

Liberation Theology and the Catholic Hierarchy:
Pruning theological growth to produce lasting fruit

by

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ABBREVIATIONS:

CDF: Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

GS: “Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,” by the Ecumenical Council of Catholic Bishops of Vatican II.

LN: “Libertatis Nuntius: Instruction on Certain Aspects of the ‘Theology of Liberation,’” by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

LC: “Libertatis Conscientia: Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation,” by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

TL: *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, by Gustavo Gutiérrez.

TO: “Ten Observations on the Theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez,” by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

INTRODUCTION: THE GARDEN OF THEOLOGICAL STUDY

Theological study does not take place in a vacuum; in fact, it is much better located in a garden. To be more exact, a rather old garden, with soil tilled for over 2000 years by many hands, and gigantic trees shading the cobblestone paths. The garden is filled with flowers and vegetables, all new at one point but by now staples for many seasons. On the whole, the garden is stable, fruitful. But every now and then a drastic event creates the conditions ripe for a change. Perhaps an elderly branch overextends itself and cracks, crashing to the ground and creating both chaos and an opening where sunshine and rain can enter for the first time, prompting the growth of new shoots on the garden floor. A wise gardener would monitor the new plants carefully, rejoicing in the garden's vitality, yet pruning any weeds that would damage the garden's integrity as a whole.

Suffice it to say that a garden metaphor aptly describes the growth of the Church over time, and in particular the theological doctrines that form the deposit of faith.¹ Even though God revealed himself fully in Jesus Christ, humankind's understanding of this revelation has expanded throughout history as men and women have grasped in ever-increasing fullness the "faith that was once for all handed down to the holy ones" (Jude 1:3). Both fruit and weeds have sprung up along the way, as certain attempts to discern God's revelation have proved to be orthodox and others heresy.² In addition, since theological development is often a response to contemporary challenges,³ all theological movements are comprehensible only in light of the historical and cultural soil in which they are born and develop, and the events that precipitate their growth and perhaps death. Finally, as gardens need gardeners, so theology needs theologians, to hoe, fertilize, and cultivate its central tenets, and at times to prune aberrations of them.

¹ *Depositum fidei*: "The heritage of faith contained in Sacred Scripture and Tradition, handed on in the Church from the time of the Apostles, from which the Magisterium draws all that it proposes for belief as being divinely revealed." *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C: United States Catholic Conference Inc., 1997), 874.

² The ancient Christological controversies come to mind, when theologians such as Arius and Nestorius genuinely tried to explain the mystery of Jesus the God-man but ended up formulating heresy, according to the judgment of the Church.

³ Note, for example, the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15, convened to decide whether non-Jewish converts to the Christian faith must be circumcised, a situation never before entertained.

The movement now known as liberation theology is no exception to the metaphor of theological development within the garden of the Church.⁴ Therefore, I propose first of all to situate liberation theology in its historical and cultural soil, noting in particular the events that precipitated its growth between 1968 and 1986. Second, even though dozens of theologians and many more lay people could claim to have cultivated (and pruned) liberation theology, I propose to examine primarily the contributions of Catholic priest Gustavo Gutiérrez, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger⁵, and the late Pope John Paul II. Finally, I will examine in depth one of the fruits produced by the gardeners who tilled liberation theology, namely the concept of liberation itself: its meaning, scope, and value.

SECTION I: TRACING THE GROWTH OF A MOVEMENT

1. Vatican II opens the doors of the Church to the world

On October 11, 1962 Pope John XXIII convened the 21st ecumenical council of the Roman Catholic Church in Vatican City.⁶ Bishops and Cardinals from around the world gathered to discuss topics pertinent to the life and mission of the Church, including revelation, the role of the laity, and relations with non-Christian religions. By the time Vatican II officially ended on December 8, 1965 sixteen documents had been promulgated.

Known as the council in which the Church opened her doors to the world, Vatican II was distinctive for its “repeated emphasis on the Christian’s duty to help build a just and peaceful world,”⁷ an attitude which, at face value, was much different than the isolationist one taken since the counter-Reformation in the mid-1500s. This attitude is seen most clearly in Vatican II’s longest document, *Gaudium et Spes*.⁸ In GS, the bishops examine the vocation of human persons

⁴ While the development of doctrine in general and the debate over liberation theology in particular has taken place in all Christian denominations, the scope of my paper is limited to the events and protagonists within the Roman Catholic Church for purposes of clarity and personal interest.

⁵ Pope Benedict XVI as of April 2005.

⁶ The most recent ecumenical council, Vatican I, had taken place from December 8, 1869 to July 18, 1870 but was interrupted by the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war and was only able to complete a fraction of its intended business.

⁷ Cardinal Lawrence Shehan, “Introduction,” in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, S.J. (New York: America Press, 1966), xvii. Shehan also lists as noteworthy the council’s concern for the poor and its insistence on the unity of the human family and therefore on the wrongness of discrimination.

⁸ Ecumenical Council of Catholic Bishops, “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*),” [hereafter GS] in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, S.J. (New York: America Press, 1966), 199-308. GS’ name come from its first words in Latin, which also serve to set the tone for the document: “The joys and hope [*gaudium et spes*], the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are

and of the church in order to discern through that lens proper approaches to some “problems of special urgency” that exist in the modern world, such as those facing marriage and the family, cultural development, socio-economic life, the political community, and peace among the community of nations.

In particular, the Church is exhorted to reclaim her ancient role of scrutinizing the “signs of the times” and interpreting them in the light of the gospel.⁹ The insistence of GS to engage wisely in modern issues, along with the general sense at Vatican II of renewal and collaboration with humanity,¹⁰ primed the global theological soil so that new shoots of fresh theological thinking, including liberation theology in Latin America, found a fertile environment.

2. Toward a theology of liberation

Hence, throughout the world, theologians and lay people took seriously the exhortation to discern the “signs of the times” in the light of the gospel and strove to truly be a leaven in temporal society.¹¹ In Latin America, heretofore a recipient of European theology, new ways of doing theology and new reflections on traditional Christian doctrines sprouted. One such shoot quietly blossomed in Perú in 1968, when a young Roman Catholic priest, Gustavo Gutiérrez, presented a talk at the national meeting of the ONIS Priest movement,¹² attended by priests and laity in Chimbote from July 21 to 25. The presentation, entitled “Hacia una teología de la liberación,”¹³ was just that; it contained in seed form what would later develop into Gutiérrez’s first full-length book, *Teología de la liberación: perspectivas*, published in 1971.¹⁴

poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ,” p. 199.

⁹ Ecumenical Council of Catholic Bishops, GS, 201. The editor adds, “‘Signs of the times’ was a phrase frequently used by John XXIII... Though some professed to find the usage disturbingly unfamiliar or misleading, it is now [1966] obviously a part of the Christian vocabulary as a result of this usage by the Council. Indeed, its source is ultimately biblical.” Walter M. Abbott, S.J., *The Documents of Vatican II*, p. 201, n. 8.

¹⁰ “For the first time in the history of the Ecumenical Councils, a Council addresses itself to all men, not just members of the Catholic Church” – Walter M. Abbott, S.J., *The Documents of Vatican II*, footnote 2 on p. 3.

¹¹ “Thus the church, at once a visible assembly and a spiritual community, goes forward together with humanity and experiences the same earthly lot which the world does. She serves as a leaven and as a kind of soul for human society as it is to be renewed in Christ and transformed into God’s family” (GS § 40).

¹² ONIS = Organización Nacional Independiente de Sacerdotes (National Independent Organization of Priests).

¹³ I will quote from the English version: Gustavo Gutiérrez, “Toward a Theology of Liberation,” in *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History*, [hereafter *LTDH*] trans. and ed. by Alfred T. Hennelly (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 62-76.

¹⁴ First published as *Teología de la liberación: perspectivas* (Lima, Peru: Centro de Estudios y Publicaciones, 1971). Published in English as *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, [hereafter *TL*] trans. and ed. by Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973). The version from which I will quote is

“Hacia” both encapsulated the ever-maturing thought of Gutiérrez, and also contributed to the burgeoning liberation theology movement, still in its infancy. As historian Pablo Richards describes it, Gutiérrez’s paper “marked the explicit break, the qualitative leap, from a worldvision tied to a ‘developmentalist’ kind of practice to one tied to a practice of ‘liberation.’”¹⁵ As Gutiérrez explains later in TL, “*Developmentalism*...came to be synonymous with *reformism* and modernization, that is to say, synonymous with timid measures, really ineffective in the long run and counterproductive to achieving a real transformation.”¹⁶ In contrast, ‘liberation’, considered politically and theologically, implies “a radical break from the status quo” that strikes at the root of social ills and sin, respectively.¹⁷

3. Medellín – a ‘new Pentecost’ for Latin America¹⁸

The dissatisfaction expressed in “Hacia” at current developmentalist models of change found an institutional voice three years after Vatican II, when the Latin American Bishops’ Conference (CELAM)¹⁹ convened its own regional meeting in Medellín, Colombia, from August 26 to September 6, 1968. The conference’s title, “The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the [Vatican II] Council” expresses well the Bishops’ intentions to apply Vatican II reflections to their own situation in Latin America.

