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AND GUTIÉRREZ. Religious and
Secular Common Grounds
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RESUMEN

Se supone a veces que quienes basan su visión del mundo en su fe religiosa y quienes lo miran desde la perspectiva de las ciencias sociales difícilmente encontrarán un terreno común y profundo de diálogo. En este trabajo comparamos los planteamientos de Amartya Sen y de Gustavo Gutiérrez sobre el significado del desarrollo y de la libertad para mostrar que hay un amplio campo de interacción

ABSTRACT

It is often supposed that those who base their view of the world upon perceived religious truth and those who do not will be unable to engage in deep and mutual conversation, for their basic assumptions are just too different. In this paper I compare the views of Amartya Sen and Gustavo Gutiérrez on development and human freedom, finding them to share a very great deal in attitude, in fundamental concern, and in intellectual method, even though the former describes himself as without religion, while the latter is profoundly theological. This comparison is of interest and importance both in its own right and as an example of the way the theologically –minded can meaningfully converse with those who are not; more than converse, establish a common project or program.

DEVELOPMENT AND FREEDOM IN SEN AND GUTIÉRREZ

Religious and Secular Common Grounds

Javier Iguñiz Echeverría*

In the world of economists —and development thinkers and practitioners— it is well known that Amartya Sen (Nobel Prize 1998) considers that “development can be seen [...] as a process of expanding the real freedom that people enjoy” (1999, 3). In the world of theologians and religious social activists it is well known that Gustavo Gutiérrez introduced, particularly in the religious and political scene, a new theological proposal, defining development as liberation. In his foundational book in 1971, after making a critical analysis of the mainstream concept of development, he suggested a change in perspective: “This humanistic approach attempts to place the notion of development in a wider context: a historical vision in which mankind assumes control of its own destiny. But this leads precisely to a change of perspective which —after certain additions and corrections- we would prefer to call liberation” (Gutiérrez 1973, 41)¹.

We find then, the suggestion to replace the term *development* with *liberation*; however, his main point is not to question the propriety of the term *development*, but to explore the depth and practical relevance of its meaning. For instance, “the issue of development does in fact find its true place in the more universal, profound, and radical perspective of liberation. It is only within this framework that *development* finds its true meaning and possibilities of accomplishing something worthwhile” Gutiérrez 1988,24)².

What is behind this apparent coincidence or, at least, convergence between the approach as of these two thinkers to the meaning of development? In this paper I want to show that the

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¹ I will be mainly using the first English edition of *A Theology of Liberation* (1973), but sometimes the edition of 1988, with the new introduction, of the same book. For some non literal quotations I will use the first Spanish edition (1971).

² The central place of liberation is well-recognized. As John Paul II states: “Recently, in the period following the publication of *Populorum Progressio*, a new way of confronting the problems of poverty and underdevelopment has spread in some areas of the world, especially in Latin America. This approach makes *liberation* the fundamental category and the first principle of action”. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis: On Social Concern* 46. 1987.

convergence is not a superficial or accidental one, but that it is based on quite extensive common grounds.

I. DEVELOPMENT: EXTENDING FREEDOM, LIBERATING

The similarities suggested by the quotations above seem to be confirmed as we move into further specification of what development means. In manifesto-style, Gutiérrez asserts that “A broad and deep aspiration for liberation inflames the history of mankind in our day, liberation from all that limits or keeps man from self-fulfillment, liberation from all impediments to the exercise of his freedom” (Gutiérrez 1973, 27)³. In general terms, and independently of that historical accent, what is meant by liberation seems to be exactly what Sen is talking about when defining development (1999, 36-7): Liberation is a means, and the exercise of freedom is an end that requires the widest possible set of opportunities. Moreover, an important exercise of freedom is that which occurs in the act of liberation. A distinction particularly stressed by Sen is that between substantive and instrumental freedoms. Many are, sometimes at the same time, both.

In our real world the exercise of freedom requires a process of liberation. “Development requires the removal of major sources of unfreedom: poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance or overactivity of repressive states” (Sen 199, 3). In both cases underdevelopment is understood as a restriction on freedom. Sen will say that his “analysis [...] builds on these understandings, in an attempt to throw light on underdevelopment (seen broadly in the form of unfreedom) and development (seen as a process of removing unfreedoms and of extending the substantive freedoms of different types that people have reason to value)” (Sen 1999, 86; also 36-7). To Sen, development is thus a liberation process. Moreover, Sen will insist that the act of liberating oneself is valuable in itself, and Gutiérrez that the reaction to oppression is already liberation, and part of any solution. In any case, the exercise of freedom includes its use to conquer greater levels of freedom; to liberate yourself, you have to be somewhat free already.

