

An Emerging Spirituality of Liberation
in Gustavo Gutierrez's
"We Drink From Our Own Wells"

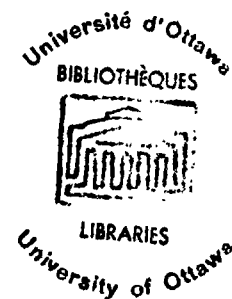
by

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DEDICATION

To the people of Peru who have taught me about a
spirituality of liberation by living it.

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INTRODUCTION

The theology of liberation as proposed by Gustavo Gutierrez has been criticized on the grounds that it seems to over emphasize a focus on socio-political analysis and action to such an extent that it falls outside of the orthodox theological currents within the Church. Much of the criticism implies that an authentic christian spirituality is precluded or debilitated by socio-political activity. Yet, Gutierrez specifically speaks in his work of a spirituality of liberation. Thus, the problem seems to be of understanding in what this spirituality consists and how it functions as an integrating principle in his theological method.

In an effort to demonstrate the fundamental importance of spirituality in the development of liberation theology as proposed by Fr. Gutierrez, in this thesis I will attempt to outline the salient features of the contextual setting out of which his thought has grown and the particular focus of his theological reflection. I will also attempt to determine the essential elements or characteristics of his spirituality of liberation and to show how it functions as an integrating principle in his proposal for a theology of liberation.

To do this, I will focus primarily on his book, *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, where Gutierrez specifically focused attention on the theme of spirituality. However,

since the roots of his spiritual focus are found in other works, I will also make reference to them insofar as they shed light on the question at hand and facilitate a deeper understanding of the elements as found in *We Drink From Our Own Wells*.

There is an urgent need for the articulation of a spirituality of liberation so as to encourage and guide those committed Christians who have taken up the struggle for justice and social transformation, as Bishop Orlando Quevedo O.M.I. of the Philippines puts it, "Deep faith-centeredness in Christ in the context of active struggle for social transformation requires a strong spirituality of liberation".¹ I hope that this thesis will help clarify the articulation of this theme as presented by Gutierrez.

But for those who choose the way of liberation, certain consequences are inevitable and must be assumed if one is to live in authenticity. The invitation of Jesus to "come, follow me" (Lukel8:23) is extended to men and women of every age and of every social condition. The modality and degree of response will vary but its challenge remains constant.

For the convenience of the reader, cross-references from the English translation to the Spanish text of

¹ Most Rev. Orlando B. Quevedo, "From a New Heart, A Deeper Social Responsibility", in Richard Hardy, *ATING MGA KAPATID: A Spirituality of the CBCP*, Quezon City, Philippines: Maryhill School of Theology, 1984, p.99.

Gutierrez's works will be found in Appendix II along with the footnote number of the reference. Any text quoted in English which does not refer to a particular translation has been done by myself. In these cases, the Spanish text will be provided in the corresponding footnote. Scripture texts have been taken from *The New Jerusalem Bible*.

1.0 CONTEXTUAL SETTING FOR GUTIERREZ'S LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Right from the beginning of his book, *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, Gutierrez points out how the great spiritual movements of our western tradition have been intimately linked to the predominant historical circumstances of the time.¹ He makes reference to the prominence of Francis of Assisi and Dominic of Guzman in a time of great opulence and political power in the Church as exemplified in the pontificate of Innocent III (1198-1216). Similarly, he shows how Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross relate to a time of geographical discoveries of new worlds and reform movements within christendom. Because, the concrete expressions of an authentic spirituality must always be seen in relation to a concrete historical context, an emergent spirituality of liberation in Latin America can only be understood within the historical circumstances in which it was born. For this reason, three components of the historical situation in Latin America since Vatican II will be discussed so as to identify the context and framework out of which Gutierrez's reflection flows: the social appropriation of the bible, the way of following Jesus in Latin America and the pastoral renewal from Medellín to Puebla. The social appropriation of the Bible refers to the

¹ See Gustavo Gutierrez, *We Drink From Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People*, translated by Matthew J. O'Connell, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985, pp.26-29.

growing tendency of the ordinary christian to have and to use the Bible as a guide for reflection on life situations. Largely because of the work of non-catholic religious groups, the Word of God has been translated into the language of the people and the people have responded by making the Bible their own. Accessibility to the Word of God has popularized the use of the Bible in the daily life of the ordinary and often formally uninstructed christian in Latin America. So too, the concept of the "following of Christ" has taken on a particular nuance in Latin America due to a focus on the characteristics of the historical Jesus which again has brought his life and mission down to earth for a people who readily relate to the historical circumstances of domination and oppression in which he lived. And finally, no contemporary movement in Latin America can be detached from the pastoral impact of the Second and Third General Conferences of the Latin American Episcopate meeting at Medellín and Puebla in 1968 and 1979 respectively. It is here that the Church in Latin America began and confirmed its preferential option for the poor, an option which in practice necessitates a deep theological reflection on the social implications of the faith.

1.1 The Social Appropriation of the Bible

In the very first chapter of his above mentioned book, Gutierrez calls into question two widely accepted characteristics of traditional spirituality. Firstly, that

it is a matter for minorities or the elite and secondly, its individualistic perspective. Much of the terminology associated with religious life as a "state of perfection" linked with monastic practices seemed to imply that any other way of life was somewhat less than perfect or at least did not involve the same quest for holiness. But perhaps the more serious deformation of the notion of spirituality came from its progressively exclusive relationship to the concept of "interior life". When focus is placed on the individual and on the development of interior attitudes of prayer, spirituality becomes warped and can quickly lose contact with the social realities of the outside world. Such an individualistic spirituality is an inadequate guide for those who have taken up the collective enterprise of liberation. The individualism and elitism of this type of spirituality is what Latin America as well as much of Christendom has inherited.²

² See *Ibid.*, pp.15-16, where we read, "When only a few authentic dimensions of Christian life are thus developed, the result may be a dangerous privatization of spirituality...It is not surprising, then, that in such a context charity should be regarded as simply another Christian virtue to be cultivated. This manner of understanding the following of Jesus is characterized as 'spiritualist'. The name is based on the fact that it shows little interest in temporal tasks and a great deal of insensitivity to the presence and needs of the real, concrete persons who surround Christians as they follow this spiritual way...Individualism and spiritualism thus combine to impoverish and even distort the following of Jesus. An individualistic spirituality is incapable of offering guidance in this following to those who have embarked on a collective enterprise of liberation."

Parallel to, if not a result of this movement towards the privatization of spirituality, was an equally noxious privatization of the bible in the hands of a few privileged religious or learned clerics. The recent recuperation of the bible by the faithful especially in Latin America, is what Gutierrez has termed "a social appropriation of the gospel".³ When asked about the meaning of the expression, he explained that "social appropriation" emphasizes the comunitarian perspective in the use of Scripture as opposed to a more frequent individualistic usage which often leads to a spiritualist interpretation and lessens the "historical and eschatological bite" of many texts.⁴ Thus, *social appropriation* reminds us of how the ordinary faithful of Latin America have taken possession of the Bible, to be used as something that is theirs and not as something they are merely allowed to use. They have deprivatized the Word of God.

³ See Gustavo Gutierrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, translated by Robert R. Barr, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1983, p.71.

⁴ The question was posed to Gutierrez by J. Delorme during the defense of his thesis leading to the degree of Doctor in Theology at the Faculty of Lyon in May, 1985. See *La Verdad Los Hará Libres; Confrontaciones*, Lima: C.E.P., 1986, p.69, "Con la expresión apropiación social se quería señalar la perspectiva comunitaria para hacer nuestra la Escritura, frente a una lectura frecuentemente individualista. Individualismo que llevaba a un 'espiritualismo', como ocurre con ciertas lecturas del hermoso texto del Magnificat por ejemplo. Lectura que le hace perder todo su mordiente histórico y escatológico. Apropiación quería recordar también el hecho de que los miembros de las comunidades eclesiales de base sienten cada vez más la Escritura, que leen en Iglesia, como suya, no extraña a sus vidas, como propia."

Carlos Mesters, a dutch born biblical scholar who has spent most of his life in Brasil, has perhaps better than anyone else, captured this sense of reappropriation of the bible by the people and explained its profound effect on biblical studies in Latin America. His insight and personal journey is marvelously presented in the "Parable of the Door" with which he initiates his book, *Por Trás Das Palavras*.⁵

Mesters emphasizes that biblical interpretation rests on three interdependent factors which he calls the "pre-text" or historical moment; the "con-text" or believing community and the "text" or written word of the Bible. Motivated by the problems of everyday life, the community reflects on the Word of God to seek direction, encouragement and light. It is then, the historical moment and faith community that provide the locus for biblical interpretation. Mesters exemplifies this relationship by an analogy. It is he says like a guitar. The "text" is as are the strings; the "context" is as the sound box and the "pretext" is the motive for playing. The music is God's word come alive. Without a motive or sound box the chords alone don't produce music.⁶ The analogy is most fitting to help us understand the

⁵ See Carlos Mesters, *Por Trás Das Palavras*, Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1980, pp.13-18. I have made a translation of the parable which appears as Appendix I.

⁶ See Carlos Mesters, *Flor sem Defesa: Uma explicação da Bíblia a Partir do Povo*, Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1983, pp.140-143.

preeminent place that the Bible holds in the life of the grassroots christian communities in Latin America.

In a paper presented during the summer session of the Department of Theology of the Catholic University of Lima in 1975, Gutierrez presented four characteristics of the way the Bible is read in grassroots christian communities. The reading is "Christological", that is, read in the light of the Christ event. The reading is "faithful", that is, not so much based on scientific exegesis as in the context of a believing community which is challenged by the Word of God and which recognizes Christ as the Lord of history and guide of its life. The reading is "historical", that is, based on the conviction that God reveals Himself in the history of His people who hope in Him. Their history then, becomes the locus for the manifestation of God Himself. And so the reading of the Bible is "militant". It is the living Word of God that strengthens and gives hope to His people in their conflicts, confrontations and struggles of life.⁷

⁷ See G.G., *The Power of the Poor in History*, p.4. When asked specifically about the expression "militant reading" during the defense of his thesis in Lyon, Gutierrez explained that the term refers to the focus of scriptural reflection in a person who is actively committed to the living out of gospel values in a concrete social context. In *La Verdad Los Hará Libres*, p.68, Gutierrez says, "Era una manera de subrayar un asunto que me parece importante, se trata del papel que juega nuestra militancia cristiana en la lectura de la Biblia. Como recordaba hace un momento todos nos acercamos a la Escritura desde nuestra situación y experiencias. Asumir un compromiso en una perspectiva de fe marca también esa aproximación, se trata entonces de una condición del lector que busca confrontar su solidaridad y acción cristiana con la Palabra. Es la lectura

For Mesters, the concept of the "re-reading" of the Bible is in practice part of the very literary formation of the Scriptures. One of the fundamental characteristics of God's people has been their consciousness of being inseparably joined to their past. He explains how they always managed to actualize their faith vision when confronting the problems of the moment by reflecting and reinterpreting the events of their history.⁸ He goes on to show that in reality, the Bible as we have it today is

que se hace desde una vida cristiana comprometida, activa, militante."

Carlos Mesters also speaks of a "militant" reading of the Scriptures, explaining how people in grassroots christian communities really take the Word of God seriously. Their reading of Scripture is not so much informative as practical. The living Word of God is what directs their efforts to transform political, social and economic situations. For these committed christians the inherent risks of announcing gospel values and denouncing what is contrary to them take on a very concrete expression. (See Mesters, C., *Flor Sem Defesa*, p.193)

This commitment to concrete conversion and social transformation, recognizing at the same time the gratuity of the action of God in history, necessitates the articulation of a new spirituality especially for those actively engaged in social struggle and who feel that the Church has offered them little in support of their struggle. (Cf. Mesters, C., *idem.*, p.199)

⁸ See Mesters, C., *Por Tras das Palavras*, p.92, "Necessitava de uma visão atualizada de fé sobre os problemas da vida e a encontrava nos acontecimentos do passado. Estes, então, eram reinterpretados e reapresentados de tal maneira, que expressassem essa visão atualizada de fé, que esclarecessem o presente e que correspondessem as exigências concretas da realidade, que o povo estava vivendo. Por meio de tal apresentação do passado, o futuro se abria e a realidade da vida novamente se unificava em torno do dinamismo redescoberto da fé."

nothing more than the literary expression and compilation of this constant process of revising, re-reading and re-interpretation. Always, however, done in the light of faith.⁹

All this is what Mesters refers to by the term "historical consciousness". It is a sense of identity with the past, the feeling that one lives in continuation with those who have gone before. When a people lose this sense of continuity with their past, they flounder in the present. The past becomes an object of study and perhaps nostalgia, something that is venerated like an old photo album, but its relevance to the present is lost. It becomes separated from the present and loses its power to energize and challenge in the struggles of daily life. When the historical consciousness of a people becomes neutralized, so does the Bible.¹⁰ For this reason, the purpose of popular biblical

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.93, "Ou seja, a Bíblia, em sua quase totalidade, é a expressão literária desse revisionismo constante, dessa re-leitura ou re-interpretação ininterrupta, não tanto de um texto antigo, mas da vida sempre nova; reinterpretação, feita a luz da fé, com a ajuda dos textos antigos, como o veremos agora mais detalhadamente."

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.104. "A preocupação de nunca desvincular do passado já vivido o presente que está sendo vivido revela uma consciência de continuidade histórica no sentido de 'nós somos hoje o mesmo povo que viveu esse passado'. Onde houver ruptura dessa consciência histórica, lá o passado se torna peça de museu, um valor em si, e começa a existir uma veneração pelo passado, enquanto passado: restauração de antigas ruínas, turismo através das antiguidades, comercialização do folclore etc. O passado aparece, então, como uma grandeza imutável, independente do homem que vive hoje. Perde o seu valor de estímulo e torna-se um setor neutro de pesquisa, que já não é mais capaz de incidir sobre

reflection is not simply to discover the historical-literal meaning of the text but rather to discover in the here and now, the signs of the presence of God and their challenge for daily life. Instead of interpreting texts, we attempt to interpret a life situation in the light of the text so as to increase the faith, the hope and the love of God's people.¹¹

Mesters goes on to demonstrate how the early christian community "re-read" the Old Testament in the light of the Christ event. In the light of the Resurrection and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the complicated history of God's people took on a new, fuller meaning. This enabled the christian community to relativize the past which took on meaning "in-so-far as it helped in discovering and in being faithful to the new presence of God in Jesus Christ; Emmanuel, God-with-us."¹² Mesters returns to the analogy of

a vida presente como apelo à conversão e à transformação das estruturas envelhecidas em vista do futuro. O passado, nesse caso, foi domesticado e neutralizado."

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.131, "O objetivo último da explicação da Bíblia ao povo não deve ser simplesmente descobrir o sentido histórico-literal dos textos, mas deve ser descobrir os sinais da presença de Deus com os seus apelos na vida que vivemos, através de uma reflexão profunda (e científica, quando necessário) sobre os textos que nos vêm do passado. Em última análise, o seu objetivo não se restringe a procurar interpretar um texto, mas a procurar interpretar a vida à luz daqueles textos a fim de que aumentem no povo a fé, a esperança e o amor. Do contrário, seríamos como o cidadão que recebeu um microscópio e que dedicou o resto da sua vida ao estudo do microscópio, sem jamais usá-lo para estudar os micróbios que minam o organismo humano."

¹² *Ibid.*, p.184. "A experiência do Espírito de Cristo ressuscitado levou os cristãos a relativizarem o passado. Este agora só tinha valor e sentido enquanto os ajudava a

the guitar to show how God's message today, is heard within the context of the christian community in response to the life situations it faces. The result may not be as much a playing of the "score" as transcribed by Tradition and by the Magisterium, as a spontaneous music which is at times slightly flawed by defects in the sound-box or inaccuracies in the playing.¹³

Mesters outlines the process by which the gradual reappropriation of the bible by the poor in Latin America took place. For generations the bible had been considered as the "book of the Church", interpreted and explained to the people by the clergy according to the norms of the Church. Even the exegetical renewal didn't really question this

descobrir e a viver melhor a nova presença de Deus em Jesus Cristo, Emanuel, isto é, Deus-conosco (cf Mt. 1,23)."

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.229, "A comunidade de fé, porém, é como a caixa de ressonância que, estimulada pelo toque das cordas da Palavra de Deus, produz a música da mensagem. Iremos estudar a música da Bíblia, não enquanto ela está escrita na partitura da Tradição e do Magistério, pois a partitura, por si só, não nos faz sentir a beleza da música e nada nos revela sobre possíveis rachaduras na caixa de ressonância nem sobre certos defeitos na execução da música. Vamos estudá-la, enquanto está sendo executada hoje, dentro da Igreja, pelos intérpretes, nos instrumentos da orquestra da Tradição, sob a regência do Magistério. Só assim é possível descobrir certos defeitos de execução que partitura por si só não pode revelar. Tais defeitos existem de fato, pois o povo não está contente com a música produzida pela atual interpretação....Onde está o defeito? Nos músicos que não tocam direito? Nos instrumentos que estão rachados? No maestro que perdeu o controle do conjunto? No povo que não sabe julgar nem apreciar essa música clássica? Como reproduzir com fidelidade a música da Mensagem de Deus, para o povo poder alegrar-se na vida e ter "vida em abundância"?"

understanding and perhaps even enhanced it by subtly transferring the role of the magisterium to the professional exegetes who became accepted as the proprietors of biblical knowledge. This created a certain inferiority complex, not only in the people at large but in some priests and bishops as well. Many hesitated to speak about the Bible. The devolution of the Bible into the hands of common people in Latin America can be largely credited to protestant biblical societies who have spread over two billion copies of the Bible throughout the world and have translated it into more than 1,200 languages. Because of this, people began to read the Bible and see in it more than a narration of past events. It became a reflection of the historical situation they themselves were experiencing. The final stage in this process of reappropriation is the general consciousness, ever growing among the poor, that this is their book; the book of the Church is the book of the people of God, a book "written for us".¹⁴

The social appropriation of the bible then, does not mean that the "experts" have no place in biblical interpretation but rather that they must place their skills at the service of God's people and recognize in them the power of God's Spirit which makes all things new. The Bible then, is not something that is taught or talked about, it is

¹⁴ More details on these stages can be found in Mesters' book, *Flor Sem Defesa*, pages 133-136.

rather, something that is related to and lived.

For Gutierrez, the integration of faith and life, past and present, is a result of this kind of social appropriation of the Gospel,

When they dispossess those who consider it their private property. The gospel tells us that the sign of the arrival of the Kingdom of God is that the poor have the gospel proclaimed to them. The poor are those who believe and hope in Christ ... those in solidarity with the interests, aspirations, and combats of the oppressed and repressed of the world today.¹⁵

1.2 A new way of following Jesus

Another predominant feature of Christian practice in Latin America is reflected in the particular modality that the "following of Christ" has taken. The life and mission of Jesus have been inexorably intertwined with the struggle to actualize in a concrete way, the values and power of the Kingdom of God. This is at the core of the struggle for liberation.

All christian spirituality is based on the "following of Christ". As Gutierrez states in the opening line of the introduction to his book, *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, "A Christian is defined as a follower of Jesus, and reflection on the experience of following constitutes the central theme

¹⁵ G.G., *The Power of the Poor in History*, p.21.

of any solid theology".¹⁶ Thus for him, spirituality and theology are always inseparably united.

For Gutierrez, the following of Jesus implies the imitation of the practice of Jesus. In his essay which serves as a preface to the work of his good friend and colleague, Hugo Echegaray, Gustavo points out how Jesus' activity touches every dimension of human life, the economic, political and social. Jesus lived according to new norms which exemplified the inner dynamic of the Kingdom. This dynamic was concerned with sharing, service and love rather than the self-centered "values" of accumulation, domination and greed. He brought the Kingdom into contrast with the Empire.¹⁷

God reveals the mystery of His person in history. But Jesus is the incarnation of the personhood of God and is for us "the Way, the Truth and the Life" (John 14:6) The following of Jesus then, implies following His lead, living in truth and promoting life. It demands the interiorization of gospel values and faithfulness in the commitment to

¹⁶ G.G., *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, P.1.

¹⁷ See Hugo Echegaray, *La Práctica de Jesús*, Lima: C.E.P., 1986, p.23, "El proyecto de Jesús, lo hemos recordado ya, abarca todas las dimensiones humanas. Hugo trabaja así la articulación y transformación que se da en la práctica de Jesús, de los niveles económico (la lógica del don contra la de la acumulación), político (lógica de la diaconía frente a la dominación de las masas) y social (lógica de libertad y amor opuesta al temor y al egoísmo). Se trata de la lógica del Reino opuesta a la del Imperio, la del hombre nuevo opuesto al hombre viejo."

struggle against the forces of death. The authenticity of the christian life is not something that is assumed; it is something that must constantly be verified in practice.

