LIBERTY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

AND GRADUATE SCHOOL

ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN:

THE SOCIAL GOSPEL AS A "THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION"

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ABSTRACT

Gustavo Gutiérrez is considered the father of Latin American liberation theology. Walter Rauschenbusch is considered the father of the Social Gospel in the United States. Although their circumstances differed greatly, both theologians made similar contributions to social Christianity, even though Gutiérrez does not seem to recognize it fully. Gutiérrez asserts that a theology of liberation must interpret the gospel in light of both the current reality and the values of the oppressed and then must use this theology to attack the social structures of oppression. This thesis asserts that Rauschenbusch did just that with his social gospel. Thus, the social gospel is a theology of liberation.

The comparison between the two theologies is made by analyzing how each thinker centers his theology on the concept of the Kingdom of God. Once the centrality of the Kingdom is posited for both men, their understandings of three doctrines – soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology – are examined. Each theologian relates these three doctrines to the Kingdom in similar ways. After each system is discussed individually, explicit comparisons are made. The study demonstrates the methodological and doctrinal similarities between Rauschenbusch and Gutiérrez, but also notes the practical shortcomings of both theologies and how these failures are essentially linked to doctrinal formulations.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The Problem

The quest for justice pervades theological discussion across racial, lingual, ethnic, and cultural boundaries. A belief in a just and righteous God dictates that theological systems will somehow address the issue of justice. Some systems are primarily concerned with divine justice and how fallen man can possibly relate to a holy God; anything pertaining to social justice is relegated to the periphery of the system. Other systems are more mundane. In these cases, mankind's treatment of his fellowman is scrutinized. Such treatment is compared to the precepts of the Bible and the commands and actions of a just God as recorded in Scripture. That is not to say these theological systems are not concerned with how a holy God relates to fallen man. On the contrary, the search for social justice is driven by an overwhelming realization of God's holiness and righteousness.

In the modern period, one such theology that is unequivocally concerned with social justice is liberation theology. Born in Latin America, liberation theology and liberation ideas have spread across the globe, from North America to Asia to Africa. But liberation theology is primarily a Latin American development. Over the last forty years, liberation theology has come to dominate the theological and religious landscape of Latin America. Indeed, the term "Latin American theology" is seen as synonymous with liberation theology.[1] The father of liberation theology, Gustavo Gutiérrez (1928-), a Peruvian Catholic priest, asserts that this theology is a truly revolutionary one because,

[1]Alfred T. Hennelly, "Theological Method: The Southern Exposure," *Theological Studies* 38, no. 4 (Dec. 1977): 709.

unlike previous attempts by both Protestants and Catholics at "reform," it seeks to understand and bring the gospel to people within the context of their own history and to transform society and the existing order by this gospel.[2] Previous attempts to reform theology to better meet the social needs of people have failed because those attempts did not probe deeply enough into the societal problems of their times. Liberation theology, Gutiérrez asserts, questions and attacks the very foundations of society which lead to poverty, oppression, and exploitation.[3] Liberation theology is not religion tacked onto revolutionary political aims. Rather, liberation theology understands that the true cause of oppression and exploitation is sin and that the gospel contains the only remedy, part of which may be political revolution.[4]

Part of what makes liberation theology unique is that it is a Latin American theology for Latin Americans created by Latin Americans.[5] So claims Gutiérrez. However, he does mention several theological movements throughout history which have sought to rectify societal wrongs. Among these he lists German, French, and English socialist and progressive movements and the American social gospel. He refers to these as types of a theology of liberation in their respective societies.[6] It is clear that while

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[2]Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Two Theological Perspectives: Liberation Theology and Progressivist Theology," in *The Emergent Gospel*, ed. Sergio Torres and Virginia Fabella (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978), 242. Gutiérrez never claims for himself the mantle of founder. However, scholars of liberation, as well as other liberation theologians, see him as the movement's principle pioneer. See also Deane William Ferm, *Third World Liberation Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986), 16; and Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1986).

[3]Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Liberation Praxis and Christian Faith," in *Frontiers of Theology in Latin America*, ed. Rosino Gibellini and trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 17.

[4]Ibid., 22, 23.

[5]Ibid., 17.

[6]Gutiérrez, "Two Theological Perspectives…," 249.

liberation theology in Latin America is a Catholic movement, not all theologies of liberation have to be necessarily Catholic.[7]

Initially, it appears he thinks very highly of the social gospel, saying that it sprang up in a "desert of academic thought."[8] Indeed, justice was an important concern to the social gospelers of early twentieth century America. However, his main argument is that these liberal and progressive movements did not go nearly far enough, for they did not attack the true cause of oppression which lies in the very structures of society itself, nor did they attempt to build their theology on the values of the oppressed.[9] Furthermore, others have gone further in saying that liberation theology is a legitimate effort at doing theology (a statement with which Gutiérrez would agree), while the social gospel was just a religious justification for a greater progressive social movement and not real theology.[10] While these efforts, especially the social gospel, may have been better than what Gutiérrez calls traditional theology, they are still seen as qualitatively inferior to liberation theology.

The Purpose

But is this really the case? Is the social gospel that different from liberation theology? Gutiérrez is familiar with the social gospel. He first encountered liberal theology in America in 1975 in Detroit.[11] Two years later, while lecturing in the United States, Gutiérrez intimately acquainted himself with the social gospel through the

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[7]Gutiérrez, "Two Theological Persepectives…", 250.

[8]Ibid., 249.

[9]Ibid., 232, 249. See also Gutiérrez, "Liberation Praxis and Christian Faith," 4.

[10]T. Howland Sanks, "Liberation Theology and the Social Gospel: Variations on a Theme," *Theological Studies* 41, no. 4 (Dec. 1980): 681.

[11]Sergio Torres and John Eagleson, *Theology in the Americas* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1976), 309.

writings of Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918), an American Baptist pastor, finding many parallels between his thought and that of Rauschenbusch.[12] But the point is that Gutiérrez is not ignorant of the finer points of this North American theology. So it seems that after Gutiérrez sets down criteria for a theology of liberation, he maintains that the social gospel, while it is a "quasi" theology of liberation, falls well short of being an actual "liberation theology" in the United States. Gutiérrez does not see the social gospel as meeting his own criteria for liberation theology.

But the social gospel is also a theological system centered in the quest for justice. Both the social gospel and liberation theology fall into the general category of social Christianity, which seeks above all to apply biblical principles to meeting man's physical and material needs. Social Christianity sees faith that works as a faith that works for the good of all mankind on earth.[13] These two movements are the two major efforts at social Christianity during the last century in the Western Hemisphere. Their magnitude and adherence is in no way a testimony to how conservative their theologies may be or how sound their hermeneutics may be. However, both movements bring to the fore an emphasis of orthopraxy in conjunction with and based upon orthodoxy. Furthermore, both movements saw this emphasis severely lacking in the traditional forms of Christianity that had dominated their respective landscapes, whether Catholic or Protestant. They took a critical look at the prevailing orthodox attitude toward the relationship between the gospel and social action. As major movements that garnered significant followings and systematized their social action, these two movements should

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[12]Robert Brown, *Gustavo Gutiérrez: An Introduction to Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll: Oribis, 1990), 48.

[13]Gutiérrez, "Two Theological Perspectives…," 233, 234, 237.

be examined in order to better understand the role of both the Christian and the Church in society.

Liberation theology is a Catholic theology in Latin America which has lasted for over forty years and continues to the present. The social gospel was a Protestant movement in the United States that lasted less than thirty years and faded away right after World War I. Why compare them? The importance of the comparison of these two movements lies in the fact that they are the two dominant and systematized social Christianity movements of the last century. Demonstrating the social gospel's "liberation" aspects in light of Liberation Theology criteria will show that a legitimate and systematized social theology can cross the Protestant/Catholic divide; a theology of liberation is not limited by the terms Catholic and Protestant.

This thesis will attempt to show that, contrary to Gutiérrez's claims, the social gospel is indeed an American theology of liberation based on Gutiérrez's own definition and description of liberation theology. This does not mean that the social gospel is in any way an ideological or theological forerunner of liberation theology or that Gutiérrez is in fact indebted to it. It also does not mean that the social gospel is, was, or should be called American Liberation Theology or that the term "liberation" was claimed and used by proponents of the social gospel. What the thesis will demonstrate is that Gutiérrez either misunderstood or underestimated the social gospel and its doctrines. Not only has Gutiérrez downplayed the significance of the social gospel with regard to its "liberating" qualities, but other theologians and scholars have done so as well.

Liberation theology and the social gospel do in fact differ on many specific theological aspects. But the social gospel will be shown to be a theology of liberation

based on what Gutiérrez himself says constitutes a theology of liberation. These basic criteria include interpreting the gospel in light of current historical realities in a certain area, formulating a gospel message based on the values of the oppressed, and using that gospel to attack the social structures which oppress people.[14] Keep in mind that these are just basic criteria and that the actual comparisons will be conducted with much more detailed information from both systems.

Defining Terms and Parameters

Liberation theology and the social gospel are by no means simple and static movements. While Gutiérrez is considered the founder of liberation theology, he is by no means the only theologian of the school of thought and the others by no means agree with him in all areas. However, Gutiérrez's liberation theology will be the theological approach to which the social gospel is compared, precisely because Gutiérrez is the primary theologian of the movement. As a point of departure, an expanded definition of liberation theology, generated from Gutiérrez himself, must be posited before continuing.

Gutiérrez succinctly defines liberation theology as "a critical reflection on Christian praxis in light of the word of God."[15] While this definition is just one sentence, it is packed with information crucial to understanding Gutiérrez's thought. The idea of "praxis" is central to liberation theology. Gutiérrez began to concentrate on theology as praxis as early as 1964.[16]

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[14]Gutiérrez, "Liberation Praxis and Christian Faith," 17-25.

[15]Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Expanding the View," in *Expanding the View*, ed. Marc H. Ellis and Otto Maduro (Maryknoll: New York, 1988), 16.

[16] Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1986), 69,70.

Teología de la liberacíon (*A Theology of Liberation)* is the seminal work of both Gutiérrez and the movement as a whole. First published in 1971, this work expanded upon the idea of theology as critical reflection. Here, Gutiérrez fleshes out liberationist concepts. He writes, "Theology is reflection, a critical attitude. Theology *follows*; it is the second step."[17] Gutiérrez's entire system is based on the fact that orthodoxy follows orthopraxy. Correct doctrine must follow correct action. This is the point of critical reflection.

It is vital to comprehend that Gutiérrez does not dismiss the importance of correct doctrine. Liberation theology does not separate the two. Action and doctrine influence and transform one another; in doing so they transform the situation to which they are applied.[18] In this case, the situation is the Latin American situation, one in which poverty and oppression are all too real for all too many. Thus, Gutiérrez applies his theology to the poor. "*Preference* for the poor is written into the gospel message itself," he explains.[19]

Gutiérrez articulates a three-fold process of liberation. This process stems from a commitment to the poor. Basically, at this level the ultimate goal of liberation is to close the gap between the rich and the poor, a gap which may begin with economic disparity but is increased by political and social action which oppresses certain groups, most significantly the poor. The second level is also mainly physical, but does involve something of a spiritual element. Here the entirety of humankind is involved in a process

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[17]Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, trans. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988), 9.

[18]Brown, 65.

[19] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983), 127.

of liberation. This is similar to the first stage, but it occurs on a much greater scale. The goal here, according to Gutiérrez, is "the creation of a new humankind and a qualitatively different society."[20]

The third and deepest level of liberation is liberation by Christ from sin, which to Gutiérrez "is the ultimate root of all disruption of friendship and of all injustice and oppression."[21] Only through Christ can both mankind and individuals be truly free, truly liberated, to enjoy communion with God and humanity. Because of Christ, who is the Liberator, man can come, unobstructed and undefiled, into the presence of God. Gutiérrez stresses these levels are not the same thing. Liberation by Christ, both initially and ultimately, is a spiritual liberation. Coming into the presence of God is a spiritual experience which surpasses all physical sensations. However, the three are interrelated and, at some level, work together toward the goal of total liberation.[22]

This overview is by no means exhaustive. The purpose is to provide a base from which to launch into further investigation of liberation theology and to facilitate the comparison between it and the social gospel. As this investigation continues, this definition of liberation theology will be elucidated, along with a demonstration of how Gutiérrez's three-tiered plan of liberation is integrated into the aspects of his theology in question. Gutiérrez's basic criteria of a theology of liberation, which is mentioned above, will be illuminated by this process, and the aspects of the social gospel in question will be scrutinized by this process as well.

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[20]Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 24, 25.

[21]Ibid., 25.

[22]Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 103.

The social gospel also was a movement with many proponents. Walter Rauschenbusch is considered the leading theologian of the social gospel. Some consider him the founder, but this is not quite accurate, considering that there were social gospel thinkers from whom Rauschenbusch learned. However, Rauschenbusch brought the movement into maturity and most completely laid down the tenets of the social gospel.[23] His presentation of the social gospel will be compared to Gutiérrez's liberation theology. Not only is he the foremost social gospeler, but his views are those with which Gutiérrez is most familiar. It is from Rauschenbusch that a definition of the social gospel will be generated in order to provide a base for further study.

Rauschenbusch offers no short, one sentence definition of the social gospel. However, he does outline the movement is his works, and several of these portions can be marshaled to provide a definition with which this thesis can move forward. In his final book, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, which is the premier work of the movement, Rauschenbusch does not seek to define the social gospel, but rather to provide a systematic theology for it. However, he does mention the social gospel and sheds light on its meaning. "The social gospel seeks to bring men under repentance for their collective sins and to create a more sensitive and more modern conscience," posits Rauschenbusch.[24] Elaborating further, Rauschenbusch asserts that the social gospel "put the democratic spirit, which the Church inherited from Jesus and the prophets, once more in control of the institutions and teachings of the Church."[25]

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[23]Christopher H. Evans, *The Kingdom is Always but Coming* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 180.

[24]Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: Abingdon, 1917), 5.

[25]Ibid., 5.

Rauschenbusch, while accused of basing his theology on Marxist thought, responded instead that his theological system was based on the democratic teachings of Christ. He also centered his theology on the working class, seeing that to succeed the social gospel must have the support of the working class. He believes that "the new Christian principle of brotherly association must ally itself to the working class if both are to conquer."[26]

Rauschenbusch realized that the secular social movement, which had been growing for over twenty years prior to publication of *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, needed a soul; it needed invigoration. Although he believed Christianity always had a social message, he knew theology needed a body.[27] Rauschenbusch sought to breathe life into the social movement and enable theology to actually serve humanity.

Rauschenbusch also came to an important conclusion about the nature of theology: "Theology is not superior to the gospel. It exists to aid the preaching of salvation."[28] Theology responds to problems with the message of the gospel. In Rauschenbusch's case, the problem was the social problem, and Rauschenbusch understood the difficulty of presenting the message of salvation to an unregenerate society for the purpose of converting that society.[29] Just as sin is societal, so is salvation. Social salvation means that the core institutions of American society – family, religion, education, politics, economics – would come under the law of Christ. But sin is also individual, and so must salvation be. Rauschenbusch envisioned a society in which

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[26]Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York: MacMillan, 1907), 409.

[27]Ibid., 409.

[28]Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 6.

[29]Ibid., 7.

regenerate men would regenerate institutions. But there could be no perfection on earth, because sin could not be eradicated in this life, and with sin new problems would arise which would require new adjustments.[30]

Like the definition of liberation theology, this definition of the social gospel is also not exhaustive. With this fact in mind, one can now understand the particulars of Rauschenbusch's theology. The foundation is now laid for its comparison with liberation theology. Clearly, Gutiérrez and Rauschenbusch go about defining their theological systems in different manners. This should not hinder the study. There are similarities. And that is the point: to more thoroughly analyze what superficially appear to be two disparate and unrelated schools of thought to show fundamental methodological and theological similarities resulting from similar theological presuppositions.

With this incisive account in mind, the elementary parameters of this work can now be submitted. The starting point of this comparison of the social gospel and liberation theology is the doctrine of the Kingdom of God. Both theologies explicitly state the primacy of the doctrine of the Kingdom in their theologies. Gutiérrez states that this doctrine provides the biblical impetus for having a theology which is of the people, by the people, and for the people.[31] Rauschenbusch also gives the doctrine of Kingdom primacy.[32] He also claims the social gospel to be a theology of the people, by the people, and for people on the basis of the Kingdom doctrine. Thus, the attempt to show the social gospel as a theology of liberation will entail comparisons between the major

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[30]James C. Livingstone, *Modern Christian Thought: The Enlightenment to the Nineteenth Century* (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 1997), 294.

[31]Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Teología de la Liberacíon.* (Lima: Centro de Estudios y Publicaciones, 1971), 98.

[32]Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*. 131.

doctrines of the two systems as these doctrines are directly developed by and stem from the doctrine of the Kingdom.

These major doctrines (in no particular order) are soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology.[33] Understand, these three areas will not be studied in-depth in and of themselves. Rather, they will be examined only in their relationship to the doctrine of the Kingdom of God in each system. Thus, how the social gospel relates these three doctrines to the Kingdom will be judged against how liberation theology accomplishes the same systematic relationship. Furthermore, because each purports to be a social theology which values the study of history and the social sciences, how each of these two systems integrates these disciplines with theology will be included in the analysis.[34] Such a comparison takes into account the developmental differences in the thought of the two theologians while recognizing and highlighting foundational presuppositions in the use of similar theological themes. While coming from entirely different backgrounds, both Rauschenbusch and Gutiérrez systematically combined the doctrine of the Kingdom of God with social concern to produce a theology devoted to the salvation of both the collective and the individual, the physical and the spiritual.

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[33]Torres, 258.

[34]Gutiérrez, "Two Theological Perspectives…," 247. See also "Liberation Praxis and Christian Faith," 16 and Stephen Evans, *The Kingdom Is Always But Coming: A Life of Walter Rauschenbusch* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 149.

Chapter 2

Background of Liberation Theology

First, the discussion will center on liberation theology and its development as a form of social Christianity. Then, the background and development of the social gospel will be laid out. Finally, an in-depth comparison of the two movements will ensue. But before theological investigation can begin concerning Gutiérrez, an abbreviated context of liberation theology will be surveyed.

Mid-Twentieth Century South America

Liberation theology, like any other theological system, did not develop in a vacuum. In this case, the political, social, economic, and religious situation of South America in the mid-twentieth century played an invaluable role in shaping Gutiérrez's thought and theology. While it is a generalization, albeit perhaps a true one, to say that one's environment influences one's thought, the case of liberation theology may stand out from the rest. The reason for this is that Gutiérrez sees history and theology as inseparably interwoven. That is, Gutiérrez sees one history, not two. Rejecting the distinction of a sacred and profane history, Gutiérrez posits, "Rather there is only one human destiny, irreversibly assumed by Christ, Lord of History."[35] This position and its ramifications will be the subject of further scrutiny later. Suffice it here to show how Gutiérrez's theology is inextricably linked to the real human historical situation. Thus, a short overview of the political, socio-economic, and religious situation in South America follows to lay a foundation for examining liberation theology. Much of what follows will consist of general statements about the situation of the entire continent of South America. However, South America is a diverse continent, comprised of several countries, one of

[35]Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 86.

which is Peru, Gutiérrez's birthplace. Thus, some specifics of the Peruvian situation will be added which shed additional light on the development of Gutiérrez's liberation theology.

