

The Trinity as A Liberation Model

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Contents

The Trinity as A Liberation Model	3
 Understanding Liberation Theology	4
 The Concept of Trinity	7
 Biblical Evidence	8
 Inspiration of Trinity	9
 Trinity Relevance in Liberation Theology.....	10
 Trinity as Basis of Understanding Liberation Theology	13
Conclusion	15
References	16

The Trinity as A Liberation Model

There is a relationship between the Trinity doctrine and the Liberation model of theology. Trinity is a central doctrine in Christianity because the believers perceive that the existence of God is in three beings, including Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. However, the three existences do not occur in triune because each is not the other, and the Holy Spirit is not either of the two. Christians believe that communion is a perfect example of human community. Although Scripture says that God is love, He can only be love if He becomes a community of divine persons. In that case, the existence of God in three persons justifies that He is love. When believers practice exclusion and oppression of others, they negate the picture of perfect communion. They act contrary to the love and compassion of human nature of communion.

Liberation theology significantly contributes to the Latin American Church among Christians. It focuses on caring and giving attention to the poor and oppressed. Liberation theology, which became an interest to many Christians, provides guidelines on how they should react to oppressed people and those suffering because of social and political structures. The theology also criticizes churches that remain dormant and pretend when people are suffering and experiencing oppression. It advises Christians to wake up and advocate for the liberation of the oppressed. Liberation theology and Trinity doctrine are interconnected because one complements the other. Trinity doctrine advocates for love because God is love, which is why He existed in three distinct persons. If Christians believe in the Trinity doctrine, they should embrace Liberation theology's teachings by showing love and care to those oppressed populations. Caring for the oppressed and suffering will occur through advocating for their rights and becoming politically engaged in fighting against the social structures and the relationships that are the major causes of poverty and suffering.

Thus, Trinity, a significant doctrine among Christians, is relevant as a model in Liberation Theology.

Understanding Liberation Theology

Liberation Theology is among the most crucial contributions to Christianity. According to Vogel (2018), liberation theology is a theological view towards the practices of the Roman Catholic that developed in Latin America in the early 1960s. The theological opinion reflects the Latin countries' social, political, and Church situations. Vogel (2018) claims that the primary aim of liberation theology was to advocate against poverty and oppression among the vulnerable population in Latin America and also try to create ways of seeing a solution to the issue through the theological framework. However, liberation theology considers the Church the key to fighting for vulnerable people and liberating them from social and political structures.

In addition, liberation theology criticizes the Church for standing still and siding with the government to oppress vulnerable individuals. According to Vogel (2018), liberation theology is against the Passive Church, which pretends to be dormant when people are suffering rather than taking action.

The Church should not form a relationship with the government to oppress people. Liberation theology calls for the Church to take action and stand with the poor and the suffering (Vogel, 2018). It preaches love to everyone as the Scripture teaches the Church. One of the significant opinions in liberation theology is that it preaches and demands for the formation of social co-existence (Vogel, 2018). We are all responsible for caring for other people on Earth and co-existing socially amongst ourselves. From liberation theology, feeding people experiencing poverty is not the only care. Still, there is a need to build new, righteous, and social relationships based on the principles of the Heavenly Kingdom (Vogel, 2018). The kingdom of heaven teaches humans how to solve the issues of suffering and

oppression. In that case, churches must become involved in creating the Kingdom of Heaven here on Earth. Neighbors appear in need and are ready to help those suffering or oppressed.

The founder of liberation theology builds the theological opinion based on several assumptions. One of the assumptions is that God is always interested in man as a whole (Veget, 2018). God wants humans to remain free of captivity from their fellow humans or other beings. The gospel of Jesus Christ indicates that freedom should be accessible to everyone and that slavery should not be part of human existence (Veget, 2018). Initially, human sins made them captives of internal corruption and enslavement of the social relationship. However, God wants every human to remain free from social corruption through Jesus Christ.

