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## The significance of politics in the liberation theology of Juan Luis Segundo and Gustavo Gutierrez.

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF POLITICS IN THE LIBERATION THEOLOGY  
OF JUAN LUIS SEGUNDO AND GUSTAVO GUTIERREZ

A Dissertation Presented

by

RAUL L. COTTO-SERRANO

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts/Amherst  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

September 1990

Department of Political Science

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OF JUAN LUIS SEGUNDO AND GUSTAVO GUTIERREZ


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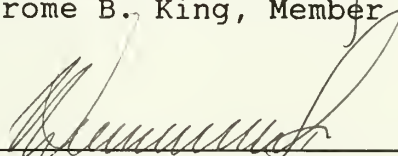
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## DEDICATION

A la memoria de  
Bartolome Cotto Reyes  
y  
Lucila Serrano Geyls  
y para  
Raul Serrano Geyls  
mis mejores maestros

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## ABSTRACT

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF POLITICS IN THE LIBERATION THEOLOGY OF JUAN LUIS SEGUNDO AND GUSTAVO GUTIERREZ

SEPTEMBER 1990

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The objective of this study has been to establish the level of significance that Gustavo Gutierrez and Juan Luis Segundo attribute to politics in their contributions to liberation theology and to extract the relevant consequences for political theory.

A systematic analysis of the theory of history in the works of these two authors indicates a higher level of integration between Christianity and politics that is usual in Christian political thought. Liberation is equated with salvation and political liberation is seen as one of its components. This brings politics to a position of privilege. When at the service of justice it occupies, for our authors, a high rank among Christian concerns and when devoted to oppression it requires diligent response from every Christian.



This understanding of politics is valuable in that it accentuates the political aspect of the Christian theory of history, an element frequently underestimated. Certain tensions remain, however, in the theory as a result of this emphasis: between the moral improvement expected from the involvement in political activities conducive to justice and the moral ambiguity of political structures emerging from such activity; and between the use of the concept of class struggle and notions of conversion and reconciliation. Finally, there is the danger of reducing the critical ability of Christians regarding a particular political project by identifying it with the concept of eschatology.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Purpose of the Study

Liberation Theology appears from a political perspective as a conscious effort to encourage social change in the context of underdevelopment.

Theology is defined by one of its major exponents as "a critical reflection on Christian praxis in the light of the Word" [Gutierrez, 1972, p.13]<sup>1</sup>. This understanding requires the theologian to be immersed in his or her sociopolitical circumstance. All critical reflection about faith must start from the actual, concrete experience and practice of Christians and from an understanding of the predicaments presented by that practice.

"Praxis" in this context means more than the application of theological truths to particular situations. It means the discovery and formation of theological truths out of a given historical situation

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<sup>1</sup>All references are to the English editions except when otherwise indicated.



through personal participation in the process of social change. The actual concrete experience of Latin American Christians is the confrontation and suffering of poverty and degradation. That must be the starting point for a liberation theologian.

For a liberation theologian the concept of history as one and the "option for the poor" are basic hermeneutical criteria. The fundamental texts of the Christian tradition as well as the ethical and political behavior of Christians are understood and evaluated on the basis of these commitments.

The most controversial aspects of Liberation Theology are those which involve their notion of poverty as oppression together with the acceptance of a Marxist diagnosis of the problem of underdevelopment, and the use of notions of class struggle.

Poverty, in their view, is either completely or for the most part the result of oppression and consequently a manifestation of sin. This interpretation has at least two consequences. It forces us to see poverty not only as a problem of the individual person but also as a political problem, as a structural problem caused by institutions that promote oppression. It also implies a

reinterpretation of the concept of charity. The traditional Christian response to poverty interpreted as a problem of the individual is to use charity at the personal level in an attempt to alleviate suffering. However, when poverty is understood to be preserved and promoted by oppressive institutional arrangements, when it is interpreted as a political phenomena, charity must become political. It must include the denunciation of social institutions and structures considered to be oppressive. Political liberation is charity turn political, it is the active attempt to construct a just society.

The definition of an institution or a social arrangement as oppressive presupposes a social and political theory. Liberation theologians accept with varying degrees of criticism the Marxist diagnosis of the problems of underdevelopment. This include notions of exploitation of one class by another and extraction of surplus from the under-developed countries by the developed ones (the Dependencia Theory). The existence of class conflict or of class oppression is neither per se a Marxist idea nor is it opposed to traditional Christian thinking. But the reinterpretation of the Christian theory of history to include notions of class struggle as fundamental is certainly controversial.

This brings us to the theory of history in Liberation Theology. Central to it is the idea that the revelation of God is to be found within human interaction in history. Orthodoxy, in their view, has been dependent upon ancient Greek notions of God that perceived him as static and distant from human history. But God is found in the course of that history.

God acts in history with a plan, a purpose, thus introducing a teleological element in historical development. Salvation, the goal of history, is an intrahistoric process which started with creation and is enhanced not only by people's spiritual growth but also by the improvement of those institutions and social arrangements conducive to justice. Thus, the struggle to promote justice, which is political, is an integral part of the salvific process.

Liberation theologians agree with other Christian thinkers in the conflictive nature of history but for them historical conflict is not just a cosmic encounter between the forces of good and evil but also a political conflict. Neutrality in that conflict is impossible: to attempt to be neutral is to side with the powerful.

Important to this approach is the notion that history is one and that it is a mistake to divide it in two: sacred and profane. By eliminating that distinction the liberation theologian asserts that there is no such thing as an area of human history to which the sacred would be irrelevant. The denial of the distinction "sacred/profane" amounts to a rejection of the idea that since politics is profane the Christian as such should not be directly concerned with it.

The objective of this inquiry is to explore the problem of the significance of politics and its relation to the theory of the legitimacy of the State in the works of two prominent liberation theologians.

I will focus on the works of Gustavo Gutierrez and Juan Luis Segundo. These are two of the most distinguished, coherent, and prolific exponents of liberation theology whose contributions have helped shape the profile of the movement and who have been active in every major debate. Their theological and political positions are very close and complementary.

The problem of the significance of politics is the problem of the relative importance of the political realm in the context of human existence. What status, dignity,



rank, should politics have? Are political activities, institutions, processes so central to human realization and well being that they should receive priority over other kinds of concerns? This has been a fundamental question for every political philosophy and specifically for Christian political thought. The adoption of a particular position on this issue carries implications for the theories of the legitimacy of the State, the obligation of the citizen and the authority and functions of the State.

In general, the greater the significance attributed to the political realm, the higher the expectations placed on political institutions and activities, and the larger the legitimate role recognized to those institutions. On the other hand, those theories which have minimized the status of politics have also tended to reduce the importance of political participation in human life and of social change as a means to improve the human condition.

In the case of liberation theology a different picture emerges. Its emphasis on the political aspects of history, its affirmation of political liberation as a component of salvation, and its use of Marxist analysis tend to connote a higher level of integration between

Christianity and politics than previously contemplated. This gives basis for the emergence of questions like the ones I am to approach in this research.

I will assert that the clue to understand the significance of politics in Liberation Theology and its implications for the theories of legitimacy is the study of its theory of history. In Christian political thought the theory of the legitimacy of the State can be related to the theory of history and specifically on the significance that is attributed to politics in it. A systematic study of the theory of history in the works of Gutierrez and Segundo will allow us to offer an accurate description of their concept of politics and its implications.

I will not examine the theological value of Liberation Theology per se. Whether Liberation Theology represents a correct understanding of the Christian faith is a problem that lies outside of the range of this work. My concern is mainly with its contribution to Christian political thought. Of course, liberation theologians claim to be part of the Christian tradition and consequently it cannot be a matter of indifference to us

whether their views concerning political philosophy are or not germane with that tradition. But is with Christian political thought that I am concerned.

### Organization of Chapters

The dissertation will be structured to consist of an introduction explaining the objective of the research and the approach to be adopted, and five chapters. Chapters from second to five will concentrate on the specific strategies and arguments used by liberation theologians that could culminate in the elevation of the significance of the political. The sixth chapter will evaluate the findings of the previous ones and critically extract the consequences for political theory.

One of the ways used by previous Christian thinkers to deny ultimate significance to politics has been the failure to attribute any political content to the crucial moments in the process of salvation [Wolin, 1960, p.124].

Chapter two will examine the arguments presented by our two authors in affirming the importance of the political in fundamental events in the Christian understanding of history. In so doing, I will pay special

attention to the relevant passages of the Instruction on Certain Aspects of Liberation Theology [Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, 1984], and the response given by Juan Luis Segundo in one of his latest books [Segundo, 1985b].

The following issues will be important in this connection: What purpose does Liberation Theology attribute to God's participation in history? What role is seen for politics in that purpose? What is the role assigned by Liberation Theology to human activity in history? In what way are notions of human agency and freedom related to the political element in historical events? In what way, if any, does the idea that "history is one" contribute to the interpretation of historical events and to the elevation of the status of politics?

Another way traditionally used to minimize the relevance of politics in the Christian interpretation of history has been to deny that any activity in this realm could culminate with an improvement of the human condition. If the efforts dedicated to the political enterprise are not going to produce anything that could be called progress, and if the moral qualities of the



participants in the political process are not going to be enhanced by it, then politics cannot be a very significant thing.

The third chapter will examine the arguments brought forward by these two liberation theologians to justify the relevance of politics to human progress and to human perfectibility.

The notion of political liberation as a component of salvation is of clear relevance in this context. It implies that the construction of a just society is per se a contribution to the realization of the kingdom of God. Also, if "history is one" does progress in one area imply progress in other areas of human activity? Is progress in the area of politics or in historical development in general reversible?

This chapter will consider in detail each of these issues and the debates which have emerged around them in an attempt to clarify if the notions of progress and perfectibility are conducive to the elevation of the status of politics in Liberation Theology.

Chapter four will examine the role that political conflict in general and class struggle in particular plays in history according to our authors.

This will bring us to the most hotly debated issue related to Liberation Theology: the Marxist influence on it and the consequences of the use of Marxist concepts and criteria of analysis. Both Gutierrez and Segundo have written and debated extensively on the issue. A clarification of their position will allow a clear determination as to whether it constitutes an elevation of the status of politics.

Chapter five will explore the position of Gutierrez and Segundo regarding eschatology. The elevation of the status of politics will require a reconceptualization of this notion. Traditionally, Christian political thought has minimized the role of politics by arguing that history would end in a way to which politics is irrelevant and also its end will signify the end of all political activity and institutions [Wolin, 1960, 124]. On the other hand, it has been argued that liberation theology tends to minimize the importance of eschatology in an attempt to underline the significance of political

activity. That issue will be explored here. Also, if eschatology has not been minimized, has it been reinterpreted?

Both Gutierrez and Segundo have accentuated the role of political utopia in their writings. I will also explore in this chapter the relation between eschatology and utopia. Why is a political utopia needed if one already has an eschatology as the goal of history? What is the political significance of introducing the concept of utopia? Does this utopia contribute to enhance the significance of politics? In what way?

Once I establish the ways in which liberation theology attempts to increase the significance of politics, I will explore, in the sixth chapter the consequences of that strategy for the theory of legitimacy of the State. After a detailed critique of the conceptual structure exposed by chapters second to five, I want to explore in this one whether the increased significance attributed by liberation theology to politics, and the specific ways in which this enhancement is achieved, in any way would alter the basis for legitimacy of the State or the obligation on the part of the Christian subject.

If the fundamental events in Christian history have a political character, if there is progress and perfectibility in history and both are related to politics, if at least one of the ways in which progress is achieved in history is through class struggle, and if the telos of history has a political content, then, in what theoretical situation is the individual Christian before the State? What criteria does liberation theology implicitly provide for Christians to evaluate the use of authority by the State? What limitations would that authority have?



## CHAPTER II

### THE IMPORTANCE OF POLITICS IN BIBLICAL HISTORY

#### Introduction

In this chapter I will examine the arguments and approaches used by Gustavo Gutierrez and Juan Luis Segundo in affirming the importance of politics in the fundamental events of biblical history.

This is an important issue from the perspective of the larger project of liberation theology, a movement that attempts to underline the relevance of the biblical message to the actual situation of the poor and exploited in underdeveloped areas of the world. It is essential that they establish the agreement between their theology and the Scripture.

I am particularly interested in the ways these theologians analyze the political content of crucial events in biblical history and the level of significance that is attributed to politics. To assign a more prominent role for politics in biblical history requires a reinterpretation. In so doing, full recognition has to be

given to the religious element while showing its relation and compatibility with the enhanced political factor.

I will first discuss the conceptual framework used by Gutierrez and Segundo to explain biblical events and then show how those notions are applied by them to the study of the Exodus, the work of the prophets and the career of Jesus of Nazareth.

Our authors' interpretation of biblical events is largely dependent on their concepts of liberation and politics.

### The Concept of Liberation

Gutierrez distinguishes "three reciprocally interpenetrating levels of meaning in the term liberation" [1972, ps.33-37, 45, 176-178, 235-36] (a) liberation from oppression and exploitation, (b) liberation from alienation, and (c) liberation from sin.

(a) When opposed to oppression and exploitation the concept of liberation "expresses the aspirations of oppressed peoples and social classes, emphasizing the conflictual aspect of the economic, social and political process which puts them at odds with wealthy nations and

oppressive classes" [Gutierrez, 1971, p.36]. This is political liberation: the realization of justice, the construction of an egalitarian society and of a just world in which fundamental human rights will not be denied, in which the product of the collective work would be fairly distributed, and in which some nations would not develop at the expense of other nation's dependency [Gutierrez, 1972, ps.103-114].

(b) When opposed to alienation the concept of liberation stands for the human aspiration to assume responsibility for its own destiny and for the desire to create "a society of solidarity out of which a new man would emerge" [Gutierrez, 1972, p.235]. This second level of meaning is wider than the previous one and includes it. It refers to all historical developments, intellectual as well as socio-political which result from the human attempt to achieve ever higher levels of self understanding and realization. It provides a larger theoretical context from which the liberation from exploitation can be better understood [Gutierrez, 1972, p.36].

Gutierrez sees the development of modern history as the gradual realization by ever increasing degrees of this aspiration. Humans have, specially since the fifteenth

and sixteenth centuries, increased their self-awareness which in turn has contributed to create the necessary environment for greater demands of freedom at the political level [Gutierrez, 1972, ps.27-33]. He is aware of the irregular and ambiguous nature of this development but sees it, on the whole, as a positive one [Gutierrez, 1972, p.32].

(c) Liberation from sin is the third and most fundamental form of liberation because sin is "the ultimate root of all disruption of friendship and of all injustice and oppression" [Gutierrez, 1972, p.37]; it is "the fundamental obstacle to the Kingdom... the root of all misery and injustice" [Gutierrez, 1972, p.176]. This liberation is reached "only through the acceptance of the liberating gift of Christ, which surpasses all expectations" [Gutierrez, 1972, p.176].