The terms *development* and *freedom* or *liberation* can be related in different ways. Sen’s proposal is to consider development *as* freedom. That can mean that development is defined exclusively in terms of freedom, or that it can be another thing as well, like justice, human fulfillment, peace, or any other positive aspect of life. In my view, Sen opts for widening the

³ It would be interesting to analyze the historical process to which the quotation refers. Recently, it has been said that: “In the last years, in the big capital cities in the southern hemisphere, the word

meaning of freedom to put it in contact with the worlds of economics, politics, culture, and other broad spheres of life. An alternative would be, for instance, that of Goulet, for whom freedom is one component of development, the others being sustenance and esteem (1995). On the other hand, Gutierrez's original proposal was to replace development with liberation (Goulet 1996). The reason given was that development was a too narrowly 'economistic' concept. But even more importantly, development was not capable of leading to the structural roots of the poverty problem and to the understanding of the conflictive nature of a true liberation process, and, finally, it was a poor way of putting in practice the Bible's call to action and transformation. The substitution expressed a change in content. At that time, this option assumed that the term development could not change its meaning. But once this is seen as untrue, and it is widened, as in the case of Sen's proposal, the need to abandon the term "development" is less urgent.⁴

II. APPROACHES TO FREEDOM

In a dialogue between religious and non-religious individuals the existence of freedom is an important topic. From the religious side somebody might say that God acts with no restriction through human action. Humans are passive intermediaries of God's will. From a materialistic perspective, we can find people saying that there are laws that leave no space for human will. The existence of freedom will be dealt with in the first part of this section. But the *meaning* of such freedom in religious and non religious perspective should be clarified, and that will be the topic of the second part.

A. *How free? How plural? What is being poor? A theological answer*

For the sake of contrast, in this part I will put the burden of proof on the religious side on three counts. One is the existence of freedom *vis a vis* God, another is on pluralism, and, finally, on the radicality of the religious perspective against poverty. After all, the combination of a belief in an all-powerful God and the long tradition of religious ambiguity about poverty requires a comment.

1. The mysterious encounter of two freedoms

As a theologian, Gutiérrez has to deal with the presence of God in history. This in itself is a complex topic but here I shall concentrate on the relation between the freedom of God and that

freedom rises great multitudes that previously only the word independence could congregate" (Hussein, 1993, 19).

⁴ Both these views are clearly different from development for freedom, or freedom in order to develop. In this case one would be the instrument of the other, and while this can be true, no one of both terms can be reduced to that.

of human beings. The status of this freedom is important for a dialogue with non-religious individuals. According to Gutiérrez, two elements have to be considered when dealing with the freedom of God. The first is that “God’s plan has its origin in the gratuitousness of creative love” (1987, 69). The second is the freedom of humans. Both freedoms are discussed in the book of Job where the question Job is asking God repeatedly is: Why am I suffering if I am innocent?

The first answer of God is that He or She is free to the point of not acting according to human rationality, in this case, the human understanding as to the proper relation between suffering and guilt. God is not predictable and the earth with its wonders has been created out of pure and gratuitous love. The world has not been created to be understood by humans. The rain does not fall only where humans need it. In the Bible, there is no anthropocentric view of nature; humans are not the center of the universe. Much less will humans understand the will of God. The earth has been created by God for the pleasure of it, with no relation to anything; it is not the effect of any cause. And quoting Gutiérrez, “This is the only motive for creation that can lead to a communion of two freedoms” (1987, 71). Humans must start thinking of God as free. As long as humans try to predict God’s behavior, they are in fact limiting or even eliminating, God’s own freedom. Their explanation of human suffering is not correct, cannot be attributed to sin, and the proof is that Job, an innocent is suffering. Suffering of the innocent, and even to that of the non-innocent escapes easy explanation. But there is another freedom involved here.

