Resonance of Bartolome de Las Casas' Thoughts in Leonardo Boff's Theology

Ramil R. Marcos

Classical theology took root in the West, and subsequent thinkers built on and enhanced the giants' thoughts before them. Since Vatican II, the need arose to pay attention to and acknowledge the faith reflections of other churches beyond Europe, where other Christians felt invited to enter into a critical reflection on their lived realities in the light of faith and in the context of the experiences of people in their own society and culture. As Hunt describes it: "the way opened for local churches to take their own respective situations as the starting point for theological reflection and evangelization." This would bring forth what she describes as "a new surge of theological creativity," characterized by "inescapable peculiarities in vastly differing contexts throughout the world."[1]

One such response to the theological widening brought by Vatican II is the Theology of Liberation that emerged from the Christian communities of Latin America and other third-world countries. This stream of theology seeks to address the crisis of faith from the poverty and marginalization experienced by the poor. Central to the reflections of liberation theologians are poverty, the appalling oppression, and the people's desire for liberation and human dignity.

1 Ann Hunt, *What Are They Saying About the Trinity?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 8.

In this article, the reflections on the doctrine of the Holy Trinity by Leonardo Boff, a respected protagonist in the circle of liberation theologians, are presented. He offers profound and interesting thoughts on the compelling power of Trinitarian doctrine that bears the potential to inspire both social and ecclesial life. The bases for this work are derived from several of Boff's essays, his major book on the Trinity, and some commentaries on or related to the points he raised. At the same time, resonances of the theology of Bartolome de las Casas—whose theology may rightly be called the Pioneer of Liberation Theology in the Middle Ages—to the issue of the Trinity will be highlighted as well. The aim of this work is rather modest: to highlight the focal points of Boff's theology of the Trinity, without attempting to provide an exhaustive presentation of it, and to discover traces of de las Casas' thoughts in the said theology.

Understanding Trinity Within a Context of Poverty and Oppression

From the point of view of Liberation Theology, the experience of the oppressed becomes a new *locus theologicus*. Thus, in seeking the relevance of the Trinitarian Mystery for today's world, Boff asks the question, "In what sense can the Trinity be called 'gospel,' good news to the people, especially to the poor and oppressed?"[2] In answering this question, Boff first situates the Trinity at the heart of the Christian teaching:

> Christianity's most transcendent assertion may well be this: In the beginning is not the solitude of One, but the communion of the Three eternal Persons:

2 Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, trans. Paul Burns (New York: Orbis Books, 1988), 156.

https://publications.lst.edu/

> Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In the remotest beginning, communion prevails. This communion constitutes both the essence of God and at the same time the concrete dynamism of every being of the whole creation. Nothing exists only in itself and for itself. Everything is situated in an interplay of relationships through which all beings live in a co-existence with one another, by one another, and in one another. The Trinity, which is the coexistence and co-life of the Father with the Son and the Holy Spirit, constitutes the root and prototype of this universal communion.[3]

Boff does not hesitate to say that, for the most part, the Trinity has meant for many Christians a mystery in logic. For him, the essence of Trinitarian faith and communion's reality has been forgotten in society and the Church. While the Church has inherited many Hellenistic concepts such as substance, relation, *perichoresis,* and procession, most Christians today barely understand or relate with them.

Boff argues that this is a difficult path to follow. New approaches that spring from a fresh encounter between the Scriptures and present-day culture are demanded. If the Trinity is central to Christianity, then it must graduate from being a mystery of logic to a true saving mystery. It must touch the lives of men and women in their ongoing struggles. The truth that God is the communion of three divine Persons should be contextualized in our everyday experience. Its meaning and relevance with it must be unfolded accordingly.