Therefore it is no surprise that a large focus of Medellín was the rampant poverty that existed in Latin America and the church’s response to it. The “signs of the times” that the Bishops observed around them were situations of inequalitable distribution of resources, which contributed to hunger, illness, and unemployment. For example, in Guatemala circa the Medellín conference, two percent of ranches occupied 70 percent of the arable land, while 88 percent of farmers squeezed into 14 percent of the land. Two-thirds of the people were illiterate. This enormous contrast between “a small, wealthy minority and a mass of poverty-stricken peasants

the 15th Anniversary Edition, trans. and ed. by Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson, with a new introduction by Gutiérrez (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003).

¹⁵ Pablo Richard, *Death of Christendoms, Birth of the Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 145, quoted in *LTDH*, 62.

¹⁶ Gutiérrez, TL, 17. Emphasis in original.

¹⁷ Gutiérrez, TL, 17.

¹⁸ Peter Hebblethwaite, “The Vatican’s Latin American Policy,” in *Church and Politics in Latin America*, ed. Dermot Keogh (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), 53.

¹⁹ In Spanish, Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano. Their website is www.celam.org.

who eke out a bare existence” was not unique to Guatemala but rather was indicative of the social situation in most of Latin America.²⁰

Three of Medellín’s major documents address some aspect of the church’s relation to those in poverty.²¹ However, as Jesuit Alfred T. Hennelly notes, Medellín was significant for Latin America not because it discovered the poor for the first time, but because it legitimized and encouraged pastoral care of the poor to an extent not seen before.²² As a meeting of Church leaders, not merely fringe theologians, Medellín raised the importance of the themes discussed, placing them squarely within the bounds of Christian reflection and action. Similar to Vatican II, it motivated Christians (this time Latin Americans) to reflect more deeply on their current situations of life. However, also similar to Vatican II, immediately after the conference ended, the bishops began debating about the ‘true meaning’ of Medellín, a debate that would continue until CELAM’s next meeting in 1979.

Nonetheless, the young liberation theology movement found much encouragement in Medellín to continue promoting human development and reflecting on such action in the light of the gospel. In its “Message to the People of Latin America,” CELAM addressed those already engaged in the renewal of Latin America, pledging to “encourage these efforts, accelerate their results, deepen their content, and permeate all the process of change with the values of the gospel.”²³

4. Gutiérrez builds a greenhouse of sorts

During the heady time of intense pastoral action following Medellín, Gutiérrez published his first major book, *Teología de la liberación: perspectivas* in 1971. As the title suggests, Gutiérrez explores the meaning of theology itself, along with the meaning of liberation and its corollaries, including the differences between liberation and development, the relation of liberation and salvation, and the meaning of Christian action in the world. However, in contrast to traditional theological inquiries, Gutiérrez relies not only on the resources of the gospel and church doctrines, but also on “the experiences of men and women committed to the process of

²⁰ Penny Lernoux, “Prophets of Change in Latin America: Catholic Bishops Challenge Military,” *The APF Reporter*, April 27, 1976, <http://www.aliciapatterson.org/APF001976/Lernoux/Lernoux02/Lernoux02.html>.

²¹ Document on Justice, Document on Peace, Document on the Poverty of the Church.

²² Hennelly, *LTDH*, 89.

²³ Hennelly, *LTDH*, 90-94.

liberation in the oppressed and exploited land of Latin America.”²⁴ In fact, Gutiérrez defines the goal of liberation theology as reconsidering “the great themes of the Christian life...with regard to the new questions posed by this commitment [to the process of liberation].”²⁵ Because of this, Peter Hebblethwaite noted that “what emerged in the early 1970s was a new way of doing theology. It was rooted, local and committed. It was not *about* liberation but *for* liberation.”²⁶

In its freshness and comprehensiveness, TL established a greenhouse of sorts, a systematic arrangement of the seedlings being birthed by liberation theology. In addition, TL’s publication was timely; Church observers noted that as early as 1971, “liberation theology...was moving out of its Latin American *habitat* to influence the universal Church.”²⁷

5. The subtle Polish Pope and Puebla

Over the next few years, the influence began to run both ways, as non-Latino Church leaders entered the increasingly polarized debate over liberation theology. By the time CELAM held its third meeting in 1979, the bishops were strongly divided as to the merits and dangers of liberation theology. Into their midst would step Pope John Paul II, and the pruning of the so-far unchecked growth of liberation theology would begin in earnest.

Much had happened politically and economically in Latin America since CELAM’s previous conference in 1968. José María Ghio summarizes:

In the interim years between Medellín and Puebla, democracies in the Southern Cone of Latin America had collapsed under a new wave of authoritarianism. These new regimes enforced policies of extreme repression and in some cases elaborated a set of economic policies that had as their objective a drastic transformation of social structures.²⁸

²⁴ Gutiérrez, TL, xiii.

²⁵ Gutiérrez, TL, xiii.

²⁶ Hebblethwaite, “The Vatican’s Latin American Policy,” 53, emphasis in original.

²⁷ Hebblethwaite, “The Vatican’s Latin American Policy,” 54, emphasis in original. Hebblethwaite cites Pope Paul VI’s encyclical *Octogesima Adveniens*, which delegated to local church leaders the task of diagnosing contemporary pastoral concerns and acting on them; and the Catholic Bishops’ Synod of 1971, which “was quite clear that the preaching of justice was ‘a constitutive dimension’ of the preaching of the gospel,” p. 54.

²⁸ José-Maria Ghio, “The Latin American Church and the Papacy of Wojtyła,” in *The Right and democracy in Latin America*, ed. Douglas A. Chalmers and Atilio Borón (New York: Praeger, 1992), 186.

In the theological realm, CELAM as a whole had been on “quite friendly terms” with liberation theologians since Vatican II, especially after Medellín’s enthusiastic embrace of pastoral action.²⁹ In addition, proponents of liberation theology gained global prestige in 1974, when an entire issue of the influential international journal *Concilium* was reserved for Latin American theologians of the liberation movement, including Gutiérrez.³⁰

However, at the same time, murmuring voices of dissent among the bishops had become louder. The increased involvement of Christians in Marxist-affiliated political parties, such as the group ‘Christians for Socialism’ in Chile and the left wing of the Peronist party in Argentina confirmed the fears of many bishops who “viewed Medellín as a Pandora’s Box for Marxist revolution.”³¹ Notably, in 1972, a Colombian bishop named Alfonso López Trujillo was elected by the Latin American bishops to be the general secretary of CELAM.³² Although hierarchically beneath the president, the general secretary played a large role in decision making and preparation for conferences. Under the leadership of Trujillo, an outspoken critic of liberation theology,³³ neutrality was no longer an option. Even those bishops without a strong opinion for or against liberation theology were forced to choose sides.

In this increasingly polemical atmosphere CELAM held its third meeting, at Puebla de los Ángeles, México, from January 27 to February 13, 1979. The opening address on January 28 was delivered by a previously unknown Polish cardinal, recently elected to the Chair of Peter: Pope John Paul II. His address set the tone for the Puebla conference, as well as for the theological debates that would follow. Acknowledging Medellín as the proper point of departure for Puebla and encouraging further implementation of its positive elements, John Paul cautioned against promulgating the incorrect interpretations of Medellín that had since sprung up. Seen in this light, Puebla was the jousting field for bishops who disagreed about how Medellín should have been interpreted and actualized, including the ever-more-touchy issue of liberation theology. The episcopal tension is seen in the aftermath of Puebla. Its documents supported a

²⁹ Hennelly, *LTDH*, 123.

³⁰ Hennelly, *LTDH*, 176.

³¹ Penny Lernoux, “The Long Path to Puebla,” in *Puebla and Beyond: Documentation and Commentary*, ed. John Eagleson and Philip Scharper and trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 13.

³² He remained in this post until becoming president of CELAM in 1979 and finally retiring in 1983. He was appointed Archbishop of Medellín in 1979 and currently he is the prefect of the Pontifical Council for the Family.

³³ See, for example, Cardinal Alfonso López Trujillo, “Liberation, a Permanent Value,” in *LTDH*, 163-173.

preferential option for the poor and for young people,³⁴ and affirmed Medellín's "elucidation of a dynamic process of integral liberation."³⁵ Nonetheless, some insisted post-Puebla that "the principal lesson to be derived from the Puebla address was that the main problem of the continent was the threat of a marxist-inspired unorthodoxy which would imperil the Church's unity."³⁶

From Puebla onward, John Paul's relationship to liberation theology is complex and at times baffling. His overall approach to shepherding his flock was very hands-on, earning him the title of 'Pilgrim Pope'.³⁷ By 1985, he had traveled to Latin America on six separate occasions³⁸ and had delivered a multitude of homilies and addresses.³⁹ John Paul rarely mentioned liberation theology by name, and when he did so in his sixth trip to Latin America in 1985, he merely referred to previous Church documents on the subject.⁴⁰ However, he often pontificated about themes that overlapped with liberation theology, such as poverty, the rights of workers, and salvation. Furthermore, his encyclical letters and apostolic exhortations were sprinkled with condemnations of injustice and he even dedicated an entire encyclical to the theme of human work.⁴¹ Finally, John Paul publicly affirmed missionaries like Mother Theresa who labored alongside the downtrodden of the world. In short, John Paul's homilies, writings, and charisma seemed to uphold values held dear to liberation theology enthusiasts.

