

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-68893-2 - The Cambridge Companion to: Liberation Theology: Second Edition

Edited by Christopher Rowland

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

THE CAMBRIDGE
COMPANION TO
LIBERATION
THEOLOGY

Liberation theology is widely referred to in discussions of politics and religion but not always adequately understood. The new edition of this *Companion* brings the story of the movement's continuing importance and impact up to date. Additional essays, which complement those in the original edition, expand upon the issues by dealing with gender and sexuality and the important matter of epistemology. In the light of a more conservative ethos in Roman Catholicism, and in theology generally, liberation theology is often said to have been an intellectual movement tied to a particular period of ecumenical and political theology. These essays indicate its continuing importance in different contexts and enable readers to locate its distinctive intellectual ethos within the evolving contextual and cultural concerns of theology and religious studies. This book will be of interest to students of theology as well as to sociologists, political theorists and historians.

CHRISTOPHER ROWLAND is Dean Ireland's Professor of the Exegesis of Holy Scripture, University of Oxford. His most recent publications include *Radical Christian Writings: A Reader* (2002) with Andrew Bradstock.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-68893-2 - The Cambridge Companion to: Liberation Theology: Second Edition

Edited by Christopher Rowland

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-68893-2 - The Cambridge Companion to: Liberation Theology: Second Edition

Edited by Christopher Rowland

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE COMPANIONS TO RELIGION

A series of companions to major topics and key figures in theology and religious studies. Each volume contains specially commissioned chapters by international scholars which provide an accessible and stimulating introduction to the subject for new readers and non-specialists.

*Other titles in the series**The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*

edited by Colin Gunton (1997)

ISBN 0 521 47118 4 hardback ISBN 0 521 47695 x paperback

The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation

edited by John Barton (1998)

ISBN 0 521 48144 9 hardback ISBN 0 521 48593 2 paperback

The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer

edited by John de Gruchy (1999)

ISBN 0 521 58258 x hardback ISBN 0 521 58781 6 paperback

The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology, First Edition

edited by Christopher Rowland (1999)

ISBN 0 521 46144 8 hardback ISBN 0 521 46707 1 paperback

The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth

edited by John Webster (2000)

ISBN 0 521 58476 0 hardback ISBN 0 521 58560 0 paperback

The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics

edited by Robin Gill (2001)

ISBN 0 521 77070 x hardback ISBN 0 521 77918 9 paperback

The Cambridge Companion to Jesus

edited by Markus Bockmuehl (2001)

ISBN 0 521 79261 4 hardback ISBN 0 521 79678 4 paperback

The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology

edited by Susan Frank Parsons (2002)

ISBN 0 521 66327 x hardback ISBN 0 521 66380 6 paperback

The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther

edited by Donald K. McKim (2003)

ISBN 0 521 81648 3 hardback ISBN 0 521 01673 8 paperback

The Cambridge Companion to St Paul

edited by James D. G. Dunn (2003)

ISBN 0 521 78155 8 hardback ISBN 0 521 78694 0 paperback

The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology

edited by Kevin J. Vanhoozer (2003)

ISBN 0 521 79062 x hardback ISBN 0 521 79395 5 paperback

The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin

edited by Donald K. McKim (2004)

ISBN 0 521 81647 5 hardback ISBN 0 521 01672 x paperback

The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs Von Balthasar

edited by Edward T. Oakes, SJ, and David Moss (2004)

ISBN 0 521 81467 7 hardback ISBN 0 521 89147 7 paperback

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-68893-2 - The Cambridge Companion to: Liberation Theology: Second Edition

Edited by Christopher Rowland

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology

edited by David Bagchi and David Steinmetz (2004)

ISBN 0 521 77224 9 hardback ISBN 0 521 77662 7 paperback

The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism

edited by Dana Evan Kaplan (2005)

ISBN 0 521 82204 1 hardback ISBN 0 521 52951 4 paperback

The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner

edited by Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines (2005)