In the mind of Boff, certain factors have eclipsed this communion-dimension of the Trinity. On the one hand, classical theology, in general, seems to have ignored the social

3 Leonardo Boff, "Trinity," in Ignacio Ellacuria and Jon Sobrino (eds.), *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 389.

implications of the Trinity. Meanwhile, in the day-to-day political, religious, and church life, a so-called 'trinitarian amnesia' appears to prevail. In the arena of politics, for example, emerged a historical concentration of power manifested in authoritarianism that prevails in the conduct of both family and government. Within the family, the stress of patriarchy brought inequality into the home, including the oppression of women and children. In the civil government, power tended to be exercised autocratically by a single monarch, tribal chief, or head of state.

Religions, too, practice this centralization of power. For instance, an overly strong emphasis on the unicity of God may be linked to a rigidly pyramidal and clericalist notion and exercise of authority. Following this line of thought, it is easy to determine how much Moltmann influenced Boff's theology. Both of them resonate with what Erikson expressed in his monograph, *Monotheism as a Political Problem* (1931). Here, Erikson claims that monotheistic religions lay the foundation for the idea of one political head.

Boff perceives that once the communion model of the Trinity is ignored, totalitarian structures' legitimization begins. In Latin America, these structures have resulted in the oppression and exploitation of the poor, which has been a menace to many lives. Thus, for Latin America and other similar contexts, it would not be appropriate to develop a theology of the Trinity that is similar to classical Western theology. In classical Western theology, the starting point is the idea of a single divine substance. This is a characteristic of the Latin system. A more appropriate starting point would be to consider the doctrine's relevance to the poor's lives. Only then can it truly be a source of inspiration and good news.

The Trinitarian Communion as Summons to Transformation

The central focus of Boff's teaching is his way of elaborating on a distinctly social model of the Trinity. Understanding the Trinity, particularly communion, is very much in accord with the Theology of Liberation, with the Trinity as the prototype of human solidarity and universal brotherhood. As such, the sense of social belonging and equality that liberation theology advocates find a solid grounding in God's very nature and mystery.

What does it mean to believe that the Trinitarian God is a communion of three divine Persons? Boff begins by observing that only persons can enter into communion. To be in communion means to be ever together, constantly loving and life-giving, mutually receiving and giving. "Life is the essence of God. And life is communion given and received. This kind of communion is love. Communion and love are the essence of God the Trinity."[4]

Of the classical theological concepts, Boff prefers the term *perichoresis* to signify the truth of the Trinity. For him this *perichoresis*-communion model "seems to be the most adequate way of expressing the revelation of the Trinity as communicated by the Scriptures."[5] *Perichoresis* precludes the subordination or elevation of any person in the Trinity. Each Divine Person exists in a relationship of equality, mutuality, and reciprocity. Sovereignty is not seen in terms of power but openness, communion, coexistence, and fellowship.

4 Boff, "Trinity," 399.
5 Leonardo Boff, "Trinitarian Community and Social Liberation," *Cross Currents* 38 (Fall 1988), 300.

In this model, the Trinity does not offer an abstract doctrine but concrete and radical social program. With its mystery of inclusion and participation, the Trinity becomes a paradigm for the human community and social structures. If Augustine sought the V*estigia Trinitatis* in man, Boff seeks in the human community the same image of God as Trinity in communion. In this inclination, Boff joins other theologians who pursue a communitarian approach to the Trinity, including the Jesuit, Joseph Bracken.[6]

Boff raises a challenge. His presentation of the Trinity produces a critical attitude to personhood, community, society, and the Church. According to him, each person is invited to mirror the Trinity in his own life. This can be done when each person engages in communion with others by performing their own tasks in unity with them. Then, the pernicious pyramid of concentration of power begins to give way to more egalitarian participation in society.

The human community and society must also try to embody the inspiration coming from the Trinitarian dynamism in their own relationships. In this vein, Boff criticizes the capitalist system as having produced "the greatest division in history between the rich and the poor, between the races and between the sexes."[7] Capitalism focuses only on the individual and on individual development. In third world countries, this has resulted in the worst of miseries on the poor.

