



## Anthony G. Reddie

I find myself getting continually irritated at the often repeated claim that Gustavo Gutierrez was the 1st person to write about Christian theology as a movement of liberation. It's as if we still can't credit Black people with being the innovators of any intellectual movement. The FIRST book that used the nomenclature of liberation was James H. Cone's "A Black Theology of Liberation" published in 1970. In fact the 1st book to connect liberation as the generative thread of Christian theology was Cone's 1st book, "Black Theology and Black Power" 1969. I love Gutierrez' s work but he wasn't the 1st.



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You, [Joseph Duggan](#), [Valerie Hugsy Bridgeman](#), [Anne Dunlap](#) and 50 others like this.



**Michael Moey** It is clear that Cone had made an unrivalled contribution to a Black theology of liberation but perhaps the biblical prophets were the first to talk about liberating the people. In particular, Moses who said, 'Let my people go.' This prophetic tradition culminated in Jesus's death and resurrection, a momentous event from which liberation theologians, scholars and activists draw their inspiration from. Shalom.

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**Andre Johnson** Wow

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**Anthony G. Reddie** I don't disagree with you Michael, and if people routinely said that, then fair enough. Knowing Cone as I do, he would not claim to have invented theologies of liberation, but he wasn't derivative of Gutierrez as I seem to hear so often – in fact, the last time was yesterday at a postgraduate seminar at which the speaker was a well known scholar who should know better.

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**Scott Elliott** Did the Reformation begin with Luther, or with Wyclif? Or with Jesus? Or with Isaiah?

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**Jason Craig Harris** [Claudio Carvalhaes](#), you might have some thoughts to contribute on this front.

June 22 at 10:48am · [Like](#) · 1



**Michael Moey** listening...

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**Steed Davidson** Isn't part of the problem the imprecision of the notion Liberation Theology as distinct from theologies of liberation?

June 22 at 11:23am · [Like](#) · 5



**Anthony G. Reddie** I agree Steed. Gutierrez is undoubtedly the scholar who helped to found, if not THE founder of Liberation Theology. LT is one form of the wider family of Theologies of Liberation.

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**Joseph Duggan** [Anthony G. Reddie](#) thank you for raising this level of awareness on the PTN. I sense that your statement needs to be said again with the timing of the Vatican's shift. Perhaps you will consider writing a longer piece on this major insight of yours that is important for all to hear again!

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**Karyn Carlo** Latin American LT and Black Theology had much in common, but they followed separate trajectories and, at times, clashed. for example, LALT tended to use Marx as a source. BT rejected most Marxism as too white and too western. LALT, at least in its earlier iterations, downplayed culture and emphasized economic class. BT used black culture and experience as a major source and put race, not simply economic class, at the center. while each addressed the problem of the non-person in society, one focused on poverty while the other focused on racism. these are, of course, related concerns but they aren't the same. imo, the tendency to make BT derivative of LALT comes from the way white people like to avoid talking about race by talking about money instead.

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**John J. Thatamanil** Not to complicate matters still more, but several years ago when I was an M.Div. student in a Liberation Theology class under Dr. Cartwright, we had a distinguished visiting guest come to our class: John Howard Yoder. Yoder stunned this Marthomite by saying words to this effect: "Many say that Gutierrez was the father of liberation theology, but I would give that honor to India's M.M. Thomas who in the 1930s already instantiated a theological program that involved active involvement with base communities, a radical commitment to the poor, a social analysis drawn from Marx and a commitment to Jesus as one who stands with the poor."

I was stunned by this comment as M.M. was a family friend and the most distinguished theologian in my church community. Sadly, I have not been able to follow up on Yoder's comments because my own work on MM has to do with his contributions to interreligious dialogue.

At any rate, Yoder's comment has prompted me to think that we need a wider study of the emergence of liberationist themes in a wide variety of social contexts and figures including perhaps Gandhi (despite his limited vision on the question of caste). I agree that my colleague James Cone must be regarded as an

independent font of liberation theology. What we need now is a deeper analysis of the sources that led to the origins of liberation theology in a variety of global contexts.

June 22 at 12:47pm · [Unlike](#) · 13



**Joseph Duggan** John – excellent additional insights, thank you! -- David Joy, a colleague and friend of Postcolonial Networks (PN) is currently writing a book for our PN Palgrave series Postcolonialism and Religions on M.M. Thomas and his connection to early postcolonial–liberation theology. David Joy plans to submit his manuscript in the coming year. David's work will no doubt make an important contribution to this conversation and future ones. With that said there is plenty of work to be done that celebrates work that has been done outside of North America and Europe. Indeed in my Sage Encyclopedia of World Religions (2013) definition of postcolonial theology I dated the beginning of postcolonial theologies with M. M. Thomas and the anti-colonialist movements not as often it is dated with theologians working in North America.