ISBN 0 521 83288 8 hardback ISBN 0 521 54045 3 paperback

The Cambridge Companion to Friedrich Schleiermacher

edited by Jacqueline Mariña (2005)

ISBN 0 521 81448 0 hardback ISBN 0 521 89137 x paperback

The Cambridge Companion to the Gospels

edited by Stephen C. Barton (2006)

ISBN 0 521 80766 2 hardback ISBN 0 521 00261 3 paperback

The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an

edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe (2006)

ISBN 0 521 83160 1 hardback ISBN 0 521 53934 x paperback

The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Edwards

edited by Stephen J. Stein (2007)

ISBN 0 521 85290 0 hardback ISBN 0 521 61805 3 paperback

The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology

edited by Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Trier (2007)

ISBN 0 521 84698 6 hardback ISBN 0 521 60974 7 paperback

The Cambridge Companion to Modern Jewish Philosophy

edited by Michael L. Morgan and Peter Eli Gordon

ISBN 0 521 81312 3 hardback ISBN 0 521 01255 4 paperback

The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature

edited by Charlotte E. Fonrobert and Martin S. Jaffee

ISBN 0 521 84390 1 hardback ISBN 0 521 60508 3 paperback

Forthcoming

The Cambridge Companion to Islamic Theology

edited by Tim Winter

The Cambridge Companion to the Virgin Mary

edited by Sarah Boss

The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Christianity

edited by Rebecca Lyman

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-68893-2 - The Cambridge Companion to: Liberation Theology: Second Edition

Edited by Christopher Rowland

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

THE CAMBRIDGE
COMPANION TO
LIBERATION
THEOLOGY

Second Edition

EDITED BY

CHRISTOPHER ROWLAND

*Dean Ireland's Professor of the Exegesis of Holy Scripture,
University of Oxford*



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-68893-2 - The Cambridge Companion to: Liberation Theology: Second Edition
Edited by Christopher Rowland
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Tokyo, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521688932

© Cambridge University Press 2007

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First edition published 1999
Second edition published 2007

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-521-86883-9 Hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-68893-2 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate. Information regarding prices, travel timetables, and other factual information given in this work is correct at the time of first printing but Cambridge University Press does not guarantee the accuracy of such information thereafter.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-68893-2 - The Cambridge Companion to: Liberation Theology: Second Edition

Edited by Christopher Rowland

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS

<i>Notes on contributors</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Foreword to the second edition</i>	xiii
CHRISTOPHER ROWLAND	
<i>Preface to the first edition</i>	xv
<i>Glossary</i>	xviii
<i>Abbreviations</i>	xx
Introduction: the theology of liberation	I
CHRISTOPHER ROWLAND	
Part I Contemporary Liberation Theology	17
1 The task and content of liberation theology	19
G. GUTIERREZ translated by JUDITH CONDOR	
2 'Action is the life of all': the praxis-based epistemology of liberation theology	39
ZOË BENNETT	
3 Liberation theology in Asia	55
BASTIAAN WIELENGA	
4 Black theology	79
EDWARD ANTONIO	
5 Feminist theology: a critical theology of liberation	105
MARY GREY	
6 Demythologising liberation theology: reflections on power, poverty and sexuality	123
MARCELLA MARIA ALTHAUS-REID	

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-68893-2 - The Cambridge Companion to: Liberation Theology: Second Edition

Edited by Christopher Rowland

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS

Part II Aspects of Liberation Theology	137
7 The origins and character of the base ecclesial community: a Brazilian perspective	139
ANDREW DAWSON	
8 The Bible and the poor: a new way of doing theology	159
GERALD WEST	
9 Liberation and reconstruction: the unfinished agenda	183
CHARLES VILLA-VICENCIO	
Part III Analysis and Criticism	207
10 Liberation theology and the Roman Catholic Church	209
PETER HEBBLETHWAITE	
11 Marxism, liberation theology and the way of negation	229
DENYS TURNER	
12 The economics of liberation theology	248
VALPY FITZGERALD	
13 Political theology, tradition and modernity	265
OLIVER O'DONOVAN	
14 Globalising liberation theology: the American context, and coda	278
IVAN PETRELLA	
Epilogue: the future of liberation theology	304
CHRISTOPHER ROWLAND	
<i>Select bibliography</i>	308
<i>Index</i>	315