However, the Pope at times seemed blind and deaf to ways in which Latin Americans were fulfilling his own desires for a more just world. In particular, his reactions to the Sandanista regime in Nicaragua seemed to many incongruous with the Pope's expressed love of mankind.⁴² The Sandanistas came to power in 1979 after a bloody revolution that ousted the dictator Somoza, whose family had ruled Nicaragua for decades. Once in power, the Sandanistas

³⁴ Latin American Bishops Conference, "The Final Document," nos. 1134-1205, in Eagleson, ed., *Puebla and Beyond*, 264-272.

³⁵ Latin American Bishops Conference, "The Final Document," no. 480, in Eagleson, ed., *Puebla and Beyond*, 190.

³⁶ Hebblethwaite, "The Vatican's Latin American Policy," 59.

³⁷ John Paul traveled to 129 countries during his 26-year tenure as Pope.

³⁸ "[John Paul] remarked in the plane on his way to Mexico in January 1979 that 'Humanly speaking, the future of the Catholic Church is being played out in Latin America.'" – Hebblethwaite, "The Vatican's Latin American Policy," 49.

³⁹ See Appendix II: "Speeches and Homilies of John Paul II in Latin America" in Carlos Ignacio González, "La teología de la liberación a la luz del magisterio de Juan Pablo II en América Latina," *Gregorianum* 67, no. 1 (1986): 44-46. [Translation mine.]

⁴⁰ González, "La teología de la liberación," 13.

⁴¹ See John Paul II, "Laborem Exercens: On Human Work [1981]", in *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*, ed. David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 352-392.

⁴² See John Kirk, "John Paul II and the Exorcism of Liberation Theology: A Retrospective Look at the Pope in Nicaragua," *Bulletin of Latin America Research* 4, no. 1 (1985): 33-47.

instituted agrarian reforms, literacy projects, and access to public health services. However, their connections with leaders in communist Cuba and Russia, along with their appropriation of private property, including that owned by foreigners, compelled the United States to help fund the *contras*. Composed largely of ex-Somoza supporters, the *contras* aimed to destabilize and discredit the Sandanista regime. The years between 1979 and 1990 were filled with more bloodshed, although this time between the Sandanistas and *contras*.

Into this milieu flew John Paul when he visited Central America in 1983.⁴³ His homilies in Nicaragua emphasized the communist tendencies of the Sandanistas and the necessity of Church unity, a “tremendous shock” for many Nicaraguans who “essentially wanted to hear a message about peace, believing that a condemnation by the Pontiff of this external aggression [by the *contras*] would carry a moral weight throughout the world.”⁴⁴ Needless to say, Nicaragua was the first country the Pope visited in which he was not “greeted rapturously” by the populace, who felt that he misunderstood their plight. In fact, during an open-air mass in Managua, “even the tone of his voice seemed harsh, as three times he shouted out ‘*Silencio!*’ when his homily was interrupted by chants of ‘We want peace.’”⁴⁵

What is the cause of this contradiction, between John Paul’s words of peace and social justice, and his seemingly oblivious and callous actions? Most cite John Paul’s personal experience, growing up and later ministering under a Marxist-inspired totalitarian government in Poland. As Pope, John Paul was highly instrumental in bringing about the decay and ultimate disintegration of the communist regime. John Kirk insists that John Paul’s personal and pastoral background resulted in “a Pope who for cultural, historical and psychological reasons is apparently unable to appreciate fully the post-Vatican social teachings as they apply to the Latin American context.”⁴⁶ In other words, perhaps John Paul considered the Marxist principles used in liberation theology as inseparable from the disastrous Marxist experiment in Eastern Europe, and this to an extent that clouded his recognition of a potentially unique role for Marxism in liberation theology and Latin American politics. However, an outsider’s view often sheds light on a situation distorted by vested interests. As we shall see, John Paul’s strong disapproval of

⁴³ From March 2 to 9, John Paul visited Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Panamá, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Belize, and Haiti.

⁴⁴ Kirk, “John Paul II,” 38-39.

⁴⁵ Father Vincent J. Giese, quoted in Kirk, “John Paul II,” 38.

⁴⁶ Kirk, “John Paul II,” 43.

Marxism translated into perceptive critiques by other Church leaders of Marxist influence on liberation theology.

6. The not-so-subtle German Cardinal

If the Pilgrim Pope publicly sidestepped liberation theology *per se* and preferred instead to delineate the dangers of Marxism and positively outline the foundations necessary for a correct understanding of liberation in general, German Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger addressed liberation theology and its promulgators head-on, pointing out a variety of reductionisms and deviations. As prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith,⁴⁷ a bureau within the Catholic Church “responsible for protecting all matters of doctrine relating to faith and morals,”⁴⁸ Ratzinger had the task of monitoring global theological development in order to assure its orthodoxy. In terms of our garden metaphor, Ratzinger served as ‘chief pruner.’

Between 1983 and 1986, the CDF promulgated two major documents concerned exclusively with liberation theology, effectively delivering an evaluation of the movement from the highest doctrinal authority in the Catholic Church. In March of 1983, the CDF published “Ten Observations on the Theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez”⁴⁹ in which Gutiérrez’s work as expressed in *Teología de la liberación: perspectivas* and *La fuerza histórica de los pobres*⁵⁰ was judged as falling prey to reductionism and ambiguity. About a year later, the CDF published “Instruction on Certain Aspects of the ‘Theology of Liberation’” on August 6, 1984.⁵¹ The critiques are similar to those found in TO but apply more broadly to all liberation theologians who uncritically borrow concepts from Marxist analysis or who rely on a thoroughly rationalistic biblical hermeneutic.⁵² In addition, the CDF specifically investigated the theological work of several liberation theologians, including Gutiérrez and Brazilian priest Leonardo Boff. In fact, on

⁴⁷ The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, hereafter CDF, was founded in 1542 by Pope Paul III under the name of the Sacred Congregation of the Universal Inquisition, “as its duty was to defend the church from heresy.” It received its current name from Pope Paul VI in 1965. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger was prefect of CDF from November 1981 to April 2005, when he became Pope Benedict XVI. The current prefect is Cardinal William Joseph Levada, former Archbishop of San Francisco.

⁴⁸ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*. 2nd ed., s.v. “Roman Curia.”

⁴⁹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Ten Observations on the Theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez,” [hereafter TO] in *LTDH*, 348-350.

⁵⁰ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *La fuerza histórica de los pobres: selección de trabajos* (Lima, Perú: Centro de Estudios y Publicaciones, 1979). In English, *The Power of the Poor in History*.

⁵¹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Instruction on Certain Aspects of the ‘Theology of Liberation,’” in *LTDH*, 393-414. In Latin, the document is titled *Libertatis Nuntius*, hereafter LN.

⁵² CDF, LN, 401.

May 9, 1985 Boff was prohibited by the Vatican from writing, lecturing, and editing an influential Brazilian theological journal, *Revista Ecclesiastica Brasileira*. The silence was lifted ten months later, on Holy Saturday, March 29, 1986.⁵³

Many interpreted the CDF's actions in terms of conflict. In 1985, John Kirk wrote, "The Vatican...has apparently decided...to mount a frontal attack on this 'errant' wing of the Church, to rein it in sharply, and to make it bow to Church orthodoxy."⁵⁴ However, Gutiérrez declared in an interview that "these criticisms will help clarify both the scope and the limitations of this theological reflection on action"⁵⁵ and in general praised the observations contained in LN. Gutiérrez also published an article in September 1984 which defended his use of Marxism and other tools of social analysis.⁵⁶

The year of 1986 proved to be definitive for liberation theology, and one filled with several surprises. On March 22, 1986, the CDF promulgated its third major document about liberation theology, entitled "Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation."⁵⁷ As the title suggests, this document is much more constructive, affirming that liberation finds its genuine roots and meaning in the Christian heritage. Less than a month later, John Paul sent a letter to the Brazilian Episcopal Conference⁵⁸ that is remarkably constructive and even praises liberation theology.⁵⁹ Furthermore, in July of that same year, Gutiérrez added his own contribution by publishing *La verdad los hará libres: confrontaciones*,⁶⁰ a compendium of his doctoral defense at the University of Lyons, France, as well as the aforementioned "Theology and the Social Sciences," and a previously unpublished reflection on the development of liberation theology from Medellín to the current time. Unlike any of Gutiérrez's previous books, *La verdad* displays on its inside front cover the declaration by the Catholic Church that the book is free from

⁵³ Harvey Cox, "Liberation Theology vs. Cardinal Ratzinger," *Tikkun* 3, no. 3 (May-June 199?): 17-18.

⁵⁴ Kirk, "John Paul II," 34.

⁵⁵ Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Criticism Will Deepen, Clarify Liberation Theology," in *LTDH*, 420. This interview first appeared in the Peruvian newspaper *La República* on September 14, 1984.

⁵⁶ Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Teología y ciencias sociales," *Páginas* 9 (Sept 1984): 4-15. In English, "Theology and the Social Sciences."

⁵⁷ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation," in *LTDH*, 461-497. In Latin, the document is titled *Libertatis Conscientia*, hereafter LC.

⁵⁸ John Paul II, "Letter to Brazilian Episcopal Conference," in *LTDH*, 498-506. The letter was mailed from Vatican City on April 9, 1986.

⁵⁹ John Paul writes in "Letter" that as long as responses to pastoral needs are consistent with the gospel and with the teaching of the church, "We are convinced, we and you, that the theology of liberation is not only timely but useful and necessary," p. 503.