Specifically, “God wants justice indeed, and desires that divine judgment (*mishpat*) reign in the world; but God cannot impose it, for the nature of created beings must be respected,” continues Gutiérrez after speaking of another part of the poem that constitutes the book of Job. In the part, God provokes Job to ask Him to use His assumedly huge powers to correct human injustices indicating, ironically, that he, God, will not do it. God’s lesson is that “God’s power is limited by human freedom (and that) ... the all-powerful God is also a ‘weak’ God” (1987, 77). Therefore, from a theological viewpoint it is necessary to respect human freedom as if it were not a creation by God. In that framework, the ground for a dialogue is present. After all, “Human beings are insignificant in Job’s judgment, 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” (1997, 79). If God stops at the threshold of individual freedom, why should Christians not do likewise?

2. Plurality and universality

In his acceptance address to the Peruvian Academy of the Spanish Language, Gutiérrez provides a reflection on the plurality of languages as a positive trait of human life, and not as a

negative one. Against the most common interpretation of the Babel tower passage of Genesis, he asserts that the plurality of languages can be interpreted as an expression of the freedom of the oppressed *vis a vis* imperial homogeneity. The text of Babel, then has to be read also as “the painful historical experience of a subjugated people”. Therefore, while it is true that “we have here a rejection of the haughtiness of those building the city and the tower”, it is also “a political attempt, totalitarian in nature, to dominate nature, to dominate people” (Gutiérrez 1999, 196 and 197). According to contemporary interpretations “in the Book of Genesis as a whole the diversity of peoples and languages is presented as a great treasure for humankind and as desired by God” (198).

But, then “what space remains for universality?” (200). Based on his previous work on Arguedas, a Peruvian novelist and anthropologist (particularly, 1990, 50-559, Gutiérrez asserts that universality can be found in a provincial setting.

‘A provincial of this world’ José María Arguedas calls himself at one point. The human universality toward which Arguedas moves, starting with the Peruvian Indian and *mestizo*, bears the mark of the suffering and hope, the anguish and gentleness of those who are sometimes regarded as human refuse. Far from limiting his perspective, this stamp gives it breath and effective power. ‘In the sound of the *charango* and the *quena*, I shall hear *everything*’, he says as he finishes his *Ultimo Diario*? His is the concrete universality which, as Hegel said, is expressed in the singular. (Gutiérrez 1999, 200; also in Nickoloff 1996, 70).

3. Poverty: non voluntary.

The concept of poverty for both authors is complex, and it is especially so from a religious perspective. At one, and very important, level, that of material poverty, the coincidence between our two authors is total. In both of them, we find, in the words of Gutiérrez “the lack of economic goods necessary for a human life to be worthy of the name”. This author continues this way: “In this sense poverty is considered degrading and is rejected by the conscience of contemporary persons. Even those who are not—or do not wish to be— aware of the root causes of this poverty believe that it should be struggled against”. However, to get to that common ground, it is useful to remember how Gutiérrez clarifies some ambiguities typical of the religious approach to this issue. Out of the whole set of ambiguities I will only summarize the one that is most immediately relevant for our purposes. It arises out of the fact that “Christians (...) often have a tendency to give material poverty a positive value, considering it almost a human and religious ideal”. This apparently goes against “the great aspirations of persons today who want to free themselves from

subjection to nature, to eliminate the exploitation of some persons by others, and to create prosperity for everyone”.

To complicate things, “the matter becomes even more complex if we take into consideration that the concept of material poverty is in constant evolution. Not having access to certain cultural, social and political values, for example, is today part of the poverty that persons hope to abolish”. With open irony the author continues with a question: “Would material poverty as an ‘ideal’ of Christian life also include lacking these things?” (1988, 1639.)

Gutiérrez will insist all along in his writings on the critical importance of the same poverty analyzed by Sen: “What we mean by material poverty is a subhuman situation. As we shall see later, the Bible also considers it in this way. Concretely, to be poor means to die of hunger, to be illiterate, to be exploited by others, not to know that you are being exploited, not to know that you are a person. It is in relation to this poverty —material and cultural, collective and militant— that evangelical poverty will have to define itself” (1988, 1649. The point is clear. Those considering poverty an option freely assumed cannot avoid taking stand with respect to the non-freely assumed poverty which is quantitatively and qualitatively the important one. What is clear is that “in the Bible poverty is a scandalous condition inimical to human dignity and therefore contrary to the will of God”. (1988, 165).