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-68893-2 - The Cambridge Companion to: Liberation Theology: Second Edition

Edited by Christopher Rowland

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

MARCELLA MARIA ALTHAUS-REID is an Argentinian theologian and holds a Chair in Contextual Theology in the School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh. She has published extensively in the area of Liberation Theology and Sexuality, and her books include *Indecent Theology* (London, Routledge, 2000); *The Queer God* (London, Routledge, 2003); *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology* (London, SCM, 2004) and the edited *Liberation Theology and Sexuality* (London, Ashgate, 2006).

EDWARD ANTONIO is Associate Professor of Theology and Social Theory at Iliff School of Theology, Denver, Colorado. Originally from Zimbabwe where he grew up on the streets and taught himself how to read and write, he holds the M.Litt. degree of the University of Aberdeen and a Ph.D. from Cambridge. He taught Political Theology at the University of Zimbabwe from 1989 to 1996. Before taking up his present position at Iliff, he was a lecturer at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa. He has written a number of articles in the areas of Black and African theologies, ecology and African traditional religions as well as on sexuality in African culture.

ZOË BENNETT is the Director of Postgraduate Studies in Pastoral Theology, Anglia Ruskin University and Cambridge Theological Federation. She is the Director of a Masters programme and a Professional Doctorate programme in Pastoral and Practical Theology. Her current research interests are in theological education in an ecumenical context, the Bible and practical theology, and the work of John Ruskin in dialogue with practical theology. Recent publications include 'Ecumenical Theological Education as a Practice of Peace' in *Religious Education*, 101, 3 (Summer 2006), pp. 331–46; and, with Christopher Rowland, 'Action is the Life of All: New Testament Theology and Practical Theology' in C. Rowland and C. Tuckett eds., *The Nature of New Testament Theology* (Oxford, Blackwell, 2006).

ANDREW DAWSON lectures in Religious Studies at Lancaster University. He researches and publishes on religion and society in South America, particularly Brazil. His publications include *New Era – New Religions: Religious*

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-68893-2 - The Cambridge Companion to: Liberation Theology: Second Edition

Edited by Christopher Rowland

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Transformation in Contemporary Brazil (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2007) and *The Emergence and Impact of the Base Ecclesial Community and Liberative Theological Discourse in Brazil* (Lanham, International Scholars Publications, 1998).

VALPY FITZGERALD is Professor of International Development at Oxford University and Fellow of St Antony's College. He teaches and researches on international finance and development economics, and has extensive experience of working with Christian groups in Latin America on economic change and social justice issues. He is an advisor to CAFOD, UNICEF, UNRISD and UNCTAD on economic and social policy. He has recently edited *The Transmission of Economic Ideas in Latin America* (Palgrave, Macmillan, 2005) and completed *Economic Growth and Welfare in 20th Century Latin America* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2008).

MARY GREY is Emeritus Professor of Theology at the University of Wales, Lampeter. She was formerly Professor of Feminism and Christianity at the Catholic University of Nijmegen, The Netherlands. Her publications include *Redeeming the Dream: Christianity, Feminism and Redemption* (London, SPCK, 1989); *The Wisdom of Fools? Seeking Revelation for Today* (London, SPCK, 1993); *Prophecy and Mysticism: The Heart of the Post-Modern Church* (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1997); and *Beyond the Dark Night: A Way Forward for the Church?* (London, Cassell, 1997). She is editor, with Elizabeth Green, of 'Ecofeminism and Theology', *Yearbook of the European Society of Women in Theological Research* (1994). She is also co-founder and Trustee of the charity 'Wells for India'.

