

## Swami Vivekananda and Liberation Theology

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There are an amazing number of similarities between the humanitarian social ideas presented by Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) and those taught by the contemporary liberation theologians. Vivekananda certainly should be considered to be a precursor of this noble, compassionate, and highly influential movement. From an international standpoint, it is possible that Vivekananda was the founder of liberation theology.

Liberation theology is a movement arising out of Latin America and other third world countries, focusing on liberating people from poverty and oppression. This radically new approach to theology begins with the poor classes of the third world, and recognizes God and the Church's presence in their struggle to throw off subjugation. A theological revolution was initiated in 1968 by the bishops of the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America, gathering in the city of Medellin Columbia. The bishops surprised the world by criticizing the church's alliance with the wealthy ruling powers in Latin America. Three years later, a textbook appeared *A Theology of Liberation*, written by Gustavo Gutiérrez (b. 1928) a Peruvian priest. Born in a relatively poor family and of Native American heritage, Gutiérrez is considered to be the "founder of liberation theology." He worked for many years in Rimac, a slum area of Lima, Peru where he lived in a small apartment. Since that time liberation theology has received the support of many prominent theologians in Latin American countries (Mexico, Central America and South America) and in the United States. Beside Gutiérrez of Peru, other leading spokesmen of the liberation theology movement include: Jose Miguez Bonino of Argentina, Hugo Assmann and Leonardo and Clodovis Boff of Brazil, Spanish-born Jon Sobrino of El Salvador, Argentine-born Enrique Dussell and Jose Miranda of Mexico, and Juan Luis Segundo of Uruguay.<sup>1</sup>

What follows are twenty-two fundamental similarities in five categories, between the ideas of Swami Vivekananda and the liberation theologians, though of course he would not accept all of their beliefs. Gutiérrez's writings are often quoted.

### a. Assisting the Poor

1) Helping the poor- Gustavo Gutiérrez: "The bishops at Medellin [Colombia] asserted, 'To us, the Pastors of the Church, belongs the duty ... to denounced everything which opposing justice, destroys peace.' They are moved to make this denunciation by the 'the duty of solidarity with the poor, to which charity leads us.

This solidarity means that we make ours their problems and their struggles, that we know how to speak with them. This has to be concretized in criticism of injustice and oppression, in the struggle against the intolerable situation which a poor person has to tolerate.”<sup>2</sup>

Swami Vivekananda: “I consider that the great national sin is the neglect of the masses, and that is one of the causes of our downfall. No amount of politics would be of any avail until the masses in India are once more well educated, well fed, and well cared for. They pay for our education, they build our temples, but in return they get kicks. They are practically our slaves. If we want to regenerate India, we must work for them” (1897; CW, V:222-23; cf., VII:246).

“Can you raise them? Can you give them back their lost individuality without making them lose their innate spiritual nature? Can you become an occidental of occidentals in your spirit of equality, freedom, work, and energy, and at the same time a Hindu to the very backbone in religious culture and instincts? This is to be done and we will do it. You are all born to do it. Have faith in yourselves, great convictions are the mothers of great deeds. Onward for ever! Sympathy for the poor, the downtrodden, even unto death—this is our motto” (1894; CW, V:29-30).

2) Preference for the poor - Liberation Theology: “All theology and mission arises out of the preferential option for the poor. In the present revolutionary situation characterized by class struggle and conflict, the church must cast its lot with the oppressed, because in history God himself is on the side of the poor. Gutiérrez explained: ‘the poor deserve preference not because they are morally or religiously better than others; but because God is God, in whose eyes ‘the last are first.’ ... Miguez Bonino was no less clear: ‘Poverty ... is a scandalous fact which must be eliminated. God himself is engaged in the struggle against it; he is clearly and unequivocally on the side of the poor.’”<sup>3</sup>

Swami Vivekananda: “Let New India arise in your place. Let her arise—out of the peasant’s cottage, grasping the plough; out of the huts of the fisherman, the cobbler, and the sweeper. Let her spring from the grocer’s shop, from beside the oven of the fritter-seller. Let her emanate from the factory, from marts, and from markets. Let her emerge from groves and forests, from hills and mountains. These common people have suffered oppression for thousands of years—suffered it without murmur, and as a result have got wonderful fortitude. They have suffered eternal misery, which has given them unflinching vitality.... they have got the wonderful strength that comes of a pure and moral life, which is not to be found anywhere else in the world. Such peacefulness, such contentment, such love, such power of silent and incessant work, and such manifestation of lion’s strength in times of action—where else will you find these!” (1899; CW, VII:327)

