

THE CONCEPT OF "THE PEOPLE" IN LIBERATION THEOLOGY

THESIS

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ABSTRACT

The concept of "the people" has become a key concept within the work of several Latin American theologians, Korean Minjung theologians and South African theologians.

When liberation theologians use the concept of "the people" in their literature they do so with a lack of clarity, to the extent that the exact meaning of the term is obscure.

In their usage of the concept "the people" liberation theologians come up with differing and at times contradictory meanings, particularly as regards the concrete and symbolic meanings of the concept.

This thesis sets out to investigate the use of the concept "the people" by liberation theologians by consulting a selection from Latin American theology, Korean Minjung theology, South African liberation theology and Marxism, to detect its influence on the use of this notion.

A general overview of the thesis indicates the following. The first chapter provides a detailed analysis of the concept of "the people" in the work of different liberation theologians. Chapter two considers "the people" in relation to poverty and oppression. The third chapter deals with "the people" as subjects of history. In the fourth chapter "the people" as a concept is developed in relation to belief within the Christian church. The final chapter is an evaluation.

The thesis reveals that the following characteristics are central to "the people", they are poor and oppressed but are also inclusive of all those persons who identify and actively support the struggle against poverty and oppression. "The people" are subjects of their own history, finally they are Christian believers.

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INTRODUCTION

The term "the people" is being used increasingly in liberation theology. On the surface it would seem that we have a clear notion of what this term means but in fact it lacks a distinct and precise meaning. The meanings and associations that are attached to the usage of the term "the people" are so vague and contradictory, resulting from ambiguity, that the concept is one of those commonly used terms from which one can derive almost anything one wishes. The notion "the people" is obviously basic for liberation theology. In its usage by liberation theologians, the term is often fraught with valuational and emotional overtones. Even though the term "the people" is neutral in itself it is of such a nature that it can be used to mean anything. But the increasing usage of this term in liberation theology is wielded as an argument in itself, often without any line of reasoning and in direct contradiction to the attitudes and ideological systems that are supposedly being defended. It is important to realize how commonplace this practice has become. One discovers that the way this term is used in liberation theology, one appeals to "the people" to make revolutions or to justify oppressive dictatorships disguised as the so-called rule of "the people" or will of "the people". The purpose of this research is to study what liberation theologians mean when they use the term. We will notice that as used by liberation theologians, the concept of "the people" often occurs as a synonym for "the poor", which in turn means "the oppressed", and the latter is a class in the Marxist language. Thus on the surface "the people" as used by liberation theologians does not reflect a distinction between "the people" as a symbol and "the people" as a concrete reality that can go wrong and be discredited at times. In the words of Gaybba: "We need to create categories that will help us retain the use of 'the people' as a symbol, while allowing us to be critical of 'the people' as a concrete reality who can go wrong at times" (Gaybba: Unpublished Paper). "The people" is not just a broad concept as to encompass the whole nation indiscriminately, except as a projective concept in the sense of something providing an ideal pointer to such an identification in the future. When liberation theologians speak about "the people" do they really mean all people who are already engaged in the praxis of a socialist revolution? When they speak about "the people" what do they mean, and are they correct?

CHAPTER ONE

AN OVERVIEW OF THE MEANING OF THE TERM THE PEOPLE

1.1. Introduction

Various liberation theologians explain the concept of “the people” in different ways. This first chapter will look into what some liberation theologians mean by this term when they use it in liberation theology literature.

1.2. Overview of the Meaning of the Term

“The Latin American people - this poor, exploited, believing people - has taken a great stride forward in these past ten years. The price has been error, impass, and martyrdom. But this is ever the case when history moves forward. And the trophy has been triumph, and the apprenticeship of the popular masses in the craft of their own liberation. It has been a decade of precious experience, during which the masses have promoted their own march forward themselves, their own historical alternative” (Gutierrez 1983:75).

For Gutierrez, “the people” are poor. “Concretely, to be poor means to die of hunger, to be illiterate”, et cetera, which implies that by the concept of “the people”, he means the materially poor (Gutierrez 1974:289). “The people” are also exploited. The term “exploitation”, demonstrates the Marxist influence on liberation theology. McGovern says that “Marx sought to demonstrate 'scientifically' that exploitation is intrinsic to the capitalist system, that profit can be explained only by the surplus-value created by workers” (McGovern 1980:36). The exploitative dimension of “the people”, one can conclude then, would be of particular relevance to the workers among “the people”. Therefore, the term “the people” would refer especially to workers, with all the circumstances surrounding their situation of struggle as labourers.

The concept of “the people” does not only mean that they are poor and exploited. They are simultaneously a believing people. They have faith in the God of the bible, a living God. “Thus the proclamation of the Gospel leads us to an encounter with the living God, right in the life and death of the people in their struggles and hopes” (Gutierrez 1983:106).

Expanding on this meaning of the concept of “the people”, Gutierrez mentions the fact that “the people” are those who also pay a price for being “the people”. This state of being “people”, is not a comfortable status that is enviable, but involves an unpleasant price one has to pay, namely, “error, impasse and martyrdom”. This is a very interesting dimension of “the people”, almost a self-criticism, demonstrating that “the people” are not always right. They are also capable of erring like all other normal human beings. Further more, “the people” also suffer for their convictions. Those who want to be part of “the people” must be prepared to suffer. One excludes oneself from “the people” if one is unwilling to suffer. However, this “error, impasse and martyrdom” is not a permanent condition, but merely a passing phase after which there is victory. In the end “the people” are those who overcome their oppressive situation, which leads us to another description of “the people” by Gutierrez earlier on, namely, that “the people” take history into their own hands.

Gutierrez includes in the concept “the people”, those who are subjects of their own history. They forge their own destiny. This dimension is the core of the term “the people” as we will see in a later chapter on the “subjects of history”.

Another term Gutierrez uses in an earlier text to describe the concept of “the people” is “masses”. “...It has been a decade of precious experience, during which the masses have promoted their own march forward themselves, their own historical alternative” (Gutierrez 1983:75-76). As used here, the concept of “the people” is identified with the term “masses”. This does not necessarily add to a clearer understanding of the term “the people”, because “masses” is a generic term and is therefore applicable to anything. It is therefore imperative to be on our guard when it comes to the usage of this term “masses”, to establish what valuational content is assigned to it. Segundo states: “...We consider the fact that it is somehow associated with the more mechanical and routine aspects of human behaviour. In addition, in Latin America it is associated with the whole notion of 'alienation'. Both liberation theology and the closely related liberation pedagogy of Paulo Freire have stemmed from the conviction that the Latin American masses are not only oppressed and exploited but also alienated. It is not just that they cannot express their own thoughts as liberated subjects of history. They cannot even think their own thoughts” (Segundo 1976:188).

Here we are cautioned by Segundo that we cannot simply take the term “masses” used in whatever context to mean “the people”. According to Gutierrez here above and other liberation theologians as we will see later, “the people” mean those who are subjects of history, not mere objects, namely that they cannot think and express their own thoughts. It must be established clearly in what sense this term the masses is used, not only by Segundo, but by any other liberation theologian, to make sure what meaning is attached to it.

Jose Comblin, when he uses the term “the people”, also means by it the poor. For example he writes: “...The people of the poor are not like the employees of a corporation, or a radio or television audience, or the groups of human beings joined by membership in social institutions. The people are made up of all who have no active social or political voice, all who are relegated to the margins of the dominant process. The people spring into being when all those human beings begin to join together in the project of a common social existence, when all those persons begin to strive to create an alternative to the existing situation. What makes the people a people is their common will to create a new social reality, a fabric woven of communion and participation. All those who are traveling through the desert, wayfarers in quest of a different society, are members of the people” (Comblin 1990:170).

For Comblin “the people” as poor means to be unemployed. They are the unemployed and therefore socially and politically marginalized. More so for Comblin, “the people” as poor are not just an inactive unemployed mass with no social and political voice, but they are those who do something about their situation, they are also subjects of history. They work towards a new society, a process which they initiate themselves, rather than just being spectators. Comblin actually states that their common will to bring about a different society, designates them “the people”.

Comblin elaborates on who is included in “the people”: “All those who are traveling through the desert, wayfarers in quest of a different society, are members of the people” (Comblin 1990a:170). In other words, all those who identify, and are in solidarity with the ideals of “the people” are “the people”. This means that even those who are not necessarily materially poor and oppressed become “the people” through solidarity and identification. This is a very important point Comblin

is making which demonstrates the inclusiveness of the term. There is also another meaning Comblin attaches to the concept of “the people”, namely, that they are the people of God. “In Latin America the people are presently coming into being precisely as a people, and their appearance on the scene constitutes a theological event of the first magnitude. The people of God are materializing here on our continent” (Comblin 1990a:170). “The people”, just like the people of God, are on the road to freedom. “How could we sing one of Yahweh’s hymns in a pagan country? asked the people of Israel, overwhelmed by the weight of the Babylonian captivity” (Ps. 137:4). “The people” too find this world of poverty and oppression a form of exile and are on the move to their true homeland, a destiny of truth and justice.

Scannone states that those who opt for “the people”, by getting involved in their struggles and aspirations, are also “the people”. ‘...People’ may be used as an historico-cultural category (a kind of ‘symbolic category’) that designates all those who share in the historical project of liberation, whatever place they may occupy in the production process” (Scannone 1979:217). Here one’s liberative actions dictate one’s inclusion in “the people” rather than one’s social status. If then, one is poor and oppressed, one is not automatically part of “the people”, for one can be poor and oppressed and not be bothered about liberation. In the same way, one can cease to be “the people” if one ceases to be involved in liberative action. This also indicates that “the people” may successfully bring about a revolution today and tomorrow become something other than “the people”.

Scannone further develops “the people” as symbolic reality. “As a category symbol, it is open, convocative and historically defined. Thus understood, the ‘people’ effectively symbolizes the oppression that is suffered by all, even by the power elite, though in varying degrees and forms according to their social status. It also effectively symbolizes the gratuitousness of the liberation that all can contribute to, even the power elite, though here again the form and degree of liberative power will depend on the type of oppression from which one suffers. The values of the power elite, too, must be salvaged so that they can contribute to the salvation of all; but the power elite must ‘die’ to their exclusivism and their absolutization, becoming assimilated into the overall culture of the people” (Scannone 1979:224-225). The term “the people” in its symbolic sense is an

inclusive term. It is first and foremost a symbol that includes all the hopes and aspirations of those who are oppressed and at the same time does not exclude those who are not literally poor and oppressed, to the degree in which they are in solidarity with the struggles and hopes of those who are poor and oppressed. "The people" as symbol reflects an awareness that ultimately all, including the dominant group of society are called to work and contribute towards the liberation of the poor and oppressed. In other words, in the final analysis we are all called to be "the people". There is only real freedom when all of us are free, the oppressed free from their oppression and the oppressor free from their compulsion to oppress others, so that eventually, we all can be "the people".

In Scannone's view too, "the people" are also seen as subjects of history. "It is the people who are the active subject and agent of human history, which is intimately bound up with salvation history. The signs of the times, then, are rendered present and decipherable in the happenings which the people perform or which affect them" (Scannone 1979:222). Here "the people" as subjects of history also have an eschatological dimension. In this context, "the people" as subjects of history, are not simply a history that develops into a so-called "perfect society" or "state" where there will be democracy, freedom and justice for all, but the concept of "the people" has a transcendent dimension, namely salvation, which is not utopian but a perennial and real, perfect peace, justice, love and harmony with God.

