

# Sin and Salvation in Relation to Male Violence Against Women - A Perspective of Feminist and Liberation Theologies

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Male violence against women is a massive problem across the world.<sup>2</sup> However, the Christian Churches are now, at last, giving it greater attention in their mission and theology.<sup>3</sup> In this article, I will make a theological contribution to their efforts by offering a feminist theology perspective on sin in relation to this violence and by showing that an option to transform such a situation is consistent with the theology of salvation through liberation of Gustavo Gutierrez.<sup>4</sup> I will begin by reviewing key literature on sin in relation to the violence from a feminist theology

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<sup>2</sup> *The Progress of Nations Report 1997*, a report by UNICEF, said that violence against women "was the most pervasive violation of human rights in the world today." While the report recognizes that women perpetrate some of this violence, and that men as such are not the problem, its focus is on the web of meaning and structures that derive from a hegemonic masculinity and its interaction with related structures in society and between societies.

<sup>3</sup> See "To Live Without Fear: A Statement by the Permanent Council of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops Condemning Violence Against Women" (June 1991), *Catholic International* (November 15-30, 1991), 1036-37; Ecumenical Canadian Church Leaders, "Violence Against Women", *Origins* (Vol. 21: No. 46, April 1992); New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference, *Statement on Family Violence* (September 18, 1992), 1-4; U.S. Bishops' Committees on Women in Church and Society, and on Marriage and Family Life; "When I Call for Help: Domestic Violence Against Women", *Origins* (Vol. 22: No. 21, November 5, 1992), 1, 355-58; "One In Christ Jesus: Excerpts from the Final Report by the United States Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee for a Pastoral Response to 's Concerns", *Catholic International* (May 1993), 205-10; Mejia, Bishop Jorge. "The Roots of Violence Against Women", *Origins* (Vol. 23: No. 21, November 4, 1993), 1, 371; The Ballycastle Declaration, "Violence Against Women in Europe: Our Story" in *Decade Link: Ecumenical Decade - Churches in Solidarity with 1988-1998* (March 1995), 4-7; John Paul II, *Letter to* (London: CTS, 1995); Irish Commission for Justice and Peace Working Group on in Church and Society, "Violence Against Women," *Intercom* (September 1995), 12; John Paul II, "Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace", (January 1, 1998); Conference of European Churches and European Bishops' Conferences, "Violence Against Women" (May 1999), and "It Happens Everywhere - Including Your Community" (May 1999); The Irish Commission for Justice and Peace and the Pastoral Commission of the Irish Bishops' Conference, *Domestic Violence* (Dublin, 2000). See also documents by conferences of Roman Catholic bishops in China (1995), Uganda (1996), Zambia (1997) and Malawi (1998) for references concerning violence against women. We are currently in a decade in which the World Council of Churches is giving special attention to violence against women.

<sup>4</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez is a founder of liberation theology and the person who gave it its name.

perspective. I will then attend to the theology of salvation through liberation of Gustavo Gutierrez with a view to identifying its concern for the transformation of this sinful situation of violence.

### **A Feminist Theology Perspective on Sin in Relation to Male Violence Against Women**

Valerie Saiving Goldstein wrote a groundbreaking article in 1960, entitled 'The Human Situation: A Feminine View.'<sup>5</sup> The article argues that the gender differential must be taken into account in attending to and addressing sin<sup>6</sup> and in articulating and advancing what communion with God and each other means. This applies reflexively, of course, to theologians whose praxis of authenticity is the foundation of theology.<sup>7</sup>

Because, for Saiving Goldstein, gender conditioning, social location and the social context were not the same for men and women as groups in society, the patterns of thinking, feeling, valuing and behaving of men and women were also different and these differences extended to the forms sin took for them and, therefore, to the sinful temptations they experienced. Sin, for men, she wrote at the time, took the form more of pride and a will to power - the first deadly sin<sup>8</sup> - whereas in women sin had more to do with self relegation and an under-valuation of the self, with not taking themselves - their selves - seriously enough, and trivialising what they had to offer. Men tended to inflate, and women to deflate their own boundaries. Men tended to exaggerate, and women to underestimate, their own importance. Men tended to be self assertive, women to be submissive. For women in that situation, therefore, a notion and language of sin which was worked out in relation to the ruling position of men could not be interpreted with equal validity for women without adding to their subordination. Conversely, the content of conversion would have to be different for

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<sup>5</sup> In Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, eds., *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), 25-42. Originally published in the *Journal of Religion*, 1960.