3) Poverty is dehumanizing- Liberation Theology: “The task of Latin American theology, in contrast, is not conditioned by the nonbeliever’s questions, but by the question of the ‘nonperson’: ‘the human being who is not considered human by the present social order-the exploited classes, marginalized ethnic groups, and despised cultures.’ ‘Our question,’ Gutiérrez explained, ‘is how to tell the nonperson, the nonhuman, that God is love, and that this love makes us all brothers and sisters.’”<sup>4</sup>

Swami Vivekananda: “It is we who are responsible for all our misery and all our degradation, and we alone are responsible. Our aristocratic ancestors went on treading the common masses of our country underfoot, till they become helpless, till under this torment the poor, poor people nearly forgot that they were human beings. They have been compelled to be merely hewers of wood and drawers of water for centuries, so much so, that they are made to believe that they are born as slaves, born as hewers of wood and drawers of water. With all our boasted education of modern times, if anybody says a kind word for them, I often find our men shrink at once from the duty of lifting them up, these poor downtrodden people. Not only so, but I also find that all sorts of most demoniacal and brutal arguments, culled from the crude ideas of hereditary transmission and other such gibberish from the Western world, are brought forward in order to brutalize and tyrannize over the poor all the more” (1897; CW, III:192; cf., V:7).

4) Allowing abject poverty to exist is a sin- Gustavo Gutiérrez: “The root of social injustice is sin, which ruptures our friendship with God and our brotherhood with other human beings.... For sinfulness occurs in the negation of human beings as brothers and sisters, in oppressive structures created for the benefit of only a few, and in the plundering of nations, races, cultures, and social classes.”<sup>5</sup>

Swami Vivekananda: “If you grind down the people, you will suffer. We in India are suffering the vengeance of God. Look upon these things. They ground down those poor people for their own wealth, they heard not the voice of distress, they ate from gold and silver when the people cried for bread” (1893; CW, VII:279).

“That some people, through natural aptitude, should be able to accumulate more wealth than others, is natural: but that on account of this power to acquire wealth they should tyrannize and ride roughshod over those who cannot acquire so much wealth, is not a part of the law, and the fight has been against that. The enjoyment of advantage over another is privilege, and throughout ages, the aim of morality has been its destruction. This is the work which tends towards sameness, towards unity, without destroying variety” (1896; CW, I:435)

5) The poor can help themselves- Gustavo Gutiérrez: “In the last instance we will have an authentic theology of liberation only when the oppressed themselves can freely raise their voice and express themselves directly and creatively in society and in the heart of the People of God, when they themselves ‘account for the hope,’ which they bear, when they are the protagonists of their own liberation. For now we must limit ourselves to efforts which ought to deepen and support that process, which has barely begun.”<sup>6</sup>

Swami Vivekananda: “Kings having gone, the power is the people’s. We have, therefore, to wait till the people are educated, till they understand their needs and are ready and able to solve their problems. The tyranny of the minority is the worst tyranny in the world. Therefore, instead of frittering away our energies on ideal reforms, which will never become practical, we had better go to the root of the evil and make a legislative body, that is to say, educate our people, so that they may be able to solve their own problems. Until that is done all these ideal reforms will remain ideals only. The new order of things is the salvation of the people by the people, and it takes time to make it workable, especially in India, which has always in the past been governed by kings” (1897; CW, V:215-16; cf., III:216; VI:493; VII:149-50).

