

GUTIERREZ AND MARX:

CHRISTIAN ETHICS FROM THE ROOTS OF MARXISM

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Introduction

The study of theology in the last century faced constant calls for relevance and connection with human struggles.¹ Many responses thought to make theology more significant in relation to politics and ethics. Liberation theology is one of such responses focused on the social struggle of Central and South American countries, influencing also several nations and sectors of society around the world.²

The writings of Carl Marx became involved in many of the social movements of the twentieth century. It was used by liberation theology in their search for relevance and understanding society's struggles. Marxist ideal is that philosophy must not only interpret the world but also change it.³ There is a clear contrast between this call for relevance and the active role that theology has played through centuries of apparent indifference to the social struggles outside of the religious arena despite the biblical calls for social justice. These calls for justice have open a space in which

¹ In the present paper, I will use the word "theology" understood as the main resource for Christian social ethics. Therefore, my evaluation of theological points will be related to its involvement in ethics. Stanley Sutphin, *Options in Contemporary Theology* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1977), 5.

² This topic has been presented as the "ecumenical" cry in Liberation Theology. Is discussed in many different approaches, especially since final years of the last century, as a reinterpretation of Liberation theology from a healthier perspective that the one that came as first response by many Christian circles and even certain areas of the Catholic church outside of Latin America. Alfred T Hennelly, *Liberation Theologies: The Global Pursuit of Justice* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third, 1995); Daniel G. Groody, ed. *The Option for the Poor in Christian Theology* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2007).

³ The phrase "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it." Is also inscribed in Marx's grave. (Karl Marx, *Marx/ Engels Selected Works*, vol. 1 [Moscow, USSR: Progress, 1969], 15). It is insisted in book from Colleen K. Flewelling when he says "Philosophy must encourage recognition of the relation between theory and practice the ways in which one's actions reflect ideas and what each person's role is in his/her society." (Colleen K. Flewelling, *The Social Relevance of Philosophy: The Debate over the Applicability of Philosophy to Citizenship* [Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005], 69).

liberation theology has been increasingly accepted.⁴ The reason for its popular acceptance may be its various attempts of to face the socio struggle of the third world countries.⁵

There are three objectives of this study. First, this paper introduces Gustavo Gutierrez, one of the most influential writers of liberation theology. In the first chapter of his *A Liberation Theology* he presents a study about what theology should be.⁶ His ideal theology is defined as a “critical reflection on praxis.” The second goal is to evaluate the relationship between the roots of Marxism and Gutierrez’s definition of theology. An inherent challenge is presented to the church by the risks of considering a non-biblical social theology. The sheer number of Marxist activists that were involved in liberation theology in the second half of the twentieth Century, especially in the Latin American Catholic Church, testifies to these risks. It is not my intention to present Gutierrez as a Marxist activist,⁷ or to make a theological study of biblical ethics in contrast to his model. The third goal is the heart of this paper; it will criticize the relationship between Gutierrez and Marx from the

⁴ For a summarized study about the participation of liberation theology in recent religious debate see Miguel A. Nuñez, "Relevancia Y Pertenencia Actual De La Teologia De La Liberacion " [Relevance and Current Membership of Liberation Theology.] *Davar Logos* 4, no. 1 (2005): 50-54.

⁵ Because of the social departure of the study of the classics, and the analytical exercise of reasoning, Liberation Theology has become a popular option in the pursuit option for the poor, discontinuing the challenge from the historical implications of the revolution, and guerrilla in Latin American countries, many crimes that were defended by the Catholic Church in countries like Nicaragua, that were lead to a revolutionary war from which the country haven’t been completely restored yet. Many priests, who were “tired” of pursuing justice through the word embodied the Marxist calling of real praxis and involved themselves in guerrilla movements, defending openly their crimes as a sacrifice in the pursuit of Justice. See IDO-C, *When All Else Fails: Christian Arguments on Violent Revolution* (Philadelphia, PA: United Church, 1970); Hugo Assmann, *Practical Theology of Liberation*, trans. Paul Burns (London: Search Press, 1975).

⁶ This book has a high value between Liberation Theologians; Ferm has considered this book the *Carta Magna* of Liberation Theology because of its influence. Recognizing this great influence, some issues related to this paper will be studied with their repercussion to Liberation Theology in general. Deane W Ferm, *Third World Liberation Theologies: An Introductory Survey* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986), 16. In the present work, the citations will be made from the 7th Spanish edition published in 1975 and the English translation of Caridad Inda and John Eagleson published in 1973. Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, trans. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1973); *Teologia De La Liberacion: Perspectivas*, 7 ed. (Salamanca, España: Sigueme, 1975).