Meanwhile, in his assessment of socialist societies, Boff praises them for starting from "right principles"[8] with their emphasis on universal participation. At the same time, he is

6 John O'Donnell, *The Mystery of the Triune God* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1988), 106.
7 Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 149.
8 Ibid, 150.

https://publications.lst.edu/

alarmed about the little regard they have for personal differences. Members of the society are treated as constituting a mass instead of a people. Thus, both capitalism and socialism fail to live the reality of the Trinitarian model.

His reflection also includes a critique of the Catholic Church. For Boff, the Church's hierarchical-monarchical structures are opposed to the principle of collegiality and produce inequality and a powerful clerical-class. The Church is likewise prone to attitudes of paternalism and authoritarianism. If seriously considered, the Trinity can help local and regional churches improve their internal organization to become a community of the faithful truly. In this way, the Church will be able to practice and promote a living experience of communion.

The weight of liberation theology's reflections on the mystery of the Trinity leans heavily on the essential communion of the Divine Persons and the social implications of this reality. This is understandably the case since Boff, among others, has the explicit aim of making the Trinity speak to the aspirations of the poor who cry to God for justice and upliftment. Thus, we recall here the oft-quoted maxim, "The Trinity is our social program."[9]

Perichoresis: Individuals in Communion

In his writings, Boff also offers a treatment of the individual Persons of the Trinity. He treats each one in the context of

9 In the course of my research, I have seen this statement attributed to several persons. One book claims that it is Moltmann who originated it (O'Donnell). Another directly quotes Boff himself (Hunt). While it is interesting to note that in the section "Trinity" written by Boff in the book of Ellacuria and Sobrino, Boff credits the Russian Orthodox Reformers for having coined the sentence.

the *perichoretic*-dialectic and their relation to the situation of the poor. In the revelation of the Divine Persons, it is Jesus' role which is central, because "it is in Jesus that we find the revelation of the trinitarian mystery."[10]

God the Father is unfathomable mystery. He is the origin of creation. He is never solitary, never apart from the Son, who has revealed him and who lives with him eternally. It is through the Son that we know the Father (Lk 6:35/ Lk 3: 21-22; 5:16; 6:12; 11: 1-5/ Mk 14: 32-42). As Boff elaborates: "The *perichoretic* setting of the divine fatherhood strongly challenges any notion of patriarchal father and any social or political structure based on authoritarianism, paternalism and patriarchism – those very structures which have oppressed the poor throughout their lives."[11]

God is the Father of liberation, who listens to the cry of the poor and the downtrodden and desires the freedom of the oppressed. His only Son came to impart to the poor the message of his invitation to fellowship with their heavenly Father. The Father sent the Son, allowing him to identify Himself with the dejected in human society.[12]

In Jesus, the mystery of divine self-communication and integral liberation can be discovered. He is the very image of the Father and the mediator of His plan. Through Jesus, divine sonship is offered to all men and women. In the Incarnation, we see the most radical action of the Son – that he brought all people into the heart of God, their Father. Jesus reveals his Sonship (Mt 11:25-27/ Mk 12:1-19; 13:32), but in doing so, he did not use so much the testimony of words. Rather, he proved to be the Son "in his life, his liberative practice,

10 Boff, "Trinity," 393.
11 Hunt, *What Are They Saying about the Trinity?,* 17.
12 Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 177.

https://publications.lst.edu/

his struggles with those who held power, his tenderness with the abandoned, his passion, death and resurrection."[13] In other words, the attitude of Jesus revealed him as the Son of the Father.

The Holy Spirit is the Giver of life, the acknowledged driving force of integral liberation. Jesus revealed the Holy Spirit in his ministry (Mk 3:20-30/ Mt. 12: 28). According to Boff, his third Person of the Trinity is "the spirit of creativity and the spirit of innovation in a group but never in an individualistic sense of for self-advancement, always for the strengthening of the community."[14] Divine *perichoresis* is best seen in the work of the Holy Spirit, who brings every being into unity. To the Holy Spirit is attributed the work of bringing about unity *and* diversity, and unity *in* diversity.