#### b. Praxis: Putting the Ideas into Practice

6) Emphasis on practicality- Liberation Theology: “Rather than developing a series of abstract and deductive propositions about the relation of man to God, theologians engage in their profession as a ‘second act,’ following after the experience of involvement with the poor at a given moment in history. Theology grows out of the combination of theory and practice that the liberation theologians call praxis rather than through some formal, systematic, organized study.”<sup>7</sup>

Swami Vivekananda: “That society is the greatest, where the highest truths become practical. That is my opinion; and if society is not fit for the highest truths, make it so; and the sooner, the better. Stand up, men and women, in this spirit, dare to believe in the Truth, dare to practice the Truth” (1896; CW, II:85). “We have the doctrine of Vedanta, but we have not the power to reduce it into practice. In our books there is the doctrine of universal equality, but in work we make great distinctions. It was in India that unselfish and disinterested work of the most exalted type was preached ... Then only will India awake, when hundreds of large-hearted men and women, giving up all desires of enjoying the luxuries of life, will long and exert themselves to their utmost for the well-being of the millions of their countrymen” (1897; CW, V:126; cf., IV:367).

7) Going to the poor- Gustavo Gutiérrez: “Love of neighbor is an essential component of Christian life. But as long as I apply that term only to the people who

cross my path and come asking me for help, my world will remain pretty much the same. Individual almsgiving and social reformism is a type of love that never leaves its own front porch (“If you love those who love you, what merit is there in that?”) On the other hand my world will change greatly if I go out to meet other people on their path and consider them as my neighbor, as the good Samaritan did—if I go out to meet other people on the street corners and byways, in factories and mines, in decaying inner cities and slums.”<sup>8</sup>

Swami Vivekananda: “Don’t you see why I am starting orphanages, famine-relief works, etc.? Don’t you see how Sister Nivedita, a British lady, has learnt to serve Indians so well, by doing even menial work for them? And can’t you, being Indians, similarly serve your own fellow-countrymen? Go, all of you, wherever there is an outbreak of plague or famine, or wherever the people are in distress, and mitigate their sufferings. At the most you may die in the attempt—what of that? How many like you are being born and dying like worms every day? What difference does that make to the world at large? Die you must, but have a great ideal to die for, and it is better to die with a great ideal in life. Preach this ideal from door to door, and you will yourselves be benefited by it at the same time that you are doing good to your country.” (Date Unknown; CW, V:382; cf., IV:362; V:381; VI:288, 404; VII:245-47; VIII:307-08)

8) The importance of educating the people- Liberation Theology: “In ringing phrases the bishops called for Christians to be involved in the transformation of society.... they called for a ‘sweeping, bold, urgent, and profoundly renovating changes’; they described education as a process that could enable people ‘to become the agents of their own advancement.’”<sup>9</sup>

Swami Vivekananda: “From the day when education and culture began to spread gradually from patricians to plebeians, grew the distinction between the modern civilization as of Western countries, and the ancient civilization as of India, Egypt, Rome, etc. I see it before my eyes, a nation is advanced in proportion as education and intelligence spread among the masses. The chief cause of India’s ruin has been the monopolizing of the whole education and intelligence of the land, by dint of pride and royal authority, among a handful of men. If we are to rise again, we shall have to do it in the same way, i.e., by spreading education among the masses” (1897; CW, IV:482; cf., III:290, 297-98; V:213; VII:149-50; VIII:307).

“Education, education, and education alone! Traveling through many cities of Europe and observing in them the comforts and education of even the poor people, there was brought to my mind the state of our own poor people, and I used to shed tears. What made the difference? Education was the answer I got. Through education comes faith in one’s own Self, and through faith in one’s own

Self the inherent Brahman is waking up in them, while the Brahman in us is gradually becoming dormant” (1897; CW, IV:483; cf., V:231; VI:489, 491).

### c. Why Should the Church Help the Poor?

9) Our moral duty- Liberation Theology: “The spirituality or understanding of the Christian life that emerges in liberation theology is one that links love with the demands of justice, in particular social justice.... An integral Christian spirituality will involve a love of neighbor that displays itself in the public and social sphere, and its general form will consist in the effort to replace unjust and oppressive social structures with liberating ones.”<sup>10</sup>

Swami Vivekananda: “Yet we must do good; the desire to do good is the highest motive power we have, if we know all the time that it is a privilege to help others. Do not stand on a high pedestal and take five cents in your hand and say, ‘Here, my poor man,’ but be grateful that the poor man is there, so that by making a gift to him you are able to help yourself. It is not the receiver that is blessed, but it is the giver. Be thankful that you are allowed to exercise your power of benevolence and mercy in the world, and thus become pure and perfect. All good acts tend to make us pure and perfect” (1896; CW, I:76; cf., V:14-16, 51, 58).