⁷ He was against what he calls "Teología de la Revolution" (Revolution Theology) of the "baptism of the revolution" even he contributes in writings of revolutionary theologians like Ernesto Cardenal, see "Teologia Y Las Ciencias Sociales," [Theology and the Social Sciennes.] *Selecciones de Teologia* 25, no. 99 (1986): 9.

perspective of biblical prophets, the testimony of other modern ethicists, and Jesus as the maximum example of commitment for liberation.

Gustavo Gutierrez on Theology

In his chapter “Theology: A Critical Reflection,”⁸ Gutierrez studies the reason for Christian theology and its connection with the mission of the church.⁹ Moved by the intention of creating a language that will situate theology in his Latin American context.¹⁰ It approaches the challenge that a method brings in the hard work of creating a system for what was called by him “liberation theology” that is now well known in the theological arena. He defines it as “critical reflection on praxis.”¹¹

For Gutierrez, theological reflection is intelligence of the faith. It comes from the inside of the believer, in all those who have received the gift of the Word of God.¹² Theology belongs to a life of faith that seeks to be authentic and complete.¹³ Segundo shares the same idea when he says, “every theological question begins with the human situation”.¹⁴ Theology cannot be separated from the historical situation of the believer and his environment because we all are related in a historical realm.¹⁵ In order to illustrate this separation of theology from the historical struggle of the poor and

⁸ Gutierrez, *Theology*, 3; *Teologia*, 7.

⁹ See Sutphin, *Options in Contemporary Theology*, 4-5.

¹⁰ For Latin American Context I make reference to the specific socio-economical situation of the countries in Central and South America. An explanation of this context is broadly explained in introductions of liberation theology, see Louis M. Colonna, *Conscientization for Liberation*, New Dimensions on Hemispheric Realities (Arlington, VA: Goodway, 1971).

¹¹ Gutierrez, *Theology*, 6; *Teologia*, 20.

¹² Gutierrez, *Theology*, 3; *Teologia*, 21.

¹³ Translated in English as understanding the faith, in its original language its reference is to an intelligence of the faith. *Theology*, 3; *Teologia*, 21.

¹⁴ Juan Luis Segundo, *Liberation of Theology*, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1976), 79.

¹⁵ Gutierrez cites Ch. Duquoc saying that “Bound to the role of the church, theology is dependent upon its historical development” See Ch. Ducoc, “Théologie Et Mission De L’Église”, *Lumière et Vie* 14; 17, no. January-February (1965): 55. Cited by Gutierrez, *Theology*, 3; *Teologia*, 22.

rejected communities in Latin America, ¹⁶ Gutierrez has explained the history of Christian theology in two aspects, defining theology as wisdom and as rational knowledge. ¹⁷

Theology is called to be relevant in the context of the “signs of the times” in consideration of constructing fraternity with history. ¹⁸ This is the only way that the truth can confirm its faith because of the responsibility and place of theology among God’s people. ¹⁹ Faith calls for a transformation of our world and it cannot be understood without a critical understanding of the evils of modern society. ²⁰ It means that theology has to be a critical thinking in itself. ²¹ It makes use of other sciences in order to be connected and relevant to the challenges of modern society. ²² Theological reflection evaluates the historical present with its basis in the Word of God. ²³

¹⁶ Bartolome de las Casas, who despite being consistently insisted Spanish voice of Aboriginal abused by settlers. He was an example of liberation in many different ways. See Juan Friede and Benjamin Keen, eds., *Bartolome De Las Casas in History* (Chicago, IL: Northern Illinois University, 1971); Lewis Hanke, *Aristotle and the American Indians* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 1959); Friede and Keen, *Bartolome De Las Casas in History*. (Chicago, IL: Northern Illinois University, 1971).

¹⁷ Gutierrez, *Theology*, 3-6; *Teologia*, 23-26.