Political Conditions

Latin America still feels the influence of Spanish colonization. Spain exploited its South American colonies for its own benefit. Both the native population and the natural resources were at the unlimited disposal of the Spanish. While the countries have long since achieved independence from the mother country, these oppressive practices are still a major part of the political system.[36]

After independence, the governments of the several countries remained largely centralized, or at least elitist, in the sense that the new rulers still sought to manipulate resources and people to better their own situation, naturally at the expense of the masses. However, the accumulation of wealth may be of only secondary concern to those who run the government. This is because paternalism was at the root of the Spanish colonial policy and continues to produce fruit today. Fernando Martinez argues that the church/state relationship of the colonial period bred obedience deep into the psyche of the

[36]Jacques Lambert, *Latin America: Social Structures and Political Institutions*, trans. Helen Ketel (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 52. Technically, Spanish colonization of the New World began with Christopher Columbus (Cristóbal Colón) in 1492. The first conquest in South America began in 1532. The conquistador Francisco Pizzaro conquered the Inca Empire, centered in what is now Perú. The Spanish dominated most of the continent until the early nineteenth century, when independence movements broke out across the continent within a few years of each other, many often led by the same leader or leaders. These men were known as *libertadores*. José de San Martín and Símon Bolívar led the Peruvian fight for independence, with San Martín overthrowing the government in Lima in 1821. It was not until 1824, however, that the last Spanish force was defeated in the field. Spanish colonial rule on the continent ended completely in 1826. [See David P. Werlich, *Peru: A Short History* (Cardondale and Edwardsville, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press).].

people: "The conquest of power seems to be actually the only psychological goal in Latin America."[37]

A quick look at the struggle for political dominance in Peru demonstrates the validity of this analysis. The decade of the 1960s saw several different political parties vie for power. Yet many of these so-called parties were actually machines unconcerned with the people or the issues and merely devoted to the election of a single individual. In 1963 Fernando Belaunde Terry, the founder and leader of one such a political organization called Popular Action, won the presidency with 39% of the vote. However, he did not actually assume the presidency until the military permitted him to do so.[38]

His reform efforts quickly failed, and a guerrilla uprising threatened his regime. So, he sent in the military and crushed the threat by 1966. Within a year that same military was sending tanks to the presidential palace to unseat Terry. General Juan Velasco Alvarado led the junta and declared extensive changes in Peru, including sympathy for the peasantry. Despite extravagant claims of reform, Alvarado's government became increasingly authoritarian and centralized, with opponents being persecuted and the government taking over TV and news outlets as well as various industrial enterprises. By the time Gutiérrez published *Teologia de la liberacion* in 1971, production had fallen and the working and lower classes became increasingly malcontented.[39]

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[37]Fernando Guillen Martinez, "What is 'The Government'?" in *Latin America: Politics, Economics, and Hemispheric Security* (New York: Frederick A . Praeger, 1965), 80.

[38]Thomas E. Skidmore and Peter H. Smith, *Modern Latin America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 215.

[39]Ibid., 216-220.

Socio-Economic Conditions

Rapid industrial growth characterized South America in the decade following World War II. With increased industrialization came increased urbanization. These two factors created a new role for governments across the continent, while at the same time improving conditions for the population as a whole. Birth rates, literacy rates, and marriage rates rose, while mortality rates fell.[40] However, the circumstances which fostered this environment and growth also produced negative results.

Developmentalism originated as a means whereby societies and individuals would better themselves through economic and industrial growth. In the case of Latin America, development depended upon foreign investment coming into the industrial center. Specifically, money flow came from monopolistic industry and went chiefly to central governments and less to private endeavors.[41] Developmentalism inevitably led to varying levels of economic dependence. "The idea of dependence refers to the conditions under which alone the economic and political system can exist and function in its connections with the world productive structure," explain Cardoso and Faletto.[42] In other words, the western nations dictated the terms under which Latin American countries would participate in the world economy.

In Latin America, foreign capitalists had total control of the capital stream, as well as debt payment, investment, and profit usage. While development brought wealth, it did not change the institutions which were already in place. With this system in place,

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[40]Rosemary Thorp, *Progress, Poverty, and Exclusion: An Economic History of Latin America in the 20th Century* (Washington, D.C.: Inter-American Development Bank, 1998), 128.

[41]Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto, *Dedendency and Development in Latin America*, trans. Marjory Mattingly Urquidi (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979), 160.

[42]Ibid., 18.

the Latin American countries had little chance of becoming independent of western economic dominance. That is, they became increasingly unable to gain capital whereby they could invest in other developing countries or even in domestic ventures. Thus, those corrupt institutions which supposedly created the problems developmentalism was supposed to solve actually gained more wealth and power.[43]

Gutiérrez holds both developmentalism and dependence responsible for the situation of Latin America in the 1960s and '70s. Latin America was born dependent, he believes. Not only does dependency create a different economic situation from the First World, it also creates a different social situation.[44] The line between the haves and the have-nots widens. The gap between rich and poor expands at a more rapid pace. The oppressed feel the full weight of their situation even more, often resulting in violence. Those in control often go to extreme measures to protect the status quo, and those who desire to be in control sometimes take even more extreme measures to gain control.

Gutiérrez reveals his indebtedness to Marx by using developmentalism and dependency to explain the situation in Latin America. The poverty and underdevelopment of Latin America are directly related to the economic policies of the First World, primarily the United States.[45] The specific focus for Gutiérrez as he deals with the causes of poverty on his continent is the exploitation of labor. The exploited classes are the poor, from whose perspective theology must be done.

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[43]James Livingston and Francis Schussler Fiorenza, *Modern Christian Thought: The Twentieth Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 288.

[44]Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 52.

[45]Anthony James Gill, *Rendering unto Caesar: the Catholic Church and the state in Latin America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 38.

Thus, Marx provides Gutiérrez with a system of analysis which Gutiérrez in turn uses to identify a starting point for theology. Recall that proper doctrine must follow proper action. The key then is to discover the type of action that must take place by identifying the problem. As Cadorett notes, "Gutiérrez draws an important lesson from Marx's observations, namely, that the negative effects of capitalism will not be overcome until the poor understand the real causes of their oppression."[46] Gutiérrez's theology remains consistent with the Marxist assertion that the economic determines the political.[47] His theology, while proffered for the benefit of all, depends upon the action of the poor and is structured to facilitate this action. A political change will occur only when the economically oppressed rise up to make it happen. Gutiérrez sees this as consistent with the message of Scripture. The poor must be liberated.

While Gutiérrez is admittedly influenced by some of Marx's ideas, he is insistent that he is not a Marxist nor does he adhere to the system of Marxism. He makes it very clear that he selectively and critically uses Marxist methods. In fact, he claims to accept Marxist analysis only insofar as it is a part of contemporary social sciences.[48] Thus, he accepts some Marxist insights, like the idea that the First World countries perpetrated ruin on the Third World. However, he rejects Marxist determinism, writing that "the determinist approach based on economic factors is completely alien to the kind of social

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[46]Curt Cadorette, *The Theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez: From the Heart of the People* (Oak Park, Il.: Meyer-Stone Books, 1988), 87.

[47]Pierre Bigo, *The Church and Third World Revolution*, trans. Sister Jeanne Marie Lyons (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1974), 181.

[48] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, trans. Michael J. O'Connell (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990), 64.

analysis that supplies a framework for the theology of liberation."[49] While oppression happens, it does not happen necessarily.

While dependency theory and developmentalism may be responsible for the current situation in Latin America, any given counter-policy will not necessarily produce the desired results. Gutiérrez gives no specific economic policy; he never explicitly calls for the rule of the proletariat. Theology must be the concern of South America, and this theology can have no fellowship with atheism. He is quite clear on this matter, writing:

> There is no question at all of a possible acceptance of an atheistic ideology. Were we to accept this possibility, we would already be separated from the Christian faith and no longer dealing with a properly theological issue. Nor is there any question of agreement with a totalitarian version of history that denies the freedom of the human person. These two options – an atheistic ideology and a totalitarian vision – are to be discarded and rejected, not only by our faith but by any truly humanistic outlook and even by a sound social analysis.[50]

Understanding Gutiérrez's use and interpretation of Marxist concepts is essential to grasping how he did theology and how he viewed his own contemporary situation. A look at the specifics of the Peruvian situation will demonstrate how Gutiérrez put the social sciences to work for theology and will establish a historical foundation from which to understand Gutiérrez's thought. The political and economic situations of Peru went hand-in-hand, as they do in any country. Recall the brief overview of Peruvian politics above. While the Alvarado government turned out to be autocratic, it initially sought to "lay the foundation for a new society founded on the middle class."[51] The military government met with initial success, as both production and wages rose, and the government itself enjoyed widespread support. However, in the midst of success, the

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[49]Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation,* 249, n. 52.

[50]Gutiérrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free,* 61.

[51]Cadorette, 11.

government was heavily in debt and still borrowing money. While the political situation had deteriorated by 1971, the economic situation remained relatively stable until 1973. Within five years of the initial publication of Gutiérrez's seminal work, prices had plummeted and Peru's debt was now being called in. The government decreased workers' wages and geared the economy solely for debt-reduction.[52]

The situation in Peru specifically, and Latin America generally, convinced Gutiérrez that the present socio-economic situation could not be reformed. The quest for power itself undid all efforts to reform. In 1983, commenting on Peru and the effects of developmentalism and dependency, he wrote:

> The possibility of significantly improving the distribution of income by correcting some aspects of the system's functioning, without altering the system itself, is no longer believable after the experience of many attempts at "reform" in Latin America….It is clear that international capital seeks countries that offer submissiveness and cheap labor, and that when it does not find those conditions in one country it goes elsewhere in search of better conditions for exploitation.[53]

Thus, it was this environment that spawned liberation theology; it was these conditions which prompted Gutiérrez to ask questions about what theology must do, why it had failed, and how it might be fixed to truly change the status quo.

Roman Catholicism

But it was not just political, social, and economic factors which led Gutiérrez to these conclusions or which gave a framework to his theology. Roman Catholicism holds a prominent place in Latin American society and has since Christopher Columbus first set sail under the Spanish flag. The ecclesiastical situation in Latin America also influenced

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[52]Cadorette, 12.

[53]Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History, Selected Works,* trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1983), 203.

Gutiérrez and his thought. Gutiérrez is a Catholic priest, and his theology must be seen both in light of Catholic theology and development within Latin America, as well as an expression of Latin American Catholicism.

The church in Latin America faced the problems of both developmentalism and secularization, two issues which are concerns to this day. Secularization is defined as "a growing inclination toward a rational understanding of the world about us through a greater systematizing of science, technology, and art."[54] Accordingly, the role of organized religion is supposed to decrease and eventually disappear altogether. However, that did not happen in Latin America. While the church is not officially established now, there were and still are very large segments of the population which hold to the Catholic faith as strongly as did their ancestors, or at least to the outward rituals.

Because of developmentalism and secularization, the focus of the church was divided between the largely unaffected masses and a ruling class which all too often did not even pretend to be concerned with the plight of the people. In order to retain or regain prestige, power, and wealth, the church placated the leaders of countries. On the other hand, to maintain relevance, the church could not lose contact with the people. Many of these people were the poor, and they were getting poorer.

Yet, secularization was another western idea that did not work as planned. The church's power and influence were not relegated to the fringes of society, but the corrupting influence of wealth and the quest for power continued to pervade the church, increasing corruption in an already corrupted institution. As the increasingly oppressed

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[54]Renato Poblete, S.J. "The Church in Latin America: A Historical Survey," in *The Church and Social Change in Latin America*, ed. Henry Landsberger (South Bend: University of Notre Dame, 1970), 48.

masses clamored for more liberty, the church as whole retained its anti-modern stance. Since the nineteenth century, the church had condemned freedom of conscience, freedom of opinion, and democracy, among other modern values promoted by the French Revolution, which the church also condemned.[55]

Vatican II

While the Latin American church as a whole continued to adhere to the Vatican, there were some Latin American bishops and priests who boldly linked modern values with church doctrine. The changing economic situation around the world and the advances of Marxism pressured the church into reconsidering its stance on social issues. To meet these challenges, Pope John XXIII called the Second Vatican Council, which opened on October 1, 1962, with 601 Latin American clergy present.[56]

Confronted with the problems of secularization around the world, the church wanted to reinforce and reassert its position in the world. The primary means of achieving this goal was *aggiornamento*, or the spiritual renewal of the church.[57] In the process, the church would demonstrate to the world that it was still relevant. This would include the acceptance of Enlightenment values and the approval of modern sciences, mainly the social sciences.

Gaudium et Spes (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*; adopted 7 December 1965) details the Council's position on the problems facing the modern world and the church's response. While affirming the traditional doctrines of sin

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[55]Michael Lowry, *The War of Gods: Religion and Politics in Latin America* (New York: Verso, 1996), 52.

[56]Enrique Dussel, *A History of the Church in Latin America*, trans. Alan Neely (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1981), 139. The council ended in 1965.

[57]Richard Planas, *Liberation Theology: The Political Expression of Religion* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1986), 58.

and salvation in the individualistic sense, the document also recognizes the need for a social commitment by the church. "Let everyone consider it his sacred duty to count social obligations among man's chief duties today and observe them as such," it reads.[58] It continues with an acknowledgement that the growth of the Kingdom includes Christians motivated by love struggling for economic and social justice.[59]

Not only did the Council announce the church's concern for social issues, it also proclaimed the church's readiness to come into the modern world and to utilize the culture to the advantage of Christ. The document asserts:

> Let the faithful incorporate the findings of new sciences and teachings and the understanding of the most recent discoveries with the Christian morality and thought, so that their practice of religion and their moral behavior may keep abreast of their acquaintance with science and of the relentless progress of technology…[60]

But the Council as a whole was not trying to break completely new ground. Both traditional and progressive statements are found in the documents, sometimes side by side. Contradictions were never resolved, resulting, as Livingston and Fiorenza point out, in traditionalists and progressives both championing and criticizing the Council.[61] Nevertheless, these pronouncements caught the attention of the liberation theologians, especially Gutiérrez.

CELAM II

The Latin American response to Vatican II took place on a continental level when the second General Conference of Latin American Bishops (CELAM II) convened in

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[58]*Gaudium et Spes*, in *Documents of Vatican II*, trans. Roman Lennon (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1975), 930.

[59]*Ibid*., 979.

[60]*Ibid.*, 967.

[61]Livingston and Fiorenza, 237, 238.

Medellín, Colombia in August 1968. The issue of justice held a prominent place in the discussion, and the bishops spoke of a "theology of liberation," writing:

> It is the same God, who in the fullness of time, sent his son in the flesh so that He might come to liberate all men 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.[62]

Using the Vatican II proceedings as a guide, the bishops undertook to address developmentalism, dependency, and secularization, which they saw as European intrusions, and the problems they caused, principally oppression. The concluding documents of the Medellín conference are filled with condemning statements about colonialism and neocolonialism, as well as any economic system, whether capitalism or Marxism, which oppresses and divides people. In short, the conference called upon the church to establish a just social order.[63]

The liberationist themes in the CELAM II documents were due in large part to the influence of Gutiérrez and like-minded clergy who served as consultants to the bishops at Medellín. But CELAM II was not the first time Gutiérrez called for liberation. At a meeting of Latin American theologians at Petropolis, Brazil, in 1964, Gutiérrez began to describe theology in terms of Christian action. Beginning with describing theology as "critical reflection on praxis," Gutiérrez and other theologians began to rally support for this description at other meetings, including some in North America and Europe as well as in South America.[64]

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[62]*The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council* (Bogota: General Secretariat of CELAM, 1970), 58.

[63]Christian Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 162.

[64]Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, 69.

Gutiérrez biographer Robert McAfee Brown relates that Gutiérrez believes liberation theology "came to birth" in 1968 shortly before CELAM II. Speaking at a conference in Chimbote, Peru, Gutiérrez outlined the fundamentals of liberation theology. It was at this meeting of ONIS (Oficina Nacional de Investigacion; translation: National Investigation Office), a group of priests working for social change, that he first used the term "a theology of liberation."[65] And CELAM II shortly thereafter gave Gutiérrez the opportunity to introduce his theology to the rest of Latin America and the world.

This brief overview of the situation in Latin America provides the context for the birth and initial development of Gutiérrez's theology of liberation. To recapitulate, the political, social, and economic circumstances in Latin America created an unacceptable atmosphere of institutionalized violence and oppression. The Catholic Church granted tacit approval of the status quo. Vatican II was seen as both a continuation of traditional theology and a moving forward into the modern age by the Church. Grasping this background is essential for properly understanding and studying his thought. Gutiérrez firmly positions himself within the Catholic fold. But he draws upon these occasions in his native Peru and in the South American continent as a whole to steer his theology in the direction he is convinced it must go. From the Latin American situation Gutiérrez formulates a theology of, for, and by Latin Americans. It is to this theology of liberation that the discussion now turns.

[65]Brown, 35.

Chapter 3

Gustavo Gutiérrez and Liberation Theology

Gutiérrez saw the entire history of his continent as a struggle between the rich and the poor. In the 1950s and '60s, the situation of the poor worsened because of interference of the rich of other countries. Liberation theology is a specific solution for this specific problem. *Teología de la liberacion* contains the most complete and detailed statement of liberation theology from Gutiérrez's perspective. This is the systematic theology of the movement. Elsewhere, certain aspects of his thought are articulated more thoroughly. Generally, however, liberation theology is more of a practical theology. Because of his concern for the wellbeing of people, Gutiérrez sought to show how the doctrines of Christianity could be applied to ensure the wellbeing of his countrymen.

As a devout Catholic, he respected the power and authority of the church and the truths it taught. But if corrupted, such power could be used to oppress the people rather than to free them. This corruption was what Gutiérrez saw in South America. The doctrines of the church, able to communicate liberating truths, were either misused or not used at all. While Gutiérrez's goal was practical rather than speculative, deliberate systemization can be seen. Going back to the Gospels, the Kingdom of God is identified as the central teaching of Christ, with justice being the primary concern of God. Therefore, all doctrines should be interpreted in light of the Kingdom and in accordance with the justice of God.

Thus, liberation theology is a theology of the Kingdom as well as a social theology. While remaining true to what he sees as the fundamentals of Catholicism, Gutiérrez revisits classical theology. After the Kingdom, ecclesiology, soteriology, and

eschatology are the three doctrines which figure most prominently in liberation theology, and so these four will be analyzed here. European Christian and Marxist thought underpins his perspective on theology in general. In fact, these influences made Gutiérrez's liberationist thought overtly political in nature. The result is a school of thought which takes very seriously the task of understanding Scripture historically and also applying it to the contemporary situation. In formulating such a theology, Gutiérrez uses three main criteria, which have been mentioned above. This analysis of his thought demonstrates his commitment to the justice of the Kingdom of God, but in doing so it will also highlight the formative criteria and note how the theology of liberation is woven around them.

Liberation: Theology, Politics, and History

Recall that for Gutiérrez, theology is a second step. It follows critical praxis, action in history. He continues, "Theology does not produce pastoral activity; rather it reflects upon it."[66] Theology reflects critically on the action taken to advance the Kingdom against the oppression present in the current situation, whatever that may be. In responding to the situation in Latin America, liberation theology presents "salvation in Christ in terms of liberation."[67] This conception of the most basic element of the Christian faith demonstrates his concern to do theology from the historical realities of a given context. As Schwarz observes, "For Gutiérrez the theology of liberation is a

[66]Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 9.

[67]Gutiérrez, "Expanding the View," 24.

theology of salvation incarnated in the concrete historical and political conditions of today."[68]

While some particulars of theology are in some sense conditioned by the historical setting of the theologian, liberation theology is firmly grounded in a principle that is universal and applicable anywhere and at anytime. This principle is love. Thus, theology, which is a "pastoral activity," is not performed arbitrarily, nor is its focus determined subjectively on the whim of the Christian. It is determined by love.

