

REDEFINING THE MEANING OF FREEDOM IN LIBERAL THEOLOGY AND LIBERATION THEOLOGY, AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION IN RELIGIOUS LIFE

Nurul Huda; Arqom Kuswanjono; Agus Himmawan Utomo
Universitas Gadjah Mada

enha300681@gmail.com; arqom@ugm.ac.id; ahutomo@ugm.ac.id

Abstract: *The concept of freedom in historical settings is often regarded as the primary catalyst for the rise and fall of civilizations. In ancient Greece, freedom was deemed to have played a crucial role in propelling Greek civilization to its zenith. The dark ages of Europe were similarly perceived as a period of diminished freedom due to the dominance of the church. However, the emergence of the Renaissance and modern era marked a resurgence of freedom, reminiscent of the values prevalent during the ancient Greek period, characterized by secular principles. Religious values were considered incompatible with modernity. Nevertheless, in a religious society, the essence of freedom lies in the most fundamental realm, namely theology. This article aims to explore how freedom is evident in the attributes of God, the life of Jesus, and the Bible within the context of liberal and liberation theology. Both of these theological perspectives signify a profound shift in religious attitudes, moving away from dogmatism and excessive conformity to orthodoxy, towards a more critical and progressive outlook. Liberal and liberation theology present a responsive depiction of religion, advocating for and fighting alongside human freedom, thus ensuring that religion remains relevant and problem-solving. While liberal theology endeavors to vocalize freedom to bridge the gap between faith and modern sciences, liberation theology strives for human freedom from all forms of discrimination and marginalization. Despite their apparent similarities, they diverge in their interpretation of freedom, leading to distinctions in the practical realm and religious practices.*

Keywords: *Freedom; Liberal Theology; Liberation Theology; Religious Life*

Introduction

The significance of freedom in the context of human existence has been a prominent topic of debate since the onset of the modern era. The idea that humans possess a free spirit forms the basis of modern human thinking. The prevailing hegemonic systems that restrict human existence have come under scrutiny and challenge, leading to various calls for the freedom of will, expression, and belief. In religious life, freedom goes beyond merely the freedom of belief, which often gives rise to secularism by relegating the role of religion to the private sphere. Instead, the value of freedom in religious life is discovered through reinterpreting sacred texts and reexamining the concept of God. As a result, religion continues to hold a vital position in the public space, serving as an institution that provides liberal freedom and emancipates individuals (liberation).

The term “freedom” itself is generally interpreted as the ability to act without certain restrictions. This understanding comes from political philosophy which

assumes that every individual has the right or freedom to act according to his will.¹ In philosophy, debates about freedom can be found in almost all stages of the history of philosophy, starting with Ancient Greek philosophy by Plato and Aristotle, the Middle Ages by Augustine, Anselm and Thomas Aquinas, the modern century by Rene Descartes, David Hume, and Emmanuel Kant, to the 20th-century philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. In every chapter of the history of philosophy, freedom is interpreted differently according to the characteristics of the philosophy that developed at that time. Freedom in the Middle Ages was believed to be a grace given by God to humans as contained in the thoughts of Augustine and Anselm. In modern times, freedom, especially in the context of ratios, is defined as freedom from all forms of hegemony and authority.²

Sartre's very popular expression about freedom is, "I am condemned to be free, this means that there are no restrictions on my freedom, except freedom itself, or if we want, we are not free to stop being free."³ Sartre's view of freedom cannot be separated from the conception of human existence which is called *l'être-en-soi* (being in himself) and *l'être-pour-soi* (being for himself). The equivalent of *en-soi* in English is thingness, while *pour-soi* is nothingness.⁴ *L'être-en-soi* (being in himself) is defined by Sartre as the existence of an-sich-like objects, animals, and plants that have no awareness and meaning of why they exist.⁵ Meanwhile, humans are different creatures, because they have freedom whose existence is full of awareness and meaning, so they deserve to be called *l'être-pour-soi* or being for themselves.⁶ Thus, freedom in Sartre's view is related to active awareness which positions humans as creatures that are free to realize their freedom.

The definition of freedom in religious philosophy is generally related to the relationship between humans and God and humans with humans or with their environment. David Ray Griffin has the view that religion is not only individual but also communal.⁷ Freedom in religion is based on the existence of God as a free substance, gives freedom, liberates, and includes the dimensions of faith and society which require each individual to perform actions that are beneficial to humans and

¹M. Taufiq Rahman, *Pengantar Filsafat Sosial* (Bandung: Lekkas, 2018), 9.

²Victor Delyv Tutupary, "Kebebasan Kehendak (Free Will) David Ray Griffin Dalam Perspektif Filsafat Agama," *Jurnal Filsafat* 26, no. 1 (2016): 136-161, 137-139.

³Thelma Z Lavine, *Petualangan Filsafat Dari Socrates Ke Sartre*, Terj. A. Iswanto, & D. A. Utama (Yogyakarta: Jendela, 2002), 350. Firdaus M Yunus, "Kebebasan Dalam Filsafat Eksistensialisme Jean Paul Sartre," *Jurnal Al-Ulum* 11, no. 2 (2011): 267-82, 270. Satria Rangga Putra, *Problematisasi Pembatasan Hak Atas Kebebasan Beragama Pada Masa Pandemi Covid-19. Dalam COVID-19, Problematisasi Negara Hukum Dan Hak Asasi Manusia Di Indonesia. Media Sains Indonesia* (Bandung: Media Sains Indonesia, 2020), 240.

⁴H Hamersma, *Tokoh-Tokoh Filsafat Barat Modern* (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1992), 109.

⁵Harun Hadiwijono, *Sari Sejarah Filsafat Barat 2* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2022), 158.

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷Donald R Griffin, *Tuhan Dan Agama Dalam Dunia Postmodern*, Terj. A. G. Admiranto (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2005), 191.

their environment. The pursuit of achieving freedom for oneself and liberating others has given rise to two theological concepts: liberal theology and liberation theology.

The difference between liberal and liberation is implicitly found in the thought of John Stuart Mill in distinguishing the two words of freedom in English, namely “liberty” and “freedom”. According to Mill, the term “liberty” is the ability to do whatever one wants, while “freedom” refers to the absence of arbitrary restraints.⁸ Orlando Patterson distinguishes between "liberty" and "freedom" by associating "liberty" with institutions and political parties, encompassing both liberal and libertarian perspectives. On the other hand, "freedom" may or may not coexist with a state of liberty. A person can be liberated but not truly free, or they can be free despite being in a state of enslavement. Patterson suggests that the concept of freedom arises from the yearning for liberation felt by those who are enslaved.⁹ But these two terms are also often used interchangeably in the same meaning. In the theological context, the word freedom is generally used instead of liberty, such as the terms *freedom of God's love*, *God's freedom*, or *freedom of God*.

