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FRAMING OPPRESSION: A DIALOGUE BETWEEN GUSTAVO  
GUTIÉRREZ AND MARK THE EVANGELIST ON THE KINGDOM,  
OPPRESSORS, AND THE OPPRESSED

Justin A. J. Comber  
Brampton, Ontario, Canada

There is a very real sense in which the distinction between theology and biblical studies is a false one. The Gospels are the Christian “theologies” of Jesus. They answer questions such as “who was Jesus?” “who is Jesus to me?” and “how does one identify with Jesus?” As such, the Gospels are ideal partners-in-dialogue. Mark the evangelist left behind one such work of theology. More than simple history, Mark’s Gospel draws Christians into a theology of both inclusion in and exclusion from the “kingdom” through story and example. Mark addresses those who, by their actions and attitudes, align themselves with Jesus, dig in against him, or watch him in bewilderment. In so doing, Mark defines what it means to align oneself with Jesus, and what kind of person is most likely to do so. He sets the criteria for participation in the kingdom of God and, not accidentally, draws up a demographic of the kingdom that includes the marginalized, the spiritually and politically oppressed, and those outside of the religious/political elite. Jesus invites these to give up all that they own and follow him. To those who do not have anything, and who are continually robbed and imprisoned, Jesus offers liberation.

In this sense, the Gospel of Mark is one (authoritative) conversation partner for other theologians. Others have considered the same questions and have outlined their understanding of where God is, what he is concerned with in modern contexts, and, taking the lead of the Gospels, what actions and attitudes in relation to the modern *Sitz im Leben* are required for participation in the kingdom of God. The purpose of this article

is to bring a modern estimation of the concerns of the kingdom of God, namely, the liberation theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez, into conversation with the Gospel of Mark, to highlight the nuanced language of each, and to draw comparison and contrast between them. Both the Gospel of Mark and the writings of Gutiérrez participate in a Christian tradition that portrays the mission of the kingdom of God as the reordering of the cosmos according to patterns of freedom and liberation, rather than the simple propagation of a Christian message or spirituality. For both, the message of the Gospel includes the message of freedom from oppressive empires, violence, and exclusion.

In order to demonstrate this, it is necessary to outline a careful reading of Gutiérrez's theology of liberation, paying attention (when appropriate) to his understanding of the kingdom of God. Following this, it will be necessary to outline a Markan theology of the kingdom of God, the oppressors, and the oppressed. With these two perspectives outlined, it is possible to compare Gutiérrez's conception of "liberation" with Mark's description of the coming of the kingdom of God, the "liberation" that it brings, and its implications for political and religious life. In this respect, what is accomplished is not a diachronic theology of the kingdom, but rather a comparison of two theological (one canonical, the other modern) approaches to the kingdom of God and its effects on social values based on two corpora—the Gospel of Mark and the writings of Gutiérrez—that display interest in answering this question.

#### *Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Liberation according to Gutiérrez*

Very little of the theology considered by Gutiérrez is left unliberated from its historical development. The doctrine of salvation is no exception to this rule. By the time Gutiérrez had finished with the subject, the Exodus from Egypt was not only programmatic for God's saving action towards the nation of Israel, but it represented a clear historical call for the liberation

of Latin America's poor.<sup>1</sup> This is not surprising—poverty and economic oppression in Peru constituted Gutiérrez's own *Sitz im Leben*. His motivation for writing was intensely pastoral. However, it simply will not do to dismiss Gutiérrez's work as a theologian due to his constant engagement with Latin American injustice. His discussion of ecclesiology and soteriology is not necessarily an ecclesiology-of-liberation or a soteriology-of-liberation in the sense that soteriology and ecclesiology are dominated by the theme. They are proper estimations of God's historical and eschatological saving work, and reassertions of a theme (namely, "justice") that Gutiérrez believed was implicit in those doctrines and mandated by the Christian call to faith. There are, however, a few foundational features of Gutiérrez work that differ from traditional approaches. Gutiérrez's understanding of ecclesiology and soteriology is predicated on a number of unique stances that will require us to discuss his position on the world and the church, and especially his propagation of "worldliness" in the church and the breakdown of the "two planes" approach, which separates sacred activity from worldly activity. This is a necessary foundation for the study of Gutiérrez's soteriology, its grounding in creation and the exodus, and his conception of the radical shift involved in the "conversion to the neighbour."

*Problem of "the Distinction of Planes"*

Gutiérrez begins his discussion of the responsibility of the church in the world with a lament over the separation of the sacred and secular, and the church's opinion on the imposition of sacred on worldly institutions.<sup>2</sup> He notes the position of *Gaudium et Spes*, which states that official ecclesial offices, and even lay apostolic bodies, should abstain from involving

1. Latin American justice is a theme that is pervasive across all of Gutiérrez's writings. He often discusses the implications of the kingdom for Latin America (see esp. Gutiérrez, "Theology and the Social Sciences," 53–84; Gutiérrez, "Truth Shall Set You Free," esp. 149–52; Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 49–57; cf. Gutiérrez, "Discipleship," 320–26), and relies on the wisdom of the Latin American martyrs (see esp. Gutiérrez, "Mark 1:14–15," 428).

2. Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 34–41.

themselves in worldly pursuits, with the obvious exception of moral teaching in which the individual Christian is called to live out his/her faith in their secular contexts, thereby accomplishing the mandate of the church.<sup>3</sup> Within this model, the Christian who is engaged in politics or economic issues is under no obligation to represent one or another particular stance. They are simply required to do whatever it is they do *as a Christian*.<sup>4</sup> The church should limit its influence to the realm of the sacred. It is the only shareholder in the economy of salvation, and is responsible for building and maintaining this sacred institution.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, the mission of the church is the “evangelization and inspiration of the temporal sphere. ‘By converting men to faith and baptizing them’.”<sup>6</sup> The church converts, Christianizes, baptizes, and propagates itself as a spiritual body, but is exempt from shaping the world in terms of political, sociological, and economic development. That is not to say that it does not intrude in these arenas. But at points of intersection, the church should only exert a moralizing influence.<sup>7</sup> The result is what Gutiérrez calls a “distinction of planes” between the sacred and the secular that restricts the mission of clergies and lay-apostolic bodies to support what the church deems sacred.<sup>8</sup>

Gutiérrez identified this distinction of planes at the core of a pressing crisis, in which the church, in an effort to distance itself from what is *worldly*, has effectively given secular institutions permission to desecralize and to distance themselves from the church. Economics, politics, and sociology have become places where the influence of the church is no longer welcome.<sup>9</sup> His solution to this problem is the secularization of the church. In

3. Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 37.

4. Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 36.

5. Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 35.

6. See Chenu, “Misión de la Iglesia,” 390–91; Congar, *Christians*, 71; cited in Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 37.

7. Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 37. For Gutiérrez, this contrast is not an option, not least because his conception of sin includes social and political sin alongside personal sin (“Truth Shall Set You Free,” 130).

8. Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 34–38.

9. Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 42; citing Cox, *Secular City*, 17.

defence of this, Gutiérrez claims that creation (discussed more extensively in the next section) is the proper sphere of humanity, and that involvement in the shaping of the secular world respects the “createdness” of humanity and the continuing work of creation. By *secularizing* the church, and making shaping the entire human sphere as the church’s mission, humans enter into better relationship with God and the world. Gutiérrez claims:

Worldliness . . . is a must, a necessary condition for an authentic relationship between humankind and nature, among human beings themselves, and finally, between humankind and God.<sup>10</sup>

For Gutiérrez, worldliness is not the failure of the church to live by a standard of holiness. It is the proper involvement of the people of God in sociology, economics, and politics to continue the historical and prophetic task of the church, that is, the building up of the kingdom of God on earth. Fundamentally, it is the call to continue the work of God in nature and society that was begun in creation and continued in the mission of the church.

#### *Liberation, Creation, and Exodus*

Gutiérrez’s work concentrates primarily on either a call to action or on theological justification for why that particular action (most often involvement in economics, politics, or sociology) is the most complete fulfillment of the Christian call.<sup>11</sup> Nowhere is this more evident than in his treatment of the theology of creation and in the lengths to which he is willing to go to connect the economic, social, and political liberation of the poor with the core of the Christian faith. He is unique in that his theology embraces the continuing aspects of creation and answers the question, “what’s next?” The first and most fundamental assumption that he draws out of creation is that God created the physical, psychological, and social world and that he created it to be the proper sphere for human activity. Creation is for the

10. Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 42.

11. See esp. Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 8; Gutiérrez, “Truth Shall Make You Free,” 97–105; Gutiérrez, “Mark 1:14–15,” 430–31.

created, and God himself has made humanity the lord over his creation.<sup>12</sup> With this view, there is no distinction of planes between what is the Lord's work and what is the domain of the secular—the secular is the Lord's domain. Communities, economies, and social systems are the ongoing creative work of humanity as a continuation of the mandate given to them at creation and the proper place for humanity to work, build, and create.<sup>13</sup> These economic, social, and political systems reflect this Godly human re-creation when they mimic the first creation. That is, as God created the cosmos from chaos, humanity is charged with bringing order to creation and with continuing the redemptive work of creation.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the actions of humanity that end slavery for liberation, that dissipate poverty, and that bring about justice are the human equivalents of God's creation of the cosmos from chaos. They are the ultimate acts of conformity to what is godly (even though they are accomplished in what might be called the secular sphere). Faith respects the continued work of creation accomplished in liberation. True faith does not distinguish planes of Godly activity, but works for the desacralization of creation. Those who live out this faith are connected in unity with the historical community of the faithful, and they work to fulfill the historically faithful goal of bringing justice to creation.<sup>15</sup>

The true agents of this quest for unity are those who today are oppressed (economically, politically, culturally) and struggling to become free . . . Salvation—totally and freely given by God, the communion of human beings with God and among themselves—is

12. Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 42.

13. Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 42.

14. Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 87–89. This particular shift, from chaos to cosmos, is the basis for Gutiérrez's claim that creation is the first stage of a plan of salvation (cf. Gutiérrez, "Truth Shall Make You Free," 125; Gutiérrez, *Power of the Poor*, 31–32), which makes it the ideal type of the Exodus, and any other salvific action of God that moves creation (of humanity) from chaos to the created cosmos or from oppression to liberation (see discussion below).

15. Cf. Gutiérrez, "Truth Shall Set You Free," 124–25.

the inner force and the fullness of this movement of human self-generation initiated by the work of creation.<sup>16</sup>

For Gutiérrez, this self-generation is not only programmatic for the creation story, it is also continued in the history of the people of God and their salvation. The Exodus story is about God's gracious gift of salvation. However, the Exodus was accomplished within the sphere of human action and the continued work of humanity (through God's charge to Moses) to champion the cause of the poor and enslaved.<sup>17</sup> The divine monarchy was a sign of Israel's salvation, and represented the continued self-generation of Israel. The divine monarch was a human appointed by God and charged with the task of ensuring justice and peace in creation, the human sphere. Ultimately, even the incarnation sees God stepping into human history and calling the marginalized to make disciples.<sup>18</sup> Social systems, economic systems, and political systems are all the work of human self-generators who continue the task of creation to build just societies.<sup>19</sup> Even though self-generation is accomplished in the human sphere, it is only possible when it is predicated on relationship with God.<sup>20</sup>

The prophetic and wisdom traditions are other hallmarks of the history of liberation for Gutiérrez. He claims that both of these traditions espouse the doctrine that "to know God is to do justice."<sup>21</sup> The majority of the Scripture that he quotes approaches this claim from a negative perspective, taking those who do not pay the wages of the poor, those who mock them, and those who manipulate and do injustice as affronts to God

16. Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 91.

17. Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 42, 90.

18. Gutiérrez, "Mark 1:14–15," 428.

19. Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 42, 90.

20. Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 90. Gutiérrez's idea of unity is almost always focused on the two unities—between God and humanity and in solidarity with all (including historical) humanity (see Gutiérrez, "Truth Shall Make You Free," 124–28; Gutiérrez, "Theology and the Social Sciences," 55–56).

21. Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 110.

himself.<sup>22</sup> In the prophetic and wisdom traditions, as well as in the Exodus and in creation, God expects his people to continue the work that he began at creation to bring about social, economic, and political order that reflects God's justice.

### *Liberation and Conversion*

The secularized creation discussed above sets up another odd turn of phrase in Gutiérrez's theology. That is, there is a distinct sense in which redemption is the result of conversion. Conversion, for Gutiérrez, is a radical shift in which a person is conformed to the image of Christ.<sup>23</sup> However, before making this connection, he spends a great deal of time describing the presence of Christ in the poor, the exploited, and the despised, making particular reference to Matt 25:45: "Anything you did not do for one of these, however humble, you did not do for me."<sup>24</sup> The result is what Gutiérrez calls a "conversion to the neighbor." Here, the convert turns to the pursuit of social justice, embraces their new-found connectedness to Christ and their neighbour (in whom Christ dwells), and is dedicated to bringing about change in the social, political, economic, and even religious structures that constitute "the human environment."<sup>25</sup> Conversion to the neighbor recognizes the presence of God in all people from creation, particularly in the poor, and the unity that is created when humans serve one another. Conversion to the neighbor is about finding God where he is most likely to be and wholly dedicating oneself to remedying the wrongs from which

22. Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 110–12.

23. Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 118.

24. Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 112–16, 118. Not only are the poor essentially 'stand-ins' for Jesus, the Gospels reinforce that the outcast and despised are Jesus' representatives. This is illustrated nicely in Gutiérrez's characterization of Jesus and the disciples as poor, claiming "It is from the poor and despised that the message comes of the universal love that the God of Jesus Christ has for humanity" (Gutiérrez, "Mark 1:14–15," 427).

25. Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 118, and Gutiérrez, "Theology and the Social Sciences," 56; cf. 72–75, offer a practical demonstration of action in a Latin American context of actions fitting this conversion, including activism for worker's rights, and opposition to disparities in a class system.



one finds God (present in the poor) is suffering. Conversion to the neighbor requires the Christian to create a social and political order in which the disenfranchised—those in whom Christ dwells—are relieved of their suffering.

*Liberation and the Kingdom of God*

The solidarity achieved with the historical people of God, the systematic process of “conversion to the neighbor,” the ongoing process of spiritual development that results (and will result) in social, economic, and political change are all, on a grand scale, the kingdom of God. The kingdom, for Gutiérrez, is an eschatological construct. However, his approach to eschatology embraces historical development. The kingdom of God is being built in the present, and is hoped for in the ultimate coming of the kingdom.<sup>26</sup> In the kingdom of God, faithful God calls his people toward himself and toward the eschatological end. That call can be heard in the history of the church, is still audible, and will be realized in the eschaton.<sup>27</sup> Conversely, humanity begins with God’s action at creation, and works to achieve liberation, responding to God’s call until the final realization of justice in the eschaton.<sup>28</sup> At the center of history is the incarnation of God into humanity to announce the coming of the kingdom.<sup>29</sup> This course of “Christo-finalized history,”<sup>30</sup> the work of God in bringing liberation through history, and the work of God’s people to shape the human domain alongside of those aspects of Christianity that have typically been the sole focus of the church

26. Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 92–97; Gutiérrez, “Mark 1:14–15,” 429–30.

27. Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 94–95; cf. “Truth Shall Make You Free,” 144.

28. Compare Gutiérrez’s discussion of eschatology (Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 91–97; cf. Gutiérrez, “Mark 1:14–15,” 429–30) with his discussion on creation (86–91). Though expressed in two streams (human history and the history of salvation), Gutiérrez is clear that they are united as one history “irreversibly assumed by Christ, the Lord of History” (Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 86). This history is begun by God in creation and is finalized by Christ in the eschaton.

29. Gutiérrez, “Mark 1:14–15,” 428.

30. Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 86.

(evangelization, morality, etc.), are all the kingdom of God.<sup>31</sup> The signs of the coming of the kingdom, however, are chiefly visible in “the defense of the poor, punishment of the oppressors, [freedom] from fear of being enslaved by others, [and] the liberation of the oppressed.”<sup>32</sup>

Further, Gutiérrez rejects simple orthodoxy as the goal of Christian theology and calls the people of God to “orthopraxis.”<sup>33</sup> The kingdom calls for a response in conduct, which includes belief in the Gospel and repentance demonstrated in action to change social and political structures by rejecting elements of the status quo that are unjust, disallowing the abuses of the powerful, and building relationships and solidarity with the oppressed.<sup>34</sup> This approach to the kingdom allows one to be faithful to the church and to the world, respecting that God created both and that the differentiation of these two planes is impossible in light of creation. Quite simply, for Gutiérrez, constructs like soteriology and ecclesiology must address the whole of the human condition as spiritual, corporeal, and systemic. Any soteriology that does not include the reordering of systemic political, economic, and social structures for the liberation of every individual—in whom God’s image dwells—who suffers oppression is incomplete. Further, Gutiérrez’s concerns align closely with scriptural traditions concerned with the reordering of the cosmos and with justice, including the Gospel of Mark.

#### *Mark and the Liberating Jesus*

The Gospel of Mark also displays a demonstrable interest in issues concerning power, poverty and oppression, and the work of the kingdom of God. The Gospel of Mark is fruitful ground

31. To this end, Gutiérrez writes, “The kingdom of love and justice is God’s plan for human history” (Gutiérrez, “Mark 1:14–15,” 429).

32. Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 97; cf. “Theology and the Social Sciences,” 55–56.

33. Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 8; Gutiérrez, “Truth Shall Make You Free,” 97–105.

34. Gutiérrez, “Mark 1:14–15,” 430–31.

for the modern theologian who needs to refine his or her understanding of oppression and the kingdom of God. The Markan Gospel and the writings of Gutiérrez are markedly different in interest and approach, but there are surprising coincidences that occur between the two. The final section is devoted to exploring some of these similarities to highlight Gutiérrez's fine work in showing his sensitivity to these matters. Meanwhile, there is a need to develop a uniquely Markan perspective. With that said, it will not suffice to simply study occurrences of words related to "justice" or "oppression" in Mark; they are simply not enough to be helpful for this study. Rather, this article will discuss Mark in three stages. The first stage concerns the introduction of the gospel and the implications of the announced coming kingdom in 1:14–15. The second stage concerns Mark's characterization of "oppressors," and notes the kingdom language that is often used in description of these characters (paying particularly close attention to 3:1–20). Finally, the last stage concerns Mark's oppressed characters and discusses the implications of their social status for the kingdom of God.

### *The Kingdom Is Near*

At first glance, Mark 1:14–15 is not a passage that shouts liberation. There are a few oddities that might stick out to a first-century reader, and these were not lost in Gutiérrez's reading.<sup>35</sup> However, it would be a mistake to say that Mark 1:14–15 heralds the beginning of a treatise on liberation. The crux of the passage seems to fall on Jesus' proclamation: Πεπλήρωται ὁ καιρὸς καὶ ἤγγικεν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ (The time has been fulfilled, the kingdom of God is near [1:15]). Due to the evident theological implications, there has been some amount of wrangling around ἤγγικεν and its translation.<sup>36</sup> Those who point to an

35. He makes specific reference to socio-ethnic stigmas attached to being from Galilee, and to the execution of John as an introduction to the violent death that people like Jesus can expect (Gutiérrez, "Mark 1:14–15," 427).

