The Liberation Theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez: A Dialectic Reconciliation of Hegel and Marx

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4/18/11
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Abstract

In *A Theology of Liberation*, Gustavo Gutiérrez defines theology as a reflection on praxis. In this reflection, he creates an ontological system that unites the temporal and eternal world. In this formulation, Gutiérrez, without explicitly acknowledging the process in which he is engaged, dialectically reconciles the theories of Hegel and Marx transforming their theories into a new theological system that could be used as an epistemological basis for a Christian understanding of the current state of the world. Grounding his theory in scripture, Gutiérrez uses theological concepts such as the Trinity, hope and love to reconcile the divergent theories of Hegel and Marx and place liberation theology as a next step in the process of the development of human thought. In this way Gutiérrez reorients the concept of theology, as an adaptable means of interpreting the world and places it squarely within the dialectical processes of the development of human thought.
Introduction

Liberation theology was founded in Latin America by Gustavo Gutiérrez, a Catholic priest who first coined the term in his book, *A Theology of Liberation*, published in 1971. Gutiérrez defined theology as a critical reflection on praxis, meaning a reflection on social practice, in light of scripture.\(^1\) This definition led him to create an ontological system that viewed the world from the perspective of the poor and mandated a transformation of the political and economic situation in Latin America. Gutiérrez sought to create a theological system that united historical liberation with salvation. Within this system liberation on earth becomes an essential part of the transformation necessary for salvation, that is, for the fulfillment of the eschatological Promise. To do so, Gutiérrez drew not only upon scripture, but also on a number of European philosophers, most importantly Hegel and Marx.

This thesis argues that in *A Theology of Liberation*, Gustavo Gutiérrez dialectically reconciles the theories of Hegel and Marx, without explicitly acknowledging the process in which he is engaged, transforming their theories into a new theological system that could be used as an epistemological basis for a Christian understanding of the world. Grounding his theory in scripture, Gutiérrez uses theological concepts such as the Trinity, hope and love to reconcile the divergent theories of Hegel and Marx and place liberation theology as a next step in the process of the development of human thought. In this way Gutiérrez reorients the concept of theology, as an adaptable means of interpreting the world and places it squarely within the dialectical processes of the development of human thought.

A. Historical Background

Gustavo Gutiérrez was born in Lima, Peru on June 8, 1928 to a poor urban worker and an uneducated mother. When he was young he suffered from osteomyelitis, a chronic bone infection which kept him bed-ridden for six years and left him lame. His disability, his working class upbringing, and his race – he was part Quechuan Indian – identified him in his childhood as a member of the poor and oppressed in Peru.²

As a medical student in his twenties, Gutiérrez was active in Church-based social action groups and served as president of the Catholic Action Movement, an organization which sought to create a new mission for the Church based on a lay apostolate that stressed spiritual renewal, evangelism and social issues.³ In 1950, Gutiérrez ended his medical studies to join the priesthood. Between 1951 and 1955 he studied philosophy and psychology at the University of Louvain in Belgium, where he wrote his thesis on Sigmund Freud.⁴ For the next four years he studied at the University of Lyons in France, where he received his Ph.D. in theology in 1959. At both universities, Gutiérrez studied the work of Karl Marx. European Catholicism at this time was experiencing a renaissance, seeking to reconnect with modern society and examining ideologies and philosophies that the Vatican denounced, such as Marxism, Freudianism and evolutionary theory.⁵ In France, Catholic priests were not only changing their theoretical perspective, but also standing with the working class and identifying with their political struggles.⁶ It is with these experiences in mind that Gutiérrez returned to Lima in 1959, where he

³ Ibid 4.
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid.
⁶ Ibid.
became the pastor of a parish and worked as a tutor in the Department of Theology and Social Sciences at the Catholic University of Lima.

The Peru to which Gutiérrez returned was a nation of gross economic inequality, with the top five percent of the population holding forty-eight percent of the national wealth.\(^7\) Wealth was also concentrated regionally, with the rural areas, particularly those occupied by Quechuan or Aymara speaking Indians, having the lowest average per-capita income.\(^8\) During the 1960’s, a variety of capitalist based economic reform plans were undertaken, but with little improvement in levels of economic equality. As a result Peru underwent a series of political upheavals, including a peasant rebellion and the development of a guerilla movement led by university students that was brutally repressed and resulted in the death of over 8,000 peasants.\(^9\) During this time the Catholic Church in Peru began to reorient its position in Peruvian society. As a result of the upheaval in the rural regions of Peru the church decided to sell off its estate, thereby severing its historical ties with the landed elite.\(^10\) However, this act resulted in little effectual change. In 1968 a bloodless led to the rise of General Juan Velasco Alvarado.

Velasco believed in a “third way” between communism and capitalism.\(^11\) He developed a five-year economic plan that was anti-imperialists, anti-monopoly, and pro-state led capital reinvestment for economic growth and development.\(^12\) His government called for social solidarity and class harmony in order to help create these changes, and asked the Catholic Church for support. Despite their action in the rural areas of Peru, the church was still viewed as hierarchical and supportive of the government, and in drawing on the church Velasco sought to

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\(^8\) Ibid.
\(^9\) Ibid 330.
\(^10\) Ibid 328.
\(^11\) Ibid 340.
\(^12\) Ibid 341.
create a sense of “reform from above” with a “catholic-corporatists approach,” reinforcing the
general perception that the Church in Latin America was hierarchical and supportive of the
government. 13 Velasco’s changes also included extensive land reform that affected nearly sixty
percent of agricultural lands. The reform effort was severely flawed, however, providing those
on larger wealthier haciendas with the most benefits, while leaving those in the most need with
little to no help. 14 It was in this tense socio-political situation that Gutiérrez wrote his A Theology
of Liberation.

B. A Theology of Liberation: Redefining Theology

In A Theology of Liberation Gutiérrez defines theology as a reflection on praxis, an
epistemological framework for understanding the current state of the world. For Gutiérrez,
theological reflection must be critical of the extent to which society and the Church have fulfilled
the Word of God. 15 Therefore, theology must be specific to the society in which it was created.
As Gutiérrez writes:

Theology is an understanding which both grows and, in a certain sense, changes.
If the commitment of the Christian community in fact takes different forms
throughout history, the understanding which accompanies the vicissitudes of this
commitment will be constantly renewed and will take untrodden paths. 16

According to Gutiérrez, theology must change with time and in light of the cultural context in
which it exists; it must create a new understanding of the world according to the relevant
commitment of the Christian community. This definition of theology as a critical reflection on
the Church and social order necessitates a new theology from a Latin American perspective. 17 In

13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
16 Ibid 10.
17 Ibid 11.
A *Theology of Liberation*, Gutiérrez argues that theology as it was currently understood was based on a European context and did not relate to the realities of Latin America. This theology, created as a reflection on the European context, was based in Enlightenment ideals. In Latin America, however, theological reflection required a different focus. Sense Latin America was the only oppressed region in the world with a majority of Christians, Gutiérrez argues, the Latin American context necessitates a theological reflection from the perspective of the poor.

**Theology from the Latin American Perspective**

Gutiérrez’s experiences in Europe, particularly his studies in France where he examined the Enlightenment in the context of the French Revolution, showed him an example of a proletariat class taking the future into their own hands and developing their own self-consciousness. Gutiérrez’s frustration with the European Enlightenment was that it promised freedoms that were understood only in an individualistic sense. This is best illustrated by its capitalist basis, which in an attempt to create an egalitarian system instead created a society based on inequality, dividing people along economic class lines rather than uniting them toward the achievement of a common goal.

Gutiérrez believed that Latin America required a different perspective based not on the individual but on the concept of humanity as a community, working toward the fulfillment of God’s word. In order to create a theological framework that was reflective of the needs of Latin America, Gutiérrez created an ontological system that unified historical liberation with salvation.

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18 Ibid xxviii.
19 Ibid xiv.
20 The development of a self-conscious, as well will see, is an extremely important element of liberation in Gutiérrez’s theology.
22 Ibid 16.
through an understanding of the world as the dialectic self-communicative process of God. For Gutiérrez, eschatology, that is, the coming of the end times, is the key to understanding Christianity. Thus, placing liberation within the salvific and eschatological perspective creates a Christian viewpoint based in the liberative transformation of the world. Gutiérrez is thus creating an epistemological framework that mandates socio-political action.

In order to create this framework, Gutiérrez draws on a number of previous thinkers, theologians and philosophers. Two of the most prominent are Karl Marx and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Gutiérrez draws on the ideas of these philosophers to create a united theologically based system. Traditionally, Marx and Hegel have been viewed as divergent thinkers. Marx, who studied Hegel, believed Hegel was far too conceptual in his thinking and created a philosophical system based in otherworld abstraction. In contrast to the Hegelian philosophy of “abstraction,” Marx sought to create a scientific understanding of history based in economics, a subject that Hegel did not discuss. In the development of his theological system Gutiérrez reconciles Hegel and Marx, thereby creating a new step in the dialectical development of human thought.

