

The Option for the Poor in Christian Theology
Edited by Daniel G. Groody

Winner of the 2007 Pax Christi USA Book Award

Since the publication of Gustavo Gutiérrez's 1973 groundbreaking work, *A Theology of Liberation*, much has been written on liberation theology and its central premise of the preferential option for the poor. Arguably, this has been one of the most important yet controversial theological themes of the twentieth century. As globalization creates greater gaps between the rich and the poor, and as the situation for many of the world's poor worsens, there is an ever greater need to understand the gift and challenge of Christian faith from the context of the poor and marginalized of our society.

This volume draws on the thought of leading international scholars and explores how the Christian tradition can help us understand the theological foundations for the option for the poor. The central focus of the book revolves around the question, How can one live a Christian life in a world of destitution? The contributors are concerned not only with a social, economic, or political understanding of poverty but above all with the option for the poor as a theological concept.

While these essays are rooted in a solid grounding of our present "reality," they look to the past to understand some of the central truths of Christian faith and to the future as a source of Christian hope. Following Gustavo Gutiérrez's essay on the multidimensionality of poverty, Elsa Tamez, Hugh Page, Jr., Brian Daley, and Jon Sobrino identify a central theological premise: poverty is contrary to the will of God. Drawing on scripture, the writings of the early fathers, the witness of Christian martyrs, and contemporary theological reflection, they argue that poverty represents the greatest challenge to Christian faith and discipleship. David Tracy and J. Matthew Ashley carry their reflection forward by examining the option for the poor in light of apocalyptic thought. Virgilio Elizondo, Patrick Kalilombe, María Pilar Aquino, M. Shawn Copeland, and Mary Catherine Hilkert examine the challenges of poverty with respect to culture, Africa, race, and gender. Casiano Floristán and Luis Maldonado explore the relationship between poverty, sacramentality, and popular religiosity. The final two essays by Aloysius Pieris and Michael Signer consider the option for the poor in relationship to other major world religions, particularly an Asian theology of religions and the meaning of care for the poor within Judaism.

Daniel G. Groody is assistant professor of theology and director of the Center for Latino Spirituality and Culture at the University of Notre Dame. He is the author and editor of a number of books, including *Border of Death, Valley of Life: An Immigrant Journey of Heart and Spirit*.

"This passionate collection gives testimony to the continued vitality of the 'option for the poor' in Christian theology, and the necessity for all theology to have a political edge in the era of globalization. Many major names in theology are gathered here as well as a wonderful diversity of perspectives on the topic: North America, Latin American, African-American, Latino, African, Asian, and Jewish. this volume will be excellent for

classroom use, while also challenging scholars to broaden their horizons and their imaginations.” —Lisa Sowle Cahill, J. Donald Monan Professor of Theology, Boston College

“The contributors to this volume include some of the most important names in Catholic social theology of recent decades. This points to the book’s significance for scholars and students in theology, ethics, justice, and peace studies. Nearly all of the authors come out of their experience as people of color, people of the Third World, or people committed to the poor in their lives and lifestyle. I think the volume presents high-caliber scholarship rooted in the reality it tries to probe.” —Stephen Bevans, Louis J. Luzbatek Professor of Mission and Culture, Catholic Theological Union

"All who believe that Liberation Theology was just a fad must read this book. Groody gathers foundational voices of the Liberation Theology movement to demonstrate that where ever the poor exist, a theological option exists for them. By focusing the discussion on the poor of the world, Groody forces all of us to interpret our Christian faith through their experiences, and whatever one chooses to call that interpretation, it will—in the final analysis—be liberationist!" —Miguel A. De La Torre, Iliff School of Theology