Hegemony and Resistance in the Name of God:
Liberation of Theology and Theology of Liberation

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Abstract

No social institution has been as resilient, adaptive and subject to manipulation as religion. This paper is an invitation to revive a discussion regarding the role of religion in the hegemonic structure and resistance to it particularly in an epoch with so much righteousness on all fronts and to take a "religion vs. religion" approach, a thesis presented by the late Ali Shariati (1933-1977) in the early 1970s.(1)

No social institution has been as resilient, adaptive and subject to manipulation as religion, and no body of beliefs has placed so much certainty on the mortal's journey from the world of matter to the beyond than religious beliefs, and at least at the level of non-critical approach, all of the rewards and punishments are delegated to the beyond accordingly. From the "primitive forms of early religious life" to the most flamboyant, technologically sophisticated marketing strategies, politically savvy, economically well organized and theocratically violent forms, it has been denounced, relied on and a studied set of beliefs and continues to stir hatred, espouse love, and all claim to know the truth and invariably are convinced of it. While the analysis of religion as a social institution is as old as philosophy and history, the most elaborate, poignant, and often dismissive and devastating ones appeared from the enlightenment (when man according to Kant, transcended his immaturity and learned to think for himself) and reached its zenith in the 19th century and in the works of Karl Marx and other materialist philosophers. Theologians, social scientists and idealist philosophers on the other hand attempted to offset the criticism both by criticizing the criticism and by attempting to liberate their theology from the bondage of institutionalized religion.
This paper is an invitation to revive a discussion regarding the role of religion in the hegemonic structure and resistance to it particularly in an epoch with so much righteousness on all fronts and to take a "religion vs. religion" approach, a thesis presented by the late Ali Shariati (1933-1977) in the early 1970s.(1)
Based on the work of pioneers on the revival of progressive and socially engaged religious thought in various parts of the world, critical and committed theologians and laity from those parts of the World well versed in philosophy and social sciences attempted to overcome the psychologically devastating "victim" complex brought on by colonial oppression and perpetuated by the internal comprador groups. Theologians and laity, historians, philosophers, and social scientists such as Clodovis and Leonardo Boff of Argentina, Jose P. Miranda of Mexico, Hugo Assman and Paulo Freire of Brazil (non-clergy), Gustavo Guteirez of Peru, Jon Sobrino of El Salvador, Juan Luis Segundo of Uruguay, Ali Shariati of Iran (non-clergy), James Cones and many activists in North America, and an increasing number in Africa and Asia (2) began a reinterpretation of their holy texts and others sources in the hope of utilizing the new and librated theology to liberate society. This paper is primarily a collection of references to a fraction of the vast literature regarding the historical role of religion in the structure of oppression and its emancipatory aspects.
Coming from a different religious faith and tradition, these theologians and laity appeared on the scene in the late 1950s and particularly in the 1960s, the era of decolonization, increasing internationalization of production and the exploitive and hegemonic neo-colonialism, spoke of different approaches and course of action in the application of the new theology. Without exception, the new hermeneutics began with history and man's role in the reshaping of history as an active player. It was a new methodology in the struggle against hegemony and domination –an unjust condition. It was a monumental and dangerous task, a calling and an act of good faith –a jihad. In this Promethean struggle, all of them suffered long imprisonment, torture, censorship and restrictions and, some were murdered. Getting murdered, however, was not limited to the committed activists in the developing world, as the murder of black theologian such as Malcolm X and Martin Luther King in the United States indicates. The violence against them by the political structure of their society was facilitated by considerable aid from the institutionalized clergy as a mechanism in the reproduction of the status quo.

The 1960s was an eventful decade, in particular the murderous colonial control of Algeria by France and Algeria's heroic struggle for liberation, Vietnam War and its devastating long term results, Civil Rights

Movement in the US, the imposition of the developmentalists' strategy, military take overs, and the decolonization of Africa all created a network of transnational and revolutionary intellectuals. Witnessing the changing direction of the social revolutions in the first half of the twentieth century, notably that of Russia, China, Cuba among others and in particular Stalin's reign of terror, radical and progressive Marxist (particularly the non-institutionalized ones), attempted to rescue Marxism from the institutionalized dogma and the ideologues in control of it. Some joined the newly flourishing dependency theory (as a rejection of capitalist developmentalist ideology) and others such as the neo-Marxists attempted a reorientation of their analysis and strategy. In either case the missing link was the presence of masses of people as partners in the process of change and transformation. And precisely for this reason it was a failing strategy. The failure of the left was also a reflection of their dogmatic ideological views in spite of the reality on the ground and their dismissal of others as potential partners in the process of liberation. What filled the gap was the liberation theology with its emphasis on grass root involvement. Similar arguments were put forth by the liberation theologians within the Christian tradition. They embarked on liberating the message from the bondage of institutional religious control by redefining the biblical concepts. Concepts such as sin, salvation, revelation, kingdom of God, exodus, etc. defined at the level of the collective, became powerful revolutionary and transformative concepts. Once the structure and the causes of oppression are identified (resistance), it is followed by liberation of the text from the bondage of oppressive structure. Resistance (passive and active both) to hegemony is as old as hegemony itself, and the hermeneutics of resistance based on the Judeo-Christian and Islamic theologies provided the framework for modern resistance theories within the framework of social and political philosophy. In the modern era, resistance to hegemony has taken many forms; during the colonial period, it took the form of nationalism and religion or a combination of the two and during the post colonial period, a blend of socialism, Communism, Christian and revolutionary Islam with nationalism became the dominant mode of resistance.

ISLAM OF LEGITIMTION AND ISLAM OF REVOLUTION: The Case of Iran

Throughout the Islamic history and the Muslim world, particularly in the greater Middle East, hegemony and resistance occupy a large portion of that history and geography. A nation that for most of its post-Islamic history has displayed a unique anti-hegemonic struggle and resistance to domination is Iran. As the heir to the first World Empire and the first Empire with a universal human rights declaration—the great Persian Empire, Iran's history has been a turbulent process of resistance and progression. From the time Persia fell to the armies of Alexander of Macedonia to the brutality of the Arab armies under the banner of Islam, to invasion by the horde of Mongol invaders, to the events in the twentieth century particularly from the time of the first Constitutional Revolution of 1911, Iran has displayed remarkable resilience in sustaining the core of its cultural identity.

From the sixteenth century to the early part of the eighteenth century, the Shia Branch of Islam became the official ideology and religion of the state under the Safavi dynasty of Iran, and the hostility between a Shia empire (Iran) and a Sunni empire--the Ottomans involved the third powerful force outside the immediate area—the European Colonial empires. In the meantime European colonial expansion (under the banner of Christianity) beyond their surroundings brought them in a bloody contact with the expanding European economic, political forces beginning with the rise of East India Companies (Dutch, British, among others) and culminating into colonial rivalry for and domination of most of the Middle East. The total control of the Middle East by the European powers was accomplished through the weakening of the Safavi dynasty of Iran and most importantly the disintegration of the once mighty Ottoman Empire, which was in control of most of the Arab and North African regions–their traditional rival. The significance of the Middle East increased as the magnitude of its resources became known and it intensified the battle for control of those resources. The newly independent countries which emerged from the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire were home to a vast amount of resources which the European industrial base was in need of. As the race for resources (inter-imperialist rivalries) intensified, so did the call to resistance to imperialism and the overall hegemonic strategy of the West in collaboration with dominant internal forces. And invariably the call to resistance took a religious tone. Both the methodology and the aim were expressed in Islamic terms and various liberating and emancipatory aspects of its ontology. Thus "jihad," which literally means struggle, was applied to all facets of life including any socially responsible act, defiance in the face of arrogance, good work, defense of the family and country, feeding the hungry, fighting for freedom, and above all revolutionary self purification and striving toward awareness, considered to be the "primary" or "greater" jihad. Islamic history whether in Iran or elsewhere shows heroic struggle against tyranny, oppression and