Outline

In Chapter 1, I argue that Gutiérrez’s overall ontological system, which is fundamental to his theological concept but is never clearly outlined in A Theology of Liberation, is based on Hegel’s trinitarian concept. This is the basic system that allows Gutiérrez to place historical liberation within the salvific horizon.

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23 Gutiérrez, Theology 92.
24 Ibid 93.
26 Gutiérrez, Theology 19, fn. 32 p. 185.
In Chapter 2, I discuss Gutiérrez’s three levels of liberation: liberation from political oppression, liberation of human consciousness, and liberation from sin. I argue that Gutiérrez bases his ideas of liberation from political oppression in the philosophy of Marx, and liberation from sin in the philosophy of Hegel, but combines the two thinkers, as well as the two spheres of temporality and eternity, into a single unity with his concept of liberation of human consciousness that utilizes the religiously based notions of human hope and love.
Chapter 1: The Dialectic Unity of Temporal and Eternal Worlds

Gustavo Gutiérrez sought to create a theological system that reflected on praxis in light of scripture. Recognizing that the Church in Latin America was deeply intertwined in politics and social life, Gutiérrez saw that it could not, and should not, escape the political and economic realities of Latin America but must instead respond to them. He believed that response required an epistemological view from the position of the oppressed and mandated a liberative transformation of the economic and political realities of society. Liberation from oppression thus became the responsibility not only of the political forces in Latin America, but also of the Church and Christian community.

Gutiérrez’s theological system seeks to place liberating historical transformation within a salvific horizon. This creates an ontological understanding of the world that requires historical liberation for the coming of the end times. The fulfillment of the eschatological promise thus becomes dependent on the achievement of liberation. Gutiérrez, therefore, creates a metaphysical system of reality that unites this-worldly and otherworldly transformation. Although he never explicitly acknowledges it, his system appears to be drawn primarily from Hegel’s theory of the Trinity. Gutiérrez does not, however, simply accept Hegel’s trinitarian system. Rather, Gutiérrez adopts Hegel’s concept of the self-communicating God and developed it using scripture to create a biblically based metaphysical system that allows for historical transformation to affect the coming of salvation.

A. The Foundations of Gutiérrez’s Trinity

In developing his metaphysical system, Gutiérrez drew heavily on Hegel’s concept of the Trinity, but does not adopt Hegel’s view that philosophy is superior to religion, but rather turns
to scripture as the basis and justification for his system. This was very much in line with Gutiérrez’s concept of theology as reflection on praxis in light of scripture. He recognizes the need for a unified system, but wished to definitively orient it within scripture, creating an ontological system that could orient the Church toward liberating ends. Thus, an understanding of both scriptural and Hegelian trinitarian concepts are useful. In this section, I will briefly outline the scriptural basis of the Trinity, followed by the Hegelian concept of Trinity and his critique of religion. In the following section I will show how Gutiérrez adopts Hegel’s basic system and justifies it using scripture.

The Trinity in Scripture

While a trinitarian system is never clearly outlined in the New Testament, much of the scriptural basis for a trinitarian system can be found in the Gospel According to John and the Gospel of Paul. Throughout the New Testament, Christ is described as having an intimate relationship with God. For instance, he is described as the Son of God, and he refers to God as “Abba,” a word meaning father in the intimate sense, over one hundred and seventy times in the New Testament. It is in the Gospel According to John, however, that the figure of Christ is raised to the level of God due to his presence at the moment of creation in the form of Logos. In the opening of John, Logos acts as the mediating agent of creation and provides light for humankind: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without

27 Terminology for the figure of Christ varies depending on context and writer. In this thesis I use Christ as a generic term, but occasionally specify it using the term Logos or Word to refer to the metaphysical being; references to Jesus or Jesus of Nazareth refer to the historical person, and Son when discussing Christ’s relationship to God.
29 Ibid 42.
him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was
the light of all people." 30 It is also in the Gospel According to John that this figure of Logos
becomes embodied as Jesus of Nazareth. 31 Thus, in John, Christ has always existed with God as
Logos, but also becomes embodied in the form of Jesus. In this way Christ is both a single mortal
being, in the form of Christ, and transcendent, as the mediating Word of God. 32

Christ, being with the Father from the moment of creation, knows the Father in a special
sense, he is with the Father and the Father is in him. 33 Because of this special relationship with
the Father, Christ is the truth, 34 through which others can know the Father because Christ keeps
his word. 35 However, it is through the Spirit that Christ brings the truth. In this way Spirit acts as
helper or advocate: “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with
you for ever. This is the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees
him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.” 36 This
notion of the Spirit as advocate is the personification of Spirit as a separate being from Christ or
the Father, 37 thus identifying the three members of the trinity as separate personified beings.

The role of the Spirit is further described in the Synoptic Gospels, the books of Mark,
Mathew and Luke, as well as in the writings of Paul. 38 In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus is

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31 “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as the father’s
only son, full of grace and truth . . . From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.” (John
1:14,16)
32 Marmion and Nieuwenhove, Introduction 43.
33 “I know him, because I am from Him, and He sent me.” (John 7:29); “Believe the works, so that you
may know and understand that the father is in me and I am in the Father.” (10:38).
34 John 14:6
35 “But I do know him and I keep his word.” (John 8:55)
37 Ibid.
38 It is in the Gospel of Mathew, for example, where the phrase, “in the name of the Father and the Son
and the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 28:19) originated.

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personally filled with Spirit through baptism, during which Spirit descends upon him.\(^{39}\) In Paul the action of Spirit in the world plays a functional role, specifically with the building of the Corinthian community: “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.”\(^ {40}\) This Spirit is a gift from God, but the gift is presented by spirit in multiple ways in a manner that aids in the creation of a community that benefits all, “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”\(^ {41}\) Spirit in Paul is thus an entity that aids humanity in the transformation of itself, as well as the means through which humanity receives God.

Gutiérrez draws upon these allusions to a trinitarian system in scripture to develop his theory of the Trinity. However, the foundation of his trinitarian system is Hegelian. Nevertheless, by relying on scripture, Gutiérrez rejects Hegel’s view that philosophy is superior to religion. Furthermore, he draws on ideas in scripture not present in Hegel’s system, such as the familial relations of father and son, thereby creating a new trinitarian concept based in part on scripture and in part on Hegel.

*Hegel’s Trinity: The self-communication of God*

Hegel believed in the primacy of reason. He distinguished three levels of knowledge: sensual perception, religion and philosophy. Sensual perception he designated as the lowest form of knowledge because he believed it had no basis in truth. He saw religion as truth but only in

\(^{39}\) Marmion and Nieuwenhove, *Introduction* 43.
\(^{40}\) 1 Cor. 12:4-6.
\(^{41}\) 1 Cor. 12:7.
representational form, and philosophy as the highest level of knowledge for it grasped truth in its conceptual form.\textsuperscript{42} Thus, religion for Hegel was a lesser form of truth.

This is illustrated in Hegel's doctrine of the Trinity. To Hegel, the doctrine of the Trinity is the truth, but religion lacks the ability to conceptually grasp the Trinity due to its seeming contradictions i.e. the notion of three as one.\textsuperscript{43} Hegel believed that the inability of religion to conceptually grasp the Trinity forced it to attempt to grasp God as a unitary being composed of three elements that are external to the world.\textsuperscript{44} Furthermore, according to Hegel this attempt to grasp the Trinity as three personified beings does not fully grasp their unity, and fails to explain why the Trinity is necessary.\textsuperscript{45} Hegel's philosophy of the Trinity embraces the Trinity as a truth represented by religion, but seeks to conceptualize it using reason. He does this by using the Trinity as the basis for his concept of a "self-communicating God." For Hegel, all of humanity is a part of the development of the consciousness of God, in which we are all united. God comes to know himself through the othering of himself in the form of the material world, which then reconciles itself with God through history. This, as we will see, is the fundamental basis of Gutiérrez's conception of the trinity and allows him to unite liberation with salvation.