These three aspects of liberation are closely related and mutually interdependent [Gutierrez, 1972, p.37]. Liberation from sin is the primary one, it is "the ultimate precondition for a just society and a new man" [Gutierrez, 1972, p.176]. Thus a just society will not be completely achieved and a new self-assertive and solidary person will not fully emerge in the presence of sin. By the same token, a contribution to the elimination of

situations of injustice and to the development of a humane society is also a contribution to the growth of the Kingdom, "it is salvific work, although it is not all of salvation [Gutierrez, 1972, p.177].

This relation between liberation from sin and political liberation is crucial both for the interpretation of biblical events as well as for the entire theoretical structure of liberation theology. There are three main arguments presented by Gutierrez to establish the thesis that political liberation is a component of salvation and that a contribution to the first constitutes an enhancement of the second.

(a) The first argument is based on the idea that history is one and on the eschatological notion of the kingdom of God. It suggests that since the salvific work of Christ permeates all history in all its aspects thus making history one [Gutierrez, 1972, ps.153-178], anything that contributes to the increase of good and the diminution of evil constitutes a contribution to the coming of the kingdom of God thereby enhancing the realization of the purpose of God.

"... all struggle against exploitation and alienation, in a history which is fundamentally one, is an attempt to vanquish selfishness, the negation of love. This is the reason why any



effort to build a just society is liberating. And it has an indirect but effective impact on the fundamental alienation. It is salvific work, although it is not all of salvation" [Gutierrez, 1972, ps.176-177].

"The elimination of misery and exploitation is a sign of the Kingdom... The struggle for a just world in which there is not oppression, servitude, or alienated work will signify the coming of the Kingdom. The Kingdom and social injustice are incompatible [Cf. Isa. 29:18-19 and Mat. 11:5; Lev. 25:10 ff and Luke 4:16-21]" [Gutierrez, 1972, ps.167-168].

(b) The second argument is based on the notion of human self realization through labor. God has given humans the task of contributing to the process of creation through their work [Cf. Gen 1:28] and through the process of constructing society. This is an invitation to human self-realization, to the active participation in the development of their own history.

"... when we assert --writes Gutierrez-- that man fulfills himself continuing the work of creation by means of his labor, we are saying that he places himself, by this very fact, within an all-embracing salvific process. To work, to transform this world, is to become a man and to build the human community; it is also to save. Likewise, to struggle against misery and exploitation and to build a just society is already to be part of the saving action, which is moving toward its complete fulfillment" [Gutierrez, 1972, p.159].

(c) The third argument relies on the concept of sin. A situation of injustice is for our authors a situation of sin. "Sin is evident in oppressive structures, in the exploitation of man by man, in the domination and slavery of peoples, races, and social classes. Sin appears, therefore, as the fundamental alienation, the root of a situation of injustice and exploitation" [Gutierrez, 1972, p.175].

From the perspective of liberation theology and certainly from the point of view of our two authors, a limited and limiting conception of sin has portrayed it as a purely private phenomenon an essentially intimate concern of the individual person. When thus conceived, sin appears to necessitate only a spiritual redemption which does not challenge or confront the injustices of the social order [Gutierrez, 1972, p.175]. The net result of this privatization of sin is the complicity of Christians with the structures that promote oppression.

Sin, according to our authors, is not just private. Sin is "a social, historical fact, that absence of brotherhood and love in relations among men, the breach of friendship with God and other men; and therefore an interior personal fracture" [Gutierrez, 1972, p.175].

Since sin has a public as well as a private dimension, salvation also has public and private facets. "Sin demands a radical liberation which in turn implies a political liberation" [Gutierrez, 1972, p.176]. Thus a contribution to political liberation is a contribution to radical liberation (salvation).

### The Concept of Politics

Two quotations will help us clarify this concept. Juan Luis Segundo characterizes it in the following way:

"When we use the term political<sup>2</sup> here, we are not alluding to the make up or support of a specific party. We are using it in a more general way referring to the dimension of the polis, to the construction of the "city of man" that is part and parce of every human project that manages to evade the magic spell of profit. Politics presupposes an analysis of existing an existing society in which the 'wherefore' always takes priority and precedence over the 'how'. In other words, it is an analysis of which the fundamental question is not how to make society function but how to make it more humane. Thus the political dimension coincides with the ethico-historical character of man's activity" [Segundo, 1971, p.56].

Gutierrez offers a parallel notion:

"The construction --from its economic bases-- of the 'polis' of a society in which people can live in solidarity, is a dimension which encompasses and severely conditions all of man's

---

<sup>2</sup> Emphasis in the original.

activity. It is the sphere for the exercise of a critical freedom which is won down through history. It is the universal determinant and the collective arena of human fulfillment. Only within this broad meaning of the political sphere can we situate the more precise notion of 'politics' as an orientation to power" [Gutierrez, 1972, p.47].

The concept of politics contained in these quotations reflects some fundamental concerns of these two liberation theologians. There is an emphasis on the ethical requirements of a good political order. This is obviously important to their critique of the modern capitalist dependent State with its abusive and arbitrary exercise of power. It is equally important to the project of the creation of new and better political arrangements.

The reference to politics as the "collective area for human fulfillment" underlines its importance as a legitimate and autonomous area of human activity. This reflects their criticism of previous notions of the relation between Church and State in which the area of political activity was not recognized as one deserving autonomous consideration but only as subordinated to the spiritual mission of the Church [Gutierrez, 1972, ps.43-77]. In contrast to that position, the autonomy of the political is affirmed as an assumption needed by Christians in order that they participate in the construction of a just society.

The phrase "universal determinant"<sup>3</sup> is an allusion to the pervasive nature of politics which I shall discuss shortly.

This conceptualization of politics is also important because of the role it assigns to human activity in history. References to the concepts of "polis", the "city of man" and "the sphere for the exercise of critical freedom which is won down through history" tend to stress a role of an active political consciousness in history.

The limitation of power to the merely instrumental in any good political arrangement is stressed here as an implicit criticism to those who by identifying the "political" with the "partisan" attempt to deny the political content of the Scripture. This matter I shall explore in greater detail.

Furthermore, Gutierrez specifies three features of politics which are going to be paramount in his application of the concept:

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<sup>3</sup> More accurately translated as "universal conditioning" since the original says "condicionante universal."



(a) Universality: This refers to the pervasive nature of politics. Politics permeates all human - relations and all human activities. The distinction between the public and the private cannot be used to separate the political from the non-political just as it cannot be used to distinguish the religious from the secular. "Personal relationships themselves acquire an ever increasing political dimension" [Gutierrez, 1972, p.47]. All political manifestations, at all levels, are evidence of the "profound aspiration of man who wants to take hold of his own life and be the artisan of his own life" [Gutierrez, 1972, p.47].

(b) Radicality: This refers to the advocacy of changes profound enough to fundamentally alter an unjust social order. It also refers to that kind of criticism of social structures that if taken seriously would have as a consequence their transformation. It is based on the realization that superficial or cosmetic changes to an oppressive social arrangement will not be enough to satisfy people's desire for freedom and fulfillment [Gutierrez, 1972, p.48].

(c) Conflictivity: "The political arena is necessarily conflictual. More precisely, the building of a just society means the confrontation --in which different

kinds of violence are present-- between groups with different interests and opinions" [Gutierrez, 1972, p.48]. Gutierrez sees the attempt to avoid the essentially conflictive nature of the politics of liberation as an evasion, an act of indirect but effective support for the status quo. The conflictual nature of politics will force profound reinterpretations of Christian life and hard choices, but is an unavoidable characteristic of human existence.

### The Interpretation of Biblical Events

These two concepts, liberation and politics, are combined in the interpretation of biblical events. The combination produces an interpretation in which each event will appear as simultaneously religious and political. This will be achieved by looking at it as a liberating event, i.e., an event that enhances justice and liberty, that contributes to the creation of a new and more humane society.

Such an event may have religious significance of its own, but would also be religious by being liberating since political liberation is already a manifestation of salvation and that which contributes to liberation contributes to salvation.

An event of this nature would be political in so far as liberation from oppression takes place in the field of politics which permeates every human activity. It would be radical both religiously and politically, because it would involve and require profound social and personal changes. It will also and for the same reasons be conflictive, inevitably causing strong antagonisms of interests to surface between those who promote liberation and those who resist it.

### The Exodus

The Exodus is for Segundo and Gutierrez a liberating event. It is a crucial step in the life of a people: the act of breaking away from a situation of slavery. An act in which God shows himself to be on the side of the oppressed, responding to the cry of the people, not indifferent, not distant, but "concerned about their suffering" [Exodus 3:7]. It is an act in which God shows his concern by intervening in the historical process. His intervention is not an irruption that imposes a certain outcome unilaterally. On the contrary, he seeks to persuade humans to do their share, to participate actively in their own liberation. He persuades Moses to assume a position of leadership in spite of his initial resistance.

And while being a source of constant guidance and support, he did expect firmness and initiative to be displayed in moments of crisis.

The process of liberation was a difficult one in which during moments of confusion and weakness the people preferred the security of slavery to the risks of freedom. But it was also an ultimately happy event in which a new society was being established based on justice and on a new relationship with God.

The Exodus is, as conceived by liberation theologians, a paradigmatic case of the relation between politics and religion. It is simultaneously religious and political. Being a liberating event, it is one that contributes to salvation while advancing the objective of the creation of a humane society. It is pervasive both in the religious and in the political sense: the entire life of the people and of every individual is at stake. None of the participants can remove themselves at a public or private level either from the demands of the presence of God in history or from the demands of the political conflict. That presence and that conflict are not only unavoidable but also radical in their demands for social and personal change.

The relations between the political and the religious in liberation theology's interpretation of the Exodus is object of a debate between the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith [SCDF] and Juan Luis Segundo.

The Sacred Congregation in the Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation" (in Latin "Libertatis Nuntius") [SCDF, 1984] argue that liberation theologians reduce the event of the Exodus "to a liberation which is principally or exclusively political in nature" [SCDF, 1984, IV.3]. According to the Congregation the correct interpretation would be one that would understand that "the specific significance of the event comes from its purpose, for this liberation is ordered to the foundation of the people of God and the Covenant cult celebrated on Mt. Sinai" [SCDF, 1984, IV.3]. The document underlines that "the term freedom is often replaced in Scripture by the very closely related term, redemption," [SCDF, 1984, IV.3] thus suggesting that this terminology implies a more spiritual meaning of the Exodus than liberation theologians are willing to acknowledge.

Juan Luis Segundo takes issue with this interpretation [Segundo, 1985b, ps.43-48]. He argues that the earliest literary sources underlying the book of Exodus don't show any trace of a finality of this event con-



sisting in establishing the people of God. Only later is the tradition of the Sinai used in order to establish the cult that came to be practiced in the temple of Jerusalem. It is only the latest sources of the Pentateuch --the priestly writers-- the ones who refer to "the Covenant cult celebrated in Mt. Sinai" to which the Sacred Congregation refers, and even then, Segundo claims, not as the aim of the Exodus. Segundo makes clear that he is not trying to deny the religious significance of the event but to challenge what he sees as the unwarranted attempt by the congregation to "spiritualize" the Exodus, depriving it of an important part of its significance.

Regarding the employment of the words freedom and redemption, Segundo points out that at the time the Pentateuch was written and when it is translated into Greek the words, freedom and redemption, had a purely secular meaning. "Freedom or liberation is more general and refers to the act of been delivered from a situation of captivity or oppression, while redemption is more concrete and signifies the price paid in order to buy the freedom of a "slave" [Segundo, 1985b, p.47]. Segundo strongly criticizes the attempt of the Congregation to use these words implying that one has a more spiritual meaning than the other thus reducing the political significance of the events it refers to.

The debate between Segundo and the Sacred Congregation on this instance, as in others I will refer to, is a mutual accusation of reductionism. The Sacred Congregation argues that liberation theologians sacrifice the spiritual meaning of the Scripture in order to elevate its political significance. Segundo argues that such is a misrepresentation of liberation theology. Liberation theology is, in his view, doing exactly the opposite: inviting Christians to notice the importance of the political and biblical events in order to stress politics as a component of salvation [Segundo, 1985b, ps.53-54]. For him it is the Sacred Congregation the one that is trying to reduce the content of the Scripture to its "spiritual" aspect. He sees in this attempt two negative consequences.

First, it is a distortion of the Scripture. If the Bible, he says, were to be reduced to those passages with exclusive religious meaning, many parts of it would have to be eliminated. The Song of Songs, no longer interpreted as a spiritual allegory, which contains no mention of God or other religious elements, and entire passages referring to the story of David in which God's only intervention is to express his non-spiritual intention of having Solomon succeed his father, would be eliminated.

If the Sacred Congregation teaches --Segundo argues-- that these books and passages are inspired by God and contain divine revelation, it is because it implicitly admits that by representing human and secular attitudes and situations they help us understand what God is, loves and wants. Thus, it is a mistake to treat the religious and the secular as fundamentally opposed.

Secondly, in Segundo's view, the Congregation's interpretation encourages escapism from fundamental human problems by depriving history and politics of their importance and by implying that to put attention in worldly matters would constitute a distraction from the experience of the transcendent [Segundo, 1985b, ps.64-65].

Of course, the Sacred Congregation would respond that in the Libertatis Nuntious a clear and insistent recognition is made of the oppressive situations in under-developed countries and the need to change them immediately:

"This warning should in no way be interpreted as a disavowal of all those who want to respond generously and with authentic evangelical spirit to the preferential option for the poor. It should not at all serve as an excuse for those who maintain in the face of the tragic and pressing problems of human misery and injustice. ...More than ever, it is important that numerous Christians, whose faith is clear and who are committed to live the Christian life in its

fullness, become involved in the struggle for justice, freedom and human dignity because of their love for their disinherited, oppressed and persecuted brothers and sisters. More than ever, the Church intends to condemn abuses, injustices and attacks against freedom, wherever they occur and whoever commits them. She intends to struggle, by her own means, for the defense and advancement of the rights of mankind, especially the poor" [SCDF, 1984, Introduction; See also Section I].

Segundo will probably argue that there is an inconsistency between that political concern and the theology of the document. And the debate would go on.

Central to Gutierrez' understanding of the Exodus is the narrative's underlying assumption of humans as participants in the making of their own history. He clarifies this point by recalling the relationship between the act of creation in Genesis and the process of liberation from Egyptian captivity. By recapitulating the biblical images and expressions that refer to both events, he establishes a close parallel between them, arguing also that they belong to the larger whole of the salvific acts of God [Gutierrez, 1972, ps.155-157].

Gutierrez then uses the relationship between the two events to underline the role of humans as actors in the historic process:

"Man is the crown and center of the work of creation and is called to continue it through his labor. And not only through his labor. The liberation from Egypt, linked and even coinciding with creation, adds an element of capital importance: the need and the place for man's active participation in the building of society" [Gutierrez, 1972, ps.158-159].

Thus, the Exodus seen as an act of political liberation, is an affirmation of the role of humans as subjects of history. This believes to be "the lesson of Exodus: the significance of the self generation of man in the historical political struggle" [Gutierrez, 1972, p.182n 41]. Hence, the human role in history takes place within the context of salvation and cannot be otherwise, because: "Salvation is the inner force and the fullness of this movement of self generation which was initiated by the work of creation" [Gutierrez, 1972, p.159].