So too, as Gutierrez stresses, the following of Jesus always implies belonging to a community. In following Jesus, we become disciples in community.¹⁸ For him, the classical expression "sequela Christi" must signify something more than a personal quest for perfection. It must include a personal commitment and tenacious faithfulness to the plan of the Father made visible in the life of Jesus. The following of Christ is something which is done as Church. The following of Christ involves a constant struggle with sin and the effects of sin as experienced on the personal and social levels of life. Such a following of Christ proposes a new model of holiness marked by a personal commitment of solidarity in union with one's brothers; a desire to share and participate in the life of the community, to deny oneself for the good of all, and to persevere in the construction of a better world. In short, to replace the values of the Empire with the values of the Kingdom within the social

¹⁸ When asked to clarify what he meant by the term "collective" in saying that the following of Jesus is a collective adventure, Gustavo responded, "Mi interés era subrayar que el seguimiento de Jesús implica siempre la pertenencia a la asamblea, la ecclesia... Seguimos a Jesús, nos hacemos discípulos, en comunidad, en asamblea." G.G., *La Verdad Los Hará Libres*, p.70.

reality in which one lives.¹⁹

The novelty in this perspective for the following of Christ is largely due to the fact that we have been marked by a process which J. Comblin calls the "iconization" of the life of Christ.²⁰ When the life of Jesus is taken out of its historical context it becomes other worldly, it moves out of

¹⁹ Echegaray, H., *La Práctica de Jesús*, p.25-26, "El seguimiento de Cristo aparece así no como una cuestión puramente personal sino como algo colectivo y comunitario, como el marco en el que se inscribe la vida de la Iglesia, en la medida en que ésta al anunciar el Reino hace que la historia toda sea vista 'como historia santa, en lucha con el pecado. La entrega solidaria de la propia vida, la unión entre hermanos, la lealtad, el respeto al otro, el deseo de compartir lo que se tiene, de integrarse, de renunciar a sí mismo en función del bien de todos, la fuerza para esperar y construir un mundo diferente, son como las notas fuertes del modelo de santidad que propone el libro, sin disociar nunca el testimonio cristiano de la alabanza o la oración en presencia de Dios'....El seguimiento de Cristo envuelve una transformación de la historia, una aceptación de que el Reino irrumpe en ella exigiendo una solidaridad con los pobres y oprimidos, y por eso mismo implica un canto de alabanza al Dios que libera de todas las servidumbres."

²⁰ Quoted by Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, translated and edited by Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1973, p.226, "This is a Jesus of hieratic, stereotyped gestures, all representing theological themes. To explain an action of Jesus is to find in it several theological meanings. In this way, the life of Jesus is no longer a human life, submerged in history, but a theological life - - an icon. As happens with icons, his actions lose their human context and are stylized, becoming transformed into signs of the transcendent and invisible world." And Gutierrez himself adds, "The life of Jesus is thus placed outside history, unrelated to the real forces at play. Jesus and those whom he befriended, or whom he confronted and whose hostility he earned, are deprived of all human content. They are there reciting a script. It is impossible not to experience a sensation of unreality when presented with such a life of Jesus."

our grasp and so can be venerated and respected but cannot be related to. The following of Jesus becomes more a matter of liturgical practice or pious devotion than of an historical commitment to the work of the Kingdom.

In Latin America, a growing awareness of the historical Jesus has promoted a reversal of this process, and so a new and at times conflictual modality of the following of Christ has become prevalent. In Latin America, the Church is witnessing a new way of living the Gospel as Christians and this gives birth to a new spirituality which is at the same time the context in which liberation theology becomes intelligible.²¹

The life and practice of Jesus is identified with his mission --- the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. This proclamation was realized by Jesus through words and deeds which served as the signs of the coming of the Kingdom. The Kingdom is seen primarily as gift, the definitive and ultimate expression of salvation which is offered gratuitously by God. Yet, while not earning it, the human person is called to promote it by making one's own and implementing in history the transforming force that it promises, provokes and is. This necessitates a radical personal conversion to kingdom values, a letting go of the

²¹ See Jesús Espeja, *Espiritualidad y Liberación*, Lima: C.E.P., 1986, p.40.

old man and a taking on of the new.²²

The Kingdom is not something that evolves; it is something that is suddenly thrust upon us, to be accepted or rejected but which can never be ignored. The Jesus event and the coming of the Kingdom are one and the same in the revelation of the plan of God. In Jesus this plan is given precise parameters which provide us with concrete guidelines for an authentic following of Christ. This thrusts us into the world of the poor. It demands solidarity in deed and not just in word. Indifference or tepidity amounts to a rejection of the God who hears the cry of the poor and acts on their behalf; it is a denial of the will of God in history, it is to become as an unbeliever.²³ The following of Jesus cannot be separated from the work of the Kingdom.

²² See Echegaray, H., *Práctica de Jesús*, p.16, "El proyecto de Jesús no es otro que el anuncio del Reino. Hugo señala que en ese mensaje hay dos polos, 'la venida inminente del Reino y el carácter radical de la exigencia de Dios a convertirse y entrar en su dinámica. De un lado hay el Reino como don escatológico, es decir definitivo y último de la salvación, ofrecido gratuitamente por Dios sin mediación de nuestro esfuerzo para obtenerlo; de otro lado, el llamado insistente a ponerse en marcha hacia el Reino y prepararlo asumiendo el esfuerzo transformador de nuestra historia que el Reino mismo simultáneamente impulsa, promete y supone'. Estos aspectos son difíciles de vivir y pensar en conjunto, pero de su interacción surge la revelación de Dios como Padre."

²³ *Ibid.*, p.20, "La irrupción del Reino en nuestras vidas supone entrar en el mundo del pobre. La revelación del Padre exige una solidaridad de hermanos. La indiferencia frente al Reino es una negación del Dios que liga su presencia a la supresión de toda explotación. El dominador es siempre un incrédulo según la Biblia, es como aquel de quien se nos habla en la parábola de los dos hijos, que dice sí al Padre pero no va a trabajar a la viña, no va al encuentro del hermano, no hace la voluntad del Padre en la historia."

Nor is the Kingdom something that can be relegated to the future or to the end of time as so often has happened to "eternal life". It is rather, something present and creatively active within history. By reducing the Kingdom to the here-after, its power in history is emasculated. The gospel becomes inoffensive because it is removed from the theatre of life or neutralized into a theoretical guide for personal perfection.²⁴

Just as the life of Jesus was lived within a specific historical context so too, "the following of Christ" today must be situated squarely within the problematic of daily living. It is the example of Jesus that challenges us to live creatively and his ever abiding Spirit that empowers us to do so.²⁵

The Kingdom proclaimed and established by Christ must

²⁴ See G.G., *The Power of the Poor in History*, p.39.

²⁵ Again Gutierrez touches on the relationship between the coming of the Kingdom and the struggle for justice which is implied in the following of Christ, as he writes in *A Theology of Liberation*, p.231, "The life and preaching of Jesus postulate the unceasing search for a new kind of man in a qualitatively different society. Although the Kingdom must not be confused with the establishment of a just society, this does not mean that it is indifferent to this society. Nor does it mean that this just society constitutes a 'necessary condition' for the arrival of the Kingdom nor that they are closely linked, nor that they converge. More profoundly, the announcement of the Kingdom reveals to society itself the aspiration for a just society and leads it to discover unsuspected dimensions and unexplored paths. The Kingdom is realized in a society of brotherhood and justice; and, in turn, this realization opens up the promise and hope of complete communion of all men with God. The political is grafted into the eternal."

still be actualized in history. And here is where we encounter the mystery of the mediation of man. It is in the authentic following of Christ, that one grows as a true disciple of Jesus. By an active commitment to the implementation of gospel values in the world, one participates in the mission of Jesus. But this implies struggle and risk, for it means neutralizing the social effects of sin in the world. This too, is the goal of salvation. Misdirected spirituality has often neglected such a confrontation with social reality. The suppression of misery and exploitation, is a sign of the coming of the Kingdom which becomes present, according to the book of Isaiah (65:22) when everyone enjoys the fruits of their labour and nobody is exploited for the benefit of others.

To struggle for a more just world in which there is no more enslavement, nor oppression, nor alienating work, will signify the proclamation of the coming of the Messiah. The messianic promises closely relate the Kingdom of God with conditions of life worthy of man. The Kingdom and social injustice are incompatible.²⁶

Therefore, it is the historical practice of Jesus that is exemplary and normative for his followers of every

²⁶ Gustavo Gutierrez, *La Fuerza Histórica de los Pobres: Selección de Trabajos*, Lima: C.E.P., 1979, p.56, "Luchar por un mundo justo, en el que no haya servidumbre, ni opresión, ni trabajo alienado, será anunciar, significar la venida del Mesías. Las promesas mesiánicas ligan así estrechamente Reino de Dios y condiciones de vida dignas del hombre. Reino e injusticia social son incompatibles." (I have quoted the spanish, since in the translation p.32, "luchar" is denoted as "to work" which is inadequate.

age. Jesus Christ is the hermeneutical principle for the right understanding of faith (orthodoxy) and for its authentic implementation in life (orthopraxis). For Gutierrez, "christian praxis acquires its meaning in the following of Jesus".²⁷ Our encounter with Christ is the starting point for our faith which is lived and reflected upon in ecclesial communion. Jesus Christ is the hermeneutical principle for all understanding of the faith. In him, we encounter God in history.

For Jesus is the irruption into history of the one by whom everything was made and everything was saved. This, then, is the fundamental hermeneutical circle: from humanity to God and from God to humanity, from history to faith and from faith to history, from the human word, to the word of the Lord and from the word of the Lord to the human word, from the love of one's brothers and sisters to the love of the Father and from the love of the Father to love of one's brothers and sisters, from human justice to God's holiness and from God's holiness to human justice.

Theology -- the understanding of the faith -- is animated by the will to help others live according to the Spirit.²⁸

1.3 Pastoral Renewal: Medellín to Puebla

In response to the growing sense of need for renewal within the Church which became concretized in the Second

²⁷ Gustavo Gutierrez, *La Verdad Los Hará Libres: Confrontaciones*, Lima: C.E.P., 1986, p.146, "La praxis del cristiano adquiere su sentido en el seguimiento de Jesús, en la práctica del Señor..."

²⁸ G.G., *The Power of the Poor in History*, p.61.

Vatican Council, the bishops of Latin America were called together to meet at Medellín, Colombia in 1968. The process initiated here and later confirmed at Puebla, Mexico, in 1979, has changed forever the direction of the Church in Latin America. The influence of these meetings has altered forever the face of the Church in Latin America. What began as an effort to implement the "aggiornamento" movement of Vatican II, turned into a process of prophetic rebirth for the Church and the context for the emergence of liberation theology.

The process has not been an easy one. In preparation for the meeting of the Episcopal Conference in Puebla, Mexico in January, 1979, a working document was distributed to the national conferences of bishops so as to prepare a basic agenda for the discussions. But subtly, there was a refocusing of some of the basic themes as developed in the meeting at Medellín eleven years previously. The major problem to be addressed was presented as secularization not social justice; the evangelization of culture, not the liberation of peoples; attention to the needs of the poor (now specifically including the handicapped, the incapacitated and the elderly), not the eradication of the causes of impoverishment. Gutierrez sounded an alarm in an article published in June, 1978, by drawing attention to the consequences of this apparently inoffensive shift of focus. Emphasis would be placed on secular ideology instead of on

structured exploitation. The God of Providence would replace the God who liberates. Culture and popular religiosity would supplant the theme of liberation and preferential option for the poor. The focus on the material poverty of the people would be replaced by a focus on their spiritual richness. And so the task of evangelization would be to discover the values that would produce a new civilization and not "to denounce the scandalous conditions of social injustice in Latin America, or to announce the love of the Father who raises his arm against the oppressor and frees the oppressed".²⁹

Happily the attempt to side track the process initiated at Medellín failed. Precision and modifications were added at Puebla but the spirit of Medellín remained.³⁰ The non-exclusive character of the preferential option for the poor was emphasized,³¹ but it was again stressed that

²⁹ G.G., *The Power of the Poor in History*, p.124

³⁰ *Puebla and Beyond: Documentation and Commentary*, Eagleson, John and Scharper, Philip, editors, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1979, (n.1134), p.264, "With renewed hope in the vivifying power of the Spirit, we are going to take up once again the position of the Second General Conference of the Latin American episcopate in Medellín, which adopted a clear and prophetic option expressing preference for, and solidarity with, the poor. We do this despite the distortions and interpretations of some, who vitiate the spirit of Medellín, and despite the disregard and even hostility of others... We affirm the need for conversion on the part of the Church to a preferential option for the poor, an option aimed at their integral liberation."

³¹ In the document of Puebla (n.1145), p.256, reference is made to "service to the poor" which "is the privileged, though not exclusive, gauge of our following of Christ". And

this option is clearly founded on the witness of the Old Testament and the practice of Jesus in the New. And by adding the phrase "whatever may be the moral or personal situation in which they find themselves"³², it is clearly shown that the option for the poor is not mitigated by personal or cultural preferences but rather is based on the example of the gratuitous love of God. Furthermore, the option for the poor is expressed primarily as solidarity with the cause of the poor.³³ But we are also reminded that the option for the poor is not just a question of dealing with the needs of individuals; poverty is a collective phenomenon whose social causes must be eradicated regardless of the risk or cost. This has become a central theme in Gutierrez's thought. For this reason, the "preferential option for the poor", demands that the Church "understand and denounce the mechanisms that generate poverty".³⁴

Medellín and Puebla have been for the Church of Latin

in (n.1165), p.267, the Church's option is described as a "preferential but not exclusive love for the poor".

³² *Ibid.*, (n.1142), p.265.

³³ *Ibid.*, (n.1156), p.266, "The gospel demand for poverty, understood as solidarity with the poor and as a rejection of the situation in which most people on this continent live, frees the poor person from being individualistic in life, and from being attracted and seduced by the false ideals of a consumer society. In like manner the witness of a poor Church can evangelize the rich whose hearts are attached to wealth, thus converting and freeing them from this bondage and their own egoism."

³⁴ See G.G., *The Power of the Poor in History*, pp.154-155

America a coming of age. A coming to consciousness that, as Gutierrez phrases it in his book, *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, we live in a "foreign land". The insights of Medellín and Puebla have had a decisive influence in the direction of the Church of Latin America and have given a basis for the development of liberation theology. The recognition of the social dimension of sin in the structures and institutions of society calls for conversion and transformation. The situation of misery in which millions of latin americans live is recognized as something that has not come about by chance. It has been produced and sustained by unjust social structures.³⁵ Nor is poverty an economic abstraction, it is a social reality and has real faces.³⁶ The sin of poverty is not so much the fact that so many have so little as the fact

³⁵ Several passages from *Puebla* develop this point in some detail. In (n.30), p.128 we read, "Analyzing this situation more deeply, we discover that this poverty is not a passing phase. Instead it is the product of economic, social, and political situations and structures, though there are also other causes for the state of misery. In many instances this state of poverty within our countries finds its origin and support in mechanisms which, because they are impregnated with materialism rather than any authentic humanism, create a situation on the international level where the rich get richer at the expense of the poor, who get ever poorer ... Hence this reality calls for personal conversion and profound structural changes that will meet the legitimate aspirations of the people for authentic social justice. Such changes either have not taken place, or else they have been too slow in coming in the concrete life of Latin America." See also (nos.328-329), pp.169-170.

³⁶ In this renowned passage from *Puebla* (nos.31-39), pp.128-129, the concrete "faces" of those who represent the marginalized of Latin America are described.

that so many have been impoverished by social structures created and maintained for the benefit of a privileged few. The misery, violence and death which prevail in Latin America is what the bishops denounce as "social sinfulness".³⁷

The fact that in Latin America injustice has been "institutionalized"³⁸ makes it all the more pressing that the Church, in faithfulness to its mission, make its voice heard in denouncing and condemning these situations, and even more so when those responsible profess to be Christian.³⁹ The situation of "institutionalized violence" made reference to in Medellín (Document on Peace, n.16) is referred to again in Puebla where it is noted that the situation has worsened.⁴⁰

³⁷ *Puebla and Beyond*, (n.28), p.128, states that, "Viewing it in the light of faith, we see the growing gap between rich and poor as a scandal and a contradiction to Christian existence ... The luxury of a few becomes an insult to the wretched poverty of the vast masses ... This is contrary to the plan of the Creator and to the honour that is due him. In this anxiety and sorrow the Church sees a situation of social sinfulness, all the more serious because it exists in countries that call themselves Catholic and are capable of changing the situation: 'They have a right to have the barriers of exploitation removed ... against which their best efforts at advancement are dashed'."

³⁸ The document of Puebla (n.46), p.129, takes up the concept from Medellín (Peace n.16) in stating, "We also frequently see a rise in what can be called institutionalized injustice".

³⁹ *Ibid.*, (n.42), p.129, concludes, "As the Supreme Pontiffs point out, the Church, by virtue of 'an authentically evangelical commitment', must raise its voice to denounce and condemn these situations, particularly when the responsible officials or rulers call themselves Christians."

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, (1259), p.278, "We are deeply pained to see that the situation of violence -- which can be called institutionalized violence (either as subversion or as

The dynamic of rich becoming richer at the cost of the poor who become ever poorer, is seen by the bishops to be at the root of a serious "structural conflict" within society.⁴¹ Such structural conflict is an inevitable source of violence. The awakening of the people to the reality of social sin and their struggle with institutionalized violence is a constant area of reflection for liberation theology.

It is the recognition of the socio-economic situation of dependence in which Latin America lives and which Gutierrez refers to as a "condition of neo-colonialism", that gives rise to the crucial theme of liberation.⁴² This growing awareness of the dynamics of this situation of dependence is essential for understanding the reality of underdevelopment which is part of a process.⁴³ And so, the

repression) --- has worsened. Human dignity is being abused, even in its most basic rights."

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, (n.1209), p.273, we read, "So there arises a grave structural conflict: 'The growing affluence of a few people parallels the growing poverty of the masses'(OAP:III,4)."

⁴² See G.G., *A Theology of Liberation*, p.109

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.84, where the author writes, "For some time now, another point of view has been gaining ground in Latin America. It has become ever clearer that underdevelopment is the end result of a process. Therefore, it must be studied from a historical perspective, that is, in relationship to the development and expansion of the great capitalist countries. The underdevelopment of the poor countries, as an overall social fact, appears in its true light: as the historical by-product of the development of other countries. The dynamics of the capitalist economy lead to the establishment of a centre and a periphery, simultaneously generating progress and growing wealth for the few and social imbalances, political tensions, and poverty for the many."

necessary relationship between evangelization and liberation becomes ever more evident.⁴⁴

For this reason, Gutierrez characterizes the Church's task as "conscientizing evangelization"⁴⁵ which means, to help the poor become aware of the anti-evangelical aspects of the situation in which they live and to join with them in the promotion of suitable change. This task is further clarified and expanded in Puebla where the expression "liberative evangelization" is used.⁴⁶

The growth in awareness of the Church in Latin America, has accelerated its coming of age. By recognizing more precisely the alienating social factors of the Latin American reality and reflecting theologically on them, the Church has come to see more clearly its role in society. Far from separating itself from society, it has come to realize that authenticity to its mission requires that it be actively present and this is where a spirituality of liberation is born.

⁴⁴ See G.G., *La Fuerza Histórica de los Pobres*, p.198, "Porque después de todo, es evidente que en Medellín el punto central es esa relación Evangelización - Liberación, que se halla presente también en la EN. (nn.29-35) y que constituyó un tema de resonancia universal en la Iglesia a partir de la experiencia latinoamericana."

Note: This passage is part of a section between pages 196 and 200 that has been left out of the translation.

⁴⁵ See G.G., *A Theology of Liberation*, p.117.

⁴⁶ *Puebla and Beyond*, (n.562), p.202 and see also, G.G., *The Power of the Poor in History*, pp.149-150, where the author develops this theme by making reference to several texts from Puebla to show how service to the poor is presented as the privileged means of the following of Christ.

But as Gutierrez observes, "We must live in a Church that is not only open to the poor but poor itself. Only in this way can we radically change the present face of the Christian community".⁴⁷ This is what Medellín calls a "poor Church", a Church committed to the poor and to poverty.⁴⁸ Thus words and deeds must be coherently united. Lifestyle and practice must be integrated in daily living. In this way, the new image of the Church will be reflected by a new and prophetic presence of the Church in Latin America.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ See G.G., *The Power of the Poor in History*, p.34.

⁴⁸ Gutierrez makes this reference to Medellín in *La Verdad Los Hará Libres*, page 240, "Eso es lo que Medellín llama una 'Iglesia pobre', una Iglesia que para ser precisamente sacramento de salvación debe comprometerse con los pobres y con la pobreza: 'la pobreza de la Iglesia es, en efecto, una constante de la historia de la salvación (Pobreza n.5)'."