<sup>6</sup> Saiving Goldstein's article has been described as "a first effort at what is now named feminist theology." It is interesting to note that this first effort focused on the doctrine of sin. It is also interesting to note that according to Gutierrez "(i)n my own approach to theology, sin occupies a central place." See G. Gutierrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 138. See, also, n. 123 in the same text.

<sup>7</sup> This is a position that emerges from a reading of the works of Bernard Lonergan, and self-attention in doing theology. See in particular, Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999 edit.), 14 and 254.

<sup>8</sup> The Seven Deadly Sins, as they were called, were: Pride, Envy, Anger, Sloth, Avarice, Gluttony, and Lust. See Richard Cohen, "Revisiting the Seven Sins," *The Tablet* (28 February 1998), 279-80 and Sara Maitland, "Proud to be Proud," *The Tablet* (21 March 1998), 379-80.

men and women. While she was not writing about sin in the context of male violence against women – the lens of violence in relation to the situation of women is a more recent one<sup>9</sup> - her perspective highlights why Lucia Scherzberg has been led to say, “(the) greatest importance must be given to the effects a specific doctrine has on praxis.”<sup>10</sup>

Saiving Goldstein’s perspective means that the hegemonic theology of sin at that time functioned in such a way as to make women vulnerable to violence from men, and to further disempowerment in the face of the need to assert themselves against this violence.<sup>11</sup> Her article leads us to ask: what would happen if sin among women was seen as indifference towards the self and towards alignment with other women in a situation of male violence against women, or as a trivialising or minimising of the violence, or as resignation or lack of courage to react to the violence of subordination, exploitation, degradation, mutilation, marginalisation, or exclusion of the self and other women, instead of as pride<sup>12</sup> and anger, to take the first two cardinal / deadly sins as examples?<sup>13</sup>

There have been developments in the theology of sin within a feminist horizon since Saiving Goldstein’s article. These, too, need to be taken into account in dealing with the pertinent violence. A number of them will now be presented.

Firstly, Rosemary Radford Ruether, a leading Roman Catholic feminist theologian, brings the gendering of sin back beyond Saiving Goldstein’s attention to

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<sup>9</sup> It is only in the 1990s that violence has become such a strong lens for reading the situation of women. This is exemplified by the United Nations *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women* in 1993. See, also, the footnote above concerning documents published by the Churches in the 1990s.

<sup>10</sup> See her “‘Guilt’ and ‘sin’ in feminist theology,” *Theology Digest* 39:3 (Fall 1992), 201-4 at 203.

<sup>11</sup> The Dutch study on Christianity and incest brings this out. See Annie Imbens and Ineke Jonker, *Christianity and Incest* (Kent: Burns and Oates, 1992; orig Dutch, 1985).

<sup>12</sup> On pride as “the most deadly of the deadly sins”, see Sara Maitland, “Proud to be Proud,” *The Tablet* (21 March 1998), 379-80. In sections 17-31 of book I of his *The City of God* Augustine asks why did God let rape happen to good Christian women. His answer is that God may have been humbling them for having unconscious pride. See Mary Pellauer with Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, “Conversation on Grace and Healing,” in *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside*, ed. Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engel (Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1998, revised and expanded edition), 177-192 at 185. See Augustine, *City of God* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963).

<sup>13</sup> For example, women in some parts of the world can now occupy positions that, formerly, they could not aspire to, or were excluded from, and this places them in a situation that can make them more vulnerable to the sin of the will to unjust power. On the same point from another angle, organisations, events, and documents on the side of women have come into being since Saiving Goldstein wrote her article. These change the conditions under which women live their lives, and leave many women at least less subject to the sin of the underdevelopment of self. For example, to my question about young women dropping out of school, a young woman in a slum in Nairobi replied in 1997, “we have Beijing now.” The Beijing Conference of 1995 was the biggest and most international gathering of women to address the situation of women in human history.