The founder of liberation theology, Gustavo, was influenced by the Marxism ideology concerning human suffering and influence. According to Veget (2018), Marxism's first influence on liberation theology was categorizing people into two classes, the oppressed and the oppressors. The oppressors are those individuals who possess authority and exercise that authority in a way that harms the subjects. Oppressed individuals are those experiencing hardships at the hands of the oppressors. When Gustavo was developing liberation theology, he drew on the societal situation of Latin America, where few were beneficiaries of the hard labor of other people (Veget, 2018). In that case, he felt the need to transform the situation based on private property rather than the means of production. A similar view of Marxism was that the private property ideology needed a change because of an unhealthy relationship between the owner and the worker (Veget 2018). The worker was experiencing all sorts of injustice, but the owner was enjoying it all. Marx was against societal trends, especially when some people were facing hardships at the expense of others. Such an idea influenced Gustavo to develop liberation theology that could call upon Church to take part and stand with the poor. He advises Christians that they have a Christian duty to fight against the oppressors so

that everyone is free, according to the Scripture. Gustavo considered capitalism as the main enemy of honest relationships.

Liberation theology is vital to Christians today because it answers how Christians should act toward the suffering and oppressed people. According to Denysenko (2016), the first step in applying liberation theology today is to take the oppressed side and proclaim hope during times of despair. When Christians in the modern world want to identify with the poor, they must advocate for the liberation of those vulnerable individuals. Secondly, Christians who want to identify themselves with the poor must always participate in poor peoples' needs and fight for them (Denysenko, 2016). When one wants to know what the other is going through, they must participate in their needs and decide to fight for them.

Liberation theology is practical to all Christians who follow the teachings of the Scripture. Theologians who study biblical texts can extract the practical part of the Holy Scripture and later apply it to social life (Denysenko, 2016). The practical part involves changing the current perspective of society into peace and justice for all people. The Bible expresses the true theology of practical and functionality (Denysenko, 2016). It encourages gospel believers to change their lives and promote a society that functions justly.

A theology that applies biblical truth in current circumstances is true theology. Liberation theology is a true theology because it applies biblical needs to the current issues happening in society. According to Denysenko (2016), the primary task of theology is accepting the challenge in the actual world situation and exerting the best efforts to solve it. Liberation theology teaches Christians in the modern world, where people are suffering and facing oppression, to stand and fight for the rights of the poor by standing on their side. It is a practical theology that embraces the advocacy of social order where no individual is a slave of the other. It preaches that Jesus Christ came for the sins of everyone regardless of social status. Thus, activism and social justice are critical components of the liberation theology.

The Concept of Trinity

Trinity is a significant concept in theological studies. According to BOAHENG (2021), the Trinity doctrine is the primary factor that helps humans understand God's nature. When Christian believers understand the concept, they develop a deep relationship with God and their fellow humans. Trinitarian theology employs a three-step method of understanding the relationship between God and humans. The initial step is understanding the biblical text and interpreting the message (BOAHENG, 2021). During the first stage, the believer will note prominent personalities and practices concerning the existence of God. Secondly, the believer should examine God's economy (BOAHENG, 2021). During the second stage, humans understand God's activities in the world through Bible teachings. In addition, they will understand that God is doing things that will make them know He is saving them from sin. The last step of understanding Trinitarian theology is understanding the divine economy regarding God's self-manifestation to humans (BOAHENG, 2021). In the last step, the believer will understand the Trinity nature of God. Biblically, God reveals Himself to humans as the Father, Son, and Spirit (BOAHENG, 2021)



fig 1. The concept of the Trinity

Source: BOAHENG (2021)

In that case, the Trinity nature of God brings the Christian to hermeneutical principles of the triune existence.