10) Follow the example of a Divine Incarnation- Liberation Theology: “Another major theme in liberation Christology is the following of Christ. The imitation of Christ is of course a classical Christian theme. But in liberation Christology it is given a new central focus. Following Christ is following and imitating Jesus in his service of the Kingdom of God, and this constitutes the essence of being a Christian.”<sup>11</sup>

Swami Vivekananda: “[Buddha] yet was ready to lay down his life for anyone, and worked all his life for the good of all, and thought only of the good of all. Well has it been said by his biographer, in describing his birth, that he was born for the good of the many, as a blessing to the many. He did not go to the forest to meditate for his own salvation; he felt that the world was burning, and that he must find a way out. ‘Why is there so much misery in the world?’—was the one question that dominated his whole life. Do you think we are so moral as the Buddha?” (1896; CW, II:352; cf., I:117; V:14, 16-17)

11) Scriptural foundations- Gustavo Gutiérrez: “In the Bible poverty is a scandalous condition inimical to human dignity and therefore contrary to the will of God.... Indeed, ‘the God whom we know in the Bible is a liberating God, a God who destroys myths and alienations, a God who intervenes in history in order to break down the structures of injustice and who raises up prophets in order to point

out the way of justice and mercy. He is a God who liberates slaves (Exodus), who causes empires to fall and raises up the oppressed.”<sup>12</sup>

Swami Vivekananda: “When the government of a country is guided by codes of laws enjoined by Shastras which are the outcome of knowledge inspired by the divine genius of great sages, such a government must lead to the unbroken welfare of the rich and the poor, the wise and the ignorant, the king and the subjects alike” (1899; CW, IV:441-42).

12) The Church helps people- Liberation Theology: “The Church should be publicly critical of social injustice and positively engaged in ameliorating human life in society according to its nature and capacity and specific means.... [quoting Juan Luis Segundo] ‘The primary preoccupation of the Church is not directed toward its own inner life but toward people outside. Unlike other organizations founded for the benefit of its own members, the Church is a community sent to those who live, act, and work outside its own narrow limits.’”<sup>13</sup>

Swami Vivekananda: “There we [the Ramakrishna Mission] shall start an Annasatra—a Feeding Home. There arrangements will be made for serving really indigent people in the spirit of God. The Feeding Home will be named after Sri Ramakrishna. Its scope will at first be determined by the amount of funds. For the matter of that, we may start it with two or three inmates. We must train energetic Brahmacharins [monks] to conduct this Home.... Didn’t you understand me? First of all, comes the gift of food; next is the gift of learning, and the highest of all is the gift of knowledge. We must harmonize these three ideals in the Math. By continuously practicing the gift of food, the Brahmacharins will have the idea of practical work for the sake of others and that of serving all beings in the spirit of the Lord firmly impressed on their minds. This will gradually purify their minds and lead to the manifestation of Sattvika (pure and unselfish) ideas.” (1898; CW, VII:159-60).

13) Oneness of humanity- Liberation Theology: “This extremely vital value in liberation theology points to a deeper ontological truth that should be characterized as a theological supposition, namely, the unity of the human race. Despite enormous cultural differences between peoples, both across the span of recorded history and the spectrum of differentiated situation and ethos today, there is some transcendental unity to the human family. Human beings journey through this life in this world together. This solidarity is being brought home to us in striking ways in the twentieth century; our ontological oneness is assuming ever more concrete and historical forms.... What makes us united with God? The response of liberation theology to this question is that we are ultimately united to God through our being united with the neighbor; we love God through loving the neighbor.”<sup>14</sup>

Swami Vivekananda: “The Vedanta claims that there has not been one religious inspiration, one manifestation of the divine man, however great, but it has been the expression of that infinite oneness in human nature; and all that we call ethics and morality and doing good to others is also but the manifestation of this oneness. There are moments when every man feels that he is one with the universe, and he rushes forth to express it, whether he knows it or not. This expression of oneness is what we call love and sympathy, and it is the basis of all our ethics and morality. This is summed up in the Vedanta philosophy by the celebrated aphorism, *Tat Tvam Asi*, ‘Thou art That’. To every man, this is taught: Thou art one with this Universal Being, and, as such, every soul that exists is your soul; and every body that exists is your body; and in hurting anyone, you hurt yourself, in loving anyone, you love yourself. As soon as a current of hatred is thrown outside, whomsoever else it hurts, it also hurts yourself; and if love comes out from you, it is bound to come back to you” (1896; CW, I:389-90; cf., I:384-85; III:129-30, 364-65, 425; V:136).

