

Background Information about "Patro Nia de Latin-Ameriko"

Krzysztof Daletski, 2020

The original Portuguese text of this song ("Pai nosso da América Latina") circulated anonymously during the 1980s in Brazil, and it has not lost its topicality until today. To emphasize its relevance beyond Brazil, I have translated it from Portuguese into the international language Esperanto and have set it newly to music.

The song originates from the context of Liberation Theology, which emerged in the 1970s in Latin America and started with the question "how to proclaim God in a reality characterized by the premature and unjust death of many people" (G. Gutierrez). Important postulates of Liberation Theology are:

- Social experience is an equally important "text" as scriptures, and the gospel has to be interpreted in the context of this experience ("releitura"). This extends the "orthodoxy" of the official church with the "orthopraxy" of base communities.
- The biblical God is not neutral, but partial on the side of the poor and oppressed. Hence, the religious praxis must include active solidarity with them ("option for the poor").
- The term "sin" is not restricted to personal misconduct, but can be applied, too, on social circumstances that systematically lead to misery and oppression ("structural sin").

Liberation theology sets itself apart from classical Roman Catholic social teaching, "which stresses the mutual responsibility of labour and capital (and poor and rich countries) to work in harmony" [3]. Classical teaching thereby deduces a duty of the poor to subordinate themselves, whilst the rich in return have the duty to mitigate the hardship of the poor ("caritas"). Liberation theologians, in contrast, do not consider the distribution of wealth and poverty to be a natural phenomenon like, e.g., weather, but asked the question: Why are the poor poor?

In order to answer this question, they used analytical tools of political economics, especially of marxism and dependency theory. Due to the characterization of structures leading to poverty and misery as "sinful" (and thus to be overcome), it is not a theology *about* liberation, but *for* liberation: it aims at overcoming the (especially: economical) status quo and the Church's blessing of this status quo.

The social commitment of many clergymen at the side of the non-persons was not without risk, and many were killed by military or US backed death squads [5]. In some cases, this even aroused international attention, like the murder of bishop Óscar Romero 1980 in El Salvador. Moreover, the prophetic challenge through Liberation Theology, and also its recourse to marxist analysis aroused the resentment of the anti-communist pope John-Paul II. He appointed cardinal Ratzinger as a prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and they jointly started to drive back Liberation Theology.

This was achieved by disciplinary actions, intense pressure on superiors to dismiss liberation theologians, the "decapitation" of the Latin American Conference of Religious (CLAR), and, primarily, by the systematic appointment of reactionary successors for vacant bishop positions [2]. Due to the long pontificate of John-Paul II, the Latin American episcopate meanwhile largely has been cleansed, and the church reverted "to a pastoral concentration upon the middle classes and bourgeois elite as the principal bulwarks of its influence in Brazil" [6]. A recent example is the visit to Europe of a Venezuelan cardinal, during which he advocated the removal of the current leftist government in his country and its replacement by a self-proclaimed counter-president [7]. Accordingly, he was welcomed favorably by representatives of the German government [8].

Although there are still today representatives of Liberation Theology, the measures taken by the Vatican had the effect that these are no longer influential. And concerning the radical biblical texts, like the Beatitudes or the Magnificat, John-Paul II clarified in "Libertatis conscientia" (1986) that these are to be understood solely in an individual spiritual sense [2]. Such taming of the biblical message has been a permanent companion of Christianity since the Constantinian shift [9], and it might be necessary for a compatibility with support by the powerful. On the other hand, the lurking radicality of the gospel waits for being rediscovered every now and then. And thus, this song is a reminder that, among the pleas of the Lord's prayer, there is the addition: "in earth as it is in heaven".

This is a translation of a text that first appeared in German in the online journal "Hinter den Schlagzeilen" with the URL <https://hinter-den-schlagzeilen.de/das-gebet-der-armen> (Feb 26, 2020)

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