the seven deadly sins of Christian tradition<sup>14</sup> to the doctrine of original sin. She points out that sin in Christianity “is not simply individual but refers to a fallen state of humanity”<sup>15</sup> and she rejects patriarchy<sup>16</sup> and androcentrism<sup>17</sup> because she regards them as expressions of this ‘original sinfulness.’ This approach emphasises that while sin refers to the reactions of individuals to situations and structures, it also refers to the impact of situations and structures on individuals that have originated with a fallen humanity. Patricia Wismer adds to what Radford Ruether says here when she reminds us that the very account of original sin in the Bible, which scapegoats women, and as a result disables them further in the face of male violence against them, can itself be viewed as part of this original sinfulness.<sup>18</sup>

Because of the preceding and concomitant impact of this original state of affairs, personal context is influenced strongly by social context, so that women in a global situation of male violence against them are under strong pressure to collude in the sinful orientation of the violent social and gendered situation in which they find themselves, and men are under pressure to suppress the truth of that violence. This socially engineered collusion and suppression may be taken as evidence, also, of what the late Juan Luis Segundo called cultural “entropy.”<sup>19</sup>

On this basis patterns of relationships between women and men that contribute to, or are themselves manifestations of, male violence against women are particular derivations of the biosocial-gendered bias that is part of original sinfulness. Such sinfulness cannot be overcome without foundational conversion concerning how to be a person with others and this quality of conversion is not possible, according to the Christian doctrine of salvation, without the liberating action of God’s saving love.

Not surprisingly, therefore, Radford Ruether calls for what Lonergan in his method in theology names conversion, away from patriarchy and androcentrism, to

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<sup>14</sup> On the emergence of the list of the “Seven Deadly Sins”, see Richard Cohen, “Revisiting the Seven Sins,” *The Tablet* (28 February 1998), 279-80.

<sup>15</sup> R. Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God Talk* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 161.

<sup>16</sup> Patriarchy refers to the rule of the father. The rule of the father in the home structured the position and situation of women at all levels of society. Elisabeth Scussler Fiorenza has generated the neologism ‘kyriarchy,’ meaning elite male power, to denote the situation of women.

<sup>17</sup> Androcentrism is the worldview that reads reality from the standpoint of historically hegemonic men. The bodies, minds and ways of being of such men are taken as normative for all humanity.

<sup>18</sup> See Patricia L. Wismer, “For Women in Pain: A Feminist Theology of Suffering,” *In the Embrace of God: Feminist Approaches to Theological Anthropology* (New York: Maryknoll, Orbis Books), 138-158 at 154.

<sup>19</sup> See J. L. Segundo, *Faith and Ideologies* (trans. by John Drury, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, Melbourne: Dove Communications and London: Sheed and Ward, 1984), 190-94.

allow for “a fundamental shift in the valuations of good and evil”.<sup>20</sup> Clearly, this process of conversion involves both men and women although the form of the conversion will differ for each group because their relationship to the sinful situation is not the same. This foundational conversion gives persons the desire and courage to challenge sinful structural determinisms and the cultural suppression of the truth of women “as persons who struggle against sexism for liberation,”<sup>21</sup> to use the phrase of Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza. This call to fundamental conversion away from the originating sin of patriarchy and androcentrism on behalf of the liberation of women as persons tallies with Gustavo Gutierrez’s emphasis on how the “non-person”<sup>22</sup> is central to the process of universal salvation as interrelated liberation.<sup>23</sup>

Secondly, what Marie Fortune, an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ, and a feminist theologian, says about sin and purity qualifies further the generating position of Saiving Goldstein on the gendering of sin,<sup>24</sup> and reaffirms Gutierrez’s emphasis on personhood in the process of interrelated liberation. Fortune notes how in the sphere of sexuality sin was related to impurity. A holy woman was expected, therefore, to do all she could to defend purity, and for Maria Goretti<sup>25</sup> this meant being self assertive to the point where she was killed.<sup>26</sup> The case of Maria Goretti shows that it was not regarded as sinful for women to be self-assertive when what was defined as purity was at stake. It also betrays a theology of sin that failed to understand that male rape of women attacks not only the purity of the women, but also the fullness of their personhood, and damages – and can even destroy - not only sexual parts of their bodies, but also their whole lives. To focus on male violence against women in this way calls for a model of sin in terms of the rupturing of right relations<sup>27</sup> between biosocial-gendered and socially situated persons. God’s saving grace, for women, is then a grace of liberation from being treated as though they were not persons by men, who act as though they themselves are not persons either. It is

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<sup>20</sup> Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God Talk*, 160.