GUSTAVO GUTIERREZ is John Cardinal O'Hara Professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame. He has been a principal professor at the Pontifical University of Peru, and Visiting Professor at many major universities in North America and Europe. He is author of *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 1971); *The Power of the Poor in History* (Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 1979); *We Drink from Our Own Wells* (Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 1983); *God-talk and the Suffering of the Innocent* (Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 1986); *The Truth Shall Make You Free* (Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 1986); *The God Life* (Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 1989); *In Search of the Poor of Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 1992); and *Sharing the Word through the Liturgical Year* (Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 1997).

PETER HEBBLETHWAITE, who died in December 1994, was the Vatican affairs writer for the *National Catholic Reporter* of the USA. Trained as a Jesuit theologian, his reporting of current church affairs went back to the final session of Vatican II. His books include *Theology and the Church* (London, Collins, 1975); *The Christian-Marxist Dialogue* (New York, Paulist Press, 1977); *The Year of the Three Popes* (London, Collins, 1978); *Introducing John Paul II* (London, Collins, 1982); *John XXIII: Pope of the Council* (London, Geoffrey

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-68893-2 - The Cambridge Companion to: Liberation Theology: Second Edition

Edited by Christopher Rowland

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Chapman, 1984); *In the Vatican* (London, Sidgwick and Jackson, 1986); and *Paul VI: The First Modern Pope* (London, HarperCollins, 1993).

OLIVER O'DONOVAN has been Professor of Christian Ethics and Practical Theology at the University of Edinburgh since 2006, before which he was Regius Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology and Canon of Christ Church, Oxford, from 1982. Born in England and educated at Oxford and Princeton Universities, he has also taught in Toronto, Canada, and is an Anglican priest. He is a past President of the Society for the Study of Christian Ethics and a Fellow of the British Academy. His publications include *The Problem of Self-Love in St Augustine* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1980; Eugene, Wipf & Stock, 2006); *Begotten or Made?* (Oxford University Press, 1984); *Resurrection and Moral Order* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, and Leicester, Apollos, 1986); *Peace and Certainty* (Oxford University Press and Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1989); *The Desire of the Nations* (Cambridge University Press, 1996); (with Joan Lockwood O'Donovan), *From Irenaeus to Grotius* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1999); *Common Objects of Love* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2002); *The Just War Revisited* (Cambridge University Press, 2003); (with Joan Lockwood O'Donovan), *Bonds of Imperfection* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2004); *The Ways of Judgment* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2005).

IVAN PETRELLA is an assistant professor of Religious Studies at the University of Miami. A citizen of Argentina, he spends almost half the year in Buenos Aires, where he participates in political and social debates about the country's future. He is the author of *Beyond Liberation Theology: A Polemic* and *The Future of Liberation Theology: An Argument and Manifesto*, editor of *Latin American Liberation Theology: The Next Generation Reclaiming Liberation Theology* and executive editor, with Marcella Althaus-Reid, of the series for SCM Press. In his spare time he roams Buenos Aires and Miami Beach in search of pickup soccer games.

CHRISTOPHER ROWLAND is Dean Ireland's Professor of the Exegesis of Holy Scripture in the University of Oxford. He has written on Jewish and Christian apocalypticism, including *The Open Heaven* (London, SPCK, 1982) and 'Revelation' in the *New Interpreters' Bible* (1998). He was for ten years a member of the board of Christian Aid, London, and chair of its Latin American and Caribbean Committee. He has written on liberation theology in *Radical Christianity* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1988) and *Liberating Exegesis* (London, SPCK, 1990). Together with John Vincent he edits *British Liberation Theology* published by the Urban Theology Unit in Sheffield.