Hegel's definition of dialectic is critical, as it is the basis of his trinitarian system, as well as his entire philosophical approach. In contrast to the usual understanding of dialectic as a synthesis of opposites, Hegel conceives of dialectic as a process of self-negation or sublation (\textit{Aufhebung}) and reconciliation. For Hegel, dialectic is a process of becoming through negation, or othering in the form of an opposite, and then reconciling that other in a unity with the original

\textsuperscript{42} Samuel M. Powell, \textit{The Trinity in German Thought} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 109.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid 110.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid 125.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid 110.
This is not a one-step process, rather a gradual movement of coming to be in one’s true form. This definition of dialectic is key to Hegel’s concept of the Trinity. For Hegel, the Trinity is understood as the dialectic process in which the universal is othered as its contradiction in the particular, or many units, and is then reconciled in the individual, where individual is understood as a singular unit. It could also be understood as the dialectic through which infinite negates itself through its opposite as finite, and then is reconciled as unity. In trinitarian terms, God represents the universal, Jesus represents the particular, and the Absolute, or Holy, Spirit is the individual. Thus, God, as the universal, others himself in the form of Jesus as a particular, and then is united as the individual in the form of the Absolute Spirit. Through this self-communicative process God comes to self-consciousness as the Absolute Spirit, his true being. The entire process is a creation process, it is the creation of the true God as Absolute Spirit.

Furthermore, for Hegel it is love that unites the infinite God and the finite Christ and proceeds from the two as the unity of the Holy Spirit. In speaking of the uniting power of love, Hegel writes:

Spirit, love [is] the intuition of oneself in another . . . The intuition of this unity [is found in] the poet, for example, who sings of his love, [who] not only loves but makes his love an object [of contemplation]. This [is] spirit: to know love, [to know] oneself in love.

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47 Powell 120.
48 Ibid.
49 Yovel, Preface 3.
50 Ibid 122.
The uniting love of God and Christ, of universal and particularity, is Spirit. But this is not just the sensation or feeling of love, but the conceptualization of love. For Hegel, “concept” is a specific term meaning that which exists both within thought and reality, exists both subjectively in the form of thought, and objectively in the world.\textsuperscript{52} Thus the concept of love is more than the feeling of love, it is also an objective entity that exists in the world as spirit and can be understood as such. Absolute Spirit and Spirit in Hegel’s system are not the same, but are related. For Hegel, Spirit has three forms: subjective spirit (the subjective human being), objective spirit (political, cultural and ethical institutions of society) and Absolute Spirit (philosophically understood united Spirit).\textsuperscript{53} Spirit, as an entirety, however, is what connects the finite and the infinite, it is that which reconciles God and humanity.\textsuperscript{54}

The role of Christ in Hegel’s trinitarian system diverges from the traditional view of that role. Hegel distinguishes between Christ and the Son. To Hegel, the “Son” represents the moment of differentiation in the creation of the particular or finitude, i.e. the physical world.\textsuperscript{55} The historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth, however, represents something different. The emphasis for Hegel is not on the birth or even the resurrection, but rather the death of Jesus, which represents the furthest moment of estrangement from God, the greatest moment of negation or othering.\textsuperscript{56} Jesus is the human figure of the divine and with his death there is not only

\textsuperscript{52} Yovel, Preface 17, 132.
\textsuperscript{53} Marmion and Nieuwenhove, Introduction 150. Absolute Spirit, in this sense, is the “concept”. God is the Subject, but is othered in the object and then is united in the Concept, or as Absolute Spirit, the unity of both. For this unity to form, furthermore, God must be present and part of human history and activity as the subject.” (Yovel, Preface 17).
\textsuperscript{54} Hegel states: “Spirit is the infinite return into itself, infinite subjectivity, not represented but actual divinity, the presence of God, not the substantial in-itself of the Father or of the Son and of Christ, who is the truth in the shape of objectivity. The Spirit is rather what is subjectively present and actual; and it is only through the mediation [in the community] that it itself is subjectively present as the divestment into the objective intuition of love and its infinite anguish.” Hegel, Lectures III 140.
\textsuperscript{55} Powell, The Trinity 130.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid 131.
the ultimate negation in the “death of God,” but also a “negation of negation.” The particular form of God is negated through death, opening up the possibility of individuality, or unity: “This death is thus at once finitude in its most extreme form, and at the same time the abolition and absorption of natural finitude, of immediate existence and estrangement, the canceling of limits.”

Thus, the role of Christ in Hegel’s Trinity is twofold. The Son represents the moment of differentiation in the creation of the world, while the historical Jesus represents the single self-conscious individual, the single particular that unites humanity and God. With his death, however, that particularity is negated, and opens up humanity to the Spirit and the possibility of communal reconciliation with God. Spirit is humanity’s knowledge of God that is released with the death of Jesus, through which Spirit overcomes singular particularity and opens itself back up to universality. Furthermore, Spirit provides true knowledge of God in the philosophical sense, not the representational religious sense that Hegel seeks to overcome. This true knowledge is in the form of love as a concept. Spirit as both subjective and objective are reconciled through the uniting concept of love. Love has the unique ability to embrace both unity and difference, for love requires an “other” in the form of the beloved, yet the two are united as lovers. Hegel writes:

“Love [consists] in giving up one’s personality, all that is one’s own, etc. [It is] a self-conscious activity, the supreme surrender [of oneself] in the other ... The death of Christ [is] the vision of this love itself – not [love merely] for or on

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58 Hegel, *Lectures III* qtd in Mermion and Nieuwenhove, *Introduction* 152. FIND REAL CITATION
59 Powell, *The Trinity* 132.
60 Ibid 135, 137.
61 Ibid 136.
62 Ibid 137.
63 Ibid 126.
behalf of others, but precisely divinity in this universal identity with other-being, death. The monstrous unification of these absolute extremes is love itself."\(^{64}\)

For Hegel, the death of Christ is the ultimate representation of this love, it is the ultimate surrendering of oneself into the other, and thus is the moment in which this love, as Spirit, is released into the world. In the dialectic process of God's coming to self-consciousness, love reconciles others, infinite and finite, death and life, etc. and is therefore the basis of the self-conscious development of spirit, both temporally and eternally.\(^{65}\)

In sum, Hegel's trinitarian system is a dialectic self-communicative process through which God comes to be its true self. The commencement of this process is at the moment of creation when God creates an other in the form of the material world. The furthest othering of God, however, is the historical Jesus who represents the ultimate negation of God as the universal othered in the opposite form of the particular. Yet Jesus is also the beginning of the reconciliation of this dialectic process, for with the death of Jesus that form of particularity is negated, and spirit is released upon the world. In Hegel's Trinity it is Spirit, as love, that is the uniting force that reconciles humanity with God, resulting in the creation of the Absolute Spirit. As we will see, these concepts are critical to the trinitarian theory developed by Gutiérrez.

B. The Trinity of Gutiérrez

In *A Theology of Liberation*, Gutiérrez never clearly outlines his trinitarian system. Yet references to Hegel's trinitarian ontology are clear. They are most overt in three areas: Gutiérrez's adoption of the Hegelian concept of the world as the self-communication of God, the process which moves the world toward salvation; Gutiérrez's adoption of Hegel's Christology; and Gutiérrez's adoption of Hegel's concept of Spirit. However, Gutiérrez parts from Hegel in

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\(^{64}\) Hegel, *Lectures III* 125. Brackets in original.

\(^{65}\) Powell 126.
that he seeks to firmly base his trinitarian concept in scripture, altering Hegel’s system in light of the writings of John and Paul, as well as the Synoptic Gospels. By doing so, Gutiérrez develops a trinitarian system that, as will be shown in the following chapter, allows him to avoid equating liberation with salvation, and to instead develop a theological system in which historical development is a process requiring liberation for the coming of salvation. Gutiérrez’s reliance on three key elements of Hegel’s trinitarian ontology to develop his own trinitarian system is analyzed below.

Promise and the Self-Communication of God

In *A Theology of Liberation*, Gutiérrez understands history as the self-communication of God. This self-communicative process begins with the moment of creation, which is oriented toward the future by the “Promise” of God. Gutiérrez writes, “The Bible is the book of Promise, the Promise made by God to human beings, the efficacious revelation of God’s love and self-communication.”⁶⁶ He then adds: “The Promise ... projects itself into the future, creating a history, because it is the self-communication of God.”⁶⁷ The Promise is the movement towards the future, which will eventually reach a complete unity of God. The achievement of that unity, however, comes through the procession of history. God’s self-communication guided by the Promise to humanity of salvation is thus, “creating history.” As Gutiérrez writes, “The Promise orients all history towards the future and thus puts revelation into an eschatological perspective. Human history is in truth nothing but the slow, uncertain and surprising fulfillment of the

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⁶⁶ Gutiérrez, *Theology* 91.
⁶⁷ Ibid 92.
Promise.”68 However, Gutiérrez is very clear that the Promise is being fulfilled dialectically in history. He writes:

There exists a dialectical relationship between the Promise and its partial fulfillments. The resurrection itself is the fulfillment of something promised and likewise the anticipation of a future; with it the work of Christ is “not yet completed, not yet concluded”; the resurrected Christ “is still future to himself.”69

The promise of salvation is the Promise of the finality of the self-communication of God, which culminates in the unification of all humanity with God. However, as in Hegel’s Trinity this process fulfills itself dialectically through a series of self-negations and reconciliations which slowly brings humanity closer to unity with God, and thus to the fulfillment of the self-communicative process and development of God’s self-consciousness. Part of this dialectical process is represented by the figure of Jesus who is the partial but incompleted fulfillment of God’s Promise.

