**Example 1 2. (a) Explain the basis of, and reasons for, the development of South American liberation theology. [20]**

Liberation theology is a movement that sprang up amongst Roman Catholic priests in South America in the 1950s. Leonardo Boff, one of its main advocates, called it “faith confronting oppression”. It says that theology must focus on the suffering of poor and oppressed people. The word “liberation” is used because these thinkers believe that just giving money to the poor (aid) or helping the poor with economic development is not enough. Society needs an entirely new structure. Liberation theologians argued that the Bible provided the basis for the movement demonstrating God's concern for the poor and oppressed – and that God wants us to be concerned as well. Boff and others speak about Matthew 25:31-46 where Jesus judges people at the end of time based on how they treated the hungry, thirsty, prisoners, strangers – those on the edge of society. Other passages such as the story of the Exodus (Exodus 3:7,9) shows that God wants oppression to end. The Hebrew prophets (like Amos) speak about the injustice created by greed. The book of Acts (chapter 2) refers to the church as a place of shared meals and where everyone contributed to a common fund to help those in need. Perhaps the most important basis of Liberation Theology was the incarnation – where God became a poor human, lived among the poor and died the death of a common criminal. Boff mentions Philippians chapter 2 and Kenosis (God’s self -emptying) as a theme rich Christians need to take seriously. Another liberation theologian, who was also responsible for its development was Gustavo Gutierrez, said that all of this is evidence of God’s “preferential option for the poor”. This does not mean that God “prefers” or loves poor people more than other people, but that they are his first priority – as it says in I Corinthians, “the last will be first”. He, like many other priests, chose to move from religious houses and live with the poor. Boff's work was also one of the main reasons for the development of the movement. He argued that are different ways to see poverty. The first way is to see that it is the result of laziness or other forms of vice. Boff says that this is the view behind the giving of aid. 6 Another way to see poverty is that it comes from people being “backward” – underdevelopment. The solution then is to help people have technology, factories, and other signs of economic progress. The problem with this is that it ignores that the development of western countries has been a part of the low wages and poor factory conditions of 3rd world countries – a situation in Latin America in the post war period. Liberation theologians see that the right way to see most poverty is as a by-product of capitalism – of an inhuman way of building society that always leaves the rich richer and the poor poorer. One of the primary reasons for the development of Liberation Theology was that it strove to be a bottom-up movement in practice, with biblical interpretation and liturgical practice designed by lay practitioners themselves, rather than by the hierarchy of the orthodox Church. Boff and Gutiérrez said that theology needs to start with practical matters - “praxis” (right action - the struggle of the poor against the higher classes) and that theology needs more “orthopraxy” and less of an focus “orthodoxy” (right belief). This led to the view from the Vatican that Liberation theology has become confused with atheism and reduced the idea of “sin” to “class struggle”. As a result of the focus on 'praxis', Christian Base Communities were set up, consisting of illiterate peasants and proletarians, who were turned into self-reliant worshiping communities through the guidance of a priest or local lay member. This meant that discussions within the church were oriented towards the conditions of the poor, which ultimately turned into a 'class consciousness' and increased the popularity of Liberation Theology. Boff, Gutiérrez and others were criticised by some in the Roman Catholic Church because of their references to Marxist terms and theory. The Vatican claimed that Liberation theology had become confused with atheism and reduced the idea of “sin” to “class struggle”

**Example 2 2. (a) Explain the basis of, and reasons for, the development of South American liberation theology. [20]**

Liberation theology comes from third world countries after World War II. It is concerned about the suffering of poor and oppressed people. Many Roman Catholic priests felt that the church was not doing enough and that lives needed to change for the better - this is why it came into being. Leonardo Boff is one such theologian. He says that what people really need is not just handouts or to work in factories making things for rich people, but “liberation” – a real change in the way society works. He says that the basis for liberation theology can be found within the Bible – especially the example of Jesus who lived with the poor, died poor and encouraged his followers to help the poor by giving food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty (Matthew 25). There’s also the story of the Exodus where God leads his people away from slavery in Egypt. 7 One of the reasons for the development of the movement, was that some priests in South America left the rich places they were living and live and helped poor people. Some even became revolutionaries and used the ideas of Karl Marx – saying that the poor classes needed to fight against the richer classes. A priest named Gutiérrez said that God wants the poor to go first. Not all Catholics agree with Liberation theology – in fact some of the popes in the 70s and 80s were against it because Marxism is about atheism. But Liberation theologians have said that the church needs to focus less on “orthodoxy” and more on “orthopraxy” meaning that there needs to be more activity to help poor people and that rich people will only find the truth if they get active in helping poor people.