36. Kümmel, for instance, suggests that it described the nearness (but not the arrival) of its object (*Promise and Fulfillment*, 24), while Kelber, using a

eschatological fulfillment (or some hybrid form of fulfillment) rely on the translation “is coming,” and their theories are likely farther from Mark’s intention. The term is parallel with the phrase Πεπλήρωται ὁ καιρὸς that indicates the *fulfillment* of a waiting period,<sup>37</sup> and Stanley Porter has demonstrated that ἐγγίζω is better understood as a verb of proximity (“is nearby”) rather than a verb of motion.<sup>38</sup>

However, more interesting than the theological-temporal connections are the literary connections. What Mark seems to be suggesting is that Jesus’ actions following this particular statement are the actions of the coming of the kingdom. One need not look to abstractions of eschatology or the immediacy of temporality when the claim “the kingdom is near” is followed by a description of Jesus’ ministry. The first chapters of Mark describe, in rapid-fire succession,<sup>39</sup> a long series of healings and exorcisms in which the people whom Jesus encounter are freed from demons and healed of disease in fulfillment of the coming of the kingdom of God. In fact, the coming of the kingdom of God and its placement in Mark’s narrative suggest kingdom implications for the majority of Jesus’ ministry.

Of Gutiérrez’s two claims about the passage—that Mark’s association of the kingdom with Galilee places Jesus and his followers under social, political, and religious discrimination, and that John’s execution sets the stage for Jesus’ own oppression—the second is of greater quality.<sup>40</sup> Jesus’ presence in

similar method, came to similar conclusions as Dodd (making connections with translated verbs from the Hebrew Bible to LXX), who claimed that it indicates an arrival (Dodd, *Parables*, 28–30; Kelber, *Kingdom in Mark*, 7; Guelich, *Mark 1—8:26*, 41; Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom*, 72–73). Others insist that the term has both a present and a future dimension, which refers to both the presence of the kingdom in Jesus’ teaching and its eschatological fulfillment (Schnackenburg, *God’s Rule*, 141–42).

37. Cf. Ambrozic, *Hidden Kingdom*, 21–22.

38. Porter, “In the Vicinity of Jericho,” 131–38.

39. Ernest Best was among the first to describe the constant sense of movement in the Gospel of Mark (Best, “Discipleship in Mark,” 326). Here, stories are built on stories with frequent use καὶ εὐθὺς and verbs of motion (most often the aorist ἐγένετο), beginning a new story with every few verses.

40. Gutiérrez, “Mark 1:14–15,” 427.

Galilee in the opening chapters of Mark says very little about his origins. There is no birth narrative, no mention of Jesus' childhood in Nazareth, and no prophetic reference to his Galilean origins. Gutiérrez forces these details onto the Markan account by way of Matthean quotation.<sup>41</sup> There is, however, a structural pattern in the Gospel that describes Jesus' mission in Galilee before proceeding towards Jerusalem for persecution, trial, and death.<sup>42</sup> There is a definite favorable stance towards Galilee in the Gospel, and Gutiérrez is correct to note the stigma that this would hold inside of Jerusalem. However, equally interesting is the immediacy of the violence that is committed against Jesus' earliest supporters in the Gospel (cf. 1:2–9)—these are subtle hints of what is to come for Jesus.

From the outset in the Gospel, the kingdom of God is placed on the social and economic margin through its representative John and in its association with Galilee, and it is subject to the oppressive violence of real political and religious power. Jesus' healings and exorcisms similarly give the kingdom of God a definitively corporeal concern. Real people suffer political and demonic oppression, but Jesus introduces the kingdom of God as an alternative to the violent social and political order of the kingdoms of the world.

*Kingdoms at War (Oppressive Forces in the Gospel of Mark)*

In the first half of Mark, Jesus frequently releases characters from demonic oppression and heals them from disabling disease. Demons and disease in Mark are quite intentionally depicted as oppressive forces and are even described using kingdom language. They are set against the kingdom of God. However, oppression is not left to demons and disease. The too-strong-to-exorcise demon in Mark 5 (as will be demonstrated below) is described using Roman military language. The presence and action of Rome in Mark is depicted as oppressive and stands in stark contrast to the liberty offered by the kingdom of God.

41. Gutiérrez, "Mark 1:14–15," 427–28.

42. Cf. France, *Mark*, 11–15, 34–35; Lohmeyer, *Galiläa*; Lightfoot, *Locality*.

Mark 1:14–15 sets a precedent for the Gospel of Mark. Jesus' actions in ministry accomplish the coming of the kingdom of God. By the middle of the third chapter, Jesus has already healed many and has been described participating in no less than three exorcisms (1:23–28, 32–34; 3:11), with the understanding that this healing and exorcising accomplishes the coming of the kingdom. However, opposition between the kingdom of God and the objects of his exorcisms is drawn into sharp relief in 3:20–30. There, the possessing forces are depicted using kingdom language. The story begins with an accusation from Jesus' opponents that Jesus is himself possessed and is casting out demons by the ruler of demons (3:22). Jesus' response Πῶς δύναται Σατανᾶς Σατανᾶν ἐκβάλλειν (How can Satan cast out Satan?) is illustrated with three parabolic statements, the first of which (καὶ ἐὰν βασιλεία ἐφ' ἑαυτὴν μερισθῆι, οὐ δύναται σταθῆναι ἢ βασιλεία ἐκείνη [If a kingdom revolts against itself, it is not possible for that kingdom to stand]) introduces the idea that the forces that Jesus is working against in his newly-established kingdom are themselves an oppressive kingdom organized under their own demonic ruler (ἄρχων τῶν δαιμονίων [the prince of demons]; 3:22).<sup>43</sup> This parable sets up the idea of a conflict between opposing kingdoms, which is enacted in a parable by the language of insurrection (3:24, 26). This parabolic insurrection language, however, is set up in an *ad hoc* semantic domain (by Markan association) with Jesus' exorcisms. Exorcism of demons in the Gospel of Mark is described metaphorically as the rising up of one kingdom against another. It is not a difficult task to establish that Satan's kingdom is a malevolent and oppressive one,<sup>44</sup> and that the exorcism of