Christian love lays the very foundation for praxis. Doctrine is abstract and impersonal. This is not necessarily harmful in and of itself. However, when doctrine gets in the way of love, the aim of Christianity is skewed. Love, which is an outworking of faith, is intimate and personal.[69] The focus of this love is two directional. First, it is directed toward God. And because God's love is directed toward mankind, so must an individual's love be directed toward mankind. Such love is manifested not only by behavior toward others, but also by the effort to abolish any injustice suffered by others.[70]

Gutiérrez fully realizes the ecclesiastical duties of theology. The church must shepherd the spiritual growth of the people. However, he admits that theology must go beyond this limit. In the past, according to Gutiérrez, theology limited itself to understanding its role based on the Bible and tradition. While there is nothing wrong with either of these, Gutiérrez posits that questions and concerns from the real world,

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[68]Hans Schwarz, *Theology in a Global Context: The Last Two Hundred Years* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 285.

[69]Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 6.

[70]Joseph Ramos, "Gustavo Gutiérrez's Theology of Liberation," in *Liberation South, Liberation North*, ed. Michael Novak (Washington: American Enterprise Institute), 53, 54.

from history, must help in determining the course and function of theology, as well as of the church and individual believers.[71]

Gutiérrez considers all of this in building the base of his theology. Again, theology is action first, then doctrine. Theology becomes a discipline concerned with relating to the world today, not just with preserving creeds or confessions from one century to the next. He asserts, "In the last analysis, the true interpretation of the meaning revealed by theology is achieved only in historical praxis."[72] He sees his theology centered in praxis as a liberating theology ─ indeed, a new way to define theology. His theology is one of "the liberating transformation of the history of humankind."[73] Not only does it reflect on the world, but it also becomes part of the process of the transformation itself.[74]

Transformation has been occurring throughout human history. Scripture itself records God's liberating acts on behalf of his people Israel. *Go'el*, one of names for God in the Old Testament, testifies to God's relationship to his people. A *go'el*, according to Gutiérrez, is one who liberates. Thus, the Christian God is one who liberates. He intervenes in history to do justice.[75] In the Old Testament, the quintessential act of liberation was the deliverance of Israel out of bondage from Egypt. Even more important than this is the life and earthly ministry of Jesus recorded in the Gospels.

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[71]Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 10.

[72]Ibid., 10.

[73]Ibid., 12.

[74]Ibid., 12.

[75]Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The God of Life*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 20, 21.

Jesus represented both a continuation and a fulfillment of the deliverance of Israel. Jesus came not only for Israel, but for the whole world. These acts of intervention illustrate Gutiérrez's position on the unity of history; there is no difference between secular and sacred history. Salvation, liberation, means something now because Christ experienced human history. This experience, this ministry, according to Gutiérrez, had overtly political implications.

Drawing upon European scholars and theologians such as Johannes Metz and Jürgen Moltmann, liberation theology recognized that salvation in the present necessitated some political involvement. "The hope of the gospel has a polemic and liberating relation not only to the religions and ideologies of men, but still more to the factual, practical life of men and to the relationships in which this life is lived," writes Moltmann.[76] Christianity is not political action, but political action is one of the manifestations of the Christian faith and an engine in striving toward the eschatological goal of Christianity. Given this aim of Moltmann's theology, his theology of hope has also been called political theology.[77]

The influence of Moltmann caused Walton to write, "Jürgen Moltmann's political theology, the Theology of Hope, is seminal for the development of the Theology of Liberation."[78] However, Gutiérrez is careful not to take too much from Europe. Part of doing theology correctly is basing it on the values of the oppressed in a given context. The European and South American environments are radically different, and so

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[76]Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 330.

[77]Scott R. Paeth, "Jürgen Moltmann's Public Theology," *Political Theology* 6, no. 2 (2005), 216.

[78]Robert C. Walton, "Jürgen Moltmann's Theology of Hope," in *Liberation Theology*, ed. Ronald Nash (Milford, MI: Mott Publishers, 1984), 143.

appropriating too much from Europe would hinder the growth of theology and liberation for and by the people of South America.

Hesselgrave and Rommen make a very relevant point when they note that social context serves as "a regulatory matrix in which certain variables limit the behavioral options open to the individual."[79] In the context of Latin America, this translates, for example, into class distinctions over racial distinctions. Gutiérrez and other Latin American liberation theologians, for instance, emphasize class distinctions.[80] While there is a significant indigenous population in his home country of Peru, as in other countries, Gutiérrez sees the socio-political problems in Latin America as a whole concentrated on class. Thus, his theology relates to the society as a whole, and not just to the individuals that comprise the group.

The collectivist approach to society and theology means that Gutiérrez must redefine or modify the meanings of several traditional Christian terms. As will be shown, Gutiérrez's entire approach to theology is based on the South American experience. He accepts the "supracultural" truth of the gospel. However, because of the Latin American situation, he seeks to present this truth in terms that are relevant to his countrymen. Hesselgrave calls this "categorical validity."[81] When, for example, Gutiérrez equates salvation with liberation, he does so because the people in South America understand freedom in terms of the earthly struggle to be free from earthly oppressors. *Libertadores*

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[79]David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2000), 166.

[80]Schwarz, 479.

[81]Hesselgrave, 172.

freed them from Spanish rule and *Cristo el Libertador* will free them, or save them, from the rule of sin.

While Gutiérrez is very careful to develop his theology within his local context, excluding those elements of Western theology he deems foreign to the Latin American experience, he nevertheless agrees with Moltmann and sees the gospel message as inherently containing a political message, and thus not dependent on any current political structure or social context. Thus he claims, "The Gospel does not get its political dimension from one or another particular option, but from the very nucleus of its message."[82] This message is about the Kingdom of God, which is good news to the poor. He declares, "The Beatitudes are a proclamation of Jesus' central message: 'the kingdom of God is at hand.' "[83]

The Kingdom message is delivered to all people, but it is especially intended for the poor. He sees preference for the poor as being written into the gospel itself. The Gospels, specifically Luke, record the preference of Christ for the poor. Jesus came to inaugurate the Kingdom (Lk. 4:43; Mk. 1:15). With the Kingdom at hand, the poor are blessed because the end of their suffering is now.[84] By positioning the Kingdom at the center of his theology and interpreting Scripture in terms of liberation of the poor, Gutiérrez fulfills the last two of his criteria. First, theology is now based on the values of the poor. Corruption, greed, opulence: such things are shunned in favor of love toward fellow man. Second, because the message of the Kingdom is a political one, theology is also used to attack the powers that oppress and impoverish.

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[82]Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 134.

[83]Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, 139.

[84]Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 170, 171.

Brown summarizes this position of liberation theology, writing:

> We love God, then, by loving the neighbor, by acts of justice rather than sacrifices (and their modern counterparts), and by extending the concept of "neighbor" to include strangers, widows, and orphans – who stand for the most oppressed and powerless in our society.[85]

Individual and isolated acts of charity are not enough. More is required because oppressors are more than individuals. Governments, companies, plantations, even the church, among other large groups, are among those that oppress. In this way, then, is the gospel a revolutionary answer to the problem of injustice. True, liberating theology purposes to subvert the existing social order, where the rich exploit the poor, in favor of an order in which no one is oppressed.[86]

So, liberation theology focuses on the Kingdom as the central message of Jesus and the poor as the primary recipients of that message. Gustavo Gutiérrez formulated a theology which was capable of accomplishing three goals – interpret the gospel in context, present the message in terms of the poor, and work to liberate the poor. These form the core of liberation theology. The construction of liberation theology, then, is supported by these goals. In what follows, the doctrines of the church, salvation, and eschatology will be analyzed showing how Gutiérrez interpreted them in order to accomplish these goals and thus truly do theology. Continue to bear in mind that Gutiérrez's theologizing was not arbitrary. Rather, having identified what he believed to be the meaning of the Gospel, and seeking to obedient to Christ, he sought to guide theology in the direction of helping the poor.

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[85]Brown, 126.

[86]Ibid., 127.

Liberation and the Church

As a devout Catholic priest, Gutiérrez sees the church as having tremendous authority and power. It can use that for justice or injustice. All too often in Latin America, however, ecclesial officials have been complicit in oppression. The true church should be a force in liberation, not in oppression. To be such a force and to preach the pure gospel, some changes in traditional Catholic ecclesiology are proposed. However, Gutiérrez never rejects the hierarchy of the church or its power and responsibility to dispense the sacraments.

The relationship between church and state in Latin America continues to be much closer than in the rest of the Western world. The Catholic Church is now officially and effectively disestablished in South America. This means that the adherents of other religions are now free to practice their faith without fear of reprisal.[87] The Catholic Church, then, is not affiliated with the government in the classic medieval sense; the state is autonomous. But, while most countries have abandoned the right of *Patronato* (the ability to exercise control over ecclesiastical appointments), they still attempt to exercise some regulatory control over the church.[88] In many of these cases, it is the clergy who capitulate to the wishes of the government, or merely watch in silence, often to the determent of the parishioners. These are the situations which Gutiérrez opposes.[89]

Regardless of its official position vis-à-vis the government, the church has always been a political force, and, Gutiérrez believes, it must continue to be one. Lernoux notes that ecclesio-political activity consistently favored the governing bodies and their unjust

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[87]Gill, 32.

[88]Dussel, 81. See also Gill, 32.

[89]Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 63.

acts against the people. Liberation theology calls the church to take the side of the poor in the political arena. Neutrality is not an option.[90] The very nature of injustice in the Latin American setting demands that the church be involved, and the true church will opt for the poor, as her Master did and commands her to do.

Sacramentalism is at the heart of this understanding of ecclesiological participation in history. People are called to live in community, not as separate individuals. This community is the church, which is a group of individuals united in the love of God, the same love which unites the Trinity.[91] The sacrament which the church is in charge of dispensing is the spreading of this message of love and communion. The word "sacrament," claims Gutiérrez, originally conveyed the meaning of "misterion." Both terms signified "the fulfillment and the manifestation of the salvific plan."[92] He concludes by affirming, "The sacrament is thus the efficacious revelation of the call to communion with God and to the unity of all humankind."[93]

This evangelization targets both the individual and the group. The chief focus is on the group, however – namely the poor. Christ's liberation, one which goes to the root of injustice and exploitation, is announced to those who suffer. "This preaching to the exploited, workers, and farmers of our continent will make them perceive that their situation is contrary to God's will which is made known in liberating events," he

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[90]Penny Lernoux, "The Birth of Liberation Theology" in *Expanding the Vision: Gustavo Gutiérrez and the Future of Liberation Theology*, eds. Marc H. Ellis and Otto Maduro (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990), 41.

[91]Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 146.

[92]Ibid., 146.

[93]Ibid., 146.

declares.[94] Informing the oppressed of liberation and liberating them means the church becomes a "popular" church. The values of the people, not those of the rich or the hierarchy, guide the actions of the church. Because of the poor, the gospel becomes social and is taken from those who would use it to exploit others for gain. As far as Gutiérrez is concerned, the poor are the Christians, and they comprise the church. "Rather than trying to make the Church poor, it is a matter of the poor of this world becoming the Church," he posits.[95]

But the church of the poor, *una iglesia popular*, is a weak church. By ridding itself of corruption and greed, the church also repudiates all methods, political or otherwise, of injustice or oppression. Cadorette points out that in losing its earthly power, the church gains a greater heavenly power. The poor, by definition, have no power of their own, and so their church will have none either. Their power is from God, and the church functions as a "counter-power."[96]

In announcing liberation, the church must also denounce sin. These two acts are two sides of the same coin. For in announcing liberation, there must a denunciation of that which oppresses and of oppression itself. The church preaches life and the fulfillment of humanity. The world preaches death and inhumanity. The church, therefore, must denounce this system of evil – both cause and effect – in word, act, and deed.[97] This mission will define the church comprised of true believers, true lovers of God and man.

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[94]Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Freedom and Salvation: A Political Problem" in *Liberation and Change*, ed. Ronald H. Stone (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1977), 90.

[95]Gutiérrez, "Freedom and Salvation: A Political Problem," 93.

[96]Cadorette, 122.

By calling for a church comprised of true Christians, Gutiérrez is breaking with the tradition of the Catholic Church. While not delving deeply into the ecclesiology of a territorial church, including questions about membership and receiving of sacraments, Gutiérrez calls for his own version of a gathered church. Called *comunidades de base* (base ecclesial communities), these small gatherings allow the poor to participate in their own liberation. He did not originate the idea, but he does support it as a means by which the church can reach out to the poor, through the poor.[98]

These communities represent one of the most effective ways the poor spread the gospel. They are both evangelized and evangelizing. "They are, in other words, a people journeying through history and continually bringing about the messianic reversal – 'the last shall be first' – that is a key element in every truly liberating process," he proclaims.[99] Only true believers are members of such communities, that is, only those who have been united to God through the love of Christ, which demands justice. Base ecclesial communities operate with some autonomy, though they do answer to the institutional Church. Nevertheless, this development of liberation theology signifies a significant ecclesiological step in Catholic theology.[100]

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[97]Ramos, 59.

[98]Gutiérrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, 151.

[99]Ibid., 152.

[100]In theory, if not in practice, Gutiérrez's ecclesiology actually appears similar to the free church position of Rauschenbusch. Although the particulars of this system are beyond the scope of this work, it is worth noting that in Gutiérrez's call for a church comprised of true believers, he essentially affirms a key principle of the radical reformation. Going even beyond the reform of Luther, the Anabaptists believed the church was comprised of the regenerate and the regenerate only. Rauschenbusch puts himself squarely within this tradition as well. Gutiérrez is not desiring anything unprecedented in the history of Catholicism; the debate about the nature of the church on earth dates back centuries, with perhaps the most notable early controversy being between Augustine and the Donatists [for an overview, see Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Chruch*, vol. 3 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1858), 360-370.]. Briefly, Gutiérrez may be putting himself somewhere in the middle of the two extreme positions of that particular controversy. He wants

Liberation ecclesiology, then, alters the interpretation of the church's role in salvation. Sanks and Smith observe how, in Gutiérrez's discussion of the church's salvific responsibilities, none of the traditional terms, like "mother Church or "the keys of the kingdom," are used. Furthermore, there is also no employment of papal supremacy or the traditional use of the sacraments of baptism or the Eucharist.[101] It is not so much that liberation theology rejects these teachings, but that it gives to the church, or from its perspective, returns the church to its rightful position of spreading the gospel via real, pro-active work in history, in other words historical praxis on behalf of the poor, rather than the ritualism of previous centuries.[102]

This "uncentering" of the church regarding salvation means that the church is now not concerned with acquiring wealth or power for itself. Its concern is for the poor and for society. It is now calling the poor to liberation in Christ. Part of this liberation is the making of a just society. First, the church is to be a sign of true community to the rest of the world. He writes:

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both the classic "church" comprised of both believers and unbelievers and a purer church made up of only the redeemed.

[101]T. Howland Sanks and Brian H. Smith, "Liberation Ecclesiology: Praxis, Theory, Praxis" *Theological Studies* 38 (March 1977), 15.

[102]The Eucharist, then, is seen in light of this modified ecclesiology. Gutiérrez sees the Eucharist as "a memorial and a thanksgiving." (*A Theology of Liberation,* 148) Interestingly, he does not call it a sacrifice. In taking the bread and the wine, the believer celebrates Christ's ultimate liberating actions – death and resurrection. This is done only within the church, and is done properly only when the church is engaged in justice for the poor. Thus, the believer must be in a proper state of love (evidenced by a preferential option for the poor and thus the preaching of the gospel to the poor) before he takes the elements; otherwise, the act is meaningless (*A Theology of Liberation*, 150). By connecting a sacrificial love for the poor with the Eucharist, Gutiérrez unites the preaching of the gospel with a modified sacramentalism and presents them both as the unified sacramental work of the church. "The place of the mission of the Church is where the celebration of the Lord's supper and the creation of human fellowship are indissolubly joined. This is what it means in an active and concrete way to be the sacrament of the salvation of the world," he declares. (*A Theology of Liberation,* 148)

> As a sacramental community, the Church should signify in its own internal structure the salvation whose fulfillment it announces. Its organization ought to serve this task. As a sign of liberation of humankind and history, the Church itself in its concrete existence ought to be a place of liberation… Since the Church is not an end in itself, it finds its meaning in its capacity to signify the reality in function of which it exists. Outside this reality the Church is nothing; because of it the Church is always provisional; and it is towards the fulfillment of this reality that the Church is oriented: this reality is the Kingdom of God which has already begun in history.[103]

Spreading the gospel is one step toward evangelizing the poor and working for the Kingdom. The next step is working to eradicate injustice at all levels of society. The church must work for a society in which justice is promoted and injustice ended.

Thus, second, the church is to be involved in politics. But the new formulation of the church leaves political power, at least initially, diminished. Ironically, by becoming pure the church hinders its ability to become involved in politics. Severing ties with those in power must limit its political involvement. At the lowest level, provided the democratic system works in a given context, church officials and laity must seek political office. There, they must use the power of the government in favor of the poor and against those who would exploit them. According to Sanks and Smith, these public officials also "must actively engage in political movements so as to prepare the social conditions for genuine Christian reconciliation."[104]

As insignificant as it may seem, this is where political action must start. If at any time such action stops benefiting the poor, then it ceases to represent the true church and the progress toward a just society; the work of the Kingdom is disrupted. But as long as the poor are given priority, Kingdom work continues. The whole of several local

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[103]Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 147, 148.

[104]Sanks and Smith, 16.

political victories, as well as any victory on a higher level, must culminate in larger political action, specifically significant practical governmental changes on a national level.

Because of liberation theology's indebtedness to Marxism, socialism is often assumed to be the political vehicle of choice for the system. This is a true statement in many ways. At least in the early stages of the development of his thought, Gutiérrez affirms socialism as the best path to take. He comments:

> Only by getting beyond a society divided into classes, only by establishing a form of political power designed to serve the vast majority of our people, and only by eliminating private ownership of the wealth created by human labor will we be able to lay the foundations for a more just society.[105]

Gutiérrez's goal is the community of man. With the means of economic production dominated by the few, communion is impossible. However, Gutiérrez does not advocate blindly following the patterns of other socialist nations. He assures that the political liberation in South America is following its own course, carefully avoiding the mistakes of others. "In doing so the people are not ignoring the defects of many actual embodiments of socialism on the world scene. They are trying to get away… to act creatively and follow their own path," he explains.[106]

Gutiérrez's descriptions of these creative new paths are always couched in terms of revolutionary action. "It comes down to taking a socialist and revolutionary stand, thereby shouldering the task of politics from a very different perspective," he writes.[107] When Gutiérrez uses the term "revolutionary," he does not mean violent, armed

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[105]Gutiérrez, "Liberation Praxis and Christian Faith," 17,18.

[106]Ibid., 18.

[107]Ibid., 9.

overthrow of the existing powers. The very concept of political liberation as a part of the greater liberation through Christ, the viewing of political action as somehow an elaboration of human salvation, is revolutionary for Gutiérrez.[108] This is so significant because Gutiérrez is rejecting the materialism that often characterizes socialist regimes. For Gutiérrez, the political powers must be based on love for humanity on a spiritual level, as God's creation, and not merely on the desire for evenly distributed wealth. To be sure, however, such economic equality is desirable, but it is not an end to itself; it is not the goal.