<sup>21</sup> E. Schussler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 53.

<sup>22</sup> For Gutierrez, non-persons are so called because they are treated as though they are not persons.

<sup>23</sup> Liberation, for Gutierrez, is an integral reality that encompasses liberation from unjust public structures, internal psychological oppressions (including a loss of utopian hope), and sin.

<sup>24</sup> Marie Marshall Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1983), 61-92.

<sup>25</sup> Maria Goretti was born in 1890 and killed in 1902. She was killed while resisting attempted rape.

<sup>26</sup> A woman who had been raped when she was a teenager told me that after the rape she felt that she was not holy enough because, unlike Maria Goretti, she was still alive.

<sup>27</sup> Salvation as right relations is the preferred model for Marie Fortune in the context of violence against women. See her *Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1983), 76-92.

only in recent years, however, that Catholic teaching has begun to speak of male violence against women as sin.<sup>28</sup>

Thirdly, Saiving Goldstein's position has to be revised in the light of pastoral evidence concerning the psychological significance of defensive reactions of women to male violence perpetrated on them. While agreeing with Saiving Goldstein that we must interpret sin in ways that promote a desire in women to participate in their liberation from biosocial-gender structured oppression, we also need to keep in mind that women who are subject to violence or abuse may distort their feelings, go numb, go into denial, dissociate from themselves, etc.,<sup>29</sup> especially if they have been socialised to believe that anger is sinful. As a result they can lose contact with their selves. In the light of Saiving Goldstein's analysis of sin in women as failure to stand up for themselves, such responses could be construed as sinful. But as Mary Potter Engel notes, because such responses may enable the women to survive what was done to them until they are able later - if at all - to face up to their experience in a more healing way, they are better viewed as "a form of life-seeking grace."<sup>30</sup> These responses, therefore, are not necessarily a sinful refusal to stand up for the self and can instead be a graced self-loving survival tactic.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, as the Jewish feminist Judith Plaskow points out, graced behaviour by women may not be endless self-sacrifice, but friendship, solidarity, co-creation, and joy in relation.<sup>32</sup>

Fourthly, other influences from Christianity besides our understanding of sin have also been identified in the intervening years as having played a part in the formation of submissiveness as a Christian value for women, and so of the intensifying vulnerability of women to male violence. For example, biblical women like Eve, Mary of Nazareth as a virgin mother and Mary of Magdala as a sexual sinner<sup>33</sup> have been used to "mutilate women as persons," to use the expression of Gutierrez, and the household codes texts of the Second Testament<sup>34</sup> have been used to reinforce traditions of inferiority and submission of women in the First Testament.

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<sup>28</sup> See the publications listed in n. 3 above.

<sup>29</sup> Mary Potter Engel, "Evil, Sin and Violation of the Vulnerable," in *Lift Every Voice*, 159-171 at 167.

<sup>30</sup> Sally Ann Reynolds and Ann O'Hara Graff, "Sin: When Women Are the Context," in *In The Embrace of God*, 161-172 at 164.

<sup>31</sup> Potter Engel, "Evil, Sin and Violation of the Vulnerable," 167.

<sup>32</sup> See Reynolds and O'Hara Graff, "Sin: When Women Are the Context," 163.

<sup>33</sup> There is no evidence in the scripture to say that Mary of Magdala was a sexual sinner.

<sup>34</sup> See Col 3:18 - 4:1 ('Wives, give way to your husbands, as you should in the Lord'); Eph 5:21-33 ('Wives should regard their husbands as they regard the Lord'); 1 Peter 2:11-3:12 ('The husband is the lord of his wife'). While the following texts encourage a patriarchal pattern of relationship, they are

Fifthly, since the publication of Saiving Goldstein's article a more differentiated feminism has emerged as a result of changes in both human awareness in relation to the situation of women and actual changes in that situation in the intervening period.<sup>35</sup>

Sixthly, current findings in gender studies, which undermine the binary model of biological men and women, and which also detail the prevalence of masculinities and femininities have implications for her theory.<sup>36</sup>

Seventhly, one of the most significant developments in the world situation concerning male violence against women since the publication of Saiving Goldstein's article has been the growing global movement against this violence. This movement of masses of women, and a minority of men, testifies, according to a theological consciousness, to the increasing shift by women away from what, for Saiving Goldstein, was their biosocial-gendered and socially structured sinfulness and towards what, for Gutierrez, is the reception and objectification of the authentic saving grace of God's interrelated liberating love.