⁴⁹ See G.G., *A Theology of Liberation*, p.114, where the author comments on the consequences of this new image and presence of the Church in Latin America, "The first evidence of this revision which can be culled from the texts mentioned is that, having acknowledged the Church's responsibility in the current situation, they strongly insist that the Church and in particular the bishops fulfill a role of prophetic denunciation of these grave injustices rampant in Latin America, which have already been characterized as 'sinful situations'. The bishops at Medellín asserted, 'To us, the Pastors of the Church, belongs the duty ... to denounce everything which, opposing justice, destroys peace'. They are moved to make this denunciation by the 'duty of solidarity with the poor, to which charity leads us. This solidarity means that we make ours 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'. Even further, the bishops are asked to go 'beyond statements about situations ... to concentrate on concrete events, and ... to take positions regarding them'."

This new, active presence of the Church in the social life of Latin America emphasizes the need for conversion as a prerequisite for a service of solidarity and this too, is a fundamental theme in Gutierrez's thought. As are individuals, so too, the Church is in need of constant conversion to more visibly identify with the poor Jesus. The Church must adapt its structures and life style so as to be more coherent with the stated priorities of its option and mission. The process of conversion is a prerequisite for individual and institution alike. Real conversion is an exigency for an effective evangelization and a condition for pastoral authenticity.⁵⁰

That the Church rely on the strength of the gospel and not on the powers of this world in order to fulfill its mission, is one of the deepest concerns in Puebla,

"The Church must become more and more independent of the powers in this world. Only thus can it enjoy a broad area of freedom that will enable it to carry out its apostolic work without interference....Thus, free of compromising and vested only with its witness and teaching, the Church will be more credible and better heard".⁵¹

The logic of Puebla is clear. The following of Christ means identifying oneself with the practice of "The

⁵⁰ See G.G., *The Power of the Poor in History*, pp.157-158, where the author develops these ideas in reference to specific passages from Puebla.

⁵¹ *Puebla and Beyond*, (n.144), p.140.

poor Christ"⁵² which necessitates continuous conversion and effective commitment to the poor of the world and against everything that dehumanizes and impoverishes mankind. This is a task both individual and communal out of which flows theological reflection.

The situation of Christianity in Latin America is likened to the problem of putting new wine into old skins, something is going to give. Many in Latin America are discovering a new, more life giving and therefore, more authentic way of following Christ. It is the way of commitment and solidarity with the liberating cause of the poor. The experience of life no longer fits within the old dualistic schemes of spirituality. The separation of spiritual and material, natural and supernatural, here and here-after, only promotes a separation of life and faith. A separation which certainly was not present in the practice of Jesus for whom life issues were the locus for faith issues. In his book, *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, Gutierrez speaks of the current situation in Latin America as "a favorable time". It is a time of solidarity, a time of prayer, a time of martyrdom and suffering, yet above all, a time of

52 See G.G., *The Power of the Poor in History*, pp.142-143, where the author explains the importance of this concept to the poor of Latin America who recognize in it an expression of their faith in Jesus, the Son of God made man, become poor, "poor like us". This affirmation of the closeness of Christ is at the same time a confession of faith in the presence of the God who saves in the concrete history of humanity which for them is experienced as "Christ the Liberator".

salvation; a time when, with the eyes of faith, we can see the liberating presence of God among his people.⁵³ The growing "solidarity of the Church with the Latin American reality"⁵⁴ imposes a new way of responding to the demands of that reality. It implies risk and uncertainty. It demands real commitment and not mere moral support. It changes the Church's relationship to society and necessitates changes in its own life and structures.

The pastoral challenge facing the Church in Latin America is the stage upon which a spirituality of liberation evolves. To give committed witness to the God of Life in a situation of death, to encourage those who struggle against the effects of sin both personal and social, to grow in awareness of the potential of faith and creatively to use its power for the transformation of everything that dehumanizes, to be faithful to the following of Christ the Liberator and to all the risk and joy that implies in daily life -- that is the framework in which a spirituality of liberation grows.

⁵³ See G.G., *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, pp.20-25.

⁵⁴ G.G., *A Theology of Liberation*, p.108.

2.0 FOCUS OF GUTIERREZ'S THOUGHT

For Gutierrez, we initiate our spiritual journey to the Father by encountering Christ in history. This journey of walking in the Spirit entails a constant discerning of the signs of the times so as to discover the recreating presence of God's Spirit in history, the exercise of *contemplatio in actione*. But, because we have been called to be a people, our journey is a communal endeavour and not merely a juxtaposition of fellow travellers. In this sense then, spirituality is not an elitist pursuit --- reserved for a few. It is, rather, the venture of all who recognize themselves as part of this chosen and empowered people and in Latin America this is the growing awareness of the poor. Spirituality is life and theology is a critical reflection on life, a "second moment" which helps one understand and articulate the first.

Gutierrez himself succinctly outlines these predominant features of his theological focus at the beginning of chapter five of his book, *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, where he says,

Encounter with the Lord is the point of departure for a life according to the Spirit. This life finds expression in a journey in search of God...it consists in the practice of the love that brings us "face to face" with God (2Cor.13:12). We are talking here about the journey of an entire people and not of isolated individuals.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ G.G., *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, p.72.

2.1 Christo-centricity

The centrality of Christ is evident in the writings of Gutierrez. Not just as a theme but as the dynamic and normative principle of integration and progress for humanity. All things come together in Christ, truly Emmanuel - God-with-us.

The God who transformed chaos into cosmos is the same as the one who acts in salvation history. The redemptive work of Christ, in turn, is presented in the context of creation (See John 1). Creation and salvation take on a christological import; in Christ all have been created and all have been saved (See Col.1:15-20).⁵⁶

Just as the affirmation and verification of the presence of Yahweh was what animated and encouraged the people of the Old Testament to continue on their journey through a hostile land, so too, the affirmation and verification of the presence of Christ with his people is what animates and encourages the faithful of Latin America in their quest for integral liberation. Theologically, the focus is on the present, the graced moment and favorable time in which we live. Attention is given to concerns of this world as opposed to an orientation to other-worldly matters. The presence of God in history is not just an event of the past, nor is it solely something to be awaited in the future, but rather, it is what unites past and future in the present where God acts confirming his presence in the past and

⁵⁶ G.G., *The Power of the Poor in History*, p.32.

anticipating his presence in the future.

In history we discover a threefold methodology in God's self-revelation. His presence has been universalized instead of remaining localized in a given area and identified with a given people. It has been internalized from places of worship to "the heart of human history"⁵⁷. And it has been personalized in Jesus Christ. For Gutierrez,

Christ is the point of convergence... In him, in his personal uniqueness, the particular is transcended and the universal becomes concrete. In him, in his incarnation, what is personal and internal becomes visible. Henceforth, this will be true, in one way or another, of every man... Since God has become man, humanity, every man, history, is the living temple of God. The "profane" that which is located outside the temple, no longer exists.⁵⁸

God reveals the secret of his person and plan in history. Therefore, "Human history... is the location of our encounter with him, in Christ".⁵⁹ God's temple is humanity and his dwelling place is human history, with the result that the concepts of "secular" and "religious" have to be re-evaluated. The life of society is not independent of the plan of God. What happens in the marketplace is not exempt from the plan of God. Expressions of our love of God are not

⁵⁷ G.G., *A Theology of Liberation*, p.193.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.193-194 See also G.G., *The Power of the Poor in History*, p.209, where we read, "In Jesus God not only reveals himself in history, he becomes history".

⁵⁹ G.G., *A Theology of Liberation*, p.189.

to be reserved to particular liturgical moments or places but are to be reflected in our attitudes and actions towards others especially the poor and the marginated. Justice and charity are not optional, they are mandatory for authentic christian life.⁶⁰

Gutierrez constantly stresses that all history is one.⁶¹ He shows that this unitive perspective of history is not something exclusively related to liberation theology but can in fact, be traced back to St.Augustine and St.Thomas.⁶²

⁶⁰ See *Ibid.*, p.201.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.153, we read, "What we have recalled...leads us to affirm that, in fact, there are not two histories, one profane and one sacred, 'juxtaposed' or 'closely linked'. Rather there is only one human destiny, irreversibly assumed by Christ, the Lord of history. His redemptive work embraces all the dimensions of existence and brings them to their fullness. The history of salvation is the very heart of human history. The Christian consciousness arrived at this unified view after an evolution parallel to that experienced regarding the notion of salvation. The conclusions converge. From an abstract, essentialist approach we move to an existential, historical, and concrete view which holds that the only man we know has been efficaciously called to a gratuitous communion with God. All reflection, any distinctions which one wishes to treat, must be based on this fact: the salvific action of God underlies all human existence. The historical destiny of humanity must be placed definitively in the salvific horizon. Only thus will its true dimensions emerge and its deepest meaning be apparent. It seems, however, that contemporary theology has not yet fashioned the categories which would allow us to think through and express adequately this unified approach to history. We work, on the one hand, under the fear of falling back again into the old dualities, and, on the other, under the permanent suspicion of not sufficiently safeguarding divine gratuitousness or the unique dimension of Christianity. Although there may be different approaches to understanding it, however, the fundamental affirmation is clear: there is only one history --- a 'Christo-finalized' history."

⁶² See G.G., *La Verdad Los Hará Libres*, pp.175-176.

It is the Resurrection of Jesus which universalizes, internalises, personalizes and prolongs his presence in history. The life of the historical Jesus is not something that can be relegated to the past. The saving presence of God in Christ is something present and active in the world today. And this has significant consequences for those who follow the Risen Lord,

That is to say, the resurrection not only confirms the practice of Jesus but also reaffirms the practice of those who take it up and prolong it in their own lives as disciples. (This option) is offered to all men of good faith as a way of salvation.⁶³

The active presence of Christ in history points to the need for a more creation centred theology where mankind is seen as an integral part of a larger earth community. Human needs and social needs cannot be separated from the needs of creation, for in Christ all things are to be brought to completion. The narrow view of humanity as master of the created world must be expanded to see humanity as its protector and spokesperson. Therefore, social issues take on a necessarily ecological perspective.

2.2 Contemplatio in Actione

For Gutierrez, the following of Christ, nucleus of

⁶³ Echegaray, H., *La Práctica de Jesús*, p.51, "Es decir, la resurrección no sólo confirma la práctica de Jesús sino que reafirma la práctica de quienes aceptaron retomarla y prolongarla en su propia vida de discípulos, y así mismo se ofrece como camino de salvación para todo hombre de buena voluntad."

the spiritual journey to the Father, is concomitant to living or walking in the Spirit. As he says, "Encounter with Christ, life in the Spirit, journey to the Father: such, it seems to me, are the dimensions of every walking in the Spirit according to the scriptures".⁶⁴

In practice this "walking in the Spirit" means arriving at an operative synthesis of action and contemplation, or as it is put in terms of Ignatian spirituality, "in actione contemplativus".⁶⁵ By this, the traditional distinction between the active and the contemplative life is questioned, especially where "contemplative" is interpreted as implying complete separation from the world and socio-political concerns. Unfortunately, this interpretation has often prevailed and has hampered modern apostolic congregations of religious which were given monastic molds of lifestyle and practice as the ideal for religious life. Needless to say, the laity were almost completely left out of the picture. The result of such a distorted concept of religious and apostolic life was that spirituality became hierarchized into states of perfection where the laity could be included only by analogy and where social commitment was separated from religious life. For many contemporary, "active" religious, concerned

⁶⁴ G.G., *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, p.34.

⁶⁵ G.G., *A Theology of Liberation*, p.7.

for the renewal of religious life, this meant either falling into a life of "scattered commitment and an unmitigated activism"⁶⁶ or leaving religious life completely. A right understanding of the expression "in actione contemplativus" is essential not only for religious life but for a correct understanding of christian spirituality in general, for "contemplation and historical commitment are indivisible dimensions of christian life".⁶⁷

In biblical terms, knowledge is more than an intellectual pursuit. To know is to love, and love is expressed through commitment. The Word of God is creative, an event, an happening. The Word of God is always fruitful and so our following of the Word Incarnate must be fruitful if it is to be authentic. We are not only to believe, we are to act and so the authenticity of one is essential to the authenticity of the other: "True orthodoxy is orthopraxis".⁶⁸

The concept of praxis is very important to a spirituality of

⁶⁶ G.G., *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, p.129.
See also, Matthew Fox, *On Becoming a Musical, Mystical Bear*, New York: Paulist Press, 1972, p.75, where the Author discusses the contemporary meaning of "active" and "contemplative".

⁶⁷ G.G., *La Verdad Los Hará Libres*, p.80,
"Contemplación y compromiso histórico son dimensiones ineludibles e interrelacionadas de la existencia cristiana."

⁶⁸ G.G., *The Power of the Poor in History*, p.60.
See also G.G., *La Verdad Los Hará Libres*, p.145 and for a detailed program based on the dialectical tension between theory and practice, see J.B. Libanio, "Formación de la Conciencia Crítica", Colección Perspectivas - CLAR, nos.8,9,10, Bogotá: Confederación Latinoamericana de Religiosos CLAR, 1984

liberation because walking in the Spirit takes on a very definite and concrete modality which integrates action and contemplation. Praxis implies freedom and critical consciousness and tends towards the creative transformation of reality. Just as Jesus announced the love of the Father and the coming of the Kingdom by word and by deed, so too must the disciple of Jesus. What has been termed as the "practice" of Jesus is thus equivalent to his "praxis" and for the disciple, praxis and commitment become one.⁶⁹

The notion of praxis is what unites action and contemplation in terms of liberation theology. On the one hand, we avoid falling into a "disincarnate spiritualism" where spirituality is divorced from social reality and on the other hand, from socio-political activism divorced from "the reality of people's faith".⁷⁰ The synthesis required by true christian praxis is not easy to achieve and because of the necessary employment of social analysis and political options, it is often seen as extraneous to what is considered legitimate theology and spirituality.⁷¹ For Gutierrez, the

⁶⁹ See Echeagaray, H., *La Práctica de Jesús*, pp.52-58, where the Author develops the notion of praxis in relation to the life and following of Jesus.

⁷⁰ G.G., *The Power of the Poor in History*, p.98.

⁷¹ In developing this point in his book, *La Fuerza Histórica de los Pobres*, p.171, Gutierrez says, "Ella sería para los sectores conservadores una mezcla extraña e indebida de la teología con análisis sociales y tomas de posición políticas". The idea being that they (conservative sectors of the Church) don't necessarily disagree with the practice but say that it isn't part of legitimate theological pursuit.

dialectic between action and contemplation; commitment and critical reflection is not only part of the spiritual journey but normative for authentic christian life.⁷²

Walking in the Spirit then, implies the continuous evaluation of commitments to assure that they are in consonance with the movement of God's Spirit in history. By critical reflection on social reality and on what we are doing as members of a believing community, we can discern where God is calling us to move and therefore, how we can better promote the coming of the Kingdom.

For Gutierrez, action and contemplation are expressed in "prophetic language" and in "mystic language".⁷³

Prophetic language denotes words and deeds which denounce situations and causes of injustice and exploitation and mystic language recognizes that everything comes from the gratuitous love of God. Without prophecy, mysticism loses its historical bite and without mysticism, prophecy becomes

I have quoted from the spanish text because I find the translation in *The Power of the Poor in History*, p.100, to be an inadequate rendition where it says, "Our theological efforts seem a strange and bastard mixture of theology and sociology, with a generous sprinkling of politics".

⁷² See G.G., *La Fuerza Histórica de los Pobres*, p.233, where the Author states, "Sin vida contemplativa no hay vida cristiana, pero sin compromiso con los pobres y oprimidos tampoco". This is part of a section (pp.230-233) omitted from the translation.

⁷³ See G.G., *La Verdad Los Hará Libres*, p.28, "Se puede decir...que un lenguaje profético y un lenguaje místico están naciendo en estas tierras de explotación y de esperanza."

narrow sighted.⁷⁴ By uniting critical reflection and active commitment something truly transformative occurs because we are empowered by the creative presence of God in the world.⁷⁵

Walking in the Spirit then, requires the integration of a mystic-prophet. It means becoming aware of the movement and presence of God in history and creation and responding creatively to all that it demands in private and public life. It means reading the signs of the times aided by scientific social analysis and critically evaluating commitments in the light of one's faith tradition. It means living with compassion, in solidarity with the weak and the oppressed. It means celebrating the joy of God's presence in history while denouncing his exclusion from given situations and structures. It allows for the recycling of "the anger of oppressed peoples, not into sublimation or passivity but into

⁷⁴ This binomial of prophecy and mysticism is taken up by Matthew Fox O.P., in his book, *On Becoming a Musical, Mystical Bear*, pp.77-116, to show how prayer can become a radical response to life through words and deeds. Mysticism he sees as "becoming rooted" in the depths of reality, in the mystery of God present in history and in creation; prophecy, as an "uprooting" of everything both personal and social which is untrue to the Kingdom.

⁷⁵ See Matthew Fox, *A Spirituality Named Compassion and the Healing of the Global Village, Humpty Dumpty and Us*, Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1979, pp.132-136, where the author describes the dynamics of this integration as "extrovert meditation" that is, "centering by way of creating". He goes on to show how such meditation is empowering because it "gives birth to this new kind of power -- not a power over (sadism) or a power under (masochism)...but a power with. This new kind of power, a power-with, is properly called compassion".

ways of transformation, self-expression, and New Creation".⁷⁶

2.3 The Communitarian Dimension of Salvation

Salvation is the realization of our quest for completion, the counterpoint to our call to perfection --- "You must therefore, be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt.5:48). Just as God is the full actualization of being so too, we are called to realize our full potential in Christ. But this is more than an individual pursuit for it is humanity that has been saved by Christ and so it is humanity that is called to actualize the fruits of salvation in history. Humanity is called and empowered by the Spirit of the Risen Lord to come to perfection. In God's plan, "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people set apart"⁷⁷ is to be the sign and agent of the Kingdom -- humanity's perfection. The journey of walking in the Spirit in the following of Christ is pre-eminently a communal venture. And so, focus shifts from individual to collective perfection, from private to public morality and from local to global perspectives.

Liberation theology therefore, takes on a communitarian perspective because it flows out of the collective experience of a people working out their

⁷⁶ Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing*, Santa Fe: Bear and Company, 1983, p.261.

⁷⁷ See the first Preface for Sundays of the Roman Missal

salvation. It is the believing community that defines the parameters for theological reflection for it is in community that one journeys and in community that one reflects on that experience, evaluates it and chooses from the options and directions that become available. The spirituality of liberation is the way of following Jesus as a community.

2.4 From the Underside of History

Another characteristic of Gutierrez's theological perspective he himself has designated as "theology from the underside of history".⁷⁸ By this he points out the fact that in Latin America, those hitherto absent from history have suddenly placed themselves front and centre in society and in the Church.⁷⁹ The people can no longer be ignored. In another place he uses the expression, "irruption of the poor"⁸⁰ to express this phenomenon. The poor who had previously not been taken into account, have suddenly thrust themselves into historical consciousness by making themselves heard in society and in the Church. They have demanded their right to speak and their right to reflect on their faith

⁷⁸ See G.G., *The Power of the Poor in History*, chapter 7, pp.169-221.

⁷⁹ See *Ibid.*, p.76.

⁸⁰ See G.G., *La Verdad Los Hará Libres*, p.18, "Se puede decir que, en las últimas décadas, la vida y la reflexión de la Iglesia en el contexto latinoamericano están marcadas por lo que podemos llamar la irrupción del pobre. Se quiere expresar con esto que quienes estaban hasta ahora "ausentes" de la historia se hacen poco a poco "presentes"."

experience and interpret it in their own terms.⁸¹ They have taken upon themselves the task of doing theology. This theology has largely been ignored in academic circles for

The perspective of the poor never constitutes the central element of an academic expression of theology. We usually find the theology of the poor emanating from spiritual movements of the poor, which are frequently social movements as well. A number of currents of medieval piety constitute a good example of this tendency. This is significant, for the life and reflection of the poor always have a contemplative and mystical dimension---and a dimension of protest and social transformation.⁸²

The document of Puebla recognizes the poor as "subjects of history"⁸³ that is, active agents and participants in the construction of their own future. This affirmation leads to a corollary proposition: the evangelizing potential of the poor. The poor in Latin America are no longer seen only as recipients of evangelization but are recognized also as bearers or agents of evangelization.⁸⁴ But there are social consequences, for when the poor become the messengers of the gospel that is when it becomes a "stumbling block and a scandal...for (it) is no longer 'presentable' in society...it will not sound

⁸¹ See G.G., *The Power of the Poor in History*, p.101.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p.94.

⁸³ *Puebla and Beyond*, (n.135), p.139.

⁸⁴ G.G., *La Verdad Los Hará Libres*, p.216, "Destinatarios privilegiados (no exclusivos) del mensaje del Reino, los pobres son también sus portadores."

nice and it will not smell good".⁸⁵ Yet, one is forced to acknowledge a certain "evangelizing charism of the poor"⁸⁶ who often, by their very life style, incarnate the gospel values of solidarity, service, simplicity and openness to God which challenges the Church to ongoing conversion.