economic exploitation. Thus attempting to remove the British monopolization of Iranian tobbacco in the latter part of the nineteenth century, a grand ayatollah declared the consumption of it a "sin." It was enough to put an end to the monopoly. During the same period, individuals such as Seyyed Jamal al-Din Assadabadi and Muhammad Abduh in Afghanistan/Iran and in Egypt included in their anti-imperialist strategy call for the overthrow of the local elites backed by external forces and the formation of a transnational alliance within the Islamic faith. As part of their strategy, they also advocated the acquisition of modern science and technology as a component of anti-imperialist strategy. In the twentieth century, several important events jolted the Iranian society. Among them are the constitutional revolution of 1911, the rise of Reza Shah and the establishment of Pahlavi dynasty, the 1953 coup d'etat against the democratically elected government of Muhammad Mossadegh by the British and the American governments and the return of the Shah who was perceived by the majority of the Iranians as the Anglo/American puppet until his overthrow by the people in 1979. In search of legitimacy, the Shah embarked on a process of "modernization" while playing the role of the police of the Persian Gulf with expensive taste for advanced weapon systems purchased from the United States. As modernization (dependent capitalist development) began to take hold, the unevenness of the process created widening disparities in access to the basic resources despite the availability of a vast amount of resources along with cultural alienation and became the impetus to and the reasons for reflection and search for methodology. From the beginning of the coup, various groups, separately or in the form of an alliance began their opposition to the Shah's regime whose power was the support of the Western and Israeli governments. In the 1960s, as elsewhere the opposition to external hegemony, expressed in the form of internal comprador groups, grew on a global scale. Some took a Marxist approach, some a socialist and some a Marxist Leninist in the form of urban guerrillas and some variety of nationalism and religious orientation. In Iran, the opposition to the Shah grew exponentially particularly from the 1960s onward. As the structural repression grew, the opposition took a religious tone, particularly the concept of "martyrdom" as exemplified by the uprising of the third Shia Imam (Imam Hussien) against injustice. Mosques and other religious institutions and later universities became the hub of anti-regime activities such as the one by the late Ayatollah Khomeini, both as a continuation of the work of the pioneers and as a precursor to more widespread resistance to the regime. Even though Khomeini was exiled, some of his contemporaries continued the work in the seminaries and mosques. In fact, several grand ayatollahs in Iran included jihad as a requirement in their epithets, and some allied with the ruling groups in alliance with external forces either paid lip service to or ignored it altogether.

The attempt to synchronize and provide the theoretical framework, however, was initiated by several prominent ayatollahs and intellectuals (Ayatollah Taleghani, Mehdi Bazargan, Morteza Motahari, M.T. Shariati, and many others) from laity and the clergy. They produced a reformulation of the rich concepts to be used as an anti-hegemonic strategy. Among the several intellectuals was Ali Shariati (1933-1977) whose political and social activism began at the age of sixteen and continued until the end of his life. A Sorbonne (1959-1964) educated sociologist whose intellectual sophistication, along with his knowledge of Persian, Arabic and Western literature and philosophy, allowed him to become one of the leading theoreticians in anti-hegemonic and resistance strategy. He was confident that a progressive (correct) interpretation of the Islamic concepts such as jihad, hajj, fasting, prayer, martyrdom, resistance, resurrection, waiting, piety, ummat, Imamat, justice, etc., would empower the people to dismantle the hegemonic structure toward their liberation. While in France, Shariati as a student both learned from and inspired people like the French Catholic Islamologist Louis Massignon, Jean Paul Sartre, Franz Fanon, George Gurvitch, Jacques Berque, and variety of other intellectuals in Paris. Shariati pointed out that the Iranian society, culture, religion and history contain the basic conceptual tools for a homegrown and authentic anti-hegemonic strategy. In spite of his admiration for the work of Karl Marx, he felt that neither the customary and often dogmatic reading of Marx nor its application to the Iranian context were viable. Throughout the period of armed struggle against the Shah's regime, Shariati considered Marxist urban guerrillas as brothers and comrades in arm, and supported them for fighting for the cause of the people and the country and vehemently criticized those pseudo religious groups who remained inactive. Shariati was equally critical of dogmatic left whose criticism of Islam was a repeat of the encyclopedia of the Soviet Union explicitly dismissing Islam as a "reactionary" religion like all other religions. Inherent in this criticism of the dogmatic left, is an invitation to reconsider an important transformation which occurred particularly in the nineteenth century when "religion became an opposition force against those very principles which religion had always declared and defended as its own. Materialism became a front espousing the values and aims against which it had

historically fought. Spirituality and God-worshipping became the basis of capital accumulation, consumerism, materialism, exploitation, parasitic existence and economism became the basis of anthropocentrism, and the struggle for equality, salvation and freedom---the essential source of conflict between religion and capitalism" (Shariati, "Class Structuration in Islam," author's trans.)
To Shariati, anyone who was struggling against injustice was his brother irrespective of ideology, religion and ethnicity. Thus he considered his sociology professor, George Gurvitch- an ex-Communist and a Russian Jew who, stood and fought for justice, closer to the spirit of Shia Islam than some ayatollahs (referring to Ayatollah Milani in the city of Mashad who declared Shariati's books forbidden (Rahnema, 2000:123). Indeed the attack on him from the conservative and pro-status quo clerics was the most vicious particularly in regard to Shariati's views on the Shia/Sunni divide. Shariati, echoed Arnold Toynbee (1960), in his observation that, the Islam he knows, recognizes most of other religions as "divine truth," yet its followers have not been able to reach an "enlightened level" to resolve the bitter division within the faith and that is primarily due to ignorance. Shariati's explicitly positive statements about the Khalifah Omar whom he described as "a man of principle, inflexible in the application of justice" and Abu Bakr as "one of the most influential figures among people" and "a very close friend of Muhammad," angered those with anti Sunni Islam sentiments who branded Shariati as a "religious saboteur" and one of the most dangerous and dreadful enemies of Islam (cited in Rahnema, 2000). Shariati believed that once Islam and indeed all monotheistic religions are liberated from the bondage of institutionalization, they can become a powerful and viable anti-hegemonic force. Shariati's short life was a rich and productive one—a life of struggle against injustice and oppression. Upon returning to Iran in 1964, and many times after that he was arrested and in most cases the international pressure gained his release. Shariati saw very little sign that reform would change the socio-economic and political structure of Iran – a country with a long history and civilization, and a people capable of creating history. His emphasis on Islam as a liberating religion was at the same time, a rejection of the efficacy of non-familiar and alien ideologies for the Iranian context. Although Shariati spoke of revolution and structural transformation, he, contrary to the grand Ayatollahs (particularly Ayatollah Khomeini who imposed stringent conditions for the formation of an Islamic government such as a constitution and free elections), did not advocate an Islamic government. He advocated liberation from a politically repressive, socially alienating and economically unjust and exploitive condition, while emphasizing the fact that liberation requires critical consciousness and a clear direction as necessary and sufficient conditions for what comes after the liberation. His political philosophy however, clearly shows a preference for the Islamic principle of "Showra" (consultation and directed democracy) provided that there is an active presence of people with high levels of awareness. Even in this context Islam would continue its role as an opposition force, the vanguard and the ever vigilant in the path toward the creation of a just and free society. To Shariati, "Islam was both an ideology and a social revolution which intended to construct a classless and free society on the basis of equality and justice and in which would live enlightened, responsible and free people (Rahnema, 2000:236). Shariati theorized that without a profound change in people's consciousnesses, a social revolution would be impossible, and even if it appears as such it would be a tragic event. Ignorance ("Istehmar"), causes absolutism ("Istebdad") and absolutism leads to exploitation and hegemony ("Istesmar"). Shariati reasoned that monotheistic religions in the Abrahamic tradition have appeared to liberate – to lead societies toward towheed. Towheed is the basis of a classless society and a just society and the absence of towheed is a reflection of a class based system in which religious sensibilities have been distorted so as to reproduce and maintain the status quo. In particular, religious awareness is turned into religious emotionalism resulting in superficial social criticism and insignificant activism.

Throughout history, the bloodiest and most violent battles have been waged between forces within the same religion and not a religion against some other religion. Shariati draws a distinction between "revolutionary religion and "legitimating religion." A revolutionary religion is a revolutionary criticism and social activism guided by the philosophy of praxis; it is monotheistic and uncompromising in its attempt at reaching social, economic and political unity (towheed). Towheed poses serious social, economic, political, interpersonal, institutional and structural questions. Legitimation religion, on the other hand, is polytheistic and it legitimizes racial, sexual, class and gender apartheid. Institutionalized religion is hegemonic; it creates consensus to accept the imposed structure of Cain and when it encounters non-conformity, it employs the coercive state power, and its main goal is to defend and reproduce the status quo. Hegemony as embedded in this thesis is the consensus of powerful forces in society, with control over the political, economic and the social sphere and polytheism as a vehicle by which hegemony is accomplished. Contrary

to the revolutionary religion which is anti-hegemonic, legitimation religion promotes predestiny and pre-determination, thereby rendering social criticism moot and social activism obsolete. Religion of revolution is a religion of awareness and protest. Its awareness of the causes of socio-economic and political problems--the structure responsible for them, compels it to protest. Standing against towheed (monotheism; unity of classes, race, ethnicity, gender) is a divisive, repressive and unjust polytheism --structure of Cain. By using the Quran as the source, Shariati (1980) portrays Moses as a rebel and a revolutionary who revolts against the three symbols of the oppressive system of Cain -- The Pharaoh, (symbol of political oppression), Croesus (the symbol of economic power, exploitation and wealth) and Balaam (symbol of institutionalized and deceptive religious authority); --the triangle of "coercion" "wealth", and "deception." Jesus fights against the money lenders and usurping the workers' wages is considered murder; Balaam then becomes the Rabbi, the priest and other representatives of the religion of legitimation and continues to fight against Moses, Jesus and Muhammad and indeed against all monotheistic worldviews which espouses equality. By promoting the polytheistic religion, it imposes the world views of those with control over economic resources, political power and ruling ideas. While the religion of legitimation defines reality and considers it as the will of some powerful force beyond man's control, the anti-hegemonic religion, particularly the monotheistic religion places man as the master of his own future (the essence of humanism). In Islam and indeed in most of the monotheistic (Abrahamic) religions, the institutionalized religion maintains the scared text, the rituals, encourages almsgiving and praises good work, and …., but its aim is cooptation of the message of liberation from the socio-economic and political structure of Cain (Shariati, 1980; 1972). The true Islam as presented in the Quran is the revolutionary ideology for social change and development, progress and enlightenment. Diametrically opposed is an Islam for the scholastic education of philosophers, theologians, statesmen and jurists, and it is this Islam that has been promoted in place of the true Islam. It is this Islam that reproduces the class based society, and justifies class distinction in the garb of Islam and by doing so, it exiles towheed.

