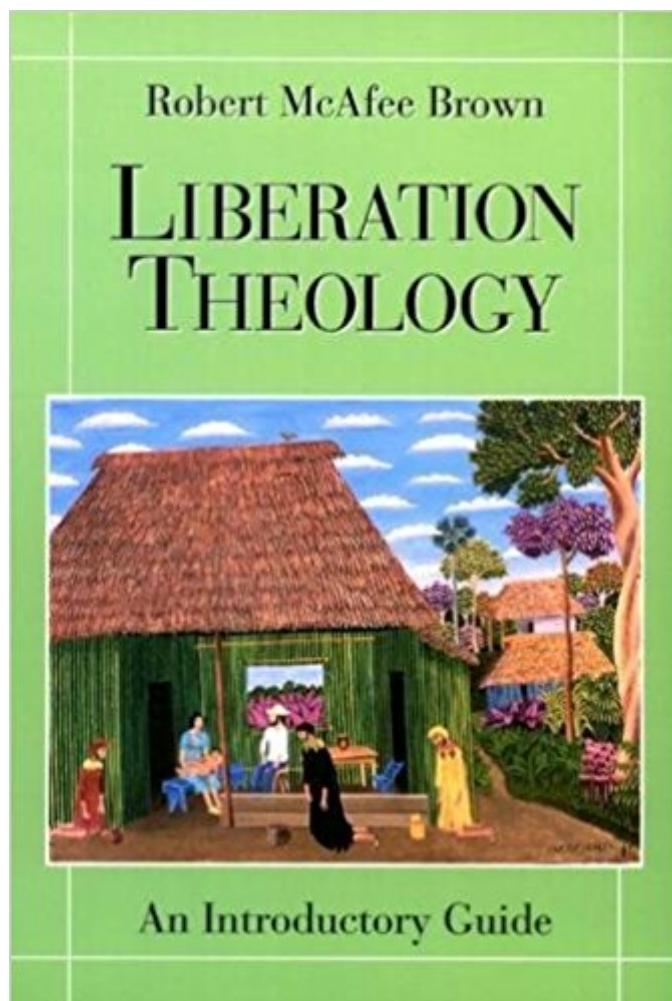


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# Liberation Theology: An Introductory Guide



## **Synopsis**

In a manner that is vivid and lively, Robert McAfee Brown explains and illuminates liberation theology for North American readers who may have no previous knowledge of this dynamic Christian movement. Growing out of the experience of oppressed people in Latin America, liberation theology lends a transforming power to both the study of the Bible and the Christian duty to work for justice for all God's people. With heartwarming, terrifying, and humorous stories, Brown shows the strength and significance of one of the outstanding developments in religious faith today and for the future.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Brown introduces liberation theology as lived reality, revealing experiences he had in Central America that brought him new understanding of people and Christian community. His trip altered his perspective on commitment and hope, as well as on Columbus and other conquerors, and showed him a deeper encounter with God through justice-making. Brown (Pacific School of Religion) criticizes U.S. policy regarding Central America and encourages Christian witness and risk-taking on behalf of justice. This book makes liberation theology "come alive" by introducing it emotionally and spiritually, rather than as a merely intellectual concept. Recommended for public and seminary libraries. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Robert McAfee Brown was a well-known theologian, writer, teacher, and social activist. He authored

many books, including *The Bible Speaks to You*; *Liberation Theology: An Introductory Guide*; *Reclaiming the Bible*; *Religion and Violence*; *Theology in a New Key*; and, a novel, *Dark the Night*, *Wild the Sea*, all published by Westminster John Knox Press.

