With Gustavo Gutierrez’s On Job: God Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent, we finally enter ‘our time’. One might think that it is easy for Westerners to understand the context in which this particular reading of the book of Job originated. It will turn out, however, that the indigenous context of the Andes is much more alien to ‘us’ than we might expect. We will encounter a context of extraordinary oppression and exploitation in a rapidly changing cultural, social and economic situation. Western society is involved in this process while being largely unaware of it. Amidst all this suffering, we meet the stubborn faithful mind of Latin American Christian believers, who put their trust in the Lord by the language of prophecy and contemplation, that is, the language of justice and protest against oppression on the one hand, and the language of faithful surrender to God on the other.

6.2 AN IMPRESSION

Gutiérrez’s work on Job is not a running commentary on each verse of Job. Gutiérrez deals with the texts in a thematic way by dividing his book in three parts. The first part, entitled “The Wager”, deals primarily with the prologue and Job’s first monologue. The main topics are God’s wager with Satan, the possibility of disinterested faith and the question whether Job “spoke rightly” of God. The second part, entitled “The Language of Prophecy”, discusses primarily the dialogues with the friends. The perspective chosen in addressing the dialogues is Job’s protest against the unjust suffering of the innocent—initially his own suffering, but gradually also the suffering of the poor. In the final part of the book, entitled “The Language of Contemplation”, Gutiérrez addresses those aspects of the book of Job that point to what he calls the ‘language of contemplation’. He pays attention to those texts in the dialogues where Job begins to put his trust in the Lord, notwithstanding his protest against him. The remainder of the third part is devoted to a discussion of the speeches of God from the whirlwind, followed by Job’s faithful surrender to God. In the conclusion of the book, Gutiérrez attempts to connect the two types of language with each other by showing how both are
indispensable for talking faithfully about God in the midst of suffering.

In many respects, the genre of Gutiérrez’s interpretation of Job is familiar to Western readers. A lengthy summary of a whole chapter would therefore not be the best way to convey an impression of the distinctive flavour of Gutiérrez’s encounter with Job. Instead, I would like to discuss four passages from the Introduction, Chapter Two and Chapter Three. In all four passages, Gutiérrez refers to famous writers, artists and a philosopher, to explain the central theme of the book, the question of how to speak about God in the midst of unjust suffering. Two of them, José María Arguedas and César Vallejo, are Latin Americans, and the other two, Albert Camus and Blaise Pascal, are Europeans. This exemplifies to what extent, in his theological writings, Gutiérrez always moves back and forth between the Western and Latin American contexts. Most of his writings are oriented towards the Western context, and reflect the fact that this is the context in which Gutiérrez received a major part of his theological education. Nevertheless, he calls attention to the problems of Latin America, where he lives, works and feels at home.

Throughout this chapter, I will repeatedly use the work of the Peruvian prose writer, ethnologist and musicologist José María Arguedas to elucidate the Latin American roots of Gutiérrez’s views. In doing so, I follow Gutiérrez’s own practice. In many of his works, Gutiérrez quotes passages from the novels of his friend. Arguedas figures prominently in the Introduction to On Job. Gutiérrez quotes Arguedas right at the beginning of the Introduction, where he introduces the central theme of the book: God-talk. In the first two paragraphs of the book, Gutiérrez brings the reader immediately to the heart of his theology. Let me quote these two paragraphs in full:

Theology is talk about God. According to the Bible, however, God is a mystery, and at the beginning of his Summa Theologiae Thomas Aquinas states as a basic principle governing all theological reflection that “we cannot know what God is but only what God is not.” Must we not think, then, that theology sets itself an impossible task?

No, the task is not impossible. But it is important to keep in mind from the very outset that theological thought about God is thought about a mystery. I


mention this here because it influences an attitude to be adopted in the effort to talk about God. I mean an attitude of respect that is incompatible with the kind of God-talk that is sure, at times arrogantly sure, that it knows everything there is to know about God. José María Arguedas poses the question: “Is not what we know far less than the great hope we feel?”3 This question will bring an unhesitating, humble yes from those who believe in the God of Jesus Christ.4

At first sight, this quotation seems a fairly standard affirmation of the mystery of God, illustrated with quotations from Aquinas and Arguedas. In fact, much more is at stake. The phrases that sound like affirmations of traditional church doctrine are already interpreted in terms of liberation theology. By quoting Arguedas’s question immediately after Aquinas, Gutiérrez employs Arguedas to interpret Aquinas. The mystery of God is drawn into the context of “the great hope we feel”, that is, the hope for the liberation of the poor and the oppressed. A theology of liberation is a negative theology in the sense that it opts for the nameless, the outcast, the ‘little children’.5 Thus, Aquinas and Arguedas are interpreted as making the same point, namely that theology is not so much knowledge, rational reflection or self-satisfied conviction of truth, but an eye for the poor, the humble, and the silent contemplation of God in the midst of suffering.

The mysterious nature of faith does not only mean a negative theology in terms of an option for the nameless. Faith is also truly mysterious in the sense of seemingly impossible in face of the overwhelming experience of suffering:

How are we to talk about a God who is revealed as love in a situation characterized by poverty and oppression? How are we to proclaim the God of life to men and women who die prematurely and unjustly? How are we to acknowledge that God makes us a free gift of love and justice when we have before us the suffering of the innocent? What words are we to use in telling those who are not even regarded as persons that they are the daughters and sons of God?6

Throughout the book, Gutiérrez illustrates the clash between faith in the God of love and the experience of suffering in various ways. In Chapter Three, for instance, he draws upon Camus’s works The Plague and The Misunderstanding to describe the way in which Camus confronted faith in God with the inexplicable experience of innocent suffering. This leads Camus to his final “No” at the end of The Misunderstanding. Gutiérrez adds:

This no is the final word of the play; it symbolizes God’s deafness, God’s silence in the face of human suffering. More accurately, it is a no to the existence of a God who can permit this suffering. Camus returns over and over to the theme of innocent suffering. He encounters dilemmas and self-criticisms in his search, but the problem remains, a source of suffering and a challenge to everyone.7

---

3 Gutiérrez quotes Arguedas loosely: “Does what we know amount to much less than the great hope we feel, Gustavo?”. In fact, the quoted passage is a question of the desparate Arguedas who, shortly before he committed suicide, posed this question to Gutiérrez in his ‘Last Diary?’. See José María Arguedas, The Fox from Up Above and the Fox from Down Below, The Pittsburgh editions of Latin American Literature (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), p. 258.
4 Gutiérrez, On Job, p. xi.
5 Ibid., p. xii.
6 Ibid., p. xiv.
7 Ibid., p. 14.
These comments by Gutiérrez do not criticise Camus’s answer. This is highly characteristic of Gutiérrez’s deep respect for the reality of human experience and his conviction that any cheap straightforward theological response to it is misguided.

Nevertheless, a final “no” is not the Latin American answer to a world full of suffering, poverty and oppression. In spite of the few things Latin American believers know, they feel a great hope. The paradoxical connection between suffering and hope is a cornerstone of liberation theology. At the end of chapter one, Gutiérrez illustrates this paradox with a quotation from the Latin American poet César Vallejo:

“My pain is so deep that it never had a cause, and has no need of a cause. What could its cause have been? Where is that thing so important that it stopped being its cause? Why has this pain been born all on its own?”

Gutiérrez remarks in response to this quotation:

To a superficial reader, the paradoxical thing about this poem is the surprising title Vallejo gives it: “I am going to talk about hope.” The hope is doubtless one that does not travel beaten paths, but it is not therefore any less firm; it is a hope that is unaccompanied by any boastful rational grasp of things and yet is clear-eyed. Vallejo’s poem, like the poet’s own life, expresses the deep, inexplicable suffering of the Latin American poor. In this case, the historical bewilderments and sadness of the indigenes as they saw the vital framework of their world collapsing is accompanied today by the exploitation and despoliation of the ordinary people. But the poem also shows the stubborn hope that gives heart to this poor, believing people.

