A need for spirituality was apparent in the 2003–2004 Annual Report of the Centre for Liberation Theologies (Catholic University of Louvain). It was raised in relationship to the struggle against poverty and inequality in the face of globalization. This call for spirituality seems to be based on the need for motivation that keeps the principles of liberation theology alive while adapting to concrete needs as poverty and inequality continue to spread in our postmodern world. Spirituality is the great motivator. It is at the heart of theology and is behind the face that Christians reveal to their neighbors.

In recent times, Christians have developed liberation spiritualities aimed at helping all of creation “share in the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Rom 8:21). These spiritualities include feminist theologies, Latino, African and Asian theologies. The Christian desire for liberation goes back to Jesus’ Jewish faith; a faith founded on the experience of the Exodus from slavery in Egypt to the freedom of the Promised Land. It was while celebrating the Exodus experience in a Passover meal that Jesus took the bread and wine of freedom and consecrated them as a memorial to his taking those who want to follow him through an exodus from the slavery of sin to the freedom of the children of God.

Many Latin Americans and U.S. Latinos understand salvation in Christ as the Christian Exodus experience. It is being saved from the slavery to sin and especially from all the effects of that sin. It is being liberated from the consequences of both personal and social sin; these are poverty, hunger, joblessness, war, divorce, abortion and all social disgraces that keep people down and creation subjugated to futility.

**Fidelity to Reality**

This emphasis on freedom from the social consequences of sin is a result of the Latino need for Christianity to be faithful, not just to our triune God, but also to the various realities and peoples in which the church incarnates itself (Comblin, 61f; Sobrino, 14–20; Casaldaliga and Vigil, 17–18). This contemporary incarnation happens through a process of enculturation.
that both comforts and challenges peoples and cultures (Cavazos, 2004, 50–51). Fidelity to reality embraces the concrete socio-political, religious, and economic conditions of a people in order to celebrate and enhance the positive elements of their lives. It also challenges anything in their world that promotes or is victimized by a “culture of death.”

Such a challenge demands conversion, both personal and social. Conversion is a response to having encountered Jesus especially in the least of his brothers and sisters (Mt 25:40). Meeting Jesus in the faces and lives of the lowly in this world presupposes the recognition of sin and its consequences in our lives and theirs.

At the heart of Jesus’ teaching and ministry was a spirituality that longed to collaborate with the reign of God. This is what was behind the face that Jesus revealed to his neighbors, especially to the poor and the marginalized. According to Archbishop Oscar Romero, collaboration with the reign of God is motivated by the hope that if we do our part, God will do his for the salvation of our countries (Romero, July 1977). Collaboration with God’s reign, faithful to the reality in which we find ourselves, is what turns ordinary Christians into saints and it is founded on five provisions that I refer to as the five pillars of a Christian spirituality of liberation: contemplation, poverty, universal fraternity, Eucharist, and the cross (Cavazos, 2002, 146).

Contemplative Vision

A spirituality of liberation needs to be grounded in a contemplative vision that helps us to see God in all people and things. It also opens our historical memory to find God lovingly active throughout all of history. In his book We Drink from Our Own Wells, Gustavo Gutierrez describes how contemplation leads us to recognize and hope in God’s gracious generosity, which is to say in his divine providence (Gutierrez, 109–12).

A contemplative vision helps us to encounter God in the neighbor as well as to see and love the neighbor with the eyes of the God who made him/her as image and likeness of God. It especially helps us to appreciate the underprivileged as a sacrament of Jesus who “became poor for our sake” (2 Cor 8:9) and poverty as a road that leads to integral liberation.

Preferential Option for Poverty

A truly Christian spirituality that motivates and strengthens those who work for the liberation of the poor and marginalized needs to be founded on choosing poverty and simplicity as a way of life. In his kenosis, Jesus who “although rich, made himself poor” (2 Cor 8:9) showed us that sin is destroyed by becoming sin (2 Cor 5:21). We can only destroy the sin of poverty by becoming poor among the truly poor and marginalized. Like Jesus, many Christian saints have born witness to this Christian virtue that strengthens those who work for the integral liberation of God’s people (Casaldaliga and Vigil, 139–43). This poverty is at the heart of Christian fraternity.

Universal Brotherhood/Sisterhood

Christians are called to live a kind of “spiritual infancy” in which God is recognized as our parent, making every person and every creature our brother or sister in God (Gutierrez, 126–27). We choose to live poverty as a way of rejecting poverty and being in fraternal solidarity and communion with the poor. As brothers and sisters of all, we search to be at the service of God’s reign which encompasses much more than a socio-economic liberation. True liberation must be an integral liberation that leads to an understanding of life based on the concepts of sister/brotherhood and communion.
Eucharistic Communion

The spiritual journey can never be undertaken or traveled alone. Rather, as Christians, we are called to journey as a community united in God because Christian spirituality is one of communion.

For many Catholics, communion recalls the Eucharist. Eucharist is an act of gratitude instituted in the context of Jesus’ passion, death, and resurrection. Eucharist commemorates his oblation made for the integral liberation of humankind (Balasuriya, 15). It is also how Jesus continues his presence among his own. The Eucharist is about gratitude, the communion of believers, bread broken and shared. It is about the sacrifice and liberation wrought by Jesus on the cross.

Sign of the Cross

Finally, as Christians we acknowledge that without the cross there is no salvation, no liberation, no conversion, and no Christianity. Walking in the spirit of the crucified savior requires the cross. The Latino spirituality of liberation proposes carrying the cross in the liberating spirit of Jesus to renew the whole world and ourselves (Casaldaliga and Vigil, 148). Ultimately, as Christians we can never be ashamed to say “we preach Christ crucified” (1 Cor 1:23). It is with the crucified one that we find our true path, and we cannot walk without the cross (Matt 16:24).

Conclusion

Indeed, spirituality is the great motivator. It must be at the heart of theology and behind the face that Christians reveal daily. In order to keep our motivation truly Christian, proponents of liberation theology cannot forget that Christian liberation is not simply a socio-political liberation. It looks to penetrate all aspects of the “socio-spiritual” life of the human race with God’s reign. By “socio-spiritual” I understand all of the aspects of the human life: socio = social, political, religious, economic, and material; namely, the exterior life. Spiritual = spiritual, educational, cultural, affective and psychological; namely, the interior life.

Anyone working for any type of liberation needs to ponder the life and ministry of Jesus in their heart (Lk 2:51) from a position of poverty. This process of reflection will hopefully awaken in them a spirituality that encounters the living and liberating Christ in the reality that surrounds them. Christians are thus called to walk in the spirit of Christ, the Savior, which is to say, the Liberator.

As “cultures of death” continue to threaten all of creation, Christians are called more than ever to foster a contemplative vision, a preferential option for poverty, universal brotherhood/sisterhood, a eucharistic communion, and living under the sign of the cross. In this way, the face and heart of Christian theology and ministry will show a continuous process of liberation from sin, from injustice, from death, and from the barriers that separate people and destroy creation.

References


_____. “Cara y Corazón (Face and Heart): Toward a U.S. Latino Spirituality of...”