Through their active participation in the process of liberation, the poor are evangelized and evangelize. By reflecting on the conflicts and struggles they face as a people in the light of faith, they become more and more aware of their Father's love who hears and takes the side of the poor. By their perseverance and steadfastness in the face of overwhelming odds, they show others how life can come forth out of suffering and death. There is then, a "profound and reciprocal relationship between evangelization and liberation...through the evangelizing witness of the poor who battle for their liberation".⁸⁷

And all this is not without its theological consequences for our understanding of salvation which is expressed as communion with and among peoples here and now and which embraces and transforms every dimension of human reality.⁸⁸ It is a totally gratuitous gift of God, yet a process in which humanity can participate, not as if it were

⁸⁵ G.G., *The Power of the Poor in History*, p.22.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.150.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.106.

⁸⁸ See G.G., *A Theology of Liberation*, p.151.

a pre-game warm up, but as part of the saving process itself.⁸⁹

2.5 Theology as a Second Moment

One of the most characteristic features of Gutierrez's thought is his insistence on the primacy of experience in the theological process. His approach is existential and experiential rather than idealistic, more a *posteriori* than a *priori*. The articulation of a spirituality is the result of critical reflection on lived experience which is then proposed to the Church as a "way for being disciples of Christ".⁹⁰ Spirituality then, as a concrete way of following Jesus, is not the product of applied theology but a systematized enunciation of the experience of walking in the Spirit. As Gutierrez says,

⁸⁹ See *Ibid.*, pp.159-160, where we read, "Salvation - - totally and freely given by God, the communion of men with God and among themselves - - is the inner force and the fullness of this movement of man's self-generation which was initiated by the work of creation. Consequently, when we assert that man fulfills himself by continuing the work of creation by means of his labour, we are saying that he places himself, by this very fact, within an all-embracing salvific process. To work, to transform this world, is to become a man and to build the human community; it is also to save. Likewise, to struggle against misery and exploitation and to build a just society is already to be part of the saving action, which is moving towards its complete fulfillment. All this means that building the temporal city is not simply a stage of 'humanization' or 'pre-evangelization' as was held in theology up until a few years ago. Rather it is to become part of a saving process which embraces the whole of man and all human history. Any theological reflection on human work and social praxis ought to be rooted in this fundamental affirmation

⁹⁰ See G.G., *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, p.35.

In a second moment, spiritual experience becomes a subject for reflection; it is "theologized", turned into theology. This makes it easier to communicate experience as well as to exercise discernment regarding it.⁹¹

This "second moment" which for him is "intrinsic to a life of faith seeking to be authentic and complete"⁹² has an essentially critical function. It means reflecting, in the light of faith, on life wherever and however it is experienced. The purpose of this theological reflection is multiple: to discern positive and negative values in social structures and culture, to make explicit the signs of faith, hope and love present in the life of a people, to point out aberrations in social behaviour as well as to call attention to neglected areas of human experience, to help avoid pitfalls in the spiritual journey, to articulate and systematize the faith experience of the christian community, to help orientate pastoral activity, and overall "to contribute...to a more evangelical, more authentic, more concrete, and more efficacious commitment to liberation".⁹³

But, in a very special way, the theological reflection should play a prophetic role in the interpretation of historical events so as to reveal their deeper significance in the plan of God, or to point out the

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.52.

⁹² G.G., *A Theology of Liberation*, p.3.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.145.

brokenness or sinfulness of given historical situations.⁹⁴ Even though his emphasis is definitely focused on the critical function of theology, Gutierrez does not disregard the more traditional approach to theology as "wisdom" and "rational knowledge".⁹⁵ These different dimensions of theology are considered as complementary and interrelated.

Nevertheless, liberation theology will be noticeably different because of its shift of focus within the "locus theologicus" which is always the very life of the Church.⁹⁶ Differences in theological perspective arise according to what dimension of the life of the Church is reflected on, by whom, when, and where. Thus, theological reflection will be characterized by the historical circumstances of where and when it is realized and by whom.

In general, theology has been seen as the domain of professionally trained theologians. But in Latin America, this domain has been breached by the ordinary believer who, united in community, reflects on the struggles of life to discover the presence and guidance of God. Thus, for grassroots christian communities, theology becomes a re-

⁹⁴ See *Ibid.*, p.13, where the Author discusses Oscar Cullmann's interpretation of the prophetic role of theology. See also, G.G., *La Verdad Los Hará Libres*, p.93, where he shows how the theological analysis of social reality differs from the purely sociological.

⁹⁵ See G.G., *A Theology of Liberation*, pp.4-5. See also G.G., *The Power of the Poor in History*, p.56, where the Author extols the need for a "spiritual theology".

⁹⁶ See G.G., *A Theology of Liberation*, p.8.

reading of the Word of God according to the circumstances of the historical moment in which they live to find encouragement and guidance. For them, "Theology is an expression of the awareness that a christian community has of its faith at a given moment in history."⁹⁷ They need the expertise of professional theologians to help them articulate and systematize their experience but the experience and reflection are theirs.

In any attempt to compare contemporary theology with liberation theology the *locus theologicus* must be clearly defined. For Gutierrez, two distinct approaches to the task of theology become evident. For contemporary theology, the challenge comes from the *nonbeliever* who questions the religious world demanding authenticity and relevance; while for liberation theology, the challenge comes from the *nonperson* who questions the economic, social, political world in which he lives, demanding recognition and participation.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ G.G., *The Power of the Poor in History*, p.36. See also, *Ibid.*, p.79ff., where the Author discusses the mutual relationship between growing political awareness and theological reflection. The theme is also discussed under the title, Theology and politics, *Ibid.*, p.42ff., where the Author makes reference to the "political theology" of J.B. Metz.

⁹⁸ See *Ibid.*, pp.57-58. Also *Ibid.*, pp.92-93, where the Author compares the two approaches by distinguishing "progressive theology" and "liberation theology". Again *Ibid.*, pp.191-193, where the interlocutor of liberation theology as the "nonperson" is further discussed.

Those who attempt to compare liberation theology with theologies of development, revolution or violence must take into account a fundamental difference. Liberation theology makes no attempt to justify positions already taken nor serve as an apologetic. It has in fact, espoused an "inverse role of an ideology which rationalizes and justifies a given social and ecclesial order".⁹⁹ By remaining true to its critical function, liberation theology will never be reduced to a revolutionary ideology. For it,

Seeks to understand the faith from within this historical praxis and from within the manner of living the faith in a revolutionary commitment. As a result, theology comes after involvement. Liberation theology is a second act. Hence its themes are the great themes of all true theology, but its focus, its manner of approaching them, is different. It has a different relationship with historical praxis. To say that liberation theology makes no claim to be a revolutionary Christian ideology is not to say that it stands aloof from the revolutionary process.¹⁰⁰

The problem is nicely summed up by J.B.Metz whom Gutierrez quotes:

Properly speaking, the so-called hermeneutic problem of theology is not the problem of how systematic theology stands in relation to historical theology, how dogma stands in relation to history, but what is the relation between theory and practice, between understanding the faith and social practice.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ G.G., *A Theology of Liberation*, p.12.

¹⁰⁰ G.G., *The Power of the Poor in History*, p.61.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.42.

Liberation theology is not presented as a new theme for theological reflection but rather "as a new way to do theology...as a critical reflection on historical praxis"¹⁰², the historical praxis of the *nonperson* in Latin America.

From this we discover the two fundamental pillars upon which liberation theology rests --- its theological method and its theological perspective. As we have seen, theological reflection is taken as a second act or moment which is legitimized by the first act or moment --- active involvement in the liberation process. Liberation theology must flow from an experiential base. It is not simply a matter of distinguishing inductive and deductive methodology but rather, a matter of reflecting on the dialectical relationship between theory and practice as it is experienced in real life situations. Secondly, the theological perspective is that of the poor. Theology is done by, and from the viewpoint of, the impoverished, the marginated and the exploited of society.¹⁰³

And so, the focus of Gutierrez's thinking comes full cycle. The encounter with Christ in history is salvific. We

¹⁰² G.G., *A Theology of Liberation*, p.15.

¹⁰³ See G.G., *The Power of the Poor in History*, p.200. Also *idem*, pp.103-104, where we read, "Consequently, when we speak of 'first act' and 'second act' we are not just talking methodology. We are talking lifestyle---a way of living the faith. In the last analysis, we are talking spirituality in the best and most authentic sense of the word. It can be put this way: in liberation theology, our methodology is our spirituality --a life process on the way to realization".

are challenged by this encounter to follow him more closely and take to ourselves his mission in the world. Aided by the Spirit, we learn to discern God's presence and movement in history and as a believing community, we become more and more aware of our power and potential as God's people as we journey to the Father. Gutierrez himself clearly and succinctly sums it up,

So we speak in liberation theology about the "first moment", which is contemplation and practice, silence; and the "second moment", which is a word about God, reflection. This methodology is not only an intellectual point; our methodology is our spirituality. To distinguish and relate the first and second moments is not only a way to understand Christian faith but also a way to be Christian.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Gustavo Gutierrez, "Spirituality is Freedom to Love and to Serve Others", Scarboro Missions, Vol.67, n.1, Ja'86, p.5.

3.0 ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR GUTIERREZ'S SPIRITUALITY OF LIBERATION

In chapter two, I discussed some of the characteristic features of Gutierrez's thought, the directional lines or orientation of his particular approach to theology. This gives us some idea of where he is coming from. Now, I will discuss the basic elements that he identifies as making up the dynamics of a spirituality of liberation. These elements are part of the "first moment" of the following of Christ in history. They flow from the lived experience of those who follow this "way" in Latin America and so will be related to attitudes and qualities that have been drawn from the awareness of those involved.

The elements of the spirituality are not deduced from the theological focus but rather are the experiential basis from which the theological articulation of that spirituality is taken. For this reason, there is no particular merit of priority in the development of these themes. The novelty does not lie in the themes themselves but rather in their overall interconnection, much as the novelty of a recipe lies not so much in the composition of the ingredients as in their particular combination.

I have thought it convenient to use the order of presentation which Gutierrez follows in his book, *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, part three: *conversion* as a requirement for solidarity, *gratuitousness* as the condition for efficacy,

joy in the victory over suffering, *spiritual childhood* as a condition for commitment, and *community* out of solitude. In short then, we will discuss some of the components of the mystic-prophet that a spirituality of liberation calls one to be.

3.1 Conversion as a Requirement for Solidarity

As Gutierrez points out, "a conversion is the starting point of every spiritual journey. It involves a break with life lived up to that point; it is a prerequisite for entering the kingdom ..." ¹⁰⁵ But conversion is not an end in itself, it is an ongoing condition for the kind of solidarity "required by the preferential option for the poor".¹⁰⁶ And in another place, Gutierrez describes an essential quality of solidarity as compassion ---"the capacity to suffer with those who are oppressed and to share in their lot".¹⁰⁷

Solidarity is something that must be freely entered into and so by taking up the distinction between *freedom from* and *freedom for*, employed by St. Thomas Aquinas, he says,

¹⁰⁵ G.G., *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, p.95.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p.106.

¹⁰⁷ See Gustavo Gutierrez, *Teología de la Liberación: Perspectivas*, Salamanca: Ediciones Sígueme, 1977, p.253, "Com-padecer, sufrir con el oprimido, compartir su destino eso es conocer a Dios." For some reason, this sentence has been left out of the translation page 196.

"Freedom from" refers to freedom from sin, from selfishness, from injustice, from need; all these are conditions that call for liberation. "Freedom for" states the purpose of the freedom acquired: freedom for love, for communion; the attainment of love and communion is the final stage of liberation. "Free to love": this phrase, inspired by Paul... (1Cor.9:19)... expresses the full meaning of the process of liberation to which many Latin American christians are committed... In this context of the struggle for liberation for the sake of love and justice, a distinctive way of following Jesus is coming into existence in Latin America.¹⁰⁸

Freedom from refers to the obstacles or limits both psychological and social which keep people "from self-fulfillment" that is to say, "liberation from all impediments to the exercise of his freedom".¹⁰⁹ In this sense then, the purpose of conversion is not for God's sake; it is for humanity's sake. Only by being truly free will one be able to truly love. But this entails a leap from abstract to real freedom which is not so easily done.

The step from an abstract to a real freedom is not taken without a struggle against all the forces that oppress man, a struggle full of pitfalls, detours, and temptations to run away. The goal is not

¹⁰⁸ G.G., *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, p.92.

¹⁰⁹ G.G., *A Theology of Liberation*, p.27. See also, Fox, M., *Compassion*, pp.69-82, where the author treats of the psychological obstacles of competition, compulsion and dualism. Then again on pp.117-124, where he discusses "fears"---of death, of life, of suffering, of pleasure, of androgyny, and of guilt.

only better living conditions, a radical change of structures, a social revolution; it is much more: the continuous creation, never ending, of a new way to be a man, a permanent cultural revolution.¹¹⁰

The exercise of real freedom means living the paradox of loosing one's life in order to save it. It means to place oneself at the disposition of the creative power of God so as to make a mark on the social structure in which one lives. It means letting go of everything that holds one back from radical commitment to the cause of the poor. It means adopting a new way of relating to others. It means loving as Jesus loved.

To be free to love, means to have the courage to identify with the cause of the poor and to work for justice by promoting right relations among human persons and nations.¹¹¹ It means to give life by recognizing people's worth and by fomenting their active participation in every dimension of social life. It means promoting cooperation and communion among peoples.¹¹²

Gutierrez outlines some of the characteristics of conversion. First of all, it is a process and "not something that is done once and for all",¹¹³ for we are talking here

¹¹⁰ G.G., *A Theology of Liberation*, p.32.

¹¹¹ See G.G., *A Theology of Liberation*, p.194.

¹¹² See G.G., *La Verdad Los Hará Libres*, p.27.

¹¹³ G.G., *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, p.95.

about faithfulness to the Word of God in our journey to the Father. A journey that is not always easy, for one may lose one's way or decide to rest or turn back. Conversion, that gift of grace that allows one to carry on regardless of the odds, or to start anew, is essentially a breaking away from the clutches of sin, "the breach of friendship with God and with the human community".¹¹⁴ Man's rejection in practice of the necessary consequences of filiation and fellowship is the root of this fundamental alienation which manifests itself through egoism and unjust social structures:

Conversion implies that we recognize the presence of sin in our lives and our world. In other words, we see and admit what is vitiating our relationship with God and our solidarity with others --- what, in consequence, is also hindering the creation of a just and human society.¹¹⁵

Here again Gutierrez touches upon the personal and social dimensions of sin, giving special mention on the personal level to sins of omission --- "the cowardice that keeps silent in the face of the sufferings of the poor and that offers any number of adroit justifications".¹¹⁶ Because of

¹¹⁴ G.G., *The Power of the Poor in History*, p.62, and also *A Theology of Liberation*, p.152;172. See also, G.G., *La Verdad los Hará Libres*, pp.193-194, and Jesús Espeja, *Espiritualidad y Liberación*, pp.85-88, where the author refers to conversion as the dialectic between sin and grace and then discusses Jon Sobrino's distinction between first and second conversion.

¹¹⁵ G.G., *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, p.97.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.97.

the interrelation of personal and social sin, conversion is ratified by social change:

The change called for is not simply an interior one but one that involves the entire person as a corporate being...and therefore also has consequences for the web of social relationships of which the individual is a part.¹¹⁷

Secondly, conversion is not purely an "interior" event for it implies breaking with old ways and starting out on new ways of living and relating which must have repercussions in "the socio-economic, political and cultural milieu in which we live, and which we ought to transform".¹¹⁸ The dynamic of conversion is twofold: a breaking with old ways and patterns of behaviour and a reorientation or starting anew. In biblical terms it is the choosing of life over death,¹¹⁹ not just for oneself but for all "those who are subject to a premature and unjust death".¹²⁰

Thirdly, Gutierrez reminds us of the collective dimension of solidarity and therefore of conversion.

117 *Ibid.*, p.98.

118 G.G., *The Power of the Poor in History*, p.53. See also, Fox, M., *Compassion*, pp.91-94, where the author relates these ideas to a "letting go".

119 See Deuteronomy 30:15-20.

120 G.G., *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, p.100. See also, Fox, M., *On Becoming a Musical, Mystical Bear*, p.89, where the author speaks of conversion as a change of heart or attitude to life, "to see the mysteries of life in a new light"...and on p.78, he connects this with prayer as "the process of becoming alive, of rooting ourselves in life"

This way of solidarity is not to be undertaken by isolated individuals. It should be done along with the entire Church...This conversion entails a break with a previous situation in which for one or another reason solidarity with the poor either did not exist or existed only as a possibility...Conversion is a requirement for the solidarity that is part of the task of the Church...It used to be called mercy, then charity, then commitment; today it is called solidarity.¹²¹

Solidarity with the poor in this context does not refer to acts of kindness to isolated individuals, it means rather, that the Church take to itself the very cause of the poor which demands the transformation of everything that impoverishes people, economically, politically and culturally.

Fourthly, for Gutierrez, "a spirituality of liberation will centre on a conversion to the neighbor"¹²² as a means to solidarity. The terminology takes its origin from

¹²¹ G.G., *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, p.101. Also in his book, *The Power of the Poor in History*, p.29, Gutierrez clearly shows what conversion implies for the Church. "The first step is for the church as a whole to break its many ties with the present order, ties that it has maintained overtly or covertly, wittingly or unwittingly, up to now. This will not be an easy task, for it will mean abandoning outworn traditions, suspicions, viewpoints, advantages, and privileges, as well as the forces of inertia. It will also mean accepting the fact that the future cast of the church will be radically different from the one we know today. It will mean incurring the wrath of the groups in power --- with all the risks that entails. Above all, it will mean believing in the revolutionary and liberating power of the gospel --- believing in the Lord -- and authentic faith, a faith that goes beyond the mere recitation and acceptance of codified truths."

¹²² G.G., *A Theology of Liberation*, p.204.

the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-36) and implies that one be open to make others our neighbor, to accept and love especially those who have been hurt, rejected or marginated by society. It means actively expanding one's circle of "neighbors" by taking to oneself the concerns and the plight of the weak and the oppressed. It means to help others out of a true love of people for their own sake and not out of moral obligation or moral expediency "for the love of God".¹²³ And so, we move from an individualistic concept of charity to a more social or political one as Gutierrez points out:

As it has been insisted in recent years, the neighbor is not only man viewed individually. The term refers also to man considered in the fabric of social relationships, to man situated in his economic, social, cultural, and racial coordinates. It likewise refers to the exploited social class, the dominated people, and the marginated race...This point of view leads us far beyond the individualistic language of the I-Thou relationship. Charity is today a "political charity", according to the phrase of Pius XII...it means the transformation of a society structured to benefit a few who appropriate to themselves the value of the work of others. This transformation ought to be directed toward a radical change in the foundation of society...¹²⁴

A fifth characteristic of conversion for solidarity

123 See *Ibid.*, pp.199-200.

124 *Ibid.*, p.202.

as Gutierrez sees it, is the focus on material poverty.¹²⁵
 The option is clearly for those who suffer from the
 consequences of material poverty and not the spiritually poor
 who suffer from the consequences of secularism. Nor is one
 directed to the poor in general which promotes indirect
 involvement, paternalistic assistentialism or some kind of
 impersonal, humanistic or christian social welfare system:

The solidarity is not with "the poor" in
 the abstract but with human beings of
 flesh and bone. Without love and
 affection, without---why not say it?---
 tenderness, there can be no true gesture
 of solidarity. Where these are lacking
 there is an impersonality and coldness
 (however well intentioned and accompanied
 by a desire for justice) that the flesh-
 and-blood poor will not fail to perceive.
 True love exists only among equals, "for
 love effects a likeness between the lover
 and the object loved". And this supposes
 an ability to approach others and respect
 their sensitivities.¹²⁶

Solidarity implies human contact not impersonalized service.
 Solidarity does not treat another as a "client" or as a
 social statistic; it treats the other as a person who merits
 respect and deserves consideration. This kind of solidarity
 which is the result of true conversion requires "constancy
 and deep conviction".¹²⁷ Only firmness of faith and resolve
 can carry one through to the ultimate consequences of active
 solidarity - - personal loss, death, or social revolution.

125 See G.G., *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, p.103.

126 *Ibid.*, p.104.

127 *Ibid.*, p.104.

