The Bible and Bread

Context, Themes, and Word Study

Liberation Theology
2026 Week 4
Exodus 3:1-8a

Exodus 3:1-8a
New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

3 Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the
wilderness and came to Mount Horeb, the mountain of God. **2** There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a
flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. **3** Then Moses said, "I
must turn aside and look at this great sight and see why the bush is not burned up." **4** When the LORD saw that he
had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." **5** Then he
said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy
ground." **6** He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of
Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

7 Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on
account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, **8** and I have come down to deliver them from the
Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and
honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

UMH p.34 RENUNCIATION OF SIN AND PROFESSION OF FAITH

On behalf of the whole Church, I ask you:
Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness,
reject the evil powers of this world,
and repent of your sin?

Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you
to resist evil, injustice, and oppression
in whatever forms they present themselves?

Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior,
put your whole trust in his grace,
and promised to serve him as your Lord,
in union with the Church which Christ has opened
to people of all ages, nations, and races?

Does God care about the plight of those who are being oppressed?

Do you believe the gospel is good news? If so, is the gospel good news for the poor, marginalised and oppressed, not just for the ruling elite?

Does your theology and biblical interpretation tell the poor that they should bow to their oppressors?

Is your idea of salvation so spiritualised that almost any level of oppression or brutality can be treated as theologically irrelevant, since salvation is about achieving life after death, not about the conditions of life here and now?

Is what happens now, politically and economically, as important to theology as life hereafter.

See, Threlfall-Holmes, Miranda. How to Read the Bible: 21 Ways to Enjoy and Understand Scripture (pp. 124-125). John Murray Press. Kindle Edition.

Four Strands of Liberation Theology

1. bottom-up approach

2. reading Scripture, from the perspective of the poor, the oppressed and the marginalised

3. redefines the classic metanarrative of fall and salvation

4. concerned with doing the right thing (orthopraxis) than holding the right beliefs (orthodoxy)

Threlfall-Holmes, Miranda. How to Read the Bible: 21 Ways to Enjoy and Understand Scripture (p. 125-127). John Murray Press. Kindle Edition.

1. bottom-up approach

'***base communities***', often lay led and meeting in homes, reading the Bible for themselves and rejecting church traditions of an authoritative interpretation

hermeneutics of suspicion

The hermeneutic of suspicion focuses on something even further removed from the simple study of the words on the page; it encourages us to ask about, and listen to, what isn't there –to see the gaps or listen to the silences.

In biblical studies, a hermeneutic of suspicion involves looking at the text and asking a series of questions, suspiciously interrogating the text and our received understanding about it. ~ lens of suspicion arising out of the context of the suspicion

Threlfall-Holmes, Miranda. How to Read the Bible: 21 Ways to Enjoy and Understand Scripture (p. 130-131). John Murray Press. Kindle Edition.

hermeneutics of suspicion: questions to ask:

Who isn't in the story who should be?

Whose voice is not being heard?

How would the story look if it was told
from their perspective?

In whose interests was it to include this story
in the canon of Scripture

How have you heard this story typically interpreted?

Whose interests does that interpretation serve?

What are the power relationships going on in this story?

What are the gender relationships going on in this story?
Are typical gender roles enacted or challenged?

What are the class or economic relationships?

Where is the economic power?

Where's the sexual power in the story?
Who wields it?

Whose fantasies are fulfilled or challenged?

What are the political arrangements or assumptions?
Are they challenged or reinforced?

Threlfall-Holmes, Miranda.
How to Read the Bible: 21 Ways to Enjoy and Understand Scripture (p. 134).
John Murray Press.
Kindle Edition.

2. **reading Scripture from the perspective of the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized**

identify not with the rich, powerful or influential characters in a story but with the poor, marginalised, humble or excluded.

i.e. the story of Exodus was traditionally read as the story of Moses, the great hero. Liberation theology asks us to read it from the perspective of the outcast and oppressed, as the story of liberation of a people who are enslaved and exploited.

God has not only heard the cries of the oppressed but cares about them and, moreover, intends to act to change their situation. Notice too that Moses himself, at this point in the story, is an outcast, a criminal on the run. He is described as being literally in the wilderness when God meets with him in the burning bush, a dramatic symbol of God's startling intimacy with people at the margins of society.

With our developing awareness of genocide and oppression as something other than just the history of winning written by the victors, our attention also tends to be caught by that long list of peoples who already make their home in the land flowing with milk and honey.

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3. redefines the classic metanarrative of fall and salvation

For liberation theology, salvation means liberation. This is a major shift from the approach common from the early medieval period, which focused on the Genesis story of creation and the fall as an interpretative framework for the whole Bible. In that metanarrative, **humanity's big sin** that Christ came to reverse was seen as **disobedience** to God's command not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Christ's obedience to death on the cross reversed or recapitulated that initial act of disobedience and thus brought about salvation.

This classic narrative is extremely useful to the ruling powers. Indeed, many of the early documents of the English Reformation are quite startling to modern eyes in their confident assertion that being a good obedient subject to the Crown is the way to salvation for normal members of the public. Slavery, empire and widespread oppression were all justified on this basis. For liberation theology, **the big sin of humanity** that Christ's saving death reverses is not disobedience, but **greed.**

Humanity's temptation to greed lies at the root of oppression, injustice and violence, as we seek to ensure that we have access to more than our fair share of the world's goods. The salvation offered by Christ is liberation from this sin of **greed**, which **is not just a matter of bad individual moral choices but is structurally embedded in our social, political and economic systems.** On this reading, '**freedom in the promised land**' is not simply a metaphor for heaven, **but a manifesto for radical change now.**

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4. concerned with doing the right thing (orthopraxis) than holding the right beliefs (orthodoxy)

the key test of whether beliefs are, in fact, right is whether they lead to right (i.e. liberating) actions. If doctrines are experienced as oppressive by the poor, they are likely to be incorrect and need revision.

the overarching story of Scripture is one of liberation. The test of whether any given interpretation is authentic is whether it tends towards liberation rather than oppression. If a given interpretation is experienced as oppressive by the poor, but liberating by the privileged members of a society, it is likely to be wrong. Conversely, if it is experienced as liberating by those who are marginalised, but oppressive by those who are privileged, it is likely to be right. This is known as 'the preferential option for the poor'.

This means that it is hard, if not impossible, to do liberation theology from a privileged perspective. If you're reading this, as I'm writing it, in a relatively privileged position, then, whatever you do, don't simply pretend that you are reading it 'as if' you were poor. Liberation theology is all about reading Scripture, and doing theology, in and from your own context, not wondering 'What would the poor think of this?'. Instead, seek out and be informed by what the poor themselves have said. To do this for yourself, you need to identify where (if) you are oppressed, and read from that perspective, ideally with others. Liberation theology is at heart a group exercise… different aspects of privilege and/or oppression **intersect** in each of our bodies and lives… [the] **concept of intersectionality** means that I have white privilege at the same time as experiencing a certain level of oppression as a woman living in a society that is still formed by patriarchy. **'White privilege' does not imply that I necessarily feel, or even am, particularly privileged; it simply means that the colour of my skin is not something that disadvantages me in the society in which I live.** {see hermeneutic of suspicion}

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