14) Work as worship- Gustavo Gutiérrez: “For many Christians a commitment to liberation does come down to being an authentic spiritual experience in the original and biblical sense of the term. It means living in and by the Spirit ... Only through concrete acts of love and solidarity can we effectively realize our encounter with the poor and the exploited and, through them, with Jesus Christ.”<sup>15</sup>

Swami Vivekananda: “The more intently you think of the well-being of others, the more oblivious of self you become. In this way, as gradually your heart gets purified by work, you will come to feel the truth that your own Self is pervading all beings and all things. Thus it is that doing good to others constitutes a way, a means of revealing one’s own Self or Atman. Know this also to be one of the spiritual practices, a discipline for God-realization. Its aim also is Self-realization. Exactly as that aim is attained by Jnana (knowledge), Bhakti (devotion) and so on, also by work for the sake of others” (1898; CW, VII:112; cf., I:84-85).

#### d. Cultural and Historical Factors

15) Secularization- Liberation Theology: “There is another aspect of secularization and the experience of it that is characteristic of theology, and this is the broad and general perception of the importance of this world, the importance of human history, of life in it and of the human institutions that govern it. It is the experience of ‘being at home’ in the world.... The experience referred to here is not contrary to religious experience; it simply says that while we are in this world this is where we belong. This is our world, the only world we have at this time, and it is important, even supremely important.”<sup>16</sup>

Swami Vivekananda: “Materialism has come to the rescue of India in a certain sense by throwing open the doors of life to everyone, by destroying the exclusive privileges of caste, by opening up to discussion the inestimable treasures which were hidden away in the hands of a very few who have even lost the use of them” (CW, III:157).

“What we want is not so much spirituality as a little of the bringing down of the Advaita into the material world. First bread and then religion. We stuff them too much with religion, when the poor fellows have been starving. No dogmas will satisfy the cravings of hunger” (1897; CW, III:432 cf. IV:368; VI:511-12; VII:160).

16) Contextual theology- Liberation Theology: “A theme implicit in all liberation theology is that theology must be contextual. This is, however more a presupposition than an explicitly stated thesis. It means that theology must be intrinsically linked with a specific social and cultural situation. In fact building on the ‘sociology of knowledge,’ liberation theologians would argue that all theologies are linked with and shaped by a specific social and cultural milieu.”<sup>17</sup>

Swami Vivekananda: “Just as there is an individuality in every man, so there is a national individuality. As one man differs from another in certain particulars, in certain characteristics of his own, so one race differs from another in certain peculiar characteristics; and just as it is the mission of every man to fulfill a certain purpose in the economy of nature, just as there is a particular line set out for him by his own past Karma, so it is with nations—each nation has a destiny to fulfill, each nation has a message to deliver, each nation has a mission to accomplish. Therefore, from the very start, we must have to understand the mission of our own race, the destiny it has to fulfill, the place it has to occupy in the march of nations, and note which it has to contribute to the harmony of races” (1897; CW, III:369; cf., III:108, 148).

17) Understanding history- Gustavo Gutiérrez: “This approach makes it urgent that we acquire a better understanding of our history. A people that know the past that lies behind its sufferings and hopes is in a better position to face and reflect on the present.”<sup>18</sup>

Swami Vivekananda: “So long as they forgot the past, the Hindu nation remained in a state of stupor; and as soon as they have begun to look into their past, there is on every side a fresh manifestation of life. It is out of this past that the future has to be molded; this past will become the future. The more, therefore, the Hindus study the past, the more glorious will be their future, and whoever tries to bring the past to the door of everyone, is a great benefactor to his nation (1895; CW, IV:324; cf., V:365-66).