43. ἄρχων carries with it definite imperial connotation, and ought to be included in those domains which describe the inner workings and power structure of βασιλεία. Louw and Nida do not miss this connection (though it is not detailed explicitly), and include both in semantic domain 37, "control, rule" (*Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:477–78; cf. O'Brien, "Principalities and Powers," 110–50).

44. Mark's description of demon possession is torturous (e.g. Mark 5:3–5, 9:17–20), and the victims are often helpless; and he is careful to include

demons in this respect represents a sort of emancipation or, in the language of Gutiérrez, “liberation.”

Mark’s description of cruel oppressive empires is not, however, limited to the demonic realm, although he does make connections between other oppressors and demons. For example, Mark 5:1–13 concerns Jesus’ exorcism of a particularly malevolent set of demons. Mark is detailed in his description of the physical cruelty of the possession (5:2–5), and compounds his description of the demonic cruelty by noting their appetite for destruction, even after the exorcism (5:12–13).<sup>45</sup> However, the name *Λεγιών* (Legion; 5:9) serves as a kind of underhanded evaluation of another oppressor in Mark—the Roman Empire.<sup>46</sup> Mark is not hesitant to associate Rome with the violent beating and crucifixion of Jesus (15:15–27), which details Pilate’s casual issuance of a death warrant and orders for his torture (15:15), the Roman soldiers’ easy violence and mockery (15:16–20), and their boredom at Jesus’ crucifixion (15:22–24). He makes frequent reference to Rome in Roman terminology<sup>47</sup> and, in

stories in which the possessed are helpless, sometimes children (for example, see 7:25; 9:21).

45. Typically, commentators focus on the nature of Jesus’ authority over the demons in their request to possess a herd of pigs. Guelich takes this stance, accusing Schenke of “softening Jesus’ role in the destruction of the swine” by placing the request for the destruction of the swine on the demons (Guelich, *Mark 1—8:26*, 282; cf. Schenke, *Wundererzählungen*, 185). This is entirely unnecessary—Jesus’ authority over the demons has already been well established. The demons’ request not to be cast out of the region has little to do with an authoritative stance, and has very much to do with the insatiable violence with which Mark characterizes the demons.

46. The reason given for the name in Mark is *πολλοί ἐσμεν* (we are many; 5:9). Myers notes that this is an entirely unique use of the term, that is, that *Λεγιών* is never elsewhere used to describe “many” of anything (Myers, *Binding the Strongman*, 190–92). While this particular claim is demonstrably false (see Lane, *Mark*, 184), there is an interesting correlation between Mark’s depiction of a violent legion of demons and use of language commonly used to describe a cohort of Roman soldiers.

47. That is, he warns of the judgment of governors and kings (13:9), which are vague enough to be eschatological, but reminiscent of Roman colonial language. He also addresses Caesar and Pilate directly (12:17; 15:1–15), associates Jesus’ crucifixion with a centurion (15:39) and his beating with

every instance where Rome is the subject, the scene is one of sanctioned cruelty.<sup>48</sup> Mark is even careful to warn the disciples of the danger that they will face from authorities in the future (13:7–12).

However, there is no exorcism of the Jerusalem Legion (cf. 5:8–10), nor any promise of political liberation from Roman oppression. Instead, in response to a warning of impending danger from present and coming earthly kingdoms, the promise is given that *ὁ δὲ ὑπομείνας εἰς τέλος οὗτος σωθήσεται* (the one who perseveres to the end will be saved; 13:13). Persecution is inevitable. Jesus' kingdom, however, is markedly different from the kingdoms of the world, and, wherever Jesus' kingdom comes, there is freedom from oppression. The kingdom is still not "fully come." Followers of Jesus are guaranteed freedom but may have to struggle under the oppression of ungodly kingdoms. However, if they remain through oppression, the kingdom of God offers complete liberation in the end. In this way, the Gospel of Mark is a kind of predecessor for Gutiérrez's work. The Gospel envisions a cosmic conflict between the kingdom of God and other malevolent kingdoms that work together to oppress the helpless, both physically and spiritually. What is called for is salvation from the forces of oppression; Jesus' saving actions bring liberty not only from spiritual oppression but also from social isolation and physical violence. Jesus' kingdom is at work on every plane of conflict and results in true liberation from every oppressor.

a whole cohort of Roman soldiers (15:16), and even uses Roman language to describe an army of possessing demons (5:8–10).

