



IMAGINING JUSTICE IN BALTIMORE

Part 3: Water Justice in Christian Tradition(s)

Liberation theologian Pablo Richard does a great job connecting Revelation's judgment texts with the contemporary concerns of the poor. If we think about Revelation as a text written to people on the margins—the actual poor in the world—we can get a little bit more into the heart and the original experience of the text.

Liberation Theology is a movement, developed mainly by Latin American Roman Catholics, that emphasizes liberation from social, political, and economic oppression as an anticipation of ultimate salvation.



It is impossible to identify in history all the plagues and punishments found in Revelation. All efforts to decipher these texts historically in order to discover in them historical events at that time or in the future end in bizarre conclusions and textual manipulation. What is most important is to interpret these two sections (the trumpets and the bowls) in the spirit of the Exodus, as a liberating intervention of God in history against the oppressors and on the side of the oppressed. These are not natural disasters (earthquakes, volcanic explosions, floods, droughts, cyclones, hurricanes, plagues), since such disasters fall not on the empire and its partisans but basically on the poor. Cosmic agonies of this kind, however, are not “natural” disasters but rather direct consequences of the structure of domination and oppression: the poor die in floods because they are pushed out of safe places and forced to live alongside rivers; in earthquakes and hurricanes, the poor lose their flimsy houses because they are poor and cannot build better ones; plagues, such as cholera and tuberculosis, fall primarily on the poor who are malnourished, uneducated, and lacking in sanitation infrastructure. Hence the plagues of the trumpets and the bowls in Revelation refer not to “natural” disasters, but to the agonies of history that the empire itself causes and suffers; they are agonies of the beast caused by its very idolatry and lawlessness. Today the plagues of Revelation are rather the disastrous results of ecological destruction, the arms race, irrational consumerism, the idolatrous logic of the market, and the irrational use of technology and of natural resources. (p. 85)



Richard, Pablo. *Apocalypse: A People's Commentary on the Book of Revelation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995.