To recapitulate, the church labors for the Kingdom on earth. The poor receive the Kingdom and are the primary recipients of the gospel message. The church takes a stand for the poor by evangelizing them and by engaging in political activity on their behalf. This is the proclamation of liberation. The preceding is an analysis of liberation ecclesiology and, by association, liberation in general. But Gutiérrez's liberation thought is much more detailed. Sin and salvation are taken very seriously in liberation theology. In order to grasp liberation theology, the specifics of the liberation process must be understood. The church is an agent in liberation and the Kingdom, and the specifics of that liberation comprise the next section.

Liberation and Salvation

Putting together his theology of liberation forced Gutiérrez to revisit the doctrines of sin and salvation. Although the foundation of this theology is the Kingdom of God, the signature component of this system is its soteriology. Jesus entrusted the church with the task of proclaiming His liberation. Given this task, the doctrine of the church is seen

[108]Gutiérrez, "Liberation Praxis and Christian Faith", 10.

in light of this task. Also, given the Kingdom as the central doctrine, the church must take on a certain appearance. Therefore, Gutiérrez sought to recover the biblical model, function, and purpose of the church. With the church as an agent of the Kingdom and liberation, Gutiérrez must specifically formulate his doctrine of liberation. True liberation occurs at both a personal and societal level because sin occurs at both a personal and societal level.

"Sin is a rejection of the gift of God's love," he asserts.[109] An articulation such as this is completely consistent with the foundations of liberation theology. Theology itself, orthopraxy, begins with love. A rejection of this love, then, prohibits one from acting in accordance with the will of God. Liberation theology's doctrine of sin aims to point out the sin of both the individual and society. By rejecting the love of God, an individual breaks the communion between himself and God, and between himself and the rest of mankind. The result for the individual is hell. But Gutiérrez wants to set forth the understanding that sin affects not only the afterlife but the present life as well. When one sins, he turns from others and from God to himself; thus, sin is selfishness.[110]

Gutiérrez affirms the individual's responsibility for sin. By a free, personal act committed in history, one sins. Therefore, sin becomes a historical reality and is thus social in its scope. Personal sin, then, is the "ultimate root of all injustice and oppression."[111] This social aspect dominates the thought. Personal salvation, personal deliverance from sin, is almost taken for granted. To him, knowledge of the way to personal salvation and the elimination of personal sin are well-known.

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[109]Gutiérrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, 136.

[110]Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 85.

[111]Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, 147.

Because this has not translated into an eradication of societal sin, and instead seemed to produce more wide-spread evil, there must be a problem with the understanding of sin. Thus, "in the liberation approach sin is not considered as an individual, private, or merely interior reality…," he writes.[112] The ubiquity of collective sin demonstrates that individual sin always begets this collective sin. Because humans are relational beings, their sin travels along relational lines.

But because of the devastating effects of collective iniquity, sin must be conceived as a social problem. The relational nature of humanity means that emphasis must be put on the social aspect because the personal interpretation of sin does not challenge this evil. Looked at as a rejection of love, the ultimate manifestation of sin is societal because this is the level at which the greatest selfishness is manifested. Both God and all humanity are being rejected in favor of the self.[113]

The solution to sin of all kinds and at all levels is salvation, or as Gutiérrez calls it, liberation. Gutiérrez uses the term "salvation" and is more than aware of all that it entails. However, he also uses the term "liberation" because it fits better with the South American situation and gives a more comprehensive understanding of sin and salvation.[114] The liberation theologian does not endeavor to illuminate the various aspects of salvation as in classical theology. Rather, salvation is seen in terms of life versus death, justice versus injustice. Liberation rests upon the justice of God because, as

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[112]Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 102.

[113]Gutiérrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, 138.

[114]Brown, 36.

Gutiérrez sees it, the justice of God marks his saving acts in human history. In a sense then, justice is equal to salvation.[115]

Gutiérrez describes three levels of liberation. The first is a physical liberation of oppressed people in social, economic, and political spheres. Historically, it is also the most neglected level of liberation.[116] Basically, at this level the ultimate goal of liberation is to close the gap between the rich and the poor, a gap which may begin with economic disparity but is increased by political and social action which oppresses certain groups, most significantly the poor. It is at this stage that the church must act as described above. Political action must be taken and the adverse effects of dependence and developmentalism must be reversed.

The second level is also mainly physical, but does involve something of a spiritual element. Here the entirety of humankind is involved in a process of liberation. This is similar to the first stage, but it occurs on a much greater scale. The goal here, according to Gutiérrez, is "the creation of a new humankind and a qualitatively different society."[117] This new, just society has many different facets. In part, it does build off the previous level. Restructuring the political and economic infrastructures of the nation is an important step toward a new society. But this second level is more nuanced, as Brown notices. Going beyond the outside affirmation of equality among men, this second level includes instilling in every man, especially the poor, that he is not bound to be poor. A

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[115]Gutiérrez, *The God of Life*, 28.

[116]Brown, 104.

[117]Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 24, 25.

slave he may be now, but he does not need to remain one. Justice really will take place here and now.[118]

The third and deepest level of liberation is liberation by Christ from sin, which to Gutiérrez "is the ultimate root of all disruption of friendship and of all injustice and oppression."[119] Only through Christ can both mankind and individuals be truly free, truly liberated, to enjoy communion with God and humanity. In liberating man from sin, Christ effects immediate spiritual liberation and frees man to act in ways to bring about physical liberation: social, economic, and political liberation. Not only are the oppressed liberated, but the oppressors are turned from their evil ways. In the liberation of Christ, all men are equal. But the preferential option for the poor acts as a guideline. Following, it is beneficial to all men.[120]

Conversion begins this process. Of it he writes, "It involves a break with the life lived up to that point; it is prerequisite for entering the kingdom…"[121] Mark 1:15 becomes a key verse in liberation theology for several reasons. Its influence on the specific Kingdom theology will be discussed below. Here though, its importance for Gutiérrez's soteriology is evident. Jesus begins his ministry with the call to repentance. From the beginning, He preaches the Kingdom and its most basic, but nevertheless important requirement. This verse is also used to link personal conversion with the collective concerns of the kingdom. Conversion, therefore, is a qualitative change. As

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[118]Brown, 105.

[119]Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation.*, 25.

[120] Robert M. Barr, *Liberation Theology: An Introductory Guide* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 32.

[121]Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, 95.

Ramsay observes, conversion effects "deeper and deeper changes in the hearts of individuals and the institutions of society."[122]

By identifying conversion as a break, Gutiérrez continues to position himself within some reach of classical theology. His words may be similar, but their meaning is very different. There is an individual focus, but the goal is still social. Conversion is tied to the Kingdom and thus to the eradication of social sin and the struggle for a just society. "Conversion implies that we recognize the presence of sin in our lives and our world," he holds.[123] When one turns from sin and himself to God and humanity, he accepts the community of love which God created and binds. "Within it there is no longer a cleavage between the 'material' and the 'spiritual'; hunger for God and hunger for bread, especially bread for the neighbor, are forever interrelated," notes Brown.[124]

Membership in such a community commits one to the causes of the working poor. In converting, one adopts the preferential attitude towards the poor Gutiérrez sees as so crucial to the liberating process. The new life attained via conversion brings one into the world of the poor. This is the birth of *la iglesia popular*. The importance of such a break and its relation to the church cannot be overstated; it "is a requirement for the solidarity that is a part of the task of the church."[125]

Although Christ is the active agent of conversion, it is through the church that the message is preached. Thus, soteriology is linked to ecclesiology. This should not be seen as merely keeping traditional Catholic sacramentalism under a different name. On

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[122]William Ramsay, *Four Modern Prophets* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1986), 65.

[123]Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells,* 97.

[124]Brown, 100.

[125]Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells.*, 101.

the contrary, he is acutely aware of the need for a true inward spiritual conversion. This is called "spirituality." Citing John 8:32, John 16:13, and 2 Corinthians 3:17, spirituality "is the dominion of the Spirit."[126] The Spirit of Lord frees the inner man. Following Jesus, who freely gave himself for others, the convert is now free from anything that may hinder or interrupt loving communion with God and man. Spirituality involves a commitment to justice and the righteousness of the Kingdom. "A spirituality of liberation will center on a *conversion* to the neighbor, the oppressed person, the exploited class, the despised ethnic group, the dominated country," he concludes.[127] The role of the church, then, is that of evangelization. It proclaims the Gospel of Liberation to the poor. True conversion is a witness of true evangelization, and thus the true church and true citizens of the Kingdom.[128]

The liberation theology treatment of faith also reflects the social emphasis of salvation and further demonstrates how all doctrines and parts thereof are subsumed under the doctrine of the Kingdom, which as far as Gutiérrez is concerned is itself an inherently collective teaching. Faith comes with liberation and battles against sin. This faith liberates one and works toward liberating others.[129] Faith implies the break that is conversion. He goes on to write, "To live the faith means to put into practice, in light of the demands of the reign of God, these fundamental elements of Christian existence."[130]

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[126]Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 117.

[127]Ibid., 118.

[128]Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, 157.

[129]Ibid., 98.

[130]Gutiérrez, "Expanding the View," 20.

Faith also provides a link between the personal and the collective. The true believer preaches the same liberation the church as a whole preaches because the church is a unity of these individuals. He is now united with God against sin and for the exploited and directs his new-found love against the oppressive social structure.[131] The working out of what personal salvation means is done in order that the believer understands what his true duty is – to labor for the justice of God and His Kingdom. The Kingdom is a Kingdom of life, and thus the message preached by both the individual and the Church is a message of life. Through liberating faith the believer is now united with others in solidarity with the poor and their struggle for liberation. This, then, means the message of life pertains to this life and the next, as the oppression of sin and death are historical realities.[132]

Christ is the author of liberation which frees man and reconnects him to God and humanity. Because of Christ who is the Liberator, man can come, unobstructed and undefiled, into the presence of God. Gutiérrez stresses the three levels of liberation are not identical to each other. This three-tiered structure is also not intended to be chronological, starting at level one and ending at level three. The series is meant to occur almost simultaneously. As soon as one becomes personally liberated, he is to work toward the other two. Gutiérrez's distinctions are arranged in order of ultimate importance. Liberation by Christ is both initially and ultimately a spiritual liberation. Coming into the presence of God is a spiritual experience which surpasses all physical

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[131]Gutiérrez, "Freedom and Liberation," 92.

[132]Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Reflections from a Latin American Perspective," in *Irruption of the Third World: Challenge of Theology,* eds. Virginia Fabella and Sergio Torres (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983), 232, 233.

sensations. However, the three are interrelated and, at some level, work together toward the goal of total liberation.[133]

From this detailed understanding, Gutiérrez draws his picture of Christ as Liberator. To be sure, it would be more accurate to continue by saying that the conception of Christ as Liberator both conditions and is conditioned by Gutiérrez's understanding of liberation. Christ effects liberation and connects the upper two levels of liberation with the third. As Gutiérrez comments, "God's saving action is working upon history from within."[134]

Gutiérrez sees the picture of Christ (or God) as Liberator throughout the Bible. In the story of the Exodus, Gutiérrez finds the perfect relation of political and religious liberation. He observes that "both points [political and religious] are in fact present in the experience; … The one aspect does not negate the other; rather they are at different levels of depth."[135] Clearly, the biblical account states that the Hebrews were liberated socially and politically from the Egyptians.

Having been enslaved and oppressed, upon crossing the Red Sea they were no longer under Egyptian political control. They were free to choose for themselves; their destiny, as it were, was in their own hands. However, Gutiérrez warns about putting too much emphasis on this political liberation.[136] In the Exodus, the initial and ultimate liberation occurred at the spiritual level. God set His people free for His glory and to bring His people into His presence. Gutiérrez uses the story of the Exodus to

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[133]Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 103.

[134]Gutiérrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, 117.

[135]Ibid., 118.

[136]Gutiérrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, 119.

demonstrate how his levels of liberation are tied together. He concludes, "This presence of the Lord, together with his gift of full communion, gives unity to a process of liberation whose several aspects (and the differences between them) we may not overlook."[137]

Gutiérrez also sees liberation as an important theme in the New Testament. It is contained in the message of the Kingdom of God, which Gutiérrez asserts is the principle focus of Jesus' preaching.[138] Gutiérrez's chief passages include ones such as Mark 1:15, in which Jesus, at the very beginning of His ministry, proclaims that "The Kingdom is at hand." However, perhaps the key passage is Luke 4:18-19, where Jesus reads from the scroll in the synagogue. He quotes Isaiah, saying:

> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

Clearly this passage sets forth the role of liberator for Christ and details His mission.[139]

The Kingdom is both now and not yet. Traditional orthodoxy puts the Kingdom of God in the category of eschatology. Gutiérrez rejects the traditional notion of the Kingdom as a break with history, as occurring at the end of history, the beginning of a new history. Subsequently, he also rejects the traditional understanding of eschatology.

Liberation and Eschatology

The Kingdom does belong in this category, but because eschatology has been misunderstood for so long by tradition dogmatic theologians, so too has the Kingdom.[140]

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[137]Gutiérrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, 119.

[138]Ibid., 117.

[139]Ibid., 117.

His rejection of traditional eschatology entails an elevation of the entire category and with it the Kingdom doctrine. Because the central message of Christ concerned His Kingdom, it is around this that all other doctrines revolve. The kingdom of God, notes Kirk, incorporates issues ranging from creation, redemption, the lordship of Christ, and man, just to name some of the more important issues.[141] To Gutiérrez, eschatology is the motivating force of salvation history. Eschatology propels salvation forward. So, he writes, "Eschatology is thus not just one more element of Christianity, but the very key to understanding the Christian faith."[142]

Gutiérrez finds fault with those who would leave the "last things" last. However, his promotion of eschatology is very Christocentric. He views the Bible as a book of Promise. This Promise, which is Christ, proclaims the message of the Kingdom. "The Promise enters upon 'the last days' with the proclamation in the New Testament of the gift of the Kingdom of God," he declares.[143] This gift must be accepted, and only Christ can give the gift, only Christ can completely set up the kingdom. This total establishment of the Kingdom occurs only as a result of the ultimate liberation affected by Christ, a liberation which frees men from spiritual and material poverty.

So, the Kingdom is coming, but it is also a present reality. Liberation itself follows the same pattern: it begins now and it is completed later. Not surprisingly, much more attention is given to formulating the doctrine of the Kingdom in its present form. He discusses the future Kingdom, but details are scant. The focus is more on what the

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[140]Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 92. According to Gutiérrez, these theologians, both Catholic and Protestant, have incorrectly relegated eschatological themes to the periphery of Christianity.

[141]J. Andrew Kirk, *Liberation Theology* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979), 177.

[142]Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 93.

[143]Ibid., 92.

future Kingdom means in general and how that relates to the completion of Liberation. First, the conception of the present Kingdom will be examined, and then that of the future Kingdom.

Clearly, the Church and the true believers are responsible for building the Kingdom on earth now. But both the future and the present stages of the Kingdom are gifts. Although humans have a responsibility, it is God who is in control. God and mankind have the same responsibilities in the liberation process as they do in the establishment of the Kingdom. As the three-fold process of liberation unfolds, the Kingdom becomes more apparent in the world. "The kingdom comes to suppress injustice," he posits.[144]

It is evident, then, that the process of liberation is integrally tied to the Kingdom. All three stages of liberation involve the growth of the Kingdom. As sin is eradicated and more individuals are brought into loving communion with God, the Kingdom grows. In its present state, the Kingdom is not just the gift of God's sovereignty or reign over man, it is also a demand. "The disciples of Jesus who accept the gift of the kingdom respond to it by a specific conduct," he asserts. "This is the ethical dimension of the kingdom."[145]

"The growth of the kingdom is a process which occurs historically *in* liberation," believed Gutiérrez.[146] All progress in each stage of liberation points to the historical reality of the Kingdom. The ethical demands of the Kingdom are applied in liberation.

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[144]Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Toward a Theology of Liberation," in *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History*, ed. and trans. Alfred T. Hennelly (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990), 73.

[145]Gutiérrez, *The God of Life*, 102.

[146]Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 104.

In accepting the ethical demands, believers are seeking the Kingdom, which Christ commanded them (Matt. 6:23).[147] Therefore, true Christians demand justice, or righteousness, because this is a characteristic of the Kingdom and of God himself. In summarizing the relationship between the present Kingdom and the process of liberation, he concludes:

> Justice is the work of God and therefore must also be the work of those who believe in God. It implies a relationship with the Lord – namely, holiness; and at the same time a relationship with human beings – namely, recognition of the rights of each person and especially of the despised and the oppressed, or in other words, social justice.[148]

Social justice may then be the greatest sign of the present Kingdom. Gutiérrez wrote that the creation of a just society is essential to the Kingdom. The close relationship between a just society and the Kingdom has led many to believe that the two are conflated in liberation theology. As Brown notes, "Liberating events enable the growth of the kingdom, but the kingdom is more than liberating events."[149]

Nor too can temporal progress be totally equated with the kingdom. To be sure, the two are related. Because sin and redemption are historical realities that occur in the context of human relations, the temporal sphere serves as a representative of the struggle between good and evil that is taking place in the spiritual realm.[150] As such, it also represents the hope for the outcome of that conflict. Nevertheless, the two are not the same. A just society is not the same as the fulfillment of the Kingdom.

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[147]Gutiérrez, *The God of Life*, 103, 104.

[148]Ibid., 120.

[149]Brown, 154.

[150]Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 102.

Both temporal progress and the Kingdom share a common goal: "complete communion of human beings with God and among themselves."[151] The growth of the Kingdom depends on historical liberation. Lest one think that Gutiérrez gives man too much responsibility and too much credit for the Kingdom, one must remember the fact that the Kingdom is a gift, one given in history. It is an act of God, and thus will happen. Historical political liberation constitutes growth of the Kingdom and is a salvific event, but, he writes, "it is not *the* coming of the Kingdom, not *all* of salvation."[152]

The proclamation of the coming kingdom is found in Mark as well. In analyzing Mark 1:14-15, Gutiérrez draws the distinction between the two Greek words for time, *chronos* and *kairos*. It is *kairos* that is most pertinent to the subject. Rather than refer to an hour or a date, the term connotes, as Gutiérrez puts it, "the element of human destiny, … to historical significance…"[153] The Kingdom is God's plan for history. The coming of the Kingdom, while it is the end of history, is a historical reality. The Kingdom is here now, but it has not yet attained its full and final form. This full and final form is the coming of the Kingdom.[154]

The coming of the Kingdom will accompany Christ's return.[155] The future Kingdom and the details of Christ's Second Coming are not treated in his liberation thought. The Millennium receives no attention at all. This lack of attention does not deter Gutiérrez from asserting the reality of the future Kingdom, a time when sin is

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[151] Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 104.

[152]Ibid., 104.

[153]Gustavo Gutiérrez, "The Kingdom is at Hand," in *Gustavo Gutiérrez: Essential Writings*, ed. James B. Nickoloff (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 172.

[154]"Ibid.," 174.

[155]Gutiérrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, 156.

crushed and true liberation is accomplished. The task of liberation is too great for man to accomplish. It can be completed only by Christ at His return, when the Kingdom comes.