¹⁸ The expression appears before in the encyclicals *Pacem in Terris* and *Ecclesiam Suam* [Peace in Earth and His Church] but it became more relevant with the *Gaudium et Spes* [Joy and Hope], were certain aspects were identified as the “signs of the times”, taking a clearer connotation. For further study, I recommend the analysis of the *Gaudium et Spes* in order to understand the concept in its context. See Marciano Midal, "Gaudium Et Spes" Y Teologia Moral: A Los 50 Años Del Concilio Vaticano Ii," *Moralia*, no. 35 (2012); Dugan McGinley, "Dialogue and the Spirit of Vatican Ii: Reading Gadium Et Spes Fifty Years Later," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 50, no. 1 (2015). Yves Congar, explains that the Christian idea of history is marked by the actions of the Christians making Christianity appear in history. In order to see the existence of a history for the Christian view, there has to be Christian actions. Yves Congar, *Christians Active in the World* (New York: Hepbutne-Scott, P. J. , 1968), 40-42.

¹⁹ This faith in action is orthopraxis, the fusion between praxis and orthodoxy. Gutierrez, *Theology*, 10; *Teologia*, 33.

²⁰ “Faith is a Grace; theology is an understanding of this gift. Theology tries to say a word about the mysterious and ineffable reality that we believers call God.” See "The Option for the Poor Arises from Faith in Christ," *Theological Studies* 70 (2009): 321.

²¹Theology is the ultimate reflection on faith, and faith is a source of the community, in that sense, for Gutierrez, there cannot be theology without a sociological reflection. Ibid.

²² *Theology*, 5; *Teologia*, 25. See also "Teologia Y Las Ciencias Sociales," in *Teologia De La Liberacion: Documentos Sobre Una Polemica*, ed. Departamento Ecumenico de Investigaciones (San Jose, Costa Rica: Editorial DEI, 1986), 71-92.

²³ “Knowledge is not neutral or value-free. Instead all knowledge tends to embody the social circumstances and conditions of its time.” (Dermot Lane, *Foundations for a Social Theology: Praxis, Process and Salvation* [New York: Paulist, 1985], 77. Cited by LeRoy and Stanley Grenz Miller, Eds., *Fortress Introduction to Contemporary Theologies*, Fortress Introduction to Contemporary Theologies [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1989], 147). Cf. Gutierrez, *Teologia*, 34.

In order to make theology more practical and functional we must understand faith in action. It is not necessarily related to the concept of faith in the church or any dogmatic affiliation.²⁴ Faith in action is a sign of mature spiritual life.²⁵ The acts of service are closely related to Christian faith because it was Jesus' commandment;²⁶ to fulfill it, is a thankful response to God's love for us.²⁷ This reflection creates a necessary ethical responsibility for theology, its relationship with the poor is not an optional task; it is God's kingdom's way to change the world.²⁸ In liberation theology, faith and knowledge moves the person in order to create change in the world. Gutierrez's definition of theology is intended to create the ground for a practical response to the social challenges of Latin America.

Challenges of the Definition

As liberation theology proposes, it is evident that the church has to become more influential in the actual world, in a sense that can it change it. However, it can be proved that Gutierrez has strong Marxist influences while he develops his idea of the task of theology. He is not disengaged from liberation theology's critics about the grounds in which his thought is built. To challenge his definition of theology, it is necessary to evaluate his roots to discover if its presuppositions affect his offer as a model for Christian ethics.

To address the issue, the concepts of Gutierrez's definition of theology will be contrasted with Marxist ideas. For Gutierrez, the implications of the use of Marxism and its materialistic

²⁴ Faith is necessary because of the sacraments; the acts of faith are not necessarily the most popular explanation of the concept in Catholic Theology, that is the background from where Gutierrez is departing. Rudolf Bultmann, *What Is Theology?* trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 1997), 104-05.

²⁵ Yves Congar, *Faith and Spiritual Life*, trans. A. Manson and L. C. Sheppard. (New York: Herder, 1962), 144.

²⁶ See Matthew 5

²⁷ John 13:34-35; "through love became servants to one another" Gal 5:13;

²⁸ Jorge Aquino, "Poverty and Prosperity after the Clash of 2008: Insights from Liberation Theology on Zero-Sum Capitalism at the Twilight of American Exceptionalism," in *Religious and Ethical Perspectives for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Paul Myhre (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2013), 243; Groody, *The Option*; Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Pobreza Y Teología," [Poverty and Theology.] *Páginas* 191 (2005).

understanding of the world are minimal, but what seems to be proved by its social context is the contrary.