In the book of Job, the question whether faith is possible in a condition of suffering is the subject of a wager. The main question of the book of Job is whether ‘disinterested faith’ is possible. Can one fear the Lord for nothing? God and Satan ‘wager’ on this question. Satan suggests no; God invites Satan to try it out on Job. Gutiérrez places the wager in Job in a universal context:

If the answer [to the wager] is yes, then it will be a priori possible to do the same [namely fear the Lord] in other human situations. But if the answer is no, then it will be irrelevant that persons living in less profound and challenging situations “appear” to accept the gratuitousness of God’s love and claim to practice a disinterested religion. Human suffering is the harsh, demanding ground on which the wager about talk of God is made; it is also that which ensures that the wager has universal applicability.

Gutiérrez relates the wager about disinterested faith to a second French thinker: Blaise Pascal. In the Pensées, Pascal develops an argument for the existence of God in the form of a wager. Pascal argues that theoretical proofs for the existence of God do not work, but that one should simply bet on the existence of God, taking into account what benefits one most:

---

8 Gutiérrez, On Job, p. 10.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., p. 15.
“God is, or He is not.” But to which side shall we incline? Reason can decide nothing here. There is an infinite chaos which separated us. A game is being played at the extremity of this infinite distance where heads or tails will turn up. What will you wager? According to reason, you can do neither the one thing nor the other; according to reason, you can defend neither of the propositions. [. . .] Your reason is no more shocked in choosing one rather than the other, since you must of necessity choose. This is one point settled. But your happiness? Let us weigh the gain and the loss in wagering that God is. Let us estimate these two chances. If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing. Wager, then, without hesitation that He is.12

The theme of the wager in both Job and Pascal moves Gutiérrez towards a comparison, with profoundly negative implications for the Pascalian. Here, Gutiérrez’s biting critique of a rationalist theology comes to the fore:

In Job the choice is between a religion based on the rights and obligations of human beings as moral agents, and a disinterested belief based on the gratuitousness of God’s love. Pascal employs a crystal-clear, almost mathematical logic in responding to the questionings of the modern mind and the first manifestations of unbelief.13

The comparison is not only between existential faith in God and rationalist argument. Pascal’s wager is placed in the context of retributive faith, in the context of the winners. Here, the real difference between Gutiérrez and Pascal comes to the fore. In his Latin American context, Gutiérrez has ample evidence that if you believe in God, you lose everything instead of nothing:

As Pascal sees it, modern men and women have to understand that belief in God is to their advantage. [. . .] In the Book of Job, to be a believer means sharing human suffering, especially that of the most destitute, enduring a spiritual struggle, and finally accepting the fact that God cannot be pigeonholed in human categories. In Pascal’s wager, he addresses human beings who are proud of their reasoning powers, and he tries to make them see how limited these powers are and how great is their need of God. [. . .] Pascal issues his shrewd and subtle wager to unbelievers; the wager in Job thrusts with beautiful radicality into the world of nonpersons. Pascal incisively confronts the winners of history; with tender compassion, the Book of Job seeks out its losers. Pascal’s wager is the first step in a fruitful theological line that even today meets the challenges of modernity; the wager in Job starts on the “garbage heap” (see 2:10) of the city to look for a suitable language for talking of God. Situated as we are on the underside of history here in Latin America, it is the second wager that is ours; to speak of God from the standpoint of the poor of the earth.14

The references to these four writers, Latin American and Western, in fact illustrate the major themes of Gutiérrez’s theology. First, the paradoxical, but for Gutiérrez essential combination of faith as action on behalf of those in need of liberation on the one hand, and faith as contemplation of the mystery of God on the other. For the Western mind, these are two; for Gutiérrez, they are one. Second,

13 Gutiérrez, On Job, p. 15.
14 Ibid., p. 16.
the enormous compassion with the suffering of his people and the willingness to participate in this suffering, recognising that it apparently conflicts with faith in the God of life. Third, the paradoxical connection between suffering and hope. Finally, the biting critique of a rationalist theology, either presenting faith as to the believer’s advantage, or ignoring the suffering of the righteous by reasoning their suffering away.

6.3 THE MAN AND HIS COUNTRY

It is somewhat against Gutiérrez’s own habits to start an academic discussion of his work with biographical comments. Therefore, these will be kept brief, as they usually are in the secondary literature about him. Gutiérrez was born in 1928 in Lima, the capital city of Peru. In Peruvian society, there are three main social groups, the indígenas (native Indians), the mestizos (people of mixed origin), and the mistis (upper class, mostly white but also of mixed origin). These groups do not coincide completely with the socio-economic categories of lower, middle, and upper classes, although most of the white people belong to the upper class and most of the indigenous people to the lower class. Gutiérrez is of mestizo origin and grew up in a poor family. A crucial period in his childhood was a six year illness (osteomyelitis) from which he suffered from the ages of twelve to eighteen. Influenced by this experience, Gutiérrez went to study medicine at San Marco University in his hometown Lima. After three years of medical studies, he decided to enter the seminary to become a Catholic priest. During his studies for the priesthood, his brilliance was recognised and, following widespread custom in Latin America, he was sent to Western Europe for further studies from 1951 to 1959. He studied philosophy, psychology and theology in Louvain, Lyon, and Rome. After returning to Peru, he began pastoral work in the poor Rimac area in Lima. He has continued to live among the poor of the city up to the present day. At the same time, he became a lecturer in social sciences at the theological faculty of the Catholic University of Lima.

Back in Lima, Gutiérrez became rapidly involved in the rise of liberation theology. As a theological adviser to the Chilean bishop Manuel Larraín, he visited one of the sessions of the Second Vatican Council. The Second Vatican Council was crucial to the development of liberation theology, because it brought a new focus on the message of the Catholic Church for the whole of society, and on the relation between salvation and human well-being. At this time, Gutiérrez joined the emerging liberation movement, and gradually acquired a key role in the development of that movement. Two conferences of Latin American bishops marked milestones in the rise of liberation theology: the conferences of Medellin

17 Van Nieuwenhove, p. 15.
(1968) and Puebla (1979). At these conferences, Gutiérrez provided important input as an adviser to the participants, so that many of the documents of these conferences reflect his influence. Medellin recognised liberation as the beginning of a new era in Latin America, free from exclusion and oppression. Puebla explicitly described the task of the Church as a ‘preferential option for the poor’.

Besides his participation in the Latin American movement, Gutiérrez was simultaneously engaged in intercontinental discussions about liberation and the role of the Church in it. In 1973, the English translation of his ground breaking work *Theology of Liberation* appeared, and received widespread attention in the Western world and elsewhere. During the seventies and eighties, he was a visiting professor at numerous North American and European universities, and received honorary doctorates from the universities of Nijmegen, Tübingen, Wilkes-Barre, and Freiburg im Breisgau. He published various books such as *The Power of the Poor in History* and *We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People*.

Apart from widespread acclaim for his work, increasing resistance emerged when in 1983, the Roman Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith questioned his allegedly Marxist interpretation of the Gospel. It was argued that Gutiérrez had mistakenly interpreted the Biblical notion of the ‘poor’ in terms of the Marxist concept of the proletariat, thus transforming the message of the Church into a revolutionary program. Without giving up his solidarity with the Church, Gutiérrez has used various opportunities to explain the principles of liberation theology in view of these objections. He maintains the central elements of his theology, but readily admits that the presentation of it may not have been sufficiently balanced.\textsuperscript{18} The sharp confrontation with the Roman Catholic magisterium influenced his later works.\textsuperscript{19} In *We Drink from Our Own Wells, On Job and Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ*, the necessity of a social revolution, which figured so prominently in the *Theology of Liberation*, is not totally absent, but has receded into the background in comparison with the earlier works.

