

### **Gustavo Gutierrez: A Theology of Liberation (Link to salvation)**

In a Theology of Liberation, Gutierrez examined the notion of salvation in the context of liberation theology. He argued that, over the years, views about salvation had changed, particularly in relation to what he called the “salvation of the pagans”, that is, the number of persons who can be saved and the role of the church in the salvation process. Gutierrez suggested that salvation could be universal, that is, open to everyone.

However, Gutierrez argued that this “quantitative” view of salvation produced certain problems, in particular, the question of “how a person outside the normal pale of grace, which resides in the institutional Church, can attain salvation.” He suggested that salvation has two very distinct characteristics: “it is a cure for sin in this life; and this cure is in virtue of a salvation to be attained beyond this life.”

Human life is a test and a person’s actions are judged and assessed in relation to what Gutierrez called the “transcendent end”. This judgement would be a moralistic one and salvation will be offered, through the grace of God, to those who believe. A person cannot save themselves – God’s grace is the only way to eliminate sin. This means that “pagans” cannot achieve salvation through their own efforts. People can only be saved if they “open themselves to God and to others, even if they are not clearly aware that they are doing so”.

This, he said, is a “qualitative leap”, for it suggests that universal salvation does not require a person to belong to a particular religious faith, or even to believe in God directly, as long as they are “open to him”. In other words, salvation is valid “for Christians and non-Christians alike – for all people...we can no longer speak properly of a profane world. A qualitative and intensive approach replaces a quantitative and extensive one.”

For Gutierrez, salvation was not so much about membership of an institutional church, but about knowing God, in either a direct or indirect way, “Persons already partially accept communion with God, although they do not explicitly confess Christ as their Lord, insofar as they are moved by grace, sometimes secretly renounce their selfishness and seek to create an authentic fellowship among human beings.” In effect, he argued that salvation is about the relationship of human beings both with God and with one another. It is “something which embraces all human reality, transforms it, and leads it to fullness in Christ, who, by his death and resurrection, transforms the universe and makes it possible for the person to reach fulfilment as a human being.”

Gutierrez sees sin as a historical reality – it was the breaking of the relationship between humans and God and each other. Sin prevents humans from reaching their full potential and is an obstacle to salvation. This leads to the question of how active the presence of God is, and the importance and religious significance of human action in history. He argued that salvation does not devalue the world, but gives life “its authentic meaning and its own autonomy”. In a very real sense, salvation is present in human life and there to be enjoyed through the grace of God. “Salvation is an intrahistorical reality...the communion of human beings with God and among themselves orients, transforms and guides history to its fulfilment.”

Gutierrez therefore rejected the Christian notion that there were, in effect, two kinds of human history, one where God is acknowledged (sacred) and the other where he is not (profane). Instead, he argued, there is one human history and Christ is the Lord of that history because his redemptive work brings all life to its fullness.

“The history of salvation is the very heart of human history...the salvific action of God underlies all human existence. The historical destiny of humanity must be placed definitely in the salvific horizon...there is only one history – a “Christo-finalised” history.

For Gutierrez, one of the key aspects of salvation is the link between Creation and salvation that is found in the Bible, in particular the story of the Exodus, where, historically God’s people were saved from slavery by the actions of God. In this respect, Creation was the first act of salvation.

God did not just create in the beginning, he also had an end on mind – that humans are to be his children. God reveals himself through historical events. According to the theologian Von Rad, in Old Testament Theology “Creation is regarded as a work of God in history, a work within time. This means that there is a real and true opening up of the historical prospect...it does not stand alone; other works are to follow.” In a similar way, the prophet Isaiah emphasised how God the creator has saved humanity, “...this is what the Lords says – he who created you...he who formed you...fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are mine.” (Isaiah 43:1)

Thus, as far as Gutierrez is concerned, “It is the work of God who saves and acts in history...”

Create an overview of the work of Guttierrez.