Christology

Christ’s role in Gutiérrez’s liberation theology is complex. According to Gutiérrez, the creation of the world is the first moment in the salvific process as represented by the Promise. In creating the world, God is creating the other through which his self-communicative process can develop. Jesus of Nazareth is a fundamental moment in the self-communicative process. He represents a re-creation of humanity that is presented within the context of creation:

The work of Christ forms a part of this movement and brings it to complete fulfillment. The redemptive action of Christ, the foundation of all that exists, is also conceived as a re-creation and presented in the context of creation (cf. Col. 1:15-20; Cor. 8:6; Heb. 1:2; Eph 1:1-22). This idea is particularly clear in the prologue to the Gospel of John.70

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68 Ibid 91.
69 Ibid 92.
70 Ibid 90.
In the *Gospel According to John*, Jesus is presented as *Logos* or the Word of God:

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people... And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.71

Gutiérrez presents Christ as fundamental to the moment of creation as the Word of God. However, to Gutiérrez the primary role of Christ is not at the moment of creation, but in the moment of re-creation. Through his death, the ultimate sacrifice, and resurrection, Jesus releases upon the world Spirit and allows for a broadening of the salvific horizon to include all of humanity.72 In this sense, he re-creates humanity to exist within the salvific horizon where before only the Jewish people had existed within that horizon. This allows for the self-communicative process to move towards a reunification with God: “With the incarnation of the Son and the sending of the Spirit of Promise this self-communication has entered into a decisive stage.”73 It is the opening of a new stage of the salvific process.

This re-creation of humanity is presented within the context of creation through the role of Christ who exists both as creator and re-creator. This is one of the moments in which the Hegelian notion of God’s communicative process as a creation of himself is evident. Again, for Hegel, God becomes his true self as Absolute Spirit through this mediated process of self-communication. Thus, Christ represents both a part of creation, and a part of the re-creation, or further creation, the coming closer to the realization of the complete God. They are both a part of the same process of self-conscious development, and thus the coming to true being, the creation of a true self. As Gutiérrez writes, “through the salvation Christ affords... creation acquires its

71 John. 1:1-5, 14
72 Gutiérrez, *Theology* 103.
73 Ibid 92.
full meaning . . . Creation and salvation therefore have, in the first place, a Christological sense: all things have been created in Christ, all things have been saved in him (cf. Col. 1:15-20).”\textsuperscript{74} Christ plays a double role, as present at the moment of salvation, and as the being whose action allows for the salvation of all of humanity.

With his death and resurrection Christ releases upon the world Spirit, allowing for the procession towards reconciliation. This conception of Christ is very much in line with the Hegelian notion of Christ, in which the figure of Christ is significant both at the moment of creation as the beginning of the self-communicative process and as the single figure whose death allows for the beginning of the movement of this dialectic self-communicative process towards unification with God. However, Gutiérrez draws on scripture for support of this system, as well as notions of the Trinity that are already present within scripture that he uses to alter the Hegelian system into his own unique system. In particular, he maintains the traditional familial relations of the Trinity that Hegel viewed as inferior due to their representative status. For instance, Gutiérrez writes, “This mystery is the love of the father, who ‘loved the world so much that he gave his only son’ (John 3:16) in order to call all humans in the Spirit, to communion with God.”\textsuperscript{75} Gutiérrez rejects Hegel’s arguments regarding the inferiority of religious representation to reason, but instead adopts Hegel’s trinitarian system and basis it in scripture. In this way Gutiérrez develops a scripturally based theological structure that unites temporality and eternality into a single salvific process.

\textit{Spirit}

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid 90.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid 146.
Gutiérrez writes, “Christ introduces us by the fight of his Spirit into communion with God and with all human beings . . . Nothing escapes this process, nothing is outside the pale of the action of Christ and the fight of Spirit. This gives human history its profound unity.” Spirit is a gift from Christ, or that which Christ has given humanity through his salvific action, and it brings humanity into communion with God as a unity. Furthermore, Gutiérrez writes:

To be saved is to reach the fullness of love; it is to enter into the circle of charity which unites the three Persons of the Trinity; it is to love as God loves. The way to this fullness of love can be no other than love itself, the way of participation in this Charity, the way of accepting explicitly or implicitly, to say with the Spirit: “Abba, Father.” (Gal 4:6) He then adds:

This mystery is the love of the father, who “loved the world so much that he gave his only Son” (John 3:16) in order to call all humans, in the Spirit, to communion with God. Human beings are called together as a community and not as separate individuals, to participate in the life of the Trinitarian community, to enter into the circuit of love that unites the persons of the Trinity. This is a love which “builds up human society in history.”

The two quotations above are taken from different sections of *A Theology of Liberation*. The first is from a discussion on the role of Christ as neighbor, and the second on a discussion of the role of the Church community. Reading the quotes together, however, allows us to examine certain fundamental elements of Gutiérrez’s conception of the Trinity. The quotations illustrate that for Gutiérrez, it is through love that unity is achieved, “to be saved is to reach the fullness of love . . . which unites the three Persons of the Trinity.” Furthermore, it is clear that this love comes from Spirit, “in order to call all humans in the Spirit, to communion with God.” Thus, Spirit, as love, is that which unites all of humanity with the trinity, creating a unity. This is the

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76 Ibid 103.
77 Ibid 113.
78 Ibid 146.
79 Ibid 113.
80 Ibid 146.
fundamental Hegelian concept of Spirit. Spirit exists as the love that has the unique ability to 
unite all contradictions in one, thereby reconciling God’s dialectic process.

A careful reading of *A Theology of Liberation* makes it clear that Gutiérrez’s notion of 
the Trinity is grounded in the Hegelian trinitarian system. First, in Gutiérrez’s theological system 
the world exists as part of the self-communication of God. As in Hegel, creation is placed as the 
first moment of this salvific process, in which Christ is present as the means of creation. Second, 
Christ also exists, as in Hegel, as an historical individual in Jesus whose sacrificial death opened 
the salvific horizon for all of humanity. Third, through Christ’s death Spirit as love is released 
into the temporal world, which as in Hegel is the means through which humanity will be united 
back into communion with God at the end of salvation. Nevertheless, Gutiérrez does not simply 
accept Hegel’s system, but instead adopts elements of it and fits them into his own scripturally 
based ontological system. For instance, he maintains the familial relations between the son and 
the father that Hegel rejected as “representative.” Gutiérrez also rejects Hegel’s notion of 
“concept.” He does not view love as a concept, but rather as a human experience that exists, for 
instance, between father and son.

C. Conclusion

Gutiérrez draws on both Hegel and scripture to create a Christian ontological system that 
places historical transformation within a salvific horizon. This is the system that allows him to 
equate historical liberation, specifically, with the salvific processes. By drawing on Hegel’s 
trinitarian system, yet basing it in scripture, Gutiérrez unites the temporal and eternal world into 
a single system that gives transcendent meaning to the historical development. It is the 
achievement of liberation, specifically, that he places as the fundamental process of historical
transformation within this system. Understanding this liberative process and how it relates to Gutiérrez’s broader ontological system is the subject of the next chapter.
Chapter 2: Three Levels of Liberation

In *A Theology of Liberation*, Gutiérrez delineates three levels of liberation. The first level is liberation from political oppression; the second is liberation of human consciousness, and the third is liberation from sin. Gutiérrez recognizes liberation from political oppression and liberation from sin as traditional political and religious ideas, but cites liberation of consciousness as the uniting level of liberation, which with the other two forms a single tripartite system. Within liberation of human consciousness, love plays a prominent role. As discussed in the previous chapter, love is the force that unites humanity as a whole and brings it into unity with God. It is also a human experience and is, therefore, foremost at the level of liberation of consciousness, but it permeates all other levels as well.

While love plays an important role in Gutiérrez’s system, hope is the fundamental uniting concept. Gutiérrez sees hope as an element of human consciousness that orients humanity in the present while creating a perspective looking toward the future. Thus, a new human consciousness, based in hope, unites the other two levels of liberation into a single liberative system. In outlining this system Gutiérrez draws on both Hegel and Marx. Not surprisingly, he draws on Hegel primarily at the level of liberation from sin, and Marx primarily at the level of liberation from political oppression. Both are alluded to, and even explicitly discussed, in his development of the concept of the liberation of human consciousness, but it is the spiritual element of hope that truly unites the two other levels of liberation into a single system.