Here, the word "terquedad" in spanish is translated as "stubbornness"¹²⁸ to express the capacity, found in all the great saints, to hang onto their vision regardless of what others say or do. Gutierrez notes that this is what St. Teresa of Avila calls "determined resolve", the steadfastness that prevents "our being easily shaken in our commitments and our Christian life".¹²⁹ This is what gives backbone to the spiritual traveller:

Spirituality as an all-embracing attitude is precisely a force that bestows constancy and prevents our being "tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine" (Eph.4:14). This stubbornness---for that is what I am talking about---has its source in hope, "for we know," as a statement by Guatemalan religious formulates it, "that after the 'torments of unleashed violence' that now afflict us, the sun of justice of God our Father will shine again. We will not betray our cause even though it brings us persecution and death, because we trust that Christ is present in the tragic reality that is our present life."¹³⁰

3.2 Gratuitousness as a Condition for Efficacy

For Gutierrez, "a spirituality of liberation must be filled with a living sense of *gratuitousness*. Communion with the Lord and with all men is more than anything else a

128 Ibid., p.105.

129 Ibid., p.106.

130 Ibid., p.105.

gift".¹³¹ Gratuitousness is the attitude, the perspective out of which christian commitment flows. More than merely acknowledging who's running the show, it implies constant awareness of whose show it is. It is not so much a matter of having God on our side as keeping ourselves on God's side, according to the popular dictum "to work as if everything depended on you and to pray as if everything depended on God".

First of all, gratuitousness is an acknowledgement that "everything is grace".¹³² It means looking at things from God's perspective, an abiding willingness to discover his plan for mankind and a constancy in promoting it. In short, making our projects subject to God's plan. This is what transforms socio-political action into the work of salvation. It means always remembering that the gift of God's love is the source of our being; we have been made by love and for love because "God loved us first"(1John4:19).

Gratuitousness is a condition for "efficacious love" which transforms love into "an effective force within history"...¹³³ Efficacious love is another name for christian commitment, "effective action in the service of the other".¹³⁴ The parable of the Last Judgement as related to

131 G.G., *A Theology of Liberation*, p.205.

132 G.G., *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, p.109.

133 *Ibid.*, p.107.

134 *Ibid.*, p.112.

us in the Gospel of Matthew (25:31-46), helps us understand that effective action must respond to the concrete needs of people. It is not a product of good intentions or moral duty. It is not a hobby which can be pursued at our leisure nor is it paternalistic, for authentic love flows from equality and mutual respect.¹³⁵ Only the experience of truly being loved can free one to truly love. This is how God loves ---without hidden agendas or vested interests---for the sake of other and not oneself.

We have also come to understand that a true and full encounter with our neighbor requires that we first experience the gratuitousness of God's love. Once we have experienced it, our approach to others is purified of any tendency to impose an alien will on them; it is disinterested and respectful of their personalities, their needs and aspirations.¹³⁶

For Gutierrez, the experience of gratuitousness is the basis for christian praxis, the effective integration of contemplation and commitment.¹³⁷ And so, prayer becomes a "humble and trusting response to the Father's gratuitous gift of love and expresses our desire to share that gift in an

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.108.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.112.
See also, G.G., *La Verdad Los Hará Libres*, pp.233-234, where the author shows in reference to the Beatitudes, how the exigency of gratuity is discipleship that is, the translation of the gratuitous love received from God into efficacious action for others.

¹³⁷ See G.G., *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, p.110.

unaffected way with our brothers and sisters".¹³⁸

Finally, Gutierrez himself points out the intimate relationship between gratuitousness and efficacy in christian praxis.

A commitment that takes shape in effective action is therefore required by the gratuitous love of the Lord, but let us not forget that an inverse moment is also needed: the contemplation that historical action calls for.¹³⁹

Effective action is not measured so much in the multiplication of activities as in the reflective quality of what is done. Efficacy is more a result of quality action than quantity of acts. And quality comes to action through contemplation which situates it within the creative flow of God's Spirit in history.

3.3 Joy as Victory over Suffering

Christian joy within the context of a spirituality of liberation is a product of conviction grounded in hope:

Hope of the resurrection is in no sense an evasion of concrete history; on the contrary, it leads to a redoubling of effort in the struggle against what brings unjust death...Belief in the resurrection is incompatible with the acceptance of a society that condemns the

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.111.
See also, Fox, M., *On Becoming a Musical, Mystical Bear*, Chapter 3, pp.49-76, where the author discusses prayer as a "radical response to life".

¹³⁹ G.G., *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, p.113.

poor to death. To be aware of this, and to act accordingly, is a central aspect of being "witnesses to Easter".¹⁴⁰

Such a joy is far removed from the superficial delight of having fun in order to escape or avoid the painful realities of life. It flows from a recognition that suffering for justice is not in vain and that pain is often part of the passage to new life. "This is a paschal joy proper to a time of martyrdom."¹⁴¹

The paradox of christian joy lies in the juxtaposition of joy and suffering which so characteristic of a time of martyrdom. And for Gutierrez, martyrdom refers to the witness "of those who give their lives because they believe in the God of life and because they love the dispossessed".¹⁴² Martyrdom means being poor or freely accepting the consequences of committed solidarity with the poor. These consequences may range from suspicion,

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.118.

See also, G.G., *The Power of the Poor in History*, p.101 and Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing*, p.18, where the author quotes from Erich Fromm, "Those whose hope is weak settle for comfort or for violence". And then continues, "The comfort of consumerism and the violence of militarism which dominate our times would suggest that we are a people with little or no hope".

The same author, in his book, *Wheel!, We, wee All the Way Home*, p.229, states, "Joy, the fruit of passion and spirit, underlies all prophetic hard times. Thus, we arrive at a notion of service as a spirituality. Service when it is prophetic in its impetus qualifies as spirituality. It is a way of life and of responding deeply to life".

¹⁴¹ G.G., *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, p.115.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p.116.

misunderstanding, loss of work and calumny to imprisonment, torture, exile and even death. Yet, "martyrdom is something that happens but is not sought".¹⁴³ Accepting the consequences of commitment is not the same as rashly looking for trouble. The focus is always on the value of witness. It means giving witness of faith in the God of life by taking up the struggle against the agents and structures of death whether they be disease, government, or political, economic or social policy that kill, impoverish or marginalize individuals or groups from active participation within society. It means giving witness to the meaning of Easter: that life will triumph over death; that the power of good will triumph over the forces of evil; that the weak ones of this world will confound the strong, by taking risks and putting one's trust in the Risen Lord. It may even mean giving the ultimate witness that death doesn't have the last word by the sacrifice of one's life. Yet, for the christian community, no amount of suffering or death can obliterate the paradoxical resurrection experience of the birth of new life even in the midst of extreme situations of suffering and death.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.117.

¹⁴⁴ See Fox, M., *On Becoming a Musical, Mystical Bear*, p.115, where the author equates "prophetic suffering" with "creative suffering" and then goes on to say that, "the prophet's sole sustaining power may be hope---which, of course, is not optimism, but the capacity to sustain one's belief that life is a gift when all else seems to dictate otherwise. Hope means that the power to deal with evil

Gutierrez goes on to show how, "the opposite of joy is not suffering, but sadness".¹⁴⁵ The witness of the Church in Latin America is not to a sad time but to a difficult one. It is living through the pangs of birth, painful yet fraught with the joy of expectancy --- the coming of the reign of God. This is what sustains commitment in the face of overpowering obstacles and fierce resistance and what Gutierrez calls a "paradoxical resignation to joy" which flows from a conviction in the presence of God and a trust in the support of the faith community.¹⁴⁶

And this paschal joy becomes a collective experience when,

an entire people, inspired by its faith and hope, sets out to defend its right to life. On this journey through the desert it experiences failures and the temptation to turn back, but also successes and, above all, hope in the God who liberates and gives life.¹⁴⁷

And so, it is the reality of paschal joy that gives the christian community the capacity to celebrate even death. Christian joy is the capacity to celebrate God's saving deeds in one's personal life and in the life of the community in spite of setbacks and difficulties. It is the lived recognition that God/good prevails. Meister Eckhart

powers is greater than oneself and must ultimately triumph, that "the gates of hell shall not prevail."

145 G.G., *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, p.115.

146 See *Ibid.*, p.119.

147 *Ibid.*, p.120.

expresses it from God's perspective.

At every deed, however puny,
that results in justice,
God is made glad,
glad through and through.
At such a time
there is nothing in the core of the
Godhead
that is not tickled through and through
and that does not dance for joy.¹⁴⁸

3.4 Spiritual Childhood as a Condition for Commitment

Gutierrez develops the unity of two basic gospel themes, "Happy are the poor in spirit" (Matthew 5:3) and "unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:2). There is a profound mutuality between spiritual poverty or spiritual childhood and real conversion and authentic commitment. Active solidarity and commitment are the signs of real conversion and,

are set forth as the indispensable condition for authentically living and proclaiming that central aspect of the gospel constituted by spiritual childlikeness---understood as availability in the sight of the Lord.¹⁴⁹

Following the approach taken by the bishops at Medellín, Gutierrez opts for the linking of spiritual poverty with spiritual childhood as opposed to a focus on "the aspect

¹⁴⁸ Fox, M., *Meditations with Meister Eckhart*, p.130.

¹⁴⁹ G.G., *The Power of the Poor in History*, pp.136-137.

of detachment from material goods".¹⁵⁰ And so, the emphasis is placed on the aspect of openness to God and to others.¹⁵¹ This approach focuses into the depths of human motivation and uncovers a new dimension to the biblical meaning of poverty. Thus Gutierrez says:

Understood in this way, poverty is opposed to pride, to an attitude of self-sufficiency; on the other hand, it is synonymous with faith, with abandonment and trust in the Lord.¹⁵²

But spiritual poverty has social consequences. Commitment to the poor means first and foremost taking up the lot of the poor. Living in solidarity with the poor is much different from working for the poor. This type of commitment is a way to live spiritual poverty --- abandonment to the Father. There is also, no better way to profess detachment from the

¹⁵⁰ G.G., *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, p.126.

¹⁵¹ G.G., *A Theology of Liberation*, pp.296-297, where the author examines the psalms so as to better understand the attributes of this religious attitude. "To know Yahweh is to seek him (9:11; 34:11), to abandon and entrust oneself to him (10:14; 34:9, 37:40), to hope in him (25:3-5, 21; 37:9), to fear the Lord (25:12, 14; 34:8, 10), to observe his commandments (25:10);...to be totally at the disposition of the Lord. This is the precondition for being able to receive the Word of God. It has, therefore, the same meaning as the Gospel theme of spiritual childhood. God's communication with us is a gift of love; to receive this gift it is necessary to be poor, a spiritual child. This poverty has no direct relationship to wealth; in the first instance it is not a question of indifference to the goods of this world. It goes deeper than that; it means to have no other sustenance than the will of God. This is the attitude of Christ."

See also, *Ibid.*, p.205, where the author describes spiritual childhood as openness to a permanent process of conversion.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p.296.

goods of this world than to enter into the world of the poor where wealth, status and privilege are lost.¹⁵³ There is then, a real connection between the spiritual experience of real poverty and the development of an attitude of spiritual childhood. This is not to sanctify poverty which is in itself an evil, but rather to discover that the world of the poor is the privileged place to learn how to live in spiritual childhood. This is the sense of poverty in religious life ---to promote commitment and solidarity with the poor by freely choosing to be poor. As Gutierrez puts it:

Christian poverty, an expression of love, is solidarity with the poor and is a protest against poverty. This is the concrete, contemporary meaning of the witness of poverty. It is a poverty lived not for its own sake, but rather as an authentic imitation of Christ; it is a poverty which means taking on the sinful condition of man to liberate him from sin and all its consequences.¹⁵⁴

Spiritual childhood then, describes "the outlook of the person who accepts the gift of divine filiation and responds to it by building fellowship".¹⁵⁵ And so, it is seen as a

¹⁵³ G.G., *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, pp.123-124. Also G.G., *A Theology of Liberation*, p.299, where the author says that the spiritual attitude of detachment "becomes authentic by incarnating itself in material poverty".

¹⁵⁴ G.G., *A Theology of Liberation*, pp.300-301. See also, *Ibid.*, p.291, where the author makes the distinction between poverty as a "scandalous condition" and poverty as "spiritual childhood".

¹⁵⁵ G.G., *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, p.127.

condition for radical discipleship, which challenges one to leave aside the securities of this world and unconditionally place oneself in the hands of God.¹⁵⁶

For Gutierrez, spiritual childhood is a fundamental attitude needed for insertion into the world of the poor and "an indispensable condition for this solidarity", as he goes on to say:

Only by becoming a child can one enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt.18:3). The same spiritual childhood is required for entering the world of the poor---those for whom the God of the kingdom has a preferential love.¹⁵⁷

Insertion into the world of the poor is not easy. To share the life of the poor is to suffer: goods that are overpriced and of inferior quality, housing that is cramped, educational facilities that are mediocre, health care that is inadequate, lack of adequate transportation and services, low wages and unemployment, strikes and marches, abuse and repression. But it also entails a change of mentality and perspective.

Being poor is also a way of feeling, knowing, reasoning, making friends, loving, believing, suffering, celebrating, and praying. The poor constitute a world of their own. Commitment to the poor means entering, and in some cases remaining in, that universe with a much clearer awareness; it means being one of its inhabitants,

¹⁵⁶ See Echegaray, H., *La Práctica de Jesús*, p.196, and Also G.G., *La Verdad Los Hará Libres*, p.230, where the author equates the poor in spirit with the disciples.

¹⁵⁷ G.G., *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, p.127.

looking upon it as a place of residence and not simply of work. It does not mean going into that world by the hour to bear witness to the gospel, but rather emerging from within it each morning in order to proclaim the good news to every human being.¹⁵⁸

This requires a real *kenosis*, a process of letting go, in imitation of Christ who did not take on the condition of man so as to idealize it but rather out of love --- expressed in solidarity -- so as to show mankind the route to salvation. And so, voluntary insertion into the world of the poor through the living of evangelical poverty must be done too, out of love expressed by solidarity.¹⁵⁹ But one must always be aware of one's limitations. Gutierrez stresses this point:

The will to live in the world of the poor can therefore only follow an asymptotic curve: a constantly closer approach that can, however, never reach the point of real identification with the life of the poor.¹⁶⁰

And this again underlines the need for an ongoing process of conversion to assure that the movement on the curve is towards identification and not away.

There must be no attempt to romanticize the world of

158 *Ibid.*, p.125.

159 See G.G., *A Theology of Liberation*, p.300. See also, Fox, M., *Original Blessing*, p.151, where the author says that "those who commit themselves to liberation must come to that 'zero point' wherein they have 'nothing to lose'."

Also, by the same author, *Meditations with Meister Eckhart*, p.63.

160 G.G., *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, p.126.

the poor nor canonize a social class. The world of the poor is as marked by sin and grace, selfishness and sacrifice, violence and peace, evil and good, as is any other social, historical reality. The poor are not necessarily good but they are preferentially loved.

For Gutierrez, Mary is a model of spiritual childhood and the Magnificat an encapsulation of its essential qualities, "a trusting self-surrender to God with a will to commitment and close association with God's favorites: the lowly, the hungry".¹⁶¹ This makes Mary the preeminent model of a spirituality of liberation because she exemplifies the attributes of spiritual childhood --- solidarity, service, simplicity and openness to the will of God. As he points out:

Mary's song, the "Magnificat", has been considered from the beginning as a central text for a spirituality of liberation. The text speaks to us of the joy that is produced by the gratuitous love of the Father. It also tells us that the powerful will be thrown down, the rich will go away empty handed and that God will vindicate and raise up the poor. The two dimensions of christian life, the mystical and the historical, are manifest here with unequalled vigour. Without a contemplative life there is no christian life, nor can there be without commitment to the poor and oppressed. The liberating dimension of Mary's message, that the poor grasp intuitively, appears ever more clearly.¹⁶²

161 *Ibid.*, p.127.

162 G.G., *La Fuerza Histórica de los Pobres*, pp.232-233, "Por eso el Magnificat ha sido considerado desde el comienzo como un texto central en una espiritualidad de la liberación. Ese texto que nos habla de la alegría que

Gutierrez shows how hope is the sustaining force of spiritual childhood without which solidarity with and social commitment to the cause of the poor can become confused and off track:

Christian hope opens us, in an attitude of spiritual childhood, to the gift of the future promised by God. It keeps us from any confusion of the Kingdom with any one historical stage, from any idolatry toward unavoidably ambiguous human achievement, from any absolutizing of revolution. In this way hope makes us radically free to commit ourselves to social praxis, motivated by a liberating utopia and with the means which the scientific analysis of reality provides for us. And our hope not only frees us for this commitment; it simultaneously demands and judges it.¹⁶³

Hope keeps man's eyes on the Lord and keeps his projects in perspective. Man's efforts, however successful, can at

produce el amor gratuito del Padre, nos dice también que los poderosos serán derribados, los ricos se irán con las manos vacías y que Dios reivindica y levanta a los pobres, Las dos dimensiones de la vida cristiana, la mística y la histórica, están allí expresadas con vigor inigualable. Sin vida contemplativa no hay vida cristiana, pero sin compromiso con los pobres y oprimidos tampoco. La dimensión liberadora del mensaje de María que el pueblo intuía, aparece cada vez más clara."

(My translation, as this is part of a section pp.230-233 that has been omitted from the published translation.)

See also, G.G., *The Power of the Poor in History*, p.139, where the author quotes from a text of Pope John Paul II (Homily in Zapopán, Mexico). "Mary is also the model, as faithful handmaid of the will of God, of those who refuse passively to accept the adverse circumstances of their personal and social life, who refuse to be victims of 'alienation', as you say today, but who proclaim with her that God is the 'avenger of the lowly', and that if need be he 'pulls down the mighty from their thrones'---to use the words of her Magnificat once more."

¹⁶³ G.G., *A Theology of Liberation*, p.238.

best be only partial realizations of a more far reaching plan
 ---God's plan for humankind.

3.5 Community out of Solitude

Community is an essential dimension of christian life and not just an option that is exercised when convenient. Not only have we been called as a people but also, it is in community that one discovers the true significance of what being a christian really means.¹⁶⁴ The christian community or *ecclesia* is called to be a community of disciples. Men and women actively committed to the following of Jesus through an historical praxis that reflects his respect for all people, love for the poor, insistence on just relationships among men, openness to the Father and conviction of the power of life over death.¹⁶⁵ As Gutierrez himself sums it up,

To announce the Gospel, is to announce the mystery of filiation and fellowship, a mystery hidden from times past and revealed now in Christ dead and risen. And so, to proclaim the Gospel is to convoke in *ecclesia*, it is to call together the assembly. Only in community can faith be lived in love, celebrated and deepened, uniquely experienced as faithfulness to the Lord and as solidarity with all people.¹⁶⁶

164 See *Ibid.*, p.207, where the author refers to the community as the "small temple" where spirituality is concretized.

165 See G.G., *The Power of the Poor in History*, p.96.

166 G.G., *La Verdad Los Hará Libres*, p.24, "Anunciar el Evangelio, es anunciar el misterio de la filiación y la fraternidad, misterio escondido desde todos los tiempos y

But there is a deeper side to community which results from "a passage through a painful experience of profound solitude".¹⁶⁷ Solitude refers to the personal quality of intimacy with God which results from one's being freed from all distractions and impediments to full communion with God who alone can fulfill the human quest for completeness and happiness. Solitude involves a consciousness of aloneness with God, not loneliness. It is the core of personal integrity and faithfulness to the Lord and to others "even in the blackest depths of the 'dark night of injustice'".¹⁶⁸ Here again, Gutierrez calls upon the spiritual language of St. John of the Cross to help us understand the spiritual experience of committed christians in Latin America today, as he goes on to say:

Like the Jewish people in the wilderness, one traveling this road travels in the greatest solitude. Solitude, but not selfish withdrawal, is a central factor in every experience of God, for it is in the wilderness that God speaks to us: "I will allure her, and bring her into the

revelado ahora en Cristo muerto y resucitado. Por eso, proclamar el Evangelio es convocar en ecclesia, es reunir en asamblea. Sólo en comunidad la fe puede vivirse en el amor, celebrarse y profundizarse, vivirse en un gesto único como fidelidad al Señor y como solidaridad con todas las personas humanas."

¹⁶⁷ G.G., *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, p.128. It should be noted that the translation here is misleading as, "or loneliness" is added to the sentence quite out of keeping with the spanish text. So too, on page 130, "deep loneliness" is given as a translation for "soledades profundas" (page 175 of the spanish text).

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.131.

wilderness, and speak tenderly to her"(Hos.2:14). Solitude thus understood has nothing to do with individualism. Nor is solitude opposed to communion; on the contrary, it prepares us for communion and creates authentic dispositions for it. Without the experience of solitude there is no communion, nor is there any union with God or any genuine sharing with others.¹⁶⁹

In spiritual language, the desert is where one encounters the stark realities of life. The place where one comes into contact with one's smallness and insufficiency. The place where one is forced to surrender to God and the place where one can be comforted and filled by the loving presence of God. The spiritual journey of committed Christians in Latin America is as a "dark night" when one travels through the vast wilderness of structuralized injustice and institutionalized violence. One comes face to face with the stark realities of life and the paltriness of one's personal resources. One often feels alone, surrounded by the forces of death and up against seemingly insurmountable odds. One experiences opposition, suspicion and hostility even from fellow Christians. One experiences personal weariness, fears, doubts and frustrations because there are no clear guidelines, no clearly defined route to follow, no pat answers. But, above all, one experiences the sustaining presence of God which makes faithfulness possible. For Gutierrez, solitude is the foundation of community.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.85-86.