Freedom in the view of liberal theology and liberation is not only in individual and social meanings but also in the search for the existence of God and its history. For liberal theology, human freedom is a must because it is created from God who is free, while for liberation theology, God's existence is not only free but also practical and historical in human experience. This was confirmed by several researchers, one of which was conducted by Peter C. Hodgson under the title *Liberal Theology and Transformative Pedagogy*. Hodgson said that freedom theologically above all is God, He who is freedom (the free, *das freie*) and who gives freedom, which gives birth to world progress (Hodgson 2010: 66).¹⁰ Whereas W. Matthews Grant in his work entitled *Can A Libertarian Hold That Our Free Acts Are Caused By God?*, explains that freedom does not stop at the meaning of "human free action", but leads to the existence of God as the liberating substance that causes it (2010: 31 -32).¹¹

The two studies explore the concept of freedom as understood in liberal theology and liberation theology, both of which are rooted in the core values of religion, often referred to as theology. Comparing freedom in these two theological perspectives is essential in order to comprehend the similarities and differences between them, as well as their implications for religious practices. This research holds significance because it delves into the meaning of freedom within these two theological traditions, an area that has not been extensively studied before. By conducting this comparative analysis, researchers can gain valuable insights into how

⁸John Stuart Mill, “On Liberty,” *Bartleby*, 1869, <https://www.bartleby.com/130/1.html>.

⁹Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Control and Freedom: Power and Paranoia in the Age of Fiber Optics* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006), 9.

¹⁰Peter Crafts Hodgson, “Liberal Theology and Transformative Pedagogy,” *Teaching Theology & Religion* 2, no. 2 (1999): 66

¹¹W. Matthews Grant, “Can A Libertarian Hold That Our Free Acts Are Caused By God,” *Faith and Philosophy*, 27, no. 1 (2010), 31-32.

freedom is perceived and valued within these theological frameworks. Understanding these distinctions can shed light on the diverse ways in which freedom is integrated into religious beliefs and activities. Such knowledge can promote a deeper understanding of the role of theology in shaping notions of freedom and its impact on religious life. Ultimately, this research contributes to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding the concept of freedom within religious contexts.

Method

This study uses the Library Research method so that all data used comes from materials or written literature, which are directly or indirectly related to the research topic. The materials to be collected are divided into two data sources, namely primary and secondary. The primary data used are the works of liberal and liberation theologians by tracing Bible texts and the history of the life of Jesus (prophetic). While the secondary data are the works of other researchers related to the theme of freedom, liberal theology, and liberation theology.

The data collection used in this study was divided into two ways, namely reading symbolically and semantically. The technique of reading symbolically is reading to capture the synopsis of books, chapters, and sub-chapters to the smallest part of the works of liberal and liberation theologians. Meanwhile, the semantic reading technique is reading data from the work of Esack and Cone and others that have been collected in more detail, decomposing and capturing the essence of the data. In data collection, there are the following steps: 1) data inventory, 2) reading, and 3) Coding.

Data analysis in this study uses a comparative technique, which means that the concepts of freedom according to liberal theology and liberation are compared. These comparisons are made among groups, situations, and structures, both very similar and very different, to find not only similarities but also differences between them. Furthermore, interpretation is carried out to determine the views of the two theologies based on their respective colors and uniqueness that are relevant to the theme of freedom. Then each view is held a third comparison to determine its implications in religious life.

Results and Discussion

Liberal Theology

Indeed, the term "liberal theology" originated as a response to the changing intellectual landscape of the 18th century. The emergence of historical studies, modern science, and critical philosophy posed significant challenges to traditional religious beliefs and the metaphysical concept of religion. Historical studies and the development of skepticism in the analysis of historical events questioned the authenticity and accuracy of religious narratives. This led to a reevaluation of traditional religious doctrines and the need for a more adaptable and open approach

to theology. The influential philosophies of Emmanuel Kant and David Hume also had a profound impact on theological thought. Kant's emphasis on human reason and the limitations of knowledge challenged the dogmatic aspects of religious doctrines, calling for a more rational and critical interpretation of religious beliefs. Furthermore, discoveries in various scientific fields began to challenge the prevailing orthodoxy that had been accepted and followed for centuries. Scientific explanations for natural phenomena and the universe contradicted certain traditional religious explanations, leading theologians to reconsider and reinterpret religious teachings in light of new scientific knowledge. In response to these changes and challenges, liberal theology sought to reconcile religious beliefs with the findings of historical studies, scientific discoveries, and critical philosophy. It emphasized the importance of reason, personal experience, and individual conscience in interpreting religious truths, allowing for a more flexible and inclusive theological approach. Liberal theologians aimed to make Christianity relevant to the modern world and to address the intellectual concerns of their time, laying the groundwork for a more progressive and open-minded understanding of religious concepts.¹² Liberal theology originated amidst the German Enlightenment, a period that called for a fresh perspective on the interplay between religion, culture, and science.¹³

Immanuel Kant's critique of reason encouraged the development of new religious thoughts, feelings, and practices initiated by Friedrich Schleiermacher and G. W. F. Hegel and followed by figures he influenced such as I. A. Dorner, F. C. Baur, A. E. Biedermann, Karl Barth, Albrecht Ritschl, Adolf Harnack, and Wilhelm Herrmann. Liberal theology also spread in England through the thought of S.T. Coleridge, F.D. Maurice, Charles Gore, William Temple, Alex Vidler, John Hick, Maurice Wiles, and Keith Ward. Then the French liberal tradition was driven by Auguste Sabatier and Alfred Loisy. Meanwhile, American liberal theology developed through the thoughts of Gary Dorrien, WE Channing, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Theodore Parker, and more recent thinkers, namely John Cobb, Langdon Gilkey, Gordon Kaufman, David Tracy, Edward Farley, Sallie McFague, Catherine Keller, James Cone, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Roger Haight, and Latin American liberation theologians.¹⁴

Liberal theological criticism demands freedom from all established orthodoxy, both religious and cultural. The demand for freedom for liberal theology is based on the view that God is a free being and one who gives freedom or liberates. Liberal Protestant theology bases its liberal ideas on the profile of the "true Jesus" both as a reaction against the dogmatic traditions of the Catholic Church, and as a

¹²David Camroux, "The Case for Liberal Theology," *The Expository Time* 103, no. 6 (1992): 168-72, 168.

¹³Peter Crafts Hodgson, "Liberal Theology," *The Expository Times* 122, no. 1 (2010): 4-10, 5. Peter Crafts Hodgson, *Liberal Theology: A Radical Vision* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 9-10.