⁶⁰ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *La verdad los hará libres: confrontaciones* (Lima, Perú: Centro de Estudios y Publicaciones, 1986). In English, *The Truth Shall Make You Free: Confrontations*, trans. Michael J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990).

doctrinal and moral error. Clearly, either Gutiérrez's work changed sufficiently since 1983, or the Church had incorporated enough insights emphasized by liberation theology that they were now part of the heritage of faith. Given the mutual influence between Gutiérrez and the Vatican, it is likely that both are true.

SECTION II: THE FRUITS OF THE MOVEMENT

Throughout the constant growth and pruning of liberation theology, enacted by gardener-theologians both within and outside of Latin America, the church as a whole came to a richer and more fruitful understanding of the meaning of liberation in the context of the Christian faith.

To begin my reflections on Christian liberation, I will offer a criticism of Christianity's approach to human liberation held by many, namely that the Church contradicts herself by affirming her love for the human person while restricting full liberation to the hereafter. Second, I will present John Paul II's formulation of the threefold truth, which provides guidelines as to what a genuine theology of liberation must entail. Third, drawing on the documents of the CDF, I will lay out where theologies of liberation are apt to, and have in fact, missed the threefold truth standard. Finally, I will discuss the ways in which all three of my protagonists, Gutiérrez, John Paul, and Ratzinger, have much to offer in way of a positive formulation of the Christian understanding of liberation.

1. A challenge from an outsider

In his early work "Hacia una teología de la liberación", Gutiérrez points out a seemingly contradictory approach the church takes toward humankind. Despite Pope Paul VI's assertion to the United Nations that the church is an expert in humanity,⁶¹ Gutiérrez declares, "often Christians, with their gaze fixed on the world beyond, manifest little or no commitment to the ordinary life of human beings."⁶² Gutiérrez then quotes prominent socialist Frederick Engels:

Christianity and socialism proclaim the proximate liberation of humanity from slavery; but Christianity proclaims it in the next life, not here on earth. That is the difference. We

⁶¹ Mentioned without citation by Gutiérrez, "Hacia," 66.

⁶² Gutiérrez, "Hacia," 66.

are both agreed that humanity has to be liberated; however, for Christians it is later on, while for us [socialists] it is now.⁶³

For Christians, the paradox of being human is perennial and seems unavoidable: we are made of dust, yet we are meant for heaven. To employ a metaphor, Christians “bound for the promised land” are like passengers on a cruise. If at some point soon the cruise will arrive at its destination and the passengers will embark to a life much more glorious than cramped quarters and sea-sickness, why bother re-upholstering the cabin in the meantime? Would it not be more worthwhile to primp for arrival and keep a lookout for land? Such is, in Engel’s view, the Christian understanding of liberation. Is such a view justified?

Gutiérrez aptly rewords this weighty question, which lies at the heart of any theology of liberation: “What relationship is there between the construction of this world and salvation?”⁶⁴ Often playing the role of the gadfly, liberation theologians prodded the church to face such a question, and renew the radically holistic nature of liberation in Christ, a liberation more integral than both that of materialist Marxists and of well-intentioned but docetic Christians. At the same time, the Vatican hierarchy, basing its reflections on the truth about Jesus Christ, the church, and the human person, accurately pruned enthusiastic but distorted conceptions of liberation that in reducing or confusing true liberation inadvertently undermined the human person.

2. John Paul and the threefold truth

We will first examine the insights of Pope John Paul II, who repeatedly offered guidelines for a genuine theology of liberation. As discussed above, soon after his election to the papacy, John Paul traveled to Puebla de los Ángeles, México, to deliver the opening statement of CELAM’s third meeting.⁶⁵ At the heart of his message was a reminder to the assembled bishops that their chief duty is to teach the truth that comes from God, a truth that includes the “principle of authentic human liberation.”⁶⁶ More specifically, the truth that the bishops are charged to proclaim is the truth about Jesus Christ, the truth about the mission of the Church, and the truth about human beings. It is this one truth from God, expressed in these three areas, which grounds

⁶³ Frederick Engels, quoted in Gutiérrez, “Hacia,” 66. The source of the quote is uncited.

⁶⁴ Gutiérrez, “Hacia,” 65.

⁶⁵ Pope John Paul II, “Opening Address at the Puebla Conference,” in Eagleson, ed., *Puebla and Beyond*, 57-71.

⁶⁶ John Paul, “Opening,” 58, with reference to John 8:32.

authentic human liberation. To elaborate what adherence to each of these three truths entails, John Paul relies on ancient and modern Church fathers, and in particular the documents of Vatican II and Pope Paul VI's 1975 encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi*.⁶⁷

a. *Truth about Jesus Christ*

John Paul affirms that Jesus Christ is the Word and Son of God, who became human in order to draw all other humans to himself and to offer them salvation. To profess Christ is to profess the gospel. John Paul warns against contemporary "re-readings" of the gospel that remain mute about Jesus' divinity or present him as a political subversive.⁶⁸ For example, some liberation theologians interpret Mark 5:1-20, when Jesus cast the demon Legion into a herd of pigs, as an entirely political message about the injustice of the Roman occupation of Palestine and their eventual defeat.⁶⁹ John Paul insists that orthodox Christology is necessary for a genuine gospel, which alone has the power to penetrate culture, transform hearts, and humanize systems and structures.

b. *Truth about the Church and her mission*

John Paul reminds the bishops that while the Church is born out of our response in faith to Christ, we are also born of the Church.⁷⁰ Drawing heavily on Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium*,⁷¹ John Paul urges love and fidelity toward the church. He says that evangelizing is the essential vocation of the church, making evangelization an essentially ecclesial act. He warns against ecclesiologies that reduce the Kingdom of God to an entirely secular plane, thereby emptying it of its content and describing our entrance into it in terms of structural change and sociopolitical involvement. Finally, John Paul cautions against strains of ecclesiology that claim to set the "people's church" against the institutional church.

⁶⁷ Paul VI, "Evangelii Nuntiandi: Evangelization in the Modern World," in *Catholic Social Thought*, 303-345.

⁶⁸ John Paul, "Opening," 59.

⁶⁹ The author learned such an interpretation while studying abroad in Costa Rica and participating in a bible study of Mark taught from a liberation theology perspective.

⁷⁰ John Paul, "Opening," 61. "The Church begets us by baptism, nourishes us with the sacraments and the Word of God, prepares us for our mission, and leads us to God's plan – the reason for our existence as Christians."

⁷¹ Ecumenical Council of Catholic Bishops, "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)," in *The Documents of Vatican II*, 14-96.

c. Truth about the human person

While the first two strands of the threefold truth are indispensable, John Paul places a premium on the third: “The complete truth about human beings is the basis of the Church’s social teaching, even as it is the basis of authentic liberation.”⁷² Unfortunately, it is precisely this truth that is woefully lacking in modern thinking.⁷³ In particular, atheistic humanism and indeed any philosophy that separates the human person from his/her ultimate end runs contrary to Christian anthropology, and they inescapably result in a vision of the person as either a mere fragment of nature or as an anonymous element in the human city.⁷⁴ In opposition to such philosophies, John Paul affirms that each human person’s dignity lies in his/her identity as the image of God, meant for communion with the Creator.

John Paul’s opening address, and the proceedings of Puebla as a whole, were fundamental events that decisively shaped the Pope’s complicated relationship with Latin America, such that from then on, he always presupposed Puebla in his thought regarding the continent and its theology.⁷⁵ While John Paul provided the Latin American bishops with a general framework of the necessary truths that are essential for a proper understanding of liberation, he only briefly specified some errors possible when theologies fall short of this threefold truth.

3. Ratzinger prunes reductions and ambiguities

Cardinal Ratzinger, acting as prefect of the CDF, builds on John Paul’s principles to detail more fully the reductionisms and ambiguities of certain theologies of liberation. As noted above, he accomplishes this in two main documents, namely, TO in March 1983 and LN in August 1984. A third document, LC, was published in March 1986, will be referred to later because its tone and content is notably more constructive regarding liberation.⁷⁶

It is important to note that the doctrinal disagreements between liberation theologians and the CDF should not be rendered as a David and Goliath lopsided battle, nor should the Church hierarchy be whitewashed as defenders of the status quo, with no sympathy for the poor and

⁷² John Paul, “Opening,” 64.

⁷³ John Paul, “Opening,” 63. “Perhaps one of the most glaring weaknesses of present-day civilization lies in an inadequate view of the human being.”

⁷⁴ See also Ecumenical Council of Catholic Bishops, GS § 12, 14.

⁷⁵ González, “La teología,” 8.

