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CY 4564: Culture and Emerging Generations

The Cost of Freedom: *Mockingjay* and a Theology of Liberation

Freedom, liberation, and justice: it is evident through the story of *Mockingjay* that the people of Panem thirst for all three. *Mockingjay*, first a book by author Suzanne Collins, and then a two-part series of films by director Francis Lawrence, chronicles the actions of the rebels of Panem as they fight to overthrow the oppression forced on them by the people of the Capitol, specifically President Snow.

The fight for justice is shouted by Katniss Everdeen in a “propo,” or propaganda video designed to encourage people to join the rebels’ cause. In the story, young Katniss becomes the face of the revolution; she becomes one who unites the districts of Panem in their battle against the fierce Snow and his Peacekeepers. Under the direction of District 13 leaders President Coin and Plutarch Heavensbee, the rebels take on their oppressors in order to bring freedom and liberation to all people in their country.¹

The people of Panem are not the only ones in history who have sought freedom and liberation from their oppressors. Catholic priest Gustavo Gutiérrez, whose work *A Theology of Liberation* paved the way for liberation theology, recognized that the marginalized in Latin America would also make their voices known. In *Liberation Praxis and Christian Faith*, Gutiérrez states that those who live on the margins of society “are beginning to speak for themselves more and more rather than relying on intermediaries.”² People on the margins want to use their voices to create a new society that is free of oppression and struggle. This liberation is

¹ *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay- Part 1*. Directed by Francis Lawrence. Lions Gate, 2014. Film.

² Placher, William C. "Gustavo Gutierrez: Liberation Praxis and Christian Faith." In *Readings in the History of Christian Theology, Vol. 2: From the Reformation to the Present*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988. 193.

rooted in the hope and peace that comes from the coming of God's kingdom. As Christians, part of our mission is to stand alongside the poor and oppressed and to "join them in the struggle to throw off oppression."³

Our world also thirsts for freedom, liberation, and justice today. In cities and on college campuses, students are protesting acts of oppression and injustice in their communities. Scandals tied to inequality and insensitivity has forced leaders out of top positions. Cries for "social justice" are heard in homes, on streets, and through social media. Not only are those living on the margins of society voicing their need for justice, but those who label themselves allies seek to bring voice to those who are in the midst of the struggle to throw off oppression. Many of our young people are engaging in these cries for liberation, too.

Gutiérrez invites us to encounter God through the struggles of the marginalized. Furthermore, he invites us to engage in God's work of liberation in the world. We are invited to help transform the unjust structures of our society, both at the personal and institutional levels. Our churches become involved in this liberating work. But the question then becomes: how far is *too* far in the fight for justice?

The second half of *Mockingjay* illustrates this point quite clearly. With united Districts that are thirsty for power and justice, President Coin sends soldiers to the Capitol to overthrow Snow and his government.⁴ Defense arsenals are attacked, buildings are bombed, and the rebellion marches on the Capitol in order to take control of the city. Innocent citizens are caught in the crossfire during the struggle for freedom from oppression. Even Katniss, the person they claim as the face of their cause, is manipulated and becomes another piece in the game played by the rebel army.

³ Grenz, Stanley J. and Ed L. Miller. "Liberating Praxis: Gutierrez." In *Fortress Introduction to Contemporary Theologies*, 142-158. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998. 155.

⁴ *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay- Part 2*. Directed by Francis Lawrence. Lions Gate, 2015. Film.

Furthermore, in the process of fighting for liberation and of making her voice heard, President Coin brings about her own form of oppression—in a way, she becomes like those whom her people are fighting against. She will go to any extent in order to get rid of the enemy, even if it includes hurting (and even killing) those who are in the way. At the end of *Mockingjay*, Coin instructs bombers to attack the center of the Capitol. These bombs not only kill citizens of the Capitol who are not involved directly in the fighting, but also kill the innocent who are on the side of the rebels. Even Primrose, Katniss' younger sister who arrives at the Capitol in order to serve as a medic and help the injured, is killed. Coin invites the rebels to fight for liberation, no matter the cost. With liberation and justice comes a new society in Panem, as well as a new hope. But that hope does not come easy to the people who are affected by the events of the rebellion.

So, the question for us becomes: what is the liberation and justice we are seeking in our world today? How do we, as Gutiérrez states, “opt for the poor and exploited classes,” identify with their struggles, and bring them the hope that comes from the resurrection of Jesus?⁵ When we listen to the voices of those on the margins, how do we respond to their calls for liberation? Do we take the fight as far as it can go, or do we seek justice in a different way?

In a world that seeks justice and equality for all, our answers to these questions can deeply inform the ways we engage in mission and outreach in our congregations and communities. Our answers can also inform how we invite young people to engage in the liberating work of social justice as we seek to transform the unjust structures of society that are in our midst.

⁵ Placher, 195.