¹⁴Hodgson, "Liberal Theology," 5.

response to criticisms arising from Enlightenment rationalism.¹⁵ God according to Karl Barth is “He who loves in freedom,” in the sense of loving us the way God wants.¹⁶ Hodgson's idea of freedom makes it worthy of being called liberal theology.¹⁷

In response to modernization, liberal theological concepts undergo a radical reconceptualization of the notion of God and traditional religious doctrines.¹⁸ The word liberal itself is believed to be found in the Bible as in the book of Proverbs which promises that “a free spirit will grow fat” (Proverbs 11.25) and Isaiah that when kings reign in righteousness, 'abominable people will no longer be called liberals, or fools who are said to be benefactor (Isaiah 32.5). The word "liberal" thus denotes generosity, open-mindedness, benevolence, and an attitude of blessing rather than condemning others.¹⁹ One of the people who are called liberals in religion are people who carry freedom of thought.²⁰

Gary Dorrien defines liberal theology principally as a mediating movement between faith and reason, tradition and culture, orthodoxy and modernism, seeking to find a “third way” that avoids unacceptable alternatives to authoritarian dogmatism and aggressive secularism.²¹ Liberal theology according to Dorrien is defined by its openness to the decisions of modern intellectual inquiry, especially the natural and social sciences, its commitment to the authority of reason and individual experience, its conception of Christianity as an ethical way of life, its support for the moral concept of redemption; and its commitment to making Christianity socially credible and relevant to modern society.²² Thus, liberal theology can be said to be a movement that rejects orthodoxy and encourages the Christian faith to go hand in hand with modernity.

Liberation Theology

Liberation Theology is the struggle of religious groups in the Latin American continent and Roman Catholic thinkers.²³ This theology reflects the problem of acute

¹⁵Pedro Casaldáliga, *Prologue: Questions on the Ascent and Descent of Mount Carmel. In The Spirituality of Liberation*, Trans. P. Burns, and F. McDonagh (Great Britain: BURNS & OATES, 1994), 61.

¹⁶Timothy Gorringer, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 272.

¹⁷Hodgson, “Liberal Theology,” 5.

¹⁸Amanda Hollowell, “Religious Responses to Modernity in Black Theology in Britain,” *The Expository Time* 120, no. 1 (2008): 16–23, 23.

¹⁹Ian Bradley, *Grace, Order, Openness, and Diversity: Reclaiming Liberal Theology* (London: Continuum, n.d.), 1.

²⁰Michael Novak, “The Liberal Society as Liberation Theology,” *Notre Dame Journal of Law, Ethics & Public Policy* 2, no. 1 (2012): 27–42, 27–28.

²¹Hodgson, *Liberal Theology: A Radical Vision*, 13.

²²Gary J Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion, 1805-1900* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), xxiii.

²³Eddy Muskus, “Liberation Theology: Its Origin and Early Development,” *British Evangelical Council*, 2015, 30–41, 30.

poverty on the one hand and extreme wealth or injustice on the other. A United Nations report in the 1950s described poverty in Latin America leaving 2/3 of the population in hunger in some areas.²⁴

Developmentalism, intended to bolster the economy of Latin America, has proven ineffective in enhancing the well-being of its people. On the contrary, liberation theologians view developmentalism with a negative connotation, as it has become synonymous with superficial reformism and modernism, failing to address the root causes of the region's problems.²⁵ Gustavo Gutierrez argues that the proponents of developmentalism do not get to the roots of evil and instead, they cause confusion and frustration.²⁶ The solution for Gutierrez is, the church must identify itself with the oppressed and the poor.²⁷ Liberation theology is born when faith is faced with the injustice that befell the poor.²⁸

Colonialism is also one of the causes of the birth of liberation theology in Latin America. Christianity was brought by the Spaniards to Latin America to conquer the world for God and Spain. For four centuries, the Roman Church with its semi-feudal socio-economic system played an important supporting role, making a negative impact, and as a result, Latin America remained a largely stagnant continent.²⁹ Stratification is formed based on economics, politics, and skin color, church and state leaders above, and black people below. Gutierrez sees such a reality that he finally struggles by combining poverty and politics. "When I discovered that poverty was something to be fought against, that poverty was structural, that poor people were a class, it became crystal clear that in order to serve the poor, one had to move into political action."³⁰

Liberation theology is the expression/legitimacy of a broad social movement, which emerged in the early 1960s. This movement involves important sectors of the Church (priests, religious orders, bishops), lay religious movements (Catholic Action, Christian University Youth, Christian Young Workers), pastoral interventions

²⁴A. J. Torrance, *The Theology of Liberation in Latin America*. In A. Walker (Eds). *Different Gospels: Christian Orthodoxy and Modern Theologies* (London: SPCK, 1993), 121-124.

²⁵C. "EA Nunez, *Liberation Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 29.

²⁶Terence Ball, Richard Dagger, and Daniel I. O'Neill Ball, *Ideals and Ideologies: A Reader* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 398.

²⁷Halim Wiryadinata, "An Evaluation Of Liberation Theology in The Light Of Its Praxis," *KURIOS (Jurnal Teologi Dan Pendidikan Agama Kristen)* 1, no. 1 (2018): 1-10, 1-2.

²⁸Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (New York: Orbis Book, 1989), 3.

²⁹Hendrick Park, *What Is the True Christianity? And What Is the True Church?* (USA: Xulon Press, 2012), 207.

³⁰David L Smith, *A Handbook of Contemporary Theology: Tracing Trends and Discerning Directions in Today's Theological Landscape* (Illinois: A Bridge Point Book, 1992), 206. Arthur F McGovern, *Liberation Theology and Its Critics: Toward an Assessment* (Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 28. Shimreingam L. Shimray, *Negotiating Peace: North East Indian Perspectives on Peace, Justice, and Life in Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2020), 23.

(worker pastoral, farmer pastoral, urban pastoral), and base communities ecclesiastical. This social movement provides a new theological experience in understanding social and historical phenomena that is as important as the rise of the revolution in Central America or the emergence of a new labor movement in Brazil.³¹ This religious movement asserts that the meeting of religious values with the reality of oppression creates a revolutionary side of religion.