June 22 at 1:18pm · [Unlike](#) · 9



**Stephanie Lowery** So any advice on where to start reading about M.M.Thomas?

June 22 at 3:17pm · [Like](#)



**Joseph Duggan** see my later post of suggested reading and also plenty of works available on Amazon

June 22 at 9:26pm · [Like](#)



**Claudio Carvalhaes** Friends, it is fascinating to talk about the origins of LTs throughout the world. Each LT started in an specific location. In the case of Latin America, as I wrote it elsewhere, there is also an unknown origin of LT that could also be traced in the work of the once Presbyterian theologian Rubem Alves who had to flee the dictatorship in Brazil and studied at Princeton under Richard Shall. He titled his PhD thesis " liberation theology" even before Gutierrez. His editor, however, had no clue what LT was about and since Moltman's theology of hope was at its pick, the editor called his book: "A Theology of Human Hope." So, we have here two different places/churches/theologians beginning to explain theologically what was already happening in the midst of the people. Having worked with Cone, he didn't like to name individuals as the founders of liberation theologians and I think that for us to get into the origins of LTs (Latin America, US, Africa, Asia and so on) one needs to see the ways in which the poor, the historical subject, was already living, suffering and resisting the dominant forces at that time. LT theologies were born in the midst of the marginalized and from there its "founders" (Gutierrez, Alvez, Cone, M.M. Thomas, Vine Deloria Jr. ), shaped their theologies. We shouldn't think about the origins of LT in authors only but within the poor. ETWOAT was formed because of these multiplicity of theologies happening from the margins, giving birth to other movements such as Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians.

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**Joseph Duggan** Thank you Claudio for calling us all out of the ivy leafed halls of who is first to publish what into praxis. Any theologian's value is our proximity to the poor who are the first to suffer and inspire liberation. Preach my friend so that together we will decolonize the academy, publishing and every communications tool.

June 22 at 9:45pm · [Unlike](#) · 4



**Elias Ortega** and don't forget Freire's work before Gutierrez...

June 22 at 9:54pm · [Unlike](#) · 5



**Burke Gerstenschlager** I'm very interested in discussing projects with scholars who are writing at the intersection of liberation theology and critical pedagogy.

June 22 at 10:00pm · [Unlike](#) · 4



**Elias Ortega** Something I meant to comment is a little known fact that in 1973, a symposium in Geneva took place between Freire, Cone, Assmann, and Bodipo-Malumba and others. Various presentations were published under the titled, "Teologia de Negra de la Liberación." (Black Theology of Liberation).

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**Elias Ortega** From my location, I like to say that the real pioneer's of liberation theologies are women and children...

June 22 at 10:31pm · [Unlike](#) · 6



**Kate Rigby** Thanks for pointing this out, Anthony!

June 23 at 2:56am · [Like](#)



**Michael Moey** My country is having a bad haze at the moment. It's pleasant to discover in the land of LTs that I have been walking with giants who tower high above me. Thanks Claudio for clarifying my haze. I like your comment about thinking of LT origins not in terms of authors only but within the

poor. My discomfort about claiming LT pioneership is that it is barking up the wrong tree. Gutierrez is certainly not the first to shape LT nor is it true to say that of Cone, though it could be said that the latter might be the first to shape Black LT 'officially'. I am mindful of Elias, Karyn, John and Claudio's comments about the different contexts for the shaping of LTs. Also for me, it might be more productive to discuss Cone if one is keen to understand BLT in particular from the angle of Black history and context but it doesn't mean that Gutierrez has nothing to contribute to the discourse theologically. Moreover, it has been said that among others, Barth has been their common Protestant referent for their theological development, and so, we have Barth in the narrative of origins as well! My two cents' worth.

June 23 at 6:41am via mobile · [Like](#) · 1



**Anthony G. Reddie** To be clear, the main point I was making wasn't about who invented LT. I was simply correcting the misinformation that Cone was derivative of Gutierrez. It is true that neither invented it, but I suspect only Karyn has seen the point I'm making, which is the naked racism in the academy, particularly in theology, that assumes Black people cannot have original thoughts.

June 23 at 6:56am via mobile · [Unlike](#) · 5



**Michael Moey** Thank u Anthony for the clarification. Cone has been a significant light for my path.

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**Elias Ortega** @Anthony... True that! True that! I am reminded of the ingenuity of Afro-Peruvian women during the 18th century who used living-wills, certified by catholic churches, to pass on property to their children—so that it would not pass to the master's house.

