

ARTICLES

Gustavo Gutiérrez's God-Talk from the Perspective of the Poor

BY

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Liberation theology's use of Marxist categories disposes it to the criticism that it reduces the concept of salvation to merely political emancipation. In connection with this accusation of reductionism is the critique that God-talk in liberation theology is but a myth-making irrationality.¹ At the bottom of these criticisms is the tension between an understanding of the Incarnation which "makes God the primary agent or 'Subject' in human history" and the dialectical vision which "makes it possible for men to enter the historical process as responsible 'Subjects.'"² In other words, owing to its use of Marxist categories, liberation theology allows God to decrease so as to enable man to increase as far as the role in the unfolding of the historical process is concerned.

An analysis of God-talk in liberation theology specifically that of Gutiérrez, is, therefore, called for in order to give light to the preceding accusations. Does liberation theology discard God's transcendence in favor of a totally immanent God, a God fully identified with the concrete struggles of the oppressed and suffering humankind? The following exposé on Gutiérrez's God-talk hopes to adequately answer this question.

¹D. McCANN, *Christian Realism and Liberation Theology*, New York, 1981, p. 195.

²*Ibid.*, p. 184.

1. Spirituality as the well-spring of theology

God-talk, for Gutiérrez, is theology itself. This God-talk or theological discourse is essentially of limited character since it articulates a reality that constantly escapes the full grasp of human understanding by reason of its being a mystery.³ This realization of the limitedness of human talk on God, spares Gutiérrez the arrogance that, according to him, has characterized and still characterizes some sectors in the Church who speak of God as if He were helplessly but clearly exposed under the scrutinizing lens of a microscope. In his own words,

It seems important to emphasize that, in fact, theology intends to think about a mystery. And this had to be clearly noted because there has been, and there still is, in the Church a certain discourse on faith which speaks of God with too much certainty, with such security which makes it appear that it is the owner of the knowledge of God. In effect, there are theologies . . . which present themselves as all-knowing as far as God's presence, attributes, qualities, etc. are concerned. In reality, however, the demand of traditional theology, as developed for instance by the doctor from Aquino - demand which is rooted in the biblical sources - alert us to take the discourse on God with much greater humility. Certainly, we will speak of God from our faith, but always conscious that there is little that we know of Him. Limitedness is a more precise character of theological reflection which can be clearly seen only after we are confronted with the classical theme . . . concerning the profound mystery who is the God of the Bible.⁴

³Gutiérrez echoes the profound thought which Thomas Aquinas already expressed several centuries ago: "Es más lo que no sabemos de Dios que lo que sabemos de El." José María Arguedas, a Peruvian writer from whom Gutiérrez draws a considerable amount of inspiration, expresses a similar idea in these words: "es mucho menos lo que sabemos que la gran esperanza que sentimos." G. GUTIERREZ, *El Dios de la vida*, Lima, 1981, pp. 5-6.

⁴*Ibid.* p. 6. The original runs thus: "No parece importante subrayar que, efectivamente, la teología intenta pensar el misterio. Y hay que recordarlo con claridad porque tal vez ha habido, y hay todavía, en la Iglesia un cierto discurso sobre la fe que habla de Dios con demasiada certeza; con tal seguridad que parece dueño del conocimiento de Dios. En efecto, se dan teologías . . . que se presentan como sabiéndolo todo sobre Dios: su esencia, atributos, cualidades, etc. En realidad, el llamado de la teología tradicional, expresado por ejemplo en el doctor de Aquino - llamado que hunde sus raíces en un fondo bíblico - nos alerta para asumir el discurso sobre Dios con mucha mayor humildad. Ciertamente hablaremos del Dios de nuestra fe, pero conscientes de que es poco lo que sabemos de El . . . Limitación mas bien carácter preciso de la reflexión teológica, que puede esclarecerse si tenemos presente un tema clásico . . . acerca de ese profundo misterio que es el Dios bíblico."

The mysterious dimension of God's essence as viewed from the perspective of human knowledge, however, does not deter man from acquiring scattered bits of information about the divine being. For God chose to reveal Himself in an unfolding which reached its culmination in Jesus Christ. In fact, for Gutiérrez, God is known only by His revelation of Himself through Jesus Christ.⁵ Moreover, the motive of God's revelation, according to Gutiérrez, is to intervene in the ongoing march of history.⁶ On the basis of this motivation, one can deduce then, that for Gutiérrez, the revelation of God's essence is, biblically, a revelation of His Will.

It is by reason of this intimate association of revelation with the person of Jesus Christ that Gutiérrez links theology (God-talk springing from revelation) with a discourse on Jesus Christ. However, this discourse on Jesus is not limited to the knowledge of the person of Jesus Christ. (e.g., who his parents are, when and where he was born, whether He is divine or not, etc.). Since God's revelation of Himself is a revelation of His Will, acceptance of God in faith requires not simply a *knowing* but likewise a *doing of His Will* in history. Theology, a discourse on Jesus Christ, involves a talk on the *following of Christ* which Gutiérrez aptly refers to as *spirituality*. Spirituality or the following of Christ, in Gutiérrez's view, involves the twin elements of *contemplation and practice*. Contemplation is seen as a prayerful openness to the outpouring of God's revelation resulting in an acknowledgement "of the Father's goodness and love that reach out to the simple and the unimportant, and give them preference." This is exemplified, according to Gutiérrez, in Jesus' words of thanksgiving to the Father when He (Jesus) said, "I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will" (Mt. 11:25-26). A key

⁵Gutiérrez writes, "Desde el punto de vista de la revelación bíblica, es clara la íntima relación que existe entre una reflexión sobre Jesucristo y un discurso sobre Dios que El revela. Basta recordar dos textos que todos tenemos en la memoria. El primero: 'nadie conoce al Padre sino el Hijo' (Mt. 11:27), afirmación evangélica que implica bastante más que un conocimiento intelectual. En efecto, conocer en la Biblia significa amar. El sentido de este versículo es, entonces, en realidad: 'nadie ama al Padre sino el Hijo'. En el Hijo, desde El, amamos al Padre. El segundo texto que quisiera recordar es: 'el que me ve a mí ve al Padre' (Jn. 14:9). Cristo es el revelador de Dios . . . *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 12" . . . Dios revela su nombre, dice quien es, precisamente a partir de su decisión de intervenir en la historia . . . "

text for Gutiérrez, this passage reveals to him the gratuitousness of God's love, i.e. "*the free and unmerited love of God for every human being and especially for the poor and forgotten.*"⁷

The words 'wise and understanding' refer to the important persons in Israel owing to their religious and social authority by virtue of their being experts on the law. They are the teachers and doctors of the law, the high priests and the scribes who sat "on the chair of Moses" (Mt. 23.2) and had taken possession of "the key of knowledge" (Lk. 11.52). By human standards, they can claim a more capable potential for grasping revelation. For Gutiérrez, Jesus' statement challenged this privileged position of the 'wise and the understanding' by saying that the *nepioi* (literally, very young children which in the sense of Matthew's usage carries a connotation of ignorance) had a greater capacity for understanding revelation by reason of the Father's predilection for them.⁸

According to Gutiérrez, the 'little children' are related to the sector of people who can be categorized as the 'poor of the land'. They are the hungry and afflicted (Lk. 6:20-23), the despised sinners and the sick (Mt. 9:12-13), the sheep who have no shepherd (Mt. 9:36), the little ones (Mt. 10:42; 18:1-4) and those not invited to the banquet (Lk. 14:16-24). God's preference for these 'little children' is not made on account of their ignorance as if ignorance is a meritorious state of mind but rather is a result of God's gratuitous will.⁹ In Gutiérrez's own words:

The ignorance in question is not in itself a virtue or a merit that explains the divine preference. What we see here is simply a situation of need. By the same token, wisdom is not a demerit or something that provokes divine rejection. The 'wise' are not necessarily proud

⁷G. GUTIERREZ, *Hablar de Dios desde el sufrimiento del inocente: una reflexión sobre el libro de Job.*, Lima, 1986, p. 15; henceforth, *Hablar*. Translation is from *On Job. God-talk and the suffering of the Innocent*, trans. M. O'Connell, New York, 1987, p. xiii; henceforth, *On Job*.