⁷⁶ See p. 3 for explanations of the documents’ abbreviations.

oppressed.⁷⁷ In the introduction to LN, the CDF insists that the document “should not at all serve as an excuse for those who maintain an attitude of neutrality and indifference in the face of the tragic and pressing problems of human misery and injustice.”⁷⁸ In fact, a driving motive behind all of the CDF’s actions toward liberation theology is that its “serious ideological deviations...tend inevitably to betray the cause of the poor.”⁷⁹

a. *Marxism*

The CDF pinpoints the uncritical use of Marxism as a major cause of liberation theology’s flaws and hence its betrayal of the poor. Indeed, philosophy professor Anselm K. Min, writing between the publication of LN and LC, summarizes LN’s three main points:

Like the early chapters of Genesis, it states, first of all, the original sin of LT [liberation theology], i.e., its alleged political and historical reductionism...Secondly, it points to the cause of the fall, namely, the seduction of LT by Karl Marx...Thirdly, it enumerates all the dogmatic errors resulting from that seduction.⁸⁰

Such a description, while perhaps overly melodramatic, is nonetheless rather accurate, particularly as regards the strong critique of Marxism found in both TO and LN. TO accuses Gutiérrez in particular of uncritically accepting the Marxist interpretation of the causes of poverty in Latin America, while in LN the critique is applied more generally, but still only to those forms of liberation theology “which use, in an insufficiently critical manner, concepts borrowed from various currents of Marxist thought.”⁸¹ It is not hard to trace the criticisms leveled by these two CDF documents to underlying Marxist principles.

Marxism, like any other ‘ism,’ can be traced back to one founder, in this case Karl Marx (1818-1883), and yet has come to encompass a wide swath of views, the validity of which are debated even among Marxists. Hence, speaking of ‘Marxism’ in a broad sense potentially blurs distinctions between particular Marxist schools of thought. With such a danger noted, we will

⁷⁷ A perusal of the Catholic Church’s social teaching in, for example, *Catholic Social Thought*, will show a thorough and ever-developing concern for ethical social principles, particularly in regards to care of the poor and oppressed.

⁷⁸ CDF, LN, 394.

⁷⁹ CDF, LN, 394.

⁸⁰ Anselm K. Min, “The Vatican, Marxism, and Liberation Theology,” *Cross Currents* 34, no. 4 (Winter 1984-1985) 439.

⁸¹ CDF, LN, 394.

still offer certain themes characteristic of Marxism that have been influential on liberation theology.

Scholars often divide Marxism into several different levels of varying importance, typically Marx's philosophy, economic analysis, and historical materialism.⁸²

Marxist philosophy is materialistic and dialectical, reflecting influence from Feuerbach and Hegel respectively. Materialists believe that matter is the only thing that exists and hence seek a scientific explanation for everything, as opposed to idealists who assume the existence of supernatural forces and do not offer scientific proof for their theories. In Marx's time, most materialists also viewed life mechanically, as immutable and explicable by mathematical equations. In the sociopolitical realm, a mechanical perspective anticipated repetition and denied the ability for society to change. However, German philosopher Hegel (1770-1831) proposed an alternative philosophical method based on argument and the exposition of contradictions. Known as dialectics,⁸³ it proposed under Hegel's pen that "humanity advances and progresses only because of conflict."⁸⁴ Hegel preferred to locate this conflict in the spiritual or ideal realm, as did 'Right Hegelians' after him. However, 'Left Hegelians,' including Marx, wanted to apply Hegel's theories to sociopolitical life. As Marx wrote, "Philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."⁸⁵ For Marx, humanity-advancing conflict is unavoidable and takes place between social classes.

Marxist economic analysis critically evaluates the workings of the capitalist system, in particular its effects on workers. With the dawn of the industrial revolution, machines drastically simplified time-consuming tasks, accelerating production and attracting massive swells of migration from rural areas to urban centers. According to Marx, the swift changes sparked by the industrial revolution solidified two new social classes: the *proletariat*, or laborers, and the *bourgeoisie*, or employers and owners of the means of production.

Marx argued that the new modes of production alienated workers from the fruit of the labor: "the deepest essence of man, his creative act, has been transformed into a possession" of the employers.⁸⁶ This in turn depersonalized and commodified the worker, changing him or her

⁸² Rius, *Marx for Beginners* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976), 66.

⁸³ From the Greek for 'to argue,' 'to contend.'

⁸⁴ Rius, *Marx*, 21. Rius continues: "Peace and harmony – [Hegel] used to say – don't make for progress," p. 21.

⁸⁵ Karl Marx, *XI Theses on Feuerbach*, quoted in Rius, *Marx*, 65.

⁸⁶ Rius, *Marx*, 81

into “a mere appendage of flesh on a machine of iron.”⁸⁷ For Marx, capitalism is inescapably a system of exploitation and conflict, since the goal of the employers (profit) depends on transforming the workers’ labor into capital to re-invest. Hence the conflict predicted by Hegel becomes concrete and unavoidable in Marxist class struggle.

According to Rius, “the purpose of Marx’s theory of historical materialism is to show us that history is *made* by man, not by ‘destiny’ or the so-called ‘hand of God.’”⁸⁸ More specifically, Marx pinpointed the modes of production created by men as the moving forces of history. Since the dawn of time, society has progressed through four stages, from primitive communities to slave states to feudal states to capitalist states, propelled by changes in method and ownership of production. The fifth and final stage is the socialist state. For Marx, transition into socialism is only a matter of time, as the unavoidable class struggle present in capitalistic societies will lead to a dictatorship of the *proletariat*. This in turn will develop eventually into a classless society devoid of the exploitation and alienation present in current capitalist models.⁸⁹

Scholars disagree on whether the various strands of Marxism can be separated or not. On the one hand, liberation theologians repeatedly defend both the feasibility and profitability of separating Marxist socioeconomic analysis from blatantly anti-Christian aspects of Marxism, such as its atheistic ideology and totalitarian tendencies. For example, Gutiérrez asserts the instrumental value of Marxist economic theory for helping theologians to better understand the existence of poverty in Latin America.⁹⁰ Father Leonardo Boff specifies that certain Marxist ‘methodological pointers’ found useful by liberation theologians are “the importance of economic factors, attention to the class struggle, [and] the mystifying power of ideologies, including religious ones.” At the same time, Boff insists that “Marx (like any other Marxist) can be a companion on the way...but he can never be *the* guide, because ‘You have only one teacher, the Christ’ (Matt. 23:10).”⁹¹

On the other hand, the CDF warns that in the modern era, any knowledge or strategy labeled ‘scientific’ poses an “almost mythical fascination” and so must be preceded a careful

⁸⁷ Rius, *Marx*, 79.

⁸⁸ Rius, *Marx*, 124. Emphasis in original.

⁸⁹ Rius, *Marx*, 93.

⁹⁰ Gutiérrez, Gustavo, “Teología y ciencias sociales,” *Páginas* 9 (Sept 1984): 4-15.

⁹¹ Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Book, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 27-28. As support Boff cites the Puebla final document, § 544.

epistemological critique.⁹² In particular, the CDF declares that the thought of Marx is particularly intricate; it is “such a global vision of reality” that “no separation of the parts of this epistemologically unique complex is possible. If one tries to take only one part, say, the [economic] analysis, one ends up having to accept the entire ideology.”⁹³ An unlikely bedfellow agrees: Vladimir Lenin, who implemented Marxist theories in the 1917 Russian revolution, enthused, “The teaching of Marx is all-powerful because it is true. It is complete and harmonious, providing men with a consistent view of the universe.”⁹⁴

Nevertheless, the fact remains that liberation theology indeed hails Marx as a companion, and both TO and LN are clear that an uncritical use of Marxism threatens the “integral and profound” meaning of liberation by introducing “reductionism and ambiguity”⁹⁵ in the areas of Christology, ecclesiology, and anthropology.

b. Reductions and ambiguities about Jesus Christ

The closest the CDF comes to accusing Gutiérrez of Christological deviation is a remark that Gutiérrez’s description of the incarnation as “God becom[ing] history” relativizes theology by fostering re-readings of Scripture in different historical circumstances.⁹⁶ Understanding Christ as history, which ebbs, flows, and changes, rather than as a Person eternal and unchanging in identity, seems to allow for morphing of Christology depending on how Christ best seems to conform with one’s historical circumstances.

However, LN highlights a major Christological reduction that stems in large part from faulty exegesis. In liberation theology institutional authority within the church, including the sacred tradition, is often considered suspect, an attitude to be examined more fully below. Because of this, a vacuum of theological sources appears and “one welcomes the most radical theses of rationalist exegesis.”⁹⁷ At the same time, liberation theology places a weighty emphasis on the political dimensions of the Christian faith. When both aspects are combined, there arises a disastrous opposition between the “Jesus of history” and the “Jesus of faith.” The “Jesus of history,” understood as “a kind of symbol who sums up in himself the requirements of the

⁹² CDF, LN, 401.

⁹³ CDF, LN, 402.

⁹⁴ Rius, *Marx*, 141.

⁹⁵ CDF, TO, 348.

⁹⁶ CDF, TO, 349.

⁹⁷ CDF, LN, 408.

struggle of the oppressed,”⁹⁸ usurps the true Chalcedonian understanding of Jesus as the incarnate word of God, fully man but also Lord and Christ. The historical creeds of the church are therefore preserved, but with a radically new meaning. This leads to a reduction in Christ’s nature to that of merely human, and an ambiguous understanding about what Christ meant to teach and accomplish during his ministry on earth.

c. Reductions and ambiguities about the church and her mission

TO and LN both highlight similar reductionisms and ambiguities in liberation theology’s ecclesiology. Again hearkening back to Marxism, the CDF charges that liberation theology transposes the Marxist concept of class struggle into the setting of the church, resulting in a bitter and conflictual relationship between the institutional leaders of the church and the congregation in the pews. In more colloquial terms, there exists a “church of the rich” and a “church of the poor.” The rich, i.e. the church hierarchy, become the “objective representatives of the ruling class which has to be opposed,”⁹⁹ while the poor become “the authentic people of God.”¹⁰⁰ Since “the class struggle is presented as an objective, necessary law,” including the affirmation of violence,¹⁰¹ “the unity of the church is radically denied,”¹⁰² making communion between Christians of different classes impossible.