The thesis is philosophically speaking neither strictly materialist nor idealist to the point of falling into the trap of solipsism. Rather it is perceived as a dialectical process of interaction between matter and idea—the interaction between concrete reality and ideological superstructure. That is the struggle between the mainstream and institutionalized religions and their non-institutionalized versions of these religions reflects the difference between what ought to be and the deep aspirations, fears and the practical aspects of everyday existence of the masses. In other words, it is about religion not as the "sigh of the oppressed" and as the "opiate of the masses," ala Marx, and not in the tradition of "death of God theology" erroneously referred to as "radical theology" (from Kant and Nietzsche to Tillich, Van Buren, Altizer, and Bultmann among others) along with secular/empiricist variety, but as a hope for the oppressed as presented by the non-mainstream religious institutions across time and space and irrespective of confessional and sectarian worldviews. The struggle is not an interfaith conflict --"clash of civilization" as popularized by Sammuel Huntington, but an intra-faith – the clash within religion, and therein lies its appeal. It is concerned less with the debate regarding the existence of God (even though it is of paramount import since according to Shariati worshiping heavenly God is tantamount to a rejection of all gods on earth) and more interested in charging the flock with social action and critical engagement. The young Shariati was one of the founders of "The Society of God Worshipping Socialists" – (composed of young Iranians) that had an early Islamic Sage, an uncompromising anti-injustice and anti-corruption fighter --Abu Zhar Ghafari as its role model and a book bearing his name and about his life which Shariati translated from the Arabic into Persian at age 18. The society of "God Worshipping Socialists" differed from the other variety of socialism (i.e., utopian, scientific, etc.) in its emphasis on "God" as sole owner of the resources. But what is unique, is the theoretical context in which following the Quran, wherever God is mention, "people" is also mentioned as a substitute. Therefore, the Quranic statement that "property belongs to God" is a statement regarding collective ownership—"property belongs to the people." With the rich Islamic history as the background and the framework along with countless role models and epic movements, the new interpretation appealed to the theologians and the laity, and often attracted support from organized leftist and communist parties to the extent that it was presented as a philosophy of praxis. Perhaps one of the most striking features of the liberation theology was an absolute rejection of theocratic rule or the support for the establishment of a theocracy. For theorcracy by definition is the institutionalization of religion, and religion and indeed all ideologies when institutionalized (become official programme) can no longer remain true to their principles and all institutionalized religions of the past have been at the service of the most powerful (Shariati, 1979). The aim of liberation theology is to liberate religion from the bondage of the three powerful dimensions of

the dominant class whose strategy is derived from the philosophy of praxis-- a philosophy that has been liberated (or it is attempting to liberate itself) from the ideological elements within the dominant superstructure. To be sure the purpose of liberating is to create an environment in which freedom can flourish. Liberation is the never ending process of untangling the contradictions and is not the same as freedom, and the process may or may not result in freedom. What provides a certain degree of hope is the belief that the untangling of contradictions as goaded by the philosophy of praxis involves people themselves, and without their aware and conscious involvement, the entire process will be either coopted, derailed or violently destroyed. Often times the mindless secularism is perceived as liberation from religious dogma, yet in the context of postmodern milieu, it seems as an escape rather than engagement in social action. And that has questionable integrity.

Religion to Shariati is the path between Man and God, between the lowest and the highest and in this process, man, as the sum of the spirit of God (highest) and its nature—putrid clay (the lowest), must chose. Islam accords man choices and the will to choose. "Islam has abolished all forms of official mediation between God and man," and the Quran has harsh words for "the third manifestation of Cain—the official clergy" (Shariati, On the Sociology of Islam, 1979:115). "When the Quran speaks of man in the biological sense, it uses the language of all natural sciences, mentioning sperm, drop of clotted blood, fetus, etc. But when it comes to the creation of Adam, its language is metaphorical and philosophical, full of meaning and a symbol" (Shariati, 1979:88). Perhaps the most profound definition of man in Islam is he who chooses and has the power to choose

"….Islam by choosing the word umma, has made intellectual responsibility and shared movement toward a common goal the basis of its social philosophy. The infrastructure of the umma is the economy, because "whoever has no worldly life has no spiritual life." Its social system is based on equity and justice …..The political philosophy and the form of regime of the umma is not democracy of heads, not irresponsible and directionless liberalism which is a plaything of contesting social forces, not putrid aristocracy, not anti-popular dictatorship, not a self- imposing oligarchy. It consists rather of "purity of leadership" (not the leader, for that would be fascism), a committed and revolutionary leadership….."(Shariati, 1979:119). Umma is the modern political party, and as such, it has an ideology, organization, and leadership. Umma is the united front against all that threatens its existence, purpose and unity—towheed.

Towheed poses social, economic, political, interpersonal, institutional and structural questions. "Just as the world-view of towheed interprets human existence in a unitary sense, so too it interprets human society in a unitary fashion. Just as on the plane of universal being, towheed is in opposition to diverse and contradictory forces, to the various deities of pagan pantheons, to the unseen and supernatural forces that are to influence men's destinies, and the processes of nature, so too towheed in human society negates the terrestrial deities that impose themselves on men…." (Shariati, 1979:33). Shariati was seeking the Islam of equality and a leadership based on the participation of the faithful in the social, political, and economic life of the umma. Convinced of the revolutionary and constructive potential of Islam, he decided to liberate it from the bondage instead of writing its eulogy. To that end Shariati suggested an interpretation of the Quran in its anthropological, sociological, historical, philosophical, economic and political (among others) context. Shariati (1973; CW#16), points out that only two of the 114 chapters (Surah) in the Quran are concerned with rituals. The rest are concerned with social, natural and material phenomena, social responsibility, social action, commitment, consciousness, and choice. By engaging in the social world, man realizes his potential and position. For, "in the socially aware and conscientious individual, ideological commitment was an expression of responsibility and yearning for higher values" (Shariati, Quoted in Erfani, 1983:125). He appealed to men and particularly the victim of discrimination—women for whom there are ideal role models in the Islamic history, to study their society, understand its pain and potentials and take action. Until his untimely and mysterious death at age 44, Shariati continued to practice what he taught his audiences and in particular a repeated rejection and dismissal of offers from the structure of domination to occupy important positions in the system. Indeed this type of personal sacrifice is the hallmark of a liberated and committed intellectual as we will see in the case of African-American and Latin American intellectuals.

While Islam encourages political acts in the process of practicing faith—being a witness to history and being a social activist—struggling toward greater good instead of being a "coffee house" (de-radicalized) "revolutionaries" which the intellectual left took refuge to. In certain denominations in Christianity notably

the Latin American Catholic Churches and the African-American churches, the idea that politics is to be avoided at all cost and that religion and politics ought not to mix (also a naïve criticism of Islam on the part of those who do not understand Islam) has been rejected, and, on the contrary, the religious identity of the community is predicated on the idea that social activism and praxis are components of "good faith." It is a design to purge the individual and the body of social toxins. In other words, practicing "good faith" and being "religious" ought to be inextricably linked with critical reflection and social activism. In Islam, the idea of faith and socio/political engagement is the Islamic praxis and has been an essential part of Islamic theology as expressed in the concepts of Jihad, towheed, Justice, leadership and political philosophy, and Resurrection among others. Each has social, political, economic and philosophical meanings and they are components of a larger worldview, means of salvation and the requirements of "Jihad," and "waiting" for the savior is a form of protest against the unjust condition.