The reality of oppression and injustice becomes the basis for liberation theology to return to Christian sources, namely a promise of liberation for the people. The poor according to him are God's chosen people, because they are in a state of negativity and exclusion. The poor are people chosen by God because they are people who are forgotten, people who are despised while rejecting and excluding them means excluding and rejecting God.³² Liberation theology is an attempt to find inspiration in faith and the Bible in establishing a commitment to fight.³³ Therefore, liberation theology is defined as the Christian faith's interpretation of the suffering, struggles, and hopes of the poor, theological criticism of society and its ideological foundations, and criticism of church and Christian practices.³⁴

Methodologically, liberation theology starts from below, namely its theological starting point, or departs from the context of the oppressed and outcasts.³⁵ Liberation theology according to Boff is a social theology. Social phenomena such as poverty and oppression become critical as well as theological reflections that lead faith to praxis and practice.³⁶ Gutierrez emphasized that reflection must be in the form of criticism of society and the church insofar as they are called and greeted by the Word of God.³⁷ The term praxis here indicates that liberation theology is explicitly influenced by Marxism. Boff asserts that Liberation Theology uses Marxism as a tool for understanding the world of the oppressed in terms of economic and class struggles and the mystical forces of ideology, including religion.³⁸ The use of Marxism here is only a means of understanding oppressive class structures because the theology of liberation is still rooted in theological values originating from the description of God, the life of Jesus, and the Bible.

³¹Michael Löwy, *Marxism and Liberation Theology: Note Books for Study and Research* (Amsterdam: IIRF/IIRE, 1988), 9.

³²Eduardo Mendieta, *Introduction. In E. Dussel. Beyond Philosophy: Ethics, History, Marxism, and Liberation Theology* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2003), 15.

³³Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (New York: Orbis Book, 1989), 8.

³⁴Phillip Berryman, *Liberation Theology: The Essential Facts about the Revolutionary Movement in Latin America and Beyond* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2003), 205.

³⁵Smith, *A Handbook of Contemporary Theology: Tracing Trends and Discerning Directions in Today's Theological Landscape*, 204.

³⁶ Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 41-42.

³⁷Wiryadinata, "An Evaluation Of Liberation Theology in The Light Of Its Praxis," 3.

³⁸ Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 28.

The Meaning of Freedom in Liberal Theology and Liberation Theology

The concept of freedom championed by liberal theology and liberation theology is built on the most fundamental, namely theology itself. Liberal theology views theology as unable to let go of external authority and historical tradition, without which it cannot be applied.³⁹ Theology for it must be practical so that it can respond to the times. Likewise, liberation theology views theology as not merely talking about God without touching human life which is full of suffering. Theology according to Gutierrez must make peace with the call for solidarity of the oppressed by responding to their material needs and paying attention to their spiritual wisdom, because without it theology will only continue to instantiate self-serving socio-political interests.⁴⁰ Thus both of these theological schools both view the need for a theological interpretation that is implementative and responsive to life's problems.

Both liberal theology and liberation theologies define freedom through interpretations of the essence of God, the life of Jesus, and the Bible.⁴¹ Freedom in their ideas has theological roots, not built on secular anthropocentrism which interprets freedom as resistance to religious authority. On the other hand, freedom in the view of liberal theology and liberation originates from the religious authority itself. Religion for them is not the opium of society as Marx said, but a source of inspiration and motivation for freedom and liberation. Liberal and liberation theologians try to present the public role of religion that is relevant to the dynamic journey of human life.

Freedom in the Attributes of God

Freedom in the perspective of liberal theology and liberation theology refers to the free and liberating characteristics of God. Theologically, humans in the Christian view are children of God who is free, He who liberates and who makes freedom or gives freedom. Hegel identified freedom as an attribute of God, He is *das Freie*, "the free One". As a truly free being, God is free to "liberate" another, the world, to exist as a free and independent being.⁴² God's mercy for Liberal Islam is limitless, it extends to all that God has made and to all God's people. God's freedom is loving, and God's love is free. Thus love and freedom cannot be opposed.⁴³ According to him, God's children should also be free because they come from a free

³⁹Hodgson, *Liberal Theology: A Radical Vision*, 9.

⁴⁰David G Kamitsuka, *Theology and Contemporary Culture: Liberation, Postliberal and Revisionary Perspectives* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 13.

⁴¹Hodgson, *Liberal Theology: A Radical Vision*, 14.

⁴²Cinzia Ferrini, "On the Role of Newton's Mechanics and Philosophy of Nature in the Genesis of Hegel's Dialectic." In: M. Bondeli and H. Linneweber-Lammerskitten, Eds., *Hegel's Denkwertung in Der Berner Und Frankfurter Zeit* (Paderborn: Fink, 1999), 77.

⁴³Bruce, *Election*. In P. T. Nimmo, & P. D. Jones (Eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Karl Barth*, 321.

substance. The root of liberal theology according to Hodgson is the view that freedom comes from God and freedom as children of God.⁴⁴

The views of liberal theology seem to contradict traditional theology which considers God's freedom and human freedom to be asymmetrical, even though the two are contradictory. God's freedom is related to God's dominion over all of His creation and is contrasted with human free will. Some modern Christian theologians also argue that God's omniscience is inherently not absolute, and God chose to limit His omniscience to preserve human free will and dignity. Some Christian critics claim that God's ability to be the basis of divine freedom and which is traditionally summarized as "Omnipotence" and "Omniscience" denies human freedom. In general, the view of modern Christian theologians is that divine freedom is incompatible with human freedom.⁴⁵ The belief that humans are free will have implications for the absolute power of God. Conversely, if God is believed to be a free or omnipotent Essence, this will have implications for the loss of human freedom.

Liberation theology sees God as a historical being with human life. God is not a metaphysical idea, He is the God of history, the Liberator of the oppressed from slavery. Jesus was not the abstract Word of God, but the Word of God who became flesh and came to set prisoners free. He is the "Lamb of God" who was born in Bethlehem and was slain in Golgotha. He is also the "Risen Lord" and the "King of Kings". He is their Alpha and Omega, the One who came to make the former last and the latter first.⁴⁶ God is not found among the high and mighty, the glamorous, or the successful, but He is found in human life most threatened and there is difficulty breaking through to triumph over the negativity that hinders it.⁴⁷

The image of God in the views of liberal and liberation theology is described as a free and liberating substance. Freedom in the view of liberal theology originates metaphysically from the attributes of God and humans as children of God must have freedom as a logical consequence of His Freedom. Meanwhile, freedom in the view of liberation theology refers to the conception of God as a practical substance. According to him, God is a historical substance and is present in every human suffering as a liberator. His presence always carries the mission of human liberation from all forms of injustice and oppression.

Freedom in the journey of Jesus' life

⁴⁴Hodgson, *Liberal Theology: A Radical Vision*, 14.

⁴⁵Axel D. Steuer, "The Freedom of God and Human Freedom," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 36, no. 02, (1983): 163 - 180, 171.

⁴⁶James H Cone, "Biblical Revelation and Social Existence," *Interpretation* 28, no. 4 (1974): 422-40, 146.

⁴⁷Joerg Rieger, "Engaging Whiteness (More) Constructively: Conversations with James Cone and Frederick Herzog on The Future of Race And Class in Theology," *Review and Expositor* 117, no. 1 (2020): 58-71, 62.