This brief review of key literature on a feminist theological perspective on sin shows that part of the task of overcoming male violence against women involves developing and inculcating a correct notion of sin in relation to the experience of women. It helps to explain why Elizabeth Johnson has been moved to say that, in her judgement, "anyone who would underestimate the wrongs occasioned by sexist prejudice deserves the classic rebuke that Anselm gave to his questioner Boso:...'you have not yet weighed the gravity of sin'".<sup>37</sup>

### **The Situation of Women in the Writings of Gustavo Gutierrez**

The theology of liberation of Gustavo Gutierrez does not adopt a biosocial-gender perspective on sin, nor does it focus explicitly on sin in relation to male violence against women. Still, closer scrutiny of his theology does disclose

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not formulated according to the literary pattern of a Graeco-Roman household code: 1 Tim 2:9-15 (I am not giving permission for a woman to tell her husband what to do); Titus 2:5 (wives are to do as their husbands tell them).

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Mary Ann Zimmer, "Stepping Stones in Feminist Theory," in *In The Embrace Of God*, 7-21. See Delores Williams, "A Womanist Perspective on Sin," in *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*, ed. Emily M. Townes (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 130-49 for a feminist theological perspective on the relationship between sin and violence against African-American women.

<sup>36</sup> See R. W. Connell, *Gender* (Oxford: Polity, 2002, 2004 edit.)

<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson. *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992, 1994 edition), 28.

developing concern within it about such violence as well as grounds in the doctrines of sin and salvation to overcome it.<sup>38</sup>

Although he did mention women and their experiences at the beginning of the original English language version of *A Theology of Liberation* (1973), he then went on in that book to develop his argument about the relationship between Christianity and liberation in a way that seemed ignorant of the hegemonic male character of Church and society.<sup>39</sup> Still, the inclusion of male violence against women is utterly consistent with the heuristic<sup>40</sup> and aim of his theology. Any doubt that such an inclusion was not intended by him has been removed by what he said during a discussion of his work at Lyons in 1985 and by what he wrote in the Introduction to the revised English language version of *A Theology of Liberation* which was published in 1988. In 1985 he said that his notion of liberation referred to all “limitations on a full human life”,<sup>41</sup> and in 1988 he wrote: “From the outset, liberation was seen as something comprehensive, an integral reality from which nothing is excluded, because only such an idea of it explains the work of him in whom all the promises are fulfilled (see 2 Cor. 1:20).”<sup>42</sup> He also says in that text: “The entire Bible beginning with the story of Cain and Abel, mirrors God’s predilection for the weak

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<sup>38</sup> In doing so he reflects his contact with feminist theology from the Theology of the Americas conference on liberation theologies held in Detroit in 1975, and from his involvement with the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) from its foundation in 1976. This development in his work also reflects his later reading of reality, under the influence of events like these, in terms of and from the side of the non-person as more than an economically poor person.

<sup>39</sup> It is worth noting, however, that Ana Maria Bidegain, a lay Catholic historian of the Church, says that “although he (Gutierrez) did not include the topic in his *A Theology of Liberation*, he was utterly aware of women’s participation in the experience he is systematizing” (in her “Women in the Theology of Liberation”, in *Through Her Eyes: Women’s Theology from Latin America*, ed. Elsa Tamez, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1989, second edition, 28). She also says that, in the 1960s when Gustavo Gutierrez was a young university chaplain in Peru, he always insisted on the importance of respecting the female contribution to the organization (the Union of Latin American Catholic university students) by maintaining a female presence among the national officers” (ibid., 24). According to Celia Tovar, “UNEC: cincuenta años de camino,” *Páginas* 111 (1991): 87-97, at 92, Gutierrez organized seminars for students on such topics as “A Biblical Theology of Women” during his term as chaplain to the university students. James Nickoloff, in *Gustavo Gutierrez: Essential Writings* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 15, the work on Gutierrez that Nickoloff edited with an introduction, also draws attention to the role of Gutierrez in championing theological education for women, especially poor and indigenous women in his own country and throughout Latin America. See *Power*, 102; see, also, *A Theology*, 174 where Gutierrez says that an authentic theology of liberation requires that the oppressed themselves must be empowered to express themselves.