18) Historical trends: rise of the lower classes- Gustavo Gutiérrez: “The lower classes of the populace, forced to live on the margins of society and oppressed since time memorial, are beginning to speak for themselves more and more rather than relying on intermediaries. They have discovered themselves once again, and they now want the existing system to take note of their disturbing presence. They are less and less willing to be the passive objects of demagogic manipulation and social or charitable welfare in varied disguises. They want to be the active subjects of their own history and to forge a radically different society.”<sup>19</sup>

Swami Vivekananda: “Engrossed in the struggle for existence, they had not the opportunity for the awakening of knowledge. They have worked so long uniformly like machines guided by human intelligence, and the clever educated section have taken the substantial part of the fruits of their labour. In every country this has been the case. But times have changed. The lower classes are gradually awakening to this fact and making a united front against this, determined to exact their legitimate dues. The masses of Europe and America have been the first to awaken and have already begun the fight. Signs of this awakening have shown themselves in India, too, as is evident from the number of strikes among the lower classes nowadays. The upper classes will no longer be able to repress the lower, try they ever so much. The well-being of the higher classes now lies in helping the lower to get their legitimate rights” (1898; CW, VII:148-49).

19) Class struggle- Gustavo Gutiérrez: “Poor and oppressed people are members of a social class which is overtly or covertly exploited by another social class. The proletariat is simply the most belligerent and clear-cut segment of this exploited social class. To opt for the poor is to opt for one social class over against another; to take cognizance of the fact of class confrontation and side with the oppressed; to enter into the milieu of the exploited social class and its associated cultural categories and values; to unite in fellowship with its interests, concerns, and struggles.”<sup>20</sup>

Swami Vivekananda: “Whether the leadership of society be in the hands of those who monopolize learning or wield the power of riches or arms, the source of its power is always the subject masses. By so much as the class in power severs itself from this source, by so much is it sure to become weak. But such is the strange irony of fate, such is the queer working of Maya, that they from whom this power is directly or indirectly drawn, by fair means or foul—by deceit, stratagem, force, or by voluntary gift—they soon cease to be taken into account by the leading class. When in course of time, the priestly power totally estranged itself from the subject masses, the real dynamo of its power, it was overthrown by the then kingly power taking its stand on the strength of the subject people; again, the kingly power, judging itself to be perfectly independent, created a gaping chasm

between itself and the subject people, only to be itself destroyed or become a mere puppet in the hands of the Vaishyas [Business class], who now succeeded in securing a relatively greater co-operation of the mass of the people. The Vaishyas have now gained their end; so they no longer deign to count on help from the subject people and are trying their best to dissociate themselves from them; consequently, here is being sown the seed of the destruction of this power as well. Though themselves the reservoir of all powers, the subject masses, creating an eternal distance between one another, have been deprived of all their legitimate rights; and they will remain so as long as this sort of relation continues” (1899; CW, IV:470-71; cf., VI:380-82; VII:172-73).

#### e. Additional Concerns

20) Women’s Rights- Liberation Theology: “In the meeting sponsored by the Mexican-based Women for Dialogue, participants concluded that traditional church structures have reinforced women’s oppression by imposing moral norms that sacralize the domination of men over women. ‘The church is a patriarchal structure allied with the powerful,’ they declared. ‘Women do not participate on the decision-making level in the church. Furthermore, hierarchal, masculine church structures serve as a model for the oppressive male-female relationships found throughout Latin American society where men dictate, in terms binding on faith and conscience, what women should believe and practice.’<sup>21</sup>

Swami Vivekananda: “It is very difficult to understand why in this country so much difference is made between men and women, whereas the Vedanta declares that one and the same conscious Self is present in all beings.... All nations have attained greatness by paying proper respect to women. That country and that nation which do not respect women have never become great, nor will ever be in future. The principal reason why your race has so much degenerated is that you have no respect for these living images of Shakti. Manu says, ‘Where women are respected, there the gods delight; and where they are not, there all works and efforts come to naught.’ There is no hope of rise for that family or country where there is no estimation of women, where they live in sadness. For this reason, they have to be raised first; and an ideal math has to be started for them” (1901; CW, VII:214-15; cf., VI:489-90).