A. Level One: Liberation from Oppression

Gutiérrez’s first level of liberation is liberation from political oppression. He defines this type of liberation as, “liberation from social situations of oppression and marginalization that
force many (and indeed all in one or another way) to live in conditions contrary to God’s will for their life.”

It is in his analysis of this level of liberation that we find Gutiérrez’s greatest reliance upon Marxist ideas. In his chapter “The Process of Liberation in Latin America,” Gutiérrez overtly advocates for socialist government as a means of liberation from the institutional forms of oppression that lead to systemic injustice and poverty and are supported by the system of capitalism. He writes that capitalism has led to an international system of independent and dependent countries. Combating this system requires an examination of new forms of economic relations, both on the international and national level, as ending the system of dominating nations also requires ending the domination of their allies working at the level of national politics. Thus, closely aligning with Marxism, Gutiérrez believes that there is a need for a social revolution in Latin America, which will end this period of domination and radically change the circumstances of the oppressed classes.

Socialism, Gutiérrez argues, is the most promising form of revolutionary transformation for Latin America. However, it must be a specifically Latin American socialism that is utilized throughout the continent:

These groups and individuals who have raised the banner of Latin American liberation are most frequently of socialist inspiration; socialism, moreover, represents the most fruitful and far-reaching approach. There is, however, no monolithic orientation. A theoretical and practical diversity is emerging. Strategies and tactics are different and in many cases even contrary.

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81 Ibid xxxviii.
82 Ibid 52.
83 Ibid 54.
85 Gutiérrez, Theology 55.
While socialism is the most fruitful means of political liberation for Latin America, Gutierrez insists it must be a continent-wide movement. He expresses concern about the lack of continuity within Latin American socialist movements, and mentions the schisms among world socialist powers as a partial explanation. He argues that socialism in Latin America must be uniquely fitted to the, specific realities and histories of the Latin American continent. He cites the Marxist thinker José Carlos Mariátegui, who wrote:

"We certainly do not wish . . . for socialism in America to be an exact copy of others’ socialism. It must be a heroic creation. We must bring Indo-American socialism to life with our own reality, in our own language. This is a mission worthy of a new generation." . . . Marxism is not "a body of principles who can be rigidly applied the same way in all historical climates and all social latitudes . . . Marxism, in each country, for each people, works and acts on the situation . . ."  

Gutiérrez advocates Marxist socialist theory, that is revolutionary socialism, as a means of liberation from political oppression. He even goes so far as to recognize the potential need for violent revolutionary action in order to end this system of oppression. In advocating "social revolution" and the need for foundational economic change Gutiérrez is drawing on Marxist notions of inadequate relations of production, that is worker-production relations, based on a capitalist economic system, where workers have become alienated leading inevitably to a socialist revolution with a complete transformation of the economic foundations. However, Gutiérrez wishes to make the socialist system resulting form this revolutionary action specific to Latin America.

According to Gutiérrez, in order for Marxism to be a specifically Latin America movement it must involve the Church, a concept antithetical to traditional Marxism. The Church

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86 Ibid.
87 Ibid 56.
88 Ibid 64.
89 The concept of alienated labor Gutiérrez recognizes and even utilizes in his text, see Gutiérrez, *Theology*
90 Marx, *Contributions* 435.
in Latin America has always been a strong political force, as Gutiérrez himself recognizes.91 However, the Church has not fully embraced the need for a new revolutionary movement against the structure of political oppression inherent in Latin America. While some Christian groups, specifically youth groups, have played a central role within the liberation movements of Latin America, the divergent perspectives between the youth groups and the institutional Church have led to multiple conflicts. In part, Gutiérrez argues, this is due to the Church’s failure to embrace a theological perspective that recognizes the need for a complete commitment to the oppressed peoples of Latin America.92 This is precisely what Gutiérrez seeks to provide, a theological perspective that contains a “resolute commitment to the oppressed people of this exploited continent.”93 However, this type of liberation is not enough:

The liberation of our continent means more than overcoming economic, social, and political dependence. It means, in a deeper sense, to see the becoming of humankind as a process of human emancipation in history. It is to see humanity in search of a qualitatively different society in which it will be free from all servitude, in which it will be the artisan of its own destiny.94

Thus, liberation from political oppression is only a part of the liberative process; the overall liberation of humanity requires further steps, liberation of human consciousness and liberation from sin.

Gutiérrez relies most directly on Marxism by calling for a socialist revolution in Latin America. He insists, however, that political liberation is not enough, it must be a part of a broader process of liberation of human consciousness and ultimately liberation from sin. The third level of liberation, liberation from sin, is where Gutiérrez primarily draws from Hegel. However, it is the second level, liberation of human consciousness, which Gutiérrez uses to build

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91 Gutiérrez, Theology 32.
92 Ibid 59.
93 Ibid.
94 Gutiérrez, Theology 56.
a bridge between the rational, scientifically based means of liberation from oppression,\textsuperscript{95} and the highest level of liberation, liberation from sin. Liberation of consciousness is thus the unifying level of liberation, and the subject of the next section.

B. Level Two: Liberation of Human Consciousness

According to Gutiérrez, it is the liberation of human consciousness that leads to the development of a new human community based in that consciousness. This is the level of liberation that Gutiérrez emphasizes and, he argues, is the level that brings the system together in a single unity:

I myself have always emphasized its necessity in my writings. This emphasis reflected an effort to avoid the narrow approach taken to liberation when only two levels, the political and the religious, are distinguished. The political and the religious are certainly basic aspects of liberation, but exclusive attention to them often led to a simple juxtaposition of them, thus impoverishing both, or else to an identification of the two, thus perverting the meaning of both.\textsuperscript{96}

The development of human consciousness is, in this sense, the most important level of liberation, for it is the unifying level. For Gutiérrez, this level of liberation encompasses multiple elements of human consciousness. It requires a self-consciousness on the part of humanity, but also requires that the consciousness of humanity be a consciousness of itself as a community, and oriented towards the development of that community. Again, Gutiérrez never explicitly outline his notion of liberation as consciousness. With a thorough reading of \textit{A Theology of Liberation}, however, it is possible to discern its description. In explaining this level of liberation, Gutiérrez draws on a variety of previous thinkers, not the least of whom are Hegel and Marx.

\textsuperscript{95} Gutiérrez recognizes Marxian approaches to liberation from political oppression as scientifically based (19), and defines his understanding of liberation from oppression as scientifically based as well (139).

\textsuperscript{96} Gutiérrez, \textit{Theology} xl.
In order to explain his understanding of the relationship between self-consciousness and freedom, Gutiérrez cites Hegel's *Reason in History*: “It is Freedom in itself that comprises within itself the infinite necessity of bringing itself to consciousness and thereby, since knowledge about itself is its very nature, to reality.” 97 Gutiérrez is alluding to Hegel's discussion of the relationship between freedom and the development of self-consciousness of Spirit. In *Reason in History* Hegel writes that the essence of Spirit is freedom. 98 Freedom comes from a consciousness of self as an independent being, for when one is conscious of oneself as a self, one is dependent on nothing:

Spirit is being-within-itself (self-contained existence). But this, precisely, is freedom. For when I am dependent, I refer myself to something else which I am not; I cannot exist independently of something external. I am free when I am within myself. This self-contained existence of spirit is self-consciousness, consciousness of self. 99

For Gutiérrez, as for Hegel, this development of Spirit's consciousness is intrinsically linked to the historical development of humanity, as it is through Spirit's development of self-consciousness of its own freedom that freedom is actualized in the world. 100 The consciousness of Spirit cannot advance without the advancement of the consciousness of humanity in history, for humanity is a part of the development of Spirit; it is all one salvific process. Furthermore, development of self-consciousness of humanity must occur with the development of a free community.

97 Hegel qtd. in Gutiérrez, *Theology* 19.
99 Ibid 23.
100 Ibid 24.
In *Reason in History*, Hegel discusses the existence of slavery in different regions of the world and the relationship between consciousness and slavery. Hegel writes that slavery does not result in a lack of freedom only for the enslaved, but for the masters as well, as it is impossible for the master as slave-holder to possess a complete consciousness of self and, therefore, complete freedom. Hegel notes that the Greeks were the first for whom some level of consciousness of freedom arose, but that their notion of freedom applied only to some and not to all of humanity. Because of this lack of complete consciousness, slavery was the basis upon which Greek society was built, tainting the freedom of the masters.\(^{101}\) Hegel writes, "their freedom itself was partly an accidental, transient, and limited flowering and partly a severe thraldom of human nature."\(^{102}\) That is, the existence of slavery within Greek society precluded any true freedom within Greece. It was an accidental semi-freedom of consciousness, as the dependence on slavery created a dependent society. While the slave was literally held in captivity, the greater society, the masters, also were not free due to their dependence on the slave. This is the idea of the well known lord-bondsman dialectic discussed in Hegel’s *The Phenomenology of the Spirit*, which Gutierrez cites directly in the same paragraph as the quote from *Reason in History*.