June 23 at 8:22am · [Unlike](#) · 3



**Christopher Ndongolera Mwangupili** In Africa LT also began as early as 1970s. In my country, Malawi, late Bishop Patrick Kalilombe (who was my professor at The University of Malawi) had his version called grassroots theology and he had to be exiled during late President Hastings Kamuzu Banda for teaching communism.

June 25 at 5:03am · [Like](#) · 2



**Anthony G. Reddie** Bishop Patrick taught me in Birmingham when he relocated to the U.K. He was a brilliant, kind and gracious man.

June 25 at 5:09am via mobile · [Like](#) · 3



**Adam Clark** This is a fascinating thread. I've placed this question directly to Cone on several occasions and he's always reluctant to say. The murkiness for me was that Gutierrez's A Theology of Liberation came out in English in '71 but I believe it was either published or in article form in Spanish earlier. Cone's Black Theology and Black Power was published in 1969 and A Black Theology of Liberation in 1970. [Claudio Carvalhaes](#) is right that Ruben Alves use of the term liberation theology predates Gutierrez in the Latin American context. But Engleberg Mveng, the late Cameroonian theologian, locates the origins of Liberation theology in South Africa. He had a spirited argument in EATWOT with Latin Americans about the historical origins of Liberation theology. He felt similar to [Anthony G. Reddie](#) (and myself) that people always ignore black thinkers and practices when discussing liberation theology and its origins. As a practical matter, I've side stepped the question by claiming Cone as the first to introduce liberation theology (in its academic form) to the United States. The broader origins of liberation theology are a more complicated and nuanced matter.

June 25 at 8:15am · Edited · [Unlike](#) · 6



**Johnny Garlington** I'll rest my brotha because "all" roads concerning liberation theology leads to the Civil Rights era in documentation and literal action is already chronicled. Its principles and everything about is sealed within the legal and written documentation of our Supreme Court and our intellectual discourse. The Civil Rights Movement is our legacy for generations to come and we need to fully understand its principles and the guiding universalism and gem of wisdom that has been bestowed upon us from our ancestors' pain. We needn't strive for it or protect it as its "signed, sealed and delivered."

Once we have truly embraced the "truths" of our pain and legacy it has brought us will change the trajectory of everything we know as black Americans. The concepts and principles of the Civil Rights era and black liberation theological will go on for millennia.

June 26 at 8:09pm · [Like](#) · 1



**Lynne St Clair Darden** Neither Cone's nor Gutierrez's LT provides a means to challenge those members of an oppressed community who have individually escaped the claws

of an unjust and unequal society and are guilty of oppressing their own. LT generalizes, homogenizes...postcolonial theory, however, makes it possible to speak about the complexity of identity construction within community and thus can challenge the ethos of the "local elites" in any given community.  
June 26 at 9:08pm · Like · 2



**Marjaana Toiviainen** I find that it is risky business to put these Theologies of Liberation in one box in the first place. It is not about who did what first, but what has happened in which contexts, how have certain contextual power structures among theology or society in a larger scale been questioned, whose voice has been heard.

The richness we – as postcolonially oriented scholars, theologians, activists – can bring into the discussion is to see the great variety of theologies: Black Theology, as mentioned above, stressed certain elements because of its context. So has Latin American Liberation Theology done, as well as other forms of theology which make the poor or the marginalized the starting point of theology. However, there are also major differences and confrontations among for example EATWOT theologies. Indigenous theologians criticize how Liberation theology stresses Christology as a universal source of liberation. Some focus more on cultural theories, some more on economical issues.

What I think is also important to notice is that liberative approaches are NOT geographical! Not all Latin American theology is liberative, not all African theology stresses this or that, not all native American theology is postcolonial. Whereas there are a lot of postcolonial approaches among groups/scholars/people in Europe or North America. Liberation theology is and has been a historical phenomena tied to its geographical context, but that can also be marginalizing approach. There are colonial theologies both in East Africa and Eastern Finland, where I come from.

The relationship between liberation theologies and postcolonial approaches is an interesting topic altogether. I will deal with it quite a bit in my Doctoral Dissertation, and these discussions among PTN are such an inspiration, thanks to everyone!  
June 27 at 6:24am · Edited · Like



**Michael McLaughlin** Great point on geography as merely a kind of frame. Lets hear it for Finland and those great folks in Iceland who figured out that the bankers had crashed their economy and stopped them.  
June 28 at 9:59pm · Like



**Gene Anderson** Having studied under Cone, I heartily agree with you.  
June 29 at 5:03am · Like