

Daily Meditation 10-28-24

Praying the News: Navalny, Stang, Gutierrez, Trumpian Fascism

Good morning.

Our meditation this morning is very full. We're talking about Navalny, we're talking about Sister Dorothy Stang, we're talking about Navalny's wife, who has emerged as a real leader. We're talking about Gustavo Gutierrez, the first one to write a book on Liberation Theology, often referred to as the father of Liberation Theology. And we talk about our current election, and the news this week about Donald Trump's coworkers when he was in the White House, saying that he is definitely a fascist and authoritarian.

What I'd like to focus on in this video is Gustavo Gutierrez, who was such a contributor to the cause of liberation, and of bringing justice back to our understanding of love. And truly, as he said, trying to develop a theology of love that is really love and not something sentimental, not something opposed to critiquing structures that don't allow love. Structures need to allow love to happen.

So for example, in this essay that I refer to today on freedom and liberation, he offers this definition of liberation theology. He says,

The theology of liberation is the theology of salvation incarnated in the concrete, historical and political conditions today. These historical and political mediations of today, valued in themselves, change the life experience and pattern, as well as a reflection on the mystery hidden from the world, and revealed now: the love of the Father, and human fraternity, and the operating salvation of time, all of which give a deep unity to human history.

So his work penetrates those themes, and catches on in many dimensions of religious life, including ritual, and what became known as base communities, for small communities: the church being small communities that interact, where everyone tells their stories, and then seeks the understanding of their own life experience in light of the Gospel and its values.

Now a big part of Gustavo's own experience was, of course, he was from Peru, and he worked in the barrios, the ghettos of Peru. But when he went to Europe to study theology and get a degree, he noticed after awhile that the poverty that he experienced as a South American, was not integral to much of the theology that he was studying in Europe. Europe, of course, being a very different culture, and being much more middle class, did not begin where his theology began.

And he's very explicit about the facts of life in South America where poverty is so prevalent. He has the statistics of how over 60% of the population in his time were very, very poor in South America. And of course, that was in no way the case in Europe. So these are some of the questions that he brought to his studies in Europe. And one of the important teachers in his life was Père Chenu.

In fact, just a few years ago at Tübingen University in Germany, he gave a talk, and the title was "Liberation Theology: The Daughter of Père Chenu." So really, he credits Chenu with giving him the insights that he later put language to, of liberation theology, beginning with the poor, and hearing the voice of those who suffer.

One of his books is called *On Job*, his commentary on Job, *God Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*. And as he says, it is an application of the theology of liberation to the story of Job.

Rosemary Luther, the feminist theologian, said about this book, *Gustavo Gutierrez' theological reflections on the book of Job focuses on the key issue of liberation theology, the problem of theodicy. In other words, God. How can one talk about God? About a God of justice in the face of the sufferings of the innocent? Like Job, Gutierrez seeks a way, not of solving the mystery, but of living in its depths.* And so that's just one of Gustavo's number of books.

Here's another list of his books: *Theology of Liberation, History, Politics and Salvation, We Drink from our Own Wells, Spiritual Journey of a People, The Truth Shall Make You Free, Confrontations, The God of Life, Las Casas in Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ, In the Company of the Poor: A Conversation between Dr. Paul Farmer and Father Gustavo Gutierrez*, and another one, *On the Side of the Poor: The Theology of Liberation with Cardinal Gerhard Ludwig Muller*.

So that's a sample of his life's work. You can see that he's very focused on the majority population on his continent, which, especially when he began his work in the 60s, late 60s, was poor.

Now, that Chenu played such an important role in his theology, is significant. I'm writing a book on Chenu now, and one chapter is on the talk that Gustavo gave about Chenu's influence on liberation theology. And it should be pointed out that Chenu, who was a paritist, that is an theological advisor invited to Vatican II. But he was not invited by any European bishops or American bishops. It was the African bishop who invited him. So, from the South, from the poor continents of the world, he was invited to participate at the Council. I think that's a very important fact, factoid about Chenu's presence at the council. And you can see in that they're an echo of what Gustavo is saying: that Chenu's consciousness was attuned to the poorer countries of the world. And it was an African Bishop from Madagascar who invited Chenu to their

conference. And of course, this bishop had been student of Chenu's in Europe also, like Gustavo Gutierrez had been.

Now there is this Dominican connection with Gustavo Gutierrez. Not only Chenu, but he studied Aquinas too, but also a very important person was Bartolomé de Las Casas, who was a Dominican missionary to South America centuries ago, but who took a very strong stand on behalf of the poor. And I have that quotation in today's essay, very powerful quotation. But he actually fought very hard on behalf of the poor, and on behalf of the indigenous people, because he saw what the Spanish (and he was from Spain) what the Spanish Empire was doing to these indigenous people in the name of Christianity and the Empire.

And as he points out, these people did not want to save, convert the Indians. They wanted to protect themselves, in order to rob, to spoil, oppress and enslave their neighbors. And it's in this context too that Gustavo Gutierrez, who's written a whole book on De Las Casas and started a institute in his name in Peru, was very inspired, if you will, and supported to offer this critique of Western culture, Western empires, the story of the oppression of the indigenous people of the Americas, in the name of empire and in the name of Christianity, sorry to say. And as he points out in that essay that I share, his opinion is it would have been better that the Spanish never came, than that they treated the indigenous people and their religious culture the way they did.

So this is just a sampling of what Gustavo Gutierrez brought to the table. And in his later years, he actually became a Dominican, as he himself was under such stress from the archbishop in Peru, who was far more attuned to the attitudes of Opus Dei, than to the attitudes of a gospel that liberates people. I think that Gustavo found a certain protection by joining the Dominicans, and leaving the diocese and priesthood, where he was much more vulnerable to the powers-that-be in the church.

Thank you. We'll see you next week.