It is exciting to note that in each of the Three Divine Persons, Boff discerns a feminine side or dimension. Thus, he says, that the Father is also Mother. Jesus, in the full maturity of his humanity, is also full of the feminine traits of tenderness, care, and mercy. The Holy Spirit also exhibits feminine characteristics in the functions of consoling, teaching, reminding, and not leaving men and women as orphans. Boff avers that God is beyond sex, and he does not confer sexual characteristics on God. In finding the feminine traits of God, he "simply discerns the ultimate source of the masculine and feminine values God himself has endowed men and women."[15]

13 Boff, "Trinity," 402.
14 Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 195.
15 Ibid., 198.

An Assessment of Leonardo Boff's Views on the Trinity

Kant made a strong criticism about the seemingly useless content of Trinitarian theology: "From the doctrine of the Trinity taken literally, nothing whatsoever can be gained for practical purposes, even if one believed that one comprehended it and still less if one is conscious that it surpasses all our concepts."[16] To Boff's credit, it can be said that this censure has met an adequate response.

Boff outlines how the mystery of the Trinity can actually function "as inspiration, as critic and as fully and actively present in the struggles of the oppressed for liberation."[17] In this way, the Trinity can have meaning both for society and for the individual Christian. For society, the Trinity can become a pattern of a responsible human community. For the individual, the Trinity offers a fresh challenge for discipleship.

In reading his book, *Trinity and Society*, Boff is careful and respectful in his approach to the topic. He is aware that human concepts are insufficient to exhaust the mystery. He is likewise conscious that the proper posture towards the mystery is adoration and praise.

> Amen is humankind's response to the revelation of the Triune God: So be it! How good that it should be so! Come, most holy Trinity, come! It is pronounced in an atmosphere of worship and reverence…[18]

Boff realizes that the ultimate goal of faith and theology is doxology and not action. Nevertheless, he knows that faith and work are corollaries. Thus, he opens an invitation to the

16 O'Donnell, *The Mystery of the Triune God*, 128.
17 Hunt, *What Are They Saying About the Trinity?*, 20.
18 Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 232.

Christian about the correspondence of one's faith and life. Boff identifies the Trinitarian inner life of *perichoresis* as a call to be emulated in society. In treating God's actions in the economy of salvation, he points to the interventions of God on behalf of the poor and seeks a Christian response following the example set by God.

Boff does not aim to critique the classical notions of the Trinity, but rather at criticism of the social institutions and church life in Latin America during his time. With this background, he does not actively construct a new theology of the Trinity, but instead, re-emphasizes the social implications of faith in God who is One in Three Persons.

For Boff, the Trinity can guide the creation of a responsible society where true human solidarity prevails. His theology of the Trinity offers hope to the poor and assures them that God desires them to be free. He calls the attention of those in powerful structures to mirror God's image in the world through the practice of participation, justice, equality, and inclusion. The ultimate call of Boff is to consider the Trinity as a serious step towards discipleship. For a true Christian, faith in the Trinity is a call to listen to the cry of the poor.[19]

The theology of Leonardo Boff on the mystery of the Trinity provides a carefully planned study of the relationship between God and human society. The inner life of God revealed through the ministry and preaching of Jesus becomes a prototype for us to be taken seriously as a model of communitarian life and Christian action in the world. The intention of Boff is not to study the Trinity in terms of lofty

19 See also "Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit," *The Word Among Us* 18/5 (May 1999), 4-23. This issue of the periodical explains how true following of Christ involves taking an active part in the plight of the poor.

theological concepts but rather to demonstrate the meaning of the Trinity today, particularly for those experiencing suffering and neglect in society.

For Boff, the Trinity is a challenge, a call to human solidarity and Christian action on behalf of the poor. If only for this, Boff succeeded in giving convincing arguments that indeed, the Trinity is our social program.

Resonances of Bartolome de las Casas' Theology on Liberation Trinitarian Theology

Bartolome de las Casas was a Dominican missionary in New Spain who lived in the 16th century and became bishop of the then newly-created Diocese of Chiapas in Mexico. A revered figure and icon for modern-day liberation theologians, he engaged the social and religious climate of his day while championing the cause of the poor and the oppressed.