21) Faith- Liberation Theology: “Sacraments above all are meant to nurture and sustain faith. But faith in liberation theology is not mere belief. Faith is a commitment of one’s life which plays itself out in praxis, so that informed action of praxis is the deepest carrier of faith itself.”<sup>22</sup>

Swami Vivekananda: “Faith, faith, faith in ourselves, faith, faith in God—this is the secret of greatness.... Have faith in yourselves, and stand up on that faith

and be strong; that is what we need.... There I saw that inside the national hearts of both Europe and America reside the tremendous power of the men's faith in themselves. An English boy will tell you, 'I am an Englishman, and I can do anything.' The American boy will tell you the same thing, and so will any European boy. Can our boys say the same thing here? No, nor even the boys' fathers. We have lost faith in ourselves. Therefore to preach the Advaita aspect of the Vedanta is necessary to rouse up the hearts of men, to show them the glory of their souls. It is, therefore, that I preach this Advaita; and I do so not as a sectarian, but upon universal and widely acceptable grounds" (1897; CW, III:190-91; cf., III:224, 243-44; V:223-24).

22) Freedom- Liberation Theology: "The term 'autonomy' is used positively and not in an anti-religious sense here; it refers to the experience that we human beings are responsible for history. Society and culture are constructed by human beings and not totally preconstituted by a created pattern of nature. And hence the pattern and structure of social life can be changed by human planning and initiative."<sup>23</sup>

Swami Vivekananda: "This attempt to throw the blame upon others only weakens them the more. Therefore, blame none for your own faults, stand upon your own feet, and take the whole responsibility upon yourselves. Say, 'This misery that I am suffering is of my own doing, and that very thing proves that it will have to be undone by me alone.' That which I created, I can demolish; that which is created by some one else I shall never be able to destroy. Therefore, stand up, be bold, be strong. Take the whole responsibility on your own shoulders, and know that you are the creator of your own destiny. All the strength and succor you want is within yourselves. Therefore, make your own future" (1896; CW, II:225).

Swami Vivekananda also offered other ideas along these line such as: Helping the poor benefits the country (1899; CW, VII:372), the class system has its virtues (1897; CW, III:245-46; cf., III:199; IV:469-70; V:214-15); and India should overcome its isolationism (1894; CW, IV:365).

### Tributes to Swami Vivekananda's Humanism

The Ramakrishna Mission that Vivekananda established has continued to aid the people of India up to this day. Vincent Sheean (1899-1975) a leading foreign war correspondent, journalist, biographer and novelist wrote the Ramakrishna Mission "teaches and heals; its hospitals, schools, shelters and free kitchens are models; in every famine or flood, in every riot or war or other disaster to which the conditions of life in India may lead, the monks of Ramakrishna are there, like the Franciscans of the thirteenth century Italy, to serve."<sup>24</sup>

Federico Mayor formerly a professor of biochemistry at the University of Granada in Spain 1963-73, became the director-general of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) 1987-99.<sup>25</sup> Dr. Mayor held a meeting on October 8, 1993, before a large congregation of diplomats and dignitaries of the world in the UNESCO building. He mentioned three remarkable similarities between the message of Vivekananda and the goals of the Ramakrishna Mission, and the objectives of UNESCO, "First, his commitment towards universalism and tolerance.... Second, his concern for the poor and destitute. The mission that he established in India and which has now spread all over the world, is working to reduce poverty and eliminate discrimination among the different segments of society. He said, "The uplift of the women, the awakening of the masses must come first and only then can any real good come about." Third, his preoccupation for human development with education, science and culture as instruments for such development....<sup>26</sup> I am indeed struck by the similarity of the constitution of the Ramakrishna Mission which Vivekananda established as early as 1897 with that of UNESCO drawn up in 1945. Both place the human being at the centre of their efforts aimed at development. Both place tolerance at the top of the agenda for building peace and democracy. Both recognize the variety of human cultures and societies as an essential aspect of the common heritage."<sup>27</sup>