Any credible analysis of the theoretical and empirical dimensions of "radical" Christianity (Latin American and African American theologies of liberation), and "radical" Islam (Middle East and elsewhere) requires a contextualization of the faith in terms of global political economy and domestic forces. That is, the analysis must begin with an overview of the historical role of institutionalized religion in the structure of domination, both in Latin America and in North America and the Middle East and in particular the role of the institutionalized religion in the reproduction of the system of domination. In Latin America, an important historical period begins with the conquest of the region and the establishment of slavery in the continent. In this context, it is important to emphasize the manner in which the institutionalized church with its European characteristics was transplanted in Latin America and the significance of this process in the structure of domination. Similarly, it is important to understand the role of the mainstream church in the North American context with respect to slavery and the challenges to its domination. Though the cultural contexts are different, the role of the dominant church - the European variety is strikingly similar. The grassroots and rebellious churches in the Latin American context and in the African-American communities provided the basis for construction of a contextualized theoretical framework and ensuing world views. Accordingly, the methodology reflected the identity of the new theologies and their roles in the rapid socio-economic and political changes which Latin America and the African American communities were facing in the Post World War II era.

AFRICAN AMERICAN LIBERATION THEOLOGY: The "Contextual" Theology

In the U.S., during the 1950s through 1970s, the rising expectations were coupled with the worsening conditions of blacks. As the institutionalized racism continued and the protests against the war in Vietnam broke out, varieties of responses on the part of African Americans developed and flourished. Socialists, Communists, Islamic and radical Christian groups provided explanations and proposed strategies. Though all of these groups shared a common goal--the elimination of the unequal system and the realization of equal treatment of African-Americans, they differed in their approaches and their methodologies. What separates the Latin American Liberation theology from the African American Liberation Theology is the reality of Race and Racism in the Anglo American context. To be sure, race as a social construct and as an outward expression of "inferior" or "superior" human qualities, played a determining role in the initial subjugation of the two peoples. To be sure, the idea of "otherness" in this case was not an exotic otherness (which is also a colonial construct), but a degraded otherness—a condition against which prominent African American intellectuals and theologians began their struggle long before the Civil Rights Movements of the mid twentieth century. As Latin American countries gained independence, the issue of "race" at least domestically and within these countries gradually gave way to the issues associated with social class and class conflict. But race continued to be the yardstick for the treatment of the indigenous people, and certainly the entire region of Central and South America was forced primarily by the imperial North into the trap of what I have called "backyardness" mediated by race. In the African American context, on the other hand, there was no need to analyze the condition of oppression; the condition had been experienced, felt and feared for generations, and the issue now was, what is to be done.
Churches, relative to other institutions such as entertainment, education, sports and other means of transformation, were more successful partly because of the community's familiarity with the institution of religion and the manner in which the church provided the platform for expressing the collective fear, frustration, aspirations and hope. The hymns, the music, the slang, the dance and the shouting of praise reflect a unique history of the struggle. These were less susceptible to commodification particularly in the North American context. It is in this context that the African American Liberation Theology finds its

identity and has evolved to oppose both the "Jack leg preacher" and the structure of oppression. Similarly, Black Nationalism" as exemplified by Malcolm X and Marcus Garvey came to diametrically oppose the integrationist and multiculturalism approach of Martin Luther King and other influential individuals and groups within and outside of religious institutions. To the radical theologians and the nationalists such as Malcolm X, the inherently "irredeemable" white racialist understood only the language of violence, and in that pronouncement they were adamant. Black theology in North America from the start aimed at liberation by formulating an identity and the formulation of an identity was vital for the process of liberation. Black theology of liberation was a reaction to a desperate and dehumanizing system of slavery. In its earliest forms, as a reaction to a very brutal system began when "...black mothers decided to kill their babies rather than have them grow up to be slaves" and when the "black clergy realized that killing Slave masters was doing the work of God" (Cone, 1986:26). Resistance to a system of domination began with the adoption of Christianity as a countervailing power to the ideology of the slave system as interpreted by the slave owning church. In other words, the very idea that Christianity, as interpreted by the slave system and adopted in its institutionalized form by the slave owning class including the Church, was antithetical to a form of Christianity they viewed as a source of salvation and liberation. The realization that the Christian message first and foremost ought to be liberated from the abuses by the masters and then it could be turned into a weapon against the very structure of oppression signaled the birth of a new religion. The hermeneutics of oppression was to be replaced by a hermeneutics of liberation and hope. Any other means of liberation would have been very costly, and it is difficult to, in retrospect argue the efficacy of anything other than what they chose. Any ideology of liberation would have been impossible to fathom, first, because the masses had to be educated as to its meaning and tenor, and second, the reaction to it would have been extremely violent. Therefore, religion as an ideology, religion to which both the oppressed and the oppressor adhered to would have been much more effective as a means of social protest and revolutionary change. But the religion of the oppressed, while textually compatible with that of the oppressed, represented a dominant socio-economic and political structure, and an ideological superstructure including a particular interpretation of the text geared toward reproduction of the system. Furthermore, the language of the religion and the application of its concepts were much more familiar to the oppressed and their condition than any other set of concepts and worldviews.

The genesis and the evolution of the Black Liberation Theology began in slavery and continues as a critical component of the community and the struggle to preserve itself and its commitment to the community. Cornell West (1982: 101-106), in his periodization of the Black Theology of Liberation into four main stages beginning with a criticism of slavery from the middle of the seventeenth century to 1863, points to an "awakening" which coincides with the accelerating European modernity and the events such as the French Revolution (West, 1999:59). During this period, they began reflecting on the conditions brought on by the slave system culminating into limited yet crucial steps toward liberation by the antislavery groups and in particular the work of Black theologians such as Gabriel Prosser, Nat Turner, Denmark Vessey, and David Walker. The Black theologians who were active in the struggle against slavery included community heroes such as Nathaniel Paul (1755-1839), Richard Allen (1760-1831), Daniel Alexander Payne (1811-1893), James Pennington (1812-1871), Henry Garnet (1815- 1882), Samuel R. Ward (1817-1878), Alexander Crummell (1819-1898), and Edward W. Blyden (1832-1912), The second period is the Black Theology of Liberation as a systematic critique of and as a front against institutional racism. During this period, (from 1864 to 1969) with reflection on the powerlessness of the Black masses and the resulting race riots of 1919, 1943, 1964, 1967, and 1968, "prophetic Christian" leaders such as Bishop Turner, Marcus Garvey , Martin Luther King, Albert Cleage, Howard Thurman, Benjamin Mays, George Kelsey and James Cone among others systematized and applied their (albeit unsynchronized) theologies . The third period in Black Theology of Liberation began as a critique of White North American Theology or the institutionalized church detached from the reality of oppression (1969-1977), led by James Cone, Cecil Cone, Major Jones, Deotis Roberts, Gayraud Wilmore among others. This group, according to West was an intellectually creative one and the stage of political praxis manifested by Black Nationalism (as opposed to Black integrationism). Black Theology of Liberation as critique of U.S. Capitalism and racism beginning in 1977 (the fourth period), utilized the methods of social sciences, was historically grounded, politically rebellious and philosophically critical. It took the debate to a different level by charting a new course and direction for Black liberation Theology. Critically important is the role of the Harlem Renaissance—a back literary, artistic and cultural movement in the 1930s based on a continuation of the "New Negro Movement" beginning with work of Hubert Harrison, who founded the very political publications such as

"Liberty League" and the "Voice." Harlem Renaissance is exemplified by such black cultural landmarks as the Apollo Theater and the works of poets and novelists such as Langston Hughes, Robert Wright (among others) and their struggle for the creation of an authentic black identity separate from what has been decided by others. Similarly, the process of political decolonization of Africa in the 1960s did not translate into the cultural decolonization. The colonialists continued to define the Africans from the colonialists point of view. The Harlem Renaissance influenced the movement by the African intellectuals in search of a new identity --"negritude." Negritude was an invitation to reflect on what it meant to be a negro and was awareness as a method for liberation. Negritude was directed against colonialism (2) whereas the black liberation theology, was directed against the internal colonialism and oppressive structure and its selective view of what and who was a human being, while professing a strong belief in human rights. Structurally, the new theologies in both contexts are products of and reactions to an imposing socio-economic and political structure created by the interaction between external and internal forces. Both in North America and particularly in Harlem, and later in the Carribean, France and Africa (popularized by Leopold Senghor of Senegal), Negritude was perceived as a means to a new cultural identity –blackness by the blacks themselves, rather than identity created by colonial apparatus as a hegemonic tool.
The Africans who were brought to the United States and the conquered Indians knew one terrifying reality; that their identities, their lives, and their future were at the mercy of the imposing structure and that they were expendable. The question was why slavery and how to eliminate it so as to reclaim their future? The answer to the first one was mundane- economic interest of the plantation owners was directly tied to their fates, and the answer to how to eliminate it was the product of centuries of struggle. The first step was an awareness of the ideological superstructure which made the social, economic and psychological subjugation possible.

