

GUSTAVO GUTIÉRREZ

Essential Writings

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Three

THEOLOGICAL AXIS: THE GRATUITOUSNESS AND EXIGENCE OF LOVE

The central axis of Gutiérrez's entire theology is the gratuitous yet demanding, universal yet preferential, love of God. The richness and complexity of these dialectical pairs are the source of the originality, profundity, and potency of Gutiérrez's understanding of God, humanity, salvation, Jesus Christ, and the church. Texts that deal with the second pair (the universality and preference of divine love) are found in Chapter Two of this volume. The selections in Chapter Three illustrate the evolution and the continuity of Gutiérrez's views on grace.

At bottom Gutiérrez believes that the free gift of God's love, made concrete above all in the gift of life, may awaken a sense of gratitude in the one who accepts it. Gratitude, however, does not stop at contemplating the gift; thankfulness gives rise to the desire to love in return. Here is the source of the "demand" to love, especially through life-giving acts. The exigency to which Gutiérrez refers, then, is interior to love; that is, it comes from love, and cannot be commanded from without, even by God. In this framework, to say that love makes demands on those who receive it as a free gift does not erase its gratuitous character. Gratuitousness and exigency together typify love; each implies the other.

21. CONVERSION TO THE NEIGHBOR

While joining many others in asserting the unity of love of God and love of neighbor, Gutiérrez also saw as few others did in the first years after the Council a further inescapable consequence of God's identification with humankind. Thanks in no small measure to his work, it has now become difficult to overlook the fact that the neighbor who most mediates the presence of God is "not the one whom I find in my path, but rather the one in whose path I place myself." As Gutiérrez's extended commentary on the parables of the last judgment (Matt. 25:31-46) and good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37) makes clear, "neighbor" denotes in particular the wounded or needy. Taken from Theology of Liberation (110-16), the following text is an expansion of a 1966 article called "Caridad y amor humano" ("Charity and Human Love") in which

Gutiérrez joined European theologians in asserting the primacy of love in Christian life and therefore in theology. The text below sets the stage for the later development of the notion of the preferential option for the poor. Here we can already see how our option for the poor must be based on God's prior choice of the needy with its twofold purpose: their rescue and our conversion. The term "conversion" suggests the difficulty that privileged persons may have in genuinely "turning to" (that is, recognizing, identifying with, and standing alongside) their abused or neglected neighbors.

The modes of God's presence determine the forms of our encounter with God. If humanity, each person, is the living temple of God, we meet God in our encounter with others; we encounter God in the commitment to the historical becoming of humankind.

TO KNOW GOD IS TO DO JUSTICE

The Old Testament is clear regarding the close relationship between God and the neighbor. This relationship is a distinguishing characteristic of the God of the Bible. To despise one's neighbor (Prov. 14:21), to exploit the humble and poor worker, and to delay the payment of wages, is to offend God: "You shall not keep back the wages of a man who is poor and needy, whether a fellow-countryman or an alien living in your country in one of your settlements. Pay him his wages on the same day before sunset, for he is poor and his heart is set on them: he may appeal to the Lord against you, and you will be guilty of sin" (Deut. 24:14–15; cf. Exod. 22:21–23). This explains why "a man who sneers at the poor insults his maker" (Prov. 17:5).

Inversely, to know, that is to say, to love Yahweh is to do justice to the poor and oppressed. When Jeremiah proclaimed the New Covenant, after asserting that Yahweh would inscribe the law in the hearts of human beings, Jeremiah said: "No longer need they teach one another to know the Lord; all of them, high and low alike, shall know me" (31:34). But Jeremiah advises us exactly on what knowing God entails:

Shame on the man who builds his house by unjust means, and completes its roof-chambers by fraud, making his countrymen work without payment, giving them no wage for their labor! Shame on the man who says, "I will build a spacious house with airy roof-chambers, set windows in it, panel it with cedar, and paint it with vermilion"! If your cedar is more splendid, does that prove you are a king? Think of your father: he ate and drank, dealt justly and fairly; all went well with him. He dispensed justice to the cause of the lowly and poor; did this not show he knew me? says the Lord (22:13–16).