DENYS TURNER is Horace Tracy Pitkin Professor of Historical Theology at Yale University. He is author of *Marxism and Christianity* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1983) and of many articles and papers on Marxism, social theory and Christian Theology. His more recent publications include *The Darkness of*

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-68893-2 - The Cambridge Companion to: Liberation Theology: Second Edition

Edited by Christopher Rowland

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

God (Cambridge University Press, 1995) and *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

CHARLES VILLA-VICENCIO is Executive Director of the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation in South Africa. His publications include *A Theology of Reconciliation: Nation Building and Human Rights* (Cambridge University Press, 1992) and *The Spirit of Freedom: Conversations with South African Leaders on Religion and Politics* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995).

GERALD WEST is Professor in the School of Theology at the University of Natal, South Africa. He is also Director of the Institute for the Study of the Bible, a project that brings together socially engaged biblical scholars and ordinary readers of the Bible from poor and marginalised communities. He is author of *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading the Bible in the South African Context* (Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 2nd edn, 1995).

BASTIAAN WIELENGA has been teaching Biblical Theology as well as Social Analysis at the Tamilnadu Theological Seminary in Madurai, South India, since 1975. Earlier, he was a research scholar in the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society in Bangalore, and co-worker in the Ecumenical Centre, Hendrik Kraemer House, Berlin. He has published in the fields of Christian–Marxist dialogue, politics and theology. His *It's a Long Road to Freedom* (Mandurai, Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary, 1998) discusses perspectives of biblical theology; *Introduction to Marxism* (Bangalore, Centre for Social Action, 1991) presents a pluralist approach to Marxist theory; and *Towards Understanding Indian Society, 3rd Edition* (Mandurai, Centre for Social Analysis, 2002), co-authored with Gabrielle Dietrich, relates social analysis to social movements and alternative development perspectives.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-68893-2 - The Cambridge Companion to: Liberation Theology: Second Edition

Edited by Christopher Rowland

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

FOREWORD TO THE SECOND EDITION

I recall a reviewer of an earlier book I wrote on liberation theology commenting that the book was now redundant, given the collapse of communism. That assessment reflects a widespread assumption that liberation theology is simply Marxism with a Christian gloss and that, with the dramatically changed situation since the fall of the Eastern bloc, the theology which was inspired by it was likewise to be consigned to the dustbin of history. There is a problem with this view. First of all, it assumes that, without Marxism, liberation theology would not have any rationale. This view is widespread (as also is the assumption that liberation theology is linked with the use of violence for political ends). What such views fail to recognise, however, is that liberation theology has never been greatly indebted to Marxism, even if in certain important respects (such as its epistemology and commitment to human history as the arena for the fulfilment of the divine purposes), it has some parallels to it. But those parallels are less indicative of indebtedness than of the recovery in liberation theology of components of the Christian way of life which more mainstream theology has lost sight of. Nevertheless, there is one sense in which the reviewer might have had a point. If liberation theology had stayed as it was in the period before 1990, such criticism would be justified. It has not, and a new generation of liberation theologians has continued with the essential features of the liberation theology method, albeit in changed circumstances. Those changed circumstances also include a more hostile environment in the Roman Catholic Church. One can get a flavour of this when one recalls that the present pope, then Cardinal Josef Ratzinger, not only was an important part of the investigation and critique of liberation theology in the 1990s but also wrote some rather harsh things about it, comparing it to the illusory fanaticism reflected in the violent preparations for the Kingdom of God in the War Scroll from Qumran.¹

The bulk of the book remains the same as the first edition. What we have in the new chapters by Marcella Althaus-Reid, Zoë Bennett and Ivan Petrella is evidence of the continuing history of liberation theology and examples of the contours of

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-68893-2 - The Cambridge Companion to: Liberation Theology: Second Edition