48. Simmonds even suggests that Jesus' trial before the council is a carefully hidden seditious message. Simply, what appears to be "a Jewish crowd acting extremely badly" to the casual Roman reader might likely be interpreted by a reader under Roman colonialism as the council "acting as Romans in the quintessentially Roman activity of calling for the freeing, sparing, or condemning of gladiators at the games" (Simmonds, "Mark's and Matthew's *Sub Rosa* Message," 734).



*Jesus and the Oppressed in Mark*

It is not enough, however, to examine patterns of freedom and liberation in Mark. There is one other pattern in Mark that is quite easily recognizable and also has implications for the study of oppression. In the Gospel of Mark, certain responses are characterized favorably, and a favorable response from a character exerts literary influence on a reader to follow with the same sorts of responses. Those who align themselves with Jesus in faith are liberated by the kingdom of God in Mark. However, Mark demonstrates his concern for social and political issues by the social standings of those represented favorably in the Gospel. It is the poor, the oppressed, and the outsiders who have a place in the kingdom of God. The political and religious hierarchy find themselves on the outside. These characters who belong to the kingdom of God are outsiders in terms of religious standing, ethnicity, age, and gender.

The faithful characters in Mark are a veritable who's-who of nobodies, but none seem to be portrayed in quite such an oppressed manner as the woman with the blood-flow and the Syro-Phoenician woman. There are a few women who are named as followers of Jesus, who are the only ones at the cross when his followers abandoned him (15:40–41), and who plan to prepare his body for burial (16:1). Many studies treat women uniformly throughout the Gospel as if gender were an organizing feature.<sup>49</sup> However, Mark seems to connect characters based on response and, given their acknowledgement of Jesus on resurrection morning (16:1–8), these women belong with the disciples.<sup>50</sup>

49. Cf. Miller, *Women in Mark's Gospel*; Malbon, "Fallible Followers," 29–48.

50. There has been some speculation that the journey to the tomb to prepare a body was evidence that the women misunderstood Jesus' predictions of a resurrection (see esp. Munro, "Women Disciples in Mark," 239; cf. Shiner's evaluation of Joseph of Arimathea on the same count in "Ambiguous Pronouncement," 3–22). This sort of speculation should not be carried too far. Mark is prolific in his use of motion to setup interaction between Jesus and other characters. The preparation of Jesus' body was not a misunderstanding; it simply brought the women to the tomb. Their negative evaluation comes as the result of their failure to report what they had been commanded, when the

One might consider the woman with blood-flow a Jewish outcast. Her chronic disease is not only medically harmful, but it excludes her from mainstream society. There has been some contention over whether her ritual uncleanness affects her social status, given her Galilean context.<sup>51</sup> However, there appears to be some correlation between the Markan description of the woman in 5:25, 29 and the menstrual purity law (Lev 12:7; 15:25 LXX).<sup>52</sup> The similarities are not strong, though the woman's description is enough to suggest that Mark is aware of the purity laws and making a conscious comparison. Further, those who deny connections between the woman's illness and purity laws do so based on their supposed relevance only to the temple,<sup>53</sup> whereas the Levitical guidelines seem to apply to the whole community. That the woman's story is interwoven with that of a diaspora Jewish religious leader is likely of no small consequence. Mark's description indicates knowledge of ritual practice and an aversion to things impure. Her healing releases her from cultic exclusion. She has been liberated from the disease that caused her to be cast out of religious acceptance, and she is not required in the least to submit to her former oppressors, even though she is culturally acceptable.<sup>54</sup>

The same is true of a second oppressed character, a Syro-Phoenician woman whose daughter is possessed by a demon

tendency of the faithful has been to ignore Jesus' commands to be silent (see Mark 3:12, 7:36, 8:30). The news was simply too good not to tell.

51. See Fonrobert, "Woman with a Blood-Flow," 130.

52. For comparison, see Miller, *Women in Mark's Gospel*, 53.

53. Fonrobert, "Woman with a Blood-Flow," 130.

54. That this is the case is illustrated nicely in Mark's account of another poor woman who aligns herself with the temple through selfless giving (Mark 12:41–44). However, the widow's offering (πάντα ὅσα εἶχεν ἔβαλεν ὅλον τὸν βίον αὐτῆς; all the she had, she put in her whole life; 12:44) is in stark contrast to the description of the temple (οἱ κατασθίοντες τὰς οἰκίας τῶν χηρῶν; those who devour the houses of widows; 12:40). Mark seems to be suggesting that her gift is not quite a commendation, but that it is a sign of Jesus' abandonment of the temple that robbed her of everything that she had (cf. Malbon, "Poor Widow in Mark," 589–604; cf. Wright, "Widow's Mite," 256–65). What follows is Jesus' pronouncement of judgment on the temple. It will be destroyed with no hope of restoration (13:1–2).