Where there is justice and righteousness, there is knowledge of Yahweh; when these are lacking, it is absent: "There is no good faith or mutual trust, no knowledge of God in the land, oaths are imposed and broken, they kill and rob;

there is nothing but adultery and license, one deed of blood after another" (Hos. 4:1–2; cf. Isa. 1). To know Yahweh, which in biblical language is equivalent to saying to love Yahweh, is to establish just relationships among persons, it is to recognize the rights of the poor. The God of biblical revelation is known through interhuman justice. When justice does not exist, God is not known; God is absent. Medellín asserts: "Where this social peace does not exist there will we find social, political, economic, and cultural inequalities, there will we find the rejection of the peace of the Lord, and a rejection of the Lord himself" (*Peace* §14).

On the other hand, if justice is done, if the alien, the orphan, and the widow are not oppressed, "[t]hen I will let you live in this place, in the land which I gave long ago to your forefathers for all time" (Jer. 7:7). This presence of Yahweh is active; Yahweh "deals out justice to the oppressed. The Lord feeds the hungry and sets the prisoner free. The Lord restores sight to the blind and straightens backs which are bent; the Lord loves the righteous and watches over the stranger; the Lord gives heart to the orphan and widow but turns the course of the wicked to their ruin." So "the Lord shall reign forever" (Ps. 146:7–10).

This encounter with God in concrete actions toward others, especially the poor, is so profound and enriching that by basing themselves on it the prophets can criticize—always validly—all purely external worship. This criticism is but another aspect of the concern for asserting the transcendence and universality of Yahweh. "Your countless sacrifices, what are they to me? says the Lord; I am sated with whole offerings of rams. . . . The offer of your gifts is useless, the reek of sacrifice is abhorrent to me. . . . Though you offer countless prayers, I will not listen. There is blood on your hands. . . . Cease to do evil and learn to do right, pursue justice and champion the oppressed; give the orphan his rights, plead the widow's cause" (Isa. 1:10–17). We love God by loving our neighbor: "Is not this what I require of you as a fast: to loose the fetters of injustice, to untie the knots of the yoke, to snap every yoke and set free those who have been crushed? Is it not sharing your food with the hungry, taking the homeless poor into your house, clothing the naked when you meet them and never evading a duty to your kinsfolk?" (Isa. 58:6–7). Only then will God be with us, only then will God hear our prayer and will we be pleasing to God (Isa. 58:9–11). God wants justice, not sacrifices. Emphasizing the bond between the knowledge of God and interhuman justice, Hosea tells us that Yahweh wishes knowledge and not holocausts: "O Ephraim, how shall I deal with you? How shall I deal with you, Judah? Your loyalty to me is like the morning mist, like dew that vanishes early. Therefore have I lashed you through the prophets and torn you to shreds with my words; loyalty is my desire, not sacrifice, not whole-offerings but the knowledge of God" (Hos. 6:4–6).

Although it is true that in the texts cited the neighbor is essentially a mem-

ber of the Jewish community, the references to aliens, who together with widows and orphans form a classic trilogy, indicate an effort to transcend these limitations. Nevertheless, the bond between the neighbor and God is changed, deepened, and universalized by the Incarnation of the Word. The famous text so often quoted in recent years, Matt. 25:31–45, is a very good illustration of this twofold process.

CHRIST IN THE NEIGHBOR

The parable of the final judgment, which concludes Matthew's eschatological discourse, seems to many to summarize the essence of the gospel message. Exegetes are alarmed by the way that many theologians use this text and by the consequences which have been deduced for Christian life. Various recent studies have attempted to deal with these new questions; they have not, however, delved into the basic problems. There are many factors involved in the reevaluation of the text. It is fertile soil for research by exegetes and theologians.