⁸That the God of the Bible has preference for the lowly is also the idea that the Amerindian sacristan expresses in José María Arguedas' novel *Todas las sangres*: "El Dios de los Señores no es igual." By this is meant that the God of the high society, the rulers is not the same as the liberating God of the Bible who has taken the part of the poor. (Part of the novel from which the sacristan's words are taken is reproduced in the dedication page of Gutiérrez's *Teología de la liberación*).

⁹It has to be noted that, for Gutiérrez, God's preferential option for the poor does not imply exclusivity. G. GUTIERREZ, *Hablar*, p. 15 (*On Job*, p. xiii)

in the moral sense; they may be, and indeed that is a danger for them. So too the ignorant may be humble, but they are not always such; humility is simply a possibility for them. It follows that the condition of being privileged addressees of revelation is the result not primarily of moral or spiritual dispositions but of a human situation in which God undertakes self-revelation by acting and overturning values and criteria . . . It must be said, however that, the reason for Jesus' gratitude is not primarily, as might appear, the fact that revelation has been hidden from some and granted to others. The structure of the sentence might suggest this interpretation, but the interpretation is wrong, as can be shown by a comparison with other passages that, like this one, use contrast in a Semitic way to emphasize a point. The fact that God hides 'these things' from the wise and reveals them to the simple is the concrete occasion for grasping what is behind this behavior and gives it its meaning - namely, the free and unmerited love of God for every human being especially for the poor and the forgotten.¹⁰

It has become evident that, for Gutiérrez, the dominant theme of Mt. 11:25 as a whole is the gratuitous character of God's love. This, as has been indicated, is a result of a contemplative act. At this point, it would be pertinent to ask about the role of practice in Gutiérrez's concept of spirituality. How is it related to contemplation? Does it follow after contemplation in the manner of theory-praxis succession viewed in a linear way?

Gutiérrez is quite explicit in his understanding of practice when he says, "To a degree, we remain silent in our practice as well, for in our involvements, in our daily work, we do not talk about God all the time; we do indeed live in God, but not by discoursing on God."¹¹ What becomes clear from this quotation is that practice refers not only to a particular action or groups of action (involvement) but that it also points to ordinary day to day living. This daily work and involvement can, indeed, proceed from contemplation. As an example, one can have recourse in the contemplation of the gratuitous love of God itself which shows a preference for the underprivileged. This contemplation can, in a following step, lead to a call to assume the way of life, the world of the poor.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 14-5 (*On Job*, pp. xii-xiii).

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 17 (*On Job*, pp. xiii-xiv).

The "evangelizing potential" that Puebla (no. 147) recognizes in the poor and oppressed points implicitly to one source of that power and ability to proclaim the Christian message. That source is precisely the spiritual experience to which the revelation of God's preference for 'mere children' (Cf. M. 11:25) gives rise. It is this encounter with the Lord that the Christians I am speaking of must make their own. The need is not simply to recognize that the experience of the people raises questions and challenges for the spirituality of these Christians . . . At present, however, the situation is a more inclusive one and reaches deeper. We are no longer faced with isolated questions, however penetrating. Something more systematic is making its appearance; its parts resist separation: they form an organic whole. In this framework the religious vows are recovering their full meaning. This new reality invites Christians to leave the familiar world they have long inhabited, and leads many of them to reread their own spiritual tradition. Above all, it is a question of making our own the world of the poor and their manner of living out their relationship with the Lord and taking over the historical practice of Jesus.¹²

To say that practice proceeds from contemplation, however, can prove to be misleading. It would make Gutiérrez's theology akin to the armchair theology which he so spiritedly criticizes. Furthermore, it would allow for an out-of-this-world mental calisthenics whose output could be dogmatically applied in practice. On the contrary, while Gutiérrez acknowledges the indebtedness of practice from the fruits of contemplation, he likewise recognizes the circularity or the dialectics of the relationship. Indeed, while contemplation can bring about a renewed practice, the latter is the groundwork on which the former is made. As Gutiérrez himself writes: "Contemplation and practice feed each other; the two together make up the stage of silence before God".¹³ In other words, the contemplation of the privileged position of the poor in the understanding of God's revelation is arrived at only by one who has assumed the world, and lived the life of the poor. This is especially true of Gutiérrez who, having had the possibilities for an affluent life, chose to live in one of Lima's *favelas*.

¹²G. GUTIERREZ, *Beber en su propio pozo*, Salamanca, 1989, pp. 44-5; henceforth, *Beber*, Translation is from *We Drink from our own Wells*, trans. M. O'Connell, New York, 1984, pp. 30-31; henceforth, *We Drink*.

¹³G. GUTIERREZ, *Hablar*, p. 17 (*On Job*, p. xiii).

Spirituality is, thus, for Gutiérrez, a dialectical interplay of contemplation and practice which generates a way of life geared towards the following of Christ. As a way of life, spirituality does not imply a contempt of and flight from the world and material things which was the predominant character of the spirituality in the Early Church, the Monastic and, to some extent, the Medieval spirituality.¹⁴ As a matter of fact, spirituality, for Gutiérrez, is very much linked with the world and its affairs. He is able to arrive at the linkage of spirituality and the world by doing away with the erroneous polarity attributed to matter and spirit, body and soul. St. Paul's concepts of flesh, spirit, and body proved useful to Gutiérrez in this regard.¹⁵ St. Paul opposes spirit to flesh but contends that the spirit and the body can harmoniously coexist.

'Flesh' in St. Paul, according to Gutiérrez, does not always carry a moral qualification or a pejorative overtone. First of all, it signifies the substance of which human beings are made (1 Cor 15:39). Moreover, it is used to refer not just to a part of the human person but the whole of the person viewed from the perspective of its physical existence.¹⁶ More importantly, Gutiérrez perceives in St. Paul's concept of the flesh a person's belongingness to the human family or in Feuerbachian and Marxian terminology, to the human species - being: "To be of the same flesh means to belong to the same ethnic group, the same people, and, in the final analysis, the same human family."¹⁷

Going further than simply pointing out the weakness and mortality of being 'in the flesh', St. Paul considers 'flesh' to be a force for evil that lays hold of human beings and subjects them to their own desires.¹⁸ At this level of conceptualization, 'walking according to the flesh' means categorically *leading to death*. Gutiérrez, quoting intermitently from St. Paul, writes,

¹⁴For a concise delineation of the history of Catholic Spirituality, see J. AUMANN, O.P., "Trends in Catholic Spirituality," in J. AUMANN, T. HOPKO, D. BLOESCH, *Christian Spirituality: East and West*, Chicago, 1967, pp. 9-97.