<sup>40</sup> A heuristic is a framework of anticipation. Objects of human intentionality can be known at the level of anticipated meaning before being known at the level of determinate meaning.

<sup>41</sup> G. Gutierrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990, span edit, 1986), 1, 35.

<sup>42</sup> Id., *A Theology of Liberation* (London: SCM Press, 1988, revised edition), xxxviii; see, also, *Truth*, 35.



and the abused of human history.”<sup>43</sup> This reference to the term ‘abused’ and to a situation of male violence,<sup>44</sup> albeit against a man, shows that the concern of his theology is not adequately attended to if it is read through the lens of the situation of the ‘economically poor’. It also, of course, shows, ironically, that he had still not grasped the full extent of what he had no intention of avoiding once his awareness about it had altered further, namely, that the Bible does not show this predilection for abused women from the beginning. The rape of Tamar (2 Sam 13: 1-38)<sup>45</sup> exemplifies this point about the Bible.

Elsewhere in that Introduction he shows explicitly his concern for the situation of women:

We in Latin America are only now beginning to wake up to the unacceptable and inhuman character of their (women) situation. One thing that makes it very difficult to grasp its true character is its hiddenness, for it has become something habitual, part of everyday life and cultural tradition. So true is this that when we point it out we sound a bit like foreigners bent on causing trouble...A growing number of persons are committed to the restoration of women’s rights, even as we realize more and more clearly how intolerable the situation of really is.<sup>46</sup>

...I have come to see with new eyes...the discrimination against women.<sup>47</sup>

He had already said in 1985 that if he were to write *A Theology* at that time and not when he did at the end of the 1960s he would attend much more to “the situation of women.”<sup>48</sup>

He follows the Latin American Catholic bishops at their conference in Puebla, Mexico, in 1979 when he says in a work published in 1991:

(W)omen are marginalized and oppressed not only because they are poor, but also because they are women...the idea of masculine superiority prevails...Machismo reigns and has longstanding and strong historical roots; it

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<sup>43</sup> *Theology*, xxvii. See, also, id., *The God of Life* (London: SCM, 1991), 115-116.

<sup>44</sup> Gutierrez in his writings treats of institutionalized violence, the violence of terrorism and repressive violence, but does so without reference to biosocial-gender. See, for example, his *Theology*, xxi. Given his opposition to violence, however, and the growing attention in his later writings to the situation of women it can be assumed that he would be very much in favour of having his theology support a position like the one being articulated here on a Roman Catholic theological perspective on male violence against women.

<sup>45</sup> See Pamela Cooper-White, *The Cry of Tamar: Violence Against Women and the Church’s Response* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), xiii-42.

<sup>46</sup> *Theology*, xxii.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, xxiii.

<sup>48</sup> *Truth*, 41.

is at the basis of an entire organisation of society and has even penetrated to some extent into the consciousness of women, causing them to feel insecure in many ways.<sup>49</sup>

He speaks, too, about “contempt for women,” which need not take the form of explicit violence but can be expressed in a more insidious violence of exalting them in the abstract and undervaluing them in the concrete,<sup>50</sup> which happens when they are regarded and treated as “slaves whom you must know how to put on thrones.”<sup>51</sup> “We have here,” he says, “a scale of values that displays a deep disdain for the condition of women, who see themselves subjected to shameful tricks for depriving them of their full rights as persons.”<sup>52</sup> He adds that if the “rights of women are not recognized, the society we live in is sick,”<sup>53</sup> and that the “mutilation of women as persons also degrades men as human beings.”<sup>54</sup>

He also refers explicitly and specifically to aspects of the negative role of the Catholic Church and Catholic theology in violence against women when he says that there is a “disproportion in the church between the acknowledged place of Mary and the low value set on women.”<sup>55</sup> He continues:

It will take a great deal of effort to overcome cultural ideas that are so deeply rooted and strongly present in society, especially when we ourselves have in one way or another helped give them their staying power. This has been true even of famous Christian thinkers whose thought was more in harmony with the prejudices of their age than with the judgement and attitude of Jesus. This is an area in which Christians must do penance; but they also face the task of overcoming social inertia, narrow outlooks, and concerns for power.<sup>56</sup>

He is aware that there is also another version of Christian revelation concerning women and he calls for it to be deepened and developed. He goes on himself to do this in relation to Jesus, and Mary.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> *The God of Life*, 165.