Hegel’s lord-bondsman dialectic posits that human beings can only be self-aware, that is aware of their own existence, through recognition by another. People are social and competitive beings who are inherently in a state of contact and conflict with others.\(^{103}\) The relationship with another on which human consciousness of the self is dependent must be a struggle, with one becoming dominant and the other subordinate.\(^{104}\) Through this struggle the one who becomes the

\(^{101}\) Ibid 24.  
\(^{102}\) Ibid.  
\(^{103}\) Kathleen Wright, Personal interview, Haverford College, Haverford, PA, 2/24/2011  
\(^{104}\) Ibid
bondsman will face their own mortality and by facing death become conscious of the possibility of their own negation or lack of existence. Through this consciousness of their own possible non-existence they develop a consciousness of their existence, and as more self-conscious beings attain greater freedom.  

The dialectic continues after the conflict when each is clearly defined as either the lord or the bondsman. Not enslaved as the bondsman is, the lord at first believes in his own personal freedom, but this concept of freedom disappears as the lord realizes his or her dependency on the bondsman’s work for survival. Likewise, the bondsman recognizes that through one’s own labor the ability emerges to make something of oneself by oneself. It is through labor that the bondsman can create an object of his or her own, and through the creation of this object the bondsman self-objectifies, or creates an other that is of its own making and is permanent. In this act of objectification the bondsman can recognize the existence of his or her own objectified self. This is a freedom that the lord does not have and cannot understand. Thus, through labor and the craft of creation those who become bondsmen attain self-consciousness and thereby freedom. Gutiérrez writes, “Through the lord-bondsman dialectic (resulting from this original confrontation), the historical process will then appear as the genesis of consciousness and therefore of the gradual liberation of humankind.”

In citing the lord-bondsman dialectic, Gutiérrez is developing a concept of freedom as based in human-consciousness. Specifically, he adopts the notion that freedom can only be obtained through a life and death struggle. Through the conflict of the lord-bondsman dialectic,

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106 Hegel, *Phenomenology* 238.
107 Wright, 2/24/11
human consciousness will develop and humanity will dialectically construct itself, thereby attaining true awareness that “liberates itself in the acquisition of genuine freedom which through work transforms the world and educates the human species.”109 However, Gutiérrez does not adopt all elements of Hegel’s lord-bondsman dialectic. While he acknowledges the need for work and production in order to reach consciousness and freedom, he also recognizes that Hegel’s dialectic is not completely reflective of current realities and lacks a communal element.110 Gutiérrez therefore reworks the lord-bondsman dialectic, relying in part on Marx’s critiques of Hegel’s theory, which he cites directly, as well on his own theologically based concepts of the spirituality of the human community.

Marx’s Lord-Bondsman Dialectic

Marx argues that in an industrialized society the products of labor are no longer the objectification of the laborer because labor has become estranged due to the creation of factories and other industrial forms of production.111 As mentioned previously, Gutiérrez takes a similar position, referring to this notion as “alienated work,” and mandates the elimination of this as a part of the salvific process: “The struggle for a just world in which there is no oppression, servitude or alienated work will signify the coming of the Kingdom.”112 Further, in his Critique of Hegel’s Dialectic and General Philosophy, Marx criticizes Hegel for developing a philosophy entirely based in abstraction, and argues that Hegel’s basis in abstract thought removes any

109 Ibid 19.
110 This recognition on the part of Gutiérrez can be seen in his discussion of the Marxian interpretation of the lord-bondsman dialectic, see Gutiérrez, Theology 19, as well as in the way in which he develops his concept of human consciousness as will be discussed in the following pages.
112 Gutiérrez, Theology 97
possibility for concrete development within society.\textsuperscript{113} Therefore, Marx redevelops Hegel's notion of the lord-bondsman dialectic by placing it strictly within the economic and social development of society.\textsuperscript{114} This is Marx's "epistemological break," as Gutiérrez puts it, in which Marx takes the possibility of human transformation and places it strictly within the material world. He removes the element of subjectivity from the external world, that is the notion of the world as a development of one consciousness, but maintains that human action through work is the fundamental basis for change.\textsuperscript{115}

Gutiérrez does not make the same epistemological break as Marx, as he maintains the subjectivity of the external world, but he also recognizes the abstractness of Hegel's system. Therefore, while he accepts the premise of Hegel's lord-bondsman dialectic – freedom as a state of consciousness of self which is achieved through conflict and (non-alienated) work – he also recognizes that in its abstractness the lord-bondsman dialectic lacks both a transformative element that humans can instinctively grasp and a communal element. He therefore seeks to ground the lord-bondsman dialectic by basing his theory of this second level of liberation, liberation of human consciousness, not only in the lord-bondsman dialectic but also in the notion of utopia and the human experiences of hope and love.

\textit{Utopia and Hope}

\textsuperscript{115} Gutiérrez, \textit{Theology} 19.
Gutiérrez understands utopia not as a fantastically idealized community, but rather as a historical possibility that is reflective of a rational and scientific consideration of the world. For Gutiérrez, utopia takes the rational and scientific considerations required for political change, the basis of liberation from oppression, and humanizes them, focusing the desire for political change on a desire for a true human community:

Utopia so understood, far from making political strugglers dreamers, radicalizes their commitment and helps them keep their work from betraying their purpose—which is to achieve a real encounter among persons in the midst of a free society without social inequalities. “Only utopia,” comments Ricouers, “can give economic, social and political action a human focus.”

Utopia brings the communal element to the quest for political liberation. A focus on a truly human community requires a new consciousness of human relations that is manifested in the development of a new society. Thus, utopia humanizes economic, social and political liberation, the first level of liberation, and connects it with the second level of liberation, that of freedom of human consciousness.

Furthermore, according to Gutiérrez, as a community based in love, utopia necessarily reaches to the third level of liberation, liberation from sin, which brings communion with God:

In human love there is a depth which the human mind does not suspect: it is through it that persons encounter God. If utopia humanizes economic, social, and political liberation, that humanness—in the light of the gospel—reveals God. If doing justice leads us to knowledge of God, to find God is in turn a necessary consequence.

116 This comment may be a reference to the Marxian concept of utopia as otherworldly and lacking potential for real change, see Karl Marx and Friedrich Engle’s, Manifesto of the Community Part, Chapter III.
117 Gutiérrez, Theology 138.
119 Gutiérrez, Theology 139. Here we also see Gutiérrez’s rejection of Hegel’s notion of the concept. Hegel advocated spirit as the “concept” of love, while Gutiérrez is clearly prioritizing the human experience of love over the rationally understood concept.
Liberation from oppression is not only humanized by the utopic vision, but this new human consciousness is paired with a growth in human love, which leads to a communion with humanity and therefore necessarily a communion with God.

Utopia is not, however, the primary uniting concept within Gutiérrez’s theological system.\(^\text{120}\) Rather, it is hope, hope for the possibility of utopia, that is the uniting element. Gutiérrez defines utopia as a forward-looking concept, “Utopia moves forward; it is a projection into the future, a dynamic and mobilizing factor in history.”\(^\text{121}\) While Gutiérrez recognizes the value of a future-oriented perspective, he also believes that a theology that is too futuristic is just as dangerous as an otherworldly theology: “One must be extremely careful not to replace a Christianity of the beyond with a Christianity of the future; if the former tended to forget the world, the latter runs the risk of neglecting a miserable and unjust present and the struggle for liberation.”\(^\text{122}\) In order to ground his theological system in the present, Gutiérrez utilized the human experience of hope. He writes: “Where oppression and human liberation seem to make God irrelevant . . . there must blossom faith and hope in Him who came to root out injustice and to offer, in an unforeseen way, total liberation.”\(^\text{123}\) Hope is a motivating spiritual experience that inspires even those facing great difficulty to live and act in accordance with the gospel. Moreover, this experience of hope and faith in the Lord, while projecting into the future, also reflects on the present: “The hope which overcomes death must be rooted in the heart of historical praxis; if this hope does not take shape in the present to lead it forward, it will be only an evasion, a futuristic illusion.”\(^\text{124}\) Hope grounds humanity in an experience that focuses on the

\(^{120}\) Cf. Aguas, \textit{Utopia}. Aguas argues that Utopia is the fundamental uniting element within Gutiérrez’s theological system.

\(^{121}\) Gutiérrez, \textit{Theology} 136.

\(^{122}\) Ibid 124.

\(^{123}\) Ibid 118.