¹⁵Gutiérrez identifies his own concept of spirituality with St. Paul's "walking according to the spirit" (Rom. 8:4)

¹⁶G. GUTIERREZ, *Beber*, p. 77 (*We Drink*, p. 56).

¹⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 77-8 (*We Drink*, p. 56).

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 80 (*We Drink*, p. 57).

"To set the mind on the flesh is death" (Rom. 8:6); such is the real dynamism of the flesh. The list of "works of the flesh" is proof of this, for they are all negations of love and ultimately of life. Consequently, those who do them "shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:21) - that is, life. In other words, "to live according to the flesh" (Rom 8:12) is not to live at all but to die; "for if you live according to the flesh you will die" (Rom. 8:13). Paul uses the expression "living according to the flesh" by way of contrast to "walking according to the spirit," which means 'advancing toward life.'¹⁹

Indeed, in contrast with the death-dealing 'flesh', the 'spirit' brings forth life. Like the 'flesh', the 'spirit' in St. Paul designates the person as a whole but from the point of view of its *dynamism*, the 'breath' that inspire a person's actions. As such, 'spirit' signifies the attitude adopted by the person and likewise it involves both the I and its intentions.²⁰

The dynamism and vitality of the 'spirit' assumes a distinct character when the human person is seen from the standpoint of God's action on it. The dynamism and vitality that proceeds from the spirit would signify a life that is in accordance with God's will. More specifically, it points to a life that is in harmony with the gift of divine filiation that finds expression in divine fellowship. Gutiérrez elaborates:

In this context, the spirit is the subject that receives the gifts of God: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren": (Gal. 6:18) - that is, with you . . . but with the connotation of you-as-receptive - to-divine grace (Cf. Phil. 4:23). The first of these gifts of the Spirit is love (agape). "The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law" (Gal 5:22-23. This fruit (*karpos*) of the Spirit is the opposite of the works (*erga*) of the flesh. . ."²¹

¹⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 81 (*We Drink*, p. 58-9).

²⁰Gutiérrez quotes the following passages from St. Paul to demonstrate this point: "For God is my witness whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son" (Rom 1:9); "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control" (2 Tim. 1:7). *Ibid.*, p. 84 (*We Drink*, p. 62).

²¹G. GUTIERREZ, *Ibid.*, p. 85 (*We Drink*, pp. 62-63). In Gutiérrez's view, St. Paul considers love to be the central gift which, in a way, contains all the others. It is also a source of dynamic activity and life.

In a deeper sense, St. Paul, according to Gutiérrez, not only identifies the spirit as the subject that receives the gifts of God but also as the human person who has been permeated by the Spirit of God Himself. Someone is called a 'spirit' or is considered 'spiritual' because of the action and presence of God in the inmost sphere of the person's being.²²

Spiritual-ness or the state of having received God's gifts or God Himself indwells in what St. Paul considers to be a more neutral facet of the human being: the body (*soma*). Like the 'flesh', the 'body' in St. Paul, according to Gutiérrez, refers not only to the stock of which human beings are made but also to the whole person. Likewise, a person's bodily component subjects him or her to the snares of sin and the death-dealing power that is the flesh. It is in this sense that St. Paul speaks of the "body of Sin" (Rom 6:6) that by its works (Rom 8:13) leads the person to death: "Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom 8:21). Nevertheless, there is no attempt at completely identifying the body with the flesh in St. Paul. In this regard, Gutiérrez writes:

The body is rather to be regarded as the field on which the flesh as death - dealing power operates, but where at the same time the Spirit, the power that gives life is also active. For this reason, Paul draws up a list of sins "according to the flesh" but not "according to the body". The body (the human person as body) . . . is the human organism and as such cannot but be located within the economy of salvation. The body therefore possesses the possibility of living according to the Spirit.²³

St. Paul, in Gutiérrez's view, not only neutralizes the body as regards its relationship with flesh and spirit but even recognizes the possibility of a spiritual body. Quoting St. Paul, Gutiérrez writes, "He (St. Paul) tells us, for example, to the surprise of those who totally equate

²²Gutiérrez, quoting St. Paul explains: "You are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God really dwells in 'you' (Rom 8:9). This dominion of the Spirit as source of life is as powerful, in Paul's view, that in many passages it is impossible to decide whether 'spirit' refers to the human person under grace or to the Holy Spirit. This difficulty is only the other side of the depth of the message itself about the intimate presence of the Spirit." *Ibid.*, p. 87 (*We Drink*, p. 64).

²³*Ibid.*, p. 98 (*We Drink*, pp. 65-6).

the flesh and body, that the body can be spiritual: "It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15:44).²⁴

On the basis of the foregoing considerations, Gutiérrez concludes that the rejection of the death-dealing power of the flesh does not necessarily imply a contempt for the body. On the contrary, the following of Christ or Christian spirituality consists in *embracing the liberated body* and thus being able to exclaim "Abba, Father!" and to join the comradely communion of humankind drawn together by Jesus Christ.²⁵ Furthermore,

Life according to the Spirit is therefore not an existence at the level of the soul and in opposition to or apart from the body; it is an existence *in accord with life*, love, peace, and justice (the great values of the reign of God and *against death*). Such is the spiritual life of Christians, "heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ" (Rom 8:17) because "all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God" (Rom 8:14).²⁶

It is through the Pauline concept of a 'spiritual body' that Gutiérrez is able to harmoniously assimilate the world, the human community (the human species) into the very essence of spirituality. God's coming and the infusion of His Spirit's gifts into the world spur it to undergo the process of spiritualization. In other words, the working of God's grace opens up the possibility of a 'spiritual world'. Implied in this is the possible spiritual-ness of man's action *in* the world and *for* it. Thus,

²⁴Gutiérrez further notes that the concept of body finds its supreme and most original use in Pauline theology when it is used in speaking of Christ and our incorporation with Him in an entity which is the *Mystical Body of Christ*. *Ibid.*, pp. 93-4 (*We Drink*, pp. 66-8).

²⁵Through the notion of the liberated body Gutiérrez wishes to point out the continuity of the process of arriving at a *spiritual body* from the resurrected body of Christ . . . Gutiérrez explains: "The resurrected body of the Lord is the body of flesh and the crucified body that were the medium of his presence in history. We are in the same situation through our belonging to the body of Christ. Our own bodies, freed from the flesh with its death-dealing power, become spiritual and a means of life and solidarity." *Ibid.*, p. 96 (*We Drink*, pp. 70-1).

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 97 (*We Drink*, p. 71).