The People of God image also features in Scannone's interpretation of the concept of "the people". "It is framed in terms of 'the people' and Latin America seems to be an indivisible and indubitable combination of both 'the people' and 'the People of God' journeying in communion with the universal church through one faith and one baptism. That unity, however can result only from a conscious decision to renounce elitism in the areas of power, knowledge, and possessions" (Scannone 1979:224). This text seems to suggest that "the people" and "the People of God" are one and the same reality, expressed concretely in ecclesiological terms, but on condition of course, that all are equal, namely, that each member of the church be equally seen as a child of God. Equal in dignity and worth before human beings and God.

Ronaldo Munoz too, means by “the people”, the poor who are subjects of history. “The people” are also those who identify with Jesus. “Something new is happening in the church communities among the poor in Latin America: the people are taking the gospel into their own hands ... they are discovering that Jesus was 'one of us': a flesh and blood human being, poor of the poor, living in circumstances similar to theirs; a man of the people, who had to make choices and take risks in a history like theirs” (Munoz 1991:30). In the text quoted “the people” make the spreading of the gospel their responsibility. They do not wait for the church to entrust it to them but they take it upon themselves to proclaim the gospel, this on the grounds of the fact that they see Jesus as one of them, who was human, poor and had to face the difficulties of life like they do. It is in this sense that Munoz sees the people as subjects of history. For Munoz, “in the light of faith we can sense a line of continuity between the people in our midst who are suffering and looking for liberation and the people of Israel who were oppressed in Egypt and liberated through the intervention of Moses”. This line of continuation further expands when Munoz refers to “the people” as “the same people whom the prophets, as men of God, championed long ago: the same poor and alienated people whom Jesus of Nazareth preferred to share his life with and who were proclaimed heirs of the kingdom of God” (Munoz 1979:154).

The concept of “the people” is also understood by Bonino as poor and oppressed. “Instances could be multiplied; common to the new Christian awareness in the continent is the discovery of 'the people', 'the poor', 'the oppressed', the vast masses of marginal population as a fundamental call to the Christian. This experience is not only a sociological discovery. It takes on theological dimensions when in the light of Christ's special and foremost concern for the poor. The people become 'a theological locus', the meeting place where Christ himself has promised to be present, the privileged sanctuary and sacrament of his presence” (Bonino 1975:157-158).

In the text, Bonino sees the poor and oppressed who are “the people” as having a privileged position in the eyes of God because of their situation. It must however be noted that according to Bonino, the basis for this privileged role of “the people” as poor and oppressed is not to be found in an idealized conception of their poverty but as children of God they have basic human rights, a fair share in material prosperity and a right to participate in setting society's direction. For

Bonino, “the people” as poor and oppressed are those who are more open to God’s power working through them to transform society. Therefore, as stated above, Christ is present among “the people” as the poor and oppressed, in a special way. As expressed above, “the people” are a “theological locus”, Christ’s presence among them. It is this presence of Christ, according to Bonino, which designates the privileged position of “the people”. One can deduce from the quotation by Bonino that if Christ is present among “the people” by identifying with “the people”, the poor and oppressed, we identify with Christ. A further deduction can be made that our way to Christ is through the poor and oppressed, “the people”. This is why Bonino here above, speaks of them “as a fundamental call to the Christian”.

Dussel speaks about the term “the people” as those who are oppressed, yet simultaneously go beyond the oppressed as to be inclusive of other human groups, not presently part of “the people”.

“Thus a 'people' is the communal 'bloc' of a nation’s oppressed. A people consists of the dominated classes (the working or industrial class, the campesino class, and so on). But it is also constituted of any human group that is either non-capitalistic or that performs class practices only sporadically (marginal groups, tribal groups, and so on). This entire 'bloc' in Gramsci’s sense - constitutes the people: a people is the historical 'subject' or agent of the social formation of a given country or nation” (Dussel 1988:81-82).

In the text quoted, where “the people” are the oppressed, those who are not oppressed, who side with the oppressed in their struggle for liberation, are also “the people”, an indication that one can become part of “the people” through option for and solidarity with “the people”. This is a symbolic expression of the concept of “the people” of which we will hear more in the final chapter. However, it is important to note here that earlier on Scannone seems to express the same idea as Dussel as regards the symbolic nature of the concept of “the people”, namely, that one’s membership of “the people” is also determined by solidarity and identification with “the people”, irrespective of one’s class and one’s place in the production process. Dussel seems to imply here above that symbolically one becomes part of “the people” and one is “non capitalistic and per-

forms class practices only sporadically”, if one opts for “the people”, identifies with “the people”, and struggles with “the people”. For Dussel, it is this active participation and action towards changing society that designate “the people” subject of history.

“The people” are the poor also according to Dussel. He compares the poor in Latin America with the poor in the bible. For him the poor in Argentina Uruguay, and elsewhere are synonymous to the poor in the bible (cf. Dussel 1988:142). “Poor”, in the biblical sense, denotes the dominated, oppressed, humiliated, instrumentalized term of the practical relationship called sin. The constitutive act of the ‘poor’ in the Bible is not lacking goods, but being dominated, and this by the sinner. The poor are the correlative of sin. As the fruit of sin, their formality as ‘poor’ constitutes the poor or oppressed, and as such, the just and holy. The ‘poor’ are those who, in the relationship of domination, are the dominated, the instrumentalized, the alienated” (Dussel 1988:22).

“The people” as poor take on all the qualities of the latter, that of being “dominated, oppressed, humiliated” et cetera. Dussel makes an interesting assumption that the poor are “just and holy” in as far as they are dominated by the oppressors. This is not a reflection on their personal and moral disposition. As far as the latter are concerned, we all strive towards the ideal to be “just and holy”. Hence then, the “just and holy” capacity of “the people” as poor should be interpreted in the light of their oppression, in this sense they are “just and holy” to the degree that they don’t dominate, oppress and humiliate others.

Jon Sobrino also views “the people” as poor. “And these poor, in their totality, as a poor people, with their failings and mistakes, but with values that dwarf their shortcomings, have been transformed into gift and grace for those who seek to walk with them, defend them and struggle at their side” (Sobrino 1988:38). Here the “failings and mistakes” of the poor Sobrino refers to applies to their personal capacity as human beings, capable of erring, but are somehow overshadowed by their values of justice and right for all, which throws some light on Dussel’s view of the poor as “just and holy”. The “failings and mistakes” Sobrino alludes to are not suggesting that the poor have all of a sudden become oppressors and dominate others, hence he adds, “values that dwarf their shortcomings”.

Moving on to Segundo, for him too, the term “the people” has ecclesiastical connotations. “Among other reasons, on the Latin American scene, this church has rightly been called 'of the people', not because liberation theologians have baptized it with that name after creating it but because it arises out of the popular culture itself” (Segundo 1987:139). According to Segundo, the “people” are also church, meaning, “the spontaneous religiosity of the people themselves” (Segundo 1987:143). Segundo further writes: “The base ecclesial community seems to be, in itself or in principle, a place where the people themselves practice an analysis of their own praxis” (Segundo 1987:144).

“The people” in Segundo’s view are also subjects of history, “... if the people with their liberating praxis use their own praxical words and even teach something to theology, it is clear that they are already the subjects, and not the mere objects, of their own history” (Segundo 1987:144).

Leonardo Boff explains in the following rather lengthy quotation what he means by the concept “the people”. “The term 'people' is not taken in the sense of nation, lumping everyone together indiscriminately and thus hiding internal differences, but rather in the sense of people/lower class, defined as those who are excluded from participation in society and reduced to the mass, a thing instead of persons. 'People' is an analytical term and also an axiological category. Analytically it defines a group in opposition to another, while axiologically it proposes a value to be lived by all persons.

In other words, all are called to be people and not just a subordinate class. Human beings achieve this in the measure to which, through the mediation of communities, they cease to be a mass, develop self-consciousness, lay out a historical plan for justice and participation for all (and not only for themselves), and teach practices that lead to the prompt realization of this utopia” (Boff 1985:117). We notice here above the mention of the term “mass” by Boff, which was also used earlier on by Gutierrez in reference to “the people”. But once again, as Gutierrez stated earlier on, the term “mass” does not necessarily contribute towards a more distinct understanding of the concept of “the people”. Hence Boff here, in line with Gutierrez, shows that the term “mass” cannot just without qualification be referred to as “the people”.

Boff draws a distinction between the nation and people. Nation is generally understood as all the people, rich and poor alike, within a particular country. The nation is usually defined by empirical characteristics such as citizenship, language, ethnic inheritance, cultural peculiarities or anything of the sort, for example, "the American nation", "the German nation", et cetera. "The people", however, is not synonymous with the nation. It is clear that in Boff's context, the nation is the dominant or ruling group in society whereas "the people" are the dominated group in society. The difference Boff speaks about, between nation and "the people", is that the goals of "the people" are opposed to the goals of the nation.

A second meaning Boff expresses by the concept "the people" is that it is both a concrete and symbolic reality. Concretely "the people" are marginalized, and reduced to the non-persons of society as opposed to those who are dominant and the so called elite of society. Symbolically the term is an inclusive reality as to include all those who work towards justice, equal status and freedom for all, not just for "the people".

In explaining the meaning of the term, Hugo Assmann stresses that it is composed of those who take history into their own hands; "...the people are standing on their own feet, steeling themselves for the historic confrontation that must come" (Assmann 1975:43). "The people" themselves work towards the fall of the present structure and are prepared to take whatever sacrifice it involves towards this goal.

Moving on to a document that has some official status within liberation Theology, "The Road to Damascus", refers to "the people" as the poor and oppressed. The poor and oppressed, "the people", according to this document are those who are killed, they are the indigenous population who are being eliminated. "The people" are further described as women and children. "The people" are those women and children who suffer. But not simply the suffering women and children but those who struggle against their suffering. The women and children who are "the people" according to "The Road to Damascus" are those who resist their oppression. They are not just mere objects of their suffering but do something about it. According to this document "the people" are those who are marked by resistance. Here, "The Road to Damascus" also sees the people as subjects of their own history as was expressed earlier on by other Latin American liberation theologians.

The above document also singles out those Christians as “the people”, who are participating in the struggle for liberation of the poor and oppressed (cf. *The Road To Damascus* 1989:1ff.). It is imperative to note here that the notion of “the people” in this document is not simply extended to include every individual Christian. “The people” are made up of both Christians and non-Christians, both believers and non-believers. Moreover, the Christians who are counted among “the people” are those who engage in liberative actions, who take up the cause of the poor and oppressed, the suffering. “The Road to Damascus” widens the notion of “the people” in liberation theology as to include even those who themselves are not poor and oppressed but identify with the struggle of “the people” for liberation. This document, in singling out some Christians as “the people”, also implies that not all of those among “the people” in South Africa are believers. The document states: “Although Christianity was part and parcel of colonial rule, Christians were also found on the side of ‘the people’ who fought against colonialism” (*The Road To Damascus* 1989:2). In a later chapter to follow on “the people as believers”, we will go into greater depth as regards this distinction.

In agreement with the document on “The Road to Damascus”, Albert Nolan, a South African liberation theologian, speaks of “the people” as those who suffer. “The suffering of the people of South Africa is one of the great signs of our times. It is a sign of God’s presence as the crucified Christ. It is the sign of the cross” (Nolan 1988:67). “The people” are a sign of God’s concrete involvement in the activities of human beings. They are a reflection of an active God, not just a passive God who is an onlooker. Nolan expands on his idea of “the people” by stating that they are those who are “in no way responsible for the system”. “They were the people who in one way or another resisted the onslaught of colonialism, racism and greed. They would include the indigenous people who fought the anti-colonial wars, the leaders, heroes, martyrs and countless other people who petitioned, protested, defied, mobilised, organised, struggled and died for justice and freedom down through the years” (Nolan 1988:90). Here Nolan gives a broad understanding of “the people”. Not only the indigenous people, but also those who are not necessarily indigenous who practice no racism, who “petitioned, protested, defied” unjust laws, “mobilised, organised, struggled and died for justice and freedom” are “the people”. In this context the concept of “the people” is an inclusive term.