### The Prophets

A second moment in biblical history which liberation theologians emphasize is that of the prophets. To talk about the prophets is of course to refer to a period of considerable length and diversity in the history of the Jewish people. There are, however, common elements in their message which once clarified will allow us to better understand the position adopted by liberation theologians and the debates concerning this issue.



The biblical prophets shared the common understanding of history characteristic of the Hebrew tradition. They believed that God is active in history with a salvific purpose and that Israel has a particular relationship with him. The nature of this relationship was established in several covenants between God and his people, specially the one at Mt. Sinai [Exodus 19; Num.10]; and another with the house of David [2 Samuel 7:4-7].

The prophets continuously denounced the social injustices and religious distortions they considered as violations of the covenants and based on the idea of divine retribution announced the imminence of God's punishment. This did not prevent them, however, from communicating with equal force a message of hope based on the establishment of a new relationship with the Deity.

Both Gutierrez and Segundo accentuate these outstanding themes of the prophetic literature. They particularly stress the prophets' concern for justice as a requirement for a good relationship with God [Gutierrez, 1972, ps.194-196; Segundo, 1985b, ps.48-51].

Because of this concern for justice and their arduous and risky activities confronting the powerful in defense

of the poor in the name of God, our authors see the work of the prophets as one of liberation. Their activity is seen as simultaneously religious and political. Not surprisingly, this interpretation of the message of the prophets is also the subject of controversy between the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and Juan Luis Segundo.

Continuing with its critique according to which liberation theologians unduly minimize the importance of the spiritual in favor of the political, the Congregation argues that in their message the post-exilic prophets stress the conversion of the heart and the gift of God's spirit, thus implying a contrast with the emphasis of liberation theologians on the deliberate change of social structures [See SCDF, 1984, IV.4].

Segundo argues that the Congregation's reading of the biblical text is partial. The passage quoted by the Congregation [Jer. 31:31-34], in which God promises a new knowledge of himself should in his view be understood on the light of another passage from Jeremiah [Jer. 22:13-16] in which the nature of this knowledge is clarified. There an identification is established between knowing God and doing justice.

Segundo further argues that it is clear from the Old Testament that the prophets had a definite participation in Israelite politics even if we take the concept of politics in the narrowest sense.

Elias' conflicts with the King --he says-- are such that the political cannot be separated from the religious. Elias not only constantly reminds the King of his religious duties but also uses non-spiritual means to pressure him in 2 Kings 18:11-40. By the same token, the demands of justice made to Achab are not any less religious because they concern a political issue. Jeremiah is another instance in which the future of the Kingdom of Juda is tied with the introduction of just political institutions.

### Jesus of Nazareth

Regarding the career of Jesus of Nazareth, the nature of the argumentation and the debates become more complex. Both in the Exodus and in the prophets there is a political dimension which has been recognized by almost every one regardless of the degree of relative importance attached to it. The case of Jesus is very different. The gospel portrays him as saying that his kingdom is not of this world, that Caesar should receive his due, and there

is no apparent conflict between him and the authorities representing the Roman Empire.

Both Gutierrez and Segundo dedicate space to the discussion of these issues although Segundo is by far the one who treats the question in greater detail. One of the first issues he addresses is the use of the concept "political" in this context [Segundo, 1982, II. ps.71-85]. He distinguishes between a wider and a narrow sense of the word. The wider sense is the one I explained before in this chapter which relates politics to notions of justice and solidarity in the construction of a better society. In its narrower sense, politics is synonymous with partisanship and with the search for power in disregard of higher moral concerns. This distinction is captured by two words in Spanish: "politico" and "politiquero". While "politico" can have connotations of statesmanship suggesting skill and vision in managing public affairs, "politiquero" always has a negative tone suggesting political jobbery, corruption, narrowness in vision and selfishness in purpose.

In the latter sense, of course, neither Jesus nor the prophets could be called "political". It would certainly be a mistake to interpret either of them as political agitators in the narrow sense. They would be political in

the wider sense of having a fundamental concern for justice and in presenting criticisms that if taken seriously would generate no less profound transformations in the political and economic structures of society than the ones they advocated in the attitudes and character of persons.

Both Gutierrez and Segundo begin their analysis of the political role of Jesus reminding us of his relation with the Zealots. They point out that Jesus attracted some members of this nationalistic and anti-Roman sect and that he didn't oppose some of them to become members of the group of his close disciples. Nor did he, so far as we know, enter in debate with them. But it is equally true, they point out, that Jesus had frequent relation with the publicans who were collaborators of the Romans and thus object of virulent opposition from the Zealots.

Gutierrez specifically emphasizes the conflict between the nationalistic parochialism of the Zealots and the universalistic content of Jesus' message.

"The awareness of the universality of his mission did not conform with the somewhat narrow nationalism of the Zealots. Because they disdainfully rejected the Samaritans and pagans, the Zealots must have objected to the behavior of Jesus towards them. The message of Jesus is addressed to all men. The justice and peace he advocated know no national boundaries. In this

he was even more revolutionary than the Zealots who were fierce defenders of literal obedience to the law; Jesus taught an attitude of spiritual freedom toward it. Moreover, for Jesus the Kingdom was, in the first place, a gift. Only on this basis can we understand the meaning of the active participation of man in its coming; the Zealots tended to see it rather as the fruit of their own efforts. For Jesus, oppression and injustice were not limited to a specific historical situation; their causes go deeper and cannot be truly eliminated without going to the very roots of the problem: the disintegration of brotherhood and communion among men... The liberation which Jesus offers is universal and integral; it transcends national boundaries, attacks the foundations of injustice and exploitation, and eliminates politico-religious confusions without, therefore, being limited to a purely 'spiritual' plane" [Gutierrez, 1972, ps.227-228].

Having distanced themselves from the idea that Jesus was a political activist and from the notion of politics thus implied, both Gutierrez and Segundo explore the sense in which the message of Jesus could be called political. The work of Jesus, they argue, is conflictive. His conflict is not with the Romans but with what our authors call "the powerful of Israel." Just as the message of the prophets caused a negative reaction from those interested in perpetuating situations of oppression, the message of Jesus provoked a negative response from the ruling elite of the country of his time.

A closer look at the internal political structure of Palestine at the times, Segundo suggests, will allow us to



understand the political impact of Jesus' message [Segundo, 1982, II. ps.90-94]. The function of the Romans in Palestine was rather limited. They were content with maintaining the order with their legions and collecting taxes, showing little inclination to change the general internal political structure of Palestine which had originated from events previous to the Roman domination and were independent from Roman influence for their preservation.

From the point of view of its external relations, Palestine was a colony of the Roman Empire but from the perspective of its internal socio-political arrangement, it continued being a theocracy. It was a theocracy, Segundo argues, because the justification for the division of social groups was provided by its religion.

There was a belief of a direct relationship between poverty and sin, and between prosperity and religious purity. Religious purity was interpreted as strict compliance with the Mosaic law and the custody and interpretation of that law was in the hands of the elite.

With that background in mind, Segundo continues, it is easier to understand why Jesus' conflict with the Pharisees and the Sadducees, religious as it was, would

have strong political connotations. In political structures like the one described whoever challenges the religious authority of the ruling group in a systematic way is inevitably and simultaneously presenting a political challenge. Segundo argues that Jesus' political conflict with the ruling elite would be more radical than the one posed by the Zealots which was directed against a "more powerful but also more extrinsic" adversary.

Viewed in this context, the political implications of a parable like the one about the Pharisee and the publican [Lc. 18:9-14] would be apparent. To call an outcast member of the populace "justified" while a member of the ruling group is criticized on religious grounds could not go unnoticed by those using religion to sustain their privileged social position.

The criticism could superficially appear to have exclusive spiritual significance. But due to the role of the Pharisees as representatives of the orthodox interpretation of the law, and being then engaged, as they were, in preserving the social structure of the country through their interpretation of the Scripture, a challenge of the authoritativeness of their message was ipso facto a political challenge not only to them but to the entire arrangement they were supporting [Segundo, 1982, II.

ps.93-94]. It is worth noticing that from the perspective of this explanation, the message of Jesus would not be political in opposition to being religious. It would be all the more intensely political the more religious it was [Segundo, 1982, II. ps.87-88].

Segundo also points out the profoundly subversive character that Jesus' unmistakable preference for the poor must have had in the eyes of the powerful of Palestine. From that perspective also, the moment in which Jesus reads Isaiah 61:1-2 in the synagogue and he says "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" [Lc. 4:16-21] must also be interpreted as a truly subversive statement.

He is also interested in the political connotations of Jesus' death. He finds it unpersuasive to think that his words or deeds, when considered as purely religious, would suffice to arouse the animosities that led to his death. He argues that the conspiracy that led to Jesus' execution brought together groups that were theologically opposed. The politico-religious criticism in the words of Jesus is profound enough to produce an alliance between the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Herodians. His ability to polarize the Palestinian society can find parallel only in the work of the prophets. By creating

this polarization, Jesus established the necessary conditions for his own death. The conspiracy of his enemies to put him through a mock trial and the pressure on the Roman authorities to consent to his death was the result of his religious message as well as of its political consequences.

It is not probable --Segundo argues-- that they failed to understand the political challenge which he represented. It is thus wrong to suggest that those who interpreted his work as political were mistaken. They were mistaken only if we use the word "political" in the narrow sense but they did indeed realize the political impact of what he was doing and saying.

The message of Jesus was not only conflictive but also pervasive and radical in the same sense the message of the prophets was. Like theirs, he would penetrate and challenge all aspects of life and would demand fundamental changes at every level of existence.

The interpretation of the message and the work of Jesus is, of course, an important part of the Libertatis Nuntius, and so is also of Segundo's response in his book.

The debate can be presented in form of five criticisms presented by the Sacred Congregation with the corresponding responses by Segundo.

(a) The Beatitudes, argues the Congregation, indicate the spiritual nature of Christianity with the utmost clarity showing that: "Conversion and renewal have to occur in the depth of the heart" [SCDF, 1984, IV.9].

In Segundo's opinion, this argument ignores the most sophisticated exegesis both Protestant and Catholic in Europe and North America. There are, he points out, two versions of the Beatitudes in the gospels: one associated with the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:3-12, and the other with the Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6:20-23. Segundo reminds us of the prevalent opinion among scholars that Luke's Beatitudes with their more direct reference to the socio-economic situation of the audience, are more nearly original than those in Matthew which appear to represent a subsequent "spiritualizing" tendency on the part of the early church [Segundo, 1985b, p.79].

(b) In [1984, IV.8] the Congregation says: "Already proclaimed in the Old Testament, the commandment of fraternal love extended to all mankind thus provides the supreme rule of social life [Dt. 10:18-19]. There are no

discriminations or limitations which can counter the recognition of everyone as neighbor" [Lc. 10:25-37].

To this second argument, Segundo responds that the ideal of universal brotherhood which is indeed based on the gospel should not be used to forget the fact of the actual existence of social conflicts in history which as a matter of fact divide people between oppressors and oppressed [Segundo, 1985b, p.60].

(c) The Sacred Congregation further argues that the first and most fundamental liberation is the liberation from sin. No where in the New Testament, they say, is it required to change one's social and political condition in order to enjoy this freedom [SCDF, 1984, IV.13].

Segundo doesn't directly respond to this third objection here but has argued in a previous book [1982, II. p.90] in ways that are applicable to the issue. There he says that although Jesus does not expressly exclude anyone from the Kingdom it cannot be received with joy by everyone and that the divisive line between those receiving it and those rejecting it is the same line dividing the rich and the poor, as in Lc. 6:24-25.



(d) Sin, says the Congregation, cannot be limited to "social sin." Social injustice is not the fundamental sin but a consequence of it. There are evil social structures which must be changed, but the root of the problem lies at the heart of individuals who "have to be converted by the grace of Jesus Christ in order to live and act as new creatures in the love of neighbour and in the effective search for justice, self control and the exercise of virtue" [SCDF, 1984, IV.14].

Segundo rejects as a caricature the attribution of the concept of "social sin" to liberation theologians and warns against the tendency to conceptualize sin in private and intimate terms thus encouraging attitudes of complicity by omission with situations of oppression [Segundo, 1985b, p.61].

(e) The next argument concerns the notion of poverty. The Sacred Congregation indicates that "Poverty for the sake of the Kingdom is praised. And in the figure of the poor we are led to recognize the mysterious presence of the Son of Man who became poor himself for love of us [2 Cor. 8:9]. This is the foundation of the inexhaustible words of Jesus on the judgement in Mt. 25: 31-46. Our Lord is one with all in distress: every distress is marked by his presence" [SCDF, 1984, IV.9].

Here Segundo argues that the adjective "poor" in the New Testament is a negative one. Being poor is not a good thing. "It is a socially inhumane condition which victimizes many persons and groups." It is necessary, he continues, to distinguish between a condition of voluntary poverty and one resulting from oppression. The document of the Sacred Congregation, he points out, seems to suggest that God sees the poverty of the oppressed as a marvelous quality that should be valued positively. This Segundo sees as a distortion of the biblical concept of poverty that has dangerous political implications.

### Conclusion

This chapter has examined the conceptual framework used by Gutierrez and Segundo in their analysis of biblical events and their application of that framework to three different situations.

In so doing, I have shown how these liberation theologians have established a union between the concepts of religion and politics. The resulting analysis is such that every event appears as simultaneously political and religious. That simultaneity is not accidental.

This is one way in which Segundo and Gutierrez accomplish what can be considered, when compared with traditional Christianity, as an elevation of the significance of politics.

In the process of effectuating this elevation, they have also done other things: they have affirmed the ethical foundation of politics; they have also affirmed the pervasiveness, conflictivity and radicality of politics; and they have conceptualized both politics and liberation in ways that affirm an active role for humans in history while emphasizing a concept of salvation that includes political liberation.

## CHAPTER III

### THE RELEVANCE OF POLITICS TO HUMAN PROGRESS AND PERFECTIBILITY

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to clarify the arguments presented by Gustavo Gutierrez and Juan Luis Segundo relating the participation of Christians in the political realm to the notions of human progress and perfectibility. It would be difficult to justify a predominant position for politics in the context of other human activities if it cannot be said to contribute to the improvement of the human condition.

Both Plato and Aristotle, for instance, based the importance they attributed to politics on their belief that the State, through its laws and educational system, could effectively promote the moral betterment of its citizens. By contrast, Augustine, who had a radical conception of sin and its effects on the individual and the human species, adopted the opposite view. He argued that the State could not realistically assume the function of improving the moral character and consequently could

not have the prominent role that Greek philosophers attributed to it.

Since our authors advocate an active role for Christians in politics, it is important that clarify their expectations about the possibility for human progress and perfectibility in that process as well as the relation between them. Our exploration will take us to Segundo's theory of the evolutionary structure of history which will then be compared with the theories of Gutierrez.

### The "Distinction of Planes Model" Controversy

The issue of human improvement in history is - addressed by our authors in connection with the so-called "distinction of planes model." This is the designation used by them to describe a theological view which draws a sharp distinction between the sacred and the profane, interprets the Christian message in individualistic terms, and advocates a position of non-involvement of Christians in politics.

