

Open letter to the World Forum on Theology and Liberation How far are we willing to go?

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After five days of listening, talking and discussing on the reason that brought theologians from all over the world together in Porto Alegre, Brazil, each one of the participants probably has his/her own evaluation, interpretation, concerns and hopes regarding the present and future of Theology in connection with the struggle for liberation. I am using this letter as a way to voice some of mine, and I am sure I am not alone.

During these days we have heard and talked about economics, politics, images of God, inter-religious dialog, etc., etc. It would be misleading to say that queer issues were not raised in this context, since I myself tried to do that a couple of times. Even so, it is not misleading to say, in my opinion, that queer issues are far from having a significant impact in the Theology that uses liberation as its central hermeneutical principle, at least among those theologians who were gathered in this Forum.

When we talked about politics, there wasn't by far any mention of the impact of the queer political movement organized throughout the world. We have not raised the question of what it means that in June over 1.5 million people gather in São Paulo (and several other millions in the rest of the world) for the Gay Pride Parade, just to mention one experience. Queer political scientists have shown to what extent these people understand their participation as a political act, while some other theologians and political scientists, without ever having participated or even acknowledged it, define it as simple partying. Maybe we should reflect on what we think about when we talk about non-violent resistance and political action. Yes, the Queer Movement might not be connected to other social and political movements many times, but it is my suspicion that this is more a consequence of the prejudice of "traditional" social and political movements than lack of interest or consciousness of the need to be interconnected of the Queer Movement, besides the fact that many queer persons are also militant in other social and political movements, most of the time without disclosing their sexual orientation under fear of being discriminated against and excluded from the struggle they believe is worth and necessary.

When we talked about economics, there wasn't any mention on the impact of the current system on the lives of queer people. Maybe because the queer community is still seen as a product of capitalist modern societies (maybe). Yes it is true that the market driven and neoliberal ideologies have made possible the social

emergence (visibility) of the queer community in many ways. As it was accurately stated by Jung Mo Sung, in this system people are (exist) when they have the means to consume. So it doesn't really matter if you are a gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender person, as long as you have money you become a citizen (or a consumer). The question that is not raised is if the fact that such economic system (with its political implications) is allowing the emergence (visibility) of the queer community is not precisely because religion and the theological discourse that supports the institutionalized religion has never been able or dared to go "that far", even when intending to be on the side of liberation. It should not surprise anybody that queer people always existed, as many queer historians have shown and are showing, but they were never able to become a community or, in Latin American Liberation Theology's terms, a people.

How can you talk about economics without acknowledging that a capitalist modern system is built on a heterocentric patriarchal principle, where the heterocentric family with its gender and sexual stereotypes is the central argument for consuming? Economic systems are heterosexualized. Well, it is true that the neoliberal ideology is fast and pervasive enough to notice those things and in the name of the high consumerist potential of the queer community includes (isn't that a paradox!) and recognizes them as consumer citizens (see the current appeal of advertisements to the acknowledgement of diversity offering products for the very different people), while theology and religion don't seem to be able to do that. Maybe because it's further than we are willing to go in questioning our own systems.

During these days we re-affirmed our option for the poor and our involvement in the struggle for "their" liberation. But still, after more than thirty years of Liberation Theology, it seems difficult for us to materialize and look at the concrete faces that "they" are. It seems to me that those who are in danger of losing their jobs, threatened of being thrown out of their families and communities, live on the streets and are forced into prostitution, commit suicide, are assassinated and suffer all kinds of violence constantly because of their sexual orientation are not counted among them. Why are we so afraid of really looking at the streets of our cities and see the poor who are living and dying there, without ignoring that they are sexual beings? There are not more urgent things to do than to reflect and fight for the liberation of the poor, the question is: are we ready to acknowledge who the poor are and what are the reasons that make them become poor and marginalized? Sex is certainly one of the aspects that supports the systems that we so much want to overcome in order to build liberation and another possible world.

I could go on speaking to all the issues and themes raised at this Forum and how they relate to the queer community and how it can contribute, what are its gifts, on

those issues and themes but this is just a starting point for dialog.

No, we, queer theologians, do not want to have the recognition of theology and religion that we have the right to exist. We are not and will not spend our time trying to justify why we should be in the struggle for liberation in first place, unless we need to help our brothers and sisters overcome internalized prejudice and self-hatred because of heteronormative and homophobic discourse, so that they can build a healthy identity and understanding of who they are. We are in the struggle for liberation. We have already made our own experience of God's grace and are not willing to wait until others decide over our own rights. We want to be partners in the struggle for liberation. And to become partners we need to be acknowledged and our issues being taken seriously. Theology and religion, for liberation, needs us as much as we need them.

No, the queer community is not the solution for all the problems and for the final achievement of liberation and has its own conflicts and internal contradictions as any other group.

But the solution for those problems and the walk in direction to the closest to liberation that we can get are not possible without the queer community. Maybe that is too far for some of us to go, and then we have to ask ourselves and be very honest about how far we are, actually, willing to go on our struggle for liberation, and maybe realize that liberation might actually not be what we are fighting for, at least not in the full meaning of this word.

I am not a political scientist or an economist; I am "just" a gay Latin American theologian working for liberation, and those are some of my reflections on what I have seen and heard at the World Forum on Theology and Liberation and an intention to build bridges for dialog.