The portrayal of "*three persons in one essence*" is the concept of the Trinity developed during ancient theological reflections in Churches. According to BOAHENG (2021), early Christian writer Tertullian developed the idea of Trinity by defining God as

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In his definition, Tertullian objected to heresy's claims that Father and Son are just the same. The idea of the Trinity gained recognition in the Western Church and still applies in Christianity. Although the idea of the Trinity as the existence of God was controversial in the initial stages, ancient Churches understood and recognized the concept. Consequently, the council of Nicea affirmed the establishment of the Holy Trinity doctrine (BOAHENG, 2021). They also emphasized the transfer of the concept from one generation to the next for the Christian world to understand it.

Biblical Evidence - Biblically, numerous pieces of evidence supports the triune of God's existence. In the New Testament, the Scripture unfolds the revelation and prophecy of the coming of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. In Luke 1, the angel Gabriel appeared to the Virgin Mary in a small-town Nazareth and told her of her favor with God and that she would conceive in her womb when the Holy Spirit came upon her, and the power of the Most High overshadowed her, then she would bear a son whose name will be Jesus (English Standard Version Bible, 2001). In Hebrew, Jesus is the same as Immanuel, meaning God with us. In Luke 1:32, the angel Gabriel indicated that Jesus would be the Son of the Highest God (English Standard Version Bible, 2001). The message in the gospel book sets the idea of the Trinity in motion as it reveals the first personality of God as the Son. In Isaiah 7:14, the prophet connects God as the Father and Jesus as the Son of God (English Standard Version Bible, 2001). In that case, the Trinity progresses with the creator of all things.

Similarly, in the gospel of John, there is an explanation and support of God's existence as the Father who manifested himself as the Son to die for human sins. John 3:16 claims, "God loved the world so much that He decided to send His only Son to the Earth so those who believe in Him will not perish but acquire eternal life" (English Standard Version Bible, 2001). The eternal life in the Scripture is God Himself, and Jesus clarifies that He is the Son of God. In John 12:44-46, Jesus indicated that anybody who believes not in me but

the one who sent me should inherit eternal life. He also adds that those who believe in Him who sent me will see Him through me (English Standard Version Bible, 2001). Those descriptions affirm the concept of the Trinity because God is the Father, and Jesus identifies Himself as the Son of God.

In the Christian faith, the final persona that completes the faith of the Trinity is the Holy Spirit. Believers consider that the Holy Spirit is one of the Holy Trinity and is the comforter to occupy Jesus's place among the people on Earth. During Pentecost, the manifestation of the Holy Spirit is evident among the believers. Jesus Christ descended among the disciples in the form of the Holy Spirit. They spoke in different tongues as Jesus told them when He ascended to heaven.

Inspiration of Trinity - The concept of Trinity is inspirational concerning the love of God for humans. In John 3:16, God's love made Him send His only Son for the sake of human sins (English Standard Version Bible, 2001). Since humans had sinned a lot, God did not condemn the world, but His overwhelming love was to save humans. In 1 John 2:2, Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for the sins humans had already committed against the will of God (English Standard Version Bible, 2001). For God's love, everyone is free from the corruption of sins.

Additionally, God is not in haste to condemn sinners despite His Son dying on the cross for human sins. 1 Timothy 2:4 indicates that God is patient enough with the sinners because He does not want any man to perish without knowing the gospel's truth (English Standard Version Bible, 2001). God is the Father and creator of every human and can take away whatever He created at any time. However, God wants everyone to acquire the gospel truth and decide which way to follow. Jesus, the Son of God, has the authority and tries to draw everyone to Him because He is the world's light, and everyone who believes in God will have to pass through Jesus Christ.

In Colossians 1:19-20, Apostle Paul wrote that God was pleased with all The fullness that dwelled in Him. Paul added that through Him, all things on Earth and heavenly things would reconcile to Him and make peace through His blood shed on the Calvary (English Standard Version Bible, 2001). The concept means that Jesus, as the Son of God, will ensure that all creatures on Earth and Heaven will reconcile through His blood on Calvary. Even during baptism, John the Baptist performed the religious act by recognizing the existence of God in the Trinity. Thus, the concept of the Trinity in the Scripture is evident in numerous biblical books.