Little is known about the history of Gutiérrez’s home country before the time of the Incas.\textsuperscript{20} Peru was the centre from which the Incas ruled a major part of Latin America from the beginning of the second millennium until the fifteenth century, when Spanish soldiers and adventurers took over the empire. During the next 200 years, the Spanish government ruled the country through a viceroy and a subordinate Indian government which dealt with the indigenous people. From the end of the eighteenth century onwards, various revolts against the Spanish hegemony resulted in the country’s independence in 1821. A turbulent time followed, in which various rulers governed the country. As of the middle of the nineteenth century, industrial exploitation of the natural deposits began. Increasing foreign investments during the first half of the twentieth century gave rise to broad nationalist tendencies (notably the so-called APRA party). After World War II, these nationalist tendencies resulted in various – sometimes dictatorial – governments that tried to nationalise the industries and carry out land reforms.


\textsuperscript{19} For a detailed analysis of the development of Gutiérrez’s thought, see Van Nieuwenhove.

\textsuperscript{20} For an excellent gentle introduction to Peru, see ‘Virtual Peru.Net’ (url: http://www.virtualperu.net) – visited on 2002-05-03.
In 1980, Peru had democratic presidential elections, which resulted in a stable democratic political system.

This historical introduction is probably less significant than the deeply conflictual nature of Peruvian society. The three main groups mentioned above go back to the Spanish invasion in the sixteenth century. From that time on, the white ruling class gradually acquired control, frequently by violent means, of almost all the country’s natural goods, land, and agricultural and industrial production systems. Agriculture was dominated by white landowners who, in many cases, had complete control over their Indian slaves, cooperating with a deeply corrupt government that justified their oppressive actions. Add to this the broad international exploitation of the country from the first half of the twentieth century onwards, and it is easily understood that the poor of Peru (and the whole of Latin America) became deeply suspicious of foreign elements in their society. This was in fact the breeding ground for the nationalist and communist guerrilla movements that attracted so much attention from Western news agencies, and that were severely suppressed, primarily by North-American military influence in the United States’ ‘backyard’.

A final note on the Latin American context. The history of Latin America shows a mixture of dictatorial and democratic governments, accompanied by a wide range of guerrilla movements. This disturbs the Western mind with its – mostly tacitly presupposed – preference for capitalism and democracy as the obvious guarantees of freedom and well-being. This combination of capitalism and democracy is not so attractive to the Latin American people, however, because behind capitalist democracy lies a liberal conception of private property. As soon as such a conception is confronted with the history of Latin America, where a small, wealthy elite have gained control of the whole economic system simply by declaring it their property, we begin to understand why Marxism, including its non-democratic means for establishing a just society, was such a natural option for the proletariat of that continent. This striking difference in context between Western and Latin American society also explains why suspicion and protest against current neo-liberal democracy are still widespread and vital among the Latin American people, and why so many Westerners fail to understand this.

6.4 LIBERATION THEOLOGY

The term ‘liberation theology’ is confusing in two ways. First, since a liberation perspective became popular in the 1960s, many theologians have adopted the term ‘liberation theology’ as a description of their way of doing theology, including South-African, Black American, and feminist theologians. As a result, the term lacks precision. In this chapter, I will only be interested in movements similar to the Latin American in so far as they helps us to understand the Latin American version, and, most importantly, Gutiérrez’s contribution to it. Secondly, the term

21 For a literary and engaged description of these developments, see Arguedas, Yawar Fiesta, pp. 10–18.
'liberation theology' is a difficult one because Western readers easily understand theology as a purely intellectual enterprise. In the second half of the twentieth century, Western theology was dominated by the great intellectual projects of individual theologians like Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, Rudolf Bultmann, and Jürgen Moltmann. Theology in the Western sense of the term may be somewhat sweepingly described as ‘a theoretical construct of the individual intellect’. Ironically, Gutiérrez’s contribution to liberation theology has frequently been interpreted in typically Western categories as his personal ‘invention’ of a new type of theology. As we will see in more detail below, Gutiérrez’s and others’ way of doing theology aims at exactly the opposite of what the term ‘liberation theology’ might suggest. They advocate most radically a theology of the people, and if ‘theology’ is taken in the modern, Western sense, perhaps even the end of theology itself.

This second misunderstanding of the movement is probably facilitated by the fact that in Gutiérrez’s ground breaking work – again: a typically Western category – A Theology of Liberation, he is most extensively engaged in fairly theoretical discussions with Western theology and political thought. However, for Gutiérrez, even that work was already fully rooted in the Latin American experience. This context of Latin America, however, was largely unknown to Western readers, who incorporated Gutiérrez’s revolutionary insights in their own post-Enlightenment progressive theology. In my analysis, I will try to locate Gutiérrez’s view in his own Latin American context. This is not an easy task, however, because Gutiérrez in fact does not describe his own world in much detail. In this regard, the novels of Arguedas will prove helpful. There, we find a magnificent retelling of the Latin American experience filled with descriptions of nature, local Indian culture and Western oppression and exploitation.

The best entrance to liberation theology is its account of the theological task itself. In his A Theology of Liberation, Gutiérrez defines theology as “the critical reflection on praxis in the light of the Word of God”.23 It is not entirely obvious what this reformulation of the theological task amounts to, but within Gutiérrez’s work, it has a wide range of meanings, of which I will discuss three.

First, it means a critique of any kind of theology that does not take human experience sufficiently into account, especially the experience of the poor. In that sense, it is a defence of an anti-intellectualist theology. Theology does not find out what is or is not the case. In Gutiérrez’s frequently recurring phrase: theology is a ‘second act’.24 It is a second-order reflection on liberating praxis.25 In A Theology of Liberation, Gutiérrez rejects the idea that faith and theology can step outside political reality and inhabit a completely separate spiritual domain. This would amount to the Church actually supporting the status quo. Both pastoral and theological activities should be rooted in the Church’s actual participation in the poor’s struggle for liberation.26

If theology is conceived in this way as a critical reflection on the liberating praxis of the Church, this also involves a critique of the ways in which theological reflection may support structures of oppression and exploitation. Liberation

24 Ibid., pp. xxxiii–xxxiv; Gutiérrez, On Job, p. xiii.
25 Gutiérrez, Theology of Liberation, p. 3.
26 Ibid., pp. 29–46.
perspectives on job

theology not only criticises the overly intellectual nature of Western theology, but also attacks it for supporting and strengthening the oppressive structures of Western society and imperialism. At this point, we encounter one of the key insights of Gutiérrez’s own move towards a liberation perspective. Gutiérrez gradually became aware of the fact that the fate of the poor is not an inexplicable brute fact, but is actually due to a system of dependence which the rich create in order to maintain their position. This is a phenomenon that occurs at the national, but even more, at the international level. The rich countries maintain the structure of dependence by their development projects, which leave the power structures essentially unchanged. Poverty is not an accident, but the inherent consequence of the political system of capitalism. A Church and a theology that avoid the political arena or, even worse, actively justify capitalist ideology, help to maintain the dominance of the rich over the poor. Any superficial service to the poor that leaves the system as it is, will fail substantially to improve the situation of the poor. In this regard, Gutiérrez was influenced by Marxist thought; he repeatedly advocated socialism as the best socio-economic system. However, we should note that, in the Latin American situation, Marxism finds a natural ally in the historical context of the continent. At the international level, the socio-economic situation is characterised by massive foreign exploitation by Western companies. At the national level, private property is owned almost exclusively by few a large landowners of Spanish origin who, as we saw in the previous section, acquired this ownership by highly suspect means.