'spiritual politics or 'spiritual economics' would not be a far cry from Gutiérrez's notion of spirituality.²⁷

Thus, for Gutiérrez, in the dialectics of contemplation and practice that springs forth into a spiritual community and a spiritual world, consists the essence of spirituality. It is this kind of spirituality on which theology of liberation stands. In fact, for Gutiérrez, there is a very close *connection* between spirituality and theology in that the latter would not be possible without the proper mediation of the former. Gutiérrez himself writes,

The point I want to make can be stated thus: God is first contemplated when we do God's will and allow God to reign; only after that do we think about God. To use familiar categories: contemplation and practice together make up the *first act*. We must establish ourselves on the terrain of spirituality and practice; only subsequently is it possible to formulate a discourse on God in an authentic and respectful way. Theologizing done without the mediation of contemplation and practice does not meet the requirements of the God of the Bible. The mystery of God comes to life in contemplation and in the practice of God's plan for human history; only in a second phase can this life inspire appropriate reasoning and relevant speech. In view of all this we can say that the first stage is *silence*, the second is *speech*.²⁸

More than simply pointing out the connection between spirituality and theology, Gutiérrez even goes further as to *identify* them. He writes, "... I shall adopt a standpoint that is dear to me, that of the connection, and even the identity between theological methodology and spirituality."²⁹ The silence-speech analogy which Gutiérrez uses to refer to theology and spirituality shows this essential identity. For silence and speech may, indeed, point to the same *essence* (content)

²⁷The Pauline notion of 'spiritual body' has already been taken up by Gutiérrez in his monumental book, *Teología de la liberación*. See *Teología de la liberación, perspectivas*, Lima, 1971, p. 212; henceforth, TdL. Translation is from *A Theology of Liberation. History, Politics and Salvation*, trans. and ed. C. Inda and J. Eagleson, New York, 1973, p. 166; henceforth, TL. This notion and the concept of the 'universality of salvation' forms a strong basis for Gutiérrez to consider the world as a theophanic locus.

²⁸G. GUTIERREZ, *Hablar*, pp. 16-17 (*On Job*, p. xiii).

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 27 (*On Job*, p. xviii).

although their *modes of being* are different. In this case, one can say that spirituality is 'unspoken' theology. Conversely, theology would be 'spoken' spirituality.³⁰

2. God of the Poor

The preceding section has indicated that God-talk flows from a contemplation of God's gratuitous love that shows a predilection for the underprivileged which results into a practice that assumes the life - world of God's preferred 'little children'. This section propels the analysis into more specific details concerning God-talk. Who is the God of the Poor? Where can he be found? How do we 'speak' of this God of the downtrodden?³¹

2.1 *Who is God?*

In his attempt to articulate God in theological discourse, Gutiérrez begins with the biblical image of God as Father. The concept of the Fatherhood of God implies a twofold meaning: *origin of all* and *transmitter of life*. Both are dimensions of a unique revelation about God. God as Father is the source of all existence and He communicates Life because He is Love.³²

God as the *God of Life* is the focal point in Gutiérrez's articulation of the divine mystery. In fact, the God of Life is intimately linked with Gutiérrez's project of liberation. While in *Teología de la liberación* (1971) and *La fuerza histórica de los pobres*, he focuses on the three levels of meaning of his notion of liberation thereby speaking of God as Liberator, in his later works, he identifies liberation with the freedom

³⁰It must be noted that 'unspoken' theology is, in Gutiérrez's view, a *contradictio in terminis* since theology is speech. Likewise, 'spoken' spirituality is an impossibility since spirituality is always a silence before God. Nevertheless, spirituality as 'unspoken' theology and theology as 'spoken' spirituality best describe the essential identity of theology and spirituality.

³¹Gutiérrez himself formulated this questioning in *El Dios de la vida*. This section will, thus, rely on this volume, drawing from other works of Gutiérrez and other authors for a better perspective.

³²G. GUTIERREZ, *El Dios de la vida*, pp. 9-10.

from the clutches of the elements of death. This gives him an opportunity to develop the concept of the God of Life.³³

Gutiérrez's biblical springboard for the discussion on the God of Life is St. John whose Gospel asserts that the Word has come into the world that there may be life, and in abundance (Jn. 10:10). As a matter of fact, in this gospel, Jesus declares Himself to be "the Way, the Truth and the Life" (Jn. 14:16)³⁴. Faith in the God of Life involves a belief that God's primordial design for human beings is to have life. Thus, the acceptance in faith of the God of Life, according to Gutiérrez, includes a trust that the realization of life in all its fullness, including its materiality - the means of life - is the prime mediation of God. Faith in God would not be possible without the deep conviction of the absolute supremacy of life over death. If life is the mediation of God, then any attack on life or any of its aspects - hunger, destitution, squalor, injustice, oppression - is an assault on God who wills life for humankind. A denial of life, therefore, is a repudiation of the God of Life. On the other hand, to opt for life, is to choose God. In the words of Gutiérrez,

Now we know what it means in concrete to give life (which is the distinctive character of the disciple of Jesus): it is to practice the true worship in spirit and in truth. It is to work for justice and to assume the cause of the poor, as an expression of the preference of God for them. We also know that to kill is incompatible with discipleship. It is to serve an idol, to be foreign to the God of the Bible. God dwells in life, and all that goes against life: hunger, misery, oppression, also fear, pervading suspicion, abuse of authority, etc., are expressions of death: incapacity of seeing the new, rejection of the ethics of the Kingdom, and consequently, absence of God.³⁵

³³Cf. J. LOIS, *Opción por los pobres*, Madrid, 2nd, 1988 pp. 21-7. Another author expresses the same idea in the following words: "Latin American liberation theology has insisted from the beginning on the development of its vision from a starting point in God the liberator, and in faith in the God who establishes justice and right. In recent years the development of this approach to the Mystery of God has been broadened in an articulation of the theme life/death." V. ARAYA, *God of the Poor. The Mystery of God in Latin American Liberation Theology*, trans. R. Barr, Maryknoll, New York, 1987, p. 70.

³⁴G. GUTIERREZ, *El Dios de la vida*, p. 18.

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 63. The original runs thus: "Ahora bien sabemos lo que significa en concreto dar vida (que es lo distintivo del discípulo de Jesús): es practicar el culto verdadero en espíritu y en verdad, es obrar la justicia, es asumir la causa del pobre como expresión de la preferencia de Dios por él. Sabemos también que matar es no ser discípulo, es servir a un ídolo, es ser ateo del Dios de la Biblia. En la vida está Dios. Y todo lo que va contra la vida: el hambre, la miseria, la opresión, también el miedo, la sospecha permanente, el abuso de autoridad, etc., son expresiones de muerte: incapacidad de ver lo nuevo, rechazo de la ética del Reino y por consiguiente ausencia de Dios."