<sup>50</sup> Eileen Power speaks of women being relegated to “the pit and the pedestal” in her “The Position of Women,” in C.G. Crump and E.F. Jacobs, eds., *The Legacy of the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938), 401.

<sup>51</sup> This is a quote from Honoré de Balzac, which he includes in *The God of Life*, 166.

<sup>52</sup> *The God of Life*, 165-66.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 167-86.

His reference above to the need for the Church to do penance is an implicit acknowledgement that the Church has sinned where the situation of women is concerned. This hypothesis that the situation of women, for Gutierrez, can be categorised in terms of sin becomes an affirmation when it is referred to how he speaks about sin and about the saving grace of “filiation”.<sup>58</sup> Sin, for Gutierrez, “is present in the denial that a human being is sister or brother to me. It is present in structures of oppression.”<sup>59</sup> Because sin is like that saving love is a gift of “filiation”: “the gift that makes brothers and sisters of all and men...a gift crying for conversion into genuine identification with the interests of human beings suffering the oppression of other human beings.”<sup>60</sup> Conversion to, and reception of, the gift takes the form of working to “make ourselves brothers and sisters to others.”<sup>61</sup>

All this means that, while Gutierrez’s theology of salvation in the key of liberation was originally focused on the economically poor of the world – 70% of whom, it must be added are women<sup>62</sup> - as non-persons, his theology also always allowed, and even required the extension of the category ‘non-person’ to women living in a world of massive male violence against them. This is confirmed in effect by Gutierrez himself in the extracts from his later writings quoted above. It is also consistent with the unifying inscription of God’s gracious saving love in all reality coming more into awareness today and the implications of the preferential option for the non-person at the heart of it being slowly worked out.

## Conclusion

A feminist and liberation theological consciousness of reality enables us to affirm that male violence against women is sin. It also enables us to assert that God’s saving love proceeds in an integral, universal and preferential way from the side of

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<sup>58</sup> G. Gutierrez, *Power*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1983. orig. Span. 1979), 63; see, also, 207, 72, 67, 52 and 18. The term is not free of sexism, but it should be clear from what is being argued here that Gutierrez’s intentions in his theology are anything but sexist, so that the development of a non-sexist language is required by that theology.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>62</sup> WHO (2000), “Gender, Health and Poverty” [<http://www.who.int/inf-fs/en/fact251.html>], 1-3 at 1. There is a general global trend for women to live longer than men (beyond 60) – see Eleonora Barbieri Masini, “Women on the Threshold of the XXIst Century: Hopes and Fears”, *Sedos Bulletin* (January 15, 1996) 21-24 at 21. This trend does not take account of femicide, the killing of the girl child in the womb. Such longevity is also a factor in why more women than men can be found in poverty. More men may die in wars of their own making.

the “non-person”, and that the “non-person” includes women embedded in a global situation of massive male violence against them. It follows that the doctrines of sin and salvation, as interpreted by the perspectives of feminist and liberation theologies, provide religious grounds for the Christian Churches and their theologians to respond transformatively to the challenge posed by such violence. A few practical ways to illustrate how they might do this can now be given:

- 1) Make courses on ‘Christianity, and male violence against women’ compulsory in the curricula of theological colleges and seminaries;
- 2) Provide similar courses in other fora for other constituencies of persons;
- 3) Hold renewal courses for church workers on this issue.
- 4) Publish articles, books, and documents on this phenomenon, and be available to address it in the media;
- 5) Use inclusive language, imagery and examples for God and God’s relationship with the world in liturgy, religious services and prayer groups and avoid readings that can give mistaken messages concerning the violence;
- 6) Give homilies regularly on the issue of ‘Christianity and male violence against women;’
- 7) Develop pastoral outreach to women in situations of violence, and collaborate with civil organisations who do this work, and with organisations like the police who deal with other aspects of the problem;
- 8) Provide sanctuary space for women and their families in situations of violence;
- 9) Develop counselling and other support services for women recovering from such violence;
- 10) Fund initiatives or responses in civil society that are aimed at transforming the situation of violence.