For Nolan "the people" are also those who have faith, "...God is at work through the faith of the people". "The people", in their striving for liberation, are also religious.

The element of being subjects of their own history is also to be seen in Nolan. It is also in the document, "The Road To Damascus". It sees "the people" as subjects of their own history who struggle. "The tradition of popular resistance lives on in our countries. Even though most of our ruling elite collude with imperialism to deceive and divide the people, groups and communities manage to reflect critically on their oppression and organise themselves. Communities of peasants and indigenous people, workers and slum dwellers - men, women and children - struggle for their own immediate needs and also for shared long term issues. In much the same way, students, youth and teachers, church people and cultural workers, doctors, nurses, lawyers and members of other professions, including some business people become part of the mass democratic movement" (The Road To Damascus 1989:3). We here notice the inclusion of those in "the people" who are not necessarily materially poor, but identify and are in solidarity and even promote the struggle for equality, justice and freedom for all. There is an element of difference between the concept of "the people" in Latin American liberation theology and South African liberation theology. For the latter, not all "the people" are believers, whereas for the former, "the people" are believers. Gutierrez for example speaks about "...the character of the people as believing Christians". He goes on to say: "This trait is evident not only in their specifically religious forms of expression but also in their lives as a whole" (Gutierrez 1981:113). Here "the people" are not simply political activists or revolutionaries, but they believe in God and gives concrete expression to it in their lives. This also applies to Korean minjung theology.

This term "the people", as a term increasingly used in liberation theology, is not only a phenomenon in Latin American and South African liberation theology, but also appears in Korean liberation theology where it is called "minjung". "Min" literally means "the people" and "jung" the mass. Combining these two words, we get the idea of "the mass people" or simply "the people" (cf. Lee 1988:3). The term "the people" is a term which refers to Korean liberation theology which is called "minjung theology".

Kim Yong-Bock expresses the meaning of the “minjung” in the following passage “Woman belongs to minjung when she is politically dominated by man. An ethnic group is a minjung group when it is politically dominated by another group. A race is minjung when it is dominated by another powerful ruling race. When intellectuals are suppressed by the military power elite, they belong to minjung. Of course, the same applies to the workers and farmers” (Yong-Bock 1983:185). Here the emphasis is on domination. The “minjung” are here referred to as the politically dominated, sexually oppressed, racially discriminated against and economically exploited.

The “minjung” are also those who are poor, “...but the constituency of the minjung is the poor and the suppressed who are alienated in their political and socio-economic condition” (Yong-Bock 1983:185). In this text the “minjung” are also the materially poor, those who are economically not viable.

Another characteristic of the “minjung” is that they are subjects of history. “The minjung themselves are the protagonists. Thus the story of the minjung entails a historical understanding which regards them as subjects - not as objects - of their own story and destiny” (Yong-Bock 1983:184). The minjung themselves decide on their own strategies for liberation and work out their own goals.

1.2. Summary

What emerges from the above overview on the concept of “the people” is that “the people” are those who are poor and oppressed. They are poor in the concrete sense of the term. “The people” are those who lack material sustenance. This lack of material possessions by “the people” is not simply a natural occurrence brought about by nature, but it is a condition imposed on them by others, the dominant sectors of society, hence liberation theologians refer to “the people” as oppressed. Gutierrez, influenced by Marxism, goes further and views “the people” as those who are exploited, hence he identifies “the people” with workers who are estranged from their work, who are denied the surplus value of their labour.

Latin American liberation theologians moreover maintain that “the people” are not just poor, op-

pressed and exploited, but they are simultaneously a believing people. They are characterized by being the people of God. South African liberation theologians express the same point as regards “the people” as a believing people. They are those Christians who are participating in the struggle for liberation of the poor and oppressed. Still some other liberation theologians identify “the people” with church, spelled out in terms of “church of the people” or “people’s church”.

“The people” are subjects of history, they are not mere passive objects of their history but are actively participating in the shaping of their history. This is the most central characteristic of “the people”. What makes “the people” a people is their common effort to do something themselves about their situation of poverty, oppression and exploitation. They are not given freedom but they work towards it themselves. Hence they do not simply strive for minor adjustments to the present system which enslaves them and keeps them poor and oppressed, but demand and work towards a radical change of society.

Liberation theologians, in their usage of the term “the people”, draw a distinction between “the people” as concrete reality and “the people” as symbolic reality. Boff expresses that the concrete reality of “the people” is that they are marginalized, reduced to non-persons as opposed to those who are dominant and the so-called elite of society. Concretely, as flesh and blood human beings, “the people” can go wrong at times. Symbolically, “the people” are inclusive of all those who work towards justice, equal, status and freedom for all, not just for “the people”. All are called to be “the people”, not just a subordinate class.

The inclusive nature of the term “the people” features very clearly in the usage of this term by liberation theologians. “The people” are not only those who are strictly poor oppressed and exploited. They also include those who, while themselves not necessarily materially poor and oppressed become “the people” through solidarity and identification with the poor and oppressed. What further emerges from this first chapter is that liberation theologians view “the people” as those who have a privileged position. For Bonino, “the people” have a privileged position in the eyes of God because of their situation of poverty and oppression, therefore Christ is present among them in a special way.

South African liberation theologians, in addition to viewing “the people” as poor and oppressed, also maintain that they include women and children who suffer and strive against their suffering. For liberation theologians, “the people” are those who also pay a price for being “the people”. To be “the people”, is not a comfortable status that is enviable, but to be “the people” involves an unpleasant price one has to pay. It means sacrifice and even martyrdom. “The people” are those who are prepared to suffer for their convictions.

This first chapter was an attempt to establish very briefly what various liberation theologians mean when they use the term “the people”. We will now go into more detail as to what it involves to be “the people” as poor, believing and subjects of history after which will follow a concluding chapter in a form of an evaluation on the concept of “the people” and its usage.

CHAPTER TWO

POOR AND OPPRESSED

2.1. Introduction

It was already alluded to in chapter one that the concept of “the people” can be viewed from different aspects. In our search for a clearer understanding of this concept, it is imperative to tease out different aspects of this term.

Needless to say, from reading the first chapter on what liberation theologians mean by the concept of “the people”, among other characteristics, this aspect of “the people” clearly emerges, namely, that they are poor and oppressed. But to establish the meaning of “poor and oppressed” here, is no simple task, for there are so many aspects to this notion. Are the poor the materially or spiritually poor? What is the relationship between these two notions?

There is a distinction between material and spiritual poverty. Because of this distinction, the notion of the poor is susceptible to ambiguity. There is the danger that this notion of the poor can be reduced to economic and social conditions of deprivation by those who are materialists and it can be reduced to a subjective spiritual attitude by those who are spiritualists.

2.2. Materially Poor

Gutierrez, when using the term “the people”, understands by it the materially poor as he states so clearly with the following. “The term poverty designates in the first place material poverty, that is, the lack of economic goods necessary for a human life worthy of the name. In this sense poverty is considered degrading and is rejected by the conscience of contemporary persons. Even those who are not - or do not wish to be - aware of the root causes of this poverty believe that it should be struggled against” (Gutierrez 1988:163).

In the text, concretely, material poverty means the lack of goods, money, shelter, food, education, transport, et cetera. The poor are those who have no work, land, healthcare and so on. These are the materially poor, “the people”, who lack or are deprived of the necessary means of subsistence.

But it is important to note that those who are impoverished, exclusively as a result of natural disasters such as prolonged droughts, infertile land et cetera, are not designated “the people”, because this kind of poverty, through natural disasters, is not by the fault of any human group, or system. Gutierrez’s notion of who the poor are is that they are those who are made poor by the dominant group or system. “The poor person is a product, or by-product, of an economic and social system fashioned by a few for their own benefit” (Gutierrez 1981:111). According to Gutierrez “the poor” as used here, are not poor through natural evolution, for example the scarcity of material resources or the fatal occurrence of natural disasters as we have heard earlier on. At the same time the existence of the poor is not politically neutral and ethically innocent. For Gutierrez, the poor are those who are marginalized by socio-economic and political systems. “They are the oppressed, exploited proletariat, robbed of the fruit of their labour and despoiled of their humanity” (Gutierrez 1983:44-45). These conditions are intolerable, not fit for a human life as was alluded to by Gutierrez earlier on.

In the text we find that the term “proletariat” is used which we also come across in Marxism. “Proletariat” in this context is associated with the poor in liberation theology. When it is used in relation to the poor, in liberation theology, it does not have exactly the same meaning Marx had in mind. The poor in liberation theology, is a much wider concept than the “proletariat” in Marxism. It consists of not only the workers, or worker class, but all the socially and historically oppressed.

Material poverty, as was stated by Gutierrez earlier on, is degrading. Boff states that poverty means: “dependence, debt, exposure, anonymity, contempt, and humiliation” (Boff 1987:31). For Boff too, the poor are those who are dispossessed, deprived and degraded, made unworthy of human life, as Gutierrez would say. These are “the people”.

The negative nature of the poverty of “the people”, Gutierrez maintains, is something to be rejected, not only in part but in its totality. Hence for him, “the poverty of the poor is not a call to generous relief action, but a demand that we go and build a different social order” (Gutierrez 1983:45). As we will see in a later chapter, “the people” include those who forge a new society.

In his understanding of "the people" as the materially poor, Gutierrez is tremendously influenced by what he calls the biblical notion of the poor, namely, that they are in the first place the materially poor, and that they form a collectivity as he states: "The poor in the bible are a social group, a whole people, the poor of the land. They are tormented, despoiled of the fruits of their labour, writhing under the oppressor's injustice. This is what we mean when we say that the peoples of Latin America, too, are poor: we mean it in this same complex and fertile sense" (Gutierrez 1983:96). It is also clear that they are not just scattered individuals but a collective group.

"The people" are the workers who are denied a just wage and therefore have a lack of money to meet the basic necessities of life. "The people" as the economically poor are not simply a group restricted to the workers but include those who do not work, "the destitute, the penniless, who must beg in order to live" (Dussel 1988:83). They are the poor who are the many unemployed in Latin America, those who cannot find work because of a system so designed by the capitalists that result in a limited amount of job possibilities which impoverish "the people".

The materially poor, "the people", according to Dussel, are those who are reduced to miserable beggars. They are the homeless, non-beings, the worthless. They are what he calls the miserable unemployed. "The people", the poor, are those who because of their state of poverty have to approach those who have money, (the capitalists according to Dussel) for money, for work. They may be those who are reduced to mere objects by the oppressive politico-economic system, but they are "subject, creative subject, of all possible value" (Dussel 1988:125). The poor who are "the people" then, may lack money, but they do not lack the force to do something about their poverty. This will be dealt with in a separate chapter.

"The people", the poor, are those who not only lack money, but they lack the basic life-support systems. They are reduced to nothing, their life disrupted with no place where they live in security, in the words of Dussel, "with legitimate wealth, with their family, relatives, nation, history, culture and religion" (Dussel 1988:125). They are rendered the weak and lowly, non-persons. Because of the lack of these life-support systems, the poor are weak.

“The people’s” poverty includes the lack of political and economic power. Reduced to paupers, they are those whose voices are silenced in high places of political power. Being homeless, reduced to nothing, according to Dussel, means that they are the ones who are worthless to the economists of domination. Gutierrez, speaks of the poor as the “weak and powerless” (Gutierrez 1983:114). This powerlessness of the poor is also expressed in the Biblical notion of the poor. “Poor, in the biblical sense, denotes the dominated, oppressed, humiliated..” (Dussel 1988:22). According to Dussel, the poor are those, who in a relationship of domination are the dominated, the powerless, the alienated. The poverty of the poor is more than just the absence of goods but it comes from being made poor, by political and economic systems.