Edited by Christopher Rowland

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

FOREWORD TO THE SECOND EDITION

that new generation. Liberation theology has pervaded much contextual theology. Thus, action/reflection models of engagement are commonplace. Zoë Bennett, writing from a background in contemporary practical theology, demonstrates the extent of this influence and contrasts what is central to liberation theology with this kind of ‘pastoral cycle’ method. At the same time, she fills a gap in the earlier edition by exploring what is perhaps the most important component of liberation theology: the basis of its epistemology in practice. She does this by reference to one of the most important texts of the earlier generation of liberation theology – Clodovis Boff’s *Theology and Praxis*² – indicates its strengths and weaknesses and points to the indispensability of the discussions raised by this question for the wider theological debate. Ivan Petrella and Marcella Althaus-Reid are representative of a new wave of liberation theologians. Their respective contributions demonstrate the extent of the continuity with the original inspiration, though both indicate the ways in which some recent liberationist discussion has lost touch with that original vision. They also point out the ways in which the original advocates of liberation theology ignored central issues in human experience, linked with sexuality and gender, which continue to be key areas of human need and oppression. Ivan Petrella indicates what is central to liberation theology: commitment to projects for social change within history. When liberation theology loses its commitment to engagement in historical projects, to bringing life where there is death, it has lost its soul.

All three writers demonstrate the ways in which, despite all the attempts by ecclesiastical officialdom to disinfect Christian culture of what they deem to be the virus of the politicised theology of liberation theology, at the grassroots level this way of understanding God is alive and well. Those who have been drawn to liberation theology practise this approach not so much because of its intellectual sophistication, as if it were one option in the academic market, but because liberation theology enables one to put one’s finger on the pulse of a world of suffering and death, personal tragedy and injustice. As a result the discernment of Christ in the persons of the needy and vulnerable, and service to them, is then the motor of theological insight. So, theological understanding comes through commitment and action. It is a form of contextual theology, therefore, in which experience and circumstances have a prime importance as the first step in seeking to be a disciple of Jesus.

CHRISTOPHER ROWLAND

NOTES

1. J. Ratzinger, ‘Eschatology and Utopia’, in *Church, Ecumenism and Politics* (Slough, St Paul, 1988), pp. 237ff.
2. Clodovis Boff, *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations*, tr. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 1987).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-68893-2 - The Cambridge Companion to: Liberation Theology: Second Edition

Edited by Christopher Rowland

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

Liberation theology has been one of the most significant movements in Christian theology in the last thirty years. For a decade or more liberation theology dominated the intellectual horizon of theologians in universities and seminaries throughout the world. Recent evidence of a declining profile cannot mask the enormous influence this approach to theology has had on the contemporary Church. It emerged in Latin America, though there have been parallel developments in other parts of the world, in which experiences of oppression, vulnerability or marginalisation have led to a sustained reflection on the Christian tradition. The Third World setting in situations of abject poverty and human need has given the theology a particular urgency and distinctive outline. The concern with human well-being and an understanding of the Church's mission which includes practical measures for human betterment have embraced theologians as co-workers in practical expressions of Christian commitment. The agenda is distinctive in its emphasis on the dialogue between Christian tradition, social theory and the insight of the poor and marginalised into their situation, leading to action for change. Liberation theology is not only of interest to theologians but also to all those studying the role of religion in contemporary society. The emphasis on the political dimensions of the Church's mission within situations of extreme poverty has made it the most compelling example of political theology in the late twentieth century. Liberation theology has a certain novelty value in the popular imagination. Many of its practitioners, however, have been quick to point out how deep are its roots in Christianity's emphasis on the life of prayer and commitment to neighbour as the necessary contexts for understanding God.