All of this is acceptable to, and much in line with Western progressive theology of the second half of the twentieth century. Theology should be relevant to the poor, in support of the poor, and critical of the oppressors. At the heart of liberation theology, however, is a theology of the people. The poor are the subject of theology, not an object. As long as theology remains outside the world of the poor, it remains a foreign perspective that is, at most, projected onto it. Therefore, Gutiérrez’s aim is to let the poor themselves articulate their understanding of God, salvation and the world. Of course, liberation theologians are well aware that, in many respects, the poor are not in a position to express their own theological concerns because even their basic needs are unsatisfied, and they lack education. For this reason, one of the primary interests of liberation theology is the education of the people and their organisation in so called ‘base communities’. Comunidades de base are small groups initiated by the local churches, where people meet for learning, reading the Bible and dealing with their practical problems.

The idea of a church and a theology of the people remains somewhat theoretical and dry, but we are in fact dealing with a phenomenon that is deeply rooted in the native culture of the Andes. Gutiérrez repeatedly builds on these roots and, especially in his later works, it even becomes part of his style of writing through the frequently recurring phrase “In Latin America, people begin to . . . ”. What

28 Cf. Judd, pp. 68–70.
he aims at is not a new theological construct that, again, glosses over the true interests of the poor, but rather a theology that originates in the Latin American poor’s own experience of faith.

First of all, then, liberation theology as a theology of the people is a theology with firm and stubborn trust in the God of life. The poor of Latin America began to see that the God whom they believe in is not the God of death – which is what their suffering ultimately is – but the liberating God of creation and exodus, and the Father of Jesus Christ who rose from death. This faith in the liberating God as the starting point of liberation theology should put aside the widespread notion that liberation theology propounds a view of salvation according to which people have to realise their own salvation. Gutiérrez repeatedly insists that the vision of a new future in which there is peace and justice for all is firmly rooted in the conviction that God is active in history to realise the heavenly kingdom.31

Secondly, the faith of the people brings a new understanding of salvation to the world. God as a liberating God brings salvation to the poor and the oppressed. Similarly, the church and its individual members should bring salvation to the people by ‘opting for the poor’. This view of salvation includes a view of the Kingdom of God that is not wholly other-worldly but begins to create symbols of the Kingdom in the earthly reality of the present. This way of doing reinforces the Church’s proclamation of the Gospel as a proclamation of justice and peace for all, and especially for those who are oppressed.

Finally, liberation theology emphasises a strong feeling for the faithful as a community. In opting for the poor and turning towards others, the Church becomes a true body of Christ together with all who do likewise. This implies a truly open church which proclaims salvation not only to its members, but to all who seek justice and peace.32

A stubborn trust in the Lord of justice and a strong communitarian characterise the picture of liberation drawn by Arguedas in his major novel Todas las sangres (All the Bloods, henceforth: TLS).33 In this book, which, compared to his other works, reflects most clearly certain strands of what would be called ‘liberation theology’ some years after its publication,34 Arguedas presents what he sees as the unique contribution of the native Latin American people of the Andes to the problem of liberation. Arguedas draws a picture of the Indian communities under increasing pressure from large landowners and foreign multinationals. In the face

---

33 At present, there is no English translation of this book available in print, although one will probably appear in the near future (Cf. Arguedas, Fox from Up Above and Down Below, p. vii). I have used the Dutch translation: José María Arguedas, De wegen van het bloed, trans. from the Dutch by Marjolein Sabarte Belacortu, 2nd edition (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1988).
34 José María Arguedas, Todas las sangres, Novelistas de nuestra época (Buenos Aires, 1964). There is direct connection between TLS and Theology of Liberation. The quotation of TLS in Theology of Liberation is referred to by Arguedas in his ‘Last Diary’, as being read by him to ‘Gustavo’. Arguedas writes: “To be sure, in Lima I had read you those pages from All the Bloods in which the sexton and singer from San Pedro de Lahuaymarca, whose church had already burnt down and who had taken refuge among the members of a highland community, replies to a priest of the Inquisitor God; he replies with arguments quite similar to those of your lucid and deeply moving lectures, given a short while before in Chimbote.” Arguedas, Fox from Up Above and Down Below, p. 258. These “lucid and deeply moving lectures” were the basis of Theology of Liberation.
of these problems, the indigenous people do not start revolutionary programs, kill their masters, or anything like that. They just keep in place, seizing every opportunity to improve their situation, but always within the bounds of justice. A strong communitarianism protects them against the influence of Western individualism and ambition (‘the coast’ in Arguedas’s terminology). Liberation by the indigenous people is no revolution at all, neither is there any policy governing the process.

One of the things that make TLS such a magnificent novel is that, in a sense, nobody is in control of the process of liberation, although the Indians and one of their masters actively participate in it. It just emerges by a web of seemingly coincidental factors—the name of the hacienda that the novel circles around is ‘La Providentia’. The theology of the book has been subtly and skillfully woven into every detail of the plot. In this regard, the end of the book is particularly significant. At the end of the story, the main supporters of liberation have been imprisoned or killed. The book ends with the executives of the ruling foreign multinational discussing their success in suppressing liberation. One of the executives, however, hears the swelling sound of the river and begins to tremble. Here, Arguedas finally shows the power of liberation in a manner highly characteristic of his art. In Arguedas’ art, Indian culture undergoes a fusion of horizons with Christian faith and Marxist ideology. The swelling sound of the river symbolises the liberating power of God, but ‘God’ as he is experienced by the Indian people, that is God as present in the Church, nature and the people. Hence, even when the champions of liberation die or are imprisoned, liberation goes on, at once directed by the Christian God (Christianity), the gods of nature (Indian Culture), and the inevitable process of history (Marxism).

We see that in his later work, the book on Job included, Gutiérrez moves increasingly in the direction of Arguedas’s type of liberation. The language of prophecy remains, but it loses most of its political aspects and becomes embedded in a more profound sense of God’s sovereignty, the language of contemplation.

6.5 GUTIÉRREZ’S ENGAGEMENT WITH JOB

Unlike many commentators of the twentieth century, Gutiérrez interprets the Book of Job as an “integrated literary and theological work”. In his view, the Leitmotiv of talk about God from the perspective of a ‘disinterested faith’ provides a strong connection between the mirror story and the poetic part of the book. He sees the book as a literary construct, over against a report of historical events, although, as we have seen, he is convinced that the author must have shared something like Job’s experiences of suffering. The endnotes to Gutiérrez’s book show that he

35 Arguedas, Todas las sangres, pp. 470–471; Arguedas, De wegen van het bloed, p. 675.
36 Van Nieuwenhove, p. 5.
37 Gutiérrez refers to the work of Habel for a similar focus on the final version of the text. Gutiérrez, On Job, pp. 1, 5, 109.
is well informed about contemporary Job research.\textsuperscript{38} When it comes to detailed exegetical issues, Gutiérrez is most interested in philological explanations.\textsuperscript{39}

Gutiérrez interprets the book, not only as a literary, but also as a thematic unity. Job 42: 6–7, where God justifies Job and criticises the friends, is the hermeneutical key to Gutiérrez’s understanding of Job. This means that in his view, God – both in the story and by inspiring Scripture – as well as the author are entirely in favour of Job and critical of the friends. Hence, Gutiérrez’s interpretation is the exact opposite of Calvin’s view that what the friends said is to be received as the “very words of the Holy Spirit”. Within Gutiérrez’s view of the book of Job as a whole, God’s answer in the whirlwind should be seen as a real ‘solution’ to the problem of the book. God does not provide a knock-down rational response to Job’s questions, but he teaches Job a different way of looking at them, thereby enabling a real encounter between Job and the Lord.

It is difficult to do justice to the richness of Gutiérrez’s interpretation of Job when summarising his view. In this chapter, I will approach Gutiérrez’s work from three different angles, linked to three central notions in his interpretation: first, the topic of disinterested faith; second, the language of prophecy; and finally, the language of contemplation. It will become clear that these three angles open up a wide spectrum of interconnected aspects of Gutiérrez’s engagement with the book of Job.

\textit{Disinterested faith} is a concept that is at the heart of the problem posed by the Book of Job: how can we talk of God in the midst of unjust suffering?