To summarize, freedom and poverty are contrary to each other, radically opposite. Sen often uses the case of fasting as an illustration to establish its difference with the non-chosen poverty. Freedom is involved here, and those who fast voluntarily are not considered poor. In that sense “evangelical poverty”, to put it simply, is not poverty.

B. Multidimensional freedom

After dealing with development in a relatively general way, at this stage of my argument I wish to introduce the more complete meaning of freedom articulated both by Gutiérrez and by Sen. If it is accepted that there are grounds for a dialogue between these two scholars and their positions, I must present a more detailed view of that dialogue. A dialogue on freedom between these two thinkers has to take into consideration both the multidimensional nature of freedom, as articulated by both authors, and the theological elements which are specific to Gutiérrez. While I shall show that there is commonality in the nature of freedom, in terms of the latter, I shall need to elucidate the ways in which Gutiérrez’ religious approach makes the task of locating a common ground both more and less difficult. Let us go step by step.

1. Three levels

Gutiérrez presents three levels of liberation. The first is liberation from the political and economic structures, for which a necessary condition is the achievement of a greater national autonomy. The second is the exercise of personal freedom. The third will be clearly present only in a religious approach to the problem. Let me quote the passage essential for my present purposes.

In the first place, *liberation* expresses the aspiration of oppressed peoples and social classes, emphasizing the conflictual aspect of economic, social and political process which puts them at odds with wealthy nations and oppressive classes (...). At a deeper level, *liberation* can be applied to an understanding of history. Humankind is seen as assuming conscious responsibility of its own destiny. This understanding provides a dynamic context and broadens the horizons of the desired social changes. In this perspective the unfolding of all the dimensions of humanness is demanded –persons who make themselves throughout their life and throughout history. The gradual conquest of true freedom leads to the creation of a new humankind and a qualitatively different society. This vision provides, therefore, a better understanding of what in fact is at stake in our times (...). Finally, the word *development* to a certain extent limits and obscures the theological problems implied in the process designated by this term. On the contrary, the word *liberation* allows for another approach leading to the biblical sources which inspire the presence and action of humankind in history. In the Bible, Christ is presented as the one who brings us liberation. Christ the Savior liberates from sin, which is the ultimate root of all disruption of friendship and of all injustice and oppression (Gutiérrez 1988, 24-5).

One way of interpreting this is considering the first one as freedom from dependence, exploitation, and oppression in general, the second as a freedom to be able to expand oneself, and the third as a mandate to free oneself from egoism, that is, to love. The second dimension has been neglected by most of the Gutiérrez critics. For him, however, “it is not enough that we be liberated from oppressive socio-economic structures; also needed is a personal transformation by which we live with profound inner freedom in the face of every kind of servitude...” (1988, xxxviii). The last aspect implies a comprehensive view of the good. However, referring to the freedom of men and women, this last liberation requires us to reflect on what Gutiérrez calls in his book of Job “The Mysterious Meeting of Two Freedoms” (1987, 71), as I shall do in a later section.

2. The freedom to live fully, and in democracy

In the case of Sen, the distinction between different dimensions of freedom is not the same although some components are quite similar. When he lists the unfreedoms, in a first group he includes being free from hunger and chronic malnutrition, inadequate health services, and in general, the worst failure of all, that is, “premature ends” of poor and women. This meaning of freedom is also presented by Gutiérrez and under much the same terms. The claim that people are dying “before it’s time” is an extremely important aspect of his views.

There are also those freedoms proper to the civil and political realm, in general, democracy (Sen 1999, 15-17). Again, this is an important topic in Gutiérrez: “Freedom and democratic participation are inalienable rights of the human person: these matters are therefore of primordial importance for those in Latin America who are thinking of the construction of a new society”. (Gutiérrez 1988, 186).

