

RECOGNITION FOR PASTOR ESTHER PÉREZ

This past December 5, my student Esther Pérez received the “Champions of Change” medal here in Mexico City from the Gandhi Mandela Foundation for her work with collectives of mothers and families who are searching for their loved ones who have disappeared in Mexico. The Gandhi Mandela Foundation is a non-profit organization that promotes human rights, civil liberties, and individual freedom around the world. The name of Esther’s collective is “Una luz en el camino,” that is, “A light on the path.”



Esther is an independent Lutheran pastor whom I have worked with for many years as a professor at Augsburg Lutheran Seminary and the Theological Community of Mexico. Over this past year, I have been working with her as she has been writing her thesis for her Master’s Degree in Critical Gender Studies at the Theological Community. Her thesis is on the same subject for which she received her medal and is titled, “In Search of Meaning: Hope and Resilience in the Face of Forced Disappearances.”

At the event at which Esther received her medal, members of the collective with which she works mentioned that over 117,000 families in Mexico are searching for loved ones who have disappeared. These disappearances take place for many different reasons, usually for motives related to gender violence and injustice, political issues, and organized crime.



The mothers who have formed collectives to look for their children such as the one with which Esther works often spend years looking for their children. In many cases, they gather in groups to scour the countryside looking for places where their children may have been buried. They also constantly seek information and leads that may allow them to locate their children. In most cases, those who do succeed in finding out what happened to their child are able only to recover their remains, which are often incomplete. Occasionally, they find their son or daughter alive as a result of their searches, although even in those cases the trauma that they suffer together is immense.



Esther’s ministry involves working closely with mothers searching for their children to provide them with spiritual, psychological, and emotional support and accompaniment. In her thesis, she addresses the question of how the discipline known as Logotherapy can be used to help mothers who continue to search for their child find meaning and hope in life, given that in most cases those searches are unsuccessful and may consume them for many years. We rejoice with Esther on the recognition of her important work!



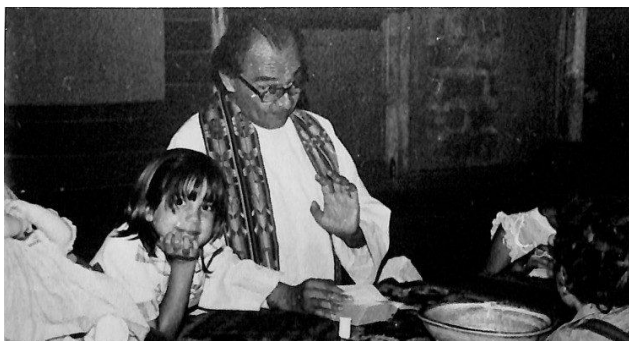
REMEMBERING GUSTAVO GUTIÉRREZ, FATHER OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY

This past October 22, the Catholic priest and theologian who is regarded by many as the father of Latin American liberation theology, Gustavo Gutiérrez, passed away at the age of 96 years. Father Gutiérrez leaves a legacy that has impacted countless lives throughout Latin America and the world as a result of the manner in which his theological work has led churches and Christians to understand the accompaniment of the poor and marginalized as lying at the heart of the biblical gospel.



Father Gutiérrez's most important work, titled "Theology of Liberation: Perspectives," was first published in 1971. It followed years of ministry accompanying the poor in his native Peru and also built upon the pastoral and theological work of others in Latin American churches who were very critical of the manner in which their churches had neglected the poor and marginalized and in many cases had been complicit in supporting systems that were extremely oppressive.

At the time, his understanding of the gospel and the church's mission was highly controversial and generated a great deal of opposition not only in the public sphere but in the churches themselves, especially among the hierarchies who felt threatened by his ideas.



Father Gutiérrez visited Mexico many times and also spoke at events sponsored by the Theological Community of Mexico where I teach, giving me the chance to meet him in person. In my classes I use his work frequently with my students. This next semester, for example, I will be teaching a course on Latin American Readings of Biblical Texts in which I will assign readings from chapters of his 1971 book, which continues to be widely studied and read around the world both in Spanish and in translations into English and many other languages.



Among the most important contributions of Father Gutiérrez to theological thought and biblical interpretation was his proposal that theology be understood primarily as a method rather than a series of contents. Instead of taking the Bible or Christian doctrine as a starting-point for our theology, Father Gutiérrez argued that we must begin by analyzing from a critical perspective the social reality around us on the basis of our commitment to the values we encounter in Jesus' own proclamation of the gospel. We then look to that gospel not only to speak words of hope and justice to that reality but also to develop the same praxis of solidarity that we find in Jesus' ministry. It is this methodology that I continue to use today in my own work.

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