Although the focus on the God of life which Gutiérrez adopts has its basis in Scriptures, it is likewise rooted in the concrete experience of the people in Latin America. True to his hermeneutical method, Gutiérrez's emphasis on the God of Life as a specific interpretation of biblical data involves a pre-understanding which can be traced back to the Inca-people's reverence for Mother Earth (*Pachamama*). Peasants who still comprise the great majority of Peru's population, particularly those who descend from the Inca tribes, still preserve this reverence in their consciousness.³⁶

Pachamama, in the Incan worldview, is the epiphany of the life-giving Power. It is the fertile, life-nurturing, and life-preserving womb for plants, animals, and human beings. De Schrijver, citing Msgr. L. Dalle, a Peruvian bishop (1922-1982) writes, "the devotion to Mother Earth was in his (Msgr. Dalle's) eyes not merely a detail, but the keystone of their religious and societal vision (*mundovision*). Only from this perspective can the farmers in the Andes understand the Christian belief."³⁷

Pachamama is not only a manifestation of God's life-giving Life. It is also a potent source of solidarity with other human beings. Again, De Schrijver writes,

"The history of the Andes teaches us that the earth is the source of life.: "The *Pachamama* gives us life like a mother, with her produce, so that we can share with one another." The earth is an economic factor, but above all "a place for communitarian brotherhood" (Msgr. Dalle). The earth inspires the life-vision of the farmers. The community draws its strength not only from the earth, but in its intercourse with the earth, it becomes conscious of its own identity: in the continuing effort to make the earth fructify, to communally

³⁶Even city-dwellers are mostly peasants who migrated to the cities from their farms to seek better opportunities or driven by violence in the countryside, even if they have acquired other jobs, still retain the peasant mentality. This surfaces in their regular processions, sacramentals, and liturgy wherein they offer prayers and libations to the *Pachamama*. Cf. G. DE SCHRIJVER, "*Pachamama* en de strijd om democratische rechten in Peru," in *Streven*, December 1986, p. 232. De Schrijver's source in this regard is L. DALLE. *Anthropología y evangelización desde el runa*, Lima, 1983.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 323. The original is as follows: "De devotie tot Moeder Aarde was in zijn ogen voor deze mensen geen detail, maar de sluitsteen van hun religieuze en maatschappelijke visie (*mundovision*). Alleen van daaruit kunnen de boeren in de Andes het Christelijke geloof verstaan."

cultivate her, to defend and regain the ownership of her from foreign masters.' The earth is the place of feasting. Our music, dance, meals, brotherhood, joy, religious libations, and prayers, are the experiences of gratitude and harmony with God, with the community, and with the family. They celebrate again and again our encounter with the deep feeling for life which we draw from the earth which surrounds us . . .³⁸

The arable land (*la tierra*) is the direct sacramental figure of the *Pachamama*. Through it the Inca people directly experienced the vivifying generosity of the *Pachamama*. They also found in it the drawing force to live in solidarity with one another. Life from the *Pachamama*, if it is to be authentic, has to be celebrated in solidarity. This is clearly shown in how the Incas organized their agricultural system. From of old, the Incas arranged it in such a way that all inhabitants of the village worked together on the land which was commonly owned (*ayllu*-system). Labor in the fields was a community undertaking through the leadership of democratically chosen chiefs. With the arrival of the Spaniards, the *ayllus* were transformed into *latifundias* where labor on land was done by slaves under the domination of foreign rulers.³⁹

The *latifundia* shattered everything that the *ayllu* stood for. For the Inca slaves, *la tierra* as *latifundia* did not anymore signify a life-giving womb except for the masters whose income from the land was used to oppress the peasants all the more. In that sense, *la tierra* has become a death-dealing power. Moreover, the *latifundia* divided the peasants inasmuch as they had to serve different masters and if they served the same master, they would compete as to who earned the best

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 234. The original is as follows: "De geschiedenis van de Andes leert ons dat de aarde bron is van leven. Of zoals de boeren zeggen: "De *Pachamama* geeft ons het leven als een moeder, met haar produkten, opdat we die met elkaar zouden delen." De aarde is een economische factor, maar vooral "een plaats van communautaire broederchap." (Mgr. Dalle) 'De aarde inspireert de levensvisie van de boeren. De gemeenschap voedt zich niet enkel aan de aarde, maar wordt in de omgang met haar zich van haar eigen identiteit bewust: in de voortdurende inzet om de aarde vrucht te doen dragen, om haar gemeenschappelijk te bebouwen, om het bezit ervan te verdedigen en te herwinnen op vreemde heersers.' De aarde is de plaats van het feest. Onze muziek, dansen maaltijden, broederlijkheid, vreugde, religieuze plengingen en gebeden, zijn de uitdrukkingen van dankbaarheid en harmonie met God, met de gemeenschap, en met het gezin; ze vieren telkens weer onze ontmoeting met een diepe levenszin die we putten uit de aarde die ons omringt . . ."

³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 233.

favors of the master. With the loss of the perception of the life-giving womb and the breakdown of solidarity, the *Pachamama* has become absent in the *latifundia* which even the present-day republic has not done away with. In a way, the God of Life is dead in the *latifundia*.⁴⁰

Mariategui, Marxist and defender of the Inca-religiosity, in his analysis of the Peruvian reality, knew the centrality of land ownership and fashioned from it a theory of liberation out of dependence.⁴¹ As was mentioned in the second chapter of this study, he broke away from Haya de la Torre's *Alianza Popular Latino Americano* because this political party which was inter-classist in approach did not take into consideration the peasants' worldview in their politics. Mariategui was more for the restoration of the *ayllus* in reverence for the Inca religious and social values.⁴²

Gutiérrez has sympathy for Mariategui's views in this regard. In *La fuerza histórica de los pobres*, he writes that "we have to take into consideration what Mariategui called the 'religious factor' in the life and history of the Peruvian people."⁴³ Concerning the preference of Gutiérrez for Mariategui's point of view, De Schrijver writes, "Gutiérrez . . . told me that, above all, he found inspiration to read history from the lowest

⁴⁰Gutiérrez focuses on this absence of God from the perspective of the native people in his review of Pedro Trigo's book, *Arguedas: mito, historia y religión*, Lima, 1982. In this review, Gutiérrez points out Trigo's perception of one of the main threads that link Arguedas' novels: the domination of the God of the poor by the God of the *Conquistadores*. Quoting from Arguedas' novel *Todas las sangres*, Gutiérrez writes: El Dios de los señores 'hace sufrir sin consuelo' (TS 404), el Dios inquisidor está ligado al azote, al 'escarmiento y a la muerte. 'Tu Dios, joven Hidalgo - dice agresivamente Rendón Willka - ¿cómo es? Dios de hacendados, de ingenieros, come-gente', estos devoran al pueblo y pretenden invocar a Dios: 'Contra de Dios! 'Contra de Dios', diciendo tranquilos matan gente" (TS 411) . . . Esto puede llevar a afirmar - desde el pobre - la no existencia de Dios: 'usted con lámina - le dice don Anatolio a don Fermín - hizo saber que Dios no hay para el pobre (TS 338). G. GUTIERREZ, *Entre las calandrias*, Lima, 1982, p. 271.

⁴¹J. C. MARIATEGUI, *Siete ensayos de la realidad Peruana*, Lima, 26th ed., 1973, pp. 42-85.

⁴²*Ibid.*, pp. 233-4.