The line of reasoning of such "model" would be the following: there is an unbridgeable gap between the religious and the political. The only authentic concern of the Christian is with the sacred and specifically with

the salvation of his/her soul. (This is what our authors see as an individualistic interpretation of Christianity.) The political consequence of this posture is to affirm that Christians are not supposed to intervene in the political sphere except indirectly by attempting to increase the number of those converted to Christianity. A better society is expected from the proliferation of such conversions [See Gutierrez, 1972, ps.56-78; and Segundo, 1972b, ps.3-6].

Our authors are in disagreement with this entire line of argument. Their idea that political liberation constitute a component of salvation is in direct opposition to an absolute distinction between the sacred and the profane. They also reject the notions of sin and salvation as purely individual, and of course, take exception from the political passivity they see as resulting.

### The Process of Cosmic Evolution

Segundo's theory of progress in history is developed in part as a response to the individualistic understanding of Christianity. He sees this as fundamentally inconsistent with the concepts of original sin and divine grace.



The original sin, he argues, is not something that happens to each individual in a separate way, but to the entire species. It is a statement about the human condition. Both sin and grace imply the fundamental solidarity of all humankind which the individualistic view denies.

In order to further clarify this to the modern mind and influenced by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin he develops an evolutionist conception of the cosmic progress. In his view, such understanding of history will help in clarifying that "... the most decisive happenings in the history of humanity have been an attack on man's collective structure and the redemption of this very same collective structure" [Segundo, 1972b, p.5].

Segundo suggests that evolution is the result of the simultaneous operation of two tendencies dialectically opposed. One produces ever greater levels of union and synthesis in the process of development, the other conspires to the dissolution of energy and thus to destruction rather than union [Segundo, 1972b, ps.21-30].

The positive vector, directed to the achievement of synthesis, operates by concentrating the available energy. At all levels of reality a permanent energetic activity is

observed directed to the conquest of higher levels of complexity. The total amount of energy in the universe is constant but can be organized in different and more useful ways.

The negative vector of evolution is the principle of entropy. It is the negative correlate of the conservation principle: energy is conserved but is also degraded. Left to itself energy is transformed in simpler forms which are more difficult to put to useful employment.

The process of evolution results from the conflictive interaction of these two opposed tendencies. There is also a complex complementarity between them. Given the degrading tendency expressed by the principle of entropy, each time evolution creates a more powerful and rich synthesis, it does so against the entropic tendency to degrade the energy and evolution is attempting to - synthesize. Only by attempting this synthesis millions of times is evolution finally able to achieve it.

On the other hand, while the positive vector strives for the complex and sophisticated the only way it can succeed at it is by using as a base the simple and unsophisticated that results from entropy. Only in the presence of large accumulations of simple energy and using

them as a source of support, it is possible for evolution to take another step. Thus entropy is on one hand resisting evolution and on the other making evolution possible.

"... we can say that every concentrated energy forms the apex of pyramid whose base is the repetition of the simplest kind of energy. Take the case of setting a world record in some field of sports. This feat presupposes a calculus of probabilities into which enter millions and millions of failed attempts that are mediocre and fairly hopeless. One might say that strictly speaking the capability for establishing a world record can show up in any part. But if we are talking in statistical terms, then there is every indication that the record will occur where there is a real chance to make millions of unsuccessful attempts, not where there is a chance to make only a few attempts" [Segundo, 1972b, p.23].

Our author traces a parallel between the concept of entropy at the physical level and the concept of sin in human experience. Entropy is for him the physical antecedent of what latter appears as the human experience of sin.

This analogy between entropy and sin is based on the assumption that there should be some continuity between the different levels of reality affected by evolution. What appears at the highest and more complex levels should

have been anticipated in the more simple ones [Segundo, 1972b, p.25]. Entropy is not sin but it is a preparation to what latter will appear as sin.

On one hand, entropy lacks the quality of being deliberate, it is just a tendency of nature, but on the other, like sin, in Segundo's view, it exhibits a tendency to the facile, to that which requires the least effort, to the simple, unsophisticated and uncomplex.

"The tendency toward sin is the tendency toward the degeneration of energy which of and by itself, would make all further evolution impossible. Of itself all sin is anti-evolutionary. Statistically speaking, we can say that on its own level 'sin' has been all the easy synthesis that have taken place on the threshold of other, new, better, and more complex synthesis that might have been" [Segundo, 1972b, p.27].

That entropic tendency manifests itself in human experience in two main ways:

(a) One way is the conservative anti-evolutionary tendencies of those who resist change. Conservatism is, according to Segundo, anti-evolutionary in that it tends to repetition, to the facile, to the mechanical and uncreative, it does not provide opportunity for change. This is a manifestation of sin that Jesus, as Segundo sees it, had to continuously confront. He was constantly

challenging the morality of those who followed the line of the least effort, who would not go the extra mile, or would follow traditional religion in a mindless way [Segundo, 1972b, ps.51-56].

(b) The entropic-sinful tendencies can also be found in the mechanism (described by Paul in the letter to the Romans) that keeps hidden from the individual person the true motives of his/her behavior. Approvingly commenting on Paul's letter to the Romans, Segundo describes sin at the individual level as that which creates a distance between the decisions of our inner humanity and our actual deeds and accomplishments. To achieve this enslaving and alienating power-Segundo argues--sin must rely on some complicity in the structure of the human being. This is the entropic tendency.

The initial motivation of the human person is toward love. This is the "spiritual law" of which Paul speaks. But when we attempt to turn love into external reality the law of the least effort takes over bringing a thousand opportunities for selfishness to conquer love [see also 1972b, Ch.4]. This entropic-sinful tendency is what Segundo sees at the foundation of the "divided person" to which Paul refers.

From this perspective sin appears for Segundo not as an exclusively individual phenomena but as part of a cosmic process. Sin is not universal just because every individual person experience it but because it is a structural component of reality.

Just as the negative vector of evolution is identified by analogy with sin, the positive vector is similarly identified with divine grace. At the physical level, the positive vector of love, as Segundo calls it, is continuously using the simple energy produced by entropy in order to achieve ever more complex and sophisticated forms of matter. It constitutes the antecedent of that which is truly creative in the human being.

The grace of God, his spontaneous love, is the source of all creativity. It has been present in the universe always: in the positive vector of evolution, in the active manifestation of God in history (specially in the life of Jesus), and in every human being.

For Segundo, the life of Jesus is compatible with this evolutionary perspective not because he is a result of the process, but because by proclaiming the victory of love over entropy he unveils the meaning of history.



Jesus as the paradigmatical anti-entropic figure brought in his message an invitation to substitute the mechanical egoistic reaction for the gratuitous, the creative, and the restore to their full humanity those who had been deprived of it, above by mechanisms of exploitation and marginalization [Segundo, 1982b, ps.887-88]. His divinity is expressed in the acceptance of the challenges of the concrete situation while providing the necessary perspective to understand that "the fundamental law of human perfection and of the transformation of the world is the new commandment of love" [Gaudium et spes 38 as quoted by Segundo, 1982b, p.892].

As it was suggested at the beginning of this chapter, for Segundo, as well as for Gutierrez neither sin nor grace are exclusively individual experiences. This can be understood by looking at the evolutionary structure of reality and the social nature of human beings.

"... sin is not exhausted when we admit the determinisms that affect us as individuals. Nor is grace exclusively a liberative dynamism that allows us to gradually gain control over the inertia of our individual nature. If grace and sin were restricted in this way, then we would necessarily hit upon erroneous solutions with regard to the social and political realm. We would be inclined to say, as some Catholics do indeed say: 'If we change individuals, then society itself would be transformed automatically.' Such a statement is based on an erroneous conception of man. It does not appreciate the fact that the individual can be

truly liberated only in terms of his total human condition: i.e., within his social context" [Segundo, 1983a, p.37].

The relation between individual and collectivity in human society is not for Segundo the same as that between the parts and the whole. Human persons are not just atoms that constitute society and society is not just an aggregate of individuals. It is a complex system of human relations. These relations are constitutive of each person.

"... society is not the end result of juxtaposing already constituted individuals, that from the very start is a system of human reactions and interrelationships that constitute the individual and form part of his total human condition. Thus we cannot talk about two types of conscience or human awareness: i.e., an individual conscience and then a social conscience that is added to it. There is one and only one conscience: The conscience of an 'I' that is and must be fashioned within us in such a way that when we say 'I,' even from a highly individualistic viewpoint, this 'I' is already inhabited by others (Fichte) [Segundo, 1968b, p.38].

Since the collectivity is constitutive of each human person the liberation of the individual requires the transformation of society.

## Critique of Pelagianism and Jansenism

We have seen that the concepts of sin and grace are central in Segundo's thought to the entire process of historical development. He traces this back to the process of physical evolution thus giving these categories not only human but cosmic importance.

In the context of Christian thought the ideas of progress and perfectibility which we are studying in this chapter have been closely related to the concepts of sin and grace. The question has been whether humans can achieve any significant moral development on their own without divine intervention. An optimistic view of the potential of humans for autonomous development including moral improvement has been usually accompanied by a moderate view of the effects of sin. A more radical understanding of sin would accentuate the need for grace in order to achieve salvation thus denying the ability of men and women to improve morally on their own.

In this section the position of Segundo concerning Pelagianism and Jansenism is presented in order to clarify his idea of the human potential for autonomous improvement. Segundo approvingly comments on the decisions of the Church rejecting both theological tendencies.

Pelagianism is a Christian heresy based on the thought of a 5th century monk called Pelagius. He minimized the moral effects of the Fall on the human person stressing the essential goodness of human nature and the freedom of the will.

In his view, Adam's sin amounted only to a bad example. He suggested that God made humans free to choose between good and evil and that sin is voluntary. His opinions were opposed by those of Augustine of Hippo who contended that humans could not without the aid of the grace of God achieve moral improvement due to the radical effects of sin.

Segundo approvingly comments on the rejection of Pelagianism by the Council of Cartage on the year 418. The Council agreed with Augustine that it is not possible to follow the divine commandments without the aid of divine grace. To accept the Pelagian position would be to deny the pervasive nature of sin which, as well have seen, Segundo affirms. Divine grace is for him, as for Paul, the answer to the predicament of the divided person: it is necessary for salvation, not merely contingent. Humans do not achieve perfectibility on their own.

On the other hand, he also applauds the Church's rejection of Jansenism. This is an extreme version of Augustinism based on the ideas of Cornelius Otto Jansen, a seventeenth century theologian.

In opposition against the Jesuits he argued that the Counter-Reformation had gone too far in their criticism of Luther's doctrine of grace and had over-emphasized human responsibility thus falling into the Pelagian heresy. In an attempt to correct this perceived mistake, Jansen greatly stressed the radical effects of sin on humans and magnified the irresistible nature of the divine grace. He went further to defend predestination as a completely arbitrary expression of the will of God.

Segundo sees in the rejection of this theological tendency by the Church an affirmation of human freedom. He argues that by distancing itself from both Pelagianism and Jansenism the Church has expressed its desire to recognize the importance of grace and freedom.

### Segundo on Progress

I have discussed the theories of Juan Luis Segundo concerning the development of history conceived in evolutionary terms and his critique of Pelagianism and

Jansenism. My main objective has been to extract from those the elements of a theory of progress and perfectibility. As I indicated previously in this chapter, the notion of sin is particularly important in the Christian theory of progress. Those Christian thinkers, like Augustine and Reinhold Niebuhr, who hold a radical notion of sin and its effects tend to be pessimistic about the possibilities of moral improvement through human institutions, while those who are more optimistic tend to minimize the effects of sin.

In Juan Luis Segundo we find an interesting combination. This is a theologian clearly committed to political action on behalf of the poor. He must, of course, have some degree of optimism about the possibilities of improvement of the social condition of the poor through politics. However, he accentuates the importance of sin in the development of history. Again, in the case of the Pelagian dispute it would be expected for him to be if not clearly pro-Pelagious, at least more ambiguous about the matter. Instead, he clearly sides with the Augustinian position in the debate and in favor of the importance of grace.

There can be little doubt that Segundo accepts the idea of progress in history since it is entailed in the



notion of evolution. Moreover, he explicitly accepts the existence of progress in science, technology and all areas of human activity where an accumulation of positive achievements can be found [Segundo, 1968b, ps.123-127]. However, he also remembers the many unfortunate events in the twentieth century which have raised questions in the minds of many concerning the human condition.

The issue nevertheless is not so much progress as perfectibility: the idea that the moral improvement of the species can be achieved through a series of advances in some fields of human activity, specifically politics. In connection with this, Segundo asserts that moral qualities are not cumulative.

"What accumualtes in history is not man's goodness or badness. The human species does not become more moral with its progress, but it is progress nonetheless. What we can and ought to transmit are the conditioning factors that will allow love, which will ever continue to be the object or free choice and intense struggle, to unfold in all its possible dimensions" [Segundo, 1983a, p.125]<sup>4</sup>.

"To put it another way: if Christian love is authentic, it will express itself in an ever growing interdependence and unity in the history of human beings. This (cumulative) factor will not make it easier to choose love over egotism. In the face of this option each generation will be equally free. But the person who chooses,

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<sup>4</sup> Emphasis in the original

out of love, to give himself to others will have at his disposal greater means and objective possibilities for going further and probing more deeply. And this portion of love, in turn, will be translated into ever greater interdependence and unity. Egotism, too, will objectively possess more means to effect its ends if a person should decide for that alternative. And its carrying out will always be translated into an effort to curb or derail this growing interdependence and unity. Hence Schoonenberg is quite justified in saying: 'Sin, although standing in history because it derives from freedom, is antihistorical'" [Segundo, 1983a, p.126].

In this perspective the value of political action on behalf of the oppressed resides not in directly bringing about a moral improvement in those persons benefited by it but in providing recognition to their human dignity and contributing to the betterment of the objective circumstances in which they live.

#### Gutierrez on Progress

In his book A Theology of Liberation, Gutierrez sees political liberation as bringing not only temporal but also spiritual progress and argues that both are conducive to the growth of the kingdom of God by different means which are "parallel but not convergent."

Political liberation will not per se bring spiritual growth but so far as it contributes to the achievement of

justice the conditions will be created in which perfectibility is more easily achievable.

"... all struggle against exploitation and alienation, in a history which is fundamentally one, is an attempt to vanquish selfishness, the negation of love. This is the reason why any effort to build a just society is liberating. And it has an indirect but effective impact on the fundamental alienation. It is a salvific work, although it is not all for salvation" [Gutierrez, 1972, ps.176-177].

He shares with Segundo the concern for an excessively optimistic view of history and accentuates the importance of sin as a factor in human life that cannot be ignored or minimized. Together with his hopeful advocacy for social change we discover an awareness of the conditional nature of every political success.

"As a human work political liberation is not exempt from ambiguities, any more than what is considered to be strictly 'religious' work. But this does not weaken its basic orientation nor its objective results" [Gutierrez, 1972, p.177].