See also, Fox, M., *Compassion*, p.90, where the author distinguishes solitude from "being alone".

The experience of solitude ... gives rise to a hunger for communion. There is an aloneness with oneself and with God that, however hard it might be to endure at certain times, is a requirement for authentic community.¹⁷⁰

With solitude comes a recognition of fellow travellers, for only in solitude is one truly led by the Spirit who actively builds up the Body of Christ in the world. Authentic life in community does not preclude a personal encounter and intimacy with the Lord, it demands it. Thus, the movement is from solitude to communion, from a sense of weakness and need to a recognition of where strength lies. The community too, discovers that its meager resources become an inexorable force when combined with a living trust in the power of the Risen Lord and expressed in committed action for justice. We are not speaking here of a simple two stage process, "first solitude and then community"¹⁷¹ but rather of an ongoing experience of solitude, an ever deepening awareness of intimacy with God as individuals and as community.

Community is where the christian celebrates faith; where one experiences and expresses the joy of the Resurrection and the mystery of filiation and fellowship. As Gutierrez puts it:

Only in community can faith be lived in love. Only in community can faith be celebrated and deepened. Only in community can faith be lived in a life of

170 *Ibid.*, p.132.

171 G.G., *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, p.132.

fidelity to the Lord and solidarity with all men and women. To receive the word is to be converted to the Other in others. We live this word with them. Faith cannot be lived on the private plane of the "interior life". Faith is the very negation of retreat into oneself, of folding back upon oneself. Faith comes alive in the dynamism of the good news that reveals us as children of the Father and sisters and brothers of one another, and creates a community, a church, the visible sign to others of liberation in Christ.¹⁷²

For the christian community, the central moment of celebration is the Eucharist. The Eucharist is a celebration of thanksgiving for God's saving deeds in history especially for the victory of life over death in the Resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Spirit. The Eucharist is a celebration of communion, *koinonia* --- a sharing of goods as brothers and sisters, union with Christ as disciples and union with the Father as a people.¹⁷³ In the Eucharist fellowship is forged and faith is deepened through the communal witness of believers to the presence of the Risen Lord and growing awareness of his presence in history both personal and social. And so,

¹⁷² G.G., *The Power of the Poor in History*, p.67. See also, Fox, M., *Compassion*, p.90 where the author refers to authentic worship and true celebration as, "Letting Be". "Letting God be. Letting ourselves be. Letting disturbances be. Letting joy be. Letting pain be. Letting beauty be. Letting be...is what all true worship presumes, for it is letting God be God, letting self be self, letting suffering be suffering, letting joy be joy...It is letting mystery be mystery wherein we do not reduce mysteries to problems, but simply let mysteries be."

¹⁷³ G.G., *A Theology of Liberation*, pp.264-265.

To be the cause of a fracture of brotherhood disqualifies one from participation in that worship which celebrates the action of the Lord which establishes a profound community among men.¹⁷⁴

For grassroots christian communities in Latin America, the Eucharist is also a celebration of commitment, a celebration of that Presence which strengthens and sustains action for justice and the defense of human rights. Or as Gutierrez so forcefully states:

Without a real commitment against exploitation and alienation and for a society of solidarity and justice, the Eucharistic celebration is an empty action, lacking any genuine endorsement by those who participate in it.¹⁷⁵

Clearly then, the Eucharist is not seen as a devotional exercise for a growth in personal piety but rather as a communal celebration and pledge of committed faith and solidarity.

Community is also a sign of the kingdom for "community life cultivates receptivity for God's reign and also proclaims it".¹⁷⁶ Thus, community is the only authentic locus for christian life - one cannot be a christian in isolation.

174 *Ibid.*, p.264.
See also, Fox, M., *Compassion*, p.4. where the author speaks of the celebration of "kinship" with all creation.

175 *Ibid.*, p.265.

176 G.G., *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, p.133.

Spirituality is a community enterprise. It is the passage of a people through the solitude and dangers of the desert, as it carves out its own way in the following of Jesus Christ. This spiritual experience is the well from which we must drink. From it we draw the promise of resurrection.¹⁷⁷

Thus, the spiritual journey of liberation develops through ongoing conversion; is expressed through commitment and solidarity; is lived in community; and is sustained by the joyful awareness of the presence of God's gracious love.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.137.

See Fox, M., *On Becoming a Musical, Mystical Bear*, p.113, where the author explains the etymology of the word community. "The word 'community', after all, does not come from the word 'communion' but from the words *cum* and *munio*, meaning 'to build with'. The primary meaning of community, then, is a task force bent on building a world of justice among brothers."

The same author in his book, *Original Blessing*, p.26, goes on to further develop the significance of *cum-munio*. "In fact, community is people building something together, working on a common project (*cum-munio*). To throw ourselves into a common project...this is no small task, no mean adventure."

4.0 CONSEQUENCES OF A SPIRITUALITY OF LIBERATION

The spirituality of liberation as articulated by Gutierrez is essentially a new way for the following of Jesus, a way that is based on corporate awareness and active commitment ---the growing consciousness of a people with a mission. Over the past twenty years the fabric and pattern of this "way" has become more clearly defined and tested through the lived experience of Christians who struggle to survive in social situations that are destructive of human dignity and life. This way is now being proposed to the catholic community as a spirituality of liberation. And for those who choose to travel this spiritual route, certain consequences are unavoidable.

Perhaps the most outstanding feature of this emerging pattern is the exigency for committed action *against* everything that dehumanizes social life and *for* structures that will effectively promote the social wellbeing and development of all. Faith is verified through social commitment.

A viable Christian community is the womb in which such commitment is born and it is inevitable that those who grow in this environment come to see themselves as part of something bigger than a social movement or community project. They come to discover their roots in the "people of God". This historical awareness of being part of a people is essential for making the leap from an individualistic

perspective of progress and perfection to a corporate sense of salvation and moral responsibility. Independence is tempered by interdependence. Salvation is not so much an individual goal as a corporate one.

The recognition and acceptance of belonging demands a serious examination of conscience so as to come to an awareness of one's social perspective as well as the values and interests that are operative in one's life. This is the meaning of "lugar social".

And finally it becomes increasingly evident to those who enter into the daily struggle with social realities that life situations cannot be neatly defined in dualistic terms of black and white. Life and human history is a complex amalgam of vying influences and forces which make everything subject to change. And so, mankind's conscious progress or decline will depend on its growth in dialectical consciousness.

These consequences are the themes that we will now consider.

4.1 Faith and Social Commitment

For those Christians who become actively involved in the process of liberation within society, certain questions are fundamental. For instance, how does faith fit into the struggle for social justice? If it is seen as intrinsic to commitment, then it becomes a guiding and motivating force.

Faith is relevant to life. But if faith is seen as something extrinsic to everyday life, then religious practice takes on a more devotional perspective --- perhaps uplifting but basically irrelevant to the struggles at hand. How does the struggle to build a just society fit with the coming of the kingdom? Can one legitimately relate a socio-political process of liberation with salvation? What is to be said to those who profess to be christian and assume revolutionary commitments? All these questions point to the modern day problem of "the shattering of the unity between religious and social life".¹⁷⁸

The problem had become increasingly more critical within lay apostolic movements which were encouraged "to evangelize and to inspire the temporal order, without directly intervening".¹⁷⁹ For this reason, attempts have been made to formulate a *political theology* so as to resolve the dilemma and define the relationship between religion and society.¹⁸⁰ But, another path of solution has opened up from the documents of the Second Vatican Council and the encyclical *Populorum progressio* where the phrase "integral vocation" and "integral development" were used.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ G.G., *A Theology of Liberation*, p.222.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.64.

¹⁸⁰ See *Ibid.*, pp.220-225, where the author discusses the concept of a "new political theology" especially in the thinking of J.B.Metz.

¹⁸¹ See *Ibid.*, p.72.

The most immediate consequence of this viewpoint is that the frontiers between the life of faith and temporal works, between Church and world, become more fluid...But there is another important consequence. This affirmation of the single vocation to salvation, beyond all distinctions, gives religious value in a completely new way to the action of man in history, Christian and non-Christian alike. The building of a just society has worth in terms of the Kingdom, or in a more current phraseology, to participate in the process of liberation is already, in a certain sense, a salvific work.¹⁸²

One of the cornerstones of Gutierrez's theological reflection is his correlation of liberation and salvation. It is through Christ the Saviour that man arrives at full freedom. Salvation in Christ takes into account all of humankind, every dimension of human existence and is realized in history. The struggle for a just society is by right woven within the history of salvation.¹⁸³ In Christ man is saved from sin. But sin does not exist in theory. The effects of sin become visible in history and in Latin America they are conspicuous in oppressive structures, exploitation, abuse of power and authority, and the enslavement and domination of peoples, races and social classes. Sin, therefore, is the fundamental alienation at the root of any situation of injustice and exploitation, not visible in itself but only in so far as it shows itself in concrete

182 *Ibid.*, p.72.

183 See *Ibid.*, p.168.

situations. The reality of sin necessitates a radical liberation and this too, must be reflected in the concrete structures of social life. Only by participating in the historical process of liberation will it be possible to expose the fundamental alienation which is present at the root of sin.¹⁸⁴ As Gutierrez says, "To sin is to refuse to love, to reject communion and brotherhood, to reject even now the very meaning of human existence".¹⁸⁵ Here lies the root of sin, the fundamental alienation; the rejection of the responsibilities of filiation and fellowship.

For Gutierrez, salvation, the full integral liberation of man in Christ must become a reality in history. This includes what Paul VI referred to in his encyclical "Populorum Progressio" as integral development, the need to humanize life situations that are less than human.¹⁸⁶ Being condemned to a life of poverty is less than human. Having to live under oppressive structures which favour a few at the expense of many, is less than human. Here, one begins to

¹⁸⁴ See *Ibid.*, p.175-176.

¹⁸⁵ See *Ibid.*, p.198.

¹⁸⁶ See G.G, *La Verdad Los Hará Libres*, p.169 "El desarrollo integral es visto como el tránsito de condiciones de vida menos humanas a condiciones más humanas: Dice Paulo VI: "Menos humanas: las carencias materiales de los que están privados del minimum vital y las carencias morales de los que están mutilados por el egoísmo. Menos humanas: las estructuras opresoras, que provienen del abuso del tener o del abuso del poder, de la explotación de los trabajadores o de la injusticia de las transacciones". Se trata de una situación infrahumana que debe ser rechazada y desde la que es necesario orientarse hacia condiciones más humanas."

discover the social implications of our salvation in Christ. Gutierrez underlines the basic unity between salvation and liberation by quoting from the documents of Medellín,

The same God who, in the fullness of time sent His Son to become flesh, now comes to free mankind from every form of slavery to which sin has it subjected; ignorance, hunger, misery and oppression, in a word injustice and hatred which are rooted in human selfishness...The work of salvation is seen as indivisibly united to the task of bettering and elevating the conditions of human life in the world.¹⁸⁷

The theme of integral or total liberation as expressed in the encyclical "Evangelii Nuntiandi" (n.30), is taken up by Gutierrez in answer to those who would employ it to reduce liberation to the purely spiritual realm. He notes how this interpretation of integral liberation has been presented as an alternative to the notion of liberation as it is dealt with in liberation theology. Yet, integral liberation is the central theme of liberation theology which attempts to take into account the complexity of the total human situation and leaves nothing aside. Herein lies the

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.171, "La perspectiva unitaria que comenzaba a tomar la teología de la liberación se reafirma en otro importante texto del Magisterio. Es el conocido pasaje del documento "Justicia" de Medellín: 'es el mismo Dios quien, en la plenitud de los tiempos envía a su Hijo para que hecho carne, venga a liberar a todos los hombres de todas las esclavitudes a las que los tiene sujetos el pecado, la ignorancia, el hambre, la miseria y la opresión, en una palabra la injusticia y el odio que tienen su origen en el egoísmo humano.'(n.3)...'La obra de salvación aparece, de esta manera, indisolublemente ligada a la labor de mejorar y elevar las condiciones de la vida humana en este mundo.'(LC n.80)"

difficulty for those who refuse to see the historical implications of salvation in Christ.¹⁸⁸

The integration of faith and social commitment Gutierrez terms "social praxis".¹⁸⁹ For him, the concept has a broader scope than personal apostolates or pastoral planning arising from "social emotion"¹⁹⁰. *Social praxis* must include integrated socio-political action for the implementation of a social project. In other words, from good works, often individually conceived and realized one progresses to a corporate commitment for the transformation of society. Good works, whether visiting the sick, establishing a food bank or shelter for the homeless, organizing a Christmas party for prisoners or the forgotten of the homes for the aged, are usually well motivated but deficient if at the same time nothing is done to rectify the political, economic or cultural roots of the problem. Social praxis aims more at eradicating the cause of the problem than treating its symptoms.

A social project is *utopian* by nature, "a historical plan for a qualitatively different society".¹⁹¹ Grounded in enlightened faith and aided by scientific social analysis, such a social project will identify clear goals and feasible

188 See G.G., *The Power of the Poor in History*, p.145.

189 See G.G., *A Theology of Liberation*, pp.48-49.

190 *Ibid.*, p.49.

191 *Ibid.*, p.232.

means for their realization rather than present some illusory, unrealistic proposal. This means first and foremost, that it be grounded in reality which entails a critical understanding of the historical moment. This, in turn, is achieved by a process of "conscientization" by which one comes to awareness of unconscious personal attitudes and hidden social realities. One is freed from "oppressive consciousness" or indoctrination, which impedes critical thinking by justifying or sacralizing what is (the *status quo*) and is moved to a "critical awareness" of one's own "ideology" (set of unquestioned assumptions) which promotes creative thinking.¹⁹²

...This critical awareness is not a state reached once and for all, but rather a permanent effort of man who seeks to situate himself in time and space, to exercise his creative potential, and to assume his responsibilities. Awareness is, therefore, relative to each historical stage of a people and of mankind in general.¹⁹³

Critical consciousness allows one to denounce with precision the deficiencies of the existing social order and to announce with clarity new and realistic possibilities.¹⁹⁴ Gutierrez describes the former as "the prophetic *denunciation* of every dehumanizing situation, which is contrary to brotherhood, justice and liberty" and a critique of "every sacralization

192 See *Ibid.*, p.91.

193 *Ibid.*, p.92.

194 See *Ibid.*, p.233.

of oppressive structures to which the Church itself might have contributed".¹⁹⁵ He describes the latter as,

The love of the Father which calls all men in Christ and through the action of the Spirit to union among themselves and communion with him. To announce the Gospel is to proclaim that the love of God is present in the historical becoming of mankind. It is to make known that there is no human act which cannot in the last instance be defined in relation to Christ.¹⁹⁶

It is man who makes the love of God effective in the world by making an historical reality of the reign of God. To promote better understanding among peoples, to help create the political conditions necessary for a more just society and world, to struggle so that right prevail in the relations of peoples and nations, is to advance the coming of the Kingdom and give witness to the gratuitous love of God which calls mankind to a fullness of life. Evangelization then, is not so much concerned with the salvation of souls as with the authentic *becoming* of mankind according to the plan of God definitively revealed in Christ. The fact that communion among peoples can become a social reality is good news.

The actualization of this *good news* has of itself a "conscientizing" and "politicizing" function in that others are animated and encouraged to take up the struggle. But these functions will only become effective to the degree that

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.267.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.268.

the one who proclaims is credible; that is, that one manifest one's solidarity with the poor by actively participating in their struggle for liberation. Without a concrete gesture of commitment, the word of solidarity will ring hollow.¹⁹⁷

The validity of the social project, then, is verified through praxis. It is done and not just talked about:

Moreover, denunciation and annunciation can be achieved only in the praxis. This is what we mean when we talk about a utopia which is the driving force of history and subversive of the existing order. If utopia does not lead to action in the present, it is an evasion of reality.¹⁹⁸

Utopia points to the goal of social progress and gives direction to social action. For the committed Christian, utopia is the Kingdom of God. It is subversive in that no social order can completely express it and so humanity is urged on in its quest for a more perfect social expression of the ideal. Yet, the growth of the Kingdom cannot be separated from the process of history and the growth of the Kingdom is necessarily part of a conflictual process for it subsumes the struggle between light and darkness, good and evil, sin and grace. The future of humanity is measured in terms of progress or decline which is predicated of the historical present. A lack of action for progress, will result in decline. An ideal that is not becoming a reality

197 See *Ibid.*, p.269.

198 *Ibid.*, p.234.

is illusory. Only action can bring reality to an ideal. The Kingdom is for all ---a new way for humankind to live--- and so one cannot say that it has fully arrived while on earth even one of the least of the sisters and brothers suffers from the effects of egoism, injustice or oppression. The true progress of humanity is essentially linked to the incorporation of Kingdom values into the relations among individuals and nations.¹⁹⁹

In Gutierrez's mind, the struggle for justice is part and parcel of the struggle to establish the Kingdom. The

¹⁹⁹ The asymptotic relation between the growth of the Kingdom and temporal progress is further developed by Gutierrez in his book, *A Theology of Liberation*, p.177, where he writes, "Temporal progress --- or, to avoid this aseptic term, the liberation of man --- and the growth of the Kingdom both are directed toward complete communion of men with God and of men among themselves. They have the same goal, but they do not follow parallel roads, not even convergent ones. The growth of the Kingdom is a process which occurs historically in liberation, insofar as liberation means a greater fulfillment of man. Liberation is a precondition for the new society, but this is not all it is. While liberation is implemented in liberating historical events, it also denounces their limitations and ambiguities, proclaims their fulfillment, and impels them effectively towards total communion. This is not an identification. Without liberating historical events, there would be no growth of the Kingdom. But the process of liberation will not have conquered the very roots of oppression and the exploitation of man by man without the coming of the Kingdom, which is above all a gift. Moreover, we can say that the historical, political liberating event is the growth of the Kingdom and is a salvific event; but it is not the coming of the Kingdom, not all of salvation. It is the historical realization of the Kingdom and, therefore, it also proclaims its fullness. This is where the difference lies. It is a distinction made from a dynamic viewpoint, which has nothing to do with the one which holds for the existence of two juxtaposed "orders," closely connected or convergent, but deep down different from each other."

Kingdom of God becomes a reality in history through the committed action of the followers of Christ. Never are all the possibilities realized nor will humanity ever bring the Kingdom to completion, for that is the work of Christ at the end of time. Nor must one confuse the instrumental role of humanity with the gracious and efficacious gift of God which the Kingdom is. Yet on the other hand, humanity is not simply a spectator to the actuation of God in history. Humanity is called to collaborate, to assume the values of the Kingdom and to implement them in the concrete situations of life. The Kingdom is not measured within the bounds of material or temporal progress. The progress of the Kingdom is seen in the quality of human relationships on a personal level as individuals and on an international level as nations.

Sin is the fundamental obstacle to the Kingdom, and at the root of all misery and injustice and so must be combated in all its personal and social manifestations. The growth of the Kingdom is the basic condition for a just society and the renewal of humankind and so every struggle against exploitation and alienation is an attempt to up-root sin and so promote the Kingdom. For this reason, every attempt to construct a more just society is an effective, even if limited, liberation from the fundamental alienation of sin. In this way we participate in the work of

salvation.²⁰⁰

Commitment to the process of liberation is not only the necessary means for the proclamation and the building up of the Kingdom in history, but also a self-perpetuating principle of inspiration and radicalization of commitment in history.²⁰¹ Commitment cannot be vague. To be effective it requires the formulation and implementation of concrete strategies for the transformation of society that is, political activity.

Concrete commitment is what Gutierrez also calls "a praxis of liberation".

The praxis of liberation, therefore, inasmuch as it starts out from an authentic solidarity with the poor and the oppressed, is ultimately a praxis of love---real love, effective and concrete, for real, concrete human beings. It is a praxis of love of neighbor, and of love for Christ in the neighbor, for Christ identifies himself with the least of these human beings, our brothers and sisters. Any attempt to separate love for God and love for neighbor gives rise to attitudes that impoverish both.²⁰²

It is *subversive* because it implies a transformation of society from the *underside or the otherside*, that is, by and for the "others" of society: the exploited, the dominated, the marginalized, the poor. It is *political and loving*, because it is historically effective and evangelically

200 See G.G., *A Theology of Liberation*, p.176.

201 See *Ibid.*, p.272.

202 G.G., *The Power of the Poor in History*, p.50.

inspired. But, most of all the praxis of liberation must be *critical*, using the tools of scientific analysis not only to examine social structures but also the content of religious belief.