Jean-Claude Ingelaere, author of the most extensive and detailed of the studies made along these lines, observes that this pericope poses two fundamental questions: who are the nations judged by the Son of God and who are "the least of the brethren" of the Son of man? In relation to these two questions, Ingelaere distinguishes three lines of interpretation of this text which have developed to date: some believe that this is a judgment of all persons—Christians and non-Christians—according to their love of neighbor, and particularly of the needy; others see in this a judgment of Christians with regard to their behavior toward the disadvantaged members of the Christian community itself (Origen, Luther); and finally, a minority believe it refers to the judgment of pagans based on their attitude toward Christians. The author obviously opts for the third interpretation. Although the work is thorough and well documented, it is less than convincing. The two restrictions involved in this third exegesis—although they do easily resolve various minor questions (for example, the failure to recognize Christ implied in the question, "When did we see you hungry?" etc.)—go against the obvious sense of the text and the context, which stress the universality of the judgment and the central and universal character of charity. This is actually an attempt to revive an old thesis of H. J. Holtzmann, hardly mentioned by Ingelaere, which M. J. Lagrange, based on Loisy, Weiss, and Wellhausen, characterized as "strangely illogical." The majority of the exegetes opt for what Ingelaere considers the first interpretation. The henotheistic expression "all nations" (v. 32) is considered to have a "clearly universal sense." According to Mühlen, it includes "not the pagans as distinguished from the Jews and the Christians, but in fact all persons: pagans, Jews, and Christians. On the other hand, there is also a general consensus regarding the universality of the content of the expression: "the least of my brethren" (v. 40). This term designates "all the needy, whoever they may be, and not only Christians."

This is the line of thinking we will follow. The passage is rich in teachings. Basing our study on it and in line with the subject which interests us, we wish to emphasize three points: the stress on communion and fellowship as the ultimate meaning of human life; the insistence on a love which is manifested in concrete actions, with "doing" being favored over simple "knowing"; and the revelation of the human mediation necessary to reach the Lord.

The human person is destined to total communion with God and to the fullest fellowship with all other persons. "Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God. Everyone who loves is a child of God and knows God, but the unloving know nothing of God. For God is love" (1 John 4:7–8). This was Christ's revelation. To be saved is to reach the fullness of love; it is to enter into the circle of charity which unites the three persons of the Trinity; it is to love as God loves. The way to this fullness of love can be no other than love itself, the way of participation in this charity, the way of accepting, explicitly or implicitly, to say with the Spirit: "Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:6). Acceptance is the foundation of all communion among human persons. To sin is to refuse to love, to reject communion and fellowship, to reject even now the very meaning of human existence. Matthew's text is demanding: "Anything you did not do for one of these, however humble, you did not do for me" (25:45). To abstain from serving is to refuse to love; to fail to act for another is as culpable as expressly refusing to do it. This same idea is found later in John: "The man who does not love is still in the realm of death" (1 John 3:14). The parable of the Good Samaritan ends with the famous inversion which Christ makes of the original question. They asked him, "Who is my neighbor?" and when everything seemed to point to the wounded man in the ditch on the side of the road, Christ asked, "Which of these three do you think was neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" (Luke 10:29, 36). The neighbor was the Samaritan who *approached* the wounded man and *made him his neighbor*. The neighbor, as has been said, is not the one whom I find in my path, but rather the one in whose path I place myself, the one whom I approach and actively seek. The other aspects of the Christian life become meaningful if they are animated by charity otherwise, in Paul's words, they simply are empty actions (cf. 1 Cor. 13). This is why Matthew's text says we will be definitively judged by our love for others, by our capacity to create comradely conditions of life. From a prophetic viewpoint the judgment ("crisis") will be based, according to Matthew, on the new ethics arising from this universal principle of love.

