in the beginning of 1980's researchers were exposing certain weaknesses of liberation theology, especially in soteriological context: "Liberation theology, in spite of its timeliness and virtues, due to its absorbing preoccupation with the historical, has to a large extent neglected the transcendent, thus weakening the possibilities of a greater impact. In a justified reaction against an excessive verticalism in much of traditional theology, it has tended to go to the opposite extreme of an excessive horizontalism, emptying the Gospel of much of its saving content".⁵⁸ Similar reservations have been brought by Konrad Keler SVD in his analysis of notion of God in Juan Luis Segundo's liberation theology: "One can see (...) a kind of absolutization of the present, leaving aside the past and the future. It follows that the truth about God can only be discovered and experienced in the present historical praxis. The effect of this theological stance, Segundo proposes, is to relativize in the knowledge of God the authority and substantive content of the Christian tradition. It concludes that one who participates in the struggle for liberation in social life is in a privileged position in interpreting the Word of the Lord. However, this deprives such an interpretation of elements that are constant and unchangeable as a result of the constant changes in the social and political nature of societies".⁵⁹ Gaspar Martinez was able to place this issue in a wider context of Karl Rahner's theology of recapitulation, related to political theology of John Baptist Metz, liberation theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez and

⁵⁶ John 8,1-11.

⁵⁷ For a summary of Pope Francis' statements on LGBT which can serve as a basis for demonstrating his alleged inconsistency. Rachel Savage. 2021. Pope Francis' LGBT+ views, as Vatican opposes same-sex blessings (25.08.2021). <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-vatican-lgbt-unions-idUSKBN2B82MN>.

⁵⁸ Dupertuis. 1982. *Liberation Theology's use of the Exodus as a Soteriological Model*, 2–3.

⁵⁹ Keler. 1983. *Pojęcie Boga w świetle teologii wyzwolenia J. L. Segundo*, 44.

public theology of David Tracy: “The three models of post-Rahnerian theology follow the double movement of exitusreditus in relation to Rahner’s theology. They exit transcendental and move to history and society in order to place the discussion on God not at the preemptive level of the transcendental analysis of the conditions of possibility of knowing and being but at the level of the conditions of history and the experiences of nonidentity found in that history. Having done that, the three theologies retrieve the hiddenness and the incomprehensibility of God, thus coming back in a kind of recapitulatory way, each through its own theological journey and in its own terms, to the mystery of God in which Rahner himself recapitulated his theological enterprise”.⁶⁰

However, some worldviews or explanatory systems named as “theology” may not be compatible with what Catholic or Christian theology, especially Christology, may adopt. Henryk Seweryniak underlines issue of “extra ecclesial” images of Jesus, which reduce His mystery or His historic relevance to the myth or a mere character of the champion of morality, the first socialist, an Essene, a philosopher and charismatic, drawing his knowledge from ancient India.⁶¹ Selective approaches to Jesus Christ may be found i.e. in the South Asian liberation theologies. Peniel Rajkumar openly states, that image of Christ is not being taken in his wholeness. Instead “two sides of a coin are being strictly separated”: “Following our analysis of Dalit theology we concluded that Dalit Christology had the potential to operate as a palliative inuring the Dalits to their existing suffering through marginalization and make the Dalits masochistic in their attitude towards suffering. (...) Making the synoptic healings as the alternative paradigm for our constructive purpose allows sufficiently for this ethical impetus for the Dalits because primarily it opens up scope for articulating a Christological paradigm of resistance, and protest”.⁶² This kind of one-sided approaches may still be found closer to Jesus of history and Christ of faith⁶³ than “death of God theology”. At the same time, if elements of Christology, even in further or narrowed sense may

⁶⁰ Gaspar Martinez. 2001. *Confronting the Mystery of God. Political, Liberation and Public Theologies*. New York: Continuum, 216, 322–323.

⁶¹ Henryk Seweryniak. 2010. *Teologia fundamentalna*. Vol. 1. Warszawa: Więż, 182.

⁶² Rajkumar. 2010. *Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation*, 115. Analogy with famous passage from Marx is evident: “Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people (...) The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions. The criticism of religion is, therefore, in embryo, the criticism of that vale of tears of which religion is the halo”. Karl Marx. 1843. A contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right. Introduction (25.08.2021). <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm>.

⁶³ This phrase recalls work of renowned Polish biblical scholar, bridging identity of Jesus during his earthy life and the One who is believed in by the first post-paschal Christian communities: Józef Kudasiewicz. 1987. *Jeżus historii a Chrystus Wiary*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL.

be found i.e. in Islamic or Jewish studies on “liberation theology”, this would not be Christology or ecclesiology per se, but rather theology of religion: non-Christian assessment of salvific (liberating) value of Christianity, which is perfectly fine from methodological point of view, as Christian theology of religion is likewise to evaluate salvific values in other religious traditions.⁶⁴ Self-reflection of the non-Christian religion representatives over native salvific values in context of freedom and liberation is another and much feasible option.⁶⁵

6. Conclusion

Liberation theology in its “third wave” carries a potential to unite Christians and people of different religions in building together the Kingdom of God in a global and radical way. Yet it can also divide. In the “second wave” the flash-point was the Cold War situation of the Church persecuted by Marxists in Eastern Europe and in other parts of the world (China, Cuba, North Korea) as well as lured into communism in South America and Africa. Nowadays, in the projects called “liberation theology” the issues of sexual orientation, for example, become an element confronting the theological (and not limited to Christian) tradition. The question is whether the defense of human dignity in the image and likeness of God, regardless of whether one is a white heterosexual Catholic Slav or a black homosexual Muslim Anglo-Saxon, must be accompanied by violence, even “as petty as” verbal or symbolic? Whether the current version of liberation theology can avoid the previous mistakes depends largely on the theologians’ resistance to counter-productive provocations and their heroic Christ-like determination to identify with every human being.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Theology of religion(s) is relatively young theological discipline. Exemplary monographies: Andrzej Bronk. 2009. *Teologia religii. Podstawy nauk o religii*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo Towarzystwa Naukowego KUL; Hans Waldenfels. 2009. *Jesus Christ and the Religions. An Essay in Theology of Religions*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press; Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen. 2003. *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions. Biblical, Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; Gavin d’Costa. 2009. *Christianity and World Religions. Disputed Questions in the Theology of Religions*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell; Gavin d’Costa. 1986. “The Pluralist Paradigm in the Christian Theology of Religions”. *Scottish Journal of Theology* 39 (2): 211–224.

⁶⁵ An example of finding a source of liberation theology in the holy book different than Christian Bible may be: Shadab Rahemtulla. 2017. *Qur’an of the oppressed. Liberation Theology and Gender Justice in Islam*. New York: Oxford University Press. Rahemtulla identifies his work with so called “Islamic reform”, stating, that: “This book offers a comprehensive survey and analysis of the commentaries of four Muslim intellectuals who have turned to scripture as a liberating text to confront an array of problems, from patriarchy, racism and empire to poverty and interreligious communal violence”.

⁶⁶ Second Vatican Council. 1965. *Gaudium et Spes*, 22: “He Who is «the image of the invisible God» (Col. 1:15), is Himself the perfect man. To the sons of Adam He restores the divine likeness which had been disfigured from the first sin onward. Since human nature as He assumed it was not

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annulled, by that very fact it has been raised up to a divine dignity in our respect too. For by His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man”.