### Conclusion

This chapter has considered the ideas of progress and perfectibility in the thought of Segundo and Gutierrez. Both of them attribute a potential for progress to political action on behalf of the poor. Progress in this

context would be understood as a higher level of achievement in the realization of justice and in liberation in general. Both of them have also been careful in trying to avoid the adoption of every optimistic postures regarding perfectibility.

An ambiguity remains, however, which is perhaps unavoidable. It is difficult for those who believe that political liberation is a component of salvation to avoid a certain degree of optimism about the positive effects of social change on human character. At the same time, it is also difficult for witnesses of the negative potential in human beings not to be cautious. The problem is how to integrate optimism and cautiousness in a single theory.

## CHAPTER IV

### CLASS STRUGGLE AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF POLITICS

#### Introduction

This chapter examines the role played by the concept of class struggle in the theory of history developed by our authors.

Our exploration of the significance of politics in liberation theology through an understanding of its theory of history requires an examination of the problem of historical conflict. My main objective will be to establish whether the use of Marxist categories of historical analysis leads to an elevation of the significance of politics.

Since most of these issues are discussed in the Instruction on Some Aspects of Liberation Theology prepared by the Sacred Congregation on the Doctrine of the Faith [SCDF], I will center my analysis on that document, on Segundo's response [Segundo, 1985b], and on the relevant passages in the work of Gutierrez.

Class Struggle: Fact or Theory?  
The Warnings of the Congregation

The greatest concern and strongest criticism presented by the SCDF to the advocates of liberation theology is the one related to what it sees as an uncritical adoption of Marxist categories.

The most important and contentious of these concepts is that of class struggle. The congregation argues that liberation theologians have borrowed this concept with all its implications in Marxist theory. "Class struggle" is not just a fact, it argues, but a theoretical understanding of history with consequences that are incompatible with Christianity in its theological and ethical consequences [SCDF, 1984, VII-X].

From the point of view of the SCDF it would have been impossible for liberation theologians to adopt this concept as a mere empirical notion used to describe a discrete, specific kind of situation. The impossibility emerges from what they see as the monolithic character of Marxism. According to their view, Marxism has such internal coherency, its categories are so closely linked with the world view imbedded in the theory that it is not



possible to extract a central concept like "class struggle" without implicitly adopting fundamental aspects of the rest of the theory.

"... the thought of Marx is such a global vision of reality that all data received from observation and analysis are brought together in a philosophical and ideological structure, which predetermines the significance and importance to be attached to them. The ideological principles come prior to the study of the social reality and are presupposed in it. Thus no separation of the parts of this epistemologically unique complex is possible. If one tries to take only one part, say, the analysis once ends up having to accept the entire ideology" [SCDF, 1984, VII.6].

The uncritical adoption of the concept of class struggle has, in the view of the congregation, several unacceptable implications.

(a) The concept of truth acquires strong partisan connotations thus loosing its inherent quality of impartiality.

"According to the logic of Marxist thought, the 'analysis' is inseparable from the praxis and from the conception of history to which this praxis is linked. The analysis is for the Marxist an instrument of criticism, and criticism is only one stage in the revolutionary struggle. This struggle is that of the proletarian class, invested with its mission in history.

Consequently, for the Marxist, only those who engage in the struggle can work out the analysis correctly.

The only true consciousness, then, is a partisan consciousness.

It is clear that the concept of truth itself is in question here, and it is totally subverted. There is not truth, they pretend, except in an through the partisan praxis.

For the Marxist, the praxis and the truth that comes from it are partisan praxis and truth because the fundamental structure of history is characterized by class struggle" [SCDF, 1984, VIII.2-5].

(b) The theoretical category of "class struggle" implies that society has its origin and foundation on violence and that consequently social and political change, in order to be effective, is unavoidably violent.

"The fundamental law of history, which is the law of the class struggle, implies that society is founded on violence. To the violence which constitutes the relationship of the domination of the rich over the poor, there corresponds the counterviolence of the revolution, by means of which this domination will be reversed" [SCDF, 1984, VIII.6].

(c) These two: the relativization of the concept of truth and the understanding of the violent foundation of society carry with them the loss of ethical constraints in

political behavior which the congregation describes as "political amorality."

"The class struggle is presented as an objective, necessary law. Upon entering this process on behalf of the oppressed, one 'makes' truth, one acts 'scientifically'. Consequently, the conception of the truth goes hand in hand with the affirmation of necessary violence, and so, of a political amorality. Within this perspective, any reference to ethical requirements calling for courageous and radical institutional and structural reforms makes no sense" [SCDF, 1984, VIII.7].

"In particular, the very nature of ethics is radically called into question because of the borrowing of these theses from Marxism. In fact, it is the transcendent character of the distinction between good and evil, the principle of morality, which is implicitly denied in the perspective of the class struggle" [SCDF, 1984, VIII.9].

(d) The class struggle is conceived as something so pervasive that there is hardly any kind of human activity exceptuated from it:

"The fundamental law of class struggle has a global and universal character. It is reflected in all the spheres of existence: religious, ethical, cultural and institutional. As far as this law is concerned, [not] one of these spheres is autonomous. In each of them this law constitutes the determining element" [SCDF, 1984, VIII.8].

(e) One of the corrosive effects of this pervasiveness is what the Sacred Congregation sees as the negation of the universality of Christian love.

"... participation in the class struggle is presented as a requirement of charity itself. The desire to love everyone here and now, despite his class, and to go out to meet him with the non-violent means of dialogue and persuasion, is denounced as counterproductive and opposed to love.

If one holds that a person should not be the object of hate, it is claimed nevertheless that if he belongs to the objective class of the rich he is primarily a class enemy to be fought. Thus the universality of love of neighbor and brotherhood become an eschatological principle, which will only have meaning for the 'new man' who arises from the victorious resolution" [SCDF, 1984, IX.7].

### Segundo's and Gutierrez' Response

As I previously indicated the most extensive and detailed response from Segundo to the Sacred Congregation's critique appears in his book Theology and the Church [Segundo, 1985b].

His first argument concerning the notion of class struggle is devoted to show it is actually a separable component of Marxism and has a history previous to its use by Marx.

Marxism, he contends, is not a monolithic body of thought since there are many versions of it and considerable debate between the proponents of diverse interpretations [Segundo, 1985b, ps.96-105]. The implication is that it is possible to make use of an idea taken from that body of thought without falling in the logical trap of having to accept the entire theory.

He furthermore argues that the idea of social conflict as the result of unfair appropriations on the part of a segment of society is much older than Marxism and is in fact present in the social thought of the Fathers of the Church [Segundo, 1985b, p.108].

Segundo sees class struggle as a reality that results from injustice. Christians do not decide to "enter" it as if they were previously in a situation of social peace. They "enter" the class struggle only in the sense of becoming aware of its depth or of its consequences. "The conflict already existed, and... it is not Marxist analysis that introduced it" [Segundo, 1985b, ps.115-116].

In his view "class struggle" and "search for justice" are synonyms and thus interchangeable expressions:

"Class struggle is the effort that every unequal and unjust society makes to better integrate all

its members, when the marginalized are awakened to the consciousness that they can and must achieve a better integration, even if this effort may collide with those who hold class privileges within society" [Segundo, 1985b, p.112].

The document of the Sacred Congregation itself, he points out, reminds us of the importance of raising the consciousness of the oppressed concerning their situation and of the value of the Gospel in this regard. He approvingly refers to the following passage from the Instruction:

"... mankind will no longer passively submit to crushing poverty with its effects of death, disease and decline. He resents this misery as an intolerable violation of his native dignity. Many factors, and among them certainly the leaven of the Gospel, have contributed to an awakening of the consciousness of the oppressed" [SCDF, 1984, I.4].

Segundo joins the Sacred Congregation in its warning against the uncritical use of the concept of class struggle. The problem, he points out, is not that it is Marxist but that it can be used as to ignore other distinctions which contribute to social marginality like race and gender.

"This is a point at which Marxist analysis is often shown to be blind of simplistic. However, many Marxists, above all cultural anthropologists and sociologists have denounced it" [Segundo, 1985b, p.110].



At this point we should remember that Gutierrez, anticipating a criticism similar to that presented by the Sacred Congregation stated in his book A Theology of Liberation a very similar position to that of Segundo.

He suggests that "class struggle" is being employed in his writings to refer to a well observed fact of central importance in understanding contemporary society.

"The class struggle is one of the cardinal problems of the world today which changes the life and reflection of the Christian community and which can no longer be avoided.

... any consideration of this subject must start from two elemental points: the class struggle is a fact, and neutrality in this matter is impossible" [Gutierrez, 1972, p.273].

The next step in Segundo's response to the Congregation is his analysis of the relation between class struggle and violence. In this instance his objective is to refute the necessary connection which the Instruction establishes first between class struggle and violence, and then between class struggle and political amoralism.

He begins by acknowledging within Marxism a tendency, which he calls "simplistic, official... deterministic and mechanical" which attribute a rigid pattern of development

to the historic process and which sees violence as its inevitable component.

"According to this deterministic and mechanical understanding of the dialectic, conflicts occur, grow, and expand in consciousness and virulence, and thus arrive at the inevitable point of violence<sup>5</sup> where the progressive forces overturn the negation that injustice imposes upon them.

In some places of his work, at least, this was Marx's thought. Even without detailing the amount of violence that would be necessary for the final step, he proposed that the general impoverishment of the English sub-proletariat would bring about, 'with the inexorability of a natural process' [Das Kapital, I, part VIII, Ch.32], a revolution in English society and, with it, the negation of the negation in the system of ownership. In this way... many Marxists in Latin America believe that the increase of oppression by military dictatorship foreshadows the inexorable fall of the global political-economic system and the rise of socialism" [Segundo, 1985b, ps.113-114].

Segundo points out that Engels has a more complex view of the process of social change which includes the notion that the class struggle need not be resolved by violence. Admitting the possibility of some liberation theologians falling in the mistake of believing that violent social change is inevitable, he praises the Congregation for admonishing against such mistake. The mistake however, in his view, does not emerge from the logic of Marxism but form a "simplistic deformation."

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<sup>5</sup> Emphasis in the original

In opposition to the point of view of the Instruction, Segundo argues that the concept of class struggle does not imply the idea that society is "based on violence."

"Can it be said simply, for example, that France or the United States is based<sup>6</sup> on violence because their social structures stem historically from violent revolutions, out of which some of their principal social problems were solved?" [Segundo, 1985b, p.112]

In his next point Segundo suggests that when the issue of violence is being discussed it is necessary to take into account that injustice tends to impose itself through violent means and it is improbable in many instances that justice will come about as the result of voluntary concessions.

Two things, he emphasizes, should be remembered in this connection:

(a) The relation between partisan praxis and transcendent truth, which is discussed by the Instruction is a serious and important one but is not exclusive of Marxism. It is a generally recognized phenomena in any social

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<sup>6</sup> Emphasis in the original.

science that the perspective of the theoretician is simultaneously his/her hermeneutical key.

In an attempt to provide an example of this, Segundo mentions the Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops (CELAM is the acronym in Spanish) held in Medellin, Colombia in 1968.

"Medellin makes an analysis of the Latin American reality, using as a hermeneutic principle the option for the poor, which is obviously partisan. From that option, Medellin sees violence not as rising from revolution but from injustice... [The Christian] recognizes that in many respects is facing a situation of injustice that can be called institutionalized violence<sup>7</sup>... Therefore, we should not be surprised that the 'temptation to violence' emerges in Latin America. One cannot try the patience of a people who have suffered for many years in a situation that is unacceptable<sup>8</sup> for anyone with the least awareness of human rights [CELAM 19, Conclusions II, 14, 16--quoted in Segundo, 1985b, ps.124-125].

This is then, for Segundo, another instance in which neutrality is not possible. Whoever passes judgement on violence does it from a particular (partisan) perspective: seen from the perspective of the oppressor, it appears as unjustified disorder; looked at from the point of view of the oppressed, it is a just response to institutional

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<sup>7</sup> Emphasis in the original.

<sup>8</sup> Emphasis in the original.

violence. He underlines that violence, when related to a process of social change is not necessary but contingent upon the historical circumstances and not inevitably amoral but subject to the application of ethical criteria especially the concept of justice.

(b) But what about a Christian perspective on violence? Or in Segundo's words, "...does the Christian not have clear norms by which to judge Latin America with regard to violence?" [Segundo, 1985b, p.125] This is the second concern that he raises in relation to the issue of violence.

In this connection he points out that the bishops at Medellin based on the words of Paul VI offered two criteria to judge violence:

"The first of these two criteria is that 'violence is not Christian or evangelical... Violence, or armed revolution generally provokes new injustices, introduces new inequalities, and causes new disasters, one cannot fight a real evil when the price is a greater evil'."

"Medellin thus arrives at the second criterion valid for Christians, and does so by again quoting Paul VI: 'It is true that revolutionary insurrection can be legitimized in the case of a manifest and prolonged tyranny that attacks the fundamental rights of the person and places in danger the common good of the nation which proceeds from persons of structures that are clearly unjust' [Quoted by Segundo, 1985b, p.126 from CELAM 19, Conclusions II.19].



And Segundo immediately adds:

"Liberation theology does not have or use any other principles that those that have been mentioned and whose source... is the Supreme Pontiff himself. ...it would be difficult to qualify so detailed a judgement as political amorality" [Segundo, 1985b, p.126].

He admits, however, that this is not enough to solve the problem. The general criteria offered by these principles requires further specification when we attempt to apply them to specific instances. Those concrete situations are often very complex making the application of the ethical norm a difficult task. In an attempt to illustrate the predicament he is referring to, Segundo narrates a personal experience that is worth quoting at length:

"Not long ago, a Uruguayan guerrilla died in the prison where for many long and terrible years he had been serving his sentence in an exemplary (so far as can be known) manner. He seemed to have much blood on his hands. Certain politicians invited me to attend the burial of this dead "companion." With whom, with what does one enter into solidarity? With the values or intentions of guerrilla warfare, beginning with its methods? With the values shown by this man, a victim of the terrible violence who valiantly underwent prison, torture, sickness, and death--whatever had been his past? To decide in this case, for the majority of people, means to take up a cause, unfamiliar to those outside of it, without being able to explain it. Photographs were taken of those who attended the funeral. Those who were not there will be conspicuously



"absent" from the photo. No one can escape what that might mean in the uncertain future.

I would ask those who compose this kind of document to make an effort to understand. Do not condemn moral indecision or assume that the lines between good and evil have been erased in the complex and always unsatisfactory judgements that Christians--as well as Marxists--have to make when facing this kind of problem whose solution always appears as terribly relative" [Segundo, 1985b, p.131].

The real problem is not, according to Segundo, to make a class analysis or to make it from a partisan praxis, since this, for him is ultimately unavoidable. The problem is to do only that, the problem is not to introduce Christian values and criteria into the analysis, that is the source of the political amorality whenever it takes place.

The next issue addressed by Segundo in his response to the document of the Sacred Congregation is that of the universality or pervasiveness of the class struggle to the point that it would have as a consequence the politization of the faith.

Segundo employs two arguments to reject this critique. First he simply describe the argument as a distortion, a "caricature" which fails to reflect the true nature of the work of liberation theologians.