On the one hand, it is true that de las Casas did not produce any treatise on the Trinity or embark purposely on creating a systematic theology as Boff has attempted. Nonetheless, some of his writings reveal, even if inchoately, several theological themes that may have a bearing, semblance, and resonance with the Trinitarian theology of Boff, which has the context of liberation as its springboard.

We will now attempt to trace the theology underpinning de las Casas' writings and explore its convergences with the Trinitarian theology of Boff. This section will only treat a limited selection of some of his thoughts and connect them with present-day Trinitarian theology in its liberation aspect.

1. The Non-Person as the Starting Point of Theological Insight

Liberation theology starts from the premise of the need to address the concerns of *non-persons* in society. These are the poor of the Third World, the underside of history who do not count at all, who do not matter to those invested with power.[20] Although there are so many of them in the world, the poor remain powerless under the mercy of the potentates of politics, religion, and economics.

De Las Casas grounded his preaching and ministry in the experience of the *non-persons* of his time - the Indians of the New World. The latter were forced to undergo harrowing poverty and oppression in the hands of their European conquerors. Like the *non-persons* of today – the poor of society – they had to struggle to survive and were exploited to satisfy their greedy exploiters' desires.

The Indians were considered as inferior human beings, casting doubt on their human nature and causing others to wonder whether they were animals, wretches or irrational beasts.[21] For de las Casas, however, who was then an *encomendero* himself, the initial stirring of his own conscience concerning the humanity of came as an influence of the Dominican missionaries he met in the New World, whom he found convincing in their words and witness. At first, the Dominicans observed the affairs in the new colonies. Still, later on, they voiced their protest against the neglect of the

20 Elizabeth Johnson, *Quest for the Living God* (New York: Continuun, 2008), 72.

21 Gustavo Gutierrez, "The Indian: Person and Poor," in Geroge Sandellin, ed., *Witness:Writings of Bartolome de las Casas* (New York: Orbis Books, 1971), xi-xiii.

spiritual and material welfare of the conquered Indians. As these friars of Saint Dominic asserted:

> Are these Indians not human? Are we not bound to keep the rules of charity, the rules of justice towards them? Are they not on their own lands with their own lords, their own authority? Have they harmed us in some way? As to the law of Christ, are we not bound to preach it and work every way we can to win them over to it?[22]

Becoming a Dominican himself, later on, de las Casas spent his energy in asserting the identity of the Indians as human persons endowed with inalienable dignity and inherent worth. While he is known mainly for his defense of the Indian natives, he also protested the inhumane treatment of African slaves who were brought to the New World after having been captured violently from their homelands. In championing the causes of the oppressed, he showed his profound respect for all peoples and his deep regard for every human person. It is this conviction that the Indians, and all human beings, regardless of race, are noble and dignified, which fuelled his lifelong crusade for the freedom and equal treatment of human beings, especially those who are demoted to the status of *non-person*. As he wrote in the prologue of his book, *The Only Way*:

> …they are all human beings. Their minds are very quick, alive, capable, clear. This mind comes to them primarily from the will of God who wished to make them so. Then secondarily, it comes from the fostering influence of the heavens, from the kind conditions of the places God gave them to live in, the fair and clement weather.[23]

22 Francis Patrick Sullivan, S.J., *Indian Freedom: The Cause of Bartolome de las Casas* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1995), 139.

23 *Bartolome de las Casas: The Only Way*, ed. Helen Rand Parish, trans. Francis, Patrick Sullivan SJ (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 63.

https://publications.lst.edu/

Thus, both Liberation Theology and de las Casas start from persons and focus on persons. Just as Liberation Theology focuses on the persons of the Trinity and not on the divine unity, de las Casas saw the importance of focusing particularly on the non-persons--the Indians--who must be regarded rightly as human beings created in the image and likeness of God, and be treated accordingly as persons.