3. Subjectivity: the risk of accommodation and evasion

A subjective approach to the problem of freedom is taken into consideration by both, but they both also express reservations. On the one hand, Gutiérrez is worried because he finds a tendency to avoid the subjective recognition of the conflictive nature of society and of the necessary struggle to escape from poverty. On the other hand, in the context of an analysis of the standard of living, Sen distrusts feelings and subjective perceptions of reality in general since very poor people tend to accommodate their feelings and aspirations to what they conceive as possible to achieve. In that way they can live, let’s say, happily while being extremely poor. In the case of Gutiérrez, his studies in psychology and his pastoral work led him to introduce a dimension that was quite rare in the structuralist —minded Latin America of the 60s and 70s and, perhaps, even today. As he asserts:

But modern human aspirations include not only liberation from the *exterior* pressures which prevent fulfillment as a member of a certain social class, country, or society. Persons seek likewise an interior liberation, in an individual and intimate dimension; they seek liberation not only in the social plane but also on a psychological. They seek an interior freedom understood, however, not as an ideological evasion from social confrontation or as the internalization of a situation of dependency. Rather, it must be in relation to the real world of the human psyche as understood since Freud (1998, 20)⁵.

Sen is also sensitive to this aspect of life, as revealed in his challenge to utilitarianism and in his perception of the need for more objective criteria to determine the quality of life than that presented by the poor themselves. “Consider a very deprived person who is poor, exploited, overworked and ill, but who has been made satisfied with his lot by social conditioning (through, say, religion, or political propaganda, or cultural pressure). Can we possibly believe that he is doing well just because his happy and satisfied?” (Sen 1987, 8). Sen obviously distrusts self perception as an exclusive method to obtain adequate information about the standard of living. A subjective approach is not enough to determine the “standard of living” of individuals. Actually, in this aspect of freedom this author considers religion as a source of accommodation, that is, of resigned acceptance of non-human conditions.

⁵ For a summary, and new and further developments see (1986, 188-193).

However, the subjective cannot be absent in this author's perspective. For instance, he repeatedly includes in his texts an expression by Adam Smith related to some feelings that are part of the needs of the individuals: not to be "ashamed to appear in public" (Sen 1999, 74).

4. Structural factors and interrelations

Individual freedom is influenced by structural factors in both, Gutiérrez and Sen. From the first, these factors were the ones against which Latin American social and political movements of the 60s and 70s, armed and non-armed, were fighting. National and international structures of power had to be replaced by more balanced ones. Agrarian reforms, nationalization of firms, powerful social programs, etc., were to be launched after political independence was completed. In the case of Sen, these structural aspects are presented with less detail, but are also part of the problem.

The freedom of agency that we individually have is inescapably qualified and constrained by the social, political, and economic opportunities that are available to us. There is a deep complementarity between individual agency and social arrangement. It is important to give simultaneous recognition to the centrality of individual freedom *and* to the force of social influences on the extent and reach of individual freedom. To counter the problems that we face, we have to see individual freedom as a social commitment. This is the basic approach that this work tries to explore and examine (1999, xi-xii).

In spite of the different weights attached to some dimensions of freedom, in both cases all forms or aspects of freedom interact in complex ways that enrich and strengthen each other. To Gutiérrez, he is not dealing with "three parallel or chronologically successive processes". Indeed, to him they are "three levels of meaning of a single, complex process..." that are interdependent (1988, 25). In Sen, the interrelation is important because "the effectiveness of freedom as an instrument lies in the fact that different kinds of freedom interrelate with one another, and freedom of one type may greatly help in advancing freedom of other types (Sen 1999, 37).

5. Liberation "from" and liberation "to"

A key distinction in the work by Gutiérrez that I will just briefly mention is that between "freedom from" and "freedom to". A formally similar distinction is also present in Sen, but its nature is different since in the first case there is an explicit proposal about what to do with the freedom acquired, namely to love (Gutiérrez 1971: 58), a commitment Sen is not prepared to make. As Alkire reminds us, "Capability is... a set of vectors of functioning, reflecting the person's freedom to lead one type of life or another ... to choose from possible livings. It is the presence of this term 'freedom to'- the inherence of free choice inhuman development- that led Sen to name this distinctive approach the 'capability' approach" (1998, 7). Given its explicitly

normative content, from a religious viewpoint it is normal to suggest a more precise course of action.

I can conclude this part by saying that the preoccupation with freedom has been central in the life and work of both authors. In close contact with the liberal tradition it is not surprising in the case of Sen. From a religious perspective, the accentuation of freedom as an essential feature of the doctrinal message is not so common but, in this case, it is absolutely clear. To Gutiérrez, “biblical faith, (...) besides being memory, is freedom: *openness to the future*” (Gutiérrez 1983, 12).

III. THE MORAL PERSPECTIVE

Intellectually speaking, it seems that their way of positioning themselves vis-à-vis reality is quite similar. At least four aspects appear to be important.