Are human beings capable, in the midst of unjust suffering, of continuing to assert their faith in God and speak of God without expecting a return? Satan, and with him all those who have a barter conception of religion, deny the possibility. The author, on the contrary, believes it to be possible, although he undoubtedly knew the difficulty that human suffering, one’s own and that of others, raises against authentic faith in God. Job, whom he makes the vehicle of his own experiences, will be his spokesman.\textsuperscript{40}

The question of disinterested faith is the challenge Satan poses to God in the prologue. Although the challenge is about Job in the first place, it has universal implications:

The innocence of Job makes it historically possible that there may be other innocent human beings. The injustice of his suffering points to the possibility that other human beings may also suffer unjustly, and his disinterested outlook points to the possibility that others too may practice a disinterested religion. Here we have the potential universality of the figure of Job; it is in fact clear that the poet intends to make a paradigm of him.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{38} He uses over ten commentaries, including well known ones by Habel, Terrien, Alonso Schökel, Lévêque, and Westermann.

\textsuperscript{39} Important examples are his discussions of ‘living Avenger’ (\textit{gô’êl}, Job 19:25, Gutiérrez, \textit{On Job}, p. 64) and “I retract and repent in dust and ashes” (see below, Job 42:6, ibid., pp. 86–87). For other examples, see also ibid., pp. 3–4, 12, 40, 86–87.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., p. 1.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., p. 4.
Already here, Gutiérrez’s own situation in Peru is strongly present in the background. The indigenous people of Latin America fear the Lord for nothing. Their lords constantly justify their cruelties in terms of faith. Arguedas’s novel provides a good example here. One of the recurring themes in the book is honesty. The oppressors are so entangled in a web of opportunism that they question each other’s intentions all the time. “Why did he do it?” “What might be his hidden agenda behind this?” This fate particularly befalls Rendon Willka, the figure who most explicitly struggles for the liberation of his people. His masters constantly ask what the hidden plan might be behind his otherwise correct behaviour, even to such an extent that throughout the story, the reader begins to doubt his good intentions as well. The indigenous people, Rendon included, reply in these cases: “We fear God.”

Gutiérrez further develops the topic of disinterested faith by connecting it with the dialogues. Here, the difference is not between God and Satan, but between Job as practising disinterested faith, and the friends who favour retributive views of suffering. Job practices disinterested faith in various ways. First, he practices it by stubbornly holding fast to God and his innocence in spite of all his suffering. Secondly, he displays disinterested faith by defending a disinterested view of suffering against the friends. Hence, in addition to the context of the wager, in which disinterested faith has to do with the question whether the faith of the righteous is based on the expectation of reward, a disinterested view of suffering means the denial of the ‘mechanism’ of retribution, in which suffering is conceived as the inevitable consequence of sin. Practising disinterested faith gains a third dimension when, during the dialogues, Job gradually broadens his attention to the situation of the poor. Finally, disinterested faith is connected with the theme of divine and human freedom in the language of contemplation. To practice disinterested faith means to enter into a mutual relationship of love with God, in which both partners recognise each other’s freedom.

Like the topic of disinterested faith, the theme of the language of prophecy opens up a range of topics. The theme is built upon the dialogues with the friends. In confrontation with the friends, Job gradually discovers his inability to fit his own experience into the common retributive explanation of suffering. During the first round of the dialogue, this clash between theory and experience is primarily oriented towards Job’s own suffering. In Gutiérrez’s view, the friends typically represent a theology out of touch with experience, a theology that has come under severe attack from the liberation perspective.

The talk about the friends as ‘friendly theologians’ makes clear how close Gutiérrez finds himself to Job’s situation. The ironical designation of ‘friendly’ people reinforces the impression that Gutiérrez has encountered this type of people as those who defend an ideological system with a kind of deceptive friendliness:

43 Arguedas, Todas las sangres, pp. 189, 392; Arguedas, De wegen van het bloed, pp. 270, 564.
44 Arguedas, Todas las sangres, pp. 189, 392; Arguedas, De wegen van het bloed, pp. 270, 564.
45 Gutierrez, On Job, pp. 28–29.
46 Ibid., p. 21.
When all is said and done, if Job is not guilty, how is it possible to explain what has befallen him? His friends want to help him, but they cannot do so except on the basis of their own vision of things, their own theology. [...] He knows his words will seem harsh to Job, but he also knows that he must offer correct teaching.47

The teaching is inevitable, although perhaps somewhat infelicitous for those who suffer. Gutiérrez, however, tries to reveal its real nature by arguing that it hides the reality of suffering, stems from a highly individualistic theology and, finally, justifies the position of the rich:

The ethical pattern they expound is a simple one that can be applied in a highly individualistic way. Its power flows precisely from its simplicity. It was the prevailing doctrine at the period when the author of the Book of Job was writing, and it has cropped up repeatedly wherever a particular religious mentality has been at work. It is, moreover, a convenient and soothing doctrine for those who have great worldly possessions, and it promotes resignation and a sense of guilt in those who lack such possessions.48

The difference between the retributive faith of the rich and the disinterested faith of the poor becomes entirely clear: in the end, the religion of the rich is intended to let its proponents receive more at the expense of the poor. Although the discussion is about Job, in fact we are at home in Peru, where a highly exploitative political, economic, and religious system is justified by reference to the capitalist ethic of the individual:

In the course of the history of the Church certain tendencies in the Christian world have repeatedly given new life to the ethical doctrine that regards wealth as God’s reward to the honest and the hard-working, and poverty as God’s punishment to the sinful and the lazy. [...] On the other hand, as everyone knows, the capitalist ideology has historically made use of this doctrinal expedient—openly in the beginning; nowadays in more subtle forms—for its own religious justification. This manipulation of the doctrine distorts one point in it that continues to be important despite all criticisms of the teaching—namely that the Christian faith necessarily entails a personal and social ethic.49

The neutral, theoretical doctrine of retribution is shattered by Job’s experience of innocent suffering. The first aspect of the language of prophecy, then, is a language of protest against self-contained theological systems that lock up the gratuitous love of God into a system of reward and punishment. That Job shared the basis of such a retributive theology makes clear why, gradually breaking out of it, he attacked the ‘retributive’ God as well with his experience of innocent suffering. In Gutiérrez’s view, however, this attack on God was not a blasphemy of God, but rather a faithful call upon the living God out of a situation of confusion.50

There is a fascinating parallel between Gutiérrez’s interpretation of the theology of the friends as a theology out of touch with reality and Arguedas’s critique

48 Ibid., p. 22.
49 Ibid., pp. 22–23.
of communism in his novel *El Sexto*.\(^{51}\) In *ES*, Gabriel (sic!), a partyless student, is imprisoned in the most notorious prison of Peru, the Sexto prison. There were many political prisoners at the time, divided into two parties, the communists and the aprists (followers of the APRA party). Political prisoners living on the third floor were in a relatively fortunate position – compared to other prisoners – in being strictly separated from criminal prisoners who lived on the ground and first floors.\(^{52}\) A condition of this situation, however, is that they must abstain from any aid to the people on the ground floor, who experience extreme forms of suffering. As soon as Gabriel enters the Sexto, he begins to break the prison laws by showing compassion with the fate of the criminals. This leads to severe disputes among the political prisoners – communists and aprists – who see their possibility of survival challenged by the young partyless student.\(^{53}\) Arguedas makes clear what he sees as the principal difference between the communist view of liberation and the Indian view. Communism is a rigid theory that overlooks the particular.\(^{54}\) True liberation means having a non-theoretical, non-programmatic eye for the suffering of one’s neighbour.