“The people’s” poverty extends to the lack of social status. On a social and human level they are weak, relegated to the margins of society, with no social status. They lack personal dignity. This is why Comblin states: “Poverty is not human. It is inhuman. Of itself it begets nothing. It destroys” (Comblin 1990:169).

Poverty also means a lack of life - death. To speak of the poor, is to speak about their death. The poor are those who are close to death. They live in an environment that is dangerous and unsafe. Among the poor babies are dying of malnutrition because they have no healthcare. The poor live in inhuman living conditions which cause all kinds of fatal diseases. The crime rate is very high because of boredom, unemployment and attempts to survive by depriving one another of the little material goods available. “The people” are those who die as a result of poverty.

Sobrino for example makes it clear that poverty in Latin America means death in contrast to what poverty would mean in First World countries where it is understood in terms of “a relative distance from certain standards of human well-being that have been realized in the past but are now seen less and less frequently. The frame of reference continues to be positive - a degree of well-being attained once upon a time and still attainable” (Sobrino 1988:159). Here poverty is seen in positive terms, in the sense that it is a poverty that does not threaten life as such. It is a poverty that does not create a lack of life-support systems as we have seen stated earlier in Gutierrez’s notion of the poor. According to Sobrino, poverty in Latin America means something negative in

the extreme. "The poor are those whose greatest task is to try to survive. The poor are those whose concrete lives are threatened by socio-economic structures" (Sobrino 1988:159).

The materially poor are further enlarged so as to include race, class, culture, and gender according to Boff, a view also upheld by Gutierrez. Boff for example states the following: "...There are various forms of poverty brought about by socio-economic circumstances, which in addition embody specific oppressions and therefore require specific forms of liberation. So there are those who are discriminated against by reason of their race (such as blacks), by reason of their culture (such as native tribes), or by reason of their sex (women). The poorest of the poor are often to be found among such groups..." (Boff 1987:47).

2.2.1. Race

For Boff, the poorest of the poor are to be found among particular races. This is a view also upheld by Gutierrez, maintaining that the poorest are found among - "Indians, blacks, and mestizos..." (Gutierrez 1983:187). The poor actually exist as a race that is poor. Boff and Gutierrez define the poor in racial categories.

Racial poverty is collective. When Boff and Gutierrez refer to the poor, they refer to a collective entity, a race. "The poor belong to social groups, races..." (Gutierrez 1981:111).

In his book, "God of the Poor", Victorio Araya, drawing on the writings of many other liberation theologians, Gustavo Gutierrez, Jon Sobrino, Leonardo Boff, Clodovis Boff, Enrique Dussel and others, stress this concrete character of the poor.

In South African liberation theology for example, with particular reference to Black Theology, the poor are also described as those who belong to a racial group. They are black. Steve Biko, in "The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa", edited by Moore, states that "the poor have always been black" (Biko 1973:40). The fact that the poor have always been black, in the case of South Africa, is indicative of a situation that has been well designed by others, namely, the domi-

nant white race. For Biko though, this very racial discrimination is turned into group solidarity in order to respond to poverty and discrimination as a cohesive group. "We must cling to each other with a tenacity that will shock the perpetrators of evil" (Biko 1973:47).

Racial poverty then, is structural. It is designed by social structures. In the case of South Africa, it was the Apartheid system that structured people according to race. It was on the basis of race that people had to live in certain areas. It was on the basis of race that people may or may not work. "In South Africa then, we are not just people in general, because it makes a fundamental difference whether one is Black or White" (Maimela 1987:64). One can deduce then, that in the days of the Apartheid system, it was easier to determine with relative certainty that "the people", the poor, were the blacks, because it was much clearer that blackness was associated with poverty. Now the situation has changed slightly, with the policy having being scrapped from the statute books. Although the overwhelming majority of the poor can still be found among blacks, it must also be acknowledged that not all the blacks indiscriminately are the poor, and therefore "the people" are not simply all those who are black. This is where the ambiguity of the term comes in that even though Maimela, Biko and others may define the poor as a racial group, this is not so clear anymore. And so it is the same with structural racism in South Africa today. While it is still very evident that there are clear demarcations between racial groups in terms of economic affluence, places of residence, education, poverty, et cetera, there are nevertheless numerous cases of affluent blacks, mixed residential areas, blacks in white educational institutions. Blackness and poverty are not coextensive.

In Latin America, Gutierrez refers to structural racism going back to colonial times, when oppression and marginalization resulting in death at times, were directed to the Indians originally. He states: "Bartolomè de Las Casas and a number of other remarkable figures of the sixteenth century in Latin America constitute an exception to the bloody beginnings of the path of murder and death that is the saga of colonial domination in Latin America. Their descriptions of the encounter of the poor one, the Amerindian, with the dominator, the conquistador, are anything but a portrait of the idyllic embrace that we are often pressured to accept today". Further on Gutierrez states: "From the very beginning, then, it was 'death too soon' for the Indians. Their right to life

was always cut off in midcourse. And, be it noted, this was an essential component in the social order then being built at their expense” (Gutierrez 1983:77). The colonialists structured society in such a way that the Indians were impoverished. As time progressed, the structure of colonialism was replaced with a new structure, capitalism. It was a system designed in such a way that the economic power remained in the hands of the capitalists, and the Indians, blacks, and mestizos were treated as underdogs.

Structural poverty according to Boff, is designed so that the poor are always in debt. He states: “...Poor for the people means dependence, debt, exposure, anonymity, contempt, and humiliation” (Boff 1987:31). Being the underdogs is indicative of being in debt all the time, dependent on the dominant group, race, the Westerners, who control the economy. This means that the poor races have no value because of their poverty.

To be poor as race means to have no socio-political value, because one’s race determines one’s place in society and what quality of life is open to one, in terms of being rich or poor. As regards South African liberation theology, Maimela states the following: “In real South Africa we have to do with a situation in which the colour of one’s skin plays a decisive role, because ‘blackness’ or ‘whiteness’ carries enormous economic and socio-political values, each determining one’s place in society and what quality of life is open to one” (Maimela 1987:63). It is one’s race that determines whether one can enjoy certain economic privileges, good medical care, educational facilities, live a certain lifestyle of affluence or a life of poverty in townships and remote homelands.

Racial poverty means humiliation. The poor are degraded in the sense that they are seen as inferior because of their race. This is a vicious circle out of which one cannot break. To quote Nolan: “Anyone who is not legally classified as white is treated as inferior not only by individual whites but by the whole system...” (Nolan 1988:51). This was a legalised humiliation, a systematic attack on the dignity of blacks according to Nolan.

2.2.2. Class

The poor, apart from being a race that is discriminated against, are also an economic class - an economically exploited class. They are economically impoverished by the capitalists, the dominant class, as was alluded to by Gutierrez earlier on. Gutierrez also calls them the exploited proletariat, robbed of the fruit of their labour and despoiled of their humanity (cf. Gutierrez 1983:44-45). "The poor, the oppressed, are members of one social class that is being subtly (or not so subtly) exploited by another social class. This exploited class, especially in its most clear-sighted segment, the proletariat, is an active one" (Gutierrez 1983:45). Here we come across the term "proletariat", used in liberation theology. Though marxist, the term should not be understood in its strict Marxist sense, as was noted earlier.

The poor as a class then, is not to be understood in its narrow sense of "class" in Marxism. McGovern for example states that "liberation theology makes use of Marxist concepts but these concepts do not retain the same meanings they have in classical Marxism..." (McGovern 1989:230). He spells out that "liberation theology clearly makes "critical" use of Marxist ideas" (cf. McGovern 1989:230).

McGovern uses the notion "class struggle" to show that it was not simply transferred from Marxism to liberation theology with exactly the same connotations. "Class struggle expresses the reality of social conflict in Latin America, not a programme to stir up hatred or eliminate some ruling class" (McGovern 1989:230). We can notice the same development of the class conflict in South African liberation theology, namely that it is not a programme to stir up hatred or to drive whites (ruling class) into the sea. In South Africa the conflict between the ruling class and dominated class (blacks), is more to do with a revolutionary change. This does not necessarily mean a programme to stir up hatred or violence. Nolan states: "A revolutionary change does not necessarily involve violence" (Nolan 1988:173). The conflict between the ruling and dominated class can be called the pressure that brings the system to the negotiating table so as to agree to a wholly new constitution (cf. Nolan 1988:173ff.). Therefore we must note very carefully that "the people" as a class engaged in struggle cannot simply be seen as the proletariat in Marxism. Along the same

lines Hugo Assmann maintains that to acknowledge the notion of class inequalities does not render one a Marxist. For him the Marxist analysis is simply a useful tool, but is not slavishly followed as the solution to our social, political and economic problems (cf. Assmann 1986:33). In this sense then, the poor understood as “the people” in liberation theology, is a broad inclusive concept.

“The people” as class in liberation theology, in Gutierrez’s view, are all the socially and historically oppressed, the popular groups, in Latin America, the exploited workers, oppressed races, as we have already seen, the oppressed cultures, as we will see in a moment, and the women who suffer sexual discrimination. These are the classes which go beyond a conception of “worker class” as to embrace all the socially and historically oppressed (cf. Gutierrez 1983:190). For Gutierrez, the poor as class include all those who are oppressed on an economic, social, and political level.

Dussel describes class in relation to domination or a relationship of inequality among groups. Social class is a result of domination. And domination he argues is a result of sin, “in the sense that the dominated class, the poor, die in life” (Dussel 1988:80). He maintains that if there were no domination, there would be no social classes. In the words of Dussel: “The classes, then, are social relationships of domination inherent in the whole praxis-production process, inevitable in any tributary system - capitalistic, socialistic, or whatever. Each type of social relationship determines distinct social classes in each system” (Dussel 1988:81).

“The people” then must be understood in this way that as a dominated group, who because they lack material goods, lack dignity, et cetera, form a class.

2.2.3. Culture

In addition to the socio-political and economic system which dominates and marginalizes “the people” as poor, they are also culturally dominated (cf. Dussel 1988:81).

Dussel links culture with production. When he states that culture is also a way of production, of material things, art, technology etcetera, we notice a Marxist influence. For Marxism, human be-

ings distinguish themselves from animals when they begin to produce their means of subsistence (cf. McGovern 1980:27). With the unemployment of the poor, they are unable to engage in the cultural activity of the production of other material things. This activity of "the people" is stifled by their poverty (cf. Dussel 1988:200).

For Dussel then, the poor are prevented from expressing their culture. They are prevented in the sense that they have no land which they can cultivate, on which they can work. Culture is a way of working. A lack of this activity, is a lack of culture. The poverty of "the people" suppresses this cultural activity (cf. Dussel 1988:190). "The people" are those who are culturally suppressed through their poverty.

Dussel maintains that culture is also symbolic production. People's spiritual culture is expressed when they relate their concrete life situations to their faith in God (cf. Dussel 1988:200). Belonging to a church that expresses our faith in God through the cultural symbols of the dominant powerful class, the symbols of expression of the poor are marginalized. In South Africa for example, the poor who belong to Western churches are dominated by the Western culture in their churches. In these churches, the poor have very little chance of expressing their own African culture.