A. *The poor*

As a consequence of the motivation summarized above, the prominence of the poor in any observation of the world leads both to give priority to the study of their situation, and to discuss alternative ways of liberating them. In the Preface to his latest book, Sen starts each of the first three paragraphs in the following manner:

We live in a world of unprecedented opulence, of a kind that would have been hard even to imagine a century ago (...) And yet we also live in a world with remarkable deprivation, destitution and oppression (...) Overcoming these problems is a central part of the exercise of development” (Sen 1999a, xi and xii).

I would say that this is exactly the same way of focusing on reality as that of Gutiérrez. For instance, when he analyzes social conflict, basically class struggle, the poor are seen as those individuals whose quality of life has been seriously affected by the society and the economy. “By the ‘poor’ I mean here those whose social and economic condition is the result of a particular political order and the concrete histories of countries and social groups” (1988, 156).

B. *Motivation and commitment*

How are these parallel and converging aspects part of a shared intellectual and practical project? To understand the depth and mutual enrichment of the interconnections between these two thinkers I have to point out, so far as I can, what is behind their intellectual endeavor. The deepest

motivation in both authors seems to be the preoccupation with the poor themselves, with their suffering, their fate, it is an interesting fact that this motivation, is “previous” to their intellectual search for understanding. In other words, the moral element of solidarity leads to their work as intellectuals. In the context of a debate with those who regard the fight against poverty as beneficial for the non-poor, Sen says clearly, “The first requirement of the concept of poverty is of a criterion as to *who* should be the focus of our concern” (Sen 1991, 9). Scientific inquiry comes afterwards; it is a second act. That is why “the focus of the concept of poverty is on the well-being of the poor as such, no matter what influences affect their well-being. *Causation* of poverty and *effects* of poverty will be important issues to study in their own rights, and the conceptualization of poverty in terms of the conditions only of the poor does not affect the worthwhileness of studying these questions” (Sen 1991, 10). The poverty problem does not have to be solved because some other goal requires it. The poor are the final end of this intellectual interest. There is no value-free approach to the poverty problem. The same can be said of Gutiérrez, who, among others, has contributed to the Catholic Church’s doctrine of what is called “preferential option for the poor” (Nickoloff 1996, 12). That option is totally independent of any merit of the poor or of any instrumental value of the alleviation of poverty, or of its usefulness as a way of increasing the poor’s involvement in the political struggle.

The coincidence between them disappears when the properly religious dimension is presented. Concretely, in the case of Gutiérrez, this option is, above all, God’s option out of His or Her pure gratuitousness, not ours. It is the ultimate reason for avoiding an instrumental option (Gutiérrez 1988, 24ff).

The ultimate reason for commitment to the poor and oppressed is not to be found in the social analysis we use, or in human compassion, or in any direct experience we ourselves may have of poverty. These are all doubtless valid motives that play an important part in our commitment. As Christians, however, our commitment is grounded, in the final analysis, in the god of our faith. It is a theocentric, prophetic option that has its roots in the unmerited love of God and is demanded by that love (Gutiérrez 1988, xxvii).

Obviously, this ultimate reason is not Sen’s source of motivation.

C. *Our exclusive responsibility*

The fact that I am comparing a religious and a non-religious perspective does not change much the answer to the question about our responsibility. Sen, for instance, recalls Bertrand Russell’s answer to the question about what he would ask God in case of meeting him or her. It would be: “Why did you give so little evidence of your existence?” Then, Sen continues saying “certainly the appalling world in which we live does not —at least on the surface—look like one in

which and all-powerful benevolence is having its way” (1999, 282). And then, he follows: “It is hard to understand how a compassionate world order can include so many people afflicted by acute misery, persistent hunger, and deprived and desperate lives, and why millions of innocent children have to die each year from lack of food or medical attention or social care”.

The difficulty in seeing God’s presence is also part of Gutiérrez’s deep preoccupations, perhaps the most difficult part of his pastoral work.

In our continent we pose for ourselves a lacerating question: How to say to the poor person, to the oppressed person, God loves you? Indeed, the daily life of the poor seems to be the result of the denial of love⁶. The absence of love is, in the final analysis of faith, the cause of social injustice. The question of how to tell the poor person “God loves you” is much greater than our capacity to answer it. Its breadth, to use a phrase very dear to John of the Cross, makes our answers very small. But the question is there, unavoidable, demanding, challenging (Gutiérrez 1999, 139-40).