**Example 1 2. (b) ‘The response of the Roman Catholic Church to liberation theology was mainly positive.’ Evaluate this view. [30]**

There have been many different responses to liberation theology from Roman Catholics across the world – both positive and negative. The positive attitude taken by some stems from the fact that Liberation theology is, after all, a movement that originated from within the Roman Catholic church, involving priests, like Gustavo Gutiérrez, who have been trained and educated in Catholic schools. Their books on the subject are about Christian theology, showing how revelation and tradition relate to extreme poverty. Liberation theology has come out of their pastoral work, to address the suffering of poor people, who are mainly religious and Catholic. At the same time that Liberation Theology was growing, Vatican II, a major council of the church, insisted that the church is a “church of the poor” and that theology should address modern issues – such as poverty and oppression. In fact, Leonardo Boff, Gustavo Gutiérrez and others have said that liberation theology should be seen as bringing these themes of Vatican II to life. Official documents of the Roman Catholic church (such as “The Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation”) have used terms from liberation theologians such as “liberation” and “preferential option for the poor”. These documents make it clear that salvation is indeed more than a spiritual matter and involves the humane treatment of people such as fair wages and good working conditions. These documents agree with the idea of liberation theologians that God “prefers” the poor not in the sense of loving them more than others, but that they are a priority for God as revealed in the Bible: “the last shall be first”. Key councils and meetings of the Roman Catholic church have affirmed the many of the ideas of Liberation theology. For example, the Latin American Episcopal Council that met in Columbia in 1968; affirmed many ideas of Gustavo Gutiérrez, including the idea of base communities (church groups in remote areas fighting for justice). 8 However, after Vatican II and the spread of liberation theology in Latin America, the church grew concerned about liberation theology for a number of reasons. Cardinal Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) warned that liberation theology was not taking traditional theology seriously enough. For example, it could lead people to think that economic change alone could end sin or bring about the Kingdom of God. Sin is bigger than economics, he insisted. He was also concerned about using only political interpretations of the Bible and neglecting spiritual interpretations. An example of this is the Atonement: Jesus is viewed only as a moral example, a martyr for the cause of the oppressed. This leaves out many of the other themes of redemption on the cross that have been looked at by theologians such as Anselm, Luther, Augustine and others. Many Catholic theologians have criticized the use of Marxist terms and ideas in liberation theology. For example, they have pointed out that Marxism is not a science that helps us understand society, but an “ideology” in conflict with Christianity because it is atheistic. Marxism’ justifies violence in the name of class struggle, but Christianity does not endorse violence, say many Catholics. The church in Rome was also criticizing liberation theologians as it was concerned loss of freedom of religion in communist bloc countries. How can Marxism truly be helpful since it leads to religious oppression – they asked? Even though there have been some very harsh responses to liberation theology, it is difficult to say that it has either been mainly positive or mainly negative – if anything the Catholic response has been increasingly more positive. For example, when the current Pope (Francis) was a young priest, he criticized Liberation theology in many of the ways noted above. Yet, over the years he became more sympathetic to it and in 2012 he invited Gustavo Gutiérrez as a special guest of honour at the Vatican. This suggests he approves of at least some of his ideology. Though he has not described himself as a liberation theologian, Pope Francis has written extensively on the dangers of capitalism in ways similar to liberation theologians.

**Example 2 2. (b) ‘The response of the Roman Catholic Church to liberation theology was mainly positive.’ Evaluate this view. [30]**

This statement is not entirely true because, Liberation theology is both loved and hated by Roman Catholics. For example, you could argue that it is mainly positive because it is a totally Catholic idea, it was invented by Catholic priests because of the suffering of members of their churches. 9 On the one hand, the Roman Catholic Church believes that the poor should be helped – Vatican II talks about this quite a bit. Liberation theologians say that their fight to help suffering people is totally based on Catholic theology, the Bible and the views of the church. In fact, Ratzinger uses the term “liberation” to describe salvation – he says that people should be helped to have a good life in all areas of life. On the other hand, it is not all a ‘bed of roses’ for liberation theology – Cardinal Ratzinger didn’t like it because it is not spiritual enough. He thinks that the world needs more than a better economy and that the oppressed can become the oppressors like they did in Russia and other countries when they banned Christianity. If you say that the Bible is all about politics then you miss how important it is to deal with Sin. Also, Marxism (which many liberation theologians say they like) is atheist – so how can those ideas be used with Christianity? So, there are a lot of different responses to liberation theology. However, times have moved on now and Gustavo Gutierrez (a liberation theologian) is an old man now, and he was just invited to the Vatican in 2012 as a guest of honour.