Slave masters used various methods for passification of the Africans. In both cases, violence and conversion to their brands of religion were the dominant modes of subjugation. David Walker (1829) observed that the European Christianity was a merchandized (commodified) "Christianity" and that there are no historical precedents for the treatment of Blacks by the "Christians." Yet he saw this brutality as a global problem and in his published "Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World," Walker drew attention to the power of a united Black front in the struggle against injustice. Garnet (1843) was equally appalled by the silence of the white church (preacher and the flock) during inhumane treatment of the Africans. The African encounters with the Europeans who claimed to be Christian, "exhibited the worst features of corrupt and sordid hearts, and convinced them that no cruelty is too great, no villainy, and no robbery too abhorant for even enlightened men to perform when influenced by avarice and lust" (W. L. Garrison, 1834; Electronic Sources). Garrison's statement was later echoed by Marx (1977a, 768) who viewed the behavior of the European colonialists in the colonies as the epitome of "the profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilization….turning from its home, where it assumes respectable forms, to the colonies, where it goes naked." Christianity as it was presented to the illiterate slaves was a legitimating religion attempting to justify their fates, and the interpretation was a distorted interpretation for the purpose of maintaining the dynamics of the slave system. One has to wonder how some 2000 biblical statements against poverty and oppression were interpreted so as to lend support to the very system that demanded such treatment. Christianization in this context then becomes a tool of subjugation and an exchange system based on human trafficking. "Although many masters considered it imprudent, the idea of bringing slaves to Christ gained momentum throughout the eighteenth century (Quarles, 1986:287). From the "great awakening" which followed mass conversion of slaves to Christianity, black churches in defiance of mainstream Christianity, began a bold exercise in autonomy. In 1816, the first African Methodist Church was founded and it denied membership to the slaveholders calling slavery the "highest violation of God's law" (Quarles, 1969:82). Overtime, the Church as described by Martin Delany, became the "Alpha and Omega of all things," while the White Churches were viewed as the "oppressor of the colored people" (Douglass, cited in Quarles, 1969:70). The "… eschatological recognition that freedom and equality are at the essence of humanity and thus segregation and slavery are diametrically opposed to Christianity" turned these churches into centers of protest and action and revolution (Cone, 1969:94)—"a political entity" (DuBios, 1899:213). In the process of fighting for freedom, the notion of politics as distinct (within the social milieu) from religion was an alien one and a component of hegemonic strategy. It is in this context that religion in the black culture is significant in that in the "dialectic of accommodation and resistance," the "protonational consciousness" of blacks was "expressed primarily through a religious sensibility" (Genovese, 1974:58-9). With the rising consciousness, protest increased and so did the violent reaction to

the protest. Conversion to Christianity did not reduce the violence against them. In response to the violence against them, the slaves' conversion proceeded at a faster rate. One can speculate as to the level of violence against the slave had they decided to maintain their traditional African religion or become Muslim or take some other religion. But it is certain that any religion would have been coopted and used as a force against them. The attraction of Christianity to the slave, was, among others, its evangelical outlook of the Baptist separatists and the Methodist and religious dissenters which "stressed individual experience, equality before God, and institutional autonomy," "triumph of God over evil," for " intellectual (analogy of exodus), existential (individual experience, ecstatic bodily behavior and the similarities between the protestant "holy dance" and that of "ring shout" in West Africa and political (lack of hierarchy and easy membership) reasons (West, 1982:35). The concrete reality –the oppressive environment invariably produces a new worldview from a body of thought which is also reproduced within the same reality. From the beginning of their introduction to the Bible, the Slaves, were able to derive meanings from it that were hidden to the oppressor (Roberts, 1980:24). As Jurgen Moltman (cited in Moyd, 1987:22) points out "Black theology offers white theology a chance to rid itself of its blindness and to become Christian in life as well as in thought." In the pre Civil war era, Black theologians moved the struggle toward freedom one step further, and in the process, some of them, including Denmark Vessey (Methodist conspirator), David Walker (the leader of slave insurrections) and Nat Turner (the pioneer of the application of religion to struggle for freedom), Gabriel (executed in 1800 for inciting slave revolts) and countless others who were marked for execution (Wilmore, 1983:55, 95). These men established a school of thought and a tradition of resistance nurtured by their blood—the essence of "jihad" and "martyrdom," challenging the future generations to make a choice. The twentieth century Black libration theologians, equipped with a good knowledge of history and tradition in the application of religion to struggle, began a new era in the theology of liberation. The Black churches in the United States of America were challenges to the religious, political, and economic as well as social order. The preservation of the status quo in both cases generated responses and resolutions. The challenges to the establishment in both cases intensified the long historical struggle on the part of both peoples. In the United States, the dominant ideology in all respect excluded the black masses from gaining or participating in the process.

The intolerable condition of blacks, along with the well entrenched Jim Crow laws in the South and the explicit racism throughout the US, were well documented truth and not a new discovery. The real fear, however, was that of a growing diversion from the original black theology toward reconciliation. The fear accompanied by a sense of distrust, prompted further radicalization as well as de-Christianization (no longer liberating) of the black theology. But by the end of WWI, the independent black churches were becoming "respectable" institutions. They rejected the nationalism of Turner and others and increasingly became accommodative and depoliticized (Wilmore, 1983:142). Booker T. Washington, with his illusion of equality under domination provided the impetus for an all out attack on radical black churches. In a sense, they were becoming increasingly perceived as White (inactive and ceremonial) in their interpretation of history and the present condition and apologetic at best (Paris, 1985:130). The power struggle between prominent black churches such as Washington and DuBois and Bishop Turner further weakened the historical mission of the black churches. DuBois's denounciation of Washington's conciliatory approach was indicative of the fear of cooptation and an indication of the evolving rift within the community (cited in Wilmore, 1983:137). These developments were perceived as de-Christianization of the black churches. It was Marcus Garvey, the radical separatist, who did not consider churches as viable means in the struggle for liberation, that found Washington's emphasis on self help as a useful component in his nationalistic and Pan-African approach (West, 1982:43). His attack was directed against the capitalist classes irrespective of their race and ethnicity (Martin, 1976:53). The rise and the fraction within the Moorish Science Temples in 1913 and later the Harlem Renaissance in the 1930s were two major social forces united in the pursuit of equality, but with very little impact as a unified front in the fight against the institutionalized black church and White domination (Wilmore, 1983:172

To be sure, "the existence of the Black Churches has always implied an indictment against the racial values of White America's religious, political and social institutions" (Paris, 1985:111). In the 1960s, the worsening condition in black communities, provided the black church with a choice; "…to die a shameful death" or "to recapture its historic mission-to be the vanguard of social , political, and economic activism within the black community" (Lincoln, cited in Young, 1979:90). The first step, however, was the "dehonkification" of black churches (Wright cited in Wilmore, 1983:2 12). Once again the attempt was to

rescue the “black messiah” from the heretics, and to liberate black theology from the bondages of white theology. At the core of the struggle was the attack on the disempowerment and alienating hegemonic components such as selfless love and redemptive suffering-- aspects of the institutionalized church which provided the means for and justified oppression. It is in this context that a rejection of what came to be known as the “White Christianity” must be understood. The Black churches emphasized an existence separate and distinct to the point of opposing the White church. While Black theology of liberation begins and ends with black people’s experiences as an oppressed group, the “White theologian has never taken the oppression of blacks as a point of departure....” (Cone, 1986:9). Symbolism plays a critical role in communicating the profound experiences and the genocidal history of the black community. Thus the interpretation of the revelation and redemption in the context of the history of the oppressed symbolize both the experiences as victims and as a force of resistance to the structure of oppression. In Black theology, revelation has meaning, and its interpretation is relevant only in the context of oppression and historical experiences of the oppressed (Cone, 1986:45; Moyd, 1979:120), while fostering a sense of “identity” and “self determination” and a rejection of “meaningless ethical interpretation” of the socially important and politically powerful concepts (West, 1982:22). Community is the collective expression of self determination and identity that individuals are yearning for.