Gutierrez resemble to be more identified with the “early” Marx (in which the liberation of man is related to his self-justification) than with his later works.²⁹ In the English edition of *A Theology of Liberation*, he cites Marx eighteen times.³⁰ In every occasion, except in one quotation of *The Capital*, all his references on Marx are allusions are with regards to his early writings.³¹ In the same book he states that he will present a future clarification about ambiguities in various interpretations of Marxism as total conception of life or a science of history.³² The only possible answer is found in a response given to the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, held in 1984 called *Teologia y las Ciencias Sociales* [Theology and the Social Sciences].³³ In the article, he reacts to some of the “ambiguities” related to Marxism that were objects of accusations in liberation theology.³⁴

²⁹For Example, In Marx, the labor of the man justifies his existence, in Gutierrez; the liberation is a necessity for man in order to become what God creates him to be. To say that Gutierrez is delimited in his idea of Marxism just to the early Marx could be dangerous, because his use of Marx is very generic, and not often have direct cites. My argument is in response to my study of his book *A Theology of Liberation*, that is the object of this present study not to the entire *corpus* of his bibliographic work. Jan Milic Lochman, *Encountering Marx: Bonds and Barriers between Christians and Marists*, trans. Edwin H. Robertson (Philadelphia, PL: Fortress, 1975), 50; Juan Gutierrez, *The New Libertarian Gospel: Pitfalls of the Theology of Liberation*, trans. Paul Burns (Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald, 1977), 63.

³⁰ Gutierrez, *Theology*, 314, 18.

³¹ Gutierrez has several references of Marx’s early works of Marx as his *thesis on Feuerbach* (1845) (ibid, 38, 239). Other works before 1850 (146, 242); or just with the simple reference to an early text of Marx (38). The problem is that he does not use to make citations about Marx and his writings. There is not even one direct citation with a specific page number and edition about Marx works in his entire book *A Theology of Liberation*, it creates an evident difficulty to understand his definition of Marxism or to clarify his particular view on the author.

³² See Endnote 40 in Gutierrez, *Theology*, 97; Footnote 40 in Gutierrez, *Teologia*, 130.

³³ Joseph Ratzinger, "Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith "Instructon on Certain Aspects of the 'Theology of Liberation' ", in *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History*, ed. Alfred T Hennelly (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984), 393-413. Cf. "Documentos De La Sagrada Congregacion Para La Doctrina De La Fe," in *Teologia De La Liberacion: Documentos Sobre Una Polemica* [Liberation Theology: Documents about a Polemic], ed. Departamento Ecumenico de Investigaciones (San Jose, Costa Rica: Editorial DEI, 1986), 15-39; Gustavo Gutierrez, "Teologia Y Las Ciencias Sociales," *ibid.*, 71-92.

³⁴ In his article, Gutierrez presents arguments in defense of liberation theology contrasting its use of Marxism as the only tool for social analysis. He argues that any social analysis has something of Marxist analysis in one or another way. He also separates ideological aspects from Marxist analysis from atheist ideology and totalitarianism to a more ‘secure’ way to see the use of Marxist tools. For Gutierrez, in contrast with Engels and the Soviet Marxism, the thought

As in Marxism, liberation theology is strongly focused on praxis as an important part of its system.³⁵ For Gustavo Gutierrez, praxis comes as a response of the historical reflection. It helps us to be relevant in the middle of social struggles; the gospel has to be rooted in people's environment.³⁶ Markey explains it saying "[if] when we act, reflect on the action, and then act in a new way on the basis of our reflection, we are illustrating praxis."³⁷ Gutierrez is constantly calling the church to take position in a historically relevant sense. However the term "praxis" has been called the "Trojan horse" of liberation theology,³⁸ Gutierrez uses the term in a very similar sense of how Marx defines it.³⁹ It is said that this praxis is an extension of the Marxist one. In *A Theology of Liberation* they are some arguments about the political situation of Latin America seems a reflection of Marx's understanding of economic and social oppression of the proletariat.⁴⁰ Gutierrez uses it, to categorize church membership, creating separation through it.

The critical reflection is a call to embody the task in order to make this change happen in one way or another. The real praxis comes when the theologian takes an active part in the construction of the ideal change. This idea was the one that moved his friend Camilo Torrez to the guerrilla

of the German philosopher can be separated and applied in partial forms (citing other thinkers as Gramsci, Mariategui and others). "Teologia Y Ciencias Sociales," 5-6.

³⁵ Gutierrez, *Liberation Gospel*, 63.