Biko states that blacks, the poor, are those who are culturally dominated. "Black culture above all implies on our part to innovate without recourse to white values. This innovation is part of the natural development of any culture. A culture is essentially the society's composite answer to the varied problems of life" (Biko 1973:45). The poor here, are those who are always kept in check, culturally in this case. They are prevented by the dominant culture to innovate on their own but must always follow suit with the dominant culture. Here then, "the people", who are the poor, are also the culturally dominated. This domination according to Biko, has reached such a level, that it has left the culture of "the people" disfigured as he states: "We accept that when colonisation sets in it devours the indigenous culture and leaves behind a bastard culture that may thrive at a pace allowed it by the dominant culture" (Biko 1973:45). "The people" as poor then, are those who are culturally disfigured.

“The people” are not simply those who are culturally suppressed, dominated and disfigured by poverty but for them poverty itself has become a culture. In Latin America it is known as a “culture of poverty, of painful alienation, of ruptures of ways of life, of unfeeling exploitation, and of basic insecurity in which the poor of Latin America live” (Gutierrez 1983:113). This culture of “the people” is a culture of hunger and want; dispossessed and suppressed; dependence and pauperism; degradation and despoilation, a culture of poverty.

Gutierrez maintains that this culture of poverty is interpreted as death. “Death, in this case, is caused by hunger, sickness, or the oppressive methods used by those who see their privileges endangered by any and every effort to free the oppressed. It is physical death to which cultural death is added, because in a situation of oppression everything is destroyed that gives unity and strength to the dispossessed of the world” (Gutierrez 1990:9-10).

This culture of poverty is concrete poverty which is misery, verging on death. It is a culture whose greatest task it is to ensure that the poor survive physically, let alone survive on other human levels. The culture of poverty is a fight against surviving socio-economic structures, threatening the concrete lives of the poor.

It is this concrete poverty, as we have also seen earlier on, which suppresses “the people’s” culture. It leaves them stripped of culture. Instead of having a creative culture, “the people’s” culture is now deformed, because of their poverty. A culture of hunger and exploitation; a culture of sickness and deformity; a culture of illiteracy and joblessness. According to Gutierrez, these have become the cultural expressions of “the people”. They feel weak and cheated, because they are hungry and exploited. They know that death is near, because they are sick and deformed with no hope of getting medical care because they are poor. They shout justice and equality, but they are not understood by the dominant sectors of society, because they are uneducated and have no money to exert pressure (cf. Gutierrez 1990:10).

The culture of “the people” then, is marked by poverty and suffering. “The people” are those who suffer. They suffer domination and destruction of culture, which means humiliation. It is

humiliating not to be able to express oneself culturally and even more so to lack culture.

But finally, “the people” as poor are also those who do not just give in to the dominant culture. Under severe cultural suppression, they rather camouflage what remains of their culture than give in to a total destruction of their culture by the dominant sectors. “It does so in its crafts, in its folklore, on the level of a despised, subordinate culture” (Dussel 1988:202). “The people” do not surrender, they resist, and in their own way, they use everything in their power to do so.

2.3. The Spiritually Poor

So far we have seen that liberation theologians assert that the poor, “the people”, are the materially poor. We have seen that “the people” are those who are threatened in their basic concrete right to life. Does this mean that the only real poverty “the people” in liberation theology are threatened with is material poverty?

Gutierrez, before expounding on the reality of spiritual poverty warns that the recognition of the reality of material poverty among “the people” of Latin America is a rejection of any attempt to cover up this reality either socially or “religiously”. And here he has a specific biblical text in mind: “Blessed are you poor for yours is the Kingdom of God” does not mean, it seems to us: “Accept your poverty because later this injustice will be compensated for in the Kingdom of God” (Gutierrez 1973:298). The danger of an overemphasis of this biblical text in Gutierrez’s view can lead to a spiritualization of material poverty which can result in a passive response to the evils of the concrete poverty prevailing in this world. For Gutierrez, concrete poverty is destructive, it is a destruction of individuals and peoples, of cultures and traditions (cf. Gutierrez 1990:10). In his own words: “We are confronted here with something opposed to the reign of life that the Lord proclaimed; with something, therefore, that a Christian must reject”(Gutierrez 1990:10). He warns against a “pie-in-the-sky” interpretation of poverty, whereby the poor are encouraged to endure whatever poverty they experience at present for a future reward in the Kingdom of God. Instead, the spiritually poor are those who engage in active action to eradicate poverty. The spiritually poor are those who love and are in solidarity with those who are concretely poor, expressed

in the form of sharing with others. For Gutierrez, this means struggling against human selfishness (cf. Gutierrez 1973:300).

However, liberation theology takes spiritual poverty not as the emptying of a scandalous reality, but as a manner of gratitude and openness to God's will for love and justice, as a spiritual disposition. Gutierrez argues that spiritual poverty is an attitude of openness to God and what he calls spiritual childhood. Because spiritual poverty is an attitude of openness to God, it is a precondition for approaching God (cf. Gutierrez 1973:296-299). An interpretation of such an attitude could read as follows: "Unless you become like the poor, you will not inherit the Kingdom of God". Spiritual poverty then, is to be totally at the disposition of the Lord. In Gutierrez's view, the poor, who have no wealth, prestige and power to depend on, have no other sustenance than the will of God. This is why Dickinson speaks of the poor as the privileged ones in God's eyes. The poor, according to him, are not extolled because some day they will reap the after life reward of simple living, but because they have a special role to play in God's redemptive work here on earth (cf. Dickinson 1983:61).

Expanding on the faithfulness of liberation theology to evangelical poverty, Gutierrez is convinced that evangelical poverty is lived as a gesture of love and liberation toward the poor among us. It is lived he claims in solidarity with the poor, and protest against their poverty. For him, the ultimate cause of exploitation which leads to poverty is selfishness. Efforts to overcome this are acts of love of neighbour. Gutierrez says that poverty - the fruit of social injustice, whose deepest roots are sin - is taken up not in order to erect it into an ideal of life, but in order to bear testimony to the evil it represents. Any reference to the poverty Christ assumed, Gutierrez further explains, must not be interpreted as an idealization of poverty, but in order to redeem humanity from sinfulness, to fight human selfishness, to abolish all injustice, division among human beings, to suppress what divides us into rich and poor, exploiters and exploited (cf Gutierrez 1973:299-302).

In his book, "Jesus Before Christianity", Nolan says: "The poor are all the oppressed, all those who are dependent upon the mercy of others. And this too is why the word can even be extended to all those who rely entirely upon the mercy of God - the poor in spirit (Matthew 5:3)" (Nolan

1976:23). It is very difficult to notice any distinction drawn by Nolan between the materially or economically poor and the spiritually poor in his discussion on the poor in this book. Whatever description he gives to the poor has connotations of both the material and spiritual: the beggars, the sick, prostitutes, the oppressed et cetera, all these can be interpreted both spiritually and materially. Spiritual and material poverty are mutually inclusive according to Nolan.

For liberation theology, then, the poor who are "the people" are open to the Word and promises of God. They are open to God's power working through them to transform society. "The people accept the promise that God has come to rescue, and so discover in his promise, their hopes for liberation and a life of human dignity" (Dickinson 1983:144).

2.4. Those who opt for the Poor and Oppressed

The question may now arise that if the meaning of "the people" can be determined by definite contexts, the poor, the oppressed; social groups, race, class, culture, et cetera, are these the boundaries to which the meaning of the concept of "the people" is confined?

According to Gutierrez, a comprehensive understanding of the notion of "the people", the poor and oppressed, is something much larger than simply belonging to a specific group (social class, culture, et cetera).

"The people" are inclusive of all those who, while themselves not being poor and oppressed, are in solidarity with or committed to the poor. "The poor constitute a world of their own. Commitment to the poor means entering, and in some cases remaining in, that universe with a much clearer awareness; it means being one of its inhabitants, looking upon it as a place of residence and not simply of work" (Gutierrez 1990:125).

An option for the poor is an option for "the people". This means entering the world of the poor, their world of poverty and struggle as was already discussed and will still be discussed in the next chapter. Those who enter the world of the poor are those who voluntarily choose the side of the

poor and share their struggle for liberation and for the establishment of a radically new society from what is at present. On a concrete level, "the people" include those who have no direct and painful experience of hunger, insufficient healthcare, lack of adequate housing, lack of education, low wages and unemployment et cetera, but who identify nevertheless with the aspirations of these for their own emancipation.

According to Assmann, option for "the people", the poor, goes far beyond a situation of merely feeling sorry for them. Like Gutierrez, he maintains that those, while not themselves poor and oppressed, must genuinely enter their world. "The poor, the oppressed, are members of a culture which is not respected, a race which is discriminated against, a social class subtly or openly exploited by another social class. To opt for the poor is to opt for the marginalized and exploited, to take stock of the social conflict and to side with the dispossessed. To opt for the poor is to enter the world of the oppressed race or culture or social class; to enter the universe of their values and cultural categories. That means solidarity with their interests and struggles" (Assmann 1975:8). Assmann seems to imply that for all those who are not poor and oppressed themselves, for them to be part of "the people", they must make a definite commitment to the world of the poor. They must dare to question the ruling social order. They realize the injustice that the present social order is built on and take a stand against it in favour of "the people". In the above text, those who opt for "the people" are those who do more than just saying no to things as they are, but make an effort to forge a new society by taking a radical option for the poor. This implies transformation of the existing social order through liberating social praxis, an activity aimed at directing society towards the creation of a free and just dispensation.

Gutierrez speaks of this option for the poor in the following way: "An option for the poor means a new awareness of class confrontation. It means taking sides with the dispossessed. It means entering into the world of the exploited social class, with its values, its cultural categories. It means entering into solidarity with its interests and struggles" (Gutierrez 1983:45). This class confrontation must be understood in this way in liberation theology that those who opt for the poor take a leading role in the participation in pursuit of an alternative society. Along similar lines Bonino states that we can only make a genuine option for the poor if we "see and serve the

poor by understanding their situation as a class and participating in the struggle through which their alienation and oppression as a class can be overcome" (Bonino 1975:158). Option for "the people" is commitment to action in bringing about a new society. Option for "the people" is solidarity and hope for a better future for all.

Solidarity with "the people" does not only include those who do so on a purely economic and political level. "Any interpretation of poverty that reduces the poor and option for the poor to the purely economic and political level is therefore mistaken and can claim no support from our thinking" (Gutierrez 1990:10). There are also others, many Christians who are in solidarity with the poor as an expression of their Christian faith. Gutierrez states: "Solidarity is seen as a concrete expression of Christian love today..." (Gutierrez 1984:96).

A distinction is drawn between individual Christians and the church as an institution. Gutierrez states very clearly: "Not all of us in the Latin American Church have committed ourselves sufficiently to the poor. We are not always concerned about them, or in solidarity with them" (Gutierrez 1983:156). In this sense, it must be stated that the church as an institution is not part of "the people", but there are some people within the church who are involved and committed to the struggles of "the people". This is why when in a later chapter we hear about a church of the poor, a people's church, it does not mean the whole institutional church but only those within the church who share the revolutionary consciousness of "the people" and are active in revolutionary praxis. In a later chapter we will deal with the ecclesial dimension of "the people".

Another category or group of people who form part of "the people" are the "organic intellectuals" (liberation theologians). With the exception of Gutierrez and a very few other theologians who are born of "the people", many liberation theologians are not poor and oppressed themselves. Despite the fact that Gutierrez and a handful of other theologians were born of "the people", they too have ceased to be marginalized due to the privileged positions they now occupy either as priests or theologians. What makes liberation theologians part of "the people" is their sharing in the life with "the people" and helping them to articulate their views of struggle and liberation. These theologians are known as "organic intellectuals", who choose the side of those who are

poor and oppressed (cf. McGovern 1989:125).