The initial dynamism may have been in Latin America, but there have emerged parallel movements in Africa, Asia and also Europe and North America. Not all of these are called liberation theology. Contextual theology is a term now widely used to designate theological reflection which explicitly explores the dialogue between social context and Scripture and

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-68893-2 - The Cambridge Companion to: Liberation Theology: Second Edition

Edited by Christopher Rowland

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

tradition.¹ It is not an ideal term, however, as it suggests that there exists a form of theology in which context plays no determining role, a notion that many, including liberation theologians themselves, would want to challenge. The greatest examples of Christian theology down the centuries (Augustine's *City of God* is a case in point) have all arisen from, and been directed to, specific historical and social contexts. There are enough common threads linking theologians in Asia, Latin America and South Africa to justify a common perspective, not least organisations like the Ecumenical Alliance of Third World Theologians which have enabled dialogue and common interests to emerge as the result of a series of influential conferences with a common sense of direction and purpose.

The chapters of this *Companion* offer a survey of examples of theology in different parts of the world which may be labelled liberation theology. The chapters have been written by contributors, some of whom live and work in the countries whose theology they write about. The first part enables readers to have some understanding of the main features of contemporary liberation theology in Latin America, Asia and Africa and the related feminist theology. In Part II specific issues which arise in the emergence of liberation theology are explored in chapters on the emergence of the base ecclesial communities, so important for the growth of liberation theology in Latin America, and the distinctive ways in which Scripture is studied. One new issue to have arisen since Gustavo Gutiérrez's pioneering *A Theology of Liberation* was published thirty years ago has been the emergence of a situation in which theologians of protest have found themselves engaged in reconstruction and reconciliation. That new situation is reflected in a chapter which examines the case of South Africa. In Part III writers turn to analysis of aspects of liberation theology and specific criticisms made of it. This starts with a posthumously published essay by Peter Hebblethwaite on the emerging critique of liberation theology from the Vatican. I am particularly grateful to Peter's widow, Margaret Hebblethwaite, for all her help in providing me with material which Peter left in a fragmentary state at his death. The extent of the indebtedness to Marxism has also been a subject of controversy from liberation theology's very earliest days, as also has the extent of the influence of a particular economic theory. Finally, its distinctive standpoint on political theology is contrasted with other traditions of political theology.

This volume should enable the student beginning a course in liberation theology to have some idea of the contours of the varied aspects of this

¹ In the Pontifical Biblical Commission's recent document (ed. J. L. Houlden, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, London, 1995) liberationist and feminist interpretations are both given the label 'contextual approaches'.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-68893-2 - The Cambridge Companion to: Liberation Theology: Second Edition

Edited by Christopher Rowland

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

significant movement and will permit someone who wants a panoramic view of the various forms of liberation theology to get some sense of the overall situation. As editor I am aware of the many other matters which could legitimately have been included in a volume of this kind: the relationship of liberation theology and evangelisation, Catholic and Protestant; the evidence of an indigenous liberationist tradition in Europe and North America; the story of Christianity in post-revolutionary Nicaragua, and an analysis of the way in which liberation theology has revolutionised much Christian pedagogy in the Northern Hemisphere even when it seems to remain peripheral to the life of most of the Christian churches.

I am grateful to colleagues at the Centro Missionário de Evangelização e Educação Popular in Valença, Bahia, Brazil for giving me permission to take photographs of their popular education material during my visit to them in 1990, an example of which forms the illustration on the front of this book. My daughter, Rebekah, has helped with proof-reading and the preparation of an index. I am grateful to her for her help and her continuing interest in, and support for, the subject of this book.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-68893-2 - The Cambridge Companion to: Liberation Theology: Second Edition

Edited by Christopher Rowland

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

GLOSSARY

apophatic theology: that which is beyond expression in language. It involves a denial that human language can ever properly be affirmed of God. It contrasts with **cataphatic theology/cataphaticism**.

caste: a hereditary group which maintained social distance from members of other castes.

catechesis/catechetical: teaching or instruction, a way of describing the preparatory teaching given to a candidate for baptism in the Christian Church.

chiliasm: the expectation of a 1000-year reign of God on earth based on Revelation 20, but which has come to be linked with any this-worldly expectation of God's eschatological reign.

christology: teaching about the person of Jesus Christ.