⁴³G. GUTIERREZ, *La fuerza histórica de los pobres. Selección de trabajos*, Salamanca, 1982, p. 120. Translation is from *The Power of the Poor in History*, trans. R. Barr, New York, 1983, p. 97.

level of the population in the 'mythical' view of the people of the Andes as Mariategui had done."⁴⁴

The focus on the God of Life in Gutiérrez's talk about God is, therefore, not purely of biblical origin. As has been said, it is likewise rooted in Peruvian soul's thirst for life in a death-drenched situation of despoliation which characterize the *latifundia* and Peru's present-day *favela*.

2.2. *Where is God?*

Gutiérrez's point of departure on his reflection on the presence (or absence) of God is the pathetic lamentation of a Levite who has been exiled and barred from the Temple worship:

*I have no food but tears,
day and night;
and all day long men say to me,
Where is your God?*

*I remember, and my soul
melts within me:
I am on my way to the wonderful Tent,
to the house of God,
among cries of joy and praise
and an exultant throng.*

*Let me say to God my Rock,
'Why do you forget me?
Why must I walk so mournfully,
oppressed by the enemy?'*

*Nearly breaking my bones,
my oppressors insult me,
as all day long they ask me,
'Where is your God?' (Psalm 42:4-5; 10-11).*

The psalm, as Gutiérrez observes, exemplifies the fact that from the experience of grave suffering, a believer always faces the question

⁴⁴G. DE SCHRIJVER, "*Pachamama*," p. 235. The original is as follows: "Gutiérrez zei me dat hij vooral in de 'mysthische' kijk van de Andes-bevolking waarover ook Mariátegui het heeft, zijn inspiratie had gevonden om de geschiedenis vanuit het perspectief van de onderste lagen van de bevolking lezen."

'Where is God?'⁴⁵ It is, in fact, by reason of a person's belief that his wondering arises. "If they believed that God was neither good nor loving, nor powerful, then there would be no problem . . . The silence of God is hardest to bear for those who believe that the God of our faith is a living God and not like the 'gods' of whom the psalmist says: 'They have mouths, but do not speak.' (Ps. 115:5)."⁴⁶

'Where is God?' The answer that Jesus Christ gives to this question, according to Gutiérrez, is that God is in His Kingdom. And God's Kingdom is incarnated wherever God's will is carried out. Gutiérrez bases this insight on the words of the Our Father, 'Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven'. These two phrases are taken to mean that "the will of the Father is that the Kingdom will be realized." It can be recalled that at the beginning of this section on God-talk, it has been pointed out that Gutiérrez identifies God's revelation of Himself with the unfolding of His Will. The God of the Bible is, therefore, inseparable from His Will and from the fulfillment of that Will which makes possible the coming of the Kingdom. It is on this account that Gutiérrez claims that a God divorced from His Kingdom is a false god, a far cry from the God of Jesus Christ: "A god without a kingdom is a fetish, a work of our hands, a negation of the Lord because it is contrary to His designs."⁴⁷

Gutiérrez provides three examples of the absence of God with corresponding texts from scriptures to support them. These examples convey one theological meaning: God is absent because His Kingdom is not realized due to non-compliance of his Will. First of all, God can be absent in the *Temple*. Jeremiah 7:1-7 prophesies Yahweh's refusal to dwell in the Temple because the people of Israel do not treat each other fairly, exploit the stranger, the orphan and the widow, shed innocent blood and follow gods that they do not know. Only when they amend their ways, will Yahweh dwell in their sanctuary. According to Gutiérrez, in this passage, Jeremiah points out that "God is absent in the Temple because the nation did not build His Kingdom by not practicing justice."

⁴⁵G. GUTIERREZ, *El Dios de la vida*, pp. 44-45.

⁴⁶G. GUTIERREZ, *Hablar*, pp. 21-22 (*On Job*. p. xv).

⁴⁷G. GUTIERREZ, *El Dios de la vida*, pp. 45-46.

God can likewise be absent in *political and even religious authorities*. Micah 3:9-12 relates how princes loathed justice and perverted what was right, how priests and prophets accumulated money for their services, all thinking that Yahweh was in their midst. They said: "Is not Yahweh in our midst? No evil is going to overtake us" (Mic. 9:11). In this case, it is clear that God is used to justify and legitimize an unjust conduct. However Yahweh Himself, the prophet tells us, abandoned and punished Sion for the sin of its authorities who, instead of instructing and leading the people to faith in Yahweh, exploited them and used them for their (the authorities') purposes.

Finally, God is absent in *religious actions* (such as to prophesy, to exorcise demons, or perform miracles) if these actions are devoid of concrete love for the neighbor, the poor (Mt. 7:21-23). In fact, according to Gutiérrez, these religious actions, if they are wanting in authentic charity, could be acts of iniquity because "the omission of charity towards the poor is already a practice of evil."⁴⁸

If God is absent in the Temple because Temple-goers are unjust to the innocent, or in the authorities because they practice unjust conduct, or in religious actions because they are empty of charity to the underprivileged, how can God be present then? Where is God?

Gutiérrez begins his answer to this question by recognizing the presence of God in the "beauty, grandeur and harmony of the cosmos, in the exquisite majesty of the natural world." This aesthetic dimension of faith in God is considered by Gutiérrez to be of prime importance in that one cannot approach God without it. For the recognition of God's presence in the aesthetic universe opens human beings to contemplation, prayer and veneration of the Creator God. It allows the praying human to understand liturgical symbols taken from nature. Gutiérrez writes: "Every symbol used in the liturgy appeals to a natural reality: fire, water, bread, light . . . We have said that the presence of God demands an ethical determination. Now it is no less certain that to encounter God in contemplation implies an aesthetic dimension."⁴⁹

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 47-50.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 51. The original runs thus: "Todo símbolo empleado en la liturgia apela a una realidad natural: fuego, agua, pan, luz . . . Hemos dicho que la presencia de Dios exige una ética determinada: ahora bien, no es menos cierto que encontrar a Dios en la contemplación implica una estética."

History, for Gutiérrez, is another theophanic locus where God can disclose Himself. God is present in history and acts in history through the realization of His Kingdom by man. Now, this assertion gives rise to some mis-interpretations. Some authors tend to read Gutiérrez in such a way that the Kingdom of God is completely identified with or reduced to temporal progress. Andrew Kirk, for instance, writes:

Nevertheless, in discussing the relationship between man's responsibility for effecting change (temporal progress) and Christ's gift of salvation (the growth of Kingdom), Gutiérrez almost always opts for the first as the best explanation of the mystery of liberation in history. In this respect, he criticizes the Church's Social Encyclicals, because they 'block the question about the ultimate meaning of man's action in history.'⁵⁰

Of course, Kirk and most other authors, have limited themselves to the first works of Gutiérrez. Having missed *El Dios de la vida* (1981) and the more recent books of Gutiérrez, they are, indeed, liable to read Gutiérrez the way they did.⁵¹ However, contrary to authors who read him as identifying God's Kingdom with temporal progress, for Gutiérrez, the presence of God in history is not so "simple and obvious that one can go and search for his presence and find him rapidly, directly, and unequivocally." There is, in Gutiérrez's view, a dialectics between God's transcendence from and immanence in history.