Even in describing the coming Kingdom, Gutiérrez finds it difficult to separate it from a discussion of the present Kingdom. There is a distinction, and while Gutiérrez admits it, he does tend to downplay it. This led Henry to claim that Gutiérrez "ignores the supernatural aspects of the Kingdom of God and substitutes a temporal sociopolitical utopia."[156] To say that the supernatural aspects are ignored may be overstating the case. While it would seem like this is the case, it is by no means so. Gutiérrez sees the spiritual transformation of the individual as essential to the Kingdom, both future and present. However, the metaphysical shift between this world and the next, between earth and heaven, does not seem to be recognized, or at least given much attention. As strong as Gutiérrez's practical theology may be, he seems to pay only lip-service to the speculative questions his system asks. This is consistent with his action over belief approach, but the lack of specifics regarding the future nature of the Kingdom may provide little solace for those who see either no action or failed action. Furthermore, grounding his theology in more stable theoretical footings may shield Gutiérrez from critics like Henry and those who note that a praxis-based theology should actually produce results.

But the lack of metaphysical theology should not necessarily discredit liberation theology completely. Generally speaking, his thought is not dualistic. Liberation, or salvation, is both a physical and spiritual event, and both occur in history. Along the same lines, the Kingdom begins in history and is the culmination of history. It may end history, but it does occur in it. This is the foundation and the capstone of liberation

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[156]Carl F. H. Henry, "Liberation Theology and the Scripture," in *Liberation Theology* ed. Ronald Nash (Milford, MI: Mott Media, 1984), 201.

theology. Justice, or righteousness, is the preeminent characteristic of God. The Kingdom is the manifestation of that justice in history.

By seeing history as the battlefield of good and evil, specifically his own historical context, he sees sin in terms which represent those ways in which evil is most revealed in his own setting – poverty, oppression, exploitation, slavery. All these are injustice in action birthed from selfishness. Thus, justice works against these forces and is birthed in man when he turns to God. This is the core of the liberation process. All revolves around the fulfillment of justice. This occurs with the growth and eventual coming of the Kingdom, which is God's goal for humanity.

Chapter 4

Background of the Social Gospel

With both the background and content established, the focus will now center on the social gospel. Following the pattern of the previous two chapters, the social gospel will be investigated in the same manner as liberation theology. Following a discussion of the context of the development of the social gospel, Rauschenbusch's theological thought will be analyzed along similar thematic lines as were Gutiérrez's ideas.

Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century America

The social gospel grew, in part, out of concern for the same conditions of poverty and inequality which beset the people of South America, for whom Gutiérrez had such a great burden. While the circumstances in the United States were not nearly as severe, the impact they had on the theological situation of the era was no less than in Latin America. Walter Rauschenbusch realized the important link between history and theology. This belief led him to incorporate the social, economic, and political circumstances of his time into his social theology. "The live substance of the Christian religion was the hope of seeing a divine social order established on earth," Rauschenbusch declared.[157] The time was now right, believed Rauschenbusch, to begin to institute this divine social order.

The social gospel movement tried to respond to conditions in the cities of America, specifically New York City. Like the background section on liberation theology, this section will contain general information about America around the turn of the twentieth century. The conditions of American cities, which so appalled Rauschenbusch, will also be discussed. The political changes taking place in America at

[157]Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order* (New York: MacMillan, 1912), 69.

the time went hand-in-hand with religious changes. Churchmen like Rauschenbusch did not confine their actions to the religious sphere; their religion motivated political action. The social gospel movement, with Rauschenbusch at the fore, exemplified this combination of religious and political reform.

Socio-economic Circumstances

Both political and religious reformers summed up the social and economic situation around the turn of the century with one word: inequality. Nowhere was the inequality more glaring than in the cities. Such severe disparity was linked to urbanization. Various Latin America countries welcomed immigrants to their shores. However, the United States felt a greater strain, as several heavy waves of foreigners came to her shores in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Industrialization and urbanization began independently of the waves of immigration, but the factories soon drew hordes of foreigners to America in search of a better life. Over 1.2 million people came in 1907 and by 1910 one seventh of the population was foreign-born.[158]

The lack of public services meant that housing and utilities were left to private enterprise, which quickly took advantage of the newcomers. These people usually found work in factories which demanded long hours in return for low wages. Mass production created enormous wealth for the owners of corporations. This resulted, among other things, in a slight increase in real wages from 1900-1914.[159] But the more radical reformers, Rauschenbusch among them, maintained that this was not enough. The wages

[158]Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 177.

[159]Ibid., 169.

were not commensurate with the profits gained by capitalists. "Wages have advanced on foot; profits have taken the Limited Express," commented Rauschenbusch.[160]

To illustrate his point, he offered a set of railway industry statistics released in 1902. From 1896 until that year, employees' average wages and salaries increased five percent, from $550 to $580. The earnings of owners increased from $377,000,000 to $610,000,000 during the same six years, a sixty-two percent increase.[161] The lack of parity in these numbers demonstrated to the social reformers that more must be done to rectify the problem. However lop-sided the numbers may have been, any increase at all for either group was due, at least in part, to both groups organizing.

In that same span, several large companies, including Standard Oil and United States Steel Corporation, incorporated. Almost seventy-five percent of trusts and nearly all of their capital came into existence as well. Labor lagged behind a few years, but "[b]y 1911 the membership of all American trade unions was five times what it had been in 1887."[162] Both organized labor and organized business had the manpower and economic clout to leverage for their interests directly against each other. They also used this numerical might to bear on the government. But these were not the only groups which turned to the government for their own benefit. The progressives, who gave their name to the period, advocated the most widespread reform, the benefits of which cut across class lines.

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[160]Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis,* 233.

[161]Ibid., 233.

[162]Hofstadter, 170.

Politics and Progressives

Reform was in the air at the end of the nineteenth century as a response to the problems besetting American society on all levels. Unlike Latin America, reform in the United States was almost always attempted through peaceful means. Although an ideological revolution was fomenting, there would be no physical revolution. Power would transfer from one party to another peacefully. Thus, while men advocated change in America, it would be change with stability.

The impetus for this change was a co-incidence of political and religious factors. Social gospelers responded to the needs of city dwellers as early as the 1880s. Led primarily by Washington Gladden, these urban congregations operated primarily out of and through the church, although there was also some political involvement.[163] But many members of the middle class, including the small businessmen and professionals, while not necessarily seeing themselves as advocates of the social gospel, did adhere to an emerging Protestant social ethic. These men were the standard bearers of traditional American values, which included the Protestant democratic ethos. This had a variety of fine and nuanced interpretations, but it generally meant that no one class would dominate the government. All citizens should have an equal voice.[164]

Advocates of urban reform sought the help of the government at local, state, and national levels at redressing grievances. The period from 1893-1920 is generally seen as the heyday of such reform.[165] The progressives, recognizing the adverse effects of

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[163]Neill Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon* (New York: W.H. Norton and Company, 2008), 103,104.

[164]George Mowry, *The California Progressives* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1951), 102.

urbanization, immigration, and industrialization, mobilized to help both the working class laborers and the middle class consumers. The exact motivation for this reform is heavily debated, with the reasons offered often being less than altruistic. Nevertheless, reformers did succeed, at least to some degree, in marshalling the power of governments on behalf of their cause. The political arena was a vital component of success, as it served to level the playing field between the rival interests. As Mowry observes, "Since the progressive was not organized economically as was the capitalist and the laborer, he chose to fight his battles where he had the most power – in the political arena."[166]

The first battleground of reform was at the municipal level. The depression of 1893 sparked concentrated, albeit somewhat amorphous, reform efforts in urban areas across the country. The widespread adverse effects caused leaders to take the urban situation seriously and to develop a thought-out plan of action. Realizing the problems were similar in different cities in different parts of the country, organizations to encourage cooperation and communication between mayors and local municipal groups formed, such as the National Municipal League in 1894.[167]

Identifying the actual problem became the first step in finding and instituting a solution. Four years after its founding, the League concluded that the problem was twofold – "the affliction was moral, but it was also structural and mechanical – a matter of both men and measures."[168] The League also published a detailed plan to restructure city government. However, there soon emerged another strand of urban reformers who

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[165]Melvin G. Holli, "Urban Reform in the Progressive Era," in *The Progressive Era*, ed. Lewis L. Gould (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1974), 133.

[166]George Mowry, *The Era of Theodore Roosevelt* (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), 104.

[167]Holli, 136.

[168]Ibid., 138.

were more concerned with social than institutional reform. These men thought that the League's agenda was not comprehensive enough to deal with the problems.

This group, which arose slightly later in the early years of the twentieth century, consisted of both religious and political leaders. They saw big business rather than the nature of the government as the primary problem. Rauschenbusch fell into this group, convinced that big business capitalism not only dominated the "machinery of our government," but that it also exerted a "corroding influence on the morality of our public servants."[169] Social reforms and public services topped the more radical agenda. The businesses would benefit from the government, under either the old or the new plan. Indeed, the new plan was seen as excluding the lower classes. On the contrary, the social reformers wanted to enable the lower classes to play a greater role in governing themselves at the most direct level.[170]

On the national scene, the presidential election of 1912 (the same year Rauschenbusch published *Christianizing the Social Order*) represented a significant moment in the Progressive Era. Pieces of the progressive agenda had been floating around for years, with different politicians at different levels promising varying degrees of reform. But even within the broader reform camp there was division similar to that seen at the local level. On the one hand, there were those who wished government to enact only those measures which would break the power of big business and ensure competition. This would, in theory, indirectly contribute to social justice and the

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[169]Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 254.

[170]Holli, 140.

improvement of the plight of the laborers. These reformers generally saw Woodrow Wilson as the champion of these polices and voted for him for president in 1912.[171]

The other camp of reformers was much more vocal and radical. These men supported Theodore Roosevelt, who was now on the ticket of the new Progressive Party. Roosevelt minced no words in describing the role he envisioned for the federal government; it was to be directly involved in both economic and social justice. Not only did Roosevelt pledge to curtail the excesses of big business, but he also campaigned on a social reform platform which included a federal child labor law, a minimum wage for women, and federal worker's compensation, among many other similar measures.[172]

Roosevelt lost the election, and the reform agenda met with mixed results in Congress. For example, a federal worker's compensation bill was passed in 1912, followed in 1916 by a child labor law. However, other progressive causes were either not seriously considered or failed to pass. A bill designed to exclude labor unions from anti-trust laws narrowly failed in 1914. Allen and Clubb conclude there was "no concerted effort…to provide relief for the unemployed, or to enact measures to correct the conditions of hardship and poverty found in American cities."[173] But the progressive impulse did not fade away, even in the face of legislative indifference. Progressives continued to fight for reform even during the Great War, albeit in an even more punctuated and abbreviated fashion. In fact, Rauschenbusch did not publish *A Theology*

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[171]Arthur S. Link, *Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era* (New York: Harper and Row, 1954), 20-21.

[172]Link, 20.

[173]Howard W. Allen and Jerome Clubb, "Progressive Reform and the Political System" *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 65 (Jan. 1974), 135.

for the Social Gospel, which was both the premier and final work of the movement, until 1917, just months after the United States entered World War I.

Protestantism

This final book by Rauschenbusch was the culmination of a theological shift decades in the making. Since the Civil War, many Protestant denominations championed various social causes, such as temperance, abolition, and education reform. Slowly, a more liberal strain of Protestantism began to emerge. The social gospel was part of a leftward theological trend, specifically in the urban North. Nevertheless, the traditional, conservative Protestantism was still very strong during the Progressive Era. By the turn of the century, two segments of Protestantism not only offered differing perspectives on how to interpret the classic doctrines of the church, they also represented two opposing ways the church responded to the social question. But the issue was deeper than just Christian social action. The theological presuppositions behind the conservative and especially the liberal approaches to the social concerns of the period were foundational in both theological schools of thought. Indeed, the stances on Christian social action were just branches sprouting from greater doctrinal stumps. These basic theological underpinnings defined two divergent segments of Protestantism: fundamentalism and evangelical liberalism.

Fundamentalism

While the term “fundamentalist” was not coined until 1920, the movement gradually began to emerge and develop in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as conservative Christians coalesced behind what they considered to be non-

negotiable doctrines of the faith.[174] Believers from many of the major denominations supported the orthodox position on these tenants, but the Presbyterians rose to the fore in articulating a defense of these in the face of liberalism and modernism. Indeed, the first listing of the fundamentals was compiled by the Presbyterian General Assembly in 1910. The original five essentials were "(1) the inerrancy of Scripture, (2) the Virgin Birth of Christ, (3) Christ's substitutionary atonement, (4) his bodily resurrection, and (5) the historical authenticity of the biblical miracles."[175]

During the late 19th century, before the rise of the social gospel, these conservatives also remained active in social concerns. Such concern crossed denominational and geographical lines. Both pre- and postmillennialists held that the Bible directed them to address both physical and spiritual needs. Conservative Christians of all theological and denominational persuasions used two principle methods of advancing social ministry. First, the government could be used to provide for the welfare of those who could not do so for themselves. Second, of course, was supporting and encouraging private charity.[176]

By 1900, however, two important factors contributed to the subordination and near total elimination of social concerns by conservatives. First, premillennial influences prompted many to abandon the idea that the world really could be bettered by legislation. This had the greatest impact among Baptists and other traditionally non-confessional denominations. Presbyterians, however, where much less affected by premillennialism.

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[174]George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 119.

[175]James C. Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 323. The second coming of Christ later became the fifth point, with the veracity of miracles being presupposed by inerrancy.

[176]Marsden, 86.

They, as well as other conservatives, reacted against the adoption of social causes by liberal Christians. The subsequent abandonment of social Christianity became known as the "Great Reversal."[177]

The "Great Reversal" was a two-phased event. It included the negative response by conservatives, the rejection of social Christianity. But it also entailed a positive response. Among other actions taken against liberalism was the publication of a twelve-volume theological series from 1910 to 1915 known as *The Fundamentals.* Conservatives adhering to the beliefs outlined therein became known as fundamentalists.[178] One such fundamentalist, a Presbyterian, was Benjamin B. Warfield. Warfield's criticisms of liberalism are typical of the era. Refuting not only the contemporary manifestations of liberalism in his day, he also struck at its Ritschlian roots, observing that not only did liberals interpret Scripture through an anti-supernatural bias, but they also reshaped Christianity to fit their own philosophies.[179]

The fact that liberals, many of whom rejected or reinterpreted the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, the inspiration of Scripture, and sin and salvation, now also championed social issues was cause for alarm in the fundamentalist camp. Social consciousness was not problematic. Rather, it was the fact that, as Marsden put it, "the Social Gospel emphasized social concern in an exclusivistic way which seemed to undercut the relevance of the message of eternal salvation through trust in Christ's atoning work."[180]

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[177]Marsden, 90.

[178]Ibid., 118.

[179]W. Andrew Hoffecker, "Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield," in *Makers of Christian Theology in American*, eds. Mark G. Toulouse and James O. Duke (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 357.

[180]Marsden, 92.

Evangelical Liberalism

The social gospel was part of a larger liberal trend in American Christianity. As new developments such as immigration and industrialization prompted changes in politics, so did new intellectual developments prompt changes in theology. In response to innovations in the physical sciences and new fields of inquiry such as psychology and biblical studies, American theologians endeavored to interpret the content of Scripture in terms of what they believed to be new truths revealed by science and other methods of human inquiry. The primary result of this effort was a reinterpretation of basic teachings, concerning Christ, the Church, sin, and salvation.

The liberalism which influenced Rauschenbusch and which he influenced was known as evangelical liberalism, so called because it "made the person and work of Jesus Christ central, but at the same time sought a faith that could be mediated to intelligent modern people."[181] Although a hallmark of evangelical liberalism, Christocentricity was also put into the modern context. The atoning work of Christ and His earthly ministry were cast in more ethical terms.

Interest in Christian ethics was appropriated from Albrecht Ritschl and his followers.

Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889) was a German theologian who de-emphasized classical metaphysical methods of investigating Scripture. Ritschlians viewed Christianity as a moral religion which conveyed truths revealed by Jesus, primarily about the Kingdom of God.[182] Protestants in America believed this ethical reading of Scripture was the best way both to reconcile the Bible with modern thinking and to respond

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[181]Ronald C. White, Jr. and C. Howard Hopkins, *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform in Changing America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976), 245.

[182]Livingston, 271.

effectively to the social problems of the period. Liberals were very much convinced of the truths of the Christian religion. Jesus revealed timeless and universal ethical truths. Theology or doctrine served to protect these truths. Thus, it could be necessary to alter theology, but only to further elucidate and explain ethical truths which, although obscured by various crises and discoveries, would always be valid.[183]

William Newton Clark, a Baptist theologian and professor, is considered the first systematic theologian of theological liberalism in America. Unlike many of the social gospelers, Clarke was a professional theologian.[184] While Rauschenbusch laid down a theology for the Social Gospel, Clarke's work represented the theological underpinnings and presuppositions used by Rauschenbusch in *A Theology for the Social Gospel.* Specifically, Clarke recognized the need to teach doctrine in collective or social terms. In doing so, the Kingdom of God was raised up as central to understanding the teachings of Christ and to serving both God and man. "It [the kingdom] was not to be a fact in the field of individualism, but an institution of the common life, a social fact," writes Clarke.[185]

It is easy to place the social gospel within the fold of evangelical liberalism. It is much harder to pinpoint an exact beginning to the social gospel. Rauschenbusch was its premier expositor and has been called the father of the movement, but he was by no means its first proponent. The term "social gospel" was not coined until 1900.[186] But

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[183]Janet Forsyhte Fishburn, *The Fatherhood of God and The Victorian Family: The Social Gospel in America* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 131.

[184]Claude L. Howe, Jr., "William Newton Clarke," in *Makers of Christian Theology in America,* ed. Mark G. Toulouse and James O. Duke (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 324.

[185]William Newton Clarke, *The Christian Doctrine of God* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1909), 263.

[186] N. A. Magnuson, "The Social Gospel," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*.

more than a decade before, several Protestants pastors and leaders became involved in social Christianity. Congregationalists Washington Gladden and Josiah Strong worked to alleviate the plight of the poor and to conceive of a social theology in the 1880s. Ritschl demonstrated the importance of the doctrine of the Kingdom of God, which quickly became important in liberal theology on both sides of the Atlantic. By 1885 the doctrine was identified as the unifying element in social theology, the doctrine around which other doctrines would center and in whose light would be interpreted.[187]

Rauschenbusch's personal theological journey eventually led him to embrace evangelical liberalism and social Christianity. The purpose here was to outline the theological and social climate in which Rauschenbusch found himself. Social changes indicated to many that traditional political and theological methods would not long suffice. The United States was never in danger of the upheaval which plagued the Latin American countries. But the problems were nevertheless legitimate. Rauschenbusch admitted the necessity of political action. As a Baptist pastor committed to liberal evangelicalism, he knew that the Gospel alone was the cure to man's problems, both individual and social. His social gospel, his "evangel for the working class," was wrought by a man who

> love[d] that class, share[d] its life, under[stood] the ideals for which it [groped], penetrate[d] those ideals with the religious spirit of Christianity, and then proclaim[ed] a message in which the working people [might] find their highest self.[188]

An examination of that gospel ensues.

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[187]Donald K Gorrell, *The Age of Social Responsibility: The Social Gospel in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988), 12.

[188]Walter Rauschenbusch, "The New Evangelism," *The Independent* 56 (Jan-June 1904), 1059.

Chapter 5

Walter Rauschenbusch and the Social Gospel

When Rauschenbusch wrote *A Theology for the Social Gospel* in 1917, he summed up all that he had learned and taught about the social crisis and what he viewed as the proper Christian response to it. World War I brought a different type of change than he had conceived. He died in 1918. But as far as he knew, the world into which his final book was released was essentially the same one in which he spent the previous two decades of his life – a world of oppression by the rich and dehumanizing of the poor. The answer to those problems was that same social gospel to which he devoted his life.