"I believe that the magisterium itself discredited by this regrettable caricature. I am not an assiduous reader of everything that liberation theology produces. I cannot be because I have work to do in it, and that means being at the service of Christians who are reflecting on their faith. I cannot, for the same reason, affirm that no one has said something similar to what is charged. However, I can affirm by oath that is not<sup>9</sup> liberation theology" [Segundo, 1985b, p.136].

Secondly, he argues that what liberation theologians in fact do is similar to what the Instruction does in its introduction and in its conclusion. Segundo approvingly quotes the following passages:

"This warning should in no way be interpreted as a disavowal of all those who want to respond generously and with an authentic evangelical spirit to the "preferential option for the poor. It 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" [SCDF, 1984, Introduction].

"The warning... must not at all be taken as some kind of approval, even indirect, of those who keep the poor in misery, who notice if while doing nothing about it or who remain indifferent to it. The Church, guided by the Gospel of mercy and by the love for mankind, hears the cry for justice and intends to respond to it with all her might" [SCDF, 1984, XI.1].

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<sup>9</sup> Emphasis in the original.

Regarding the Congregation's argument that liberation theologians by uncritically adopting the concept of class struggle implicitly deny the universality of Christian love, Segundo argues the following:

(a) He recognizes the extraordinary difficulty which the problem represents. On one hand, universal love is the duty of the Christian in every circumstance even after having recognized that in the face of injustice neutrality is not possible and that one has to choose for justice and for the poor. He approvingly quotes Gustavo Gutierrez as saying: "There are no situations, no matter how difficult that would imply an exception or a parenthesis on the universal demands of Christian love.

(b) The sincere acceptance of the universality of Christian love does not solve the problem:

"The class enemy does not cease to be a human being whom we must love--and love effectively. But this does not mean he or she ceases to be a class enemy--just as those who rejected the good news of the Kingdom of God did not cease to be the enemies of Jesus. There is no analysis that makes that opposition disappear and thus allow one to love more easily. How to love efficaciously in the midst of struggle and choice is and always will be a challenge to one's Christian creativity. Because one must opt; one must choose sides" [Segundo, 1985b, p.117].

In A Theology of Liberation [1972, ps.272-279]

Gutierrez adopts a more ambiguous position. On one hand he expresses awareness of the tension between the concept of class struggle and the demands of Christian love: "It is undeniable --he says-- that the class struggle poses problems to the universality of Christian love and to the unity of the Church" [Gutierrez, 1972, p.273].

On the other hand, he reasons as if the conflict between the two were only apparent.

"Universal love comes down from the level of abstractions and becomes concrete and effective by becoming incarnate in the struggle for the liberation of the oppressed... To participate in class struggle not only is not opposed to universal love; this commitment is today the necessary and inescapable means of making this love concrete. For this participation is what leads to a classless society without owners and dispossessed, without oppressors and oppressed" [Gutierrez, 1972, p.276].

## Conclusion

This chapter has examined the introduction of Marxist categories in historical and political analysis on the part of liberation theologians. The discussion has focused on the concept of class struggle. The debate concerning the use of this concept and its ethical and political implications has been detailed.

The main line of thought presented by Segundo and Gutierrez identifies the class struggle with the search for justice and puts the weight of the discussion in justice as the goal for the political activity of the Christian. It is from that point of view that the issue of violence and all other implications of social conflict are dealt with.

Our authors admit the existing tension between the search for justice in concrete situations and the effective exercise of Christian love. They also argue that their employment of concepts like class struggle and the non-neutrality of politics has left in place the ethical criteria that would prevent political amoralism.

Since the political activity they advocate for Christians continues having justice as its goal and is subordinated to ethical criteria related to the concept of justice, they would in my opinion, argue that in spite of a greater recognition of the significance of politics its proper limits within Christian political thought are being respected.

## CHAPTER V

### ESCHATOLOGY AND POLITICS

#### Introduction

This chapter will explore the views of Juan Luis Segundo and Gustavo Gutierrez concerning eschatology. This is the study of that area of Christian theory of history which functions as the final cause of the historic process. It serves as the goal to which events are ultimately directed and in which they find their culmination. It is also a source of hope that helps structuring the present behavior of Christians.

Here I intend to show how our two authors relate eschatology to politics via the concept of liberation, what understanding of the "last things" results, and whether the reconceptualization of escathological ideas leads to an elevation of the significance of politics.

#### The Kingdom of God

The concept of the kingdom of God understood as a situation in which the will of God is realized on each (Mt 6:10), is the central category of escathology as discussed



by our authors [Gutierrez 1972, ps.160-61; Segundo, 1982b, ps.129-131]. It is understood as a situation of "complete communion of men with God and of men among themselves" [Gutierrez, 1972, p.177], a condition of peace in the biblical sense which is predominantly associated with justice.

"It presupposes the defense of the rights of the poor, punishment of the oppressors, a life free from fear of being enslaved by others, the liberation of the oppressed" [Gutierrez, 1972, p.167].

Our authors see the idea of justice as the fundamental component of the kingdom of God.

"... the kingdom of God necessarily implies the re-establishment of justice in the world" [Gutierrez, 1972, p.298].

"The elimination of misery and exploitation is a sign of the kingdom... The struggle for a just world in which there is no oppression and servitude, or alienated work signify the coming of the kingdom. The kingdom and social injustice are incompatible" [Cf. Isa. 29:18-19; Mat. 11:5; Lev. 25:10ff; Lc. 4:16-21] [Gutierrez, 1972, ps.167-68].

See also Segundo:

This relation between justice and the kingdom is seen as central to the message of Jesus.

"... the kingdom of God necessarily implies the re-establishment of justice in the world, we must believe that Christ says that the poor are blessed because<sup>10</sup> the kingdom of God has begun: 'The time has come; the kingdom of God is upon you' (Mk 1:15). In other words, the elimination of exploitation and poverty that prevent the poor from being fully human has begun; a kingdom of justice which goes even beyond what they could have hoped for has begun" [Gutierrez, 1972, p.298].

### Constructing the Kingdom

The kingdom of God is not, according to our authors, something Christians wait for passively. The circumstances for its emergence have to be propitiated. This is what Segundo and Gutierrez mean when they talk about "constructing the kingdom." The process of building the kingdom, of contributing to its realization, is identified with the struggle of those who seek to make this world a more just one. In other words, the process of political liberation that I referred to in the first chapter. It is through this concept of the construction of the kingdom that eschatology and politics are brought together by our authors. The bridging concept is that of justice.

One hand, as I explained, justice is taken to be crucial to the kingdom of God thus becoming a central

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<sup>10</sup> Emphasis in the original.

eschatology notion. On the other hand, as I said in the first chapter, the authentic political activity is considered to be that of constructing a just society. That being the case, the person who struggles for justice, that is, the person who engages in acts of political liberation is involved in a process which has simultaneous eschatological and political implications.

Our authors see eschatology as an invitation for Christians to look simultaneously into the present and the future. They argue against the notion that eschatology is to be realized exclusively at the end of the history. The realization of eschatology, as they see it, is not sudden and final but takes place in a partial and progressive way. Their emphasis is thus on the present, on the activities Christians must carry out in order to propitiate the coming of the kingdom.

This Gutierrez sees as exemplified in the eschatological message of the prophets. He argues that there is a reciprocal relation between the present and the future implicit in the thought of the prophets which contributes to stress the importance the present had for them.

"The historical implementation of promises in the present<sup>11</sup> are --insofar as they are ordered

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11 Emphasis in the original.

toward what is to come-- as characteristic of eschatology as the opening of the future. More precisely, this tension towards the future lends meaning to and is expressed in the present while simultaneously being nourished by it. It is thus that the attraction of 'what is to come' is the driving force of history. The action of Yahweh in history and his action at the end of history are inseparable" [Gutierrez, 1972, p.164].

This relation of mutual dependency in which the present acquires its meaning from the future while the future serves as 'telos' for the present, is, according to Gutierrez, characteristic of eschatological thought. It helps underline the imminent need the prophets saw of effectuating changes in the present in expectation of God's intervention in the future.

"... the prophet's concern [is] for the present, for the historical vicissitudes which they witness. Because of this concern, the object of their hope is very proximate. But this 'closeness' does not exclude an action of Yahweh at the end of the history" [Gutierrez, 1972, p.163].

Both Gutierrez and Segundo see the realization of eschatology as an earthly phenomena. The kingdom of God should not be seen, in their view as exclusively spiritual.

"Christ does not 'spiritualize' the eschatological promises; he gives them meaning and fulfillment today (Lc 4:21); but at the same

time opens new perspectives by catapulting history forward towards total reconciliation. The hidden sense is not the 'spiritual' one, which devalues and even eliminates temporal and earthly realities as obstacles: rather it is the sense of a fullness which takes on and transforms historical reality. Moreover, it is only in the temporal, earthly, historical event that we can open up to the future of complete fulfillment" [Gutierrez, 1972, p.162].

Segundo underlines the same idea:

"Jesus' listeners understood one thing perfectly: While the force behind the kingdom was the force of God, the reality of the kingdom was something to be achieved on earth, so that society as a whole would reflect the will of God: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven'" [Segundo, 1982, p.44]

### Eschatology as Utopia

The concept of the kingdom of God, according to our authors, is important to the Christian who struggles for justice because it offers a goal and a hope. This hope is essential in order to be able to endure the frustrations and problems inherent in the liberating activity. It also offers a criteria against which the moral state of contemporary society can be judged and both failures and successes of the struggle can be measured. This is precisely the point at which eschatology becomes utopia.

In his development of the theme of eschatology, Gutierrez starts by distancing himself from the common usage of the term. A utopia is not for him an impossible goal, but rather, "A historical plan for a qualitatively different society [which serves to] express the aspiration to establish new social relations among men" [Gutierrez, 1972, p.232].

This utopia is related to concrete historical practice in two different ways. On one hand it is an instrument for systematic criticism of the injustices and mistakes of the present, an instrument for denunciation of what needs to be corrected. On the other hand it is related to the future by proposing imaginative alternatives to the present situation thus also becoming the goal of all present liberating activity.

"If utopia does not lead to action in the present, it is an evasion of reality... Authentic utopian thought postulates, enriches, and supplies new goals for political action while at the same time it is verified by this action" [Gutierrez, 1972, p.234].

Another aspect of utopia is its rational nature. Gutierrez disagrees with those who see in utopian thought an expression of the irrational.



"Utopias emerge with renewed energy at times of transition and crisis, when science has reached its limits in its explanation of social reality, and when new paths open for historical praxis. Utopia, so understood, is neither opposed to nor outside of science. On the contrary it constitutes the essence of its creativity and dynamism. It is the prelude of science, its annunciation. The theoretical construct which allows us to know social reality and which makes political action efficacious demands the mediation of creative imagination..."  
[Gutierrez, 1972, p.234]

In this connection he established a sharp contrast between utopia and ideology. The latter is described as fulfilling the function of preserving the status quo being consequently of a conservative, oppressive nature.

"... ideology tends to dogmatize all that has not succeeded in separating itself from it or has fallen under its influence. Political action, science, and faith do not escape this danger" [Gutierrez, 1972, p.169].

Utopia, however, because of its function as a goal for practical actions and institutions, serves as a stimulant to criticism, as an anti-dogmatic force. It is seen by Gutierrez as an invitation to seek for options based on rational analysis.

Gutierrez attributes the oppressive distortions of political movements initially devoted to liberation to the

forgetfulness about ideals such as those embodied in the concept of the kingdom of God.

"The loss of utopia is responsible for man's falling into bureaucratism and sectarianism, into new structures which oppress man... Without this critical and rational element of historical dynamism and creative imagination, science and political action see a changing reality slip out of their hands and easily fail into dogmatism. And political dogmatism is as worthless as religious dogmatism; both represent a step backward toward ideology" [Gutierrez, 1972, p.237].

### The Task of the Church in the Construction of the Kingdom

From the perspective of our authors the function of the Church in the world has to be understood in the context of the construction of the kingdom of God. It is within this framework that its mission should be defined.

"The first task of the Church is to celebrate with joy the gift of the salvific action of God in humanity, accomplished through the death and resurrection of Christ. This is the Eucharist: a memorial and a thanksgiving" [Gutierrez, 1972, p.262].

"To preach the Good News is for the Church to be a sacrament of history, to fulfill its role as community... is to announce the coming of the kingdom" [Gutierrez, 1972, ps.268-9].

Our authors see this annunciation as taking place in a historical context. That context will condition the

form of the proclamation. The messenger will not be helping to construct the kingdom if he/she ignores the situation of those who receive the message. Moreover the interpretation and understanding of the message itself has to be done from the perspective of their predicaments, that is what liberation theology is about as our authors see it.

"If a solution of injustice and exploitation is incompatible with the coming of the kingdom, the word which announces this coming ought normally to point out this incompatibility. This means that the people who hear this message and live in this conditions by the mere fact of hearing it should perceive themselves as oppressed and feel impelled to seek their own liberation... The annunciation of the Gospel thus has a conscientizing function or, in other words, a politicizing function" [Gutierrez, 1972, p.269].

Gutierrez is careful to underline in this connection that the religious component of liberation is not being obliterated by the political one.

"When we affirm that the Church politicizes by evangelizing, we do not claim that the Gospel is thus reduced to creating a political consciousness in men or that the revelation of the Father... is thereby nullified. We mean that the annunciation of the Gospel, precisely insofar as it is a message of total love, has an inescapable political dimension, because it is addressed to people who live within a fabric of social relationships, which in our case, keep them in a sub-human condition" [Gutierrez, 1972, p.270].

He also distinguishes between political liberation (which, as I clarified in the second chapter, he sees as only one form of liberation), and salvation.

"Without liberating historical events there would be no growth of the kingdom. But the process of liberation will not have conquered the very roots of oppression and the exploitation of man by man without the coming of the kingdom, which is above all a gift. Moreover, we can say that the historical, political liberating event is the growth of kingdom, and is a salvific event; but it is not the coming of the kingdom, not all of salvation" [Gutierrez, 1972, p.177]<sup>12</sup>.

Gutierrez is also careful to trace a distinction between the kingdom of God and any particular society, even a just one.

"Although the kingdom must not be confused with the establishment of a just society, this does not mean that it is indifferent to this society. Nor does it mean that this just society constitutes a 'necessary condition' for the arrival of the kingdom nor that they are closely linked, nor that they converge. More profoundly, the announcement of the kingdom reveals to society itself the aspiration for a just society and lead it to discover unsuspected dimensions and unexpected paths. The kingdom is realized in a society of brotherhood and justice; and, in turn, this realization opens up the promise and hope of complete communion of all men with God. The political is grafted into the eternal" [Gutierrez, 1972, ps.231-2].

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<sup>12</sup> Emphasis is in the original.

## Conclusion

We have seen how the concept of eschatology acquired new meaning for our authors reflecting the special relation they want to establish between religion and politics in the activity of the contemporary Christian.

Using the idea of the construction of the kingdom of God through acts of justice they have attempted to locate the political actions on behalf of the oppressed in an eschatological framework while at the same time using the notion of eschatology-utopia to provide the political struggle for justice with a goal and a moral criteria for action.