The second reference to freedom according to liberal theology is to the historical life of Jesus himself. Liberal theology seeks to penetrate human dogmatic piety through the birth of Jesus. Christ for liberal theology is not a human being but was made humanly. God is considered to have entered human life through the birth of Jesus and this has become the central point of the human encounter with God. This meeting was later understood as the loss of the dichotomy between faith and history.⁴⁸ In addition, the death of Jesus for liberal theology is not just a loss of the dichotomy of faith and historical context, but a symbol of surrendering oneself for the sake of others, finding oneself by losing oneself, and participating in the larger whole.⁴⁹ Freedom in the death of Jesus has a purpose for the sake of others, from individual freedom to community freedom. In other words, freedom must begin with individual freedom.

According to liberation theology, the history of Jesus is much more than the loss of the dichotomy between faith and history. His presence is a process of struggle that begins with Jesus suffering, Jesus equalizing, Jesus meaning freedom, and Jesus becoming the liberator.⁵⁰ The stages of Jesus' journey from the sufferer to becoming the liberator show an illustration that Jesus does not only give dignity to those who suffer but fights for them towards the liberation process. The death of Jesus on the cross is a process of liberation or redemption toward a victorious resurrection. An understanding of Jesus according to Liberation Theology must be based on praxis because Jesus is the Liberator of social injustice.⁵¹

These two theologies try to reject the dogmatism of classical theology which is not free and liberating. Liberal theology tries to reject the dogmatism of faith which is far from historical praxis, while liberation theology tries to reject the dogmatism of theology which does not liberate and does not support liberation. The difference between the two lies in the history of Jesus as a free and liberating figure. Jesus in the view of liberal theology is a free figure and breaks through the dichotomy of faith and history through his presence in the world as a free child of God. The history of Jesus according to liberation theology is full of suffering and struggles that end in liberation, so Jesus is not only free but also frees.

Freedom in the Bible

The theme of freedom in liberal theology draws heavily on the Bible, especially in the official version. Several verses in the Bible according to liberal theology explicitly contain the term freedom, as in the book of Proverbs "A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed (Proverbs 11:25)," and the book of Isaiah says that when kings rule in righteousness, "The vile person shall

⁴⁸Camroux, "The Case for Liberal Theology," 169-170.

⁴⁹Hodgson, "Liberal Theology," 6.

⁵⁰Hannah Lewis, *Deaf Liberation Theology* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 139.

⁵¹Nunez, *Liberation Theology*, 209.

be no more called liberal, nor the churl said to be bountiful (Isaiah 32:5)”. Then the practical use of the word free is found in the story of Paul telling the Corinthian Christians that they would glorify God by “and for your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men (2 Corinthians 9:13)”. According to liberal theology, these expressions provide legitimacy and support that theologically, the freedom being fought for refers to the Bible.

The Bible according to liberation theology also contains stories of struggles against oppression. In the book of Matthew, it says: So the slave who liberates is the first to die: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those who are sent to you!” (Matthew 23:37). The purpose of the book of Matthew in the view of liberation theology is interpreted as “the liberator becomes a redeemer,” because he paid in his flesh for the liberation of others. The book of Matthew (20:26–28) also contains: whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant (*diakonos*); “and whoever wants to be first must be your slave (*doulos*); just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve (*diakonesai*), and to give his life as a ransom for many.” In these verses, the Bible contains stories of liberation which culminate in the event of redemption. Christianity for liberation theology is reclaimed as a fully material or materialized reality that is “the Word became flesh”.⁵² Therefore the Bible according to Boff and Boff must be interpreted in the context of the suffering of the poor.⁵³

Liberal theology and liberation theology draw legitimacy from the freedom-related verses found in the Bible. This sacred text offers numerous stories and teachings highlighting the significance of freedom and the pursuit of a liberated life. However, the specific verses relied upon as theological support by each tradition tend to differ. Liberal theology focuses on passages advocating for a free and just attitude, while liberation theology centers around verses that speak of struggles and resistance against injustice.

| The Meaning of Freedom | Liberal Theology | Liberation Theology |
|--------------------------|---|--|
| God's attribute | Freedom is metaphysically sourced, namely God as a Free and Independent Essence (Das Freie). | Freedom does not only originate metaphysically but originates from God's attribute as the God of history, the liberator who is oppressed from slavery. |
| The Historicity of Jesus | • Freedom comes from the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ as the loss of the dichotomy between faith and history. The | • The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is a process of struggle that begins with Jesus suffering, Jesus |

⁵²Daniel. Bell, *Liberation Theology After the End of History: The Refusal to Cease Suffering* (London: Routledge, 2001), 86.

⁵³Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Liberation Theology*. In S. Ferguson, & D. Wright (Eds), *New Dictionary of Theology* (Liecester: IVP, 1988), 388.

| | | |
|----------------|--|---|
| | <p>death of Jesus on the cross is freedom for the sake of others or from individual freedom to community freedom.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom is a rejection of classical theological dogmatism that is not free and liberating. | <p>equalizing, Jesus meaning freedom, and Jesus becoming the liberator.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom is a rejection of theological dogmatism which does not liberate and does not support liberation. |
| Bible messages | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom is explicitly found in Bible messages such as the Book of Proverbs (11.25), the Book of Isaiah (32.5), and the Book of 2 Corinthians (9:13). • Kebebasan berdasarkan pesan-pesan Alkitab mengandung seruan dan dukungan untuk bersikap bebas dan adil | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom as a struggle for liberation is also found in the Bible, such as Matthew (23:37 and 920:26-28). • Freedom based on the messages of the Bible contains a call and support for being free and fair |
| Implications | <p>Freedom is relative truth, the loss of the boundaries of revelation and historical context, and the relevance of religion to the times.</p> | <p>Freedom is freedom, justice, and equality, thus rejecting all forms of monopoly, oppression, slavery, and discrimination in any form and the name of anyone.</p> |

The meaning of freedom is based on the table above, there are many differences and similarities between liberal theology and liberation theology. Liberal theology fights for freedom in the interpretation of religion as relative truth without getting stuck in religious conservatism, trying to remove the barriers of revelation and historical context, and fighting for the relevance of religion to the times. This is following Martin Camroux's expression that the meaning of freedom in the view of liberal theology is a commitment to critical thinking towards faith, a commitment to the view that no one has all the truth, and the freedom to adjust faith with new knowledge.⁵⁴ The mention of the term liberal theology very accurately describes the characteristics of this theology. This word comes from the Latin *liberales*, an adjective that refers to something that is “free”.⁵⁵ Besides being used as a characteristic of thought and movement in economics and politics, this term is also used in theological contexts.