³⁶ Segundo, *Liberation of Theology*, 82-83.

³⁷The problem with this definition of praxis on Gutierrez is the strong influence from the idea of praxis that comes from Hegel and Marx, even the strong affection for praxis that liberation theology argues; their terminology is rooted in social behavior separated from Christian faith as a tool for making Christian faith more relevant. See John J. Markey, "Praxis in Liberation Theology: Some Clarifications," *Missiology: An International Review* XXIII, no. 2 (1995): 181. Cf. Robert McAfee, *Gustavo Gutierrez, Makers of Contemporary Theology* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1980), 34.

³⁸ Markey, "Praxis in Liberation Theology: Some Clarifications," 179.

³⁹ John J. Markey explains this comparison when he says:

"In Carl Marx, there are basically three levels of meaning for praxis that influence the current discussion. Praxis means human *creative* activity. Those activities that shape change and transform history and individuals. Praxis also refers to social praxis, a complex system of social human activity. [...] Finally, for Marx, praxis refers to *revolutionary* praxis. Revolutionary praxis is that form of human activity which works to subvert, counter and overturn the existing social praxis." (Ibid., 181).

⁴⁰Arthur F. McGovern, "Dependency Theory, Marxist Analysis and Liberation Theology," in *The Future of Liberation Theology: Essays in Honor to Gustavo Gutierrez*, ed. Marc H. Ellis and Otto Maduro (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989), 274.

movement in Colombia (1966), and which caused the death of the “Jesuits martyrs” of El Salvador in 1989.⁴¹

The difference between the argument of Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Every Day Life* and the praxis that Gutierrez is offering in *A Theology of Liberation* is not the mechanism of resistance, or “user’s tactic”, but a critical reconceptualization of the function of the church in making the voices of the clergy agents of social change.⁴² Instead of converting the church as a group of people preparing themselves to face the calamities of society in a more Christ-like form, Marxism influences the church in becoming an accusatory finger against an already violent society. It is hard to conceive that the church can use a part of an atheist ideology without getting influenced by the whole. The Marxist materialistic philosophy practiced by liberation theologians in Latin America resulted in revolts and injustice justified by church leaders.⁴³

Another example is Gutierrez’s call to do “truth” as a necessity to make a relevant Christian life from a historical perspective. The problem with this “truth” is the definition of truth for the Marxist perspective. Truth is often connected with violence or as a justification of any other act because to do truth makes any cause fair. The only requirement is when this truth is committed to the freedom of the oppressed.⁴⁴

⁴¹ The expression “Jesuits martyrs” was used to describe the scene for the Oxford University Catholic Chaplaincy, in their article commemorating the 23th anniversary of the event, in 2012. These priests were Ignacio Ellacuría, Segundo Montes, Ignacio Martín Baró, Juan Ramón Moreno, Amando López and Joaquin López y López. See Oxford University Catholic Chaplaincy, “The Six Jesuits Martyrs of El Salvador,” <http://www.catholic-chaplaincy.org.uk/the-six-jesuit-martyrs-of-el-salvador/>.

⁴² “‘Making Do’: Uses and Tactics” in Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Arts the Faire (Berkeley, LA: University of California, 1984), 29-42.

⁴³ The justification of violence, the separationist analysis of society and the blind pursuit of “liberty” created other fissures in Latin America that led society poorer. Pictures of violence are still evident after decades of social conscience. Socialism has been precursor of gangs and other social evils in Central and South American society.

⁴⁴ Marxism defines truth as inseparable of praxis; Praxis is everything that contributes to the success to the oppression of the class struggle. It is clearly against Christian definition on truth that is based on the Bible. It was reflected in the second *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith*, through a reflection on John 8:32. Joseph Ratzinger and Alberto Bovone, “Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith “Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation”,” in *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History*, ed. Alfred T Hennelly (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986), 462; Christopher

Gutierrez argues that the church has developed most of its story in the search of truth, while it did almost nothing to “better the world.”⁴⁵ Biblical register challenges this idea on Marx. As Girard proved, the Biblical testimony is the only ancient book with a historical account concerned for the poor and the weak.⁴⁶ Charity and compassion have been argued as a form for fulfilling Jesus’ order. This historical materialism explains Gutierrez’s critique of the church’s role in history.⁴⁷ This concept is not argued in detail through the chapter that is the object of our study, but it makes reference to the dichotomy as Marx establishes in his explanation of history whereby the poor are in one side of and the dominant in the other.⁴⁸

The social implications of the evidence of Marxism in Gutierrez’s definition of theology falls in the risk of making Christianity defend the same causes of Marxism. Even if we set some kind of a common goal, Christianity has very different tools. Gutierrez and his interest in finding equilibrium between theory and practice in the theological discipline illustrated correctly the necessity of the poor; but if a separation from Marxism in Gutierrez is not possible, then his theology will always manifest the risk of revolution and in some areas distrust in the church’s authorities as it was in Latin America during the last decades of the twentieth century.