Instead of remaining a distant and nebulous idea in the background eschatology becomes central to the theological and political understanding of liberation theology. It fulfills many functions: motivation for a hard struggle against injustice, realistic ideal for the future, and antidote for dogmatism and other potential vices threatening movements involved in social change. The enhanced role of politics in this understanding of eschatology is evident.

## CHAPTER VI

### CRITICAL EVALUATION

#### Introduction

The objective of this study has been to establish the level of significance that Juan Luis Segundo and Gustavo Gutierrez attribute to politics in their contributions to liberation theology. My approach has been based on the idea that by abstracting the theory of history from the works of these two authors it would be possible to determine by deduction the relative importance attributed to politics and the basic elements of a political theory. This chapter will critically summarize the results of this inquiry and extract the relevant conclusions.

#### The Significance of Politics in the Christian Tradition

The relative importance of politics in Christian political thought is a matter of degrees. No fundamental



political thinker in that tradition has either absolutely denied the importance of politics or affirmed that Christianity was merely a political movement. The tradition is complex and extends itself over a long period of time. It encompasses many experiences and has acquired a degree of flexibility so that several postures are possible within it concerning this issue.

If we are going to fully appreciate the contribution of our authors in this regard, it would be useful to have a theory to be used as a counterpoint in order to make comparisons and contrasts. I have chosen to use the political thought of Augustine to fill this role. I hope that by establishing this comparison the ideas of our liberation theologians will appear in a sharper contrast.

### The Concept of Politics in Augustine

As I have occasionally mentioned in previous chapters the political thought of Augustine is permeated by his concept of the human person as radically affected by the Fall. Influenced by Paul's interpretation of the human condition as divided, Augustine came to reject the ancient Greek notion that political institutions and activities were able to produce a better person. He rejected any relation between politics and perfectibility

arguing that moral improvement was to be accomplished only through the grace of God without which men and women would never achieve their goal of peace and harmony with God and themselves.

This understanding of the human predicament became central to his entire way of thinking and was reflected both in his theory of history and in his political theory. This is not the place for a detailed exposition of those theories but the main points should be underlined so that they may serve as a point of contrast with Segundo and Gutierrez.

With the adoption of the radical notion of sin came the loss of all hope in the ability of people, even well intentioned and generally virtuous people, to create a situation in which the conflicts of society would be fundamentally resolved. The problem of social disharmony was not for him limited to the inadequacy of the social structures but to the basic character of the human condition.

Humans were for Augustine created as social beings but political institutions existed only as a partial remedy for the most undesirable effects of sin. Their primary function is to minimize disorder to provide the

minimum essential components of social life and to allow the Church to spread the message of salvation in relative peace.

The function attributed by the classical writers to government of promoting the good life and moral elevation of its citizens is too lofty and unrealistic in Augustine's eyes. There is an obligation on the part of Christians to procure justice and order and to comply with the legitimate demands of the State but there was also the warning not to be over optimistic about the possibilities of achieving justice on earth.

Augustine uses the image of two competing cities to represent the conflicting motivations in humanity: the love of God and the love of self:

"... two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God: the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self. The former, in a word, glories in itself, the latter in the Lord. For the one seeks glory from men; but the greatest glory of the other is God, the witness of conscience. The one lifts up its head in its own glory; the other says to its God, "Thou art my glory, and the lifter up of mine head." In the one, the princess and the nations it subdues are ruled by the love of ruling; in the other, the princess and the subjects serve one another in love, the latter obeying, while the former take thought for all..." [City of God, XIV, 28]

The City of God and the earthly city are a reflection of the inner tendencies of their members. Every human belongs to either one. They are incompatible. The only thing they have in common is the need for "earthly peace": some minimal degree of order in human affairs that would allow their members to pursue their objectives whatever they may be. Apart from this limited element in common, the cities pursue fundamentally different goals.

History is seen as the result of the conflict between the "cities": a cosmic confrontation not between God and evil but between the love of God and the love of self.

The net result of this understanding of humanity and its history is to minimize the significance of politics. Politics both as an activity and as the set of institutions in which those activities are carried out has an importance that is not negligible but is not transcendental either. Its goals and indeed its possibilities are very modest although certainly necessary.

One of the consequences of this view is that the importance of activities directed to the achievement of social change are minimized. With the exception of the necessary resistance to the government who attempts to put Christians in situations where their loyalty to God would

be put in question, there is nothing in Augustine's political thought to stimulate the advocacy for social change. One thing that is certainly lacking is the notion that a better world would be achieved through political action.

### The Assumptions of Liberation Theology

Having briefly summarized the political theory of Augustine with the objective of using it as a contrast to the theories of our authors, I will now survey the two basic assumptions of liberation theology in order to facilitate later criticism.

#### History is One

This is the idea that God's sovereignty and the salvific work of Christ permeate all history. There is no such thing as an area of human experience that is not filled with the presence of God. This implies in our author's view, that the distinction between the sacred and the profane, which presupposes the latter to be an area outside of the interest and the competence of the religious, is rejected. Another consequence that our authors extract from this assumption is the idea that any contribution to the increase of good and the diminution of

evil in the world contributes to the realization of the divine plan. Whatever good is done in the secular realm will have religious implications and vice versa.

Our authors are particularly concerned with issues of justice. Their argument is that when an injustice takes place in what is traditionally considered as the secular realm, that injustice has to be challenged from the perspective of the sacred. When injustice assumes the form of a structural oppression the challenge is even more necessary and political in nature.

A corollary of this understanding of history as one is the identification of salvation with liberation. Salvation is believed to involve the entire human experience. It is not limited to the realm of the "spiritual" but extends itself to all forms of alienation, oppression, injustice, that is, to all manifestations of sin. To talk about liberation in general is to refer to all areas of human life: it is to speak about salvation. Political liberation is only one form of liberation, only one aspect of salvation.



## Option for the Poor

This is the belief that the social doctrine of the Church must affirm the spirit of poverty proclaimed in the gospel. It involves the firm commitment to serve the cause of the poor.

This concept implies that there is such thing as the "perspective of the poor." Social reality in general, and the Christian message in particular, are interpreted differently when looked at from the point of view of the poor. Liberation theology is an invitation to the adoption of such point of view as a hermeneutical criteria. This is in their view the perspective that better enables us to understand the situation of the oppressed and to contribute to change it. The option for the poor is expressed in terms of solidarity and must become a denunciation of the injustice that makes them poor.

When confronted with injustice from the perspective of the poor, we have to realize that neutrality is not an alternative. One of the ethical consequences of the option for the poor is the realization that when confronted with injustice it is not possible to attempt to remain neutral because such attempt will only benefit the

powerful. It is not that neutrality is undesirable, it is impossible. By not taking sides one is actually choosing and supporting one side.

Another ethical consequence of the option for the poor is the concept of justice in liberation theology.

There is in liberation theology as well as in all Western thought an influence of the Greek concept according to which justice is the constant disposition to give to each his/her own, treating equals as equals and unequals as unequals.

Their criticism of capitalism and of imperialism is implicitly based on this notion. Capitalism is conceived as a "pleonexic" regime: one in which there are some people that systematically extract more than is due to them.

Of course, the concerns of our authors extend primarily not to justice in its commutative or distributive individual form but to social justice, that is to the ability of social structures to make the necessary resources accessible to the entire community. As I have mentioned they are very worried with the

inadequacies of the distribution of resources in Latin America.

But as a criteria for justice, the Greek notion is incomplete. It is a formal construct that requires more specific and concrete content for its application. In the view of liberation theologians, the option for the poor provides that content.

To opt for the poor is to recognize their needs as criteria for justice. As conceived by our authors, this idea reflects the biblical thinking on the subject bringing together notions of justice and love. As presented in both the Old and the New Testaments there is a very close connection between doing justice and caring for the needy. This is a persistent idea in Mosaic law, in the work of the prophets, and in Christian ethics.

In a situation of underdevelopment, of real and concrete misery and exploitation, the act of attending the needs of the poor requires more than private charity. When poverty results from oppression, love demands a struggle for a just society. Love requires a political search for justice.

## The Significance of Politics

Having reviewed the basic assumptions of liberation theology, I will now show the specific ways in which the relative elevation of the importance of politics is accomplished.

### The Importance of Politics in Biblical History

Chapter two examined the arguments used by our authors in affirming the importance of politics in the fundamental events of biblical history. This chapter is basically divided in two parts: one that explains the theoretical framework used by Segundo and Gutierrez to analyze biblical events and a second one in which their application of these criteria to some biblical events is presented.

The result of this particular inquiry is to show that the elevation of the significance of politics in liberation theology is partly accomplished by interpreting the experiences described in the Bible as simultaneously religious and political. There is a mutual entailment between religion and politics within the same occurrence.

When an event is analyzed as a purely political one, it could be viewed exclusively in terms of power. The interests and resources of the participants are identified and compared. Attempts would be made to foresee the probable outcome based on a particular notion of rationality. This perspective would not show the religious significance of the event.

If it were seen as a purely religious event, the tendency would be to discern its spiritual significance while locating the political in the background at a secondary level as the "merely terrestrial".

The liberation theologian asks a similar question to that raised by Augustine in connection with the fall of Rome: How is the salvific purpose of God advanced by this event? For them, God's plan includes the preferential option for the poor and thus the realization of justice conceived in terms of the satisfaction of their needs.

Justice is a crucial component of political liberation. An event that contributes to its enhancement is a liberating event. It is a salvific act, a partial realization of God's will. By being liberating it is religiously significant. Instead of keeping the religious and the political as two separate and discrete elements

virtually disconnected within the event, our author's interpretation has combined them in a holistic way.

Perhaps it could be pointed out from an Augustinian perspective that the period between the Incarnation and the Second Coming is radically ambiguous, that there is no way to tell what is the will of God regarding any particular event or institution.

It would be possible for Segundo and Gutierrez to accept this and still argue that even though we ignore the ultimate significance of any particular event, revelation tells us enough to be able to discern what is and is not acceptable in the eyes of God. This, they could argue, is enough to make an assessment of the present situation just as Augustine does with the fall of Rome.

The argument could also be made that even if an unexpected degree of justice were to be accomplished in a particular society, this by itself would not allow anyone to move from the earthly city to the city of God. This is the issue examined in the next section.

It is true, however, that when liberation is equated with salvation and political liberation is viewed as one of its components, politics appears in a much brighter



light that would be the case for Augustine, not as a necessary evil or as a secondary and subordinate phenomena. When at the service of justice it occupies a high place among Christian values and when devoted to oppression it requires diligent action from every Christian. There is an implicit expectation that just political institutions would be able to improve the human lot in ways outside of Augustinian theory.

#### The Relevance of Politics to Human Progress and Perfectibility

This chapter attempted to clarify the relation between the political participation of Christians and the attainment of perfectibility. It was divided in three main parts: a description of Segundo's view on cosmic evolution showing the interplay between grace and sin, his critique of Pelagianism and Jansenism, and a comment on our authors' views on progress and perfectibility.

The fundamental issue here is whether the theory of progress contributes to the elevation of the significance of politics. This would happen if political action on behalf of the poor were to accrue moral and religious benefits.

We found in the first two parts of this chapter that Segundo and Gutierrez make a consistent effort to recognize the importance of sin as a component of the human condition and as a powerful element in the process of historical development.

Segundo and Gutierrez are not optimists. Their position is not that the first Augustine or of the Ancient Greek thinkers. They are aware of the frailty of all human accomplishments and of the moral ambiguity of social institutions.

They admit the possibility of progress in history in the arts, sciences, and technology as well as in political institutions but do not see the moral condition of humanity as improving in direct proportion with the improvements in social justice. Sin is not viewed as the exclusive result of oppressive political institutions, the opposite is true: oppression is the result of sin. Political liberation is salvation but is not all of salvation.

On the other hand, there is no doubt in the mind of our authors about the moral and religious value of struggling for justice on behalf of the poor. This is an activity that when successful will produce much needed

progress at social and personal levels. It couldn't be morally or religiously indifferent whether the rich man helped Lazarus or not.

Perhaps it could be objected from an Augustinian perspective that there is an implicit expectation here, in spite of all the cautionary notes, that by helping in the improvement of justice liberation theologians would be attempting the impossible: to bridge the gap between the two cities. It would be like letting the Greek concept of perfectibility enter through the back door. Moral improvement would not be achieved as a result of good political institutions but as a consequence of attempting to improve imperfect ones. The purely remedial nature of the State would have been forgotten.

A liberation theologian would answer along the following lines: It is true that for liberation theology the State is not merely a remedial institution, it has the more positive function of contributing to the common good. It is also true that the distinction between the cities in the mind of Augustine corresponds to a distinction between the two loves, the love of God and the love of self. If Christians attempt to cooperate in the improvement of the State out of love for God and neighbor, they would be completely within the confines of the City of God. The

mere act of working to improve a human institution doesn't make their acts a contribution to the earthly city.

However, if the person who is supposedly trying to improve justice does it for selfish reasons, no matter how effective her or his external acts would be they would be a contribution of the earthly city.

It is true however that liberation theologians have the expectation that it would be easier to find God under conditions of freedom than under a situation of exploitation.

#### Class Struggle and the Significance of Politics

This chapter examined the role played by the concept of class struggle in the theory of history of our authors and how its use is conducive to an elevation of the significance of politics. It concentrates mainly on the debate between Segundo and the Sacred Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith.

In this case, the elevation of the significance of politics is effectuated by arguing in favor of a reciprocal relation between religion and politics in the historical conflict. This conflict is part of the liberating process and consequently both religious and

political. The search for justice implies an option for the poor. If it encompasses all aspects of human life and assumes the character of a class struggle, then politics cannot be an activity of secondary importance.

As was explained in detail, the Congregation argues that the adoption of the concept of class struggle forces the theorist to accept several undesirable consequences: the distortion of the concept of truth, the violent origin and foundation of society, the loss of ethical constraints in political behavior, the pervasiveness of the class struggle, and the negation of the universality of love.

Our authors respond to each one of these arguments saying, in synthesis, that it is possible to borrow the concept in question without such negative implications, that the conflictive nature of the relation between oppressors and oppressed has to be recognized and that a choice in favor of the oppressed is a moral imperative.

Several of these arguments deserve comment:

(a) On the issue of the possibility of borrowing Marxist categories, I disagree with the idea that in general this is an impossibility. No social theory is structurally so hermetic that a concept cannot be borrowed

from it if the necessary qualifications are made. What needs to be considered are two things: the relative location of the concept in the theory and the usefulness of placing it in a new context.

A theory has several levels of abstraction. The closer the concept is to the fundamental assumptions, the more qualifications are needed in order to take it out of its original context. The Sacred Congregation is perhaps adopting a rigid position about it but the truth is that the transplant has to be done carefully. It may happen that the qualifications needed are too many. The associations of the concept with the cloister of notions where it was originally located may be too difficult to avoid. In that case, perhaps the best thing is to formulate a new concept.

(b) About the concept of class struggle and the specific way in which it is taken from Marxist thought, some observations are pertinent.