To support the above assertion of the inclusion of liberation theologians into the folds of “the people”, Leonardo and Clodovis Boff state the following: “Liberation theology does not end with the production of theological works in centers of theological study and research, or institutions in which the church trains its priests and lay specialists. Such places are hardly the epicenters from which liberation theology emanates; its theologians are not armchair intellectuals, but rather 'organic intellectuals' (in organic communion with the people) and 'militant theologians', working with the people of God and engaged in pastoral responsibilities. They certainly keep one foot in centers of study, but their other foot is in the community” (Boff 1987:19).

2.5. Summary

The term “the people” is understood as the poor and the oppressed. They are primarily the materially poor.

Concretely, material poverty means the lack of economic goods including those without work, land and healthcare.

“The people” are those who are made poor as opposed to poverty through natural conditions, droughts, infertile land, natural disasters, et cetera. The poverty of “the people” is caused by socio-economic systems enforced by the dominant sectors of society. This is a form of structural poverty. The poverty of “the people” is a poverty that means death.

The poor and oppressed, “the people”, are also inclusive of social groups, race, class, culture and gender. They are those who are discriminated against because of their race, exploited classes, oppressed cultures and women discriminated against because of their sex.

Although “the people”, according to liberation theology are understood as mainly the materially poor, this does not exclude the element of spiritual poverty in the sense that they are open to God’s power at work in them in their strive for liberation. The ultimate goal of “the people’s” freedom is of a perennial nature, which can only be in God.

“The people” are not only those who are poor and oppressed, but include those, while not poor and oppressed themselves, choose the side of “the people”.

Liberation theologians, better expressed as “organic intellectuals” also belong to the fold of “the people”.

CHAPTER 3

SUBJECTS OF HISTORY

3.1. Introduction

For liberation theologians the most essential characteristic of “the people” is that they are “subjects” of their own history. “The people” map out their own liberation. In chapter one we have seen Gutierrez stating that “the people” promote their own march forward towards liberation and determine their own historical alternative. Jose Comblin stated very clearly in the first chapter that what makes “the people” a people is their common will to create a new social reality. And Scannon also maintains that “the people” are the active subjects and agents of human history. In recalling what liberation theologians say about “the people” in the first chapter it is clear that they are of one mind that for “the people” to be “the people”, they must be the agents of their own freedom.

3.2. “The People’s” Action

It has become almost commonplace to remark that, in picking up any classical history book for an account of historical events, one almost exclusively reads about the actions of powerful kings and queens, army generals and state presidents, influential and rich people, with an account of the actions of the poor and the oppressed in the very same context mentioned as an appendix. The poor and oppressed, “the people”, never feature. According to Gutierrez, this is not seen as a mere accident. It is a deliberate attempt to deprive the poor and oppressed from claiming their rightful place as agents of history. This is how Gutierrez puts it: “History has been written from the viewpoint of the dominating sectors. We have a clear example of this in the history of Latin America and Peru. The perspective of history’s vanquished is something else again. But history’s winners have sought to wipe out their victims’ memory of the struggles, so as to be able to snatch from them one of their sources of energy and will in history: a source of rebellion” (Gutierrez 1983:20).

The presentation of history from the point of view of the dominant sectors in society, according to Gutierrez, was a deliberate attempt from their side to misrepresent the actions and struggles of "the people". The question now arises: What are the actions that will effectively demonstrate who "the people" are?

For Gutierrez, the actions of "the people" are actions of rebellion. They refuse to be reduced to mere objects of history. No matter how hard the dominant sectors try to wipe out their memory of struggles, they constantly march forward promoting their own historical alternative. "The people" demonstrate resistance. They fight and die for liberation, for love of their brothers and sisters. They are the makers of history according to Gutierrez (cf. Gutierrez 1983:75ff.).

For Boff too, "the people" are not those who allow themselves to be treated as collective objects of history by the dominant sectors, but they themselves act as subjects of their own liberation. They demonstrate actions of strength to resist. They are those who have the capacity to understand their rights and organize themselves to transform their subhuman situation. Boff states the following of the poor, who are "the people": "Despite the massive and gospel-denying domination of the colonial centuries, dreams of freedom were never entirely extinguished. But it is only in the past few decades that a new consciousness of liberation has become widespread over the whole of Latin America. The poor, organized and conscientized, are beating at their masters' doors, demanding life, bread, liberty, and dignity. Courses of action are being taken with a view to release the liberty that is now held captive. Liberation is emerging as the strategy of the poor themselves, confident in themselves and in their instruments of struggle: free trade unions, peasant organizations, local associations, action groups and study groups, political parties base Christian communities. They are being joined by groups and individuals from other social classes who have opted to change society and join the poor in their struggle to bring about change" (Boff 1986:6).

For Boff, a new history is being written by those who are "the people". It is not a history of the rich and powerful, but a history of "the people" organizing themselves for liberation. He maintains that the coming about of a history from below, from "the people" is not simply a natural evolution, in the sense that a wait-and-see approach is adopted. No, this history comes about

through definite action and initiative on the part of "the people", by planning and actively organizing a new history. For Gutierrez too, the poor, the masses, "the people" as he calls them, through their organization are those who transform history. He thus designates "the people" the agents of liberating praxis (cf. Gutierrez 1983:105ff.).

We notice in the text earlier on that for Boff, the poor, and therefore "the people", are inclusive and open. They include all those while not existentially poor and oppressed, join the struggle of the latter.

The actions of "the people" are not only this-worldly. There is also a transcendent dimension to "the people". They discern, interpret and criticize their present-day process of liberation in salvific terms. This is an unforeseen future which goes beyond what "the people" themselves can attain through their own actions. It is a future which only God knows. Scannone states: "The sensing and feeling of the people will take in yearnings and frustrations, hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, peaceable agreements and conflicts. Out of all that will emerge the real possibilities for the future that are open to the people in their freedom. The social sciences can certainly help to determine what the real possibilities are. It can study their material structures, the structures in which the transcendent summons of the future is fleshed out, thus helping us to distinguish truth from illusion. But in doing this the social sciences must not reduce the possibilities in any univocal way, closing them off to the unforeseen originality of history or to the freedom wherewith people take on history" (Scannone 1979:235).

For Gutierrez too, the actions of "the people" are not restricted to present political praxis but point beyond their present history. He speaks of the political awareness and their Christian awareness which go hand in hand (cf. Gutierrez 1979:98ff.).

The fact that the actions of "the people" are not only this worldly, can also be traced in the concept of "the people" in Korea known as minjung. According to minjung theology, the minjung as subjects of history are those who transcend their socio-political and economic realities and also point to God. As subjects of history they not only take into their hands their social, cultural, po-

litical and economic destiny, but also participate in helping to point history towards God. This is how Kim Chi-ha describes this transcendent reality of the minjung: "From the beginning the minjung are partners of the covenant with God and the true subjects of human history - subduing the earth, producing the values of life, revolutionizing the world, and pushing human history ahead. These have been alienated suppressed, and have fallen into the category of lower people and sinners. Now, in order to advance the cause of history, the minjung have to strive for their own salvation. They themselves must bring about the upheavals which will retake the power which has been taken from them and used against them and thus restore God's justice" (Yong-Bock 1983:156).

The minjung are also those who relate their own accounts of history. They themselves relate their own actions against the events or ideologies of the dominant classes. Up to the present, as was stated earlier on, historical writings were almost exclusively accounts of the tyranny and activities of the rich and powerful. "A typical example of this is Confucian historiography. It is the chronicle of the king as ruler. Here the people do not appear as actors in history. Our proposal is that we read history from below, from the point of view of the minjung, rather than from the point of view of the ruling power. History is the process in which the minjung realize their own destiny to be free subjects of history ..." (Yong-Bock 1983:186). Reading history from below, means that the minjung instead of being spectators are active participants in the creation of history.

We also find an example of "the people" as active participants in the shaping of history in South African liberation theology. To be "the people" in South African liberation theology, means a full participation in determining the destiny of the country. "The people", we are told, are not fooled by minor cosmetic alterations to their political structure. "...The people are not demanding more and more concessions or privileges or benefits, they are demanding a say - participation in the whole process of decision making in South Africa. They do not want to be objects who receive concessions, they want to be subjects who decide with others what is to be done or not done... Now the people no longer want to be consulted, they want full participation, they want to be subjects of their own destiny and in many ways they have already become the agents of their own future" (Nolan 1988:144).

Nolan sees "the people" as those who design history and not simply objects of history. "The people do not seek adjustments to our structures, but demand a complete change of structures, something completely new. As stated above, "the people" "...have already become agents of their own future" (Nolan 1988:144). For Buti Tlhagale too, "the people" are those who are in the forefront of history. They call for a new humanity. For him "the people" are inclusive of communities of poor people, ordinary workers, the inhabitants of squatter camps, the marginalized (cf. Tlhagale 1991:57). How exactly then, have "the people" already become agents of their own future especially in South Africa, where to date white minority rule is still very much the order of the day?

As we have already noticed in the section on the "poor", Gutierrez made the point that the poor and oppressed, "the people", are not simply disjointed individuals shouting freedom but that they are an organised "social group", "whole people". Nolan seems to agree with Gutierrez on this point that "the people" act together in solidarity with one another. "The people" are already agents of their future, first of all, by being in solidarity with one another by coming together in organisations.

This acting together is accomplished among other things through unions. "The people" are inclusive of those who act through unions. "It has often been pointed out that the power of the poor and the oppressed lies in their ability to make their demands in unity and solidarity through the creation of their own organisations. The excessive individualism of the system, its policy of 'divide and rule', and its attempts to destroy extra-parliamentary politics, have made 'the people' all the more determined to create and expand their own organisations. The best example of this is trade unionism" (Nolan 1988:145). "The people", we are told, decided themselves that unionism is a viable strategy for working towards liberation. Unionism is a powerful tool which "the people" apply to bring about change in this country. To the dominant classes of South Africa the strikes and work stoppages are irresponsible and destructive of the economy, while for "the people" it is their way of redirecting the course of history towards bringing about an end to worker exploitation and instead to strive for a just wage. It is clearly evident in the South African situation currently that one will almost daily read about strikes that take place. Arbitration and nego-

tiations around industrial disputes seem to be the order of the day in South Africa. There seems to be a completely different consciousness among the present working force than there was about ten to fifteen years ago. The type of consciousness and organization among workers today appear to be uncontrolled by the system (cf. Nolan 1988:146).

For Tlhagale too, "the people" are those who are organized. Through their own organization, they become subjects of history, make their own history and leave the observers' status in history to become players in their own right. In other words they themselves take the initiative and cease to be victims of oppression but conquerors of their oppression. Their organization becomes a challenge to those who oppress them. Tlhagale states this about the poor who are "the people": "They have organized themselves into basic communities, into worker movements, into organizations that can no longer be ignored by the mighty and powerful. They are the champions of the true liberation" (Tlhagale 1991:57).

Another way in which they become subjects of history is through "challenge". "The people" are also those who challenge. Up till now, the history of "the people" has been obscured by the dominant sectors of society. "The people's" actions have not been taken seriously. But now, "the people" themselves announce their presence by organising themselves as a force to be reckoned with. For Tlhagale this presence of "the people" is not a mere presence, but a challenging presence, a disturbing presence to the dominant sectors of society. Unlike in the past when the presence of "the people" was hardly acknowledged by the dominant group, now it is a presence that is impossible to be ignored. Tlhagale asserts that the various organizations and actions and campaigns of "the people" cannot simply be brushed aside. It is a new history of "the people", in the form of basic communities, worker movements and other organizations of "the people", which make their voices heard (cf. Tlhagale 1991:57).