It must not be forgotten that the Bible has been read and communicated from the viewpoint of the dominating sectors and classes, abetted by a good part of exegesis that is thought of as "scientific". In this way what is "Christian" has been forced to play a role, within the dominant ideology, that affirms and consolidates a society divided into classes.²⁰³

Social praxis or the praxis of liberation is not just an individual pursuit. It is also a requirement for the Church who "politicizes by evangelizing". Gutierrez explains such evangelizing by saying:

When we affirm that the Church politicizes by evangelizing, we do not claim that the Gospel is thus reduced to creating a political consciousness in men or that the revelation of the Father-- which takes on, transforms, and fulfills in an unsuspected way every human aspiration---is thereby nullified. We mean that the annunciation of the Gospel, precisely insofar as it is a message of total love, has an inescapable political dimension, because it is addressed to people who live within a fabric of social relationships, which, in our case, keep them in a subhuman condition.²⁰⁴

The proclamation of the Gospel must contribute to the liberation of humanity from everything that dehumanizes it.

203 *Ibid.*, p.18.

204 G.G., *A Theology of Liberation*, p.270.
See also *Ibid.*, p.223.

It must teach people to live as brothers and sisters and to enter into communion with the Father. As Bishop Oscar Romero put it, "the political dimension of the faith is nothing more than the response of the Church to the needs of the real socio-political world in which the Church lives".²⁰⁵

For Gutierrez, involvement in the process of liberation is "the locus of a spiritual experience".²⁰⁶ The place where one encounters the Lord of history and the place where being "contemplatives in political action"²⁰⁷ is learnt. It is also,

the locus of verification of our faith in God, who liberates by establishing justice and right in favour of the poor. It is also the locus of verification of our faith in Christ, who laid down his life for the proclamation of the kingdom of God and the struggle for justice.²⁰⁸

To follow Jesus with authenticity means to make operative in one's life those values and priorities that were operative in his.

Commitment to the process of liberation means much more than assistentialism or social reformism for it implies a redefinition of neighbor. Neighbor is no longer defined in

²⁰⁵ Espeja, J., *Espiritualidad y Liberación*, p.136, "La dimensión política de la fe no es otra cosa que la respuesta de la Iglesia a las exigencias del mundo real socio-político en que vive la Iglesia."

²⁰⁶ G.G., *The Power of the Poor in History*, p.51.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.52.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.17.

terms of personal choice. There is no choice of neighbor, rather the option for the poor defines neighbor for us as the exploited worker in the factory, mine or on the farm, the margined person in the slum or institution for the aged or handicapped, the refugee on our border.²⁰⁹ Neighbor goes beyond nationalistic, linguistic or cultural bounds.

Solidarity with the poor takes on a political character for "to be with the oppressed is to be against the oppressor".²¹⁰ But there is more, the very gratuitous love of God demands a commitment for justice because, "to love someone gratuitously is not only to love what he is, but also what he is capable of being and to have confidence in him".²¹¹ And so, to do nothing to remedy a situation where a human being is forced to live or work in sub-human conditions would be to reject the responsibility of filiation and fellowship. It would be to give in to sin.

It is committed action for justice that transforms words and projects into deeds and new social realities. And so for Gutierrez,

To be a christian in our day is to involve ourselves creatively in the different phases of humanity's liberation process. Faith opens up infinite

209 See *Ibid.*, pp.44-45.

210 G.G., *A Theology of Liberation*, p.301.

211 G.G., *La Verdad Los Hará Libres*, p.72, "Amar gratuitamente a algien es no sólo amar lo que es, sino también lo que es capaz de ser, es confiar en él." See also, *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, p.113.

horizons to our human effort, giving
dynamic vitality to our active presence
in history.²¹²

4.2 Experience of belonging to the "people of God"

One of the most striking features of the revitalization of the Church in Latin America has been the multiplication and growth of grassroots christian communities. By returning to biblical sources for guidance and encouragement, the members of the christian communities have discovered that they can readily identify with the struggles of God's people in the past. For many, the Exodus experience of the Old Testament is their experience today. The struggle to escape from slavery and bondage is not understood by analogy. Workers who spend up to five hours crammed into busses or trains to get to and from work or who have to try to hold down two jobs at starvation wages just to put food on the table, understand Pharaoh's ploy to wear down the Hebrews. Women carrying their dehydrated children to the clinics or hospitals where they will watch them die don't have to be taught about social structures that bring death to their children. For these people, the experience of belonging to the people of God is direct and immediate because they identify with the past. They are the people of God. This is why the bible is seen as their book and salvation history is lived in their struggle. For others,

²¹² G.G., *The Power of the Poor in History*, p.33.

the experience of belonging to the people of God is more indirect through the learning experience of solidarity with the poor.

Gutierrez speaks of "a people in search of God"²¹³, to emphasize the communitarian dimension of the spiritual journey of the believing community. The growing consciousness of this journey as unfolded in the Old Testament is further clarified in the New and projected to completion in the person of Christ. One participates in this communal journey by "learning to be free"²¹⁴, that is, by accepting the consequences of filiation and the responsibilities of freedom as a member of the community. Filiation not only empowers but it demands that we live according to the potential of what we have been called to be, the people of God and disciples of Jesus. And freedom costs because together we must accept responsibility for what we do or neglect to do. When one participates in the spiritual journey of a people, one discovers how to recognize the presence of God in history and how to celebrate his saving deeds as a community. One experiences the need for constant conversion as a community so as to be ever more faithful, authentic and true to what it has been called to be, a people working to transform unjust structures and destructive

²¹³ This is the title of chapter five of his book, *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, p.72.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.73.

patterns of behaviour. One discovers how to let go: how to let go of our fears and the clinging to man-made securities: how to let go of the need to control and to dominate: how to let go of the temptation to settle in, or turn back or give up. And one discovers how to let be: how to let God be God and how to let creation be whole. People learn how to trust in what they are and in what they are called to be, how to persevere in the struggle and how not to short-circuit processes. One learns the meaning of spiritual childhood. In the spiritual journey as a people, one learns to broaden perspectives and widen horizons, to defer immediate expediency to more long range goals. One discovers the links between local and global issues, and one learns to relativize individual to social needs, to subordinate group or national interests to the welfare of the whole earth community. One learns how to let God's love become effective in history.

Life among the poor often becomes a practical *koinonia*. A sharing, communion and solidarity are not so much an option as a necessity for survival. When this *koinonia* becomes energized by faith and historical consciousness the result is a liberating force that is not easily thwarted.²¹⁵

Gutierrez develops the Pauline theme of the Body of

²¹⁵ See Gibson Winter, *Social Ethics*, pp.242-248, where the author discusses "the role of the Christian Koinonia in the revolutionary process". See also, G.G., *A Theology of Liberation*, p.301.

Christ in the same "supra-individual perspective...the body of Christ is the entire Christian community".²¹⁶ For the poor in Latin America the analogy is not difficult to grasp. Conflict with authority, suffering and death were all a part of the bodily experience of Jesus yet, it was also through that same body resurrected that suffering proved not to be in vain and death was an entrance into new life. So too, in the christian community, suffering is conquered by hope and death is celebrated and remembered as a pledge of fuller life.²¹⁷

The local community, understood as part of the greater whole, the people of God, is the forge where spirituality is shaped. Here one gets one's identity as a christian and as a member of God's people with a mission to fulfill. The community is both the cause and the effect of liberating praxis: cause, in that here efforts are coordinated and focused; effect, in that here solidarity is experienced and interdependence appreciated. As Gutierrez puts it, "Liberation leads to communion. This is the process by which the 'people of God' is built."²¹⁸

216 G.G., *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, p.68.

217 See Fox, M., *Compassion*, pp.238-240, where the author discusses the community focus of the doctrines of The Mystical Body of Christ, The Cosmic Christ and The Communion of Saints.

218 G.G., *The Power of the Poor in History*, p.10.

4.3 Morality and Collective Responsibility

Gutierrez always stresses the essentially collective nature of Christianity. One must never lose sight of the fact that to become a disciple is to become part of a community of disciples. The practice of Jesus then, is not only exemplary and normative for the individual follower of Christ in his journey to the Father but is also exemplary and normative for the community of believers in their collective journey to establish the Kingdom. Just as the practice of Jesus took on definite characteristics, so too, must the practice of his followers. And just as the practice of Jesus in proclaiming the arrival of the Kingdom had definite implications for the social order of his day and unavoidable consequences for himself so too, does the practice of his followers. Christianity then, is essentially a spirituality, a way of living and not an ethical system or moral code.²¹⁹ It is important to recognize that a moral code is but one aspect of spirituality. Ethical systems and moral codes endeavour to give criteria with which to judge the rightness or wrongness of individual acts and so inevitably lead to polemics which can be used more to justify or to defend one's position than to situate things in a wider global and contextual framework. Christianity as spirituality is of divine origin; ethical systems and moral codes are products of human understanding.

²¹⁹ See Fox, M., *Compassion*, p.30.

Unfortunately, in the Western world, the concept of morality has been largely related to the elaboration of ethical systems and moral codes which have focused on private life. Good works are done out of "social emotion"²²⁰ and morality is reduced to a disproportionate concern with sexual behaviour to the detriment of concern for social issues.²²¹

The shift in human consciousness from a cosmological to an anthropological worldview, brings important moral consequences for mankind.

Man perceives himself as a creative subject. Moreover, man becomes aware...that he is an agent of history, responsible for his own destiny.²²²

Freedom is the source of all moral responsibility and so a free agent is a moral agent and a responsible agent. The human person must accept the consequences of what one does both individually and collectively. And there is more, for historical consciousness, (the awareness of belonging to a people or nation and forming a continuation with the past) implies also accepting responsibility for what was done in the past. No one can be isolated from the past. No one can complacently wash one's hands of responsibility for what "they" have done, whether that be the instigation of a world

220 See G.G., *A Theology of Liberation*, p.49.

221 See Fox, M., *Compassion*, p.14, where the author develops the theme of "bedroom morality".

222 G.G., *A Theology of Liberation*, p.67.

war, the dropping of an atomic bomb, or the establishment of a social system of privilege and segregation. In his book, *La Práctica de Jesús*, Hugo Echegaray draws an interesting conclusion from the text of Luke (11:47-51) where Jesus imputes responsibility on the present generation "for every prophet's blood that has been shed since the foundation of the world".

The accusation is serious because it supposes solidarity with the shedding of blood; the crime committed against the prophets by their fathers is in some way prolonged in the present generation.²²³

One remains in solidarity with the crimes of the past if nothing is done to compensate or make amends for them in the present.

Sin is a wilful act either personal or collective which effectively rejects some aspect of filiation and fellowship. The result of sin is a deformity in the development of the image of God within and a distortion in the development of social relationships without. In both cases, individual perfection and collective progress towards Kingdom is jeopardized.²²⁴ Consciousness of "social sin"

²²³ Echegaray, H., *La Práctica de Jesús*, p.121, "La acusación es grave porque supone una solidaridad en cuanto a la sangre derramada; el crimen cometido por los padres contra los profetas se prolonga en cierto modo en la generación actual."

²²⁴ See G.G., *La Verdad Los Hará Libres*, p.196, where the author describes sin as "an intrahistorical reality---personal and social --forming part of the trauma of daily life but also and above all, an obstacle to the attainment of the fullness that we call salvation".

then, is the result of an awareness of collective moral responsibility. It does not exist as an entity outside of society but rather reflects on those who make up the body politic. Being created in the image and likeness of God gives humanity its dignity and also its responsibility.²²⁵

The peoples of democratic countries pride themselves on the political freedom they enjoy to choose and to direct their common destiny. Yet, this too, brings moral consequences. How can one justify the development of a stupendous, technological creativity to kill through the expansion of the armament industries, the deployment of "star wars" strategies and the cool acceptance of "mutual assured destruction" (M.A.D.) as a way of maintaining peace? What is the responsibility of the individual for the "introverted living"²²⁶ of the nation where political and economic

"El pecado es una realidad intrahistórica---personal y social---formando parte de la trama diaria de la vida humana, es también, y ante todo, una traba para que aquella llegue a la plenitud que llamamos salvación."

²²⁵ See Fox, M., *Original Blessing*, p.99, where the author discusses the implications of "royal Personhood".

²²⁶ See *Ibid.*, pp.119-120.
See also, Lonergan, Bernard, *Insight*, pp.223-224, where the author develops the same theme under the title of group bias, "the group is prone to have a blind spot for the insights that reveal its well-being to be excessive or its usefulness at an end. Thus group bias leads to a bias in the generative principle of a developing social order...The advantage of one group commonly is disadvantageous to another, and so some part of the energies of all groups is diverted to the supererogatory activity of devising and implementing offensive and defensive mechanisms...Classes become distinguished, not merely by social function, but also by social success; and the new differentiation finds expression

policies are formulated to maintain national interests which most often are those of a few, over the progress of all mankind and the protection of creation? Is the individual an accessory to the crime of industrial pollution and the wasteful abuse of resources because he assents to the lure of consumerism? What is to be done when it is recognized that there are poor because there are rich; that there is a "third" world because there is a "first"?

For a people who profess faith in the Risen Lord as the "Cosmic Christ"²²⁷, the unifying and harmonizing principle of history and source of mankind's "interconnectedness" and "kinship"²²⁸ with creation, it is difficult to escape the moral consequences of collective responsibility. For a people who profess belief in salvation through Christ and at the same time affirm that they make up the Body of Christ, it is difficult to avoid the moral responsibility to heal and make whole the human relationship with God, with creation and with others. Mankind's moral responsibility is not to be good but to do good. It is not so much a matter of avoiding sin (which for many is interpreted as not getting involved) as actively struggling

not only in conceptual labels but also in deep feelings of frustration, resentment, bitterness, and hatred...The sins of group bias may be secret and almost unconscious. But what originally was a neglected possibility, in time becomes a grotesquely distorted reality".

227 See Fox, M., *Compassion*, p.239.

228 See *Ibid.*, p.34.

against sin. For this reason the sin of omission has always been recognized as negligence to combat sin in all its personal and social manifestations.

For humanity then, "noblesse oblige". The fact of being created in the image and likeness of God, of belonging to the people of God, of accepting the invitation to discipleship, morally obliges one to accept the concomitant responsibility. Responsibility demands the promotion of what is life giving to self and others and the eradication of every deformation of filiation, fellowship and kinship with creation from personal attitudes and social structures.

One cannot claim to be whole if the society in which one lives is sick. The health of the body is the responsibility of its members.²²⁹ Salvation, the quest for fullness, wholeness, and completion is both a process and a goal. Something at once personal and collective.

4.4 Awareness of One's "lugar social"

As Gutierrez points out, an active commitment of solidarity with the poor inevitably means for most "a break

²²⁹ See Echegaray, H., *La Práctica de Jesús*, p.15, "No puede un hombre considerarse sano él sólo, independientemente de los demás o del hecho de que subsista en medio de una sociedad "enferma". La existencia de hombres sanos se prolonga de modo necesario en la irradiación de esta salud a todos aquellos que todavía deben devenir sanos. El espíritu que vivifica es el cuerpo que simbólicamente lleva en él mismo inscrita esta solidaridad y finalidad colectiva."

with the social milieu to which we belong".²³⁰ This comes as a consequence of first becoming aware of one's "lugar social"²³¹ or social perspective. When we speak of social perspective, we are not referring to where one lives but rather to the basis for one's interpretation of reality which in turn will give direction to one's commitments in life. In simplistic terms, one interprets reality from one of two viewpoints: "rich" or "poor", *from above* ---a position of power and authority or *from below* ---a position of weakness and marginalization. According to this, one acts to promote the interests of *the haves* or *the have-nots*; the oppressor or the oppressed. Social perspective and one's operational values are closely allied. And here too, for the purpose of contrast we will use simplistic terms to distinguish "yuppie" and "popular" values. The former are task/efficiency oriented with a focus on the future and success. Education is for personal development, and wealth means possession. The latter are people/participation oriented with a focus on present living. Education is directed towards community leadership and wealth is measured in terms of relationships and sharing.

In Latin America, the option for the poor implies

²³⁰ G.G., *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, p.99.

²³¹ This theme has been extensively developed in reference to religious life in Latin America. See for example, *Formación para la Vida Religiosa Hoy*, CLAR no.54, published by the Confederación Latinoamericana de Religiosos in 1984.

operating from the social perspective of the poor which for many is a conversion process, a breaking with the viewpoint and interests of the "rich" and a taking on the viewpoint and interests of the "poor". This process is reflected in one's degree of commitment. Commitment may be on the *intellectual* level, on the level of good intentions, to sympathize with the plight of the poor and to place one's resources at the service of the poor. And so, we find many people involved in social welfare programs, political lobby groups and coalitions, relief organizations or programs for social development. Another level of commitment could be termed *affective*, that is, based on social emotion which motivates one to share experiences with the poor. And so too, we find people who choose to work in the inner city, visit third world countries or participate in humanitarian projects. But this is done on a part-time or temporary basis. Finally, there is *insertion*, a commitment of real solidarity, an entering into the world of the poor to really share life with them, to try to think as they do and operate out of their value base. This means to identify with the cause and struggle of the poor and to accept the consequences this option brings: the loss of privilege, power and security. It could mean giving up one's citizenship or not taking advantage of one's "connections" (whether personal or institutional) when things get bad in times of repression, reprisal or threat. This requires a radical conversion, a

truly Christlike *kenosis* or letting go which is most difficult to achieve.²³²

So far, we have spoken of conversion as a change in "lugar social" consistent with an option for the poor. But there can also be negative change. This is best described by the spanish term "arribismo": moving up in the world, leaving behind the perspective of the "poor" and taking on the values and interests of the "rich". This is a real temptation for all peripheral people ---whether in a third world country or the inner city. In this case, the struggle to let be is as equally difficult as the struggle to let go. Letting be does not imply apathy to one's social situation but rather acceptance of one's roots and commitment to one's people. *Letting go* is the challenge for the *rich* and *letting be* is the challenge for the *poor*.

4.5 Dialectical Consciousness

A spirituality of liberation cannot allow theological reflection to become separated from lived experience. For those who make a faith commitment to the struggle for social justice, respect for human dignity, and the global welfare of mankind and creation, life is experienced as a challenge, not a problem. Tension is taken as an opportunity for

²³² See G.G., *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, p.126, where the author employs the image of an "asymptotic curve: a constantly closer approach that can, however, never reach the point of real identification"...

creativity, not as something to be avoided. One must learn how to adapt, and how to apply social pressure to best advantage. The theological language that attempts to articulate the spiritual experience of social liberation is incompatible with dualistic thought.²³³ The theological analysis of liberation cannot be presented in terms of natural-supernatural, spiritual-temporal but rather in terms of "a dialectical relationship between the Promise and its partial fulfillments".²³⁴ Salvation, the freeing of mankind from the influence of sin, is a process that is worked out in history. The more one becomes personally and collectively involved in the process, the more one grows in dialectical consciousness.²³⁵

A spirituality of liberation is based on participation in the social process which is dialectical by nature. One grows in this "way" to the extent that one integrates action and contemplation within daily life. One becomes wholesome/whole and holy to the extent that one becomes more and more integrated as a mystic-prophet within a

²³³ G.G., *A Theology of Liberation*, p.69.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.161.

²³⁵ See Fox, M., *Compassion*, pp.81-87, where the author presents dialectical consciousness as an alternative to dualistic thought and gives examples of the difference between "both-and" vs. "either-or" thinking. See also, *Ibid.*, p.241, where the author discusses some of the dialectical doctrines of Christianity (e.g. Trinity) and the dialectical spirit of Jesus as expressed in his use of paradox.

prophetic community.²³⁶

There are no clear-cut, communal responses to life situations. One must live in creative tension within the faith community to discern the will of God through a critical reading of the signs of the times in the light of faith. This means eliminating dualistic patterns of thought that separate humanity from God and Redemption from the process of history.²³⁷

To grow in holiness is to grow in consciousness of one's identity as made in the image and likeness of God and called to full discipleship within a covenant people. Freedom and privilege bring responsibility, the responsibility to work for more healthy human relationships, more just social structures and a more wholesome world. Dialectical consciousness teaches that Christian responsibility is in view of the *here* and not the *hereafter*.

²³⁶ See G.G., *A Theology of Liberation*, p.166, where the author shows how Western dualistic thought is foreign to the biblical mentality. See also, Fox, M., *Original Blessing*, p.62, where the author gives examples of the "un-dualistic" nature of the Jewish spirituality in which Jesus grew, and on p.210 the author stresses the dialectical nature of creation centered spirituality.

²³⁷ See Fox, M., *Original Blessing*, p.236, where the author discusses the healing and redemptive quality of dialectical consciousness.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis, I have endeavored to demonstrate the fundamental importance of spirituality in the development of liberation theology as proposed by Gustavo Gutierrez. I have endeavored to determine the essential elements of Gutierrez's proposal for a spirituality of liberation in relation to the predominant focus of his thought and in view of the contextual setting out of which it grew. The nature of this spirituality, which is based in social commitment, is the integrating principle of his theological methodology.

Any spirituality begins with religious experience and biblical spirituality begins with an experience of the presence of God in the life of a people. The growing awareness of this presence is the thread that integrates people with history and provides the axis for spiritual growth as a people. This awareness brings responsibility and so morality takes on a collective dimension.