Accompanying the decline of Communism, there has been a considerable interest in Vivekananda's teachings in Russia. For example, A. D. Litman (1923-92) the founder of the Soviet School of Research in Modern Indian Thought and Ideas, and a senior research associate of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences discerned, "Characterizing Swami Vivekananda's ideas of enlightenment, it must be specially stressed here that their decisive features are a steadfast faith in people, in their constructive powers, and the ardent love for the working masses, sympathy for their wants and sufferings, and a fervent urge to free them from colonial and social oppression.... His social-political and specially enlightening ideas objectively helped in the awakening of the wide masses of India, and prepared them for the subsequent growth of national-liberation movement, which, as a result of heroic efforts of the Indian people, culminated in the historic victory, in the creation of the independent Republic of India. This is just why we, along with the friendly Indian people, greatly respect the name of her glorious son, the ardent patriot, humanist-thinker and enlightener, Swami Vivekananda."<sup>28</sup>

Professor E. P. Chelishev (b. 1921) a leading Indologist of Russia, worked as a researcher and director of the Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow, and as head of the department of Indian literature. In 1987, Chelishev expressed his admiration for Vivekananda's humanism, "I think that Vivekananda's greatest service is the development in his teaching of the lofty ideals of humanism which

incorporate the finest features of Indian culture.... In my studies of contemporary Indian literature, I have more than once had the opportunity to see what great influence the humanistic ideals of Vivekananda have exercised on the works of many writers.... Vivekananda's humanism, we recognize that it possesses many features of active humanism manifested above all in a fervent desire to elevate man, to instill in him a sense of his own dignity, sense of responsibility for his own destiny and the destiny of all people, to make him strive for the ideals of good, truth and justice, to foster in man abhorrence for any suffering.... Together with the Indian people, Soviet people who already know some of the works of Vivekananda published in the USSR, highly revere the memory of the great Indian patriot, humanist and democrat, impassioned fighter for a better future for his people and all mankind."<sup>29</sup>

### Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> "Liberation Theologians," in Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson, *20<sup>th</sup> Century Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), pp. 210-14. Gutiérrez is presently a member of the Theology Department at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana.

<sup>2</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1988), p. 68.

<sup>3</sup> Grenz and Olson (1992), p. 218.

<sup>4</sup> Grenz and Olson (1992), p. 215.

<sup>5</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Liberation Praxis and Christian Faith," in *Frontiers of Theology in Latin America*, ed. Rosino Gibellini, tr. John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), pp. 20-21.

<sup>6</sup> Gutiérrez (1988), p. 174.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Sigmund, *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> Gutiérrez (1979), p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> Phillip Berryman, *Liberation Theology* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), p. 23.

<sup>10</sup> Roger Haight, *An Alternative Vision: An Interpretation of Liberation Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), p. 22.

<sup>11</sup> Haight (1985), p. 108.

<sup>12</sup> Gutiérrez (1988), pp. 69, 165.

<sup>13</sup> Haight (1985), pp. 165, 332.

<sup>14</sup> Haight (1985), pp. 21, 23.

<sup>15</sup> Gutiérrez (1979), pp. 15-16.

<sup>16</sup> Haight (1985), pp. 17-18.

<sup>17</sup> Grenz and Olson (1992), p. 214.

<sup>18</sup> Gutiérrez (1988), p. xxxv.

<sup>19</sup> Gutiérrez (1979), p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Gutiérrez (1979), pp. 8-9.

<sup>21</sup> Alfred Hennelly, S.J., *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), p. 386.

<sup>22</sup> Haight (1985), p. 189.

<sup>23</sup> Haight (1985), p. 17.

<sup>24</sup> *What Vedanta Means to Me*, ed. John Yale (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961), p. 8.

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<sup>25</sup> Wikipedia. Web: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federico\\_Mayor\\_Zaragoza](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federico_Mayor_Zaragoza)

<sup>26</sup> Swami Tathagatananda, *Journey of the Upanishads to the West* (New York: Vedanta Society of New York, 2002), pp. 228-29.

<sup>27</sup> Swami Prabhananda, "Swami Vivekananda, the Educationist Par Excellence," *Vedanta Kesari* (2006), pp. 260-65, 301-05, 339-42.

<sup>28</sup> *Swami Vivekananda Studies in the Soviet Union*, tr. Harish C. Gupta (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Institute of Culture, 1987), pp. 155, 157-58; "Russian Indology." Web: [www.russian-centre-mumbai.org/russianindology/personalities.htm](http://www.russian-centre-mumbai.org/russianindology/personalities.htm)

<sup>29</sup> Gupta (1987), pp. 206-09, 220.