The concept of community in black theology has significant meanings. This significance of this concept is rooted in the African tradition of community and a negation of crass individualism of the Western culture, while promoting individuality. That is “while salvation from sin and guilt is an individual concern, salvation from woes and earthly tribulations is also an ongoing, communal activity in the plan of God” (Moyd, 1979:121). Theology in general cannot separate itself from community, therefore ,“it is the theology of a community whose daily energies must be focused on physical survival in a hostile community” (Cone, 1986:11). Prophetic Christianity as distinguished from the established or priestly Christianity (church), “elevates the notion of struggle... to highest priority”; it serves both the “tragic” (the “aggressive” and the “antagonists”), and the “pitiful” (the subject of history and the “victims manipulated by the evil force”) (West, 1982:19-20). Prophetic Christianity essentially empowers people to fight for social freedom, it empowers the tragic to “negate and transform what is…” and strive for existential, and social freedom (West, 1982:18). Black Churches operating within the democratic context, increasingly opted for integration and not militant separatists as envisioned by Garvey and others. The context was conducive to reform and from the late 1950s, the struggle for equality on the part of the African American community intensified to the point that reconciliation was the only option. In Latin America the progressive church and the left were faced with a repressive state apparatus supported by an upper class allied with the international capital.

Indeed the history of Latin America from the arrival of Columbus to the independence movements in the nineteenth century was a history of outright subjugation. The past history of Latin America, as is its recent history is marked by violence and oppression on the one hand and resistance and negation on the other- a situation closely paralleled to that of African Americans. From the era to decolonization to the 1960s, the struggle for the creation of a viable and promising socio-economic and political structure continued, but was often interrupted by wars, invasions and coups d’etat.

Colonial Latin America and the Church

From the time Columbus landed on the beaches of San Salvador, the native culture, civilization and religion were dealt a devastating blow, beginning with the label of inferiority and the process of internalization of that label by the natives. The defaming features of the natives gradually were replaced with those of Christian and Spanish varieties. Conquistadores brought with them and transplanted the institutions of Spanish empires in Latin America. Catholic religion was one of these institutions which was introduced in the region. The Church in the New World as in Spain and Portugal was a subservient institution to the absolutist policies of the state apparatus seeking world domination. The slogan of “temporal Messianism” promoted the belief in the complementarity of the interest of the empire and the interests of the church (Dussel, 1976:83). In the New World, the triangle of church, state and the landed oligarchy was becoming consolidated. The Spanish king in collaboration with the Catholic church -a collaboration that lasted five centuries (from the 12th to the 16th century), established Councils so as to control all aspects of the church. The Patronatos (the juridical-religious systems) were developed under the direct control of the Spanish or Portuguese kings. The system of Patronage by which the church and the

state were dependents of the King, gave the king the power to nominate "suitable" Pastors, particularly for such functions as collection of tithes (which was divided between the King and the Bishops) (Pike, 1964:4; Houtart and Pin, 1965:19-20). Both the Portuguese and the Spanish Kings had the blessing of the Pope in their conquest of various regions including Latin America claiming for missionary and evangelistic purposes. Thus church in colonial Latin America was, from an administrative point of view, a national church controlled from Madrid (Pike, 1964:4). Accordingly, the church in the New World, was assigned the role of teaching the indigenous people the Spanish world view and religion (Dussel, 1976:80). While the church was busy converting the natives, the Spanish military slaughtered thousands, and confiscated their land. Beginning with the destruction of the Aztec and the Inca civilizations, the Spaniards imposed the Mediterranean culture over the pre-historic civilization of America (Dussel, 1981:41). Although the church in the colonial times was either under the control of the state or allied with it, there were sporadic clashes between some elements of the church and the colonizers, particularly from the early years of the 16th century onward. One example of the early clashes between the church and the states that of Father Montensinos in 1511, who, by citing the prophetic texts of Isaiah and John the Baptist, attacked the Spaniards for the inhumane treatment of the Indians (Dussel, 1976:82). Montensinos certainly had a different interpretation of the biblical stories than the institutionalized church. The well known Bartolome de Las Casas, in 1554, cited a biblical passage parallel to the treatment of the natives by the colonizers: "A man murders his neighbor if he robs him of his livelihood, sheds blood if he withholds an employee's wages' (cited by Dussel, 1981:48). Antonio de Valdivieso, in 1550, as Bishop of Nicaragua was murdered because of his defense of Indians; Bishop of Honduras Cristobal de Pedraza, Valle of Popayan, Cali his successor, and La Coruna among others (Dussel, 198 1:54-55) were among the very few who raised their voices in defense of the oppressed.

The transformation of the economic structure of the colonies continued to occur on the basis of the division of labor—as producers and providers of gold and silver to Europe so as to sustain the Spanish empire while impoverishing the local economies. Locally, the encomienda- gave way to Hacienda or large rural estates where debt bondage turned Indians into slaves (Houtart and Pin, 1965:9). The church was the primary organ of perpetuating the Spanish world view by controlling the educational means. This "political theology' or the theological justification for "reason of the state"- the legitimization of the status quo was absolutely essential in the structure of domination (Assman, 1975:29). The church had the duty to evangelize the conquered. The success of evangelization (as experienced in Africa and in pre-Columbus Latin America) facilitated an easier and more effective process of colonization and exploitation. The church and the military played an important role in the conquest leading to the creation of a mercantilist system which sustained the church, the military, administrators and the merchants of the old world, while it impoverished the colonies. From the 18th to the early 19th century, the French and British triumphed over Spain already suffering from a severe economic depression. These emerging powers carved up the Spanish colonies between themselves and took the control of the seas. With the growing influence of France and Britain, a new international economic system in place of Mercantilism was established. The new system, although as domineering, created a new international division of labor in which the new nation-states and the colonies were assigned the role of providing raw materials for the industrial centers in Europe for finished manufactured goods from Europe and later the United States. The laissez faire system, emphasized the role of the market forces independent of the state. This ideology also promoted individualism as one of its principles in and out of the market. During this period, the institutionalized church in Latin America (with the exception of Brazil which under the Pedro II created an independent empire) gradually lost most of its power. The end of scholasticism and the attempt at modernization including the rise of anti-religion ideologies (such as the growing Positivism) put the institutionalized church on the defensive (Houtart and Pin, 1965:33 & Dussel, 198 1:128). The church initially allied with the regal power of the colony, later with the creole-oligarchic aristocracy during the independence, with the conservative forces during the 19th century and in the 20th century, with the landed oligarchy backed by military and international capitalist classes, in defense of Christendom" (when Christianity became an established religion and an official ideology of the empire) and Western Christian Civilization (Dussel, 1981:128). Changes in the global economic system, particularly the consolidation of the international division of labor in the 20th century, particularly after decolonization, produced structural changes in nation-states. Those nation-states, which were either resource rich and or geopolitically significant, were rapidly incorporated into the world system. As a result of a long process of power struggle within these groups and by virtue of their position in the world system either as providers of raw materials or as means to a balanced power, they experienced

massive changes in their internal configuration. As a result of a long process of power struggle within these groups and by virtue of their position in the world system either as providers of raw materials or as means to a balanced power, they experienced massive changes in their internal configuration. The increase in the demand for raw materials particularly in the context of the Cold War, locked these countries into their semi-permanent dependent position. The dependency was intensified by the implementation of developmentalists' strategies geared toward regime building and capitalist development.

Although the developmentalists' strategy produced limited industrialization and development in its early phase, it produced alarming and ugly realities in all of these countries. This process produced a dependent industrialization in Latin America as in other regions. It also resulted in the growth of lumpen proletariat class. Beginning with the 1940s and throughout the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, structural changes intensified disparities and produced marginalization of a great number of people. The worsening conditions led to political instability in many of the Latin American countries with non-military regimes. The military overthrew the governments and established dictatorships ostensibly to save the Fatherland. In the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, changing global economic conditions disproportionally affected the working classes (lower and the middle classes) of these countries. Three main groups began their strategies in combating the new ideology deemed responsible for these conditions; the armed groups, the academic left and a small number of priests well versed in history, religion, politics, social sciences and the culture of Latin America. Bolivar, Che Guevara and Castro among others influenced the rise of armed groups seeking to change the political structure through social revolution. The youths and the peasants were their audiences and sources of support. The academic left (intelligentsia) conceptualized about the causes of the condition, and its monumental contributions produced a school of thought –, the dependency theory with intellectuals both at home and abroad as its main consumers. The third group approached the marginalized masses, urban poor and the natives, attempting to teach people to recognize their reality as oppressed people and how to eliminate the conditions which demand their oppression. This approach initiated by the concerned and liberated wing of the Catholic Church, gathered momentum as it educated the masses by using the "new church"- the "theology of liberation. In either case the opposition to the new form of Christian activism came from the Pope and the mighty Vatican and particulary from the then Cardinal Ratzinger (present Pope Benedict) who was charged with representing the Vatican position on liberation theology by standing firm against it. The opposition also came from the elites and the military in Latin America and elsewhere where the institutionalized and official churches were challenged by the militant and rebel priests within its structure.