Expanding on the organisational aspect of "the people" as already agents of history, Nolan cites the example of "June 1976", in Soweto, Johannesburg, South Africa, when students took history into their own hands by demonstrating and demanding equality in education. "Soweto 1976 was the beginning of one of the most remarkable features of the struggle against the apartheid system:

the rebellion of school children and their use of the school boycott. This required a considerable amount of organisation" (Nolan 1988:147).

The organisational aspect of "the people" extends also to civic associations. "The development of civic associations in almost every township in South Africa has been no less remarkable. In one way or another they have been responsible for community campaigns: bus boycotts, consumer boycotts, rent boycotts and stayaways" (Nolan 1988:147). These are all ways and means by which "the people" already determine their own destiny. Nolan goes further to cite the contribution of women organisation as he states in the following: "The organisation of women in South Africa has also been very important and very powerful. Because of the many ways in which women in particular suffer under the system and because their cause is seldom appreciated by men, it has been necessary for women to develop their own campaigns and their own organisations" (Nolan 1988:148). An example of these campaigns in particular, is the most famous demonstration of 60 000 women who marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria in 1956, protesting against the pass laws. As regards women's own organizations, we can here cite the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW), established in 1954. This organization was striving for the removal of all laws, regulations, conventions and customs that discriminate against women (cf. Nolan 1988:148).

In Latin American liberation theology too, "the people" are being subjects of history by organising themselves. Thus Boff speaks of the essential organizational unit "the people" form in the base communities. He states: "They organize memorials, group projects, community activities, neighbourhood credit unions, efforts to resist land take overs, and many other concerns of the people" (Boff 1985:129). It is here in the base communities that "the people" organize, map out new strategies for their own destiny. The organization in these communities is also seen as challenging and posing a threat to the established social order (cf. Boff 1985:129). These communities grow more numerous, stronger, moving from strength to strength. There will however, follow a more detailed discussion on the base communities in a later chapter.

For Comblin too, "the people" as subjects of history, organize themselves in movements to work

out their own history. He writes as follows: "The people manifest themselves by means of historical movements: unions, parties, local associations, liberation movements. Many historical factors enter into these movements: ideologies, schemas of organization, methods of action, psychosocial dynamics, and so on..." (Comblin 1990:171). In these movements, Comblin maintains, "the people" gather together as all classes of the oppressed and dominated, working out a project for a new society. Here they make history.

Still on the organizational aspect of "the people", Munoz speaks about "the pole of organizations"; he states: "This is the pole of organizations existing among the people, the popular movement. We speak of a 'popular movement of liberation'; this would include the whole history of workers' movements, the trade union movement, people's political parties - with all their ambiguities - insofar as they are truly popular or have taken root in the people, neighbourhood groups, such as youth centers, mothers' centers, and newer types dedicated to claims for basic rights or cultural resistance. All these represent a long tradition of organizing, sharing, struggling together for dignity and less inhuman living conditions" (Munoz 1991:20-21). Munoz sees "the people" as making their own history as thoroughly organised in these movements which makes it difficult for the dominant class to divide or destroy. It appears here that the new history of "the people", among other things is characterized by organization.

"The people" then, are those who take their own actions and do not simply imitate the actions of the dominant sectors or the praxis of marxism, but they have their own vision of the world and human beings. They have their own line of action for attaining their freedom. Put differently, they have their own history of liberation, justice and hope. Without this historical consciousness "the people" remain rootless and deprived of the aid required to nurture their struggle for liberation.

"The people" as subjects of history have a definite consciousness. Their oppression, suffering and struggles give them a unique awareness of themselves. Let us now turn to the consciousness of "the people".

3.3. Consciousness

“The people’s” ability to become subjects of history is triggered off by the development of a specific consciousness. “The people” are those who have a critical form of thinking about their world of poverty and oppression. Whereas in the past the poor and oppressed were overwhelmed by their miserable situation of oppression, the consciousness of “the people” is a deepening of the attitude of awareness, a greater understanding of their situation. In “Pedagogy of the Oppressed”, Paulo Freire states: “Obviously, consciousness does not stop at the level of mere subjective perception of a situation, but through action prepares men for the struggle against the obstacles to their humanization” (Freire 1970:112). For Freire, consciousness must lead to action. Mere awareness of a bad situation is inadequate, and will serve no purpose. Consciousness, for Freire leads to active efforts to transform the present unacceptable inequalities among people.

Examples of liberation theologians citing instances of the situation of the poor and oppressed which gives rise to the consciousness of “the people” to liberate themselves, to be subjects of history, are numerous in Korea, Latin America and South Africa. Kim Yong-Bok in Korea for example, states: “Koreans have suffered numerous invasions by surrounding powerful nations so that the very existence of the Korean nation has come to be understood as han”. Han is “the most important element in the political consciousness of the minjung which appears in the social biography of the oppressed people of Korea”. Han is known as ...”the suffering and helplessness of the oppressed” (David 1983:24). The poor and oppressed always knew that they were suffering and helpless, but the turning point is the consciousness that they can actually do something about their situation. In minjung theology, it is precisely the heightened awareness of the suffering people who see themselves as subjects of history which designate them “minjung” (the people) as we now see stated by Kim Yong-Bock: “Thus the story of minjung entails a historical understanding which regards them as subjects - not as objects - of their own destiny” (Yong-Bock 1983:184). Consciousness is the refusal to be condemned to the fate of being objects of manipulation and suppression. “The people” therefore, with this heightened awareness talked about by Freire earlier on, are those who refuse to be condemned to their fate of poverty and oppression.

In Korea, the situation of the *minjung*, where they have at numerous occasions suffered the tyranny of the rulers so that they thought of their existence as common people, economically impoverished, politically weak, and socially deprived, gave rise to a consciousness which led them to positive action towards the development of a community of liberated human beings.

In Latin America there are also instances and opportunities of conscious-raising of "the people". Boff states: "Their popular culture especially, their piety, their organizational forms (such as the basic community), are all factors for conscientization (conscious-raising) and thrusts for liberation" (Boff 1984:28). Boff stresses that this consciousness is not a mere reflection on the present conditions of their poverty and oppression, but simultaneously spurs them on to resist this suppression and to mobilize themselves for social transformation. Here we find that this consciousness enables "the people" to discover by themselves the paths of their own liberation. They come to an appreciation of the value of their culture, religion and power in history. In other words, in Boff's view, this is a new consciousness, the consciousness of the poor and the oppressed, "the people". In the past, the historical consciousness of "the people" had been erected and structured upon the consciousness of the dominant classes, who turned the poor and oppressed into objects. But this new consciousness according to Boff is a consciousness that the poor and oppressed, "the people", are subjects of their history.

We also find situations in South African liberation theology which give rise to a heightened consciousness of "the people" that they are ultimately to take history into their own hands if there is to be any hope for justice and equality.

In South Africa, the whole situation of "apartheid", scrapped now from the statute books but still a way of life in the South African society, made "the people" aware that they cannot expect any change on the part of those who keep it in place. Nolan writes: "It would be impossible to exaggerate the evil of the system in South Africa. It has wrought havoc in the lives of people of their humanity, produced blindness, alienation and violent conflict. All that it can promise us is that the poor will become poorer and the blind blinder, that there will be more conflict, more bloodshed and total chaos - a veritable hell on earth" (Nolan 1988:86). It is this situation that has a

conscientising effect on "the people". Their expectation that the dominant group will undergo a change of heart and cease to oppress, is always met with disappointment, because the oppressors refuse to relinquish their oppression voluntarily. This gives rise to the awareness of "the people" that ultimately they themselves have to do something about the cessation of their oppression. The system actually brings about the consciousness of "the people" according to Nolan as he so clearly states here: "There is also a process whereby the system itself conscientises and politicises the people" (Nolan 1988:143). The question now arises. How exactly does the system give birth to the consciousness of "the people"?

"When the system, in its frustration, sends its police and its army into the townships to beat people up, shoot, maim and kill, to rape, rob and imprison them indiscriminately and ruthlessly, thousands and thousands of people are conscientised and politicised overnight" (Nolan 1988:143). Through these actions by the system, "the people" in South Africa become aware of who their oppressors are. Certainly, given such situations, it would be rather naive for anyone to think that some individuals, negatively known as "agitators", are responsible for conscientising "the people" to rebel against their aggressors. Such a situation is conducive to a consciousness which arrives at a conclusion that enough is enough and that something must be done to stop it.

For "the people", consciousness is aimed at understanding their world, in order to transform it. According to Assmann, consciousness is a form of reflection and interpretation of one's world, after which should follow transforming action. "Reflection ceases to have a world of its own and becomes simply a critical function of action; its world and its truth are experience itself, and there is no more flight to a verbal world decked with ontological considerations that reflect man's inability to deal with the real problems. Interpretation and the language in which it is expressed become the humanizing dimension of the act of transforming the world" (Assmann 1976:74).

"The people" then, are a group who are conscientized by their situation. They are conscious of their power to transform their conditions and are therefore subjects of history.

Consciousness leads thus to an intensified reflection and action in the life of "the people", which ultimately result in struggle.

3.4. Struggle

For “the people” to act as subjects of history involves struggle. It is a struggle for human dignity, a struggle against the evil forces of this world that reduce human beings to non-persons through political, racial, economic and cultural domination. And if “the people” are those who uphold human dignity, they must struggle.

“The human condition is delineated by struggle. From birth to death we are caught up in struggle, and this is what constitutes the substance of human dignity” (Comblin 1990:169). For Comblin, there is a constant tension among human beings caused by the desire of one group to dominate the other. Therefore there is a continual struggle to resist domination. Comblin implies here that struggle is not a phenomenon unique to “the people”, but is a universal human condition.

“The people” are those who are actively engaged in struggle and are not only shouting slogans. For Comblin “the people” are those who express themselves in real and specific historical movements. These movements are manifold and varied. They are movements of ethnic and racial groups who are discriminated against, who struggle for their human dignity. They are movements of classes that are exploited (cf. Comblin 1990a:169ff.). Movements of cultures that are suppressed, struggling to survive, including those people who, while themselves not poor and oppressed, opt for those who struggle as we have seen earlier on. According to Comblin, in and through these movements and groups of people involved in struggle, we can come to know who “the people” are.

Just as the human condition is portrayed by struggle, Comblin maintains that “the people” are described by struggle. It is through their struggle that they are subjects of their own history and therefore “the people”. To further pursue the content of the concept of “the people” as subjects of history through struggle, we now need to look at the following: Class struggle; racial struggle and gender struggle.

3.4.1. Class Struggle

The notion of class struggle, it can be said, clearly belongs to the very essence of Marxism. For liberation theologians to describe "the people" as those involved in a class struggle, shows a Marxist influence. It is however important for an understanding of the term "the people" in liberation theology that even though the notion class struggle has strong Marxist connotations, it should not be understood in its strictest Marxist sense.

For liberation theologians, class struggle is a social reality. It cannot be explained away by being rejected as a Marxist creation and therefore regarded as totally unacceptable. The fact that Marxism makes use of the notion of "class struggle" does not deny the fact that it is a social reality. This means that it exists, with or without Marxism. Bonino states: "Class struggle is a fact. This is not Marx's discovery" (Bonino 1975:119).

Liberation theologians see class struggle not necessarily as a conflict but a reality in which neutrality is impossible, for to deny the existence of social divisions would mean accepting the prevailing system of poverty, exploitation, oppression and the suffering of the dominated sectors of society. Bonino states: "Class struggle is finally, the effort of the oppressed to break into a new form of economic and social organization in which work will be related to need and creation and not profit. It is a struggle for the power to reshape society. It is not a mere outlet for resentment or an instrument of revenge - although these things are by no means absent - but a means for attaining a new more just situation" (Bonino 1975:119).