Freedom in the view of liberation theology requires a radical attitude towards religion. The progressive side of religion is very necessary for this theology to foster a spirit of struggle to defend injustice. God, Jesus, and the Bible don't just teach freedom, but are present in the suffering of the people and fight for it to achieve freedom. This theology makes religion a tool for the struggle for freedom, not just showing an attitude of being free from religious conservatism and being free to

⁵⁴Bradley, *Grace, Order, Openness, and Diversity: Reclaiming Liberal Theology*, 5.

⁵⁵Jonathan David Gross, *Byron: The Erotic Liberal* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 5.

criticize religious dogmatism and striving for a religion that is in harmony with the times. Freedom in this case means freedom, justice, and equality, thus rejecting all forms of monopoly, oppression, slavery, and discrimination in any form and on behalf of anyone. This is under several liberation theology doctrines which contain; sharp moral and social demands on dependent capitalism as an unjust system, the use of Marxist instruments to understand the causes of poverty, the contradictions of capitalism and forms of class struggle, the preferential choice of the poor for self-liberation, and so on.⁵⁶

The similarities between liberal theology and liberation can also be identified easily. Both of them fight for theological freedom as the basis of their thoughts and movements. The implications of this similarity have resulted in both of them looking for the same authoritative sources, namely the attributes of God, the presence of Jesus in human life, and the Bible. Therefore, both of these theologies propose new interpretations or new readings of God, Jesus, and the Bible. But even though these two theologies differ in many respects, liberation theology can be said to be a continuation of liberal theology. Liberation theology is a theology of liberation as stated by Casaldáliga: *The spirituality of liberation is the spirituality of freedom; because only the free can liberate. And it is the spirituality of poverty, set free from egoism, consumerism, and vain possessions.*⁵⁷

Indeed, liberation theology incorporates elements of both liberal theology and Marxist theory. It draws upon the foundation of liberal theology's emphasis on freedom, justice, and social reform, while also integrating the critical analysis of society and power structures provided by Marxist theory. By combining these perspectives, liberation theology seeks to address issues of oppression, poverty, and social inequality, aiming to bring about transformative change and liberation for marginalized and oppressed communities.

Hodgson also said that liberal theology can also be said to be liberation theology.⁵⁸ The freedom project demands human liberation and human culture from oppression stemming from colonialism, racism, classism, gender discrimination, homophobia, xenophobia, nationalism, consumerism, violence, economic and political injustice, ecological exploitation, and so on. All the ideologies that drive society into evil seem to be rooted in sin, while sin is a threat and instability that we as free beings experience. According to Hodgson, the concept of liberation emerged as an integral part of liberal theology. Furthermore, in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the liberation theology movement originated from liberal theologians. After the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, this movement gave rise to various

⁵⁶Löwy, *Marxism and Liberation Theology: Note Books for Study and Research*, 9-10.

⁵⁷Casaldáliga, *Prologue: Questions on the Ascent and Descent of Mount Carmel. In The Spirituality of Liberation*, Trans. P. Burns, and F. McDonagh, xxvi.

⁵⁸Hodgson, *Liberal Theology: A Radical Vision*, 69.

branches such as African, American, Latin American, and feminist liberation theology.

The Meaning of Freedom in Liberal Islamic Theology and Islamic Liberation Theology

In the Islamic world, liberal theology and liberation theology also exist as part of the dynamics of Islamic scholarship. Although in terms of liberal theology and liberation, both were born out of Christian religious responses to social, political, and religious issues, this does not mean that liberal Islamic theology and Islamic liberation theology are simply imported from Christianity. Islam also faces how Islam must adapt to developments in science and technology, modernization, democracy, and others, which underlie the birth of liberal thought in Islam, such as Shah Waliyullah, Mahmoud Muhammad Taha, Subhi al Salih, Faraq Fuda, and in Indonesia the founders of the Jaringan Islam Liberal (JIL) Ulil Abshar Abdalla. Likewise, Islam must also respond to Muslims who are underdeveloped in civilization and oppressed due to unjust economic structures, gender inequality, and racism which underlies the birth of liberation theologians such as Farid Esack, Ashgar 'Ali Engineer, Hassan Hanafi, Aminah Wadud, and in Indonesia Abdur Rahman Wahid (Gus Dur), who has made great contributions to liberating minority groups.

According to Kurzman, liberal Islam appears to be contradictory in terms of terminology.⁵⁹ This statement is based on Western scientific identification of Islam and the Islamic world for centuries. Islamic faith is identified with fanaticism, while Islamic tradition is seen as backwardness and primitiveness, Islamic political authority is seen as despotism, and Islamic military practices are seen as terror and rape. In short, everything about Islam and the Islamic world is identified with “threatening images of theocracy and terrorism.”⁶⁰ Even though liberal Islam still refers to fundamental values in Islam and the seeds of liberal thought are rooted in the classical Islamic theology that existed long before liberal theology and liberalism in Western politics were born.

The themes of God's freedom in the sense of "Omnipotent" and "Almighty" with human freedom color the debates between theological schools. From theological schools such as the Qadariyah and Mu'tazilah, they produced the doctrine of human freedom for his actions which resulted in the absolute will and power of God. On the other hand, the Murji'ah, Jabariyah, and Ays'ariyah schools produce doctrines about the absolute will and power of God which have implications for the absence of human freedom. The birth of liberal thought in Islam still has compatibility with the classical Islamic scientific tradition. Likewise, those who reject it also get

⁵⁹Biyanto, "Trend of Liberalism in Islamic Thought," *Jurnal Salam* 14, no.1 (2011): 61-73, 61.

⁶⁰M. Nur Kholis Setiawan, "Liberal thought in Qur'anic Studies: Tracing humanistic approach to sacred text in Islamic scholarship." *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 45, no. 1 (2007): 2-28, 23.

legitimacy in classical scholarship. Islam as a religion demands obedience to Allah and is bound by the Shari'a brought by the Prophet Muhammad. Based on this perspective, it can be concluded that Islam does not mean freedom.