But this charity exists only in concrete actions (feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, etc.); it occurs of necessity in the fabric of relationships among persons. "Faith divorced from deeds is barren" (James 2:20). To know God is to do justice: "If you know that he is righteous, you must recognize that every man who does right is his child" (1 John 2:29). But charity does not exist alongside or above human loves; it is not "the most sublime" human achieve-

ment like a grace superimposed upon human love. Charity is God's love in us and does not exist outside our human capabilities to love and to build a just and friendly world, to "establish ties" as Saint-Exupéry says. "But if a man has enough to live on, and yet when he sees his brother in need shuts up his heart against him, how can it be said that the divine love dwells in him? My children, love must not be a matter of words or talk; it must be genuine and show itself in action" (1 John 3:17-18). Loving us as a human, Christ reveals to us the Father's love. Charity, the love of God for human beings, is found incarnated in human love—of parents, spouses, children, friends—and it leads to its fullness. The Samaritan approached the injured man on the side of the road not because of some cold religious obligation, but because "his heart was melting" (this is literally what the verb *splanchnizein* means in Luke 10:33; cf. Luke 1:7, 8; 7:13; 15:20), because his love for that man was made flesh in him. . . .

We turn to the third idea we wished to consider in connection with this text of Matthew: human mediation to reach God. It is not enough to say that love of God is inseparable from the love of one's neighbor. It must be added that love for God is unavoidably expressed *through* love of one's neighbor. Moreover, God is loved in the neighbor: "But if a man says, 'I love God,' while hating his brother, he is a liar. If he does not love the brother whom he has seen, it cannot be that he loves God whom he has not seen" (1 John 4:20). To love one's brother, to love all persons, is a necessary and indispensable mediation of the love of God; it is to love God: "You did it for me. . . . you did not do it for me." In his perceptive homily at the closing of the Council, Paul VI commented on Matthew's text saying that "a knowledge of humankind is a prerequisite for a knowledge of God"; and he summarized the objective of the Council as "a pressing and friendly invitation to humankind of today to rediscover in fraternal love the God [to use the words of St. Augustine] 'to turn away from Whom is to fall, to turn to Whom is to rise again, to remain in Whom is to be secure, to return to Whom is to be born again, in Whom to dwell is to live.'" . . .

But really this conclusion is valid not only for Christians, but for all persons who, in one way or another, welcome the Word of the Lord into their heart. God's presence in humanity, in each person, which is expressed, for example, in the idea of the temple mentioned above, seems to us more fruitful and richer in ramifications. It is in the temple that we find God, but in a temple of living stones, of closely related persons, who together make history and fashion themselves. God is revealed in history, and it is likewise in history that persons encounter the Word made flesh. Christ is not a private individual; the bond which links him to all persons gives him a unique historical role. God's temple is human history; the "sacred" transcends the narrow limits of the places of worship. We find the Lord in our encounters with others, especially the poor, marginalized, and exploited ones. An act of love toward them is an act of love toward God. This is why Yves Congar speaks of "the sacrament of our neighbor," who

as a visible reality reveals to us and allows us to welcome the Lord: "But there is one thing that is privileged to be a paradoxical sign of God, in relation to which men are able to manifest their deepest commitment—our Neighbor. The sacrament of our Neighbor!"

Nevertheless, the neighbor is not an occasion, an instrument, for becoming closer to God. We are dealing with a real love of persons for their own sake and not "for the love of God," as the well-intended but ambiguous and ill-used cliché would have it—ambiguous and ill-used because many seem to interpret it in a sense which forgets that the love for God is expressed in a true love for persons themselves. This is the only way to have a true encounter with God. That my action toward another is at the same time an action toward God does not detract from its truth and concreteness, but rather gives it even greater meaning and import.