2. Equality and Justice Among Persons in Community

De las Casas' theology is concretely and practically applied. Like Boff, he did not dwell in intellectual gymnastics or wordplay. Still, he sought ways to teach God, the human person, and the call of discipleship to be concretely felt in society in view of transformation. Thus, he endeavored to highlight the relationship between faith and practice, Indian and Spaniard, God, and creation. On its part, Liberation Theology attempts to underline the connection between God and the universe and the relationship of human beings to one another in bonds of deep solidarity and responsibility.

Boff's Trinitarian theology is anchored on the classical interpretation of the intra-divine relationships called *perichoresis* or mutual indwelling of the three divine Persons, expressed in a language of common love, dignity, and essential equality. For him, this characteristic of divine life is the model for the human community.

Meanwhile, de las Casas was a prophet of a just and egalitarian society. In his defense of the oppressed Indians, he sought to bring about a harmonious relationship between the two races, Indian and Spanish: a kind of human *perichoresis*. He did this by formulating a proposal for a society where

both could live in peace and mutual co-existence, where the Indians could instead flourish in peace and see progress. Thus, he offered his alternative model of a settlement called the *reduccion system* in place of the *encomienda system*, which was harmful and ruthless.

As Sullivan writes, "de las Casas' efforts, after his awakening, were at first to adjust the life of the Indian and the life of the Spaniards to each other by creating community schemes which would allow fruitful cooperation."[24] For this, the fundamental premise he insisted on was freedom for the Indians, which is essential for harmonious co-existence. Unless the Indians were free from Spanish injustice, they could not be expected to live in peace alongside the Europeans. Sadly, this societal experiment did not materialize due to a fiasco arising from the greed of the Spaniards for the wealth of the Indian natives and their abundant natural resources.

De Las Casas believed that if true justice prevailed and the Indians were treated as equal subjects of Spain, then the major players, both indigenous and Western, would be mutually benefitted and enabled to flourish in cooperation. As such, he was not merely an ideological thinker but one who truly thought of ways to bring about real changes in the society of his time, which he conceived as a community of persons called to co-exist in peace and harmony.

Another proof of de las Casas' struggle for justice and equality among human beings is his earnest desire for reconciliation, which he sought to actualize in concrete gestures. For instance, he was responsible for the return of Enriquillo, a legendary Indian warrior, to a peaceful relationship with the

24 Sullivan, *Indian Freedom: The Cause of Bartolome de las Casas*, 157

https://publications.lst.edu/

Spaniards. Although reared as a Christian from childhood, this chief rebelled after a Spanish *encomiendero* raped his wife. This blatant disrespect for his rights and other abuses of the conquerors provoked the valiant spirit of this fighter who was regarded as having legendary combat skills. Unarmed and with only one lay brother to accompany him, de las Casas facilitated the truce and reconciliation between Enriquillo and the Spaniards. In his own words:

> …I was the one who went to Bauroco – with God's grace and with a Dominican brother the Order assigned to me – and brought Don Enrique to peace, and back into the service to Our Lord, the Emperor, and I strengthened him in his resolve. I stayed a month with him, confessed him, his wife, his officers. And I dispelled all of the well-founded fears he had. He did not want to leave the mountains, but I persuaded him to come out with me to the town of Azua where he met and made happy friends of the villagers. I got him to agree to go and reassure the other villages of Spaniards, to bring back under obedience to his Majesty several other rebel leaders and their men, but most of all, got him to settle his own people some seven leagues from Azua, and provide that whole area with bread and other foods.[25]

Though de las Casas did not specifically discuss Trinitarian doctrine, his faith in the Triune God is implicitly revealed in his convictions and manifested in his actions. He believed in authentic human relationships, which are reflections of the divine relationships in heaven--the *perichoresis* of the Trinity in heaven reflected on earth in the human *perichoresis* of justice and in the just and equitable treatment of persons. When this is achieved, the spirit of true communion and solidarity forms the basis of a strong community.