(7:24–30). Demon possession is not the only evidence of oppression in this passage. Mark has already demonstrated Jesus' ability to release characters from that oppression. Nor even is it her gender that is at stake.<sup>55</sup> Jesus has already healed a ritually unclean Jewish woman (5:25–29). The woman and her child are outsiders based on their ethnicity.<sup>56</sup> There are significant problems posed by Jesus' early interaction with the Gentile woman. Jesus' words to the woman are particularly cruel and bring to the fore the tension between the woman's Gentile and Jesus' Jewish heritage.<sup>57</sup> This is the tension that Mark needed to emphasize, and this is the tension that is eventually resolved in the passage: Jesus has something to offer those who do not belong to Israel and, though the tone of the conversation suggests that the Gentiles are a second choice, there is no indication whatsoever that Mark prefers those of Jewish heritage. Mark even argues for the downfall of the structures that enforce this tension. In the end, she is commended by Jesus for her answer, and her daughter is emancipated from her demon (7:29). Following this, the story comes to a close, and the woman disappears from the narrative.<sup>58</sup> However, by healing the woman's daughter, Jesus essentially invalidates the ritual and ethnic separation that make the woman and her daughter outsiders.

There are many other instances of liberation in the Gospel of Mark: (1) a man with a withered hand aligns himself with Jesus when given a choice to do as Jesus tells him or obey the

55. Contra Miller, *Women in Mark's Gospel*, 93.

56. This is indicated by Jesus' response to her persistent appeals for exorcism and by Mark's careful description of her ethnic background (7:26–27; cf. Miller, *Women in Mark's Gospel*, 97; Iverson, *Gentiles in the Gospel of Mark*, 45).

57. Miller notes a number of references in which Gentiles are referred to as "dogs" to suggest that it was a commonly used derisive title (*Women in Mark's Gospel*, 97).

58. This is typical of minor/faithful characters in the Gospel. They appear in a scene only long enough to interact with Jesus, with the notable exception of Barnabas, who Williams uses as a kind of summary character (Williams, *Other Followers*, 151–71).

commands of the religious elite (3:1–6); (2) a Jewish synagogue leader (i.e., a diaspora worshiper) disobeys ritual purity laws and is rewarded with the life of his daughter (5:22–43); and (3) a man who cannot walk aligns himself with Jesus by allowing Jesus to “work” his healing on the Sabbath and is released from his inability to walk and his sin (2:3–12).

At every stage, the Gospel of Mark tells the story of the emancipation from ritual, gender, and even racial exclusions of those who are willing to side with him. The kingdom of God in the Gospel of Mark is on the side of the excluded and is interested in their release from oppression. For Gutiérrez, it is the concern of the Christian to continue the work of creation by establishing systems in which the outcasts are allowed participation, dignity, and relief. For Mark, this was accomplished in the ministry of Jesus—those who suffered due to some social or religious stigma were given passage into the kingdom of God and out of the corporeal causes of their suffering. Both envision the reordering of the cosmos that is currently dominated by violence and exclusion through the liberation of the oppressed and outcast.

#### *Conclusions: A Canonical and Modern Theological Dialogue*

The initial difficulty in setting up this conversation between Mark the Evangelist and Gustavo Gutiérrez is their mode of communication. That is, Gutiérrez, taking up the mantle passed on to him from the earliest fathers, has written his theology in propositional prose. Gutiérrez’s concerns are demonstrably with the social and economic situation in Latin America and are developed within the framework of the Roman Catholic Church and in dialogue with the Second Vatican Council. Quite to the contrary, Mark writes his theology in narrative form, and leaves a proposition to his characters. Essentially, the task of this paper was to exegete two theologians writing with a concern for a particular subject, with a few basic caveats. First, we assume the canonical authority of Mark over Gutiérrez, but do not necessarily need to conform him to a Markan view. Second, we approach Mark to discover his (evident) concern for the

oppressed, but do not need to explain the whole of the Gospel along those lines. As a result, it is possible to identify a common concern with violence and oppression and a governing order. The kingdom of God in Mark, and the church for Gutiérrez, both accomplish a reordering of the sinful and violent cosmos by releasing the oppressed from their oppressors and aligning with the outcast.

There are significant differences between the two as well. But most of these concern their individual approaches to praxis. For example, Gutiérrez makes it clear that Christian conversion, spirituality, and salvation are all intricately entangled with a theology of liberation. The pursuit of the kingdom of God is the pursuit of justice. For Mark, the emphasis on Christian action is there—it is rhetorically encouraged by positive characterization of those who would normally be excluded. However, Mark's theology of oppression and the oppressed is more concerned with who is welcome in the kingdom, and what God does and will do for those who persevere through persecution.

There are also some correlations between the two that are quite encouraging—the canon and those whose concern is to constantly re-consider Christian theology are, in this instance, pleasantly harmonized. Both Mark and Gutiérrez see the unwelcome as welcome to God, both see weakness in religious hierarchy that ignores human need, both see the implications of oppression and liberation beyond the normal scope of religious life and into social status and the political realm, and both propagate a Gospel in which the kingdom of God is a safe haven for everyone who should not belong, who cannot afford to belong, or who are not accepted by mainstream society. The kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

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