Trinity Relevance in Liberation Theology

Having understood the description of the two concepts, Trinity and Liberation theology, it is easier to detail the relevance of the Trinity in Liberation theology. Harmakaputra (2013) states that liberation theology understands the Trinity as communion. The concept of communion in liberation theology is the existence of God in three persons. Harmakaputra (2013) claims that the existence of God in three persons united in divine communion makes humanity live in an ideal society.

In Liberation theology, any form of oppression in society is against communion. According to Harmakaputra (2013), communion, which is Trinity, is an integral part of human nature. In such an understanding, no man should be less than the other because divine communion exists equally in three persons. Liberation theologian, Boff, argue that Trinity does not justify any form of sexism because the Bible identify male and females as just imagery to describe God (Harmakaputra, 2013). When considering the divine persons in Trinity, the issue of sex does not occur. Jesus Christ came to liberate males and females without considering gender differences (Harmakaputra, 2013). The practical and perfect communion of the Trinity should occur in the principle of community equality.

The concept of the Trinity in Christian theology has significant implications for the impoverished and oppressed population. According to Hogewoning (2012), the Trinity concept lays a foundation of mutuality, openness, and equality. Understanding Trinity as the existence of God in divine communion, one will practice love for other people and promote equality. Hogewoning (2012) claims that love is based on understanding identity and makes one promotes anti-oppressive practices everywhere, including social work. Trinity promotes the commandment of loving your neighbor as one loves self. Understanding the love of neighbor as one loves self leads to developing the importance of anti-oppressive practices. Hogewoning (2012) states that Tri-unity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit exist under eternal love. The three persons relate by realizing each of them under surrendering love.

Since liberation theology argues against the oppression of the poor, the Trinity life and the self-sacrifice of Jesus for the sake of humans are characterized by self-giving love explained in two concepts. The first concept is that self-giving love is not depriving others but reaching others aiming at fellowshipping for a common human bond (Hogewoning, 2012). The life of the Trinity involves living in love with Holy Trinity because we are sons and daughters of the Father. Selfishness against the life Trinity because the three divine persons exist through sharing. The second concept is allowing people to create space in themselves (Hogewoning, 2012). The life of the Trinity is against oppression of any kind because it advocates for creating space for others rather than for self.

Furthermore, with self-giving love as the basis of the Trinity, consideration of mutual egalitarianism is essential. Although God is the Father, it does not mean that the other two persons, Son and Holy Spirit, are subordinates (Hogewoning, 2012). Self-giving love among the three persons in Trinity promotes equality rather than subordination. Hogewoning (2012) claims that through self-sacrificing love, the Father instills equality between the Son and

Holy Spirit, but in their constitution, the Father appears first. In that case, the Father and the other two persons exist through egalitarianism instead of hierarchy.

On the same note of the Trinity, humanity is all equal and is subordinate to God. However, humans tend to perceive worthless uniqueness in a way that is contrary to the Trinitarian equality that results in oppression (Hogewoning, 2012). People propagate oppression through their ego and the development of hierarchical structures. Hogewoning (2012) claims that Trinity persons are characterized by their relations to the other because they are equal and never separate. Trinitarian principles promote equality by acknowledging other people's uniqueness to bring the relationship closer. The same principle appears in liberation theology, as no one should experience oppression at the hands of the other. Trinity forms the base argument of liberation theology by promoting equality for everyone.

The Trinitarian principle also promotes openness to other people as an aspect of communion. According to Hogewoning (2012), the three persons turn toward one another and become one. Each person lowers their divinity and surrenders to each other, giving life and every possession. However, the Trinitarian persons will ensure their existence without losing the uniqueness of each (Hogewoning, 2012). The concept of openness occurs towards the act of divine grace of creation by God. When Christians embrace God, they acknowledge the space model for other people within the Trinity (Hogewoning, 2012). Liberation theology indicates that the way to become part of the oppressed is to participate in their needs by practicing openness and advocating for them. Thus, the concept of the Trinity becomes relevant when explaining the liberation theology of openness to the poor. According to Hogewoning (2012), openness in anti-oppressive practice involves enhancing collaboration and determination for vulnerable people. Biasness and values that promote oppression among people are against the likeness of the Trinity life.