It is also necessary to avoid the pitfalls of an individualistic charity. As has been insisted in recent years, the neighbor is not only a person viewed individually. The term refers also to a person considered in the fabric of social relationships, to a person situated in economic, social, cultural, and racial coordinates. It likewise refers to the exploited social class, the dominated people, the marginalized. The masses are also our neighbor as M.-D. Chenu asserts. This point of view leads us far beyond the individualistic language of the I-Thou relationship. Charity is today a "political charity," according to the phrase of Pius XII. Indeed, to offer food or drink in our day is a political action; it means the transformation of a society structured to benefit a few who appropriate to themselves the value of the work of others. This transformation ought to be directed toward a radical change in the foundation of society, that is, the private ownership of the means of production.

Our encounter with the Lord occurs in our encounter with others, especially in the encounter with those whose human features have been disfigured by oppression, despoliation, and alienation and who have "no beauty, no majesty" but are the things "from which men turn away their eyes" (Isa. 53:2-3). These are the marginal groups, who have fashioned a true culture for themselves and whose values one must understand if one wishes to reach them. The salvation of humanity passes through them; they are the bearers of the meaning of history and "inherit the kingdom" (James 2:5). Our attitude toward them, or rather our commitment to them, will indicate whether or not we are directing our existence in conformity with the will of the Father. This is what Christ reveals to us by identifying himself with the poor in the text of Matthew. A theology of the neighbor, which has yet to be worked out, would have to be structured on this basis.

22. FREEDOM AS A GIFT AND TASK AT PUEBLA

Freedom, like the love it makes possible, is understood by Gutiérrez as both a gift and a task. While the theology of Vatican II largely moved beyond an earlier view of Christian discipleship as a straightforward matter of obedience to divine authority, the Council favored the language of moral exhortation, which continues to understand authority in extrinsicist terms. In Gutiérrez's formulation of the theology of liberation, the human task arises out of profound gratitude for God's freely given gifts (freedom and love). In this framework human beings accept God's gift precisely in dedicating themselves to others, especially the most vulnerable. Thus, Gutiérrez insists on the purpose for which God frees us, namely to love (and not simply to be able to obey divine commands). In this paradigm, then, Christian life is understood as both gift and task, the unity of which originates in the very gratuitousness of God's love. Such a dialectic forms the central axis of nearly all of Gutiérrez's writings, including the following passage from his 1979 commentary on the results of the Puebla conference, "Pobres y liberación en Puebla." The English translation (revised here) is found in Power of the Poor, 145–48.

Medellín had spoken of the muffled cry for liberation of millions of Latin Americans (*Poverty* §2). Puebla asserts that, ten years later, things have changed: "The cry might well have seemed muffled back then. Today it is loud and clear, increasing in volume and intensity, and at times full of menace" (§89).

Puebla recognizes that the yearning for liberation in Latin America has become even more urgent and demanding than before. In his addresses in Santo Domingo and Mexico [in 1979], the pope had already spoken in this vein more than once, and now Puebla takes up the theme—frequently employing the adjective "integral." Hence it is important to see what Puebla means by "integral." One text is especially worthy of note. It expatiates on the integral character of true liberation, and makes some important precisions. This passage, part of the contribution of the Commission on Human Dignity, is so long (§§321–29) that we can cite only a few extracts, paraphrasing and condensing the rest.

After asserting that freedom is a gift and a task, which "cannot be truly achieved without integral liberation (John 8:36)," and which "in a real sense . . . is the goal of human beings, according to our faith," Puebla cites a text from St. Paul that has played an important role in our thinking about liberation—Galatians 5:1. The apostle says, "When Christ freed us, he meant us to remain free" (§321). Puebla goes on to say that to turn the establishment of community and of active participation (rooted in freedom understood as the capacity to take charge of ourselves) into definitive realities is something which must be done "on three inseparable planes: our relationship to the world as its master, to other persons as brothers or sisters, and to God as God's children" (§322). There follows a detailed presentation of these three planes (§§323–25). Finally, their intimate links with one another are expounded, as based upon a profound unity:

Through the indissoluble unity of these three planes, the exigencies of communion and participation flowing from human dignity appear more clearly. If our freedom is fully realized on the transcendent plane by our faithful and filial acceptance of God, then we enter into loving communion with the divine mystery and share its very life (*Gaudium et spes*, 18). The opposite alternative is to break with filial love, to reject and despise the Father. These are the two extreme possibilities, which Christian revelation calls grace and sin respectively. But these two possibilities do not occur without simultaneously reaching the other two planes. This has enormous consequences for human dignity [§326].