In addition, such a conception of the church as the locus of class struggle radically undermines the objectivity of truth. LN points out that “for the Marxist, only those who engage in the struggle [for liberation] can work out the analysis [of society] correctly.”¹⁰³ If the church hierarchy is automatically on the side of the oppressors, then their theology is discredited in advance. In other words, “Arguments and teachings do not have to be examined in themselves since they are only the reflections of class interest.”¹⁰⁴ Dialogue breaks down before it begins, orthopraxy becomes the only standard by which orthodoxy is judged, and the validity of objective truth and universal moral standards is drastically undermined.

⁹⁸ CDF, LN, 408.

⁹⁹ CDF, LN, 407.

¹⁰⁰ CDF, TO, 350.

¹⁰¹ CDF, LN, 404.

¹⁰² CDF, LN, 409.

¹⁰³ CDF, LN, 404.

¹⁰⁴ CDF, LN, 407.

d. *Reductions and ambiguities about the human person*

Finally, TO and LN address certain reductionisms and ambiguities regarding liberation theology's understanding of the human person. TO speaks briefly about this matter, commenting mainly on Gutiérrez's reduction of sin to social sin¹⁰⁵ and his borderline Pelagian approach to humanity's actualization of history.¹⁰⁶

LN highlights anthropological errors both in liberation theology's doctrine and in the practice it inspires, focusing mainly on its tendency to ignore the transcendent nature of the human person, including his/her ability to act freely.

Liberation theology tends to localize evil in unjust economic, political, and social structures. LN insists instead that "the root of evil...lies in free and responsible persons."¹⁰⁷ If evil resided primarily in certain temporal structures, then a reformation of these structures would need to precede any transformation of human persons. But the witness of Scripture declares otherwise, since "the New Testament does not require some change in the political or social condition" prior to entering into the freedom offered by Christ; this serves to stress Christian freedom's "radical character."¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, rejecting the idea that sin and evil are rooted in the free actions of human persons subverts the possibility of free action at all, ethical or otherwise.

Also, in a critique leveled squarely at the atheistic ideology of Marxism, LN charges liberation theology with misunderstanding the fact that the human person is physical *and* spiritual, and has a final eternal destiny.¹⁰⁹ Such a misunderstanding has historically led to political subordination of individual persons to the collective good of the whole in a way that reduces them to mere cogs in a machine.

Finally, LN draws attention to the methods of liberation theology that run counter to the true nature of the human person, namely its tendency to resort to violence as a way of effecting liberation.¹¹⁰ LN insists that "the truth of humankind requires that this battle [for justice] be

¹⁰⁵ CDF, TO, 349.

¹⁰⁶ CDF, TO, 350.

¹⁰⁷ CDF, LN, 398.

¹⁰⁸ CDF, LN, 398.

¹⁰⁹ CDF, LN, 402.

¹¹⁰ CDF, LN, 410.

fought in ways consistent with human dignity,” an assertion that rejects violence, which only begets more violence and “degrades humankind.”¹¹¹

4. Discovering the Truth amidst the errors

It is clear that there exist certain tendencies in liberation theology that threaten to subvert the meaning of Jesus Christ, of the church and her mission, and of the human person as articulated by the Catholic Church. In fact, a few months prior to the publication of LN, Ratzinger described liberation theology as a “fundamental danger for the faith of the church.” Yet he continued:

Undoubtedly one must realize that an error cannot exist unless it contains a nucleus of truth. In fact, an error is much more dangerous to the extent that it contains a greater proportion of truth. Moreover, the error could never appropriate that portion of the truth if this truth were sufficiently lived and witnessed where it is in its place, that is, in the faith of the church. For this reason, alongside the demonstration of error, and the danger of liberation theology, we also have to consider the question, what truth is hidden in the error, and how do we recover it completely.¹¹²

Ratzinger’s statement coalesces well with the garden metaphor of theological growth. If every plant in a garden bloomed to the full extent of its beauty, perhaps dandelions would not be as easily mistaken for flowers. Furthermore, pruning as doctrinal purification implies that in the midst of weeds and diseased branches lives a plant of potential fruitfulness that must be painstakingly trimmed instead of burned altogether.

I contend that a richer understanding of liberation itself blossomed out of the vigorous debate over liberation theology during the 1970s and 1980s. Reacting to disheartening and literally morbid ‘signs of the times’ they observed around them, liberation theologians spurred the church to come to terms with the relation of eternal salvation in Christ and the current well-being of human persons. In return, the Catholic hierarchy strongly asserted the necessity of orthodox Christology, ecclesiology, and anthropology as a foundation for true liberation. While

¹¹¹ CDF, LN, 410.

¹¹² Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, “Liberation Theology,” in *LTDH*, 367-368.

all three of these areas are essential, because the latter is a subject proper to both Christian and non-Christian philosophers, it more easily fell prey to deep distortions smuggled in by seductively charitable-sounding secular ideologies. Also, because anthropology, more than Christology and ecclesiology, directly affects programs and policies that deal with human persons, its distortions posed a present and insidious threat to how true Christian liberation is enacted. Hence, I will concentrate on how Church leaders prevented the seduction of well-meaning Christians by philosophies and programs of action that diminished the full meaning of the human person. When the reflections of Gutiérrez and the Church hierarchy are considered together, it is clear that both sides further advanced the church's understanding of the meaning, scope, and value of liberation, which, as Gutiérrez insists, is "in truth, a question *about the very meaning of Christianity and about the mission of the church.*"¹¹³

a. *The meaning of liberation*

Even a cursory glance at any description of liberation raises a teleological question: what is the result of liberation? In other words, given that it is the human person who is to be liberated, what would a life fully liberated look like? Such an inquiry depends, as John Paul predicted, on the understanding of the identity and destiny of the human person.

Perhaps it would be instructive to revisit one of the CDF's criticisms of liberation theology, namely that of its tendency to reduce or deny the transcendent nature of the human person. In particular, liberation theology's emphasis on social sin and on the impetus of the Christian faith to act *now* in the world can diminish both the nature of persons as free actors and the Christian hope of life after death.¹¹⁴ If the human person is understood as entirely material, liberation can only mean the achievement of those conditions of satiation and comfort desired by any sentient being.

A materialist description of liberation is entirely incompatible with the Christian proclamation of the human person as the image of God, free actor and created to commune with his/her Creator both now and after death. However, it must be noted that liberation can and has been limited in a way opposite to that of materialist reductionism. If the human person is

¹¹³ Gutiérrez, TL, xiv. Emphasis in original.

¹¹⁴ Liberation theologians Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff admit that some temptations facing liberation theologians include disregard for mystical roots, overstressing the political aspect of questions related to liberation, and subordinating considerations of faith to considerations of society. See *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 64-65.

understood in docetic terms, as a spiritual being in temporary possession of a body, liberation would then be limited to a spiritualist and moralist definition, concerned only with conditions that impinge upon persons' mental and spiritual freedom.

In short, neither a materialist nor a docetist anthropology is adequate for understanding what liberation of the human person means. Let us turn to Gutiérrez and Pope Paul VI, who offer helpful and complementary orientations toward what true liberation is.

i. Gutiérrez: Three levels of liberation

The term 'liberation' is used by Gutiérrez as an improvement over the more aseptic term 'development.'¹¹⁵ As noted above, development, especially as it came to be played out in certain public policy programs, connotes a sense of improvement, but in a way directly continuous with what has come before. In contrast, liberation is much more *radical*, both literally and etymologically; to liberate is to strike at the *roots* of the situation and effect a sharp break with the status quo.

To describe liberation, Gutiérrez employs "three reciprocally interpenetrating levels of meaning."¹¹⁶ First, liberation "expresses the aspirations of oppressed peoples and social classes" to have better material living conditions.¹¹⁷ It is on this level that social analysis, including that of Marx, is most often employed. In particular, Gutiérrez points out that the concept of development fails to describe the process necessary for impoverished people to escape their poverty. "Their underdevelopment," he insists, "is only the by-product of the development of other countries."¹¹⁸ On this level of material needs, development too often masks the systemic changes necessary for human persons to acquire adequate material goods.

Second, "liberation can be applied to an understanding of history."¹¹⁹ In other words, humankind assumes its proper responsibility for the unfolding of history and is not chained by a sterile and deterministic outlook. Such a liberation rejects the continual passing of blame for undesirable events, be it from person to person or from person to social institution, as Marxism suggests. Gutiérrez desires persons to take an active, not passive, orientation toward their existence in the world and the scope of their actions.

¹¹⁵ Gutiérrez, TL, 24.

¹¹⁶ Gutiérrez, TL, 24.

¹¹⁷ Gutiérrez, TL, 24.

¹¹⁸ Gutiérrez, TL, 17.

¹¹⁹ Gutiérrez, TL, 24.

Finally, liberation refers to Christ's power to free people from sin, "the ultimate root of all disruption of friendship and of all injustice and oppression."¹²⁰ Here too, liberation connotes a drastically different reality than that of development, one that seems to capture more accurately the radical nature of conversion which, although it could happen gradually, in the end requires an uncompromising rejection of sin and evil.