The richness of human experience lies in its diversity and while the object of religious experience will always be the same, an encounter with the transcendental. It is experienced in a variety of ways according to the scholastic dictum, "quid recipitur in modum recipientis recipitur".

Theology is secondary to experience which it attempts to articulate and explain so that the experience can at least be understood and at best be shared by others. Biblical

theology helps the human person see the implications of this religious experience and so discover further dimensions to the meaning of one's existence and one's role in history. Christian theology clarifies this meaning and specifies the human person's role by proposing concrete and proven means for human fulfillment. Liberation theology does this in reference to the religious experience of people in Latin America.

5.1 Socio-political Action as a Sign of Spiritual Authenticity

From a reading of Gutierrez, it is evident that the Church in Latin America is giving witness to a profound religious experience which in turn is giving birth to a spirituality that manifests all the characteristics of authentic christian spirituality. A spirituality that, far from being debilitated by social action is effectively enhanced by it. As Gutierrez says:

A spirituality is a concrete manner, inspired by the Spirit, of living the Gospel; it is a definite way of living "before the Lord", in solidarity with all men, "with the Lord", and before men. It arises from an intense spiritual experience, which is later explicated and witnessed to. Some Christians are beginning to live this experience as a result of their commitment to the process of liberation.²³⁸

This is the discovery that social and political involvement

²³⁸ G.G., *A Theology of Liberation*, p.204.

becomes a religious act when it is motivated and conditioned by faith. The emerging spirituality of liberation is a dialectical process of ongoing conversion and deepening commitment to solidarity which is guided and directed by the dynamic of "contemplatio in actione", a critical reflection on concrete action. In this way, one grows in the attitude of spiritual childhood ---an openness to God due to the awareness of his gratuitous love and manifested by a joy in living. The believing community is the locus for this "walking in the Spirit" and encounter with Christ in history. It is also the theological locus for reflection and reading the "signs of the times" as well as a practical locus for an experience of *koinonia*, sharing, and *diakonia*, service. The spirituality of liberation is "kingdom" oriented. The dynamic of "already" and "not yet"²³⁹, is the experience of a people in their struggle with injustice; filled as it is with partial victories and painful set-backs. With faith in the *Presence* that is and hope in the *Promise* of what is to come, the people continue on their journey by insisting that love be made effective in history.

Without the given contextual situation of Latin America, there would have been no birth of liberation theology for it represents the theological reflection which corresponds to a given historical time and place and so is

²³⁹ See S. Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology*, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978, p.39.

not necessarily perennial. Liberation theology has not been presented to be used as a blueprint for action but rather is an articulation of something that is happening ---a movement of the Spirit in history. Nor is it to be used as an academic subject to be studied because liberation theology will be unintelligible or grossly misunderstood if separated from an experience of liberation. Meister Eckhart sums it up well:

Spirituality
is not to be learned
by flight from the world,
by running away from things,
or by turning solitary and going apart
from the world.
Rather,
we must learn an inner solitude
wherever or with whomsoever we may be.
We must learn to penetrate things
and find God there.²⁴⁰

An emerging spirituality of liberation is not an invention of Gutierrez nor a product of liberation theology. Quite the contrary, it is the source or font that has given life to Gutierrez's theological reflection. And as in all human endeavors to understand, focus limits scope. The greater the focus, the more reduced is the scope. One would hope that this would be remembered by those who are unduly critical of Gutierrez's work, especially when their conclusions are drawn from deductions based on suppositions.

²⁴⁰ Fox, M., *Meditations with Meister Eckhart*, p.91.

5.2 Salvation, Spirituality and the Process of Liberation

Salvation, as we have seen, is both a process and a goal. It is an individual and a corporate endeavour. Salvation is the promise of perfection, fulfillment and wholeness. It points to the realization of full potential: to be what we have been called to be as individuals and as a people. Salvation implies liberation from everything that impedes this fulfillment both on a personal and social level. Salvation is basically a liberation from sin which is the conscious or unconscious rejection of filiation and fellowship, a conscious or unconscious rejection of interrelatedness with God, with one another and with creation. The product of sin is alienation. Man is not at home in the world and it shows through personal despair, social violence and ecological destruction.

The process of liberation is basically the establishment of conditions for human fulfillment; the development of awareness of interrelatedness and the formation of creative consciousness so as to clearly identify where the problem lies and remedy it. This means actively entering into the struggle with sin both on a personal and social level. Sin is made real in real people and in real social situations. The struggle with sin is not a battle of ideas. It is a battle with social realities which is fought in the circumstances of daily life.

For the believing Christian, Jesus is "the Way, the

Truth and the Life" (John14:6). In him one discovers both the means and goal of human fulfillment.²⁴¹ And so, christian spirituality entails nothing more than the following of Jesus the Christ. He who conquered sin and proclaimed the goal of human fulfillment ---the Kingdom of God. But the following of Christ is shaped by personal conditions and the historical situation of life. And so, for the Christian the practical problem lies not so much in *what* to do (the following of Christ) but in *how* to do it.

5.3 Future Prospects

In Latin America, the contextual setting has given birth to a spirituality of liberation which focuses on a commitment of solidarity with the poor who struggle for liberation from oppressive social structures. This has given rise to a theology of liberation which helps focus the struggle and identify the enemy ---sin. The focus is on the consequences of alienation on a social level ---the breakdown of healthy social relationships which becomes manifest in unjust social structures. This theology is clearly at the service of commitment to solidarity.²⁴²

In Europe and North America, the process has been different. From the development of an incarnational

²⁴¹ See Winter, G., *Social Ethics*, p.241, where the author discusses the "political character of God's activity" which is made manifest in Christ.

²⁴² See G.G., *A Theology of Liberation*, pp.307-308.

theology, there has been a movement towards a creation-centered, spirituality which focuses on the relationship of man and creation. The focus here, is on the consequences of alienation as manifested in consumerism and ecological destruction.

I believe that today's theological challenge is to develop and articulate the characteristics of an authentic biblical spirituality for modern man.²⁴³ A spirituality based on the presence of God in history and developed by mankind's growth in consciousness of interrelatedness with God, with one another and with creation. Liberation theology has contributed to a better understanding of the social implications of humanity's alienation from itself and the proponents of creation-centered spirituality have contributed to a better understanding of the ecological implications of humanity's alienation from creation.²⁴⁴ And so, I would propose the further development of the themes of filiation, fellowship and kinship as building blocks for the articulation of such a biblical spirituality.

²⁴³ See G.G., *The Power of the Poor in History*, p.53, where the author introduces the theme of "the spirituality of the *anawim*".

²⁴⁴ I find Matthew Fox to be a clear exponent of the creation-centered perspective and his writings to be complementary to those of liberation theology. For example, see *Original Blessing*, p.70, where he speaks of "Cosmic spirituality" as "justice spirituality" and *Ibid.*, p.272, where he makes reference to Jon Sobrino's call for "an authentic theology of creation", and finally *Ibid.*, p.275, where he speaks of "creation spirituality" as "a lay spirituality". See also, Fox, M., *Compassion*, chapter 8, pp.243-270.

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APPENDIX IThe Parable of the Door

In a small town there was a house. It was called the "people's house". It was very old and well built. It had a beautiful, large door that opened out onto the street where people passed by.

It was a strange door. Its threshold seemed to eliminate the separation between the house and the street. When one entered by it, one seemed to be still on the street. When one walked down the street, one seemed to be pulled to enter the house. Nobody ever thought much about it, for it seemed a very natural thing, like experiencing the light and warmth of the sun in the sky.

The house was part of the life of the people, thanks to that door that united the house with the street and the street with the house. It was a happy spot, where life evolved, where everything was discussed, where people got-to-gether. The door was open day and night. Its threshold was worn thin by the use of time. Everybody went through there.

One fine day, two scholars arrived. They came from afar. They weren't from around there. They weren't familiar with the house. They had only heard speak of its beauty and antiquity. They came to see for themselves. They were experts who appreciated old things. When they saw the house they immediately recognized its great worth. They asked

permission to stay. Their desire was to study.

They looked around and discovered a side door. Through it they came and went in order to do their studies. They didn't want to be disturbed by the hustle and bustle of the people who used the front door. They wanted to have the necessary tranquility to carry on their reflections.

They remained inside, far from the people's door, in an obscure room, absorbed in their investigations about the past history of the house.

When the people came into the house, they saw the two surrounded by thick books and complicated instruments. Coming up close to them, the simple people were speechless. They remained quite so as not to disturb them. They had a great admiration for them, "They're studying the beauty and history of our house", they said; "They're doctors!"

The investigators advanced in their work. They discovered wonderful things that the people didn't know about even though they visited the house every day. They obtained permission to scrape some of the walls and discovered ancient pictures which told the history of the life of the people, a history which the people themselves didn't know. They made excavations around the foundations and were able to discover the history of the construction of the house, a history that no one remembered.

The people didn't know much about their past or that of their house because the past was inside them. Their vision

wasn't orientated inward towards themselves but rather outward towards everything else. This is what orientated their lives forward.

At night, the two scholars, surrounded by people, told about their discoveries. Among the people, admiration grew for their house and for the scholars.

On one occasion, they informed the townsfolk that certain people from other countries had spoken and written against their house. They, however, had come to study and to defend the people's house. They wrote scholarly articles in foreign languages which were published in great cities of which the people had never heard. The people began to discover the names of the dangerous enemies who went around downgrading the house. "These are evil people", they said, "They don't like us and they're against the house we love."

The days passed. The people remained quiet when they entered the house. A house so rich and notable, so distinguished and talked about throughout the whole world, deserved respect. It was different from the cheap life of the street outside. They ought to be a little more respectful. This was not the place for dancing and carrying on. Of this, everyone agreed.

Some of the people of the town, stopped coming in through the noisy front door. They preferred the silence of the scholar's side door. This way they avoided the din of the crowd. Now, they came to the house not so much to meet

friends and converse, as to appreciate better the beauty of the house, their house. They received so many explanations about the house from the scholars, that it seemed they had never really known it.

And so, little by little, the "people's house" stopped being of the people. All the people preferred the door of the scholars. There was a guide book which explained the old and the rare things discovered in the house. The people became more and more convinced of their ignorance. The scholars knew and understood the things of the people better than the people themselves. Or so everybody thought.

Now, people were silent and careful when they entered into their house because they felt like strangers in a house whose history they did not know. They observed and studied in small groups, guidebooks in hand, stumbling in the darkness. Now nobody remembered the times of old when together they danced and carried on in the place where now they studied, looking serious, imitating the scholars, guide books in hand, repeating the lessons.

Little by little, the front door was forgotten. A sudden wind storm shut it. Nobody even noticed. But it wasn't completely closed. A small crack remained open. Grass grew up in front. For lack of use, vegetation covered the entrance. Even the aspect of the street changed. Now, it wasn't the same street. Not any longer. Sad and deserted, a dead end, no more encounters of people who walked

by that way.

The side door was still open to the public who came in and looked around in admiration and wonder. Such wealth that they had never before known! Inside, the house was a little darker, for lack of light from the street. Lamps and candles made up for the lack. But the artificial light changed the look of things.

Time marched on. The joy for the new discoveries dwindled. The number of people entering by the side door, the scholar's door diminished and nobody remembered about the front door. Some of the more instructed people along with distinguished visitors from other places, continued to frequent the house through the scholar's door. They held meetings, discussing the antiquities of the house and things of the past.

The poor and uneducated walked out on the street now deserted and sad. They weren't interested anymore in antiquities. They didn't understand the language of the scholars. They just lived life. But they knew that something was missing. They didn't know what, since nobody remembered. There was a need for a place that really would be of the people.

The scholars, overjoyed with their discoveries, continued their studies. They founded a school to teach the children of the village in the science of the past. These then, would be their successors in defending the "people's house". Or so

they thought.

But one of the scholars became a little troubled by the growing lack of interest on the part of the people. Now the majority of them didn't even show up. He saw that the life of the town wasn't the same. There was less joy. Things were different from when he had first arrived. Now, everyone only thought of himself. There were no more get-togethers. They were getting-together elsewhere. The programmed encounters were less and less get-togethers. Something was missing. He didn't know what. But he was going to find out.

He asked himself, "Why is it that the people no longer feel at home in their own house? Why is it that they no longer come to hear about the things we have discovered and defend for them? Why do they no longer come here to converse and get-together; to dance and carry on; to talk and sing?" But he didn't have any answers to the questions he posed.

The other scholar didn't notice any of this, absorbed as he was in his studies of the past. He complained to his colleague, "You're very distracted these days! Your studies are becoming worthless. They're very superficial!" He demanded more dedication of him to studies of the past and less attention to the people in the street. And ultimately, it was he who was in charge of the expedition. One night, it happened that an old mendicant, homeless and with no place to stay, entered the vegetation that was growing up along side of the street, looking for shelter.

And there he noticed, without knowing what it was, an opening through which he entered. There in front of him, opened up an enormous house. A house more beautiful than he could ever have imagined. He seemed to be in the street and at the same time well sheltered. The next night he returned. He continued going back. He told his friends about it, all of them poor mendicants like himself. He talked about his discovery as if it were a secret. They went with him. They all went in one by one, through the narrow opening in the front door which one day the wind had partially shut.

Because of so much coming and going through the front door, the grass was trampled and the vegetation knocked down. A narrow track became visible on the ground, a new path was broken. So many friends wanted to enter, that they pushed the door and it opened further. The entrance was now much bigger so that the people could pass through and the sunlight could enter. The inside of the house became illuminated and was much more beautiful. It was much more homey and the people were very happy.

The discovery was passed along by word of mouth among the simple people. They didn't tell others. It was their secret. "That's our house", they said. But the discovery could not remain hidden long.

One morning, when the clock struck the hour for opening the side door to receive the renowned visitors, the custodians found inside the signs of the presence of simple

people. They heard their laughing and talking. Conversations of happy people, making themselves at home and who weren't uncomfortable with old things nor did they bother to pay to enter. The laughter was of people who obviously felt at home. The house again began to be the "people's house".

The fact was brought to the attention of the scholars. One became very annoyed, the other was silent. The first one complained, "How is so much ignorance possible! They're profaning our house! And all our efforts? The studies of so many years? What about that?" He spoke as if he were the owner of the house. So the other observed, "But the house isn't yours!" And the two quarrelled because of the house.

The second scholar hid himself by night in one of the rooms of the house. He watched how the people entered, without asking permission, to dance and to carry on, to talk and to sing, to relax and get-to-gether. It was good to see this kind of joy in the house and to forget for a moment, the rich antiques. He liked it so much that he joined in and began to dance. He danced and carried on, talked and sang, all through the night. Something which he had never done. Never before in his life had he felt so happy. He discovered that night that everything that he had ever studied was really for the people, so that they themselves could find joy in life. He discovered then the answer to the questions he had previously posed.

The mistake was the side door. This side tracked the people from the front door; separated the street from the house and the house from the street; made the house more somber; scared away the simple people; made the street deserted and sad ---it was a dead end.

He too, went around and came in through the front door. And so he did every night. He became known and accepted by the people who don't make distinctions among those who share with them. He was one of the people. Entering by the front door, he saw the richness and beauty of the house from a new angle he had preciously not noticed. Because of the light that come from the street and because of the joy of the people, the house revealed beautiful things that the books didn't teach. For him, the house became as a majestic mountain which the sun suddenly illuminated in the glorious golden rays of a new day. Everything changed, yet nothing had changed. Everything was as before, yet everything was so different. A new sense of hope was born.

He began to study his books with a different outlook and discovered things that his colleague never even suspected. His love for study grew but his colleague was suspicious.

Standing among the people and participating in their joy, the scholar spoke to them about the richness of the house. He spoke of the wonderful things that were in the house and which he had discovered through his books and study of the past. He spoke too, of what he now discovered from

the light of the street and from the joy of the people. He spoke whenever he got the chance. He wasn't disturbed by the noise. He tried not to make the simple people keep quiet in view of his knowledge and learning. Happily he taught the people and his joy for life grew.

And so he reflected to himself, "Before this, suffering people didn't talk much, they knew when to keep quiet. The wisdom of the people was forgotten and they played dumb, but now they have begun to think" It was 1974.

APPENDIX IICross references between *We Drink From Our Own Wells* and
Beber de Su Proprio Pozo

Drink	Beber	footnote	Drink	Beber	footnote
p.1	p.11	no.16	109	149	132
15-16	28-29	2	110	150	137
26-29	42-45	1	111	151	138
34	56	64	112	153	134
35	57	90	112	153	136
52	73	91	113	154	139
68	95	216	113	154	211
72	100	55	115	156	141
73	101	214	115	156	145
85-86	117-118	169	116	158	142
92	128-129	108	117	159	143
95	132	105	118	160	140
95	132	113	119	161	146
97	134	115	120	163	147
97	135	116	123	166	153
98	136	117	125	169	158
99	137	230	126	170	150
100	138	120	126	170	160
101	138	121	126	170	232
103	142	125	127	171	155
104	143	126	127	171-172	157
104	143	127	127	171-172	161
105	144	128	128	173	167
105	144	130	129	174	66
106	145	106	131	176	168
106	145	129	132	178	170
107	146	133	132	178	171
108	147	135	133	178	176
			137	182	177

Cross-references between *A Theology of Liberation* and
Teología de la Liberación: Perspectivas

Theology	Teología	footnote	Theology	Teología	footnote
p.3	p.21	no.92	p.69	p.102	no.233
4-5	24-25	95	72	107-108	181
7	28	65	72	107-108	182
8	29	96	84	118	43
12	36	99	91	133	192
13	38	94	92	133	193
15	40	102	108	148	54
27	52	109	109	151	42
32	61	110	114	162	49
48-49	78-80	189	117	167	45
49	80	190	145	189	93
49	79	220	151	197	88
64	94	179	153	199-200	61
67	99	222	159-160	210-211	89
161	213	234	232	309	191
166	223	236	233	311	194

168	226	183	234	312	198
175-176	237	184	238	319	163
176	238	200			
177	239	199	264	340	174
189	244	59	264-265	340-341	173
193	249	57	265	341	175
193-194	249-250	58	267	345	195
194	251	111	268	346	196
(omitted)	253	107			
198	257	185	269	347	197
199	259	123	270	349	204
201	262-263	60	272	352	201
202	264	124	291	369	154
204	268	122	296	377	152
204	267	238	296-297	377	151
205	268	131	299	381	153
205	268	151	300-301	383	154
207	272	164	300	382	159
222	291	178	301	385	210
226	298	20	301	385	215
231	308	25	307-308	387-388	242

Cross-references between *The Power of the Poor in History*
and *La Fuerza histórica de los Pobres*

Power	Fuerza	footnote	Power	Fuerza	footnote
p.4	p.13	no.7	p.62	p.111	no.114
10	20	216	67	118	172
17	31	208	71	125	3
18	33	203	76	133	79
21	37	15	79	138	97
22	37	85	94	162	82
32	55	56	96	165	165
32	56	26	98	168	70
33	57	212	101	172	81
34	59	47	101	172	140
36	63	97	103-104	176	103
42	74	97	106	179	87
42	74	101	(omitted)	198	44
44-45	78-79	209	(omitted)	233	72
50	88	202	(omitted)	232-233	162
51	90	206	124	234	29
52	92	207	136-137	259	149
53	93	118	139	263	162
53	95	243	142-143	269-270	52
56	99	95	145	274	188
57-58	101-102	98	150	283	86
60	106	68	154-155	293	34
61	108	28	157-158	297-298	50
61	108-109	100	200	367	103

SUMMARY

For Gutierrez, theology flows out of religious experience as an attempt to annunciate and clarify it so that it may be understood by others. The source of liberation theology then, is the religious experience of the oppressed and marginated peoples of Latin America. The religious experience of Latin America points to a new way of following Jesus through commitment to solidarity with the poor and to the transformation of unjust structures within society. Participation in the process of liberation is the key to this emerging spirituality of liberation. And the coming to awareness of this way is what characterizes the contextual setting of the Church in Latin America after the Second Vatican Council. Gutierrez does not propose liberation theology as a new theology but rather as a new way of doing theology for the authors of the theological reflection are the people themselves. This theological reflection, a reflection of faith on lived experience, is what constitutes and delineates christian praxis which is the basic component of the spirituality of liberation. The purpose of christian praxis is to make love an effective transforming agent in history and this requires constant conversion, a letting go of man-made securities, and an ever deepening openness to the movement of God in history as perceived and discerned through the faith community. The direction of the spiritual journey to the Father through Christ and in the Spirit is the same

for everyone, only the route or modality of travel will change. For Latin America, the route is liberation and the modality of travel is collective. For those who partake in this spiritual journey as a people, an encounter with the God of Life in history is inevitable and is the motivating force which sustains commitment even in the face of overwhelming obstacles and transforms hope for the coming of the Kingdom into a reality in the present. A faith commitment of solidarity with the poor constantly questions assumptions and life style bringing to awareness unconscious motivations and demasking ideology. The historical consciousness of belonging to the people of God brings with it the collective moral responsibility to respond to life according to the plan which God has for all humanity.