The last two points are an effort to identify the relationship between the third plane—one's relationship with God—and the other two: the relationship among persons and the relationship between persons and the material world (§323). The link between the third and second planes will be "first and foremost a labor of justice":

The love of God, which is the root of our dignity, necessarily becomes loving communion with other human beings and fraternal participation. For us today it must become first and foremost a labor of justice on behalf of the oppressed. The fact is that "one who has no love for the brother he has seen cannot love the God he has not seen" (1 John 4:20) [§327].

This "labor of justice," then, means the effort of liberation. The link with the first plane is expressed in a transformation of the material world with a view to the construction of a just lordship there—one that will consist in a true communion of sisters and brothers:

Authentic communion and participation can exist in this life only if they are projected on to the very concrete plane of temporal realities, so that mastery, use, and transformation of the goods of this earth and those of culture, science, and technology find embodiment in humanity's just and fraternal lordship over the world—which would include respect for ecology [§327].

Next, the document reaffirms the inseparability of the planes, following the schema of grace and sin indicated above. First, grace; the document sets forth the concrete social and historical demands of the love of God, of friendship with God:

Confronted with the realities that are part of our lives today, we must learn from the gospel that in Latin America we cannot truly love our fellow human beings, and hence God, unless we commit ourselves on the personal level, and in many cases on the structural level as well, to serving and promoting the most dispossessed and downtrodden human groups and social classes, with all the consequences that will entail on the plane of temporal realities [§327].

There is no love for God without love for one's brothers and sisters, particularly those who are most poor, and this means—the document could not be

clearer—a commitment on the level of social structures, “with all the consequences that will entail on the plane of temporal realities.”

Now the document looks at what happens in the other half of the schema: sin. Of course the picture just presented is only reinforced. The concrete, historical consequences of sin—breach of friendship with God—are inevitable:

Sinfulness on the personal level, the break with God that debases the human being, is always mirrored on the level of interpersonal relations in a corresponding egotism, haughtiness, ambition, and envy. These traits produce injustice, domination, violence at every level, and conflicts between individuals, groups, social classes, and peoples. They also produce corruption, hedonism, aggravated sexuality, and superficiality in mutual relations (cf. Gal. 5:19–21) [§328].

All this is a description of the creation of a situation of sin, a notion that, as we have already mentioned, was central in Medellín and which Puebla here takes up again with greater force and insistence: “Thus they establish sinful situations which, at the worldwide level, enslave countless human beings and adversely affect the freedom of all” (§328).

Sin, the breach with God, is not something that occurs only within some intimate sanctuary of the heart. It “always” moves into interpersonal relationships, the document says, and hence is the ultimate root of all injustice and oppression—as well as of the social confrontations and conflicts of concrete history, whose existence among us the document makes no attempt to sidestep.

This is how far one must go if one wishes to grasp the meaning of Christ’s liberation and all its implications. As Medellín says, in a now familiar passage:

It is the same God who, in the fullness of time, sends his Son in the flesh, so that he might come to liberate all people from the slavery to which sin has subjected them: hunger, misery, oppression and ignorance, in a word, that injustice and hatred which have their origin in human selfishness [Justice §3].

