

## Columnists

## Liberation theology and the curial ax

By Father Richard P. McBrien

Father Gustavo Gutierrez, a diocesan priest from Lima, Peru, has recently turned 60.

He is generally regarded as the founder of Latin American liberation theology — a movement that is anathema to some and a matter of supreme indifference to most.

Liberation theology pays special attention to the book of Exodus in the Old Testament and the Gospel of Luke in the New Testament. The God who emerges from the pages of these two books of the Bible is a God who liberates us from oppression and leads us into a new land of promise and hope. In particular, this God is a God of the poor and for the poor.

This is the content of liberation theology. But liberation theology is also important for its method, i. e., for its way of doing theology.

The liberation theologian believes that one cannot reflect properly on the faith unless one enters into the situation and experience of the poor, the powerless, and the oppressed. To understand the God of liberation, one must participate in the work of liberation.

For years, politically conservative Catholics in Latin America and elsewhere have criticized liberation theology. They say it is Marxist because it sometimes uses Marxist forms of social analysis. They call it humanistic because of its concentration on politics and economics. They say it is anti-Church because it encourages the formation of base communities that are independent of the local bishop. They say it is anti-religious because it ignores the needs of the spirit.

Although none of these charges can be fairly laid at Gustavo Gutierrez's doorstep, there is a worry these days that the Vatican will eventually censure him for his role in the creation and development of Latin American liberation theology.

Heretofore, efforts to gain the support of the Peruvian hierarchy for such a censure have failed. At the center of the bishops' phalanx in Gutierrez's defense has been Lima's Cardinal Juan Landazuri Ricketts. But Cardinal Ricketts is about to retire.

Speculation is abroad that the longstanding conservative campaign against Father Gutierrez may now succeed. Not only is his cardinal-protector about to leave the scene, but the Peruvian bishops' conference as a whole is lurching rightward. At least seven new bishops are members of Opus Dei. One always has to

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say "allegedly" when talking about Opus Dei because the organization is shrouded in secrecy, contrary to the Gospel's injunction to let our light shine before the world, and contrary also to its notice that only the children of darkness fear the light.

If and when a censure is imposed upon Gustavo Gutierrez, one can safely predict that some North American Catholics will immediately applaud the action without ever having read so much as a paragraph of the man's writings, much less one of his books.

Although Father Gutierrez has produced several other works since his groundbreaking *A Theology of Liberation* appeared in 1971 (English translation, 1973), that book will always be his most important. It is the classic text of Latin American liberation theology, and no one can pretend to have grasped liberation theology apart from it.

In that book, Gutierrez makes it clear that he understands liberation as a three-dimensional reality.

Firstly, liberation is economic, social, and political in character. It lifts the burden of oppression from the backs of the poor and the persecuted.

Secondly, liberation is an historical process, for it is on the stage of history that the human race assumes conscious responsibility for its own destiny.

Thirdly, liberation is spiritual. It is Christ who liberates us from sin, which is the ultimate root of all injustice and oppression.

Liberation, Gutierrez has written, "finds its deepest sense and its full realization in the saving work of Christ."

You can be sure that Father Gutierrez's detractors will completely ignore all this if the curial ax should ever fall. After all, doesn't history teach us that the censors are always right and the censored always wrong?

Or is it the other way around?

## Diocese seeks sponsors for Amerasians

Bishop Matthew H. Clark and Catholic Family Center's Refugee Resettlement program are asking individuals and parishes to sponsor Amerasians who will be admitted to the United States through the "Amerasian Homecoming Act" of 1987.

Officials of the Migration and Refugee Services branch of the United States Catholic Conference (USCC) estimate that as many as 8,000 Amerasians and 22,000 immediate family members still remain in Vietnam, where they are typically considered outcasts. All are eligible for resettlement in the United States, thanks to the 1987 legislation.

As one of 10 preferred sites identified by the USCC, the Diocese of Rochester will be asked to resettle as many as 150 Amerasian "cases" during the next two years.

The main cost to the sponsor of a refugee

case is measured in time — an estimated 10 hours per week for up to 12 weeks. Sponsors are asked to meet refugees at the airport, transport them to temporary or permanent housing and to various medical and social service appointments, help collect furniture, bedding, clothing and other necessary items, and help guide them toward self-sufficiency.