\(^{124}\) Ibid 125.
present situation, but still projects humanity forward toward the dialectic fulfillment of the Promise. Gutiérrez emphasizes the importance, even the primacy, of hope in the development of a theology that reflects on the current historical realities:

The primacy of faith was followed by the “primacy of charity.” . . . But paradoxically, at the same time this was also partially responsible for the fact that for some the relationship with God was obscured and became difficult to live out and understand. Today, due partly perhaps to such impasses, the perspective of a new primacy seems to be emerging— that of hope, which liberates history because of its openness to the God who is to come.125

Hope is the uniting element of Gutiérrez’s theological system. Hope is a mobilizing spiritual experience that is part of the human consciousness and focuses on the present need for change while orientating toward the fulfillment of the eschatological Promise. Gutiérrez attributes this concept of hope in part to Marx. In his description of hope he discusses Marx’s idea of praxis, he writes: “Marx’s idea of praxis is different; it is based on a dialectical conception of history—necessarily advancing, with eyes fixed on the future and with real action in the present, towards a classless society based on new relationships of production.”126 This concept of praxis is the basis of his understanding of hope, a concept based in action in the present with eyes on the future.127 But while building on Marx’s basic notion, Gutiérrez incorporates into his theology of hope a spiritual dimension:

Christian hope opens us, in an attitude of spiritual childhood, to the fight of the future promised by God. It keeps us from any confusion of the Kingdom with any one historical stage, from any idolatry toward unavoidably ambiguous human achievement, from any absolutizing of revolution. In this way hope makes us radically free to commit ourselves to social praxis, motivated by a liberating utopia and with the means which the scientific analysis of reality provides for us. And our hope not only frees us for this commitment; it simultaneously demands and judges it.128

125 Ibid.
126 Ibid 126.
127 Ibid 121.
128 Ibid 139
For Gutiérrez, hope not only orients one toward the present and the transformation of society in the Marxist sense, it also takes on a spiritual religious dimension in its orientation of present transformation towards both a utopic society, of which Marx disapproved, and further toward the fulfillment of the eschatological Promise.

*Liberation of human consciousness: the reconciliation of Hegel and Marx:*

Gutiérrez's theory of the liberation of human consciousness is multidimensional. The two central elements of this level of liberation, as discussed above, are the concepts of the lord-bondsman dialectic, leading to self-consciousness grounded in the communal human experience of love and, more importantly, hope. Hegel's lord-bondsman dialectic recognizes the need for humanity to develop a consciousness of self in order to attain freedom. Gutiérrez, however, seeks to place this consciousness in a communal context by basing humanity's self-consciousness in love and projecting its development towards the eventual construction of a utopia. Yet, Gutiérrez does not wish to understand the development of human consciousness as completely future oriented, as this would disassociate it too much from the present. Therefore, he utilizes the human experience of hope to ground the development of consciousness in the present, but project it toward the future. This hope he explains in Marxist terms, as a present-focused, future-oriented outlook. But he also gives hope a spiritual element, orienting it not only towards the achievement of a utopian just society, but also towards the fulfillment of the eschatological promise.

Gutiérrez thus utilizes the Hegelian concept of the lord-bondsman dialectic to develop an understanding of self-consciousness as the basis of freedom, but this self-consciousness must be at the communal level. Humanity must come to understand itself as a community of love and
through this understanding a utopian community will be formed. However, as it is only in the future that this utopian community exists. Gutiérrez, therefore, utilizes the human experience of hope, defining it in part based on Marx’s concept of praxis, to create a concept of human consciousness as based in the present but projecting towards the future.

C. Level Three: Liberation from Sin

The final and highest level of liberation described by Gutiérrez is liberation from sin, which encompasses all levels of liberation. Within the framework described in Chapter One, salvation is universal, as all of humanity is a part of this dialectic process of self-communication, all souls are seeking communion with God.\(^{129}\) Gutiérrez argues that the universality of salvation and the concept of salvation as an achievement fulfilled through historical progression, requires that sin be a historical reality:

Therefore, sin is not only an impediment to salvation in the afterlife. Insofar as it constitutes a break with God, sin is a historical reality, it is a breach of the communion of persons with each other, it is a turning in of individuals on themselves which manifests itself in a multifaceted withdrawal from others. And because sin is a personal and social intrahistorical reality, a part of the daily events of human life, it is also, and above all, an obstacle to life’s reaching the fullness we call salvation.\(^{130}\)

In Gutiérrez’s metaphysical system Spirit is the uniting force of God and humanity, and is defined as love. Fittingly, therefore, Gutiérrez understands sin as lack of love: “To sin is to refuse to love one’s neighbors and, therefore, the Lord himself. Sin – a breach of friendship with God and other – is according to the Bible the ultimate cause of poverty, injustice, and the oppression in which persons live.”\(^{131}\) Sin is lack of love for fellow humans, and is expressed in the forms of poverty, injustice and institutional oppression. Therefore, liberation from sin

\(^{129}\) Ibid 84.  
\(^{130}\) Ibid 85.  
\(^{131}\) Ibid 24.
requires the permeation of love throughout human society and the end of systemic oppression, which is constituted by sin. This liberation is the highest form of liberation and ultimately leads to communion with God. It is also deeply connected to the first two forms of liberation. Because sin is an intrinsically human experience, and is in fact manifested in political forms, the first step to its eradication is liberation from political oppression. But sin is also a lack of love, it is a lack of communion with God. Therefore, liberation from sin requires a development of human consciousness in history.

In support of this multilayered system Gutiérrez cites the Biblical stories of Genesis and Exodus, arguing that the moment of creation was also the beginning of the process of liberation from oppression and sin, as well as the beginning of the development of human consciousness.

_Biblical justification._

Gutiérrez argues that the creation story of Genesis, the beginning of the salvific self-communicative process of God, is deeply connected with the liberation story of Exodus.\textsuperscript{132} He utilizes a passage from Isaiah to create a link between Genesis and Exodus: “Awake, awake, put on your strength, O arm of the Lord, awake as you did long ago, in days gone by. Was it not you who hacked the Rahab in pieces and ran the dragon through? Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great abyss, and made the ocean depths a path for the ransomed?”\textsuperscript{133} Gutiérrez argues that the link here is the reference to water: “The “waters of the great abyss” are those which enveloped the world and from which creation arose, but they are also the Red Sea

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid 87.
\textsuperscript{133} Isaiah 51:9-10 (NRSV)
through which the Jews crossed in their exodus from Egypt.\textsuperscript{134} Thus, the story of the creation and the liberation of the Jews from Egypt are but two parts of the same salvific act.\textsuperscript{135}

Not only are the two closely linked biblically, but for Gutiérrez the exodus from Egypt also represents the destruction of a disordered political society and the creation of a new order.\textsuperscript{136} The people of Israel had lived in an oppressive society, marked by “alienated work” and “humiliations.”\textsuperscript{137} It is through the work of Yahweh that Moses is awakened to his vocation and begins the process of liberation.\textsuperscript{138} The Exodus story goes beyond that, developing a progression of events necessary for the Jewish people to attain freedom, both physically and mentally. For at first they were afraid of the uncertainty of liberation and looked back toward the security of slavery as a comfort. However, through a “gradual pedagogy of successes and failures” they became aware of the oppression, which they had experienced and began to sense the liberation toward which they were traveling.\textsuperscript{139} Thus, for Gutiérrez, this illustrates the fact that the development of a new society is not possible through political liberation alone; it requires the development of a new consciousness, a new outlook on how the world and human relations should function.

Gutiérrez argues that this liberative act, the liberation of the Jews from Egypt in the political sense, as well as their liberation in the sense of consciousness, is fundamentally connected to the salvific act of creation.\textsuperscript{140} For Gutiérrez, liberation and creation are simply two parts of one salvific act, the act of the self-communication of God. Furthermore, it is a two-way relationship: creation is a fundamental part of the liberation process, and liberation is

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Gutiérrez, \textit{Theology} 87.}
\footnote{Ibid 88.}
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\footnote{Ibid 89.}
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fundamental to creation. As mentioned in Chapter One, in Hegel’s dialectic, Spirit’s self-consciousness – the equivalent of salvation – cannot be achieved without the creation of the world, or the othering of the Spirit through the creation of the world. However, salvation is also a fundamental element in the process of creation, as through the salvific process Spirit comes to know itself, to create itself in its true form. 141 In citing this relationship between Genesis and Exodus, therefore, Gutiérrez is, drawing on this Hegelian concept, placing liberation as a vital part of the salvific process. The self-consciousness of God, and thereby the true creation of God, cannot be achieved without liberation on earth. Salvation, the coming of God, is predicated on liberation on earth, and is even a sign of the fulfillment of the eschatological Promise of complete unity with God:

The struggle for a just world in which there is no oppression, servitude, or alienated work will signify the coming of the kingdom . . . The complete encounter with the Lord will make an end to history, but it will take place in history. 142

Thus, the relationship is reciprocal, creation of man is a fundamental part of liberation, but liberation is also a fundamental part of the creation of the true God. Just as the Liberation of the Jews in Egypt began with an act of God on earth, through the dialectic process of their self-liberation they came to know themselves and create their true form as a just society.