Trinitarian doctrine promotes the idea that each person is for others and in others. Life is truly the essence of Godliness because God is love. Trinity Life advises Christians and believers that loving the other person and treating them equally is the communion in the Trinity life. For one to make communion, they must face the other. Trinity doctrine is about caring for other people because of selfless love. Such an explanation is the basis of explaining liberation theology, which advocates the love of other people and against oppression of any kind. In the Trinity doctrine, communion cannot exist on one side alone; rather, it will exist in all three forms that become a unified whole. In the presence of God, every individual is whole because God's project involves Trinity.

Trinity as Basis of Understanding Liberation Theology - In early theology, theologians began by understanding the concept of the Trinity. According to Boff and Burns (1988), the doctrine of the Trinity became the initial step before developing liberation theology. Most ancient liberation theologians thought it was critical first to understand the concept of three-ness in oneness. Although the concept brought numerous debates, theologians concluded that Trinity is the first community of divine persons whose uniqueness involved the shared existence. In addition, they understood that the three-person existence shared the relationship and surrendered to each other (Boff & Burns, 1988). The theologians deduced that despite the existence of God in distinct forms, they formed wholeness that surrendered to each other. From that concept, the principle of liberation theology includes promoting equality among people. Thus, the universe is a whole, and there should be no oppression or suffering of people because of others.

Additionally, the theologians objected to the hierarchical model of the Trinity. According to Boff and Burns (1988), God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct persons describing the existence of God. However, despite their distinct existence, they do not follow a particular hierarchical model. They create an idea of equality in existence with

love and submission to each other. Liberation theologians found the concept fascinating and used it to advocate for equality ideology. For instance, when Gustavo was developing liberation theology, he drew on the societal situation of Latin America, where few were beneficiaries of the hard labour of other people (Veget, 2018). Liberation theology aims to correct situations where some people, especially the poor, suffer oppression at their oppressor's hands. Theologians claim that no human is above the other because God created everyone equal to the other. However, some human uniqueness makes them propagate oppression to others, contrary to the doctrine of the Trinity.

As the initial step of developing liberation theology, theologians understood the doctrine of the Trinity as a prototype of the human community. According to BOAHENG (2021), God reveals Himself to humans as a community of the Father, Son, and Spirit. A community collaborates in most of their work to produce a wholeness of results. Liberation theologians also merged the same concept in their explanation of liberation theology. They considered that humans on Earth exist like the prototype of the Trinity because they came from a single creator. Thus, they are responsible for functioning together and promoting values that will benefit all as a community. Therefore, liberation theologians took the doctrine of the Trinity at a large scale to promote the ideal of human society.

Conclusion

Trinity is a relevant concept in liberation theology in various ways. The first way is that liberation theology understands the Trinity as communion. Communion in liberation theology is the existence of God in three persons. Liberation theologians argued that any form of oppression in society is against communion. Secondly, Trinity has significant implications for the impoverished and the oppressed population. Understanding Trinity as the existence of God in divine communion, one will practice love for other people and promote equality. Thirdly, self-giving love as the base of the Trinity considers mutual egalitarianism essential. The Father instills equality in the Son and Holy Spirit, but the Father appears first in their constitution. A similar principle appears in liberation theology, as no one should experience oppression at the hands of the other. Lastly, the doctrine of the Trinity became the initial step before developing liberation theology. The theologians deduced that despite the existence of God in distinct forms, they formed wholeness that surrendered to each other. From that concept, the principle of liberation theology includes promoting equality among people. Thus, the universe is a whole, and there should be no oppression or suffering of people because of others. Therefore, Trinity is a vital concept in theology for contributing to the compassionate nature of God and its application to society.

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