Puebla takes up the same idea, in the conclusion of this long passage on manner of understanding the expression “integral liberation”—and reasserts from this viewpoint the inseparability of the three planes that have now been so carefully expounded:

It is from this sin, sin as the destroyer of human dignity, that we all must be liberated. We are liberated by our participation in the new life brought to us by Jesus Christ, and by communion with him in the mystery of his death and resurrection. But this is true only on the condition that we live out this mystery on the three planes described above, without focusing exclusively on any one of them. Only in this way will we avoid reducing the mystery to the verticalism of a disembodied spiritual union with God, to the mere existential personalism of individual or small-group ties, or to one or another form of social, economic, or political horizontalism (John Paul II, Opening Address at Puebla, III, 6) [§329].

Puebla has the perspicacity to insist on the pope’s integral focus—which condemns not only horizontal reductionism (the shibboleth of the polemicists) but the vertical as well, so frequently passed over in silence.

The passage is crystal clear. And the precision of its language recaptures the best of Latin American reflection on the point at issue. Puebla does not fall prey to the terrorist attitudes of those who undertake to ignore the complex, rich meaning of the term “liberation” as it has been used during recent years—years of increasing commitment, in the form of Christian practice and reflection, to the struggles of an exploited community of believers to build a humane and just society. Their communion with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, at the heart of this battle, is the magnificent witness of this people during these years.

To live the love of Christ to the point of giving one’s life for one’s sisters and brothers, affirming one’s hope in the life of the resurrected Christ who vanquishes all death and injustice, is the central element of the power of the poor in history. This is why the aspirations and struggles of the poor for liberation are a threat to the great ones of this world, those who reap the benefits of a social order where they sow death—but fail to stifle hope.

This long passage, then, is the key to the correct understanding of the term “integral liberation,” so frequently used in Puebla. It is in light of this notion of integral liberation that the whole series of Puebla documents on the subject should be read.

23. FREE TO LOVE

From the beginning Gutiérrez’s work stressed the theological link between freedom and love. His 1966 study of love in the Bible (“Caridad y amor humano”) concluded that “the disciples are chosen for love; that is why they are sent and that will be their testimony.” Employing a Pauline intuition, he notes in Theology of Liberation that, in the final analysis, liberation serves a purpose beyond freedom. “Free for what? Free to love” (24). Consequently, love must guide the process of liberation. The introduction to Part Three of We Drink from Our Own Wells (1984: 91–94) summarizes his thinking on the subject.

Encounter with the Lord, a life according to the Spirit, a wayfaring that embraces all aspects of life and is done in community: these are dimensions of every journeying in search of God.

In this process the way is carved out as we go, because no previously traced route exists. Spirituality, as I have said repeatedly, is the area of the Spirit’s action: it is therefore characterized by freedom. To quench the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19) is to do away with the fruit of the Spirit: love and those actions in relation to God and neighbor in which love finds expression; with regard to these “there is no law” (Gal. 5:23). Law in this context is external coercion and, as such, is associated with the flesh and death.

St. James can therefore say: "So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under *the law of liberty*" (James 2:12). The law of freedom, the law of the Spirit, is the law by which will be judged the works without which faith is dead (James 2:14, 26). We know too that, according to the Letter of James, these works are above all those done for the "poor in the world" whom God has chosen as "heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to those who love him" (2:5).

Jesus gives us an example of freedom as a distinguishing trait of a life in the service of others. This service is expressed in and acquires its meaning from the way in which Jesus controls the surrender of his own life: "No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord" (John 10: 18). This is the attitude of one who comes to decisions without being influenced by external pressures, and who makes these decisions out of love for others. Jesus freely decides to give his life in *solidarity* with those who are under the power of death. Freedom exercised within a communion of life: such is the meaning of Christian freedom, such is the context for its full development.

[Earlier] I analyzed certain passages of Paul (e.g., Gal. 5:1 and 13). It was these texts that gave rise to the familiar distinction, taken over by St. Thomas Aquinas among others, between freedom *from* and freedom *for*. "Freedom from" refers to freedom from sin, from selfishness, from injustice, from need; all these are conditions that call for a liberation. "Freedom for" states the purpose of the freedom acquired: freedom for love, for communion; the attainment of love and communion is the final stage in liberation. "Free to love": this phrase, inspired by Paul (another text in the same line is that of 1 Cor. 9:19: "though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all [*edoulasa*]") expresses the full meaning of the process of liberation to which many Latin American Christians are committed. In the final analysis, to set free is to give life—communion with God and with others—or, to use the language of Puebla, liberation for communion and participation.