The theology of the friends, having no connection to the real world, is a repetitive theology that does not make any progress during the dialogues, apart from an ever more biting tone towards Job’s call for justice.\(^{55}\) Job, however, due to his open eyes for the experience of innocent suffering, gradually discovers that he is not alone in his dreadful situation, but shares it with all poor and oppressed people:

> An important point is reached in this progress when he realizes that he is not the only one to experience the pain of unjust suffering. The poor of this world are in the same boat as he: instead of living, they die by the roadside, deprived of the land that was meant to support them. Job discovers to his grief that he has many counterparts in adversity. The question he asks of God ceases to be a purely personal one and takes concrete form in the suffering of the poor of this world. The answer he seeks will not come except through commitment to them and by following the road—which God alone knows—that leads to wisdom. Job begins to free himself from an ethic centered on personal rewards and to pass to another focused on the needs of one’s neighbor.\(^{56}\)

Job’s discovery strengthens his case over against the friends, because he is now able to refute the claims they base on experience with clear examples of the opposite. After that, Job’s understanding develops further:

> Moreover, his line of argument will now change radically, as a result precisely of his realization that poverty and abandonment are not his lot alone. For he sees

\(^{51}\) Again, no English translation is available of this work. I have used the Dutch translation: José María Arguedas, *De gevangenen van de Sexto*, trans. from the Spanish by Marjolein Sabarte Belacortu (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1992). ES is strongly autobiographical. In 1937–38, Arguedas was imprisoned in the Sexto prison for eight months.


\(^{53}\) Arguedas, *El Sexto*, p. 71; Arguedas, *De gevangenen van de Sexto*, p. 72.


\(^{56}\) Ibid., p. 31.
now that this poverty and abandonment are not something fated but are caused by the wicked, who nonetheless live serene and satisfied lives. These are the same ones who tell the Lord, “Go away!” The wicked are both rejectors of God and enemies of the poor—two sides of the same coin. All this leads the author of the book to put into the mouth of Job the most radical and cruel description of the wretchedness of the poor that is to be found in the Bible, and also to have Job utter a harsh indictment of the powerful who rob and oppress the poor.57

Then, Gutiérrez quotes Job 24: 2–14, a description of the suffering of the poor that is “full of detail” and displays “careful attention to the concrete situation of the poor”. Gutiérrez admits that the friends utilise the language of prophecy as well, but they make it fit into their theology of retribution, thereby further oppressing the poor.58 The second important aspect of the language of prophecy, then, is the prophetic critique of the wicked and the proclamation of the ‘preferential option for the poor’.

Finally, however, the language of prophecy remains a language of justice. Even in Job’s speeches, the clash between his experience of suffering, the conviction of his innocence and his cries to God rest upon the idea that the justice of God needs to be visible in this world, which it is not, from Job’s perspective. For Job’s insight in proper talk about God to develop further, a radical shift is needed. The language of prophecy needs to be complemented by the language of contemplation. The first step towards the language of contemplation is, surprisingly and “despite himself”, the speech of the “lusive and boastful” Elihu.59 By pointing to the transcendence of God, Elihu prepares for the revelation of God from the heart of the tempest, notwithstanding or “thanks to” the lacunae that his speech contains. Elihu qualifies the, in his view, oversimplistic view of justice that Job and the friends have worked with so far. He argues that God might have reasons human beings do not know. Suffering might be a way in which God reveals himself and it might have a place in God’s plans. Furthermore, Elihu applies Job’s language of prophecy and focus on the poor to God: God will eventually deliver them from oppression. However, Elihu sticks to the doctrine of retribution and therefore:

This explanation does not do away with the mystery of suffering in human life. The poet is using Elihu to convey one answer given in his day to the difficulty that the doctrine of retribution is at odds with human experience. It is clear, however, that the author is not satisfied with this answer; the best of his own thinking will be given in the speeches of God from the heart of the tempest.60

The final perspective on Job provided by Gutiérrez is that of the language of contemplation or mysticism.61 Again, the phrase ‘language of contemplation’ functions as an umbrella term for a range of notions in Gutiérrez’s interpretation of Job. Much in line with liberation theology’s view of theology as a second order discourse, Gutiérrez starts the third part of the book with a chapter on the “faith of the people” entitled “Everything Comes from God”. In this chapter, he goes back to the prologue of the book of Job, where Job speaks the famous words: “Yahweh

57 Gutiérrez, On Job, p. 32.
58 Ibid., pp. 34–35.
59 Ibid., p. 39.
60 Ibid., p. 46.
61 Ibid., p. 51.
gave, Yahweh has taken back. Blessed be the name of Yahweh! Gutiérrez takes this text as an expression of Job’s “profound sense of the gratuitousness of God’s love.”

Everything comes from God and is God’s gracious gift; no human being, therefore, has a right to make any demands. Contrary to what the satan has claimed, Job’s religion is indeed disinterested—that is, given freely, “for nothing.” He does not need material prosperity to sustain his trust in God.

Gutiérrez links this strong sense of the gratuitousness of God’s love to his own context:

The language used by Job in these opening chapters is often found on the lips of the poor who are believers. How often we hear simple folk use the very words of Job at the loss of loved ones: “God gave them to me, God has taken them away from me.” This faith is sometimes described as “the faith of a cleaning lady,” but this seems inaccurate. There is something deeper here, something that more learned types find difficult to grasp. The faith of the people is characterized by a strong sense of the lordship of God.

This is one aspect of the language of contemplation: the acknowledgement of divine sovereignty. However, in line with the critical nature of liberation theology, Gutiérrez does not accept the faith of the people in an unconditional way. The language of contemplation needs the language of prophecy:

Job’s language here is, in outline, the language of contemplation and contains all its values. At the same time, however, his language shares the limitations of the faith of the poor; if one remains at this level, one cannot withstand the onslaught of ideologized ways of talking about God. That is, the faith of simple folk can be manipulated by interpretations alien to their religious experience. Furthermore, as happens in Job’s own case, unremitting poverty and suffering give rise to difficult questions. A quick acceptance of them can signify a resignation to evil and injustice that will later be an obstacle to faith in the God who liberates. The insights present in the faith of the people must therefore be deepened and vitalized, but this process requires certain separations.

Without fully explaining the significance of the gratuitousness of God’s love in this chapter, Gutiérrez wants to show that it is the indispensable starting point of Job’s journey to God, but that at the same time, a simple affirmation of it cannot suffice as an answer to the embarrassing experience of suffering. The faith of the people needs to be complemented by the language of prophecy and the transformation of faith in the real encounter with the Lord.

The deepening of Job’s insight is continued in the dialogues. The dialogues bring a second aspect of the language of contemplation to light: the spiritual struggle of Job who is waiting for God to come forth and reveal himself to him.

---

63 Ibid.
64 Ibid., p. 54.
65 The meaning of the term ‘separations’ seems somewhat unclear, probably due to a defective translation of the original Spanish. From the wider context, it seems that Gutiérrez means something like ‘changes of one’s mind’. Ibid.
Gutiérrez highlights three moments in the dialogues where Job’s paradoxical hope in the Lord becomes most prominently evident. These are Job 9:33, where Job calls for an arbiter to plea for him before God, Job 16:19, where Job calls for a witness to testify for him before the Lord, and 19:25, where Job speaks of his faith in a Go’el, an advocate or liberator who lives and will deliver him in the end.66 These three moments in the dialogues share the same paradoxical nature in that they are preceded by Job’s strongest accusations of God. Job wants to meet God himself and this desire gradually grows in strength. Gutiérrez shows that while experiences of protest and despair are not unique in the Bible (Lamentations, Asaph in Psalm 73 and 77), they are never as extreme as in Job. It shows that the language of contemplation in search for an encounter with the Lord in the midst of suffering must wrestle itself through confusion and despair. Seen in this light, cries of protest and despair of the suffering believer are not so much expressions of unbelief, but rather utterances of a profound trust in the Lord.