Gutiérrez insists that these three levels of the meaning of liberation are neither parallel nor chronological processes, but rather are one "single, complex process, which finds its deepest sense and its full realization in the saving work of Christ."¹²¹ Such a description is different from both a materialist and docetist understanding of liberation because it considers humans in their desire for material, psychological, and spiritual liberation.

ii. Pope Paul VI: A fully human life

In his 1967 encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, Pope Paul VI enhances the concept of liberation by describing what is necessary for a fully human life, a description cited approvingly both by Gutiérrez¹²² and by Medellín.¹²³ Paul considers that humans should progress from "conditions of life that are less human, to those that are more human."¹²⁴ What is most instructive is that at both the less human and the more human level, he includes both physical and spiritual aspects of the human person. Therefore, less human conditions include lacking minimum material needs as well as being mutilated by selfish desires. More human conditions include victory over social calamities as well as an increase in knowledge. Finally, the most human conditions, i.e. most fitting to the life of a human being, include primarily "faith, the gift of God...who calls us all to participation, as sons and daughters in the life of the living God who is the father of all human beings."¹²⁵

From the perspective of the materialist, it seems contradictory to maintain that the most human condition possible is being a son or daughter of God and sharing in the divine life. And yet seen through the eyes of proper Christian anthropology, that is precisely the pinnacle of human existence, the purpose for which we were created. Hence, Christian liberation, grounded

¹²⁰ Gutiérrez, TL, 25.

¹²¹ Gutiérrez, TL, 25.

¹²² Gutiérrez, "Hacia," 70.

¹²³ Latin American Bishops Conference, "Introduction to the Final Documents," in *LTDH*, 96.

¹²⁴ Paul VI, "Populorum Progressio: On the Development of Peoples," in O'Brien, ed., *Catholic Social Thought*, 244-245.

¹²⁵ Paul VI, "Populorum Progressio," 245.

on a Christian anthropology, is shockingly more comprehensive than either a materialist or docetic ‘liberation’ because it speaks the gospel of Jesus Christ to human persons who are body and soul, who exist as dependant members of the earthly community and yet as wholes in themselves transcend society and are never entirely explicable in material terms.¹²⁶

Furthermore, Christian liberation must be based on truth and oriented toward communion. Springing from Jesus’ words, “The truth will make you free” (John 8:32), both Gutiérrez and the CDF agree that for liberation to be genuine, it must be grounded on truth.¹²⁷ The human person is a free, moral being, and so his/her “conscience is under an obligation to be open to the fullness of the truth.”¹²⁸ Liberation based on lies or half-truths is not only pointless; it is also damaging to the human person whose heart is restless until it rests in God, the source of all truth.

Humans are created to live in society with other persons and with their Creator; therefore, genuine liberation is not merely freedom from oppression nor is it an end in itself, but it instead tends toward communion. Reflecting on the Israelites’ exodus, Gutiérrez says, “The Covenant gives full meaning to the liberation from Egypt; one makes no sense without the other.”¹²⁹ Similarly, LC declares that “God sets his People free and gives them descendants, a land and a law, but within a Covenant and for a Covenant.”¹³⁰ Liberation without communion is only half of the story. To summarize, a Christian understanding of liberation tends toward communion and is based on truth,¹³¹ in particular the truth of the human person as an intimate union of body and soul.

b. The scope and value of temporal liberation

Let us return for a moment to the charge advanced by Engels, namely that Christian liberation is all well and good, but will be obtained only beyond one’s earthly life. It should be clear by now that since the object of liberation is the human person, its scope extends to all aspects of that person’s life, both material and spiritual. Such a broad scope plants us squarely

¹²⁶ See especially Jacques Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*, trans. by John J. Fitzgerald (University of Notre Dame Press: Notre Dame, 1966).

¹²⁷ Cf CDF, LC, 462; and Gutiérrez, *La verdad los hará libres: confrontaciones*.

¹²⁸ CDF, LC, 462.

¹²⁹ Gutiérrez, TL, 89.

¹³⁰ CDF, LC, 474.

¹³¹ John Paul would remind us that this truth is the truth about Jesus Christ, the truth about the church’s mission, and the truth about humankind.

back at Gutiérrez's initial question: "What relationship is there between the construction of this world and salvation?"¹³² To be more specific, what effect and purpose do actions directed toward securing better living conditions have? For Gutiérrez, salvation lavishly "embraces all human reality, transforms it, and leads it to its fullness in Christ,"¹³³ so that "any effort to build a just society...is a salvific work, although it is not all of salvation."¹³⁴ Hence, all action that tends toward the material or spiritual liberation of transcendent human persons shares in Christ's work of salvation.

Gutiérrez's limitation on the temporal scope of liberation, which he repeats often, is crucial in order for the growth of a just society not to be identified as the growth of the Kingdom of God.¹³⁵ Several clarifications are helpful to delineate why action to build a just society can never be "all of salvation." First, the definition of freedom must be made clear. The freedom of a fully liberated person is neither a consumerist freedom that merely chooses between options nor a negative freedom to do whatever one pleases without any type of external constraint. Both of these are strongly present in modern culture and are just as easily ascribed to wild animals as to human beings. On the contrary, true freedom, as expressed by many ancient philosophers and Church fathers, consists of having a will so finely tuned to truth and goodness that one acts virtuously as if by one's very nature; in other words, persons are free only when they choose rightly, toward what is perfective of their nature. Because of this, the results of temporal liberation are inescapably limited; someone can be in every material sense free and yet still be enslaved to lust, to greed, to pride, or to any number of vices that prevent a person from acting rightly and thereby being free. Free in body, chained in spirit.

Is the opposite true? May one be chained in body and free in spirit? In one sense, certainly. Paul and Silas locked in prison maintained their freedom to believe in the risen Christ and praise him still. There are any number of accounts of Holocaust survivors who somehow preserved their humanity and dignity in the midst of unspeakable degradation. However, two points should be noted. First, the possibility that a person may live an exemplary virtuous life even while desperately poor in no way sanctions any sinful actions that contributed to his/her poverty. Second, a life lived in such deprivation that concern for daily survival dominates every

¹³² Gutiérrez, "Hacia," 65.

¹³³ Gutiérrez, TL, 85.

¹³⁴ Gutiérrez, TL, 104.

¹³⁵ Gutiérrez, TL, 104: "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."

waking moment is not a life fit for a human being any more than is a life dominated by evil desires. As body *and* soul, human persons have the amazing yet delicate ability to create, to commune, to civilize, to do a myriad of higher-order actions beyond subsisting from day to day. As is quite clear from the developed world, the mere lack of deprivation does not automatically translate into truly free human persons who act virtuously. However, the possibility for a person to measure up to the full potential of his/her humanity is drastically diminished when food, shelter, and safety are never-ending concerns.

Because of this, LC grants a limited but decisive role to temporal liberation, saying that it “involves all the processes which aim at securing and guaranteeing the conditions needed for the exercise of an authentic human freedom.”¹³⁶ In other words, temporal liberation can never be an end in itself because the final end of the human person transcends the temporal world. In fact, temporal liberation can never even meet all of humankind’s needs. As Ratzinger writes after he has been elected Pope Benedict XVI, “Love—*caritas*—will always prove necessary, even in the most just society. There is no ordering of the State so just that it can eliminate the need for a service of love. Whoever wants to eliminate love is preparing to eliminate man as such.”¹³⁷ Temporal liberation merely (yet crucially) provides the setting wherein the human person can use his/her gift of free will to achieve full freedom by acting rightly and in conformity with the highest standards of morality.

With all this in mind, let us reexamine our cruise ship metaphor. If the passengers are due to disembark at their next destination, and will take nary a deck chair with them, what is the point of renovating their temporary accommodations? All activity seems futile *unless* we consider that while the deck chairs and pool cues and martini glasses are meant to stay with the ship, the same people who embark onto the boat are those who will disembark. In other words, all activity to improve the accommodations of the cruise ship en route to its destination is not futile if it is done *for the sake* of the human persons who will continue living after arriving at their destination.

In GS, the Catholic bishops proclaimed much the same idea:

¹³⁶ CDF, LC, 470.

¹³⁷ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 28b, 2005.

Therefore, while we are warned that it profits a man nothing if he gain the whole world and lose himself [Cf. Luke 9:25], the expectation of a new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this one. For here grows the body of a new human family, a body which even now is able to give some kind of foreshadowing of the new ages.¹³⁸

And later, to introduce a section specifically about socio-economic life, the bishops assert that “man is the source, the center, and the purpose of all socio-economic life”¹³⁹ in a way that no other creature can or should claim.

C. S. Lewis echoed the same sentiment, more poetically:

There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilisations – these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit – immortal horrors or everlasting splendours.¹⁴⁰

This helps to explain how Christian action in the world can truly be Christian, even when externally it seems the same as that of any charitable group. John Paul explained at Puebla that it is the Church’s understanding of and love for human persons “in terms of their whole being” that compels her to defend and promote human dignity, even when that task ostensibly takes the Church outside of her own walls.¹⁴¹ Because of this, the Church can maintain independence from competing ideologies and political systems, even those that seem to share many of the same goals for the human person. As John Paul explains, “the Church’s activity in such areas as human promotion, development, justice, and human rights is always intended to be in the service of the human being, the human being as seen by the Church in the Christian framework of the anthropology it adopts.”¹⁴² The mission of the Church, as the Bride of Christ, is decidedly Christocentric; in an unexpected twist brought by the Incarnation, this makes her both profoundly

¹³⁸ Ecumenical Council of Catholic Bishops, GS, 39.