As a class, the bourgeoisie had the backing of the international capitalist classes (particularly those of United States whose government monitored the condition and had the political movements and development under surveillance) in search of new markets and spheres of economic influence. The changes in global economy enriched the elites of these countries and worsened the conditions of the masses. In the 1960s, countries such as Brazil, Argentina and Peru witnessed the rise of the military once more. In Brazil, the military government sought the reestablishment of the Western Christian morality and ethics through violence (Dussel, 1981:129). The church came under the control of the state, and the economic condition worsened. As the discontent grew all over Latin America, the need for reform became apparent, while the state apparatus increased its level of violence ("structural sin"). To be sure, the bourgeois state enjoying the support of the U.S. administration as part of the anti-communist campaign, in a perverse way assumed that the market forces were capable of creating a prosperous condition in Latin America. It was assumed that the free market forces could repel communism—the enemy of the state and the church. Monsenor Padim, the Bishop of Lorena Brazil, observed that the military take over and repression are justified under the assumption that "there are two blocks of nations in the world irreducibly opposed: The democratic and Christian West and the Communist and materialistic East. Between them there is a permanent and omnipresent antagonism, a total war" (cited in Greenbrant, 1974:207). On this basis, then the bourgeoisie state representing Western Christendom and law and order, allows itself to suppress and immobilize every thought and action it deems subversive. Assman (1975:32) reflecting on this fact, points out that "every political ethic based on law and order tends to- narrow the operational field of politics, for it de-politicizes one area of human activity." The depoliticization of the institution of politics, promotes exclusion and repression. It is part of an ideology that promotes the interest of one group at the expense of the other both nationally and trans-nationally. And precisely for this reason, theologians with critical consciousness of the

particular concrete reality of oppression and degradation and with a sense of social responsibility must join forces and if they are to be socially relevant, cannot remain neutral.

During 1930 to 1962 as Latin America industrialized and class consciousness increased, the new Christendom era- theological faculties or centers were established in many countries. In 1962, a young priest, Antonio Melo, led two thousand peasants assisted by Catholic university students from the Brazilian region of Pernambuco to occupy some land. When the government of Goulart ceded the land to the new occupants, the military deposed the president (Congar 1962:10-15; Antoine, 1973:21). Allied with the military, some Bishops rejected the land distribution and declared it illegal. For instance the Bishop of Matanzas, raised his opposition in 1959 as did the Cardinal of Bogata, M.L. Concha. Concha in 1961 even displaying certain level of ignorance of the reality on the ground, asked "why talk about an agrarian reform" (Dussel, 1981:183). But the presence of an active laity on the scene along with socially aware religious leaders outnumbered the institutionalized clergy. Laity, once an insignificant group when the church was controlled by the empire, is playing an important role in educating the masses, even though they are not part of the decision making bodies. This is perhaps one reason for the tension between the two. In 1968, 300 laypersons and a group of priests took control of the Cathedral in Santiago Chile. The "Young Church" as they were called, demanded structural changes in the hierarchy (Dussel, 1981:212). It also happened in Mexico, Dominican Republic, Peru and elsewhere. The frustration along with the crises in pastoral experiences of the new Christendom such as the attempt at mass evangelization by the use of urban radio employed in many Latin American countries, produced interests in community living. Furthermore, these communities were to organize and bring people together in a personalized manner by which people could share their experiences (Brown, 1990:119; Boff, 1985:116)). The Medilin conference accelerated the growth of the Basic Christian Communities, by acknowledging their historic existence prior to Christendom. Paulo Freire in Northeast Brazil began his experiment which later spread to Colombia (Dussel, 1981:215). Both Basic Christian Communities and the black churches are responses to the total grip by the institutionalized church and the creation of that church. In reality they derive from the Movement for Basic Education (MEB) in Brazil which were influenced by the Catholic Action Method of see-judge-act (Dussel, 1981:215; 1976:131; Adriance, 1986:46-48).

In Latin America, the process of liberation also began by a pedagogy of liberation. The liberation of the theology was the initial effort. The obstacles, however, were and are strikingly similar as are the methodologies of revival. In a pastoral letter of 1915, the Bishop of Brazil instructed his priests to "inculcate the spirit of obedience and submission to those who govern in civil society, in religion and in the family.... to lead the faithful to accept their proper situation and the conditions in which they were born and not to hate the modest and difficult life in which providence has placed them" (Cited in McGovern, 1989:227). That is the poor must accept the condition of poverty, for it is the will of God. Against this environment rose a different kind of theology. A theology that urged reflection and action in the context of Latin American culture and against the European political theology presented as the universal and unchanging theology of Christianity. Boff (1986:17) argues that "the universality of the church resides in the universality of God's salvific offer. But this universal salvific mystery is manifested in space and time, and in being revealed, it takes on the particularities of ages and places." Thus "the one and universal church…" is nothing but "the local Church". That is the highly bureaucratic and rigid structure of the Vatican controlled Church and therefore it must be contextual. For Assman, "Faith is no more or less than man's historical activity (which is essentially political)" (1975:35). The genesis of the BCCs is related to the consequences of developmentalists policies namely the marginalization of the masses. In Brazil some priests along with once outcast laity, who for the most part came from the poorer classes with a conviction that the will of God does not permit atrocious poverty and inequality to persist, ushered in a new direction for their theology. In 1958, Pope John XXIII approved of the Unified Pastoral Plan designed to internally overhaul the church and give it a proper role in society (Adriance, 1986:99). It was the Unified Pastoral Plan that explicitly urged the formation and the expansion of the Basic Christian Communities (BCCs) as a vehicle for greater social involvement. BCCs are genuine churches because they provide "community coordination, catechism, liturgy, of caring for the sick, of teaching people to read and write, of looking after the poor...." (Boff, 19 86:23). Perhaps one of the most important contributions of the BCCs is in helping the institutionalized church -declericalize itself—creating a broad popular participation and decision making. BCCs are the first step toward rejecting orthodoxy in favor of "orthopraxis" (correct acting) allowing the totality to reinvent itself (Boff, 1986:33). The new theology rejects the notion of Christianity as a subjective

private (individual) matter. Its history shows engagement in history and if a faith is to "…. achieve social justice faith must take on the role of a transforming agent" (Boff, 1986:38). Before a faith can become a transforming agent, it must begin by protest and development. An urgent priority in the face of an oppressive global economic order and elitist attitude is the presence of a network of people fighting oppression first and foremost by restructuring the institutionalized church. The imposing and alienating hierarchy promotes exclusion rather than inclusion. BCCs are attempts at grassroots inclusions ultimately for structural transformation. Borrowing from the methodology of the Catholic Action groups (which began in 1950s by the Belgian priest Cardinal Cardijin), BCCs practice "Observe", "Judge" and "Act" as they engage in social action. BCCs were to observe the abject poverty and human degradation and then use their judgement to select a strategy for Action on the behalf of the disinherited—the voice of those who cannot speak for themselves. Boff (1990:434) argues that this approach has influenced even some Bishops in return to a simple way of living, "Gospel-centered" and closer to the struggle of the people. A liberated theology is based on praxis and praxis requires conscientization. "Conscientization implies going beyond the spontaneous phase, where reality becomes a knowable object, where the human takes an epistemological stance…" (Freire, 1990:7). In other words, "conscientization is a "….historical commitment... a commitment in time and it implies, that when I realize that I am oppressed, I also know I can liberate myself if I transform the concrete situation where I find myself oppressed" (Friere, 1990:7). According to Boff though the church has warned against the concentration of the power in the hands of a few, it has arrogated all spiritual power to itself. In this respect the church is violating basic human rights - a grave pathology. BCCs are designed to raise consciousness, protest the existing condition, educate the public, develop liberating ideas and promote equality. During the 1980s, with the rise of the new right, in politics and religion there were renewed interest in liberation theology in general and African-American liberation theology in particular. The emphasis on meaningful contact with the people as a means of encouraging them to engage in the process of reflection and action (praxis) is common to all theologies or approaches to theology presented here. Furthermore, the historical experiences of Africans in the New World and Natives at the hands of the colonialist are very similar in intensity, but vary in the length of time. The temporal and spatial as well as contextual (the socio-economic structure and political ideology) are of central importance. Latin American masses, on the other hand, from the beginning were defined and treated as the subjects of colonial mercenaries and administrators. In the eighteenth century, the puritans of New England "by decree of their assembly set a minimum of 40 pounds on every Indian scalp and every captured redskin…." In 1744, the price for a male scalp of 12 years and upward was 100 pounds and for women and children it was 50 pounds (Marx, 1977a:918). The British Parliament declared that scalping was a "means that God and nature had given into its hands" (Marx, 1977a:918). The resistance to the colonial rule was either passive or did not materialize. Though officially they were not considered slaves, the treatment was no less than that received by the slaves in North America. The dominant theology occasionally expressed concerns about the mistreatment of the Indians. There were sporadic clashes between the institutionalized clergy and the colonial administrators. The Africans on the other hand, who were transplanted in North America and elsewhere were the bearers of religions, cultures and identities known to the European Christians as well as to the Middle Easterners. And the Africans were equally aware of these identities.