The paradoxical character of faith comes to the fore most prominently when Gutiérrez discusses Job’s faith in his Go’el:

To whom is Job appealing? The subject is much debated, and rightly so, for the passage is one of the high points of the book and crucial for its interpretation. Is Job referring to God or to some third person? In my view, he is referring to God and not to an intermediary distinct from God. Job’s cry expresses an anguished but sure hope that comes to him from a profound insight—namely, that God is not to be pigeonholed in the theological categories of his friends. It might almost be said that Job, as it were, splits God in two and produces a God who is judge and a God who will defend him at that supreme moment; a God whom he experiences as almost an enemy but whom he knows at the same time to be truly a friend. He has just now accused God of persecuting him, but at the same time he knows that God is just and does not want human beings to suffer. These are two sides of the one God. This painful, dialectical approach to God is one of the most profound messages of the Book of Job.67

It becomes clear how much his own context is in the background when Gutiérrez explains this paradoxical nature of the language of contemplation by reference to the Latin American poet César Vallejo:

A similar splitting of God is seen in a passage of an author who had a keen awareness of human suffering and is representative in so many ways of the suffering peoples of Latin America. That is one reason we have already met him in these pages; I am referring to César Vallejo, whose witness has helped me to understand the Book of Job and relate it more fully to my own experience. Shortly before his death, Vallejo dictated these dramatic and trustfilled lines to his wife Georgette: “Whatever be the cause I must defend before God after death, I myself have a defender: God.” In the language of the Bible, he had a goel. This was a God whose fleeting presence he had felt at certain moments in life; a God who had slipped by him clad in the rags of a lotteryticket seller and whom he therefore once described as a “bohemian God.” At this final moment, in a decisive hour of his life, he sees this God at his side as he faces the judgement that his life has merited from the same God.68

66 Gutiérrez, On Job, p. 56.
67 Ibid., p. 65.
68 Ibid.
Finally, the language of contemplation culminates in the encounter with the Lord from the heart of the tempest. Against those interpreters who hold that God does not really answer Job’s questions, Gutiérrez argues that although the answers are not what we might expect, they are nevertheless real answers. God is answering already by actually revealing himself to Job, instead of reproaching him in the way the friends predicted in the dialogues.\(^69\)

Job has fearfully anticipated the way in which God would speak to him: “He will crush me in the tempest and wound me over and over without cause” (9:17). […] But the fear proves mistaken. God does not crush the addressee, but returns to the theme of God’s own greatness. […] The greatness of God is to be identified less with power than with freedom and gratuitous love—and with tenderness.\(^70\)

Gutiérrez is not content with the fact that God speaks. Everything in the speeches of God hinges upon the notion of freedom. Job as well as the friends tried to pigeonhole God into their own system of reward and punishment, which forced them to choose between either ignoring the reality of the suffering of the innocent, or accusing God of misgovernment. Job had been challenging two things in his speeches. First, he had been challenging God’s plan with the world and secondly, God’s just government. In God’s two speeches, the first is concerned with the idea of God’s plan (‘ṭṣāh) with the world, and the second deals with God’s just government (mishpat).

In his interpretation of the first speech of God, Gutiérrez stresses God’s freedom as the ultimate cause of the creation of the world. The friends and Job thought of the good fortune of human beings as God’s plan behind the creation of the world. This idea is challenged by God in the first speech:

The reason for believing “for nothing”—the theme set at the beginning of the book—is the free and gratuitous initiative taken by divine love. This is not something connected only indirectly with the work of creation or something added onto it; it is the very hinge on which the world turns. This is the only motive for creation that can lead to a communion of two freedoms. It must therefore be the point from which we always start in order to make all things new.\(^71\)

The starting point of divine love implies that the simple calculus of the friends does not hold. In Gutiérrez’s view, the divine critique of the doctrine of retribution becomes particularly clear by the fact that in God’s speech the natural inanimate world plays a key role. Gutiérrez connects the doctrine of retribution with an anthropocentric view of the world:

God’s speeches are a forceful rejection of a purely anthropocentric view of creation. Not everything that exists was made to be directly useful to human beings; therefore, they may not judge everything from their point of view. The world of nature expresses the freedom and delight of God in creating. It refuses to be limited to the narrow confines of the cause-effect relationship.\(^72\)

\(^{69}\) Gutiérrez, On Job, p. 67.
\(^{70}\) Ibid., p. 68.
\(^{71}\) Ibid., pp. 70–71.
\(^{72}\) Ibid., p. 74.
Hence, the plan of God is not the mechanism of cause and effect, but the free creation of a world in which freedom rules.

Upon this speech of God, Job acknowledges his littleness, but in Gutiérrez’s view, he is not really convinced and far from admitting his sin. Then, in the second speech, God deals with the just government of the world, actually by pointing to the second freedom, that of creatures. God wants justice, but not in the sense the friends and Job have in mind:

"The Lord is explaining, tenderly and, as it were, shyly, that the wicked cannot simply be destroyed with a glance. God wants justice indeed, and desires that divine judgement (mishpat) reign in the world; but God cannot impose it, for the nature of created beings must be respected. God’s power is limited by human freedom; for without freedom God’s justice would not be present within history. Furthermore, precisely because human beings are free, they have the power to change their course and be converted. The destruction of the wicked would put an end to that possibility. In other words, the all-powerful God is also a “weak” God. […] The mystery of divine freedom leads to the mystery of human freedom and to respect for it. […] God is manifest not in the mighty wind or the earthquake or the fire but very tactfully in the whisper of a gentle breeze that is incapable of crushing or burying anyone."

The respect of God for human freedom has important implications for the position of human beings as well. Nobody can ever be in a position of absolute wickedness in the sense that conversion is impossible. It means also that, although God wants justice, he involves human beings in his government of the world:

Human beings are insignificant in Job’s judgement, but they are great enough for God, the almighty, to stop at the threshold of their freedom and ask for their collaboration in the building of the world and in its just governance.

Upon the second speech, Job changes his mind and faithfully surrenders to God. He does not give up his innocence, though. He did not need to do so, because God never questioned it. In this connection, Gutiérrez follows a translation that renders Job 42: 6 as “I repudiate and abandon (change my mind about) dust and ashes” instead of the regular translation “I retract and repent in dust and ashes”, emphasising that the change of mind in Job is not directed to his own person, but to his insight in God’s just government of the world:

The phrase “dust and ashes” is an image for groaning and lamentation; in other words, it is an image befitting the situation of Job as described before the dialogues began. This, then, is the object of the retraction and change of mind of which this key verse speaks. Job is rejecting the attitude of lamentation that has been his until now. The speeches of God have shown him that this attitude is not justified. He does not retract or repent of what he has hitherto said, but he now sees clearly that he cannot go on complaining.

In the remainder of the book, Gutiérrez moves back and forth between the language of prophecy and contemplation, showing their mutual interdependence

73 Gutiérrez, On Job, pp. 77–79.
74 Ibid., p. 78.
75 New Jerusalem Bible quoted in ibid., p. 86.
76 Ibid.
and presupposition. We might even say that he is at pains to show that, if properly conceived, they do not come into conflict with one another. On the other hand, Gutiérrez admits that the insight that Job attained during his journey remains partial in nature and, hence, not all of his questions were answered.

6.6 HERMENEUTICAL REFLECTION

The most distinguishing feature over against the other case studies described in this book, is the explicit role Gutiérrez gives to his own reading context. We have seen that, in all the examples, the influence of the cultural, social and religious context plays a major role in the interpretation, but in none of the other examples was this role explicitly and positively valued. In the case of the Testament and Lasso, this comes as no surprise, because the genre of the work precluded it. In Calvin’s case, however, we saw that, although the context was very important for understanding the why and how of his interpretation, the Sola Scriptura maxim rendered an explicit positive evaluation of the context impossible.