The cost of sponsorship should be minimal, since the USCC and Catholic Family Center provide each refugee with \$250 to cover basic needs until social services allowances are available.

For more information, or to arrange a presentation on resettlement for parishes or other groups, contact Jim Delaney, Catholic Family Center refugee resettlement manager, at (716)546-7220, ext. 659.

## Spiritual Life Forum series planned for Divinity School

The Divinity School and St. Bernard's Institute will present the sixth Spiritual Life Forum series, entitled "Spiritual Growth and the Gift of Diversity," beginning September 26.

Sponsored by the Rochester Center for Theological Studies, Colgate Rochester/Bexley Hall/Crozer Theological Seminary and St. Bernard's Institute, the series is based on the interrelation between spirituality and ministry.

On Monday, Sept. 26, Sister Barbara Moore, RSM, executive director of Rochester Interfaith Jail Ministry, Inc., will lead a program entitled "Spiritual Growth and Social Diversity: The Challenge of the Really 'Other.'"

Dr. Robert M. Franklin Jr., a preacher, teacher and student of the thought and ministry of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., will deliver a lecture entitled "Spiritual Growth and Public Conflict: Toward a Ministry of Peace-making" on Monday, Oct. 24.

Dr. Roslyn A. Karaban and Dr. Devadasan N. Premnath will close out the series on Monday, Nov. 21, with a forum entitled "Spiritual Growth and Global Vision: The Experience and Sharing of Cultural Variation." Dr. Karaban, an assistant professor of Ministry

Studies at St. Bernard's, joined the faculty in 1987. Dr. Premnath is an adjunct instructor in Biblical Studies at St. Bernard's.

All programs, which are free and open to the public, will begin at 1 p.m. in the Divinity School Auditorium, 1100 S. Goodman St., Rochester. Registration is required. Call (716)271-1320, ext. 290, for information.

## Two support groups to meet

Mental Health Association-sponsored support groups for care-givers of the elderly now meet in two locations in Monroe County.

The Rochester group meets on the second and fourth Thursday of each month from 7-9 p.m. at the Association's Carriage House, 973 East Avenue. The Brockport group meets on the second and fourth Monday of each month from 7-9 p.m. at the First Presbyterian Church, 35 State St., Brockport.

Both groups are professionally facilitated and are open to anyone caring for and about an older person. The groups are free and pre-registration is not required.

For more information on either group, call the association at (716)423-9490.



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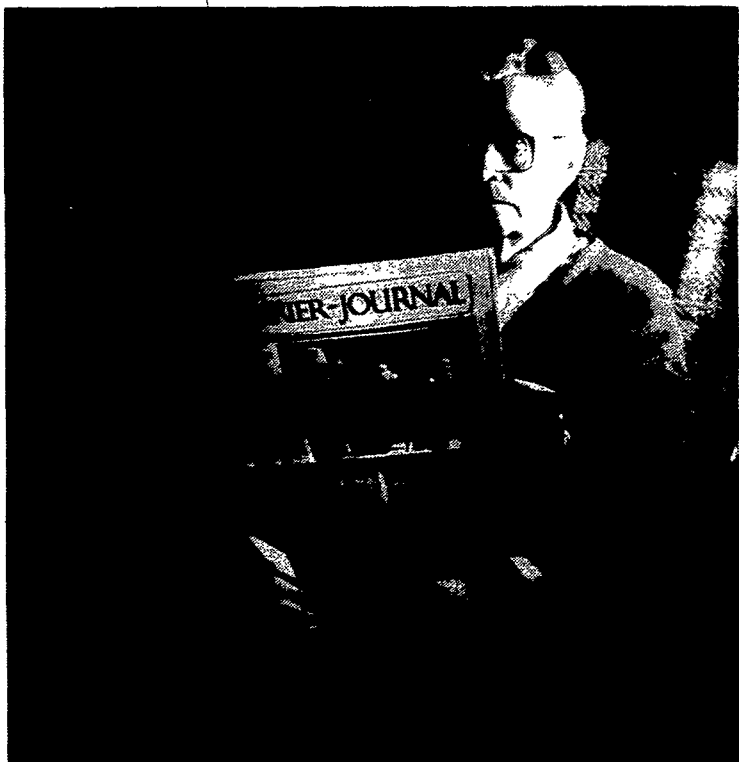
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