What first attracted me to this book was one simple thing---fear. I had recently read an article where the Vatican had essentially warned its priests, bishops, parishioners, or other religious leaders to "stay away" or face excommunication. Then I read where other mainstream religious organizations had done basically warned its' members to stay away as well. I was hooked! I had to find out what could so inspire so much fear from some of the most powerful religious institutions in the world. Liberation Theology is really not that complex to understand. It understands the message of Jesus, indeed the Bible itself, as one whereby we are to take care and empower the poor; the weak; the widows and orphans. The message was about them, not the establishment, be it the governments or religious heirarchy. In fact, most of the commandments of in the Bible, including the Talmud, is about how we should treat those who are at the bottom of the social ladder. In short, Liberation Theology represented a direct threat to the political and religious status quo. It racialized religion in a way the established Church had thought is stamped out long ago. I could see now why it was so feared. This book, as it's title states, is an introductory guide. As such, it doesn't go into a great deal of depth, nor is it an academic study. It's approach is basically from the standpoint that the reader has little or no knowledge of the subject matter. From there, it takes the reader through the history of Liberation Theology, from it's founding among the dirt poor communities of Latin America in the mid 20th Century to the present, and offers a glimpse of its possible future. The book was well written, easy to understand, and full of personal examples based on the author's experiences. I strongly recommend this book to anyone interested in learning about how we can make positive changes in our society today.

Robert McAfee Brown's Liberation Theology is a helpful introduction to the subject, one that I think will be of most interest to American readers who immediately oppose LT without knowing a thing about it other than it is somehow connected to Marxist analysis and for that reason suspect. Brown was a theologian, activist, and long time advocate and friend of Liberation Theology and its Latin American advocates. The book is quite readable. Brown writes with considerable wit. Read his "Unexpected News" and "Saying Yes and Saying No" for a reading of scripture that stands in support of LT and for a take on the Christian's relationship to the powers that be.

If you're interested in starting down the road of understanding Liberation Theology, this is a great springboard. You will definitely understand the history, mission, and movement of Liberation Theology, but you will also receive enough information to point you in the direction of furthering your knowledge, if that is what you desire.

Although I have not been able to read it thoroughly, I will be able to use it for my paper. There is so much information available in this publication.

Nice review of the concepts of Liberation Theology

This book uses great examples as evidence of liberation theology. The author chooses his words carefully and makes strong connections. After I finished this book I felt like I really understood what the theology is, why it's necessary to practice, and how to talk about it. Many books don't leave me feeling as educated as this book does. However, having a degree in theology and studying it on my own, I do not agree that liberation theology should exist. This book allowed me to really think through my stance, but I feel that the concept of liberation theology assumes too much about God's will and doesn't acknowledge the difference between human will and God's will.

The author, Robert McAfee Brown, states that his goal for this book is to bear witness to the extraordinary faith of Latin American Catholics who participate in the Liberation movement (20). He has been, no doubt, successful in his objective. This text is intriguing more for its intent (a "call to action" for first-world readers) rather than for its main content (an introductory description of Liberation Theology-primarily in Latin America). The reader of this book will find many entreaties to action on behalf of the oppressed peoples of the world, many of whom reside in our "backyard"-the poor urban areas of North American cities (94). Brown does a commendable job of keeping the topic interesting through the consistent intermingling of real-life anecdotes with theological and historical descriptions. Perhaps the most impressive characteristic of this book is the fact that it reads more like a story than a theological text. In most non-fiction books, there are some areas that stand out more than others. This book is no exception. The introduction, for example, carries several stories of actual people who have suffered horrible atrocities in some areas of Central America. These real-life stories help the reader to understand the type of political, economic, and social oppression that a majority of Latin American people must deal with daily. Accordingly, it becomes more realistic for the reader to understand what a powerful "liberator" the Liberation

movement has become for the lay Catholic in many parts of Latin America. The base church communities that have evolved to support the critical needs of the oppressed are much more than a reflection of a "professional" theological movement as we might, at first, guess. On the contrary, the roles are reversed. It is these base communities, providing for the needs of people, through which Liberation Theology-the subject-has evolved. So then, Liberation Theology as an academic field, is a mere reflection of how oppressed Christians respond-epistemologically and ecclesiologically-to the institutionalized oppression with which they must deal. Brown notes that "It is not enough to read books about poverty; commitment means encountering poor people" (56). Liberation Theology, therefore, can only be truly understood and practiced through and with the lives of oppressed peoples. Again, the real value of this book comes in Brown's consistent appeals to his readers for action in support of oppressed people groups. In fact, he even lists steps that we might take to truly "practice" Liberation Theology even while in the midst of our comfortable, first-world environment (116-120). If the reader is interested, the author's Endnotes and Section on Discussion Questions are both helpful and useful for further research.

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