In order to defend the adoption of the concept, Segundo equates it with "search for justice." I don't think this is appropriate. The concept "search for justice" has a wider application than of "class struggle" as Segundo himself must see because he complains that



there are other forms of oppression like those relative to gender and ethnicity that are not covered by the concept of class.

Besides, if they are equivalent, why not just stay with "search for justice" which has a wider application and is less contentious. It seems to me that "class struggle" is kept precisely because it has connections with other concepts in Marxist theory which our authors want to preserve. The concept of class struggle is tied in Marxist thought with the concept of "mode of production." The class struggle is not just any struggle for justice. It presupposes that what is basically wrong and should be changed in society are the relations of production. It may be the case that what needs to be changed in order to achieve a just society is the mode of production but "class struggle" and "search for justice" are not the same.

(c) The Sacred Congregation's criticism concerning the pervasiveness of the class struggle is more accurate than Segundo admits. Liberation theology's own concept of politics would indicate that the Congregation is right.

Gutierrez characterizes politics as "universal" meaning that it permeates all areas of human existence

cutting through distinctions of private/public and sacred/profane. Having done that, he later describes the class struggle as a most important political conflict. It is difficult to deny, just as a logical consequence, that class struggle would be conceived as reaching many areas of human life.

(d) The applicability of Christian ethics to a conflict conceived as a class struggle is problematic. The reason why many Marxists see the class struggle as inevitably conducing to violence is because of their theory of political interests which is part of their theory of human beings. In this conception, the political interests of the individual are strongly conditioned by their participation or lack of it in the ownership and control of the means of production. The "class interests" thus emerging are so strong that those in power will not relinquish voluntarily their positions of privilege. Whoever opposes those interests has to be prepared to confront violence.

Liberation theologians, however, are Christians. As such, they have to attribute to God the power to transform the human mind, that is, to "convert" a person. In other words, to change his/her structure of interests.

The location of a particular individual in the class structure of a society cannot be so strong as to render ineffective the power of the grace of God.

If someone believes that God is willing and able to change the structure of interests of her/his enemy, then so far as that person is concerned reconciliation is always possible and desirable. But if someone sees that possibility as so remote as to be politically negligible, then the rules of behavior will be different. That's why there will be a conflict between the political ethics of a Christian and of a Marxist.

For Christians, reconciliation has to be the priority because the transforming power of God is an ever present reality. For Marxists, such transformation is either impossible or so remote that it is irrelevant to the nature of the conflict. After all the critique presented by Marx to the so-called "utopian socialists" was precisely that they didn't take seriously enough the structure of interests of those who own the means of production and thus over estimated their disposition to share their privileges.

It is worth noticing that the Christian concept of justice so dear to the liberation theologians and so

central to their political thought become relevant here. In the Sermon of the Mount, Jesus wants his disciples to go beyond the traditional understanding of justice. His emphasis is on love. The objective of his message is not only that people behave in a just way in their dealings with others considering always the needs of the poor. The idea is also to transform the heart of those who act unfairly partly by presenting to them a criteria for action that goes beyond justice and becomes generosity. It is not always easy for a Christian who adopts the concept of class struggle to conciliate it with this aspect of Christian ethics.

Finally, we can briefly compare the theory of historical conflict in liberation theology with that of Augustine. For Augustine politics has little relevance to the conflict which is basically a cosmic and eschatological one. It is not a struggle between social institutions and practices but between two different ways of life. There are members of both cities everywhere: members of the City of God among the rich and members of the earthly city among the poor.

This does not mean that Augustine would be indifferent to poverty and injustice but he would

accentuate that both are external conditions and that the relation with God is an intimate one.

For Augustine the historical conflict could not be resolved or meaningfully affected by political means. His concept of sin is too radical to allow for the idea of a lasting situation of justice on earth. The whole idea of social improvement through political conflict would be alien to him.

### Eschatology and Politics

This chapter explored the views of Segundo and Gutierrez concerning eschatology in an attempt to show how was the elevation of the significance of politics accomplished in this areas. It was divided in three parts: the first one studied the concept of the kingdom of God, the second the relationship between eschatology and utopia and the third the task of the Church in the construction of the kingdom.

I hope I was able to establish that the increased importance attributed to politics in the area of eschatology results from the concept of the kingdom of God. The kingdom is associated with justice conceived as the satisfaction of the needs of the poor and most

importance in this connection, it is not something that suddenly appears before us but something Christians contribute to construct through acts of justice. Since those acts of justice are directed to the political transformation of oppressive social structures, there is a strong political component to the idea of the construction of the kingdom. When located in this context, the acts of political liberation assume eschatological significance.

In addition to this, Gutierrez accentuates the identity between eschatology and utopia thus giving the former a concrete role in the design of goals for political action. The kingdom of God becomes the 'telos' of political action as well as a criteria for criticism of the deviations from the idea.

Several comments are appropriate at this point.

(a) From a purely political perspective, the notion of eschatology-utopia has advantages and disadvantages. The main advantage is that it can provide a powerful stimulation to action on behalf of the oppressed on the part of persons who accept it as their goal. It makes eschatology appear as closer to the concerns of concrete people thus underlining its relevance for their daily lives. The disadvantage is that the notion of the kingdom



of God both in the Bible and in the subsequent tradition is a very vague one. It would be necessary to be very careful with the specific political program that is justified by associating it with the concept. One of the great contributions of Christianity to Western political thinking is the idea of a point beyond which the activity of the State is illegitimate and has been confronted in the name of God. It is necessary to be very careful not to associate a particular political project with the core concepts of Christian theology thus preventing the believer to establish the necessary critical distance between the project and his/her religion. This observation must of course apply to all sides of the political spectrum. The truth of the matter is that liberation theologians are correct when they point out that Christianity has been traditionally interpreted in very conservative ways and that the conservative political project has been actively promoted through its theology many times to the advantage of the oppressor.

(b) A comment from the Augustinian perspective is in order. It must be noticed of the kingdom of God as something to which Christians contribute through their social action or that would help as a goal for a political project would appear to him as eminently distorted. A contribution to the improvement of a political structure

couldn't enhance access to the City of God. The purely remedial nature of such institutions would put limits to their ability to perform as liberation theologians would want them to. Augustine's expectations were much more limited "to the degree that a political society promoted peace it was good; to the degree that it embodied a well-ordered concord among its members it was even better; to the extent that it encouraged a Christian life and avoided a conflict in loyalties between religious and religious obligations it had fulfilled its role within the universal scheme. The highest aspiration of political society was satisfied if it permitted those of its citizens enrolled in the *civitas dei* to pursue salvation unhindered by political distractions." [Wolin, 1960, p.125]

It is not only Augustine's concept of politics that would force him to disagree with our authors but also his concept of eschatology. This realm was for him "both unpolitical and anti-political: unpolitical in that the vital moments of meaning (*kairoi*) in time, such as creation, Incarnation, and Redemption, lacked any essential connection with political matters; anti-political in that political society was implicated in a series of historical events towards a final consummation which would mark the end of politics" [Wolin, 1960, p.124].

It could be argued, however, that in this specific instance the thought of Augustine was not consistent. At the beginning of the fifth century he endorsed the government's measures against Donatists with the idea of forcing them back into orthodox Christianity. By doing this he was implicitly using the power of the State to procure the salvation of souls, that is, to enter the City of God. This by itself doesn't refute Augustine's view but does show how strong is the tendency to establish a connection between the two realms.

### Implications for Political Theory

Having clarified the specific ways in which the elevation of the significance of politics is accomplished in the work of our authors using as a basis their theory of history, I will now attempt to describe the consequences of this for a political theory of liberation theology.

I will adopt for analytical purposes a model of the structure of a political theory which assumes that every complete such theory will have as a minimum three subsets: a theory of the human being as a political agent; a theory of political institutions which will explain the nature, authority and structure of the State; and a theory of

political change. There are, of course, concepts like those of politics, justice and liberty that penetrate all three areas. There is also a certain level of deductibility between the three subsets so that, for example, the adoption of one type of concept of the human being would impose constraints in the other parts of the theory.

Using their model, I will now attempt to summarize what we have learned about the political ideas of liberation theologians.

#### Theory of the Human Person as a Political Agent

Great emphasis is placed by our authors on the concept of humans as political agents who contribute to the advancement of creation being co-creators with God and engaging in the development of a just society.

Notions of responsibility and solidarity are central to what is worthy on human nature are underlined and related to the dignity implicit in the belief that we are created at the image of God. Clearly these ideas put forward by Segundo and Gutierrez about human nature are designed to challenge what they see as a sinful political passivity on the part of many Christians. They want to

stress the values that would motivate people to assume an active role in defense of the oppressed.

Gutierrez and Segundo abundantly stress their opposition to an individualistic understanding of the human person. They do not see society as the sum of a multitude of persons who function as discrete and independent atoms and who happen to find it convenient or necessary to function together. Society is, for them, constitutive of the individual. Individuals are who they are because they grow in a certain social context and in that process of growing they become defined as persons in the particular way in which such society defines its members. A consequence of this is that it is not possible to liberate the isolated individual. Liberation is contextual. This is the basis, as I have explained, of their rejection of the idea that the solution of social problems will be a by-product of the proliferation of individual conversions.

There is a reciprocal relation between the elevation of the significance of politics and this understanding of the human being. On one hand, because humans are conceived as constituted by their social relations and politics, which is an important component of any such context, is understood to be of great importance. On the

other, because politics has such a high rank, any movement attempting to improve the real situation of people has to be a political movement.

In any Christian political theory, however, another aspect of the human condition must be underlined: the weakness and destructiveness emerging from sin. The accent placed by our authors on the pervasive nature of sin sound a note of caution about the moral ambiguity inherent on all human activities and institutions. This introduce some tensions within the theory. On one hand, there is the optimism associated with the struggle for justice and the hope for a better world and on the other the realization of the ambiguous nature of even the most brilliant human accomplishments.

The adoption of the concept of class struggle introduces a paradoxical note in the theory of human nature. On one hand it rests on optimistic assumptions about the possibilities of social improvement and on the other is much more pessimistic about the likelihood of the personal transformation of the oppressors. This tensions are not resolved in the work of our authors as far as I can see.



## Theory of Institutions

As I have pointed out, there is in our authors an awareness of the need to radically improve social institutions specially in the underdeveloped countries. Their message is a constant denunciation of the extreme and constant abuses that take place in those areas. In some instances the institutional arrangements they refer to are the very minimal required to insure the mere physical survival of the population. In other cases, more complex sophisticated institutions are needed in order to insure the just distribution of resources and adequate participation of the people in those decisions that affect them.

In any event, the criteria of legitimacy for the State or for any social arrangement emerges from the assumptions that have been discussed. A legitimate institution is that one that is devoted to satisfy human needs, especially those of the poor. This is the basic criteria of justice and implies a disposition to empower the forgotten, marginal members of society. This is an ideal which assumes an egalitarian political and economic structure, some form of socialism.

The heightened significance of politics in the work of our authors implies a considerable degree of trust in the ability of political institutions to promote the common good when correctly established and directed. With that confidence will probably come an elevation of the responsibilities of the State for the well being of the population, especially of the most disadvantaged. This, in turn, elevates the expectations concerning the performance of these institutions. In order to produce the expected level of performance, it will probably be necessary to increase the power of the State. What does liberation theology have as an assurance to the citizen in general and to the Christian in particular against such power if it becomes misused?

The probable answer is that precisely because of the importance attributed to politics, both the individual Christians and the Church will become more vigilant, more militant, more aware of their political responsibilities, and more ready to be critical of the political institutions and those in power.

This is where I see the danger of identifying a particular political project with notions of eschatology. Instead of contributing to enhance the critical ability of Christians, which becomes crucial once more and more

functions are given to the State, this identification will tend to lower it. It may end up legitimizing a set of political institutions in the name of the kingdom of God.

The importance attributed to politics by our authors is a reflection of their concern for the need for action in that area. The distance between reality and the ideal is very vast. It is by now clear that in the opinion of our authors the efforts of Christians in that area have either being minimal or misdirected. The other side of the equation needs attention too. It is necessary to create enthusiasm for the struggle for justice while preserving an element of skeptical criticism against any form of power and against any political project. Both elements are present in the Christian tradition. It is important that the elevation of the significance of politics if necessary be accomplished in such way as to preserve both elements resolving the internal tensions I have mentioned within the theory.

### Theory of Political Change

There are two critical questions on any theory of political change: justification and method.

As I have previously noticed, liberation theology appears from a political perspective as a body of thought created to stimulate Christians to engage themselves more actively in the struggle for justice. This being the case, all of its components are somehow related to the theory of political change.

These include its conception of the human being as socially constituted and as a creative agent in history, the idea that it is impossible to be neutral in the face of oppression, and that all activities directed to the achievement of justice belong to the larger process of salvation.

The elevation of the significance of politics contributes to the theory of political change by assigning to that kind of activity a privileged place in human life so that Christians don't have to feel any kind of alienation between their faith and the struggle for a better world.

A comment would perhaps be appropriate on the question of method since there is a difference in approach between Gutierrez and Segundo on this issue.

In his debate with the Sacred Congregation, Segundo adopts a criteria for the use of violence that is very old going back at least to Thomas Aquinas. This criteria puts the emphasis on the idea of resistance. When in cases of extreme oppression, Christians are believed to have a right to resist.

On the other hand, Gutierrez seems to be adopting not a theory of resistance but a theory in which revolution would be seen as the necessary instrument to bring about the desired social changes. Here again we have the problem of the degrees of optimism that the theorists have and the ethical constraints that necessarily accompany these considerations when made from a Christian perspective.

Of course liberation theology does not need to be a monolithic movement and their exponents don't have to agree on everything. Besides both positions can be defended within the context of Christian political thought if the relevant ethical considerations are taken into account.

## Conclusion

Liberation theologians are not political theorists in that their main objective is not to cultivate that specific discipline. They are theologians who want to develop an interpretation of Christianity that would be relevant to persons who live under conditions of oppression. This would be a theology developed from the perspective of the poor not just given by others coming from different experiences.

In the process of developing this kind of thinking, this "theology from below", as Gutierrez calls it, they have created a theory of history that is parallel but different from that of Augustine's. In it they have argued in favor of an understanding of politics that significantly enhances its relative importance vis a vis other forms of Christian political thought. They do this by identifying salvation with liberation and by identifying the struggle for justice with political liberation.

These assumptions concerning the concept of liberation permeate their view of the historical process. They contribute to the elevation of the significance of politics in the interpretation of crucial biblical events,



in the theory of historical progress, of historical conflict and finally on the concept of eschatology.

In critically summarizing the result of this research, I have employed the political ideas of Augustine as a counterpoint. This enabled me to establish by comparison the degree of relative importance attributed to politics and the tensions emerging from such elevation in the significance of politics.

I have found that our authors render a significant service by developing a theology from the perspective of the poor and by underlining with it the need of Christians to be actively involved in processes of social change that promote justice. Several tensions that I have examined and cautioned about appear within the theory. The correction of these may require a reconceptualization of some of the assumptions of the theory in order to preserve the built-in protections that Christians have in their theology against the power of the State.

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