Can it be useful?

The question if Gutierrez’ definition of theology can be usefully separated from the presuppositions of his method, is the most important question that should be addressed in this study.

Rowland, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, 2 ed., Cambridge Companions to Religion (United Kingdom: Cambridge University, 2007), 232.

⁴⁵ Gutierrez, *Theology*, 10; *Teologia*, 33.

⁴⁶ Yoder, J. H. “Why Jewish’s pacifism makes sense?” in *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisted* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 82-87.

⁴⁷ Marc H. and Otto Maduro Ellis, eds., *The Future of Liberation Theology: Essays in Honor to Gustavo Gutierrez* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989), 279.

⁴⁸ However, Girard presents the uniqueness approach of the Bible in relationship with the weak and the one silence by *myth*. The view of the Scripture regarding to the poor is completely different to any materialistic understanding of history. See Rene Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, trans. James G. Williams (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001), 103-20.

Marxism is not the main tool for Gutierrez's theology. His apparent intention is to use it for the greater good in order to create a more practical theology calling the church to become more relevant in the context of the social challenges that are present in Latin America. From a historical perspective, the tools of Marxism have failed to reach its social goals. Its influences could be separated from Gutierrez's ideal in defining theology, but it cannot be separated if it keeps the same meaning and language.⁴⁹ The challenge here is to redefine the influences of Marxism in order to enrich the evident positive values behind Gutierrez's definition of theology.

For the purpose of separating the idea from its background, the critical reflection on praxis has to create another set of tools that are not based in Marxist ideologies. The development of liberation theology in Latin America in the successive years of the publication of *A Liberation Theology*, testifies that is very difficult to use Marxist tools without being influenced by his ideals. The result of his standards has been shown through history. His idealistic society created the situation of chaos in which the western world was involved due to the Soviet Union and socialist countries. Separating Gutierrez' ideal from its Marxist roots and vocabulary, I see the possibility to offer a healthier critique for traditional theology.

The Old Testament prophets can give us a system that should be appropriate to describe an idealistic place of theology in the midst of society's struggle.⁵⁰ The prophets suffered with their people and wrote their story from the eyes of the poor. As was mentioned before, Biblical story is the only register that takes consideration of the weak in its description of history. The prophets

⁴⁹ Smith notes that when we use secular philosophy to "ontologize Christian teachings" the language changes the phenomenon creating a different one. This different phenomenon is the composition of both ideals. In this case, a syncretism between theology and Marxism, producing a risky mix of Christianity and socialism. (James K. A. Smith, *The Devil Reads Derrida and Other Essays on the University, the Church, Politics and the Arts* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009], 66-67).

⁵⁰ See Am 3:9; 4:1; 5:11, 21- 24; 6:1; 8:5; Mi 3:3, 9-10; Is 3:14; 5:8; 11:1-9; 29:20-21; Jer 22:6, 15-16; Ez 18:5-9, and others.

fulfilled the message of liberation with a direct dependency on God as the provider of the whole Justice in times of oppression and discrimination.

Talking about the problem of poverty will not change the social situation in Latin America or the world.⁵¹ The issue of Justice is a bigger and more important concept to discuss as the final task of theology. The poor should always be with you,⁵² but the pursuit of Justice has to be an endless ideal and everlasting pursuit of God's people. It should also be more relevant from Biblical description of the reign of God, where Justice is a testimony of the messianic kingdom.