Dalit: the name chosen for itself by the outcaste group in India; it means 'crushed' or 'oppressed'.

dialectical: concerning the understanding of or reconciliation of contradictions, e.g., in theology between God and humanity and different social and economic phenomena. It is a word used both in political philosophy influenced by Hegel and Marx, where it is used of the progressive resolution of contradictions in history, and also in the theology of Karl Barth, which contrasted human ways of knowing and the revelation of God.

encyclical: in modern Roman Catholicism refers to a circular document sent to the church by the Pope.

epistemology: concerned with the theory of knowledge and how humans know anything about themselves, the external world, and God.

eschatology: the hope for the future, both for the individual and the world. There has been a divide in Christian theology between a this-worldly hope and an other-worldly hope.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-68893-2 - The Cambridge Companion to: Liberation Theology: Second Edition

Edited by Christopher Rowland

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

GLOSSARY

exegesis: the practice of interpretation and exposition, specifically of the Bible.

fetishism: according to Marx, the bestowal in a capitalist society on material objects of certain characteristics, such that they appear to possess these naturally.

Feuerbachian: referring to Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–72), who demanded that theology be understood as a projection on to the transcendent of ideas concerning humanity and society.

fideism: a doctrine which places emphasis on the need for faith and rejects the ability of the human mind to understand God, with the consequent denial of the possibility of the need for rational justification.

hermeneutics: the task of reflecting on how we go about doing our interpretation of texts, life and culture.

hermeneutics of suspicion: interpretation linked with what Paul Ricoeur has called the masters of suspicion, Marx, Freud and Nietzsche. Its major characteristic is suspicion of the validity of received narratives and explanations with a demand to probe to get at the underlying truth behind appearances.

immanentism: in contrast with **transcendence** in theology this doctrine stresses God's nearness and involvement in history, including ordinary events and situations.

neo-liberal: a way of characterising the free-market economic theory which has been influential in global economics in the last decades of the twentieth century.

orthopraxy: right way of behaving, contrasted with **orthodoxy**, right belief, which is held to be less interested in the practical demands of faith.

praxis or practice: action, a term often used in liberation theology to describe the actions and commitments which provide the context for theological reflection.

proletariat: the working class which in Marxist theory would be the agent of the defeat of capitalism.

Promethean: referring to Prometheus, the figure in Greek mythology who stole fire from the gods and taught humankind divine wisdom, for which he was imprisoned for having aspired to divinity.

soteriology: the doctrine of God's saving work, especially through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

typology: the relation of different persons and narratives (usually in the Old and New Testaments), so that the character of one is informed by the character of the other (so the sacrifice of Isaac informs the understanding of the death of Jesus).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-68893-2 - The Cambridge Companion to: Liberation Theology: Second Edition

Edited by Christopher Rowland

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

ABBREVIATIONS

CCA	Christian Conference of Asia
CDF	Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The major institution of the Roman Catholic Church responsible for the church's faith and morals
CEB/BCC	Basic Ecclesial Community or Basic Christian Community
CELAM	The Latin American (Roman Catholic) Bishops' Conference
CIIR	The Catholic Institute for International Relations
CISRS	Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society
CLAR	The Latin American Conference of Religious
CSR	Centre for Social Research
EATWOT	Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians
ECLA	Economic Commission for Latin America
EFECW	European Ecumenical Forum of Christian Women
ESWTR	European Society for Women in Theological Research
GATT	The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GS	<i>Gaudium et Spes</i> . The major document of the Second Vatican Council dealing with relations between the Church and the World
IMF	The International Monetary Fund
ISB	Institute for the Study of the Bible
MNC	Multi-National Corporation. Also called Trans-National Corporation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation. A term used to describe organisations like charities or intermediate groups engaged in development work in the Third World
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ST	<i>Summa Theologiae</i> of Thomas Aquinas
URM	Urban-Rural Mission
WCC	The World Council of Churches
WSCF	World Student Christian Fellowship