The social gospel was formulated with genuine social concern. But more accurately, it was a genuinely theological movement. Rauschenbusch intended to use Christianity to address the social needs of the day. Christianity stressed relationships, both horizontal and vertical. Thus, the true Christian message answered the social question. But that was not its primary concern, and that was not the primary concern of Rauschenbusch. While answering the social question, he endeavored to center his theology around justice. A just God demands righteousness. Continuing in the liberal theological tradition, he accepted the doctrine of the Kingdom as the central doctrine. All other areas of Christian belief were subjugated to this understanding of the Kingdom. For the purposes of this paper, however, only three of them will be discussed: ecclesiology, soteriology, and eschatology. Each one of these is distinctly affected by Rauschenbusch's understanding of the Kingdom. While not a full-fledged systematic theologian, he systematically examined what he considered to be the essential elements of the faith. His doctrine of the Kingdom of God determined how he comprehended the

rest of contents of Scripture, and his understanding of the relationship between history and theology determined how he understood the Kingdom of God.

The Social Gospel: History and Christianity

Rauschenbusch is indebted to liberals for his view of history, which did have a major formative impact on his theology. Like other liberals, he firmly believed in universal absolute truths, and like them he held that theological doctrines preserved such truth. However, over the course of history these doctrines may need to be reinterpreted and rethought in order to communicate such truths to new people in new contexts. As a professor of church history, Rauschenbusch examined how different denominations and historical figures labored for, or sometimes against, the Kingdom.[189] Christians acted in history to advance the Kingdom because God had acted in history.

"The fundamental fact in the Christian revelation was that the Word became flesh. Therewith, Truth became History," he writes.[190] Recognizing and appreciating the historicity of Christianity formed the backbone of the social gospel. God was acting in real time on real people; He continues to do so today. History itself is how God interacts with man and thus how man experiences God. Throughout all of history, God has communicated in various ways to man. History is not just a sequence of events, it is a sequence of events related to the self-revelation of God.

This is not to say that all events in history are good, for many are quite evil. Even the good events in history are not all equally good or significant. The singular most important act of the revelation of God was the Incarnation of Christ, and therefore also

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[189]Evans, 152, 153.

[190]Walter Rauschenbusch, "The Influence of Historical Studies on Theology," *American Journal of Theology* 11 (Jan. 1907), 127.

His teachings. Thus, the task of the theologian becomes identifying which events in history which are indicators of this revelation.[191] That is, the theologian must identify what events and actions are in accordance with the true revelation of God in the teachings of Jesus.

In order to do so, Jesus and his teachings must be more fully understood. Rauschenbusch fully admitted that the social concerns of his day helped bring to light the social dimensions of the gospel.[192] However, it must not be assumed that the gospel was so interpreted because of the contemporary situation. Rather, the American situation helped Rauschenbusch and others better understand the teachings of Jesus in their original context. The American social crisis brought to light the true meaning of the gospel.

"The social gospel is, in fact, the oldest gospel of all," he declares.[193] In a sense, the social gospel was the rediscovery of the true meaning of the teachings of Christ. Rauschenbusch was convinced that the idea of collective redemption was not foreign to the teachings of Jesus. And Jesus stood at the end of a long line of Hebrew prophets who declared the same ethical teachings. The core of this message, which encompassed the ethical but went far beyond it, "was the conviction that God demands righteousness and demands nothing but righteousness."[194] This righteousness was inherently both public and private.

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[191]Max L. Stackhouse, "Introduction," *The Righteousness of the Kingdom* by Walter Rauschenbusch, ed. Max L. Stackhouse (New York: Abingdon Press, 1968), 28.

[192]Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 46.

[193]Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 24.

[194]Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 4.

Because the gospel is social, that is, it is for both the individual and society, the most important events in history are the ones which work toward the future historical perfection of society. For Rauschenbusch, theology works in history towards the eradication of sin. It is God's will for man that he seek righteousness and fight against sin. These actions are markers of true revelation because they are in accordance with the teachings of Jesus.

The Church and Society

Walter Rauschenbusch was the son of a German Lutheran pietist who had become a Baptist pastor. As such, both Lutheran and Baptist theological traditions bore heavily on his own religious growth. Soon after a conversion in 1879 at the age of sixteen, he felt called to serve the Lord in the same capacity as his father. "I want to be a pastor, powerful with men, preaching to them Christ as the man in whom their affections and energies can find the satisfaction for which mankind is groaning," his secretary records him as saying.[195] This passion for the church, both local and universal, never left him and would resurface frequently throughout his theology.

In 1886, he assumed the pastorate of the Second German Baptist Church of New York City, located in a rough and economically down-trodden neighborhood on the Westside known as "Hell's Kitchen."[196] Initially his social interest was merely secular. He supported the progressive reformers in their political endeavors. The gospel he delivered from the pulpit was consistent with traditional conservative orthodoxy. It was a call to personal salvation through faith in Christ. Even in the early years the Kingdom of

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[195]Dores R. Sharpe, *Walter Rauschenbusch* (New York: Macmillan, 1924), 54.

[196]Paul M. Minus, *Walter Rauschenbusch: American Reformer* (New York: Macmillan, 1988), 53.

God occupied a prominent place in his theology, but there was little hint of the liberalism which would later guide him.[197]

His experience in Hell's Kitchen weighed heavy on his soul. Confronted directly with disease, poverty, violence, crime, homelessness and a multitude of other problems associated with rapid urbanization and industrialization, he soon came to believe his concept of Christianity was woefully unsuited to deal with the problems of the people. In 1891 he took an indefinite leave of absence from his church, due in large part to an illness which left him partially deaf. Originally, he planned to go to Germany to visit family and perhaps seek medical treatment. He ended up going to England as well.[198]

For nearly a year he acquainted himself with the teachings of Schleiermacher, Ritschl, and Harnack, which caused him to abandon many of his previous conservative theological positions and to adopt more liberal stances in such areas as salvation and sin. While in Germany, he also came to embrace the doctrine of the Kingdom of God as the central teaching of Christ. Rauschenbusch writes, "Here was the idea and purpose that had dominated the mind of the Master himself… When the Kingdom of God dominated our landscape, the perspective of life shifted into a new alignment."[199] He explicitly insisted the Kingdom was central to the message of Jesus, writing, "The fundamental purpose of Jesus was the establishment of the kingdom of God…"[200] And more than a

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[197]Minus, 55.

[198]Evans, 89.

[199]Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order*, 93.

[200]Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 143.

decade before that, in 1896, he equated the gospel itself with the Kingdom. In his diary he boldly asserts, "The entire Gospel was a word about the Kingdom."[201]

The Kingdom of God presented an opportunity to preach a gospel of both personal and social salvation. Handy observes the chance afforded Rauschenbusch to incorporate his evangelical concern for the salvation of individual souls with his desire for social redemption. The Kingdom of God, he writes, "brought together his evangelical concern for individuals and his social vision of a redeemed society."[202] And once discovered, the doctrine of the Kingdom would dictate Rauschenbusch's course for the rest of his life; he was determined to find and to formulate a Christian teaching for the social gospel.[203]

The concept of the Kingdom became the centerpiece of the social gospel. Of it he writes, "This doctrine is itself the social gospel. Without it, the idea of redeeming the social order will be but an annex to the orthodox conception of the scheme of salvation."[204] Jesus himself proclaimed that the Kingdom would grow outward only because of the inward growth of the Kingdom. Men as individuals must be saved before any society can truly be saved. But just because men are saved does not mean a society is saved.[205] This two-fold goal rests upon the foundation of the Kingdom.

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[201]Minus, 81. Reprinted here from Rauschenbusch's notebook.

[202] Robert Handy, ed., *The Social Gospel in America* (New York: Oxford, 1966), 255.

[203]Walter Rauschenbusch, "The Genesis of 'Christianity and the Social Crisis'," *Rochester Theological Seminary Bulletin* (Nov. 1918), 52.

[204]Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 131.

[205]Walter Rauschenbusch, *The Righteousness of the Kingdom*, ed. Max L. Stackhouse (New York: Abingdon, 1968), 102.

But coming from a Protestant church, this approach to the Kingdom of God was different than Gutiérrez's. Rauschenbusch was not just a pastor in a Baptist Church. He was a devout Baptist Pastor committed to Baptist theology, even after adopting liberalism. His traditional Baptist ecclesiology is one such example. Evans observes how Rauschenbusch not only distrusted church-state authority, but also viewed the more sacramental and sacerdotal denominations, like Lutherans and Anglicans, with suspicion as well.[206] He continues, "Walther rooted himself in the democratic theological ethos of the Baptists [sic]."[207]

Despite their liberalism and acceptance of the Kingdom, the German liberals, many of whom came from the Lutheran tradition, were still largely socially conservative. Anabaptists and Baptists, on the other hand, promoted personal liberty and democratic equality.[208] Further following in his Baptist heritage, Rauschenbusch believed the Baptists most closely resembled the primitive church. Not only were they free from ritualized worship and a hierarchy, but they encouraged their members to have an individual religious experience and individual freedom.

Adherence to such Baptist values came directly from his view of Kingdom ethics. Jesus first articulated these at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:5-10). Virtues such as gentleness, purity of heart, and peace naturally led to those things which Baptists and Rauschenbusch supported, which should be universal among Christians.[209] As he saw it, however, this individualism had gone too far, especially

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[206]Evans, 29.

[207]Ibid., 29.

[208]Ibid., 153.

among Baptists. Individualism, which had served a great purpose in freeing the conscience and encouraging men to have their own relationship with God, was now "militant" and "handicaps the Baptists to some extent in adjusting themselves to the social needs of the present day."[210]

Baptist polity was nevertheless worth emulating because of its similarity to the primitive church. The early church possessed the passion of its Lord and founder for positive moral action to make a social impact. These churches were communities within larger communities. They both ate and worshiped together. "They were democratic organizations of plain people," he asserts.[211]

The church represented a microcosm of the Kingdom. As the church grew, so would the Kingdom. The Kingdom's growth was gradual. Evans sees the connection between the gradual growth of the Kingdom and the individual's growth in the perfect and perfecting love of God. The transformation of man is both sudden and gradual. He is instantly changed by God, yet throughout his life he is deepening his relationship with God. Thus, love gradually yet powerfully impacts society and the Kingdom grows.[212]

Thus, the church was supposed to be the agent and propagator of the Kingdom.[213] Again, it was individualism which hindered the growth of the Kingdom. As emphasis on eternal life, which was correctly identified as an individual hope, increased, the doctrine

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[209]Walter Rauschenbusch, *The Social Principles of Jesus* (New York: The Women's Press, 1907), 56,

[210]Walter Rauschenbusch, "Contributions of the Baptists to Civil and Religious Liberty," manuscript copy in box 19 in the Rauschenbusch Family Manuscript Collection, American Baptist-Samuel Colgate Historical Library at Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, Rochester, New York.

[211]Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 120.

[212]Evans, 95.

[213]Donovan E. Smucker, *The Origins of Walter Rauschenbusch's Social Ethics* (Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 65.

of the Kingdom fell back and was reinterpreted. Rauschenbusch came to this conclusion shortly after his return from Europe. He reasons, "Because the Kingdom of God has been confined within the church, therefore the church has been regarded as an end instead of a means.[214] This focus on individualism also encouraged the rise to prominence of the more metaphysical doctrines of the faith, many of which were intimately related to the doctrine of eternal life.

It is vital to realize that Rauschenbusch never completely rejected any of these doctrines. He always believed in the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Resurrection, and eternal life. However, he did think the theological direction of the church reflected too much Greek dualism. The present life was something not to be denied, but to be celebrated.[215] This predilection against what he saw as the Hellenization of Christianity explains why the church forgot the social message of Jesus. If the next life were all that mattered, there was no need for social justice and fighting against societal ills.

By embracing individualism for more than one thousand years, the church had done a great disservice to the Kingdom. In fact, the doctrine of the Church had superseded that of the kingdom. The church was a necessary component of the Christian life. But it must be subordinate to the idea of the Kingdom.[216] Referring to the church's role in social salvation, Rauschenbusch writes, "If the Church is to have saving power, it must embody Christ… The saving qualities of the Church depend on the question

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[214]Walter Rauschenbusch, *Brotherhood of the Kingdom*, Brotherhood Leaflet No. 2, 1893.

[215]Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 162-163.

[216]Robert Handy, "Walter Rauschenbusch," in *Makers of Christian Theology in America*, ed. Mark G. Toulouse and James O. Duke (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 343.

whether it has translated the personal life of Jesus Christ into the social life of its group and thus brings it to bear on the individual."[217]

Rauschenbusch's reliance on the belief in a gathered, regenerate church is clearly displayed here. But the church and the Kingdom must never be conflated. The church impacts society on behalf of the Kingdom by fighting societal evils. At first glance, it would appear that the easiest way to do this would be a union of church and state. But, true to his Baptist upbringing, Rauschenbusch would have none of this. While it was appropriate to work for the bettering of society via politics, the church, as a group of gathered believers, was not to become officially intertwined in the workings of the government.

Recall that Christ was a religious, not a political figure. Thus, his people, the church, operated first and foremost on the principles of Christ. To Rauschenbusch, "Christianity meant opposing societal forces of power and privilege," observes Evans.[218] The church worked against societal sins best when it was not shackled to the secular government. Rauschenbusch concludes his chapter on the Church in his *A Theology for the Social Gospel* by writing:

> The saving power of the Church does not rest on its institutional character. . . It rests on the presence of the Kingdom within her. The Church grows old; the Kingdom is ever young. The Church is the perpetuation of the past; the Kingdom is the power of the coming age. Unless the Church is vitalized by the ever nascent forces of the Kingdom within her, she deadens instead of begetting.[219]

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[217]Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 128.

[218]Evans, 156.

[219]Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 129, 130.

So, Walter Rauschenbusch sets up the Kingdom of God as the foundation for his entire social gospel system. As the central message of Christ, it was His goal to advance the Kingdom, and He charged His disciples, both then and now, to labor for it as well. The body of disciples is collectively called the church. Ultimately, Rauschenbusch's views on the identity of the church can be summarized in six points. A list assembled by Smucker, here condensed, includes the following markers: the church 1) is a voluntary association of believers; 2) is a Christian democracy in which the people are sovereign; 3) distinguishes no priestly class; 4) has no ministerial hierarchy; 5) has local body autonomy; and 6) is not allied with the state.[220] The church, with a redefined purpose and constitution, was to fight against sin, both personal and societal. In this way it would spread the Kingdom.

Positing such a role for the church and defining it in such a way forced Rauschenbusch to re-examine salvation. The much decried individualism had prevailed in Christian theology since late antiquity. The Reformation, with its emphasis on a personal relationship with God, further entrenched individualism, with the Enlightenment cementing it as the lens through which to interpret the Bible and the means through which to live out true Christianity. European theologians offered somewhat of a challenge, and Americans even less.

The Enlightenment brought about a major shift in Christian thinking. Concerns like the relationship of the state to the church and the ability of human reason are two of the broadest and most lasting impacts of the period between the end of the Thirty Years War in 1648 to the beginning of the French Revolution in 1789. While these are not the primary concerns here, the implications of the Enlightenment philosophy had a direct

[220]Smucker, 66, 67.

impact on the understanding of several important theological doctrines. The notion of autonomy is of particular import here. Autonomy involves man's release "from the inability to reason and to will without sanctions imposed from outside the self."[221] This concept alone has far-reaching implications. The old structures of authority were being called into question again. Whereas Luther called into question the authority of the Pope over spiritual matters, Enlightenment thinkers called into question the authority of any power external to human reason. This did not mean that the church or the Scriptures were rejected outright, nor that was antinomianism touted. Rather, the truths supported by these powers must be verifiable by human reason, which was capable of discovering and following the natural law.[222] "No longer, then, is authority simply imposed arbitrarily from without; authority now depends on its inherent ability to produce rational conviction," observes Livingston. [223]

Clearly, this demonstrates a shift in emphasis towards the individual. Many denominations in both Europe and America rejected many of the excesses of the Enlightenment, including radical spiritual autonomy. The anti-clericalism of the French Revolution, for example, did not appear in the American counterpart. However, the individual was now firmly entrenched in the western world. Salvation came to be seen in purely individual terms, conveyed form God to the individual. The church was now only a place of corporate worship and teaching. It was, as Rauschenbusch saw it, stripped of a vital salvific responsibility. It had lost its prophetic function of proclaiming the Word

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[221]Livingston, 6.

[222]Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *20th Century Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1992), 21.

[223]Livingston, 7.

to the world, of condemning sin and offering a better way. Rauschenbusch sought to restore this function to the church and therefore affirmed the collective nature of the salvation and blessings of God.

Handy is convinced the dual emphasis on personal and societal salvation represents the first serious American challenge to this aspect of the Reformation.[224] In issuing such a challenge, individualism would not be rejected completely. Recall that Rauschenbusch encouraged a personal relationship with God. However, he saw an imbalance between the personal and the collective. He merely sought to reclaim that balance.

Sin and Salvation: Personal and Societal

Saying that Rauschenbusch reinterpreted or redefined the terminology is true to some extent, but it also may be misleading. He did not reject the traditional understandings; he merely thought that the traditional renderings were incomplete because they did not go far enough to cover both personal and social salvation. So, it may be just as appropriate to say that he expanded or reworked the definition of salvation and the terms related to it as he understood the subject matter.

The next step in social gospel theology was a reworking of the doctrines of sin and salvation. The church must know against what it was fighting, thereby enabling it to better serve the kingdom of God. Following the ecclesiology, hamartiology and soteriology formed the next building block in the system of thought. "The sections of theology which ought to express it [the social gospel] effectively, therefore, are the doctrines of sin and redemption," Rauschenbusch concludes.[225]

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[224]Handy, "Walter Rauschenbusch," 343.

The social gospel is popularly known for advancing moral reform on a wide scale, primarily concerned with meeting people's physical needs. It is true that the social gospel was intimately concerned with both the physically and spiritually poor. But Rauschenbusch was an evangelical, and even though a liberal one, he was convinced of the need for each individual to have a personal relationship with God. This notwithstanding, he wrote comparatively little on personal sin and salvation, confining most of his work on the subject to his final work in 1917.

Keep in mind that Rauschenbusch's evangelical concern came from his conservative Baptist upbringing. He would never quite be rid of the influence of his father. His teachings of personal sin and salvation reflected both liberal and conservative influences, both traditional and innovative perspectives. He elucidates, "Theology with remarkable unanimity has discerned that sin is essentially selfishness… The definition of sin as selfishness furnishes an excellent theological basis for a social conception of sin and salvation."[226]

So, Rauschenbusch's entire conception of sin is social. For him, societies are just groups of individuals. Individuals are infected, and then so too are societies. The transmission of sin occurs biologically and socially. Insofar as he accepts the biological transmission of sin, he affirms the doctrine of original sin, and that will be the primary focus for now. What he means by social transmission will be discussed shortly. The effects of the fall, depravity and corruption, are transmitted from one generation to another.[227]

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[225]Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 31.

[226]Ibid., 47.
[227]Ibid., 58.