I propose a reformulation of the Christian pursuit for Justice in the world as a reflection of its exilic idea taught by Yoder.⁵³ In contrast with Gutierrez, our theological reflection cannot come from our world around us if it is not strongly rooted in the personhood of Christ who is the reconciliation of the God of the Bible. The idea of social justice cannot come from secular tools for social transformation but from the Biblical rule of a standardized justice with its roots in the God of scripture.⁵⁴ The pursuit of Justice in Christianity cannot be found in external apparatuses, but in an increased awareness of the value of human life. The ethics of the Bible are above any modern tool of self-awareness of the challenges of modern society.⁵⁵ To follow the Biblical principles of ethics will be enough to have awareness of the divine.⁵⁶ The example for a theological transformation of the

⁵¹ The action that is required in order to create the social challenge demanded by Liberation Theology, has to begin as a systematic implementation of social tactics, that empower people with the hope and discipline to overcome the social challenges, taking an active role in the establishment of society. See de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xi.

⁵² Matthew 26:11

⁵³ John Howard Yoder, *Reading the Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 17.

⁵⁴ It is one of his attempts to prove in his book *The Politics of Jesus*; this idea of ethics centered in Christ is insistently present in his work see *ibid.*, 25.

⁵⁵ An excellent reading to prove this point is Yoder's presentation of "Why Jewish's pacifism makes sense?" in *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 82-87.

⁵⁶ Sobrino alludes the parable of the Rich Man and the Poor Lazars as the true parable of our world, I will just contrast, and that what must be convinced first is not the "international community" but the church. This calling is already done in the Scripture, and there is not most powerful book than it. See Jon Sobrino, *No Salvation Outside the Poor: Prophetic-Utopian Essays* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008), 47.

church should be to turn to Jesus' approach for ethics. Exalting what Caputo calls with the Apostle Paul "the weakness of God,"⁵⁷ transforming the theological reflection to a more Christocentric appeal for justice. Using the fruits of the spirit as mechanism of defense, giving constant discourse of hope and justice in a world submitted in darkness. Sutphin says in one of his most beautiful quotes: "When honest and sensitive men assert that God has been crowded out of the world of human experience, that the Biblical vision of the love of God is contradicted by the vast evil apparent in the world, and that the biblical notion of God threatens human dignity and freedom, theologians must take notice."⁵⁸ If the theologian participates in the discussions of the world, it should be with a different approach than the secular arena has intended. Jesus' methods of resistance through hope, justice and second chances, are the best way to overcome injustice. It will be separated by any external discourse of action or intellectual reflection, to bring real liberation to an oppressed world.

Conclusion

In December 2012, a theology major colleague, in the midst of the celebrations of our Graduation shared with me his decision to leave his career in ministry. He said, "theology cannot change the real problems of society... these people [referring to the community] are just hungry." In this paper I have presented an evaluation of Gutierrez's approach to address this social issue and the challenge of its Marxist roots.

I have presented Gutierrez's concept of theology that calls for a more active role of the theologian in the challenges of a post-modern society. His definition can be seen as a Christianization of the idealistic labor of the philosopher in Marx's thought. Therefore, the

⁵⁷ 1 Cor. 1:25. He also says in a powerful sentence: "The God of forgiveness, mercy, and compassion shines like a white light on the hypocrisy of those who, under the cover of God, oppress the most defenseless people in society." John D. Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007], 82-83).

⁵⁸ Sutphin, *Options in Contemporary Theology*, 6.

theologian is not just called to interpret reality in the present world in the light of the scripture, but also to participate in human experience in a way that can influence it for a transformation.

The presence of the tools of Marxism implicit in Gutierrez's definition of theology becomes what may be a mayor weakness of his method. There are shadows of the early Marx in Gutierrez's understanding of the development of history, the vocabulary used for his system, his dualistic description of the members of society and his pursuit for truth as praxis. These roots of Marxism have become the seeds for application of theology as a justification for revolutionary acts. They too often ignore the vitality of Christ's ethics as a response to the world struggle.

This study has addressed the role of the biblical prophets as social transformers understanding history from the eyes for the poor. Second, I presented comparison between liberation theology and other philosopher's propositions to overcome social systems of power and injustice without the necessity of a violent and materialistic understanding of the world. Third, Jesus revelation is a call for liberation; his gospel is enough to understand how the world should be and an everlasting example of the values that can make the theologian to transform the world. This topic asks for a deeper research, specifically about the different implications of the tools used for Christian ethics and how the biblical principles should be used to evaluate social reality.

The call for a relevant connection with human struggles that Gutierrez represents, calls for a biblical rather than a political active response to injustice. The ideal of Gutierrez should be stimulated without the necessity of using Marxist tools. Scriptures have enough material available for a departing point for a critical reflection. The place of the theologian should be enriched with the biblical example, not through reformulation of political theory.

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