These views of Gutiérrez on God's historical presence are, in fact, based on two correctives taken from the prophets. The first is that no historical place or occurrence is capable of fully containing God. Nobody can fix limits to God's presence and activity in the world.⁵² Being so, God

⁵⁰A. KIRK. *Liberation Theology: An Evangelical View From the Third World.*, p. 60. For other authors who criticize Gutiérrez in this regard, CF. P. LeMASTERS, *A Critical Analysis of Walter Rauschenbusch and Gustavo Gutiérrez' Respective Uses of the Kingdom of God as a Normative Symbol for Theological Ethics*, Houston, Texas, May 1987, pp. 127-155.

⁵¹Kirk's book was published in 1979, *El Dios de la vida* came out in 1981.

⁵²Gutiérrez writes: "Así en el momento mismo en que el pueblo judío, tras recordar la presencia del Señor en el monte y la experiencia de su compañía en el desierto, construye un templo, un lugar fijo para fijar la habitación de Dios, los profetas ampliarán el horizonte. Ante el hermoso templo de cedro de Libano, los profetas replicarán que la morada de Dios son los cielos. 'Oye pues, la plegaria de tu siervo, y de tu pueblo Israel cuando oren en este lugar. Escucha tú desde el lugar de tu morada, desde el cielo, escucha y perdona' (Rey 8:30)." *El Dios de la vida*, p. 54.

cannot be manipulated for He is the master of truth and freedom. The second corrective, taken from Isaiah 45:15, avers that although God is self-disclosed at the heart of history, His presence there is given in a hidden form:

God often performs his deed of justice, of liberation, of salvation in a hidden way . . . God is within human history, yes, in its tensions, advances, and conflicts. But to find God, you have to look, you have to search. This search is a deep spiritual theme in any treatment of the journey to God, any reflection on unprecedented modes of access to this hidden God whose salvific work more often than not travels ways that are not our ways, as we read in Isaiah (55.8).⁵³

The foregoing correctives, according to Gutiérrez, are still applicable even if one takes into account the fact of the Incarnation. Indeed, it would be wrong to say that God is not fully contained in Jesus Christ. But the first corrective is relevant to Christ's prolongation of his presence in history through Christians who are incorporated by baptism to His own body. The 'ecclesia', the Body of Christ, which journeys in history cannot fully contain the parameters of God's presence in the world on account of the 'parousia'. The 'parousia', being the 'plenitude of the presence of God in history, and of history in God'⁵⁴, discredits any pretensions to the definitive capture of God's presence in the world. Belief in the 'parousia' brings with it the realization that to be a Church is to be on a journey, to draw an itinerary, to embark on a march towards the fulfillment of the promise.

The second corrective - the hiddenness of God - can be applied likewise to the Incarnation as an Epiphany of God. For God, in becoming man, chose to rise out of a margined people, a nation which was insignificant compared to the powers of that time. And within this people, the Lord chose to come from and live with the 'little ones', the poor, in order to inaugurate the Kingdom of love and justice. Alluding to Mt. 25, Gutiérrez declares:

⁵³*Ibid.*, 54-55. The original is as follows: "Dios lleva a cabo muchas veces su obra de justicia, de liberación, de salvación de un modo oculto . . . Dios está en la historia humana, en sus tensiones, logros y conflictos, pero encontrarlo supone una búsqueda. La búsqueda es un profundo tema espiritual en todo tratamiento del itinerario para llegar a Dios, en toda reflexión sobre las vías, siempre inéditas, para acceder a ese oculto Dios, cuya obra salvífica discurre las más de las veces por caminos como se dice en Isaías (55:8)."

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, p. 56.

The God hidden in Jesus Christ is a hidden God - second corrective-precisely in the measure that he makes himself present through those who are absent in history, through those who are not dominators, not the great ones, not the well-esteemed, not the wise and the understanding. This situation of smallness and hiddenness is emphasized in the revelation of God through the poor.⁵⁵

With the acceptance of the fact that it is impossible to limit God to a certain place or occurrence and that His self-revelation is done with 'hiddenness', it is beyond Gutiérrez's intention to identify the Kingdom of God with temporal progress. Since, in spite of the presence of God in worldly affairs, He cannot be fully captured in them and that something of Him always remains hidden, one can say that God maintains His transcendence. By reason of this ever-transcending character of the divine reality, Gutiérrez remarks that "to believe in God is always to believe in the possibility of something new."⁵⁶

Based on the foregoing concept of the Kingdom of God as the realization or fulfillment of God's Will, Gutiérrez draws the ethical dimension of his theology:

The behavior, the practical norms of conduct, the morals which correspond to the Kingdom is 'to do the will of the Father'. This is the ethics of the Kingdom, this is to welcome the Kingdom of God. And, inasmuch as God is love, the origin of all, Father, life, the ethics of the Kingdom is to give life and not death.⁵⁷

To give life is, in fact, for Gutiérrez, to do justice. He presents this in a negative way by pointing out that to violate the rights of the poor,

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. 57. The original is as follows: "El Dios que se encarna en Jesucristo es un Dios Oculto - segundo correctivo - precisamente en la medida en que se hace presente a partir de los ausentes de la historia de aquellos que no son los dominadores, los grandes, los bien vistos, 'los sabios y prudentes'. Esta situación de pequeñez y ocultamiento está subrayada en la revelación de Dios a través del pobre".

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, p. 60. The original is as follows: "Creer en Dios es siempre creer en la posibilidad de algo nuevo."

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, p. 61. The original runs thus: "El comportamiento, las normas prácticas de conducta, la moral que corresponde al Reino es 'hacer la voluntad del Padre'. Esa es la ética del Reino, es acoger el Reino de Dios. Y puesto que Dios es amor, origen de todo, Padre, vida, la ética del Reino es dar vida y no muerte."

withhold their wages, or deny them their work is biblically to shed innocent blood. Gutiérrez bases this claim on Ecclesiasticus 34:20-22: "Offering sacrifice from the property of the poor is as bad as slaughtering a son before his father's very eyes. A meagre diet is the very life of the poor, he who withholds it is a man of blood. A man murders his neighbor if he robs him of his livelihood, sheds blood if he withholds an employee's wages."⁵⁸

2.3 *How do we speak of God?*

It has already been pointed out that spirituality, for Gutiérrez, is the well-spring of God-talk or theology. Now, since spirituality consists in the twin elements of prophecy (practice of solidarity with the poor) and contemplation (prayerful openness to God's gratuitous love), theology as speech would also involve the twofold languages of prophecy and contemplation. These two languages has been expounded by Gutiérrez in his analysis of the Book of Job.