The reality of personal sin necessitates the reality of personal salvation. "Yet the salvation of the individual is, of course, an essential part of salvation," he affirms.[228] Though briefly, Rauschenbusch discusses some of the various aspects of salvation. His concern for personal salvation is genuine, but his perspective on this issue is colored by his "solidaristic comprehension" of salvation. Thus, he defines salvation as a turn "from self to God and humanity."[229]

This change is conversion. One converted has left his old sinful life and the sinful aspects of the life of the community and turned to a new life. Rauschenbusch had a profound respect for the devastating impact of sin on the individual. Thus, he emphasized God's role in regeneration, the creating of a new life within the believer. He found that John chapter three, the classic passage on the new birth, linked personal salvation to the Kingdom of God. Because as verses three and five state, one must be reborn in order to enter the Kingdom. Personal salvation is absolutely essential if the church is to labor for the Kingdom.[230]

Here again, Rauschenbusch takes traditional terms to new frontiers. The salvation of God consumed all things. The individual was the beginning, but not the end. In the same way, because of his Kingdom hermeneutic, he took the occasion to clarify the definition of faith. Using Hebrews 11:1-2, he highlighted the fact that faith is supposed to help man venture into the future.[231] The Christian knows that God is at work and that

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[228] Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 95.

[229]Ibid., 96, 97.

[230]Ibid., 100. John 3:3, 5 read, "Truly, truly, I say unto you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God. . . Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

[231]Ibid., 101. "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained approval." Heb. 11:1-2.

His will will be done, both on earth and in heaven. That is the point of faith. Things now unseen will in fact come to pass. Because the Kingdom is the ultimate end, faith affirms "fellowship with God and man" and declares "solidarity with the Kingdom of God."[232]

The final term which Rauschenbusch re-explored was sanctification. He agrees with conservatives that sanctification involves growth and increasing in holiness. But again, the Kingdom of God steers him. Following his train of thought logically, he concludes that sanctification is the continuing process of fellowship with man and God. It is the bearing of fruit in the service of both man and God. It is ever laboring for the Kingdom.[233]

Rauschenbusch was committed to social salvation, but this could occur only through the work of regenerate individuals. Only those in the Kingdom could work toward the growth of the Kingdom. And entrance to the Kingdom came only through the new birth. Thus, only the saved could help save society. This commitment to personal salvation and aspects of conservative evangelical theology should not be ignored. Nevertheless, Evans is correct in his observation that "the discussion of an individual's spirituality was inconsequential, unless it was spoken of as part of the larger society."[234] Or as Rauschenbusch sees it, "The greatest contribution which any man can make to the social movement is the contribution of a regenerated personality, of a will which sets justice above policy and profit, and of an intellect emancipated from falsehood."[235]

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[232] Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 102.

[233]Ibid., 102, 103.

[234]Evans, 259.

[235]Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 351.

Society is just as ravaged by sin as any individual. Recall the assertion that sin is transmitted socially. Sin builds collectively from generation to generation, and is passed from generation to generation. Humans are by nature social creatures who organize in groups. These groups exercise a certain amount of control, both direct and indirect, official and unofficial, over their members. Rauschenbusch calls these groups super-personal forces, and it is through these that sin oppresses society.

Citing I Timothy 6:10, Rauschenbusch truly believed that the love of money was the root of all evil. This love is the "most inviting outlet for sinful selfishness."[236] In the conversation with the rich young ruler in Mark 10, he finds evidence that Christ himself taught that greed and riches were the greatest hindrances to the Kingdom of God.[237] The accumulation of wealth in and of itself is no problem to the social gospel. If reward, financial or otherwise, is earned in exchange for service, fine. But too often gain is sought at others' expense, without regard for society.[238] This is accomplished by oppressing and impoverishing. This is the sum of social evil.

Evil begets evil. The stronger and more evil the super-personal forces become, the easier it is for evil and sin to continue to spread. The network of these forces and the evil which is spread is called the Kingdom of Evil; it is in direct opposition to the Kingdom of God.[239] The church is to fight against this kingdom on behalf of the Kingdom of God. As the Kingdom of Evil flourishes, the Kingdom of God suffers, and

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[236]Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 72.

[237]Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 75, 76.

[238]Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order*, 228.

[239]Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 78.

vice-versa. The Kingdom of God is a kingdom of justice. The Kingdom of Evil is a kingdom of oppression.

Though not heavily influenced by metaphysics, Rauschenbusch firmly believed in the real supernatural forces of evil. Satan and his minions were real, and they did their part to tempt men to sin. The sinful nature of man combined with the activities of the fallen angels weighed powerfully against the individual. These Satanic forces exercised tremendous influence over the Kingdom of Evil. The hereditary nature of sin, which demonstrates the racial unity of humanity, and the real supernatural evil "created a solidaristic consciousness of sin and evil."[240] The Kingdom of Evil provided more and more outward opportunities to sin because sinning brought such great earthly gain. If the church focused only on the inward temptation, but ignored the outward opportunities, little gain would be made, and those offering the opportunities would not see the error of their ways.[241]

The recognition of societal evil and sin inevitably led to the identification of many of the era's political and economic woes as machinations of the Kingdom of Evil. Rauschenbusch did have a high view of personal property. As a champion of equality, he saw personal property and the acquisition thereof as a means of freeing the individual and bettering himself.[242] Greed often corrupted this, turning a liberating endeavor into an oppressing one. The condition of urban workers in early nineteenth century America

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[240]Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel,* 90.

[241]Rauschenbusch, *The Righteousness of the Kingdom*, 190.

[242]Anna M. Singer, *Walter Rauschenbusch and His Contributions to Social Christianity* (Boston: Gorham Press, 1926), 54.

resulted from such corruption and oppression. Rauschenbusch witnessed what he believed to be the advance of the Kingdom of Evil.

This crisis, as it was termed, applied not just to society but also to the church. The forces which crippled society were also at work within the church. Thus, the church must stand up not just for society, but for itself as well. This struggle was a God-given opportunity for the church.[243] But it was also a crossroads. Taking action, the church could help the kingdom. Doing nothing, the church would witness the destruction of civilization.[244]

As the agent of social salvation, then, the church had a daunting task. This task was to bring social forces to bear on super-personal forces.[245] This may appear to indicate that Rauschenbusch thought the church should persuade the political and economic powers to act justly, for the Kingdom, and not unjustly, against the Kingdom. This interpretation is true, but it is only part of what is meant by bringing social forces to bear. Remember that first and foremost, the church itself is a community; the church is a counter-society. If the church truly is the democratic society it is supposed to be, then it prompts the social institutions of the world to be so also.[246]

This begins the same way salvation begins for the individual, with repentance and faith. When the church repents of social sin, and has faith that the social order can change, it can target the super-personal forces which represent the Kingdom of Evil on earth. Super-personal forces are simply organized groups. Businesses, schools,

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[243]Gorrell, 58.

[244]Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 210.

[245]Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 119.

[246]Smucker, 38.

churches, social clubs, and political parties are all examples of super-personal forces.[247] These forces are not necessarily or inherently evil. But for Rauschenbusch, most of them, including the church, are corrupt and working for the Kingdom of Evil, not the Kingdom of God.

As an individual can be saved, so can these groups. Society itself was to be "Christianized" by bringing it under the law of Christ. But this can be done only if the church itself is under the law of Christ. Beckley, then, observes that the church forms "the religious foundation" for this transformation. At first the church is the alternative, but it labors to become normative.[248]

To become normative, the church must take a stand on current issues leading to sin, injustice, and oppression. While circumstances may change, the principles which guide the church are universal and unchanging. Love and justice are the primary principles which must guide the church. The power of the church to save society is related to how it reflects and embodies the love of Christ.[249] Motivated by love, the church then calls for justice within society. As a body of the redeemed, the church should already be experiencing and practicing the true justice within its physical walls. The poor of the congregation are provided for and physical and spiritual needs met. Love guides the work of the church, and love will guide society. Justice is practiced in the church, enabling it to guide society.

When the church discovers this need for justice, then it will act in the realm of politics to bring justice to society. Rauschenbusch writes:

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[247]Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 70, 71.

[248]Harlan Beckley, *Passion for Justice* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 106.

[249]Walter Rauschenbusch, *Dare We Be Christians?* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1914), 26.

> We cannot make the permanent progress toward a just social order as long as the masses of the working people in the industrial nations continue in economic poverty and political helplessness, and as long as a minority controls the land, the tools, and the political power.[250]

This and similar statements led many to believe that Rauschenbusch advocated a form of government antithetical to private property. This could not be further from the truth. True, he did advocate some form of communism or socialism, but not as commonly understood today.

The government should not be based on the ideas of Marx, who was a materialist, but on the ideas of Christ, who advocated love and justice.[251] Both capitalism and Marxism dehumanized man because money or property is the end, not the good of man. Minus correctly analyzes Rauschenbusch's political views. The social gospel saw the state as a vehicle of the people. When the government provided public services, protected labor rights, eliminated monopolies, and so on, it denied sinful men the opportunity to oppress their fellowman.[252]

Thus, super-personal forces "step out of the Kingdom of Evil and into the Kingdom of God."[253] Confronting institutions with the democratic ethos of Jesus, driven by love and justice, the church promotes the Kingdom of God on earth. Individual salvation is vital and necessary, for without it there can be no true social salvation. The hearts of men must change in order for their institutions to change. By bringing these two aspects of salvation into balance and into the consciousness of the church,

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[250]Rauschenbusch, *The Social Principles of Jesus*, 145.

[251]Evans, 180.

[252]Minus, 171.

[253]Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 117.

Rauschenbusch determined to return the concerns of the Kingdom to what he believed was their rightful place of prominence.

The Kingdom of God: On Earth and In Heaven

Social gospel theology was intensely integrated. Not all standard doctrines were involved, but the ones that were involved formed an intimate connection. The Kingdom of God drew all theological doctrines together. The doctrine of the Kingdom revealed the true meaning of the doctrines of the church and salvation. But as Rauschenbusch used it to unite both theology and man, it became perhaps his most misunderstood doctrine and thus caused his entire social gospel to be misunderstood. Ironically, Rauschenbusch thought the doctrine of the Kingdom was mostly misunderstood throughout history. Once central to the teachings of Jesus and His primary focus, it since has been relegated to eschatology.

Such a situation was lamentable due to the current state of eschatology. Far from rejecting eschatology, Rauschenbusch viewed this segment of theology as vital to Christianity precisely because it dealt with the future. However, eschatology had become apocalyptic and not historical. Premillennial eschatology was partially to blame for this, for they saw the Kingdom of God as a completely future state which would appear only when Christ returned, and He would return only when society utterly collapsed.

To Rauschenbusch this was antithetical to the will of God, since it discouraged righteousness and salvation.[254] While Rauschenbusch paints an inaccurate portrait of premillennialists, he falls in line with the postmillennialism popular at the end of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth. That is, he believed that humanity could affect the coming of the Kingdom. To correct the problem, eschatology must be

[254]Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 211.

understood as part of the historical process, and not an ahistorical series of events. Thus, the Kingdom is both present and future, and its coming can be seen "in all ethical and spiritual progress of mankind"; it is a historical force.[255]

The Kingdom does properly belong in eschatology, for this subject covers things for which man hopes and the Kingdom is the ultimate hope. Eschatology can be properly understood when the Kingdom doctrine is properly understood. The first step in such an endeavor is to clarify the very term "Kingdom of God." A better translation is "Reign of God."[256] While he does not use this term often, and the term "Kingdom" is quite correct, thinking of it in these terms does shed more light on Rauschenbusch's conception of the Kingdom.

"Kingdom" can carry with it the connotation of a specified geographical area with identifiable boundaries, a capital, and recognizable citizenry. To Rauschenbusch, such a connotation lent itself easily to premillennialism, when the Kingdom would be established immediately and without progress. Instead, the kingdom is "always but coming."[257]

First, it comes with struggle. Christ, who initiated the Kingdom, struggled against the forces of evil in this world and calls his followers to do the same. The struggle of the church against personal and social evils is the struggle of the Kingdom of God versus the Kingdom of Evil.[258] Second, the kingdom or reign occurs in history. He affirms, "The

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[255] Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 165, 225.

[256]Rauschenbusch, *The Social Principles of Jesus*, 49.

[257]Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 421.

[258]Minus, 159.

Kingdom of God is humanity organized according to the will of God."[259] Each time an individual is saved, the kingdom progresses. Each time justice prevails or a super-personal force is saved, the kingdom progresses. So then, the Kingdom has no boundaries in the traditional sense.

It goes even beyond the church, which is clearly why Rauschenbusch thought "reign" was the better translation. "Reign" can signify both a place and a state of being. The place is ultimately the whole world, and the state of being is living according to the will of God. God reigns in the hearts, and according to Rauschenbusch, in the organizations and institutions of man. God's reign is manifested in these super-personal forces as they are guided by love to practice justice for all.

As a postmillennialist, he believed man could at least help bring in the Kingdom. By contrast, the premillennialist labors for the church. Recall, though, that in the social gospel the church was a means, not an end. Here of course, the church is laboring for the Kingdom, not for itself. However, one must never assume that Rauschenbusch thought man would or could usher in the Kingdom. "The Kingdom of God is divine in its origin, progress, and consummation. . . it will be brought to its fulfillment by the power of God in his own time," he clarifies.[260]

Man, in working for the Kingdom, does not do his own work. Rather, he does the will of God. Thus, it is always God who is in control. The church can fight successfully against evil, but only God himself will ultimately conquer evil and sin. Only He will finish the Kingdom of Evil and finally establish His own because only He can act in true love and justice. This should not dissuade men from doing what God commanded, to

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[259]Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 142.

[260]Ibid., 139.

seek first the kingdom and its righteousness.[261] Man sows the seed, but God always gives the increase.

As much space as Rauschenbusch devoted to explaining his doctrine of the present Kingdom, he gave that little to explaining the return of Christ. He also did not give substantial account of anything traditionally associated with the end time. This may be due, at least in part, to the fact that he cared little for millenarianism in general. He perceived that all forms of millenarianism cultivate "the attitude of separation while mingling with the world, and the consequence is frequently a life in two sections, the one expecting the Lord, the other conformed to the laws of the world."[262] Though he held postmillennial views, he never associated himself with the school of thought. And his own view of society led him to agree with the premillennialists, who believed society was deteriorating. They thought nothing could be done. Rauschenbusch thought something must be done.[263]

Nevertheless, the hope of the millennium played a significant role in the early church. The millennium represented a time when the entire world would be under the control of God. Thus, the millennial hope is a social hope, and although this doctrinal particular was largely forgotten in the social gospel, Rauschenbusch realized that to the early church the millennium was the completion of both personal and social salvation.[264]

To the early church, eschatology was a revolutionary part of theology. The millennium was to be a time of swift, abrupt, and final change. This was not to be the

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[261]Rauschenbusch, *The Social Principles of Jesus*, 60.

[262]Walter Rauschenbusch, "Our Attitude Toward Millenarianism," *The Examiner* (Sept 24. and Oct. 1, 1896), 91.

[263]Evans, 118.

[264]Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 106.

case, according to Rauschenbusch, but the revolutionary character of the Kingdom is just as apparent. Rather than occurring quickly and outside of history, the revolution occurs slowly in history. Christ himself began the revolution and gave it direction. It is now the responsibility of his followers, guided by the Spirit, to continue the revolution in history.[265] Christ himself will finish His revolution at the end of history, but it will be a historical occurrence.

Thus, in the social gospel theology of Walter Rauschenbusch, little place is given to the details of the future and final state of the Kingdom. It will come when God decides it will come. It will be a time of peace, love, and justice. All sin and evil will be vanquished. Other than that, Rauschenbusch outlined almost nothing about the coming Kingdom. The Kingdom of God united his theology; all other doctrines "articulate organically with it" in the social gospel.[266] Without this doctrine, Christianity is impotent to perform its duties. Rauschenbusch elucidates:

> This doctrine is absolutely necessary to establish that organic union between religion and morality, between theology and ethics, which is one of the characteristics of the Christian religion.[267]

To that end, it has been shown here how Rauschenbusch subordinates all doctrines to that of the Kingdom of God. Ecclesiology, soteriology, and eschatology are three traditional doctrines he revised which figured most prominently in his version of the social gospel. The gathered body of believers, the church, labors for the Kingdom by striving for the salvation of both the individual and society. In this way it contributes to the growth of

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[265]Rauschenbusch, *The Righteousness of the Kingdom*, 176.

[266]Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 131.

[267]Ibid., 140.

the Kingdom on earth in the present. The growth is not a steady increase. There may be several setbacks, but the Kingdom will eventually prevail because God makes it so.

Clearly, Rauschenbusch's social gospel theology is centered around the doctrine of the Kingdom of God and the ideal of justice. Seeking to eradicate injustice, the social gospel movement sought to identify with the poor and oppressed, the victims of injustice, in the name of Christ. "The poor, the alien, the stranger and the outcast, need the championship of the strong," summarizes Singer.[268] This is the function of Christian love. Guided by love, Christians seek the justice of God for all men, because not only is that what Christ taught, that is what Christ did.

[268]Singer, 51.

Chapter 6

Comparison and Conclusion

Each theological system has been discussed in detail using its own terminology and understanding of those terms. In order to draw the most accurate comparison possible, no attempt was made to translate or redefine terms used by either Rauschenbusch or Gutiérrez into the language and context of the other. By letting each theologian speak for himself using his own terminology and in his own context, his views, concepts, and theology in general are best grasped and freed from any misconceptions.

Hopefully, by addressing similar key concepts systematically and in similar order, the reader will be able to see similarities between the two without the aid of direct comparison. The aim of the preceding chapters was to outline both the social gospel and liberation theology in a way that holds true to the respective theological angles, peculiarities, and themes of each, while enabling comparisons to be made. It would be a mistake to make ideological, chronological, or other causal connections between the social gospel and liberation theology. But the study above demonstrated the theological similarities of the two movements and thus how the social gospel, and potentially other theological movements, can be considered a theology of liberation, as defined by Gutiérrez himself.

To recapitulate, Gutiérrez posits three basic criteria for a theology to be considered a theology of liberation. First, as Gutiérrez enumerates most succinctly in the article “Liberation Praxis and Christian Faith,” a theology of liberation must interpret the gospel in light of the current historical realities in a certain area. Second, the gospel

message must be formulated based on the values of the oppressed. This does not mean that the content is changed, just the context and method of delivery. Third, and finally, this gospel must be used to attack the social structures that are oppressing.

The presentation of liberation theology given above concentrated on showing how theology was used to meet and advance these criteria. Likewise, the social gospel details were arranged in a similar fashion to show the theological similarities between the two despite the cultural and theological differences. The primary similarity between the two posited here is the doctrine of the Kingdom of God. There are differences between the two systems in the particular details of the Kingdom, many of which are inherent in the differences between Catholics and Protestants. Thus, in drawing more explicit comparisons, the similarities in Kingdom theology and the use thereof will be examined briefly. Then, a careful look at how Rauschenbusch's theology, as outlined earlier, does in fact meet Gutiérrez's criteria will ensue.

Kingdom Theology

In comparing liberation theology with the social gospel, Sanks notes that although liberationists tout the uniqueness of their religious/theological solution to their particular social, political, economic, and religious problems, no situation or theological system is unique in defying a legitimate comparison between itself and another system. "The North American theologian who studies Latin American theology seriously cannot help but be reminded of an earlier movement in North America: the 'Social Gospel' movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries," he writes.[269]

Sanks recognizes the centrality of the Kingdom of God in Gutiérrez's thought. The Kingdom is not only central, it is also both now and not yet; there is also a

[269]Sanks, 668.

soteriological dichotomy – salvation is both personal and collective. Furthermore, he identifies the church as playing a liberating role in society and politics. All of these themes, he argues, with the Kingdom chief among them, are found in the writings of Walter Rauschenbusch.[270]

Within the doctrine of the Kingdom of God, the crucial point of parallelism between Rauschenbusch and Gutiérrez is the way both men focus on not only the centrality of the Kingdom, but also the present and future state thereof. It should not be assumed that only these men thought of the Kingdom in terms of a present reality. The present aspect of the Kingdom has been a part of various Christian theological traditions. The point here is not to survey this aspect of historical theology. Rather, it is to show how the two conceptions in question here both continue the traditional understanding and deviate from it.