25 Ibid., 198.

This response is a result of the recognition of personhood. Once you recognize another human being as truly a person, you must be willing to reach out in a relationship, and in dialogue, you will act with justice and respect. This was de las Casas' dream and lifelong project: to build a Christian community inspired by the Trinitarian gospel of liberation and freedom. This gospel is sensitive to the cries of the poor.

3. The Salvation of the Indians

Finally, let us venture into one of the theological achievements of de las Casas vis-à-vis the theological climate of his time. This theme pertains to the salvation of the Indians. Based on the *Patronato Real*, Spain's avowed aim in discovering and occupying new lands was primarily the salvation of souls - a missionary expansion on behalf of the Catholic Church - and only secondarily, the expansion of the Spanish realm and its civilizing effects on these newfound lands. At the time of de las Casas, this kind of missionary venture was deemed necessary because of the belief that "outside the Church there is no salvation," a maxim derived from Cyprian, albeit an expression that has been sometimes misunderstood. For instance, a hard-line interpretation of this idea proceeds from the assumption that the Gospel had been proclaimed to the whole world. This was enough to justify leading the unbelievers to accept the Gospel to be saved, even if this meant the use of coercion and force.[26]

Various theologies of salvation prevailed in this period of las Casas that would serve as the background of the concern for the salvation of the "pagan" tribes. Some theologians

26 Gustavo Gutierrez, *Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ*, Robert Barr, trans. (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 242.

https://publications.lst.edu/

taught that to be saved, one must have expressed explicit faith in the truths of Christianity. Some were inclined to believe that implicit faith was needed by those who lived before the coming of the Gospel.[27] At the same time, there were also the likes of Trithemius, who went as far as to declare that "there will be no Indians in heaven." They will be damned, although with a lesser punishment than the Jews and Muslims who rejected the Gospel.[28]

On his part, de las Casas believed in a God who is merciful and loving. He believed in the Holy Trinity whose one goal and mission is the universal salvation of all creation: the Father who reached out to the world in love and was revealed through the effusion of grace by the Son and the Holy Spirit in the economy of salvation. To be a Christian is to be aware of this basic truth that God revealed himself for our salvation. Fighting for the Indians' freedom in the New World, de las Casas had a deep passion for the salvation of these peoples as a priest and an ardent missionary to the new lands.

Against the current of theology that called for explicit faith in the divine mysteries, de las Casas believed that God had mysterious plans for the salvation of all nations, saying that: "However, to them, as to all others, never has that great means of the supreme and divine assistance been denied that has always been granted to all human beings for their succor."[29] This salvation is an offer by God that must be accepted in full freedom. And de las Casas long championed the freedom of the oppressed so that they can more fully and generously respond to the gift of faith and justification.

27 Ibid.
28 Ibid, 243.
29 Ibid, 254.

For him, the Gospel could not be imposed by force but must be offered with respect to the dignity of those who are to be evangelized. This was to be the gist of his book: *The Only Way*. While we are unable to treat the intricate subtleties behind de las Casas' theology of salvation at a length, it is clear that in his thoughts on the salvation of the Indians, he respected their conscience and freedom and rejected the use of power and force in evangelizing efforts.

Conclusion

As a true theologian of Liberation, Leonardo Boff expounded his Trinitarian theology with his people's experience of poverty and oppression as context and starting point, instead of merely repeating abstract concepts culled from classical Western theology. In this manner, he would give particular emphasis in his Trinitarian theology on communion-perichoresis, which is very relevant in providing a critical appraisal of both capitalism and socialism, which were both rampant during his time. Based on this, he would provide an important critique of the society and of the Church, and their tendency to deal with people in terms of power and hierarchy instead of cooperation and complementarity.

Like Liberation Theology, de las Casas took as a point of departure the daily sufferings of people and reflected on how the light of the Gospel illuminates the situation of those who are maltreated, violated, and treated in scandalous ways. Thus, it is no surprise that some essential aspects of his thought find resonance in Boff's Trinitarian theology. His advocacy for a harmonious and mutually-beneficial coexistence between human beings, regardless of any distinctions or differences, remains especially relevant even today, attesting to the real potency of the Trinity as a social program.