Not so for Gutiérrez, who brings in his own context on the theoretical as well as the practical level. In his theoretical reflection on the task of theology, the interaction between Scripture and context is already present in two ways. Given that theology is the reflection on praxis in the light of the Word of God, the very first place where the interaction between Scripture and context takes place is the community of faith. The community lives out its faith in dialogue with the Word of God. Only then, in a ‘second act’, does theology reflect on praxis in the light of the Word of God once more. It uses all scholarly means at its disposal to explain the meaning of the text, but it is ultimately intended to return to the world of faith. These theoretical considerations are substantiated by Gutiérrez’s exegetical practice. We have seen that the Latin American background is always present, and guides the approach to the text in many respects. This does not make for a monologue on Gutiérrez’s part in which the text has no role to play. In responding to those who wonder what the Book of Job can teach liberation theology, Gutiérrez sets out his view of Scripture:

In point of fact, however, if this surprise exists it shows an ignorance of the biblical orientation that has characterized the theology of liberation from the outset. Above all, it signals a failure to grasp the connection between Christian life and the word of God. Not only is it legitimate in principle to read the Bible from the standpoint of our deepest and most pressing concerns; this has also in fact been the practice of the Christian community throughout its history. But this principle and this fact must not make us forget something I have often said because I am deeply convinced of it: although it is true that we read the Bible, it is also true that the Bible reads us and speaks to us.

This is not an empty phrase in Gutiérrez’s thought. The careful reader of On Job will notice that the further Gutiérrez proceeds in the book of Job, the more at odds the message of the Book becomes with clear cut liberation theology. The end of Gutiérrez’s book clearly displays traces of the tension he experiences between the

78 Ibid., p. xvii.
urgent need for the language of prophecy and the inevitability – first theologically and then, eventually, experientially – of the language of contemplation. Gutiérrez shares Job’s difficulty with a faithful surrender to the just government of the Lord.

What Gutiérrez aims at is a dialogue with the text in which the reader brings in the whole of his own context but at the same time opens up that context to have an encounter with the otherness of the text. From a theoretical perspective, Gutiérrez’s approach can be aptly described in terms of Gadamer’s hermeneutics. Gutiérrez’s positive appreciation of his own context is in line with Gadamer’s positive view of the ‘Vorverständnis’. The reader can only have a true encounter with the otherness of the text if she is aware of her own situation. Gutiérrez’s high esteem of the significance of the text for the community of faith finds an easy parallel in Gadamer’s notion of the ‘Vorgriff der Vollkommenheit’. The aim of the hermeneutical process in both views is a fusion of horizons, whereby the otherness of the text becomes incorporated into the life of the believer. This fusion of horizons is fundamentally open in nature. In Gutiérrez’s view, the reading of Scripture is never exhausted as a source of inspiration for the life of the Church, just as the things we learn from it never become the final instruction for all places and times. In Gutiérrez’s hermeneutics, this contextuality of the reading of Scripture does not lead to hermeneutical relativism because, in the course of the dialogue with the text, the community of faith will have experiences of truth in relation to its specific context.

I would like to go one step further, however, and uncover the view of Scripture underlying Gutiérrez’s interpretation of Job. We have seen that, ‘although’ he takes his own context seriously, Gutiérrez succeeds in initiating a dialogue between text and the reader in which both partners have a constructive role. This should not mislead us to think that what happens here is some kind of encounter of the reader with the ‘text itself’—a dialogue in which the text appears in unmediated form. The hermeneutical process that we meet in Gutiérrez’s work is in fact a religiously mediated reading of the text of Job. There are influential presuppositions governing the reading process. The most fundamental presupposition seems to be the idea of the Bible as the Word of God. This idea forms the background of the Vorgriff der Vollkommenheit. It leads to what in typically Protestant terms could be called the idea of the unity and perfection of Scripture. These presuppositions mediate the text in Gutiérrez’s reading, and prepare it for being applied to his own context, resulting in various hermeneutical consequences. On the one hand, Gutiérrez’s conviction of the unity and perfection of Scripture forces him not to split Job up into different incompatible sources – from which it would be hard to choose the authoritative one – but rather to resolve ambiguities into one coherent message of the book of Job. In realising such a level of coherence, Gutiérrez chooses to read the dialogues in the light of God’s final judgement over them, which prevents him from evaluating them positively. If, as various recent interpreters have argued, the Book of Job should be read as a ‘bricolage’ of various perspectives on the problem of innocent suffering, Gutiérrez’s high view

79 For a more elaborate discussion of Gadamer, see chapter 9, section 9.3.
of Scripture makes it rather unlikely that he adequately perceives this.\textsuperscript{81} On the other hand, the assumption of the unity and perfection of Scripture leads to the attempt to renew the life of the believer with the message of the speeches of the Lord from the whirlwind as much as with the prophetic speeches of Job.

Of course, not only Gutiérrez’s view of Scripture plays a role in mediating the text to the audience. His own context does so as well. Gutiérrez’s own context, combined with his unconditional trust in the relevance and suitability the Word of God for his own context, naturally leads to the portrayal of Job as the proponent of liberation theology. Gutiérrez acknowledges some difficulties with this view, given the fact that Elifaz already mentions the poor in his first speech, and that Elihu shows a profound engagement with the lot of the poor as well.\textsuperscript{82} Nevertheless, Job exemplifies the position of the poor in history.

David Brown criticises Gutiérrez for portraying Job as having an eye for the poor. He draws attention to an isolated verse that Gutiérrez left out of consideration: Job 30:1, where Job says: “But now they mock me, men younger than I, whose fathers I would have disdained to put with my sheep dogs” (niv).\textsuperscript{83} Brown presupposes that Job is disdainful of the fathers of the ‘men younger than I’ because of their poverty, or, more generally formulated, their social or economic status. In defence of Job, it must be said that this is a rather artificial reading of the text, because in the remainder of chapter 30, Job gives a lengthy description of these ‘men’ as the godless rather than the poor.\textsuperscript{84}

This having been said, there is nevertheless additional reason to doubt the all too easy connection between Job and the poor. In chapter 3, where I discussed the Testament of Job, I suggested that the particular view of evil implicit in the book of Job might be seen as a ‘perspective of the rich’. In Job, a rich man falls to poverty and begins to ask why he, the righteous man, has to suffer. Such a question is unreasonable for those who struggle through the difficulties of life every day. They ask how to suffer, instead of why they suffer. Hence, it can be argued that Gutiérrez’s high view of Scripture, together with his own context of the poor of Latin America, made it inevitable for him to conceive of the book of Job as a book for the poor although it is far from certain that this was its original setting.

By way of conclusion, we can say that when it comes to the fundamental religious character of their reading, Calvin and Gutiérrez do not differ all that much. Both read the Book of Job as a source of divine inspiration and as a normative criterion for truth. However, the ways in which both readers value their own roles as readers differ considerably. On the one hand, Calvin tries to hide his own situation by claiming that his interpretation is completely based on the

\textsuperscript{81} See, for example: Penchansky; Ellen van Wolde, Mr and Mrs Job (London: scm Press, 1997).
\textsuperscript{82} Cf. Gutiérrez, On Job, pp. 34–35.
\textsuperscript{83} Brown, Discipleship and Imagination, pp. 191–192.
\textsuperscript{84} David Wolfers, Deep Things out of Darkness: The Book of Job. Essays and a New English Translation (Kampen/Grand Rapids, 1995), pp. 430–437. Wolfers draws attention to the parallel between chapter 30 and 24. In the latter, the godless stand in opposition to the poor. With regard to 30:1 and 2, Wolfers suggests that Job replies here to the friends: “Correctly read, this brutal slap is a direct riposte to 15:10 Among us are both old and grey-haired men, weighted with more years than your own father, involving a struggle for seniority which we would consider infantile! These two expressions, juxtaposed, reveal themselves, as ritual forms of insult, with no true implications regarding the ages of either speaker or addressee.” (ibid., pp. 431–432)
text itself, thereby suggesting a one to one relationship between his interpretation and the Word of God. On the other hand, Gutiérrez, by explicitly acknowledging the role of his own context, remains much more modest in his claims about his own interpretation, preserving an openness to criticism and renewal that – perhaps paradoxically – brings him closer to the idea that Scripture must speak for itself.