¹³⁹ Ecumenical Council of Catholic Bishops, GS, 63.

¹⁴⁰ C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (New York: Macmillan, 1949), 14-15, quoted in Peter Kreeft, *Heaven: The Heart’s Deepest Longing* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1980), 103.

¹⁴¹ John Paul, “Opening Address,” 66.

¹⁴² John Paul, “Opening Address,” 66

theocentric *and* anthropocentric, out of love for the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us. (John 1:14).

CONCLUSION: JAMS, JELLIES, & OTHER FRUITS THAT PRESERVE

Just as the fruits of a garden, once harvested and canned, will preserve their flavor for seasons to come, so the fruit of both liberation theology itself and the debate that spurred its growth preserve their value today, often subtly integrated into the Church's understanding of ministry. The controversy over the novel claims of liberation theology was at times heated, but as a whole served to display the continuing vitality of the Church as she perpetually renews and reforms herself. In particular, the fact that liberation theology first sprouted in Latin America affirmed the burgeoning influence of third-world Christians to the universal Church. Theologians like Gutiérrez who live and work among those in need of hope help to prevent theology from becoming merely the pastime of intellectuals instead of the ever-developing understanding of the message of love given by God to his creation.

The rich understanding of Christian liberation that grew out of the interaction between liberation theologians and the Church hierarchy proves Engels wrong. The point of contention between Christian and secular proclamations of liberation is not one of time, but rather one of identity: who are these human persons who are to be liberated? As liberation theology endeavored to show, Christian liberation is shockingly comprehensive in its embrace of every person, both body and soul. The gospel calls all persons to become more like Christ, and in doing so to become more human. As the bishops proclaim in GS, "Christ, the final Adam...fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear."¹⁴³

At the same time, the criticisms of liberation theology are essential to save well-intentioned lovers of humanity from sacrificing that very humanity to the expediency of a quick fix by the use of inhuman means. All cries for liberation should be responded to with tenderness, but methods toward liberation should be judged by John Paul's threefold truth to avoid the reductions and ambiguities highlighted by Ratzinger. Prophetic voices such as theirs are increasingly more necessary as countries engage more and more in foreign aid and developmental programs. May all who endeavor to aid humanity heed John Paul: "We cry out

¹⁴³ Ecumenical Council of Catholic Bishops, GS § 22.

once more: Respect the human being, who is the image of God!”¹⁴⁴ Liberation theology’s fervor, coupled with John Paul’s threefold truth, promises a revitalization of the church’s mission to love humankind as she loves Christ.

¹⁴⁴ John Paul, “Opening Address,” 68.

APPENDIX: BRIEF TIMELINE OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Key:

Papal Encyclicals

Gustavo Gutierrez works and actions

Vatican works and actions

JPII speeches and other (non-encyclical) writings

ACTIONS AND WORKS BY LATIN AMERICAN LEADERS

1891

- ***“Rerum Novarum: The Condition of Labor,” Pope Leo XIII***

1931

- ***“Quadragesimo Anno: After Forty Years,” Pius XI***

1961

- ***“Mater et Magistra: Christianity and Social Progress,” John XXIII***

1962-65: Vatican II Council

1965: “Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World”

1963

- ***“Pacem in Terris: Peace on Earth,” John XXIII***

1967

- ***March 26 (Easter): “Populorum Progressio: On the Development of People,” Paul VI***

1968

- *July: Gutiérrez - “Hacia una teología de la liberación”, given at conference in Chimbote, Peru July 21-25 to priests and laity, in English, “Toward a theology of liberation”*

- **AUGUST 26 - SEPT 6: CELAM 2, MEDELLÍN COLUMBIA**

1969

- **“In Search of a Theology of Development,” SODEPAX (Vatican + WCC)**

1971

- ***May 14: “Octogesima Adveniens: A Call to Action on the Eightieth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum,” Pope Paul VI***

- **PRIOR TO SYNOD: PERUVIAN BISHOPS WRITE “JUSTICE IN THE WORLD”**

- **November Synod of Catholic Bishops (theme: Evangelization) declares that preaching of justice is “a constitutive dimension” of the preaching of the gospel. Key document (Nov 30): “Justice in the World”**

- *Gutiérrez: “Teología de la liberación: perspectivas” (A Theology of Liberation)*

1975

- ***December 8: “Evangelii Nuntiandi: On Evangelization in the Modern World” Pope Paul VI***

1978

- October 16: Karol Wojtyla elected Pope John Paul II

1979

- Jan 25 – Feb 1, JPII's Trip 1 – Santo Domingo (25-26), Mexico (26-31), Las Bahamas (31-1)

- JAN 27 - FEB 13: CELAM 3, PUEBLA DE LOS ANGELES, MÉXICO

- Jan 28: JPII opens Puebla with an address, selections

- Jan 29: JPII address "Indians of Oaxaca and Chiapas"

- February 21: JPII, general audience on evangelization and liberation, Rome

- NOVEMBER 17: "CHRISTIAN COMMITMENT FOR A NEW NICARAGUA" BY NICARAGUAN BISHOPS

- July: Gutiérrez: "La fuerza histórica de las pobres: selección de trabajos"

1980

- MARCH 24: ARCHBISHOP OF EL SALVADOR OSCAR ROMERO DELIVERS LAST SERMON AND IS MARTYRED

- May 4: JPII addresses priests in Kinshasa, Zaire - "Be Pastors, not Politicians"

- June 30 – July 12, JPII's trip 2 – Brazil

- June 30: JPII delivers "Address to the President and other Government Officials" in Brasilia, Brazil - "The Fundamental Rights of Man"

- July 2: JPII delivers "Address in Vidigal" in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil - "Poverty, Abundance, and Compassion"

- July 3: JPII address workers in Sao Paulo, Brazil - "Politics must serve the common good"

- December 2: Four American women murdered by Salvadoran military

1981

- Sept 14, "Laborem Exercens: On Human Work", John Paul II

1982

- June 11-12, JPII trip 3 (Argentina)

- June 29: "The Bishop: Principle of Unity" JPII, directed at Nicaragua

1983

- Gutiérrez: "Beber en su propio pozo: en el itinerario espiritual de un pueblo" (We drink from our own wells: The spiritual journey of a people)

- March 2-9, JPII trip 4 – Costa Rica (2-3, 6), Nicaragua (4), Panama (5), El Salvador (6), Guatemala (7,8), Honduras (8), Belize (8), Haiti (9)

- March 4: "Unity of the Church" JPII, in Managua, Nicaragua

- March: "Ten Observations on the Theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez," by CDF

- "The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response," U.S. Catholic Bishops

1984

- March: "Liberation Theology" by Ratzinger, published in public press

- August 6: "Instruction on Certain Aspects of the 'Theology of Liberation,'" by CDF

- September 7: Leonardo Boff is summoned to Rome for a "conversation" with Cardinal Ratzinger. Boff presents "Defense of His Book, Church: Charisma and Power"

- Sept 14: Gutiérrez: “Criticism will deepen, clarify liberation theology” (interview)
- Sept: Gutiérrez: “Teología y ciencias sociales” in Páginas
- October 11-12, JPII trip 5 – Santo Domingo (11), Puerto Rico (12)
- **October: “the entire Peruvian hierarchy was brought to Rome (at its own expense) in order to secure a condemnation of Gustavo Gutiérrez; but, although the bishops were evenly divided, none was forthcoming”.**

1985

- Jan 26-Feb 5, JPII trip 6 – Venezuela (26-29), Ecuador (29-1), Peru (1-5), Trinidad y Tobago (5)
- February: Gutiérrez: “La visita del Papa vista por Gustavo Gutiérrez.”
- **March 11: “Notification sent to Fr. Leonardo Boff regarding Errors in His Book, *Church: Charisma and Power*,” by CDF.**
- **May 9: Boff receives official notice from CDF that he is silenced**

1986

- **MARCH 13-15: BRAZILIAN CHURCH LEADERS MEET WITH ROMAN CURIA, IN PRESENCE OF POPE AND ENGAGE IN A “GENUINE EXCHANGE”**
- **March 22: “Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation,” by CDF**
- **March 29: Boff’s silence ban lifted (Holy Saturday) by CDF**
- April 9: “Letter to Brazilian Episcopal Conference,” JPII - “an unusually cordial letter” read at the Bishops’ annual meeting
- Gutiérrez: “Hablar de Dios desde el sufrimiento del inocente: una reflexión sobre el libro de Job”
- July: Gutiérrez: “La verdad los hará libres: confrontaciones” (*The Truth Shall Make You Free: Confrontations*)
- “Economic Justice for All,” U.S. Catholic Bishops

1987

- **December 30: “Sollicitudo Rei Socialis, On Social Concern” John Paul II**

1989

- Gutiérrez: “El Dios de la vida” (*God of Life*)

1991

- **“Centesimus Annus: On the Hundredth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum,” John Paul II**

1992

- Gutiérrez: “En busca de los pobres de Jesucristo” (*In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ*)

1995

- Gutiérrez: “Compartir la palabra a lo largo del año litúrgico”

1996

- Gutiérrez: “Densidad del presente: Selección de artículos” (*The Density of the Present*)

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