Historically, in more conservative Catholic and Protestant circles, the Kingdom dichotomy splits between the humility of the present and the glory of the coming Kingdom.[271] While Rauschenbusch does not focus on the Mark 1 passage, Gutiérrez discerns the chronological dichotomy of the Kingdom in this passage. Both he and Rauschenbusch are in line with traditional teaching in some of their interpretations. Commenting on the passage, France writes that the term "Kingdom" is basically an abstract term referring to the rule or kingship of God and should not be seen as referring to a specific time, place, or event.[272] Noting the use of the word *kairos*, Brooks goes a

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[270]Sanks, 673.

[271]G.E. Ladd, "Kingdom of Christ, God, Heaven," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 659, (657-660).

[272]R.T. France, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 93.

step further. For him the Kingdom "refers to a present, spiritual kingdom rather than a future earthly one." [273]

The spiritual nature of the present Kingdom dates from the early church, with Augustine formalizing the concept.[274] However, both Rauschenbusch and Gutiérrez see both spiritual and physical aspects to the present Kingdom. Remember, neither one sees the fulfillment of the Kingdom as co-terminus with the creation of a just society. Instead, the establishment of justice is evidence of the Kingdom. Thus, in both liberation theology and the social gospel, evidence of the physical aspect of the present Kingdom is the improvement of physical and material conditions on earth. While the Kingdom is not a defined area, its growth is seen in the progress of justice. This is caused by and is itself evidence for the spiritual aspect of the present Kingdom. In both movements, it is the work of the righteous, the citizens of the Kingdom, who work for justice. To reiterate, both theologians see the present Kingdom as both a spiritual and a physical reality which culminates in the historical coming of Christ; this future, complete Kingdom both fulfills and ends history.

The Kingdom of God stood unquestionably at the center of liberation theology and the social gospel because Gutiérrez and Rauschenbusch placed the Kingdom at the center of Christ's teaching and at the heart of the gospel. Everything was subordinated to the concept of the Kingdom. This was precisely the reason for the development of their doctrines and social concerns.[275]

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[273]James A. Brooks, *The New American Commentary: Mark* (Nashville: Broadman, 1991), 47.

[274]Augustine, *The City of God, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2.

[275] Luis J. Pedraja, "Eschatology," in *Handbook of Latino/a Theologies*, ed. Edwin David Aponte and Miguel A. De La Torre (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2006), 115. See also Smucker, 7, and others, for how Rauschenbusch used the Kingdom to rediscover the social dimension in Christianity.

Thus, Sanks observes the relationship between their understandings of the Kingdom and their social understanding of salvation. Ramsay also sees the mutual language and perception in the realm of soteriology. Both men have a concern for both qualitative and quantitative spiritual growth, a spiritual experience which produces both personal and societal results.[276] Even though they both acknowledge the importance of the Kingdom, neither Sanks nor Ramsay directly connects the social concerns with the primacy of the Kingdom. The social theologies covered here are so constructed because of the primacy of the Kingdom and how this Kingdom is viewed. The present physical and spiritual realities of the Kingdom necessitate such social views of salvation and a restricting of the doctrine of the church to meet newly recognized social and personal needs, which are both physical and spiritual.

In Gutiérrez's case, his conception of the Kingdom drives his theology to such an extent that it not only becomes the basis for his particular liberation theology, as well as for Latin American Liberation theology as a whole, but also provides essential and necessary underpinnings for all theologies that would be true and genuine theologies of liberation. This eschatological dimension pervades all areas of liberation theologies. So as Pedraja points out, all doctrines are understood in the context of liberating action.[277]

Because the Kingdom is to be a current, historical reality, action must be taken now in light of that fact. Thus, as has been described, liberation is also a current, historical reality because this is to be the reality that the Kingdom produces. Liberation and the resultant justice are the will of God done on earth as it is in heaven. Rauschenbusch's theology, although developed in a different cultural, intellectual, and

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[276]Ramsay, 65.

[277]Pedraja, 115, 116.

ecclesiastical environment, reached similar conclusions. With this establishment of the Kingdom as pivotal in doctrinal formation for both thinkers, the discussion concludes with pinpointing how Rauschenbusch's social gospel meets the criteria set by Gutiérrez to liberate.

A Theology of Liberation

Because analysis and description of both theologies occurred earlier, relevant passages already discussed will not be reintroduced in their entirety. Asserting the claim that the social gospel is indeed a theology of liberation will be accomplished by calling attention to these already cited passages in light of the criteria mentioned in the Introduction and Gutiérrez's critique of liberal Protestantism in general. Further analysis will accompany this, with new passages introduced for added emphasis.

Despite Gutiérrez's familiarity and supposed fondness for Rauschenbusch, he never mentions him by name or criticizes his particular theology directly, even though he is critical of liberal or progressive theologies, specifically in the western First World. He does not even use the term "social gospel." Rather, he calls it *el "problema social,"* which Drury translates as "the social question."[278] This term was commonly used by liberal Protestants in the United States around the turn of the twentieth century to describe various societal ills caused and accentuated by rapid urbanization and industrialization.

With regard to the first mark of a true theology of liberation, Gutiérrez maintains that American social Christianity did not go far enough in interpreting the gospel in light of current historical realities. While social gospelers were aware of problems of poverty

[278]Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Praxis de liberación y fe cristina," in *La Nueva Frontera de la Teolog*ía en America Latina, ed. Rosino Gibellini (Salamanca: Crítica Religión Sociedad, 1977), 15. See Drury's translation in Gutiérrez, "Liberation Praxis and Christian Faith," 4.

and oppression and encouraged some societal change to counteract and remedy these injustices, such efforts did not go far enough. Regardless of socio-economic methodology, American social Christianity continued to cast doctrinal affirmations "in completely ahistorical terms."[279] Although he does not mention Rauschenbusch by name, it seems that Gutiérrez must put him in this category and apply these general criticisms to him particularly. Rauschenbusch was a leader of American social Christianity. If Gutiérrez believes the movement in general did not go far enough, it is reasonable to assume that he also thought its leader did not go far enough either. There seem to be no exceptions to this critique of American social Christianity, Rauschenbusch included.

But is this actually the case with Rauschenbusch? It is hard to believe that he was not guided to speak of theology in terms of his historical setting. His ministry in Hell's Kitchen invaluably impacted his life and career. Because of it he embraced what he saw as the social message of the gospel. Perhaps more so than Gutiérrez, Rauschenbusch articulated that the social message, the message to the poor, was by no means new. It was as old as the gospel itself. Again, it was the gospel (hence his dependence on the Kingdom).

Nevertheless, he reinterpreted doctrine "in the light of his understanding of the Bible's social concern."[280] This retrieval was based squarely and immovably on the historical realities of poverty, oppression, and injustice he saw around him, and which he thought characterized Jesus' environment during his ministry. Rauschenbusch responded to his historical situation just as Gutiérrez responded to his. There is certainly an

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[279]Gutiérrez, "Liberation Praxis and the Christian Faith," 4.

[280]Ramsay, 18.

argument to be made about the quantitative gulf between the Third World poor and the First World poor, even over a fifty-year gap such as this one. However, as should be evident from the entire discussion, the focus is on quality, not quantity. In other words, while the poor of South America may be significantly worse off materially than their American counterparts, such injustice is a qualitative result of a qualitative deficiency. Sin is sin, and any quantity of it requires just as radical a response. This response can be based only on the historical realities of that sin, and that is exactly what Rauschenbusch sets out to do.

Second, a theology of liberation must be based on the values of the poor. "But the construction of a different society and a new person will not be authentic unless it is undertaken by the oppressed themselves; hence it must start from their own values," Gutiérrez writes.[281] While he never directly critiques either Rauschenbusch in particular or the social gospel in general in this way, it could be pointed out that Rauschenbusch had strong middle class values and believed that group to be key in the reforming of America to a more just society.

Perhaps this is what Gutiérrez had in mind when he listed the shortcomings of North American social Christianity. While this observation by Gutiérrez is true, it is not true that Rauschenbusch neglected the values of the poor. He too championed solidarity with the poor. Again, it was from this perspective that he viewed all teachings of Christianity. Because the Kingdom was for the poor, it was from their perspective that theology was done.

Stackhouse brings up the fact that the New Testament provided the source for Rauschenbusch's ethics. When studying the New Testament, Rauschenbusch discovered

[281]Gutiérrez, "Liberation Praxis and Christian Faith," 18.

Christ spreading a message of just relationships.[282] In criticizing the existing social order and pointing out the deficiencies in popular thinking of the day, Jesus was actually appealing to the values of the poor and using the oppressed against the oppressor. Specifically, Jesus preached love, equality, and justice, all of which are yearnings of the poor. As Rauschenbusch identified this, he began to preach this gospel. "Those who today side with the poor as a class against the rich as a class are quite in harmony with the biblical conceptions," he asserts.[283] This siding with the poor does not involve a co-opting of their values or situation to suit middle or upper class needs. It is for the good of the poor, and therefore, by extension, good for the rest of mankind. Gutiérrez also encourages people of all walks and from all socio-economic backgrounds to participate in liberation.[284]

Finally, theologies of liberation must use the gospel to attack the structures which oppress the poor. This standard is the culmination of the previous two criteria and is in a sense the most important one because it involves action, and a theology of liberation must be active. A liberation gospel attacks "oppressive structures created for the benefit of only a few, and in the plundering of nations, races, cultures, and social classes."[285] This includes several features and may be where Gutiérrez sees the social gospel failing the most to reach the mark.

First, because theology is understood historically in terms of the poor, it is therefore involved in subverting or remaking history. The order that oppresses now must

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[282]Stackhouse, 46.

[283]Rauschenbusch, *The Righteousness of the Kingdom*, 219.

[284]Gutiérrez, "Liberation Praxis and Christian Faith," 31.

[285]Ibid., 21.

be overcome by the order that liberates.[286] This is the idea of liberative praxis, which occurs at all levels of society, including the political level. Second, theology is political. Finally, theology is radical and revolutionary.

As a theology of revolution, any theology of liberation must act carefully but decisively. It must not justify non-Christian actions in the name of Christianity, for instance violence. It must infiltrate whatever revolutionary activity is present and change that activity so that it can change history. He elucidates, "This is done by framing the political commitment to liberation within the context of Christ's gratuitous gift of total liberation."[287]

Gutiérrez's critique of the Social Gospel is that it did not go far enough. As an advocate of democratic principles, Rauschenbusch saw within the American political tradition the necessary components for a liberating and just social order.[288] The problem with the government, as Rauschenbusch saw it, was not the structure itself, but the way that structure was manipulated by the rich against the poor. This is a point where Gutiérrez's critique against the social gospel is justified. "The system that meant intellectual and political freedom and economic opportunity for Europe and the United States brought only new forms of oppression and exploitation to the common people of Latin America," he believes.[289] That system is liberal constitutional democracy.

But in that same section, Gutiérrez admits the rich co-opted constitutionalism for their own ends. Ultimately, Gutiérrez rejects all efforts to transplant western democracies

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[286]Gutiérrez, "Two Theological Perspectives…," 248.

[287]Gutiérrez, "Liberation Praxis and the Christian Faith," 23.

[288]Beckley, 98.

[289]Gutiérrez, "Two Theological Perspectives…," 237.

and democratic ideals to Latin America for use in the process of liberation. In response to this, two important points are given. First, Rauschenbusch, while favoring the American system, encouraged the socialization of wealth in many ways. It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyze the finer points of the political philosophy of either man. And it is not necessary to do so. On a basic but real level, the political goals of Rauschenbusch and Gutiérrez are virtually identical. While there may be policy differences, both men rejected the excesses of capitalism. Both men wanted to wrest control of vast wealth and power from a few and give it to the many.

Gutiérrez may see Rauschenbusch as bourgeois and capitalistic. But Rauschenbusch did not favor paternalism by the few, but cooperation among the many. This leads to what may be at the heart of Gutiérrez's criticism. Although he never says it outright, he seems to think that the social gospel was ineffective because it was not revolutionary enough, a fact evidenced by the stance on liberal democracy.

Based on results, it is now equally difficult to say Gutiérrez proposed a theology of liberation. It is easy to look back and not to see results. That is a luxury Gutiérrez enjoyed over Rauschenbusch and which scholars today enjoy over Gutiérrez. As Gutiérrez measured the social gospel by societal and therefore political victories, so too is Gutiérrez judged.

In 1982 Schall commented that liberation theology "has not really produced as yet, if it ever will, a viable political power…"[290] Over twenty years later, that statement remains true. Schall also questions whether liberation theology genuinely speaks for and to the poor. Because of the failure of Marx-based systems and the subsequent

[290]James V. Schall, *Liberation Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 61.

questioning of Marx-based analyses, there is cause to wonder whether Liberation Theology was, is, or ever can be in a position to reach the poor as it claims to do.[291]

Following this line of criticism, even Jurgen Moltmann has questioned the viability of Liberation Theology as a whole. As early as 1975, Moltmann, whose thought was so formative for Gutiérrez, criticized him and others. Referring to Gutiérrez's *A Theology of Liberation*, Moltmann pens, "…one would like to discover Latin America in this book…in this respect the reader is disappointed."[292] This criticism flies in the face of Gutiérrez's claim not to import directly any foreign theological ideas, namely the thought of Moltmann and Metz, without adapting them to the Latin American situation. This failure to do so would have to affect political liberation, and Gutiérrez himself admits that the religio-political scene in South America differs significantly from that in Europe. This impact could be seen, if in no other way, in the fact that Gutiérrez so closely links poverty with political oppression and thus the eradication of this condition with political liberation.[293]

Finally, although Gutiérrez is understandably optimistic about the future of liberation theology, there is reason to believe that despite his claims to the contrary, his theology so depends upon politics that it will collapse if that pillar is removed. Indeed, some believe that it has been removed with the failure of socialism to solve the problems it faced. Smith poses the question,

> "…if liberation theologians continue to abandon dependency theory and distance themselves from socialism, will not their developing theology, de facto,

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[291]Schall, 62.

[292]Jurgen Moltmann, "An Open Letter to Jose Miguez Bonino," in *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History*, ed. Alfred T. Hennelly (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990), 198.

[293]Gutiérrez, "Two Theological Perspectives…," 240.

> increasingly resemble the progressive, reformist theology they repudiated in the late 1960s?[294]

Smith's analysis leads directly into Gutiérrez's criticism of the effectiveness of liberal democracy in liberation. As he points out, is liberation theology without socialism any different from discarded progressive theology? More important, though, is that in his rejection of the social gospel as a liberation theology Gutiérrez seems to discard his own cardinal rule and the first criterion mentioned, that theology must be based on the historical reality within a given context.

Gutiérrez, in borrowing from Moltmann and other German hope theologians, adamantly denied transplanting the political situation of Europe to South America. Yet that is precisely what he is asking Rauschenbusch to do. Constitutional government is native to the American context. Rauschenbusch argued for a particular interpretation of this tradition, but he was well within it nevertheless. The Detroit Conference recognized that any American liberation theology must be different from those of Europe or Latin America.[295]

Therefore, there is a sense in which the social gospel, by Gutiérrez's own admission, cannot be held to the same particulars as his own theology. But that does not mean no criteria are applicable or that no comparison can be drawn. The Detroit Conference agreed with Gutiérrez that all theologies of liberation, regardless of geographical boundaries, must follow certain standards if they ever hope to truly liberate. Rauschenbusch's theology, in its own language, meets these standards.

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[294]Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 230.

[295]"Contextualization of North American Theology," *Theology of the Americas,* 434.

Rauschenbusch fully intended theology to attack super-personal forces, those forces which oppressed. They were to be brought under the law of Christ. He meant these forces, whether governments or companies, should be controlled not by want of profit, but by want of serving public need.[296] In asserting his rejection of greed-based capitalism and the need to save super-personal forces, he uses no language that mirrors Gutiérrez's rhetoric of the gospel being subversive. Nevertheless, his theology is no less revolutionary and radical. Although he never uses the term "subversion," it is clear that he intends for the social gospel to be a remaking force in the world.

Thus, he writes, "Ascetic Christianity called the world evil and left it. Humanity is waiting for a revolutionary Christianity which will call the world evil and change it."[297] Rauschenbusch saw his social gospel as a revolutionary force in American secular and religious life, just as Gutiérrez sees his liberation theology the same way in Latin American life. Like liberation theology, the social gospel, founded on the doctrine of the Kingdom, aimed to shift the focus of everything secular and religious in light of the needs of the poor – love, justice, and equality. These were the teachings of Jesus, and Rauschenbusch saw Jesus as a revolutionary figure. He came to change the world and commanded his disciples throughout all generations to do the same.

Conclusion

The actual tangible results – spiritual, temporal, ecclesiastical or political – may be negligible or non-existent for both movements. While results are very important, they are not the purpose this academic study. While in a practical sense both liberation theology and the social gospel are inherently goal-oriented, as is any theology in a sense,

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[296]Rauschenbusch, *A Theology of the Social Gospel,* 126.

[297]Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis,* 91.

and can and should be judged using that standard, the realization of the goal does not define how the movements operate on a theological level.

Gutiérrez developed his liberation theology as a solution to certain problems evident in the Latin American situation. Though this is a detailed theology, he did separate three key points by which theology could be judged. If it met these criteria, it would be a theology of liberation, regardless of where it initiated. The Detroit Conference recognized the presence of theologies of liberation in North America, even though it did not mention the social gospel.

Judging Rauschenbusch's writings and ideas against those of Gutiérrez and his three standards, it is clear that the social gospel as articulated by Rauschenbusch is a type of theology of liberation. True, there is a sense in which it is anachronistic to call the social gospel a theology of liberation. However, when examining the ways in which theologies of liberation cross cultural and geographic boundaries, it is beneficial and appropriate to call the social gospel a theology of liberation. Because of the concern for the poor, for justice, for the Kingdom of God, and for how theology is used to address those issues, the social gospel identifies the same concerns as liberation theology and identifies the same essential theological and methodological solutions.

Rauschenbusch contextualized his theology for the North American urban poor just as Gutiérrez contextualized his for the South American poor. Similar theological presuppositions, such as the primacy and nature of the Kingdom, led them down similar theological paths. The Detroit Conference urged North Americans to develop authentic North American theologies, lest they lack "prophetic voice."[298] Rauschenbusch did just that. Social gospel theology was a genuine theology derived from the experience of the

[298]"Contextualization of North American Theology," 433.

United States. Furthermore, Rauschenbusch in a sense was a prophetic voice in America.[299] He called the world evil and set out to change it.

In the most basic and foundational sense, liberation theology by definition aims to liberate men from spiritual and physical oppression. All complexities, nuances, and presuppositions aside, the freeing of men from all chains of bondage is the goal because liberation theologians see this as the goal of Christ in the Gospels. Thus, a theology is constructed to do the job. Rauschenbusch saw the same problems as did Gutiérrez. Social gospel theology was constructed for the same purpose: to free men with the truths of the gospel. And not only was the objective the same, but the essential and formative means were as well. Rauschenbusch contextualized his theology for the poor and for his time and place in history. He met Gutiérrez's basic criteria and also trod in many ways a nearly identical theological path well before Gutiérrez. In focusing on freeing men for the Kingdom via the gospel, Rauschenbusch preached a genuine theology of liberation.

[299]Ramsay, 10.

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