

Summer 1994

Review of Liberation Theology: an Introductory Guide

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Recommended Citation

Schubeck, Thomas L. S.J., "Review of Liberation Theology: an Introductory Guide" (1994). *Theology & Religious Studies*. 63.
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Liberation Theology: an introductory guide, by Robert McAfee Brown. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993.

The author presents this Latin American theology to North American readers not simply to inform them about its origins, method, and themes, but also to show them that this theological approach, if adopted, can become a *kairos*, or decisive time, for change needed in the U.S. This six-chapter introduction illustrates the method that liberation theologians have created. Brown presents this theology like a two-act drama in which the theologian first encounters people living in precarious circumstances and then bears witness to the people's experience by writing about their image of God and their way of being the church. Brown, a Protestant theologian writing about a predominately Catholic theology, brings alive the world of the poor by narrating stirring tales learned firsthand from his travels throughout Latin America.

He emphasizes the theology's newness: its new way of understanding people, of seeing the world, of encountering God and of being the church. The final chapters creatively develop how it can be adopted by North Americans. While the author does not explicitly reflect on church-state relations, his five options of stances taken by persons toward the power establishment imply a theology of church and state. These options, reminiscent of H. Richard Niebuhr's typology in *Christ and Culture*, are freshly developed from the biblical story of exodus in which the pharaoh represents the power structure and the readership the servants in pharaoh's court.

Speaking in a prophetic voice, Brown inspires and challenges. While his prophetic stance may unsettle some, he offers encouragement by humbly confessing his own limitations and by suggesting a variety of options for addressing the problem. The chief contribution is the insightful connection made between liberation theology and its possible use in the North. Certain elements of the theology might have been better elaborated, including a development of social analysis and ethics, which together offer a critique of social structures. This is a profoundly challenging and rewarding book.

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