Hablar de Dios desde el sufrimiento del inocente: una reflexión sobre el libro de Job (1986) deals with the problematic of how to speak of God in the midst of suffering. An upright man living a prosperous, happy life, Job is suddenly reduced to ruins. How will he speak of God in the midst of his wretchedness? Will he curse and reject God? Aware of his innocence, Job complains to God and demands that God talked to him. His friends comfort him and finally God Himself dialogues with him. In the course of the conversations, Job discovers the correct way of talking about God through the language of prophecy and contemplation. In the words of Gutiérrez:

Two major shifts of viewpoint take place in Job's way of speaking as he tormentedly rejects the doctrine of retribution in the light of his personal experience. The first occurs when, at the instigation of his friends, he broadens his perspective, abandons his initial narrow position, and realizes that the issue here is not simply the suffering of one individual. The real issue, he sees, is the suffering and injustice that mark the lives of the poor. Those who believe in God must therefore try to lighten the burden of the poor by helping

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 61-62.

them and practicing solidarity with them. The speeches of God occasion the second shift: Job now understands that the world of justice must be located within the broad but demanding horizon of freedom that is formed by the gratuitousness of God's love.⁵⁹

Job's friends keep on insisting to him that misery is a consequence of sin in view of the principle that God punishes the wicked and rewards the upright. But Job, speaking from his own experience, knows that he does not deserve the torments he is suffering. In their different views of the same phenomena of the suffering of the innocent, Job and his friends display two theological methods. Eliphaz and his companions take a specific doctrinal principle (the doctrine of retribution) and apply them to Job's situation. They feel competent and convinced of their teaching unaware that it is empty of meaning as far as the actual suffering persons are concerned. Job is also confident, not of a doctrine but of his own experience of life. Over and against the abstract theology of his friends, Job sets his own experience and tries to understand the action of God on its basis.⁶⁰

Job's dialogue with his friends brings him to a realization that he is not the only one to experience the pain of unjust suffering. There are many in the world who, instead of living, die by the roadside, deprived of the land that was meant to support them. Furthermore, Job sees that this wretchedness of the poor is not something fated but is the result of the exploitation by the wicked who nonetheless live serene and abundant lives. In a deeper twist, Job's conversation with his friends "led him to understand that innocence is not a matter simply to individual uprightness. It is rather a question above all of one's behavior to the poor, who are especially loved by the Lord."⁶¹ By helping to free the poor rise from the quagmire of their downtroddenness, Job has spoken well of God. As Gutiérrez remarks:

⁵⁹G. GUTIERREZ, *Hablar*, p. 65 (On Job, p. 16). For a concise summary of Gutiérrez's *On Job*, see S. RAYAN, "Wrestling in the Night" in H. ELLIS and O. MADURO, (eds.), *The Future of Liberation Theology*, New York, 1989, pp. 451-454.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 82-9 (On Job, pp. 28-29).

⁶¹*Ibid.*, p. 105 (On Job, p. 39).

Job next calls to mind his own actions in this (solidarity with the poor) area. By means of them he had been able to speak of God. Now that he is sharing the lot of the poor in his own flesh, his talk of God becomes more profound and truthful. The point is that commitment to the poor provides firm ground for prophetic talk of God. The prophets repeatedly stress the importance of fidelity to the covenant. When they deal so sternly with the sins of their people, they are speaking in place of God. . . . At the same time, in their discourse, they talk primarily about God.⁶²

Prophetic talk about God, therefore, is a language that speaks of God through commitment to the sorry lot of the exploited of the earth. It speaks of God inasmuch as it incarnates the Will of God to liberate the poor by actually fulfilling that Will and thus establish the reign of God. However, prophetic talk is not enough. It has to be complemented by the language of contemplation.

Job's contemplative language, although already present in his strong faith in the lordship of God (Yahweh gave, Yahweh has taken back <Job 1:21>) manifested at the beginning of the book, was even deepened in the course of his conversation with God. Job came to realize the *plan* of God, which unfolds and gives meaning to God's creative work (Job 38-39) and God's *just government of the world* (Job 4:7-41). Likewise, Job's eyes, Gutiérrez writes, were opened to the fact that God acts in gratuitousness, in freedom:

What God is criticizing here is every theology that presumes to pigeonhole the divine action in history and gives the illusory impression of knowing it in advance. The outlook God is rejecting is obviously the one that Job's theologian friends defend and, despite himself, Job shares at bottom. God will bring him to see that nothing, not even the world of justice, can shackle God . . .⁶³

The recognition of God's plan for and just government of the world and the acknowledgment that He acts in gratuitousness makes it difficult and even impossible to uncover comprehensively the reasons for God's action, so as to be able to foresee it and, as it were, manage it. Contemplative language is, therefore, an expression of a prayerful

⁶²*Ibid.*, pp. 121-2 (*On Job*, p. 48).

⁶³*Ibid.*, p. 161 (*On Job*, p. 72).

openness to the unfathomable depth of God's plans and a constant faith in His just government of the world which He carries out in complete gratuitousness. The gratuitousness of God's love is important for faith and ethical life inasmuch as it is the framework within which the demand for practicing justice is to be situated. Quoting St. Paul, Gutiérrez explains:

This is an essential point of our faith; it is present everywhere in the Bible, and the book of Job only emphasizes it in an extraordinarily forceful way. Human works as such do not justify, they do not save. St. Paul says, in light of the revelation given in Jesus Christ, that human work cannot tie God's hands. This is the point of his statement about 'justification by faith' (Rom 3:28). The faith that saves is itself a grace from the Lord. Entrance into the Kingdom of God is not a right to be won, not even by the practice of justice; it is always a freely given gift. "By grace you have been saved," he tells the Ephesians (2:5).⁶⁴

Gutiérrez, however, does not imply that God does not ask for a certain kind of behavior from human beings. He writes, "the reign of God makes the ethical demand that every believer practice justice, but this demand is not in any way inconsistent with the free and unmerited initiative of God. On the contrary, it acquires its full scope and vitality only when located within this gratuitousness."⁶⁵ It seems that by the preceding statement, Gutiérrez wants to point out that man's ethical behavior must also be gratuitously offered in response to the free offer of God's love in a joyous encounter between two freedoms: God's and that of the human being.⁶⁶ There is, therefore, an inherent link between prophecy and contemplation in the thinking of Gutiérrez. Thus, the practice of justice and solidarity with the poor must not grow into an obsession that lose sight of the fact that such commitment "reveals its value and ultimate meaning only within the vast and mysterious horizon of God's gratuitous love."

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 195-6 (*On Job*, p. 89).

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, p. 197 (*On Job*, p. 90).

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 151-78 (*On Job*, pp. 67-81).

At this point it is important to emphasize that as early as *Teología de la liberación* Gutiérrez acknowledged the element of gratuitousness in liberation theology. He expressed this when he wrote that "the Kingdom is above all a gift."⁶⁷ To accuse Gutiérrez of reductionism or as denying transcendence is, thus, to misinterpret the true content of his theology. Gutiérrez himself writes:

Despite reductionist interpretations that try to deny the fact, this conviction has been part of the theology of liberation from the beginning and has always fed the spirituality that animates this theology. The theme of the gratuitousness of divine love is, therefore, the point of reference for determining the ultimate meaning of the emphasis on the practice of justice.⁶⁸

Gutiérrez sees the importance of both languages in any God-talk. The prophetic dimension is important for the language of contemplation to spare it the 'danger of having no grip on the history in which God acts and in which we meet God.' On the other hand, the mystical dimension nourishes the language of prophecy by saving it from narrowing its vision and weakening its perception of the God who makes all things new.⁶⁹

⁶⁷G. GUTIERREZ, *TdL*, p. 229 (*TL*, p. 177) "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."

⁶⁸G. GUTIERREZ, *Hablar*, p. 209 (*On Job*, p. 129, n. 4).

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p. 210 (*On Job*, p. 96).