Muslims, according to liberal Islam, should protect Islam so that it always functions as *salih li kulli zaman wa makan*. The term "liberal" thus implies several modern standards which include opposing theocracy, promoting democracy, awareness of women's rights, rights of non-Muslims, freedom of thought, and progress. In its adaptation to modern standards, Islam must display other faces that are non-orthodox, Islam that is following the changing times, futuristic-oriented.⁶¹ That is why liberal Islam requires freedom of thought which is important in the Islamic scientific tradition called *ijtihad*.⁶² Liberals are generally people who dare to question and criticize theological doctrines.⁶³ The Qur'an itself was linguistically realized by scholars in the classical era about the principle of freedom of thought.⁶⁴ Islam in the perspective of Liberal Islam is in line with modern values of freedom.⁶⁵

Islamic Liberation Theology is also built on the fundamental values of the Islamic religion. Ashgar 'Ali Engineer makes a definition that is quite complex to describe the typology of Islamic liberation theology. There are four areas of the struggle for Islamic liberation theology formulated by the Engineer, namely: a theology that looks at life in the world and in the hereafter; theology that is anti-status quo, which protects the rich against the poor; a theology that plays a role in defending groups that are oppressed and dispossessed, as well as fighting for the interests of their groups and equipping them with strong ideological consistency to fight groups that oppress them; and theology which recognizes the metaphysical concept of destiny and recognizes the concept that humans are free to determine their destiny.⁶⁶ These four points are explored from the values of liberation that have appeared since the birth of Islam through the verses of the Koran and the story of the struggle of the Prophet Muhammad. Eating freedom here is also the same as Christian liberation theology, namely liberating the oppressed.

Farid Esack one of the theologians of Islamic liberation points out that before liberating humans, it is necessary to liberate religion from uncritical social, political, and religious structures and ideas. After that, we will fight for the freedom of all

⁶¹Biyanto, "Trend of Liberalism in Islamic Thought," 68.

⁶²Ahmad Bunyan Wahib, "Questioning Liberal Islam in Indonesia: Response and Critique to Jaringan Islam Liberal," *Al-Jami'ab: Journal of Islamic Studies* 44, no. 1 (2006): 23-51, 25.

⁶³Eni Zulaiha and B. Busro, "Prinsip Liberalisme dalam Metodologi Tafsir Feminis: Pembacaan pada Karya-karya Husein Muhammad," *Khazanah: Jurnal Studi Islam dan Humaniora*, 18, no. 1 (2020): 25-48, 26.

⁶⁴Setiawan, "Liberal thought in Qur'anic Studies: Tracing humanistic approach to sacred text in Islamic scholarship," 23.

⁶⁵Syafa'atun Almirzanah, "On Human Rights and the Qur'anic Perspective: Freedom of Religion and the Rule of Apostasy." *Al-Jami'ab: Journal of Islamic Studies* 45, no. 2 (2007): 367-388, 367.

⁶⁶Asghar Ali Engineer, *Islam dan Teologi Pembebasan*, terj. Agung Prihantoro. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2009.

people from all forms of injustice and exploitation, including race, gender, class, and religion. In this context, Esack said: "We must also ask why are people hungry and why are unemployed. Hunger and unemployment do not come from Allah. Political and economic systems cause it."⁶⁷ God's way for Islamic theology of liberation is a way that leads to the welfare of human society as a whole, the way of justice, and human freedom so that a few people cannot control the strengths and capacities of humanity that prevents them from mastering the natural resources that God has provided for all.

Esack built an Islamic theology of liberation based on the Koran and al-Sunnah, not post-Muhammad's theological and fiqh traditions. This is what distinguishes Islamic liberation theology from liberal Islam. Islamic theology of liberation does not want to be trapped in school divisions, so it cannot be considered the legacy of one of the classical theological schools. Esack says: "I assume that an Islamic perspective is one which emerges from the textual sources of Islam, the Qur'an and the Sunnah (the precedent of Muhammad-peace be upon him)."⁶⁸ It is from here that the freedom fought for by liberation theologians refers to the struggles of the prophets, especially the Prophet Muhammad, to liberate his people from various forms of oppression in ancient times.

Implications of Freedom in Religious Life

The emergence of liberal theology and liberation theology brought many changes in theological discourse and its relation to the implementation of religion in real life. Theology is no longer understood as a sacredness that is far from the hustle and bustle of the profanity of human life in the world, but it is present in the dynamics of human life. Religion finally breaks through the dichotomy of faith and history which is accepted as religious dogmatism. Liberal and liberation theology tries to bring back the public role of religion amid increasing secularism due to the achievements of science and technology in modern times. Even further, the religious spirit shows its urgency at a time when modernism creates gaps, discrimination, and oppression. Both contributions are very clear in the realm of religious thought and practice.

Contributions of liberal theology

One of the contributions of liberal theology is the birth of a critical study of the Bible. Liberal theologians adopted new methods and considered Christianity to be resistant to self-criticism. They claim, that no other religion has ever scrutinized its sacred texts with the thoroughness with which this liberal theologian has approached the Bible.⁶⁹ This effort is made to maintain Christianity so that it can

⁶⁷Farid Esack, *But Musa Went to Fir-aun!: A Compilation of Questions and Answers about the Role of Muslims in the South African Struggle for Liberation*, California: the University of California Press, 1989.

⁶⁸Farid Esack, "An Islamic view of conflict and reconciliation in the South African situation," *Religion, Conflict and Reconciliation*, Vol. 17 (2002): 290-297, 290.

⁶⁹Camroux, "The Case for Liberal Theology," 169.

dialogue with the times. Therefore, there are at least two views that trigger the accommodation of new methods of interpreting the Bible: first, if all truth comes from one God and His revelation, then it must be welcomed from whatever source the truth comes, second, the belief that the Bible, when viewed from a new perspective it will be more useful and inspiring.⁷⁰

Another contribution of liberal theology is support for morality and social issues. Rooted in the Social Gospel of the last few decades of the 19th century and the first three decades of the 20th century, liberal theology believes that faith can change social structures, so that it does not only work on one's relationship with God.⁷¹ Liberal theology is the same as the Social Gospel in that it exalts man, his physical needs, and his powers of rationality tend to sacrifice God.⁷² Kenneth Cauthen, when labeling the era of the early 20th century as the era of liberal theology, said that Social Evangelists had a deep awareness of their continuity with the main lines of Christian orthodoxy and felt they could retain their essential features in modern civilization. Faith based on the Social Gospel cannot be separated from moral and social issues.⁷³

Liberal theology reconciles the gap between reason and revelation and can accept "truth" wherever it is found. In his view, there is no discontinuity between human truth and religious truth. Truth must be found in experience, guided by reason, more than is known in tradition or authority. Liberal theology opposes dogmatism and exclusivism and appeals to unverifiable reality. Liberals are open to the truth of other religions. Christianity is not seen as the only expression of man's search for God or God's revelation to man. God's revelation about Himself continues and is present in all places and at all times.⁷⁴ By reconciling revelation and reason and its tendency to accept truths that originate outside the Bible, liberal theology certainly accepts contemporary science, art, and humanities.

These various contributions are following the characteristics of liberal theology put forward by Michael Langford, namely the desire to use rational methods, the desire to take seriously the intellectual climate in which faith must be lived, and the belief that all truth will eventually point to God, the refusal to be fascinated by tradition or authority, dislike of any formal relationship between Church and state, general skepticism of claims unsupported by reason or experience, tolerance of dissent, and emphasis on the importance of the individual rejecting the

⁷⁰*Ibid*, 170.