In this context of the struggle for liberation for the sake of love and justice, a distinctive way of following Jesus is coming into existence in Latin America. A new spirituality is in the germinal stage there; because it is germinal it cannot as yet be sketched out in detail for the purposes of labeling it and circumscribing it by characteristic traits. At present we are in the position of those trying to decide whom a newborn child resembles. Some will say the father, others the mother; some will even find that the child has this grandfather's nose or that aunt's eyes, whereas still others will even be of the opinion that the child does not remind them of any family features known to them. Better to photograph the child and decide later on whom it resembles.

I am aware of this difficulty. But lest I dwell too long on the point, I shall take the risk of singling out some characteristic features of the spirituality that is now developing in Latin America. What I shall really be attempting is to organize certain experiences and the reflections they provoke; we still lack the necessary perspective and distance to proceed in any other fashion. The traits I shall point

out will therefore not be sharply defined and will call for a good deal of nuancing; some of them may have to be dropped, others added.

As in the case of other spiritual ways that I have previously called to the reader's attention, the major themes of collective Christian experience in Latin America are those proper to Christian existence in its entirety. Here, too, reorganization is being carried out in view of some central intuitions regarding the demands of the historical moment. Our experiences in the framework of commitment to the poor and oppressed of Latin America are sending us back to fundamental ideas in the gospels. It could not be otherwise. These experiences are suggesting new approaches and raising new questions. But at the same time the biblical message is challenging our experiences and shedding light on them.

I shall keep this circular relationship in mind when trying to suggest some features of the spirituality that is arising among us. The experience of solidarity calls for a conversion, which is the point of departure for any following of Jesus. A commitment within history calls for effective action within history, but the effort to achieve efficacy brings with it a deeper penetration into God's gratuitous love as the source of everything else and as a power that sweeps us along with it. The Latin American situation is characterized by profound suffering out of which comes a new, paschal experience of joy that flows from the gift of life. "Inhuman" and "anti-evangelical" poverty is a massive reality in our midst, but commitment to the poor and the oppressed leads to the rediscovery of a central gospel theme: spiritual childhood. Solidarity with the dispossessed has brought many Christians a painful experience of loneliness due to the isolation into which they are thrown, the suspicion that their actions arouse, or the imprisonment they suffer; this loneliness proves nonetheless to be a privileged means of grasping the deeper meaning of ecclesial community.

I think that the characteristic traits of the "walking according to the Lord" that is developing in Latin America are due to the relationships I have just described. It is important, however, not to isolate the various factors, because only when they are interconnected is it possible to grasp what is peculiar to each of the traits. When they are linked as I have linked them we shall perhaps better understand what it means to live in community or what the attitude of spiritual childhood really is. Joy in the gratuitous gift of God's love calls upon us to break with sin, injustice, and death in contemporary Latin America.

As I attempt to sketch a profile of the new way that is coming into existence among us, I shall illustrate what I am saying by stringing together texts that attempt to express the spiritual experiences that are at the heart of solidarity with the poor and dispossessed. I make no claim to completeness. The subject deserves a more comprehensive and detailed book that is presently beyond my abilities. The texts I shall cite are meant to be representative of many others, perhaps even others that are far richer. My purpose here is simply a first approach to the subject.

The fact is that daily contact with the experiences of some, a reading of the

writings of many, and the testimony of still others have convinced me of the profound spiritual experiences that persons among us are having today. They are a gift from the Lord and therefore have a good deal of the ineffable about them. My hope is that what I say will not betray, even if it inevitably diminishes, the way in which the presence of the God of life is being experienced in these lands of premature and unjustly inflicted death.