Be it a powerful benevolence, be it god, the extensive suffering in the world seems to contradict both, and makes faith difficult, while religions often show themselves excessively compatible with avoidable and undeserved human suffering. In any case, as Sen himself asserts, the responsibility for the poor transcends religious faiths.

This issue, of course, is not new, and has been the subject of some discussion among theologians. The argument that God has reasons to want us to deal with these matters ourselves has had considerable intellectual support. As a nonreligious person, I am not in a position to assess the theological merits of this argument. But I can appreciate the force of the claim that people themselves must have responsibility for the development and change of the world in which they live. One does not have to be either a devout or nondevout to accept this basic connection. As people who live—in a broad sense—together, we cannot escape the thought that the terrible occurrence that we see around us is quintessentially our problem. They are our responsibility—whether or not they are also anyone else’s” (1999, 282).

The “somebody else” is not of little importance for religious people, but in Gutiérrez, human responsibility for whatever is human is absolutely clear from the beginning of his work. The first quotation of this paper shows it. Before, in the Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes* 55, we find the following statement:

In each nation and social group there is a growing number of men and women who are conscious that they themselves are the architects and molders of their community’s culture. All over the world the sense of autonomy and responsibility increases with the effects of the greatest importance for the spiritual and moral maturity of humankind. This will become clearer to us if we advert to the unification of the world and the duty imposed

⁶ I would have preferred: “the equivalent to a denial of love”.

on us to build up a better world in truth and justice. We are witnessing the birth of a new humanism, where people are defined before all else by their responsibility to their sisters and brothers and at the court of history.

D. Immersion

The final pint is not only methodological: it is also social and personal, and relates to the need for involvement in the process. Gustavo Gutiérrez is widely known as a social activist (Nickoloff 1996, 2-5; McAfee Brown 1990, ch. 2). Sen is part of the world of academic intellectuals but he is also an activist. For instance, today we would say that he speaks from and to the civil society as the following statement reminds us: “I have, throughout my life, avoided giving advice to the ‘authorities’. Indeed, I have never counseled any government, preferring to place my suggestions and critiques —for what they are worth- in the public domain” (Sen 1999, xiv). Both share an incredible activity as worldwide lecturers. Both write often in a non-technical jargon, and their activism is translated into an intellectual perspective. That is why immersion is considered essential to an analytical exercise that has to include the ethical dimension. “Ethical truth is in and of human life; it can be seen only from the point of view of immersion”. (Nussbaum and Sen 1989, 311)⁷.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the work by Sen and Gutiérrez on development and freedom I hope to have shown that there is a quite strong common ground for a profound dialogue on development between a religious and non-religious perspective. There are many common elements not only in the definition, scope, and status of development, but also in the ethical and agent-oriented approach to the problem. The promotion of a greater social commitment is at the core of Sen’s and Gutierrez’s work. On the other hand, I have shown that the theological elements in Gutiérrez’s work are not an important barrier, or at least, not an insurmountable one, to such a dialogue. Freedom and plurality are strongly located in both authors’ proposals. The crucial connecting point is, however, the importance of the poor as an intellectual and moral source of personal commitment.

⁷ “Sen and Nussbaum distinguish two forms of ethical inquiry about development. The externalist of Platonic model is one in which ‘rational criticism is detached and external’. From a transcendent, and a-historical standpoint, the ethicist looks down and ‘recommends certain values as best for the development and flourishing of a people’ and excludes ‘any influence from the beliefs of those people as to what lives are best to live, or from wishes as to the sort of lives they want to live’ (Crocker 1998b, 320).

In spite of their common themes and viewpoints, a deeper analysis of their particular views, particularly when dealing with freedom, will show interesting differences that will, with great probability enrich each other's analysis. On the other hand, a more historical study of their concrete analysis of India in one case, and of Latin America in the other, will also show that their more precise proposals for social action are not identical. Future work will have to deal with these two geographic and cultural origins, and with the way they lead them to accentuate different aspects of the social processes at the national level, and of the place of their respective subcontinents in the world scene. Finally, and in spite of their common ground, I find that the differences emerging out of their secular and religious perspectives should also be the matter of future work. This paper is an invitation to that dialogue and that study.

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