⁷¹*Ibid*, 171.

⁷²Pierre Jacobs, "The Social Gospel Movement Revisited: Consequences for the Church," *HTS: Theological Studies* 71, no. 3 (2015): 1-8, 3.

⁷³Katherine Cauthen, *The Impact of American Religious Liberalism* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1983), 28.

⁷⁴Alan Richardson and John Bowden, *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1983), 324-325.

relevance of differences based on nationality, race, religion, social status, and gender.⁷⁵ This characteristic shows that liberal theology was indeed born as a response to religious polemics and the development of modern science.

Contributions of liberation theology

Liberation theology according to Michael Lowy is the disclosure or validation of a social movement that emerged in the early 1960s before this term appeared. This movement involves priests, bishops, and religious organizations among Catholics and Protestants. They gathered themselves based on morals, faith, and the religious spirit against all forms of discrimination, injustice, and oppression.⁷⁶ This theology generally focuses on the praxis of liberation for the oppressed, poor, marginal, discriminatory, and persecuted and immerses themselves in fighting for their fate and demands.⁷⁷

The liberation theology movement in the 1960s did not only occur in Brazil and Chile, similar movements also emerged in other countries. In Colombia, Father Camilo Torres led a militant people's movement and joined the National Liberation Army. Organizations for Third World priests are also formed everywhere, including Sacerdotes para el Tarcero Mundo in Argentina, the National Organization for Social Integration in Peru, and Golconda in Colombia. The involvement of the priests finally coincided with the momentum of the renewal efforts proclaimed by Vatican II which led to this movement expanding to churches on all continents such as America, Europe, and Asia.⁷⁸

The term liberation theology itself was only born in 1971 through a book by Gustavo Gutierrez from Peruvian Jesuits. Gutierrez's work made a real contribution to the liberation theology movement. He brought a new doctrine that opposed the theology of the Greek heritage which separated the spiritual from the mortal, the sacred from the profane. According to him, there is only one history and that happened in the history of mortal humanity, that the Redemption and the Kingdom of God must be realized now and in this world.⁷⁹ Injustice and discrimination are forms of the absence of God's Kingdom in the world. God's kingdom for Gutierrez must be realized in a fraternal and just society; and in turn, this revelation opens up the promise and hope of all humanity's complete communion with God.⁸⁰

⁷⁵Bradley, *Grace, Order, Openness, and Diversity: Reclaiming Liberal Theology*, 2-3.

⁷⁶Michael Löwy, *Teologi Pembebasan*, Terj. R. Topaimasang (Yogyakarta: Insist Press, 2003), 26.

⁷⁷Fajar Gumelar and Hengki Wijaya, "Peran Gereja Masa Kini Menyikapi Teologi Pembebasan Gutiérrez," *Bia: Jurnal Teologi Dan Pendidikan Kristen Kontekstual* 2, no. 1 (2019): 14-26, 16.

⁷⁸Löwy, *Teologi Pembebasan*, Terj. R. Topaimasang, 49-51.

⁷⁹*Ibid*, 54.

⁸⁰and Jurgen Moltmann Gutierrez, Gustavo, Caridad Inda, John Eagleson, Johann Baptist Metz, Jose Miguez Bonino, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (New York: Orbis Book, 1988), 231.

Freedom in Gutierrez's view is not a term that stands alone, without origin and purpose. For him “freedom from” and “freedom to” can be surpassed by “freedom with”—freedom in solidarity with other people, especially the poor.⁸¹ Liberation theology opposes the meaning of freedom in an individual sense because freedom is a continuous social concept and gives birth to a unique concept of social freedom that places differences in race, gender, and social stratification within the same equality and solidarity. This equality is the key and the goal of freedom that liberation theology strives for because only then can humans truly be free and find moral freedom.

The struggle in creating equality, and usher in liberation theology must reveal itself in three different arenas. *First*, liberation theology struggles for economic, social, and political justice, most of these struggles originate in Latin America. *The second* is centered on racial militancy in the United States and, increasingly, in South Africa. *The third* focuses on women's struggle to achieve equality and respect that was spearheaded by female theologians in industrialized countries, such as the United States, the Netherlands, and Germany.⁸² Although these three appear to be different, they are interrelated, because racial and gender injustice also results in economic, social, and political injustice.

Conclusion

The term freedom seems to have many meanings depending on the building of thought that underlies it. Freedom for religious people is explored and found in the most authoritative sources of religion, namely God, the life of Jesus, and the Bible. Liberal and liberation theology proves that freedom is an integral part of religion. Both of them explore the meaning of freedom by breaking through the sacred boundaries of classical theology which tend to separate the attributes of God from real life. Both try to present the theological spirit in real life, to find its relevance in the dynamics of human life. The urge to present religion in the public sphere is based on the interpretations of liberal theologians and liberation in interpreting theology. They bring a new interpretation or a new reading of theology itself, so that it becomes a down-to-earth theology, legitimizing freedom and liberation.

The meaning of freedom in the views of liberal theology and liberation theology also has fundamental differences. The concept of freedom brought by liberal theology is rooted in the interpretation of the free nature of God, the birth of Jesus which penetrates the dichotomy between faith and real life, and the Bible's call for the importance of freedom. Meanwhile, freedom initiated by liberation theology tends to present God, the history of Jesus, and the Bible as liberators and calls for

⁸¹H. Mark Roelofs, “Liberation Theology: The Recovery of Biblical Radicalism,” *American Political Science Review* 82, no. 2 (1988): 549-566, 557-558.

⁸²D. Goulet, “Liberation Theology and Liberal Society,” *Notre Dame Journal of Law, Ethics & Public Policy* 2, no. 1 (2012): 43-53, 45.

the liberation of the oppressed. This difference has implications for the meaning of freedom that both of them are fighting for. The meaning of freedom in the view of liberal theology tends to be individual and avoids radical or extreme religious attitudes by accepting truths that originate from other than the Bible, including acceptance of scientific truths. On the contrary, freedom in liberation theology shows a collective meaning by fighting for the freedom of oppressed humans and wanting a radical attitude toward religion by taking it as a liberating institution.

This difference has an impact on the contribution of both in religious life which is also different. Liberal theology's most important contribution has been its attempt to overcome the dichotomy between religion and science. He rejects religious orthodoxy which overrides rationality and freedom of interpretation. Meanwhile, the contribution of liberation theology is the struggle to present religious institutions, religious priests, priests, and youth in overcoming all forms of discrimination caused by gender and racial differentiation, as well as social, economic, and political stratification. Therefore, these two theologies are very important for religious renewal and its efforts to present religion in the public sphere.

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