Yet there are differences in what the concrete steps toward liberation must be. . In the Islamic, while the colonial (internal and external) victims did not experience such a brutal treatment, they did experience dehumanizing and demonizing treatment to warrant the inclusion of jihad and martyrdom as critical components of the process of liberation. Black liberation theology within the Christian tradition differs from its Latin counterpart in many respects. While the Latin American liberation theologians are predominantly Catholics, the African-American liberation theology exhibits a diverse denomination within the Protestant sect (Methodists, Baptists, and Episcopalians). While the theologians opposing the enslavement of natives in Latin America were predominantly from the European stock, the North American theologians who made up the anti-slavery bloc from the seventeenth century were African Americans. The liberation theology in Latin America was systematized in the 1960s but with tasks similar to those of African-American liberation theology in the same time period. The Latin American liberation theologians had to confront the established church, the international capitalist classes and the domestic regimes in the process of liberation. The methods in both cases are (were) very similar. In both theologies the emphasis is on the liberation of theology first and foremost through reflection (education and protest) followed by change and development

CONCLUSION:

The belief in freedom as a fundamental, "natural" and "God given" right and the belief that the sacred texts contain both an ideal image of the condition and a blue print for the materialization of the right to be free are compelling reasons for the reinterpretation of texts. The reinterpretation is designed to resist the hegemonic structure within these religions and from the time the first sign of clash between the old guard and the revolutionary guard appeared, the current of history entered a different path, and that path is subject to detour and diversion. What guarantees the positive outcome in resistance to hegemony is the consensus of the peoples across time and space based on their true awareness, rather than based on the ideological superstructure of the system of Cain. And the belief that even though liberation may be attained, freedom does not come easy, and/or that it may never come makes the struggle of "religion versus religion" daunting and the process painful. The forces whose survival depend upon the survival of the status quo, will continue to nurture false idols and the supporting ideologies which promote resignation and inaction as we have seen in most of the world. At the present, some of these religions are demonized not because of the mindless violence committed by certain elements within them, which in reality is an indispensible component of hegemony, but because of the fear of the liberated message. The "communism" of the Soviet Union in the 1950s was the demon, the cancer and an existential threat to the American democracy and the way of life. Anything that opposed the core values of capitalism was labeled communist and had to be confronted head on. The strategy for its containment and ultimately its defeat required a global alliance of the capitalist states led by the United States. Participating states were to contain and defeat communism within their borders. Today once more we are witnessing the same strategy. The Muslim states for the most part are charged with containing "revolutionary" Islam through repression and violence while the United States and its major allies are engaged in a bloody war, as believed by the Muslims to be against them and their religion—a religion that in its true form does not allow blind obedience and sheepish following. Most Muslims do believe that the war is against them and their religion and not against the rogue (the "Islamic Terrorists") elements of their community who are committing acts of violence in the name of their religion and which they strongly believe are "Western creations." The Talibanization of Islam is and has been a vital component of hegemony whose reproduction demands continual coincidence of interests of the internal and the external forces. When Islam is viewed as a "dangerous ideology", in support of this view, the veiling of women from head to toe (berka) as a sign of oppression and restriction and stonning as an exclusively Islamic form of retribution and the killing of homosexuals and ….. are cited and they are correct on this form of Islam—"Islam of legitimation." No doubt if they were to study and understand Islamic political economy, principles, and perspective, they would be content with the Islam of legitimation. The expression of the feeling of abandonment on the part of the Muslim masses has heightened anxiety not just in the countries where the "religion of legitimation" is the dominant form, but also in the West. The consideration of jihad as "holy war" is the product of a violent mindset that perceives it as such and justifies military response which in turn is supported by the suffocating level of ignorance. The progressive developments within various Christian denominations must be viewed as a reaction to the imposing religion of "legitimation." Even though in Latin America with the exception of Nicaragua, liberation theology did not become an active player in the governance, their conscientization helped the wave of change in Latin America in the 1960s. Yet the violation of the very basic eschatological issues abounds; from the rich pastor peaching from a multimillion dollar pulpit, to the preacher who is a consumer of the services provided by the prostitutes while preaching against adultery, to the preacher whose fame is his anti-homosexual campaign only to be discovered that he has been using male-prostitutes, to the activities of the people at The Family" and the "C-Street," (4), to repeated sexual abuses of children, to glittering lights and jewelry and display of opulence at the alter all have played a role in the reproduction of the hegemonic structure and the resistance to it.

The African American Liberation theology becomes the topic of discussion as a scandalous and slanderous issue in the wake of Rev. Wrights' comments on the American dilemma. Rev. Wright's comments and the use of words such as "damnation" were never contextualized and therefore misrepresented particularly against the then Democratic Candidate Barak Obama. But the fact is the noise, in reality, was not about Obama, but it was a part of the strategy of getting concessions from the candidate. And that is why the corporate media are in a jingoistic fashion making sure that the structural contradictions are not subject to debate. Furthermore, Obama has been "accused" of being a Muslim, and has forced him to spend a considerable amount of time in his campaigning to prove that he is not. He is also presented as the

"illegitimate son of Malcolm X" and recently, a conservative host of a TV show added another term, "liberation theologian" to describe Obama. In reality, when he is called a Muslim, they mean non-White, but an explicit reference to his race in the context of "multiculturalism" (so much for the depth of the term) as an offense is not acceptable, since they fear of a strong reaction (as should be) but, using the label of "Muslim" as a pejorative term is for now acceptable and does not generate a strong revulsion. And in the same manner the "Quran burning parties" in some cities in the United States is a reaffirmation of the fanatical "us vs. them" as a tool of hegemonic structure. On this point, I would like to point out that the burning of the Quran by the Muslims occur on a daily basis and in more ways than one; from anti-Islamic acts of stoning, usury, corruption, denying food to the orphans which is Quran's definition of the "infidel" to not standing up to injustice, dictatorship, and economic exploitation along other acts which are equally or if not more abhorant. And the building of a mosque near Ground Zero (which is neither a Mosque nor on Ground Zero) is a new challenge and an opportunity. What have we learned from it and where are we going with its commemoration? We saw obscene commercialization, violence and vengefulness use of the event, and very little reflection of the history prior. In reality, the hegemonic structure –the global economic system, promoted it as the beginning of history. All of these events are designed to hide troubling and paralyzing systemic contradictions. Yet instead of masking the contradictions, they are beginning to reveal more of them and by showing their severity. Taking a simple cause and effect approach and a demystification of that causality, could help us see the dangerous trends and developments. If the current reality is any indication (mass hunger, structural violence, degradation, terrorism, dehumanization and environmental destruction all point to a very powerful and hegemonic class whose religious wing encourages people to seek solace in a basterdized interpretation of "the meek shall inherit the Erath."

ENDNOTES

[1]A few of Shariati's work have been translated into English as they appear in the bibliography.

[2]In Africa there were (are) so many fighting against colonialism and Aparthied such as the nuns fighting alongside the Zimbabwean Liberation Army, and in Asia, an Asian adaptation of Christianity as appears in such works as *Rice-Roots Theology, Theology of the Womb, and "The Tears of Lady Ming*."

[3]Opinions on the viability of Negritude as reflected in the printed and electronic sources both historically and contemporaneously varied; Aime Cesaire used negritude to mean 'blackness" –an autonomous intellectual and cultural existence inspired by Harlem Renaissance and the works of African American writers such as Langston Hughes and a negation of European particularly Colonialist view of black as an inferior being. Cesaire's view was that Haiti's struggle against French Colonial rule was an example of negritude in action. The French Existentialist Jean Paul Sartre on the other hand considered negritude as a necessary (albeit weak) component and as an "antiracist racism" in anti colonial struggle. Franz fanon on the other hand considered race as an important factor in collective consciousness, but the concrete reality of socio-economic and political structure which decided and alters race" are much more important. "Wole Soyinka the Nigerian Playwrite denounced Senghor's "nostalgic glorification" of negritude as a major factor in reinforcing the Eurocentric view of Africans as emotional beings who are consumed by the past while ignoring the present. "A tiger" he lamented "does not shout its tigritude, it acts." What the Africans need is to tap into the process of modernization and development (various electronic sources). In Africa, the continent most battered by colonialism negritude was an inwardly search an introspection and it was an "antiracist racism". African nationalist group vying for independence were labeled the "communist" so as to crush he movement in favor of a "modernizing elite" supported by colonial powers.

[4]These are also titles of two books by Jeff Sharlet on the structure, conduct and particularly the influence of secretive "Christian" organizations on the socio-economic and most importantly the politico-military structure of the United States.

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