Gutiérrez’s discussion of the Genesis and Exodus stories places the first two levels of societal liberation, liberation from political oppression and liberation of human consciousness, within the salvific process. These forms of liberation, however, are only partial fulfillments of the third level of liberation, the liberation from sin, which as noted previously is a lack of love, and since love is that which unites humanity with God, sin is precisely what prevents that unity. The fulfillment of the various dimensions of liberation requires embracing various levels of love,

141 Yovel, Preface 3.
142 Gutiérrez, Theology 97.
and once a community entirely of love is achieved, society is liberated from sin. For Gutiérrez, this will signify the coming of God and the fulfillment of the eschatological Promise.

D. Conclusion

Gutiérrez’s three levels of liberation create a system through which liberation is progressively achieved through history. The fulfillment of these various levels of liberation, however, cannot happen separately, but each is dependent on the partial fulfillment of the others. For instance, freedom from political oppression cannot be achieved without at least a partial liberation of human consciousness and thus a partial liberation from sin, for any liberation of human consciousness cannot be achieved without at least some level of love. Love permeates all levels of liberation; however, it is the concept of hope that unites these levels. Hope focuses on the need for the present transformation of history, while creating an orientation towards the achievement of a better society, even a utopia, and eventually towards total liberation from sin and the fulfillment of the eschatological Promise. In order to develop this three level system, Gutiérrez draws on the thinking of both Hegel and Marx. He dialectically reconciles these two thinkers by drawing on various elements of their philosophical systems and uniting them by utilizing the idea of hope. He thereby creates a new outlook on historical liberation based in scripture that combines the perspectives of both Hegel and Marx in a new theologically based epistemological system.
Conclusion

In this thesis I have argued that Gutiérrez dialectically reconciled Hegel and Marx within a theological framework. He draws on the aspects of their systems of thought that he felt were most pertinent to the Latin American situation and reconciled them using theological and biblical concepts. He believed that Latin America required an ontological framework in which liberation and salvation are united in a single salvific process, giving liberative work on earth a transcendent meaning. Gutiérrez develops this ontological framework by creating an overarching metaphysical system in which human development in the material world is placed within the salvific horizon. This framework is based on Hegel’s concept of the dialectic trinity in which God negates himself in the form of the material world and through a process of self-communication, guided by the Spirit of love, comes to a new self-consciousness as Absolute Spirit and is reconciled in a single unity with the material world. Gutiérrez adopts this system but adapts it to fit within the scriptural concept of the Trinity.

Within this framework, Gutiérrez signifies liberation as the primary form of human work that will lead to unity with God. He delineates three levels of liberation all working together with in the same salvific system. The lowest level of liberation is liberation from political oppression, which he bases in the political philosophy of Marx. The highest level of liberation, liberation from sin, he bases again in the system of Hegel. He defines sin as lack of love and thereby designates love, or spirit, as the means through which liberation from sin is achieve. Liberation from sin is therefore a fulfillment of the eschatological Promise as all humanity will be united in love, and signifies the coming of God and therefore salvation.

It is at the middle level of liberation, liberation of human consciousness, that the two other levels of liberation are reconciled. Here Gutiérrez draws upon Hegel’s concept of the lord-
bondsman dialectic as the basis for equating consciousness of self with freedom. However, he seeks to communalize this concept of self-consciousness by utilizing the more religiously based concepts of utopia and love. He argues that the development of a new human consciousness will lead to a utopic community based in love. In order to avoid a too future-oriented consciousness, he relies on the concept of hope, which he defines in accord with the Marxian concept of praxis, as focused on action in the present with an eye toward the future. Yet he spiritualizes this concept of hope by orienting it towards the fulfillment of the eschatological Promise, while maintaining it's grounding the present.

In *A Theology of Liberation*, Gutiérrez never explicitly outlines the system I have delineated above. However, he discusses various elements at different points through his text, and in viewing them in the manner I have outlined it is possible to see the way in which Gutiérrez draws on Hegel and Marx to create a multilayered salvific process in which human liberation and salvation are reconciled.

Gutiérrez develops this system in light of his definition of theology as a reflection on praxis. As I have shown, Gutiérrez basis much of his theological system in Hegelian thought. It is not surprising; therefore, that this would include Gutiérrez’s definition of theology, which is very similar to Hegel’s definition of philosophy. In his *Preface to the Philosophy of Right*, Hegel writes:

One word more about giving instruction as to what the world ought to be. Philosophy in any case always comes on the scene too late to give it. As the thought of the world, it appears only when actuality is already there cut and dried after its process of formation has been completed. The teaching of the concept, which is also history’s inescapable lesson, is that it is only when actuality is mature that the ideal first appears over against the real and that the ideal apprehends this same real world in its substance and builds it up for itself into the

Levitan 47
shape of an intellectual realm... The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk.\textsuperscript{143}

Philosophy does not teach, it does not progress, it reflects. It creates an epistemological framework through which the world can be understood. For Hegel, the realm of philosophy is the realm of the concept, the ideal. The ideal, however, is the highest form of existence; it must follow the real, the less form of existence. Thus, philosophy is the second step; it takes flight only at dusk. Gutiérrez’s definition is quite reminiscent of Hegel’s; in fact, Gutiérrez directly cites Hegel in his definition:

\begin{quote}
Theology \textit{follows}; it is the second step. What Hegel used to say about philosophy can likewise be applied to theology: it rises at sundown. The pastoral activity of the Church does not flow as a conclusion from theological premises. Theology does not produce pastoral activity; rather it reflects upon it.\textsuperscript{144}
\end{quote}

Gutiérrez seeks to frame theology as that which reflects on reality through a biblical lens. It creates a similar epistemological framework, but from a Christian perspective.

In developing this definition, Gutiérrez is recognizing the dialectic development of human thought. If philosophy/theology are reflective of the place of human progression in history and human progress develops dialectically, as I have argued Hegel, Marx and Gutiérrez believe, then philosophy/theology must also develop dialectically. However, Hegel’s concept of the development of human thought is biased towards the superiority of philosophy, and Marx is clearly a secular philosopher. Gutiérrez, as a theologian utilizing these philosophers, is blurring the lines between philosophy and theology. Thereby, he not only recognizing the value of both in the progression of human thought, but is also arguing for the benefits of a theological system over, or at least in conjuncture with, a philosophical one. In basing his system in theology, Gutiérrez provides a humanizing element. He connects his system of thought with human

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\item \textsuperscript{144} Gutiérrez, \textit{Theology} 9.
\end{itemize}
experience in a way that philosophy often lacks. Furthermore, by basing his philosophy in a
theological system that necessarily projects toward the future, due to its orientation to the
fulfillment of the eschatological Promise (which Gutiérrez defines as the key to Christianity),
Gutiérrez provides a motivational or transformative element to his philosophical system.

In reconciling Hegel and Marx, therefore, Gutiérrez is providing a next step in the
dialectic development of human thought. Understanding dialectic as a progression involving the
existence of a being, the negation of that being, and the reconciliation of the original being with
the negated other, Hegel, Marx and Gutiérrez can be seen as an example of that dialectic process.
Here, Hegel represents an idealist understanding of the world based in a broad conceptual
philosophical project. Marx is his negation, as a materialist, placing his understanding of
humanity into a scientifically based rational system, purposefully opposed to the abstraction of
Hegel.145 And finally, Gutiérrez, who reconciles these two into a united theological system based
in an overall salvific concept of human history that depends on materialist development of
human society.146

Gutiérrez’s reconciliation is only another step in this process. Gutiérrez’s theology is
what he believes is relevant to the existing place of Latin American society in its overall
development. His dialectic transcendence of Hegel and Marx using theological concept is due to
an understanding that this is what the Church, and indeed Latin American society, requires at the
present time. He does not believe his is the end, or ultimate, system of thought.147 Theology
changes with time. Just as Gutiérrez has adopted and developed the thought of previous thinkers,
in a future time and place, with different epistemological needs, Gutiérrez’s theological system

145 Critique of Hegel’s general philosophy
146 I do not mean to imply that Gutiérrez only draws on Hegel and Marx, on the contrary, Gutiérrez draws
on many different theologians and thinkers throughout history. It is with Hegel and Marx, however that it
is possible to clearly see this dialectic progression.
147 Gutiérrez, Theology 9-10.
will be utilized in a new theological or philosophical system, reconciled with its own negated form of thought, and became just another step in the development of human consciousness.
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