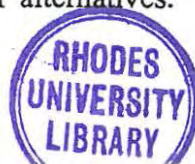
"The people" who engage in class struggle, Bonino implies, are not spurred on by hatred and conflict, but by their quest for a new society, an alternative society to capitalism, one going beyond socialism as it exists today, embodying the hopes and needs of the least of all peoples, namely, those who are poor and oppressed and all those who side with them, "the people". But it should also be noticed here that for Bonino, "the people" are not perfect beings who cannot go wrong. Even though he states that "the people" are those who do not resent or pay revenge, he does not rule out the possibility of "the people", in their concrete constitution as a class, to go

wrong at times. Thus for Bonino, "the people" are those, who in their struggle as a class, are always open to correction and purification.

Gutierrez, in his notion of class struggle, calls for universal Christian love in the midst of class conflict. Far from advocating class hatred, he puts forward the love of God for all people. He calls for opting with the poor against oppressing classes, but makes it clear that what he seeks is a restoration of true unity in society, not the victory of one class over another. He does not endorse violence, and he nowhere says or even implies that class struggle is the driving force of history. Gutierrez states: "The Gospel announces the love of God for all people and calls us to love as he loves. But to accept class struggle means to decide for some people and against others. To live both realities without juxtapositions is a great challenge for the Christian committed to the totality of the process of liberation. This is a challenge that leads him to deepen his faith and to mature in his love for others" (Gutierrez 1973:275).

In liberation theology, class struggle means a strategy for social change, a means of overcoming class division. According to Bonino, the poor who are "the people", can only be understood in their situation as a class and participating in the struggle through which their alienation and oppression as a class can be understood (cf. Bonino 1975:158ff.). "The people", then, are those who are involved in class struggle as a means and strategy to overcome their oppressive situation. In Gutierrez's words: "To 'advocate' class struggle, therefore, is to reject a situation in which there are oppressed and oppressors. But it is a rejection without deceit or cowardliness; it is to recognize that the fact exists and that it profoundly divides men, in order to be able to attack it at its roots and thus create the conditions of an authentic human community. To build a just society today necessarily implies the active and conscious participation in the class struggle that is occurring before our eyes" (Gutierrez 1973:274).

As we have seen earlier on "the people" are those who struggle for an alternative to capitalism. The capitalist system creates class conflicts. The conflicts can only be eliminated by changing the system itself. "The people" as we have also seen in an earlier chapter are not interested in cosmetic changes, adjustments or amendments but struggle for alternatives. This is where the



characteristic of "the people" as subjects of history is clearly highlighted in the sense that they themselves struggle for an alternative society. "The people", according to some liberation theologians are those who opt for a reconciliation and harmony model of social change and class struggle as opposed to a conflict model of class struggle, as it is in the case with Marxism. In "A Theology of Liberation", Gutierrez states: "There is one characteristic in particular which holds a central place: the division of humanity into oppressors and oppressed, into owners of the means of production and those dispossessed of the fruit of their work, into antagonistic social classes. But this is not all; the division brings with it confrontations, struggles, violence. How then are we to live evangelical charity in the midst of this situation? How can we reconcile the universality of charity with the option for a particular social class?" (Gutierrez 1973:272-273).

We need to dwell for a moment on "the people's" option for a reconciliation and harmony model of social change and class struggle according to some liberation theologians, as opposed to a conflict model of class struggle as it is the case with Marxism. Gutierrez is realistic enough to acknowledge that class struggle poses a serious problem to humanity, to the universality of Christian love. However, for him, to love all people does not mean avoiding confrontations, neither does it mean preserving a fictitious harmony.

For Gutierrez this reconciliation and harmony model is expressed as universal love which in solidarity with the oppressed seeks to also liberate the oppressors from their own power, from their selfishness and ambition to oppress others. According to Gutierrez, love for those who live in a condition of objective sin demands that we struggle to liberate them from it. In his view, the liberation of the poor who are "the people", and the liberation of the rich are achieved at the same time. For Gutierrez, one loves the oppressors by liberating them from themselves. But he adds that this cannot be achieved except by resolutely opting for the oppressed, that is, by combatting the oppressive class. Gutierrez is of the opinion that it must be a real and effective combat, not hate (cf. Gutierrez 1973:272ff.).

Boff too, rather than pursuing a conflict model of class struggle, as a form of liberation, speaks of a Christian way of struggle, a reconciliatory model. Of the poorest of the poor, therefore "the peo-

ple”, with particular reference to women, who are part of “the people” Boff writes the following to demonstrate his model of struggle against oppression. “In one base community a woman described herself as oppressed and impoverished on six counts: as a woman, as a prostitute, a single parent, as black, as poor, and because of her tribal origin. Faced with such conditions, what can being a Christian mean except living the faith in a liberating way, trying every possible avenue of escape from such a set of social iniquities”(Boff 1987:47)?

The Marxist “conflict model”, alluded to earlier on is different from the “reconciliation and harmony model” of liberation theologians. Whereas the liberation theologians’ reconciliation model of class struggle is based on love of neighbour, of humankind, at the base of the Marxist model is a negation of the love of God and neighbour. Central to any Marxist analysis is the concept of “class struggle” and the divisions engendered by the capitalist system. For Marx, history consists of a pre-determined outcome. History is “dialectical”. It is spurred on by contradiction and struggle. The importance according to Marx is to opt for the right side, the victorious side, the side with ultimate power, the proletariat. In a speech delivered at the Third All-Russia Congress of the Russian Youth Communist League, Lenin had the following to say: “We say that our morality is entirely subordinated to the interests of the class struggle of the proletariat. Our morality is derived from the interests of the class struggle of the proletariat.... What does this class struggle mean? It means overthrowing the czar, overthrowing the capitalists, abolishing the capitalist class.... The class struggle is continuing and it is our task to subordinate all interests to this struggle. And we subordinate our communist morality to this task. We say: morality is what serves to destroy the old exploiting society and to unite all the toilers around the proletariat, which is creating a new, communist society” (Lenin 1947:667-669).

We notice the crudity of the marxist conflict model of class struggle which hits with the most force, because it suggests for the liberation of humanity a very different model from that of liberation theologians: the dynamic of the theory and practice of class struggle for the benefit of the proletariat. The Marxist conflict model of class struggle does run a chronic risk of class hatred, the violent repudiation of the bourgeois spirit and principles and ultimately hating them as human beings. For Marx, the violence of oppression that he wanted to stop, appeared to justify the vio-

lence that would be as a result of the revolution. He envisioned that true justice could only be attained by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Marx saw the class struggle as a struggle to the death in which the revolutionary activities could result in extreme violence. Marx states: "Meanwhile the antagonism between proletariat and bourgeoisie is a struggle of class against class, a struggle that, carried to its highest expression, is a total revolution. Indeed, is it at all surprising that a society founded on the opposition of classes should culminate in brutal contradiction, the shock of body against body, as its final denouement?... It is only in an order of things in which there are no more classes and class antagonisms that social evolutions will cease to be political revolutions. Till then, on the eve of every general reshuffling of society, the last word of social science will always be: "Combat or death, bloody struggle or extinction. Thus the question is inexorably put" (Marx 1976:212).

As stated earlier on, in liberation theology, "the people" as a class, who struggle, cannot simply be equated with the proletariat in Marxism. In fact we will now see that when some liberation theologians, Gutierrez in particular, speak about "class struggle", they appear to mean a rather more racial and ethnic conception of "class" than the notion of "proletariat" in Marxism.

3.4.2. Racial Struggle

It is interesting to note that when Gutierrez speaks of "class struggle", he seems to mean a rather more racial and ethnic conception of "class" than an economic one. When he speaks of "the poorest" of the poor he often means (and at various instances says explicitly), the "Indians, blacks, and mestizos" of Latin America (cf. Gutierrez 1983:187). In other instances when he refers to the oppressed class, with an ethnic connotation in mind, he criticised the preparatory document of Puebla for praising Western culture without hearing the indigenous voices of Latin America that have always been oppressed by Western culture (cf. Gutierrez 1983:113). For Gutierrez the poor, therefore "the people", have been oppressed and marginalized because they belonged to a particular race, Indian et cetera (cf. Gutierrez 1983:186). Gutierrez further speaks of the native peoples of Latin America as "underdogs" (cf. Gutierrez 1983:189). We can conclude then that when Gutierrez speaks of the poor, "the people", he appears especially to have in mind the non-West-

ern Indians, blacks, and mestizos, most of whom are by no means industrial workers or proletarians.

Boff too seems to express a racial dimension to the notion of "class struggle" of "the people". According to him, we cannot confine ourselves to the purely socio-economic struggles of "the people", however basic and determinant this may be. He states: "We have to look also to other levels of social oppression such as racist oppression, discrimination against blacks..." (Boff 1986:29). There are also those among "the people" who are oppressed and marginalized by reason of their race (such as blacks), or by reason of their sex (women). With the latter group we will deal in the following subsection.

Another liberation theologian, Joseph Comblin, also states the racial dimension of "class struggle". For him, the struggle of "the people", among other forms of struggle, also involves a struggle against racial discrimination. "Still today whites dominate blacks, those descendants of enslaved ancestors. Whites still dominate Indians, those heirs of crushed peoples" (Comblin 1990a:165). "The people" are those who struggle not only against oppressive socio-economic structures, but also against racial discrimination. Comblin here above stresses that this racial oppression is still an existential problem. This is a problem debated in Black Theology in the United States of America and South Africa. A lot of discussions take place as to whether economics or race should be the fundamental category in analysing the oppressive structures of the United States and South Africa.

Up until the 1970's, for black theology, the struggle against oppression was primarily a racial one. For black theology according to James Cone, racism was the central problem in the world (cf. Cone 1982:114). It was quite clear that for Cone, the most obvious and severe oppression stemmed from the racial attitudes of whites. The question of class struggle did not appear to warrant the same attention as racism. Cone in his book, "My Soul Looks Back", states the following: "Like feminism, Marxism was not a part of my political and theological consciousness when I first began to write about black theology. My introduction to Marx came with my encounter with Third World theologians, especially Latin American liberation theologians. They

were strong advocates of class analysis in their writings and also in my personal encounters with them. As with feminism, my first response was to ignore the problem of class, because race appeared to be the most dominant manifestation of injustice in the United States" (Cone 1982:123). South African Black Theology too started off with the racial struggle as fundamental, a struggle against the enslavement of Black people, a struggle against the loss of their sense of dignity and worth and a search for new symbols to affirm their humanity (cf. Moore 1973:9). For South African black theology, the struggle is first and foremost a struggle against racial discrimination. Moore states: "Black theology seeks to cut across this classically arid detachment. It begins with people - specific people, in a specific situation and with specific problems to face. Thus it starts with black people in the South African situation facing the strangling problems of oppression, fear, hunger, insult and dehumanization. It tries to understand as clearly as possible who these people are, what their life experiences are, and the nature and cause of their suffering. This is an indispensable datum of Black Theology" (Moore 1973:6).

Because of the constant debate among black theologians, both from the United States of America and South Africa, a shift of emphasis took place. Cone admits that it was not until he began to travel to other continents, Asia, Africa and Latin America that he began to recognize the shortcomings of a solely racial struggle (cf. Cone 1982:114). He now sees the complexity of the world's problems. Even though he still holds on to a primarily race analysis of the situation of oppression in the world he does acknowledge that putting the racial problem first does not eliminate classism, sexism or imperialism et cetera. He states: "While I still think that racism is and must remain the chief focus of my theological and political endeavors, I no longer regard it as the only problem or even the primary contradiction in the world today" (Cone 1982:115). An interesting observation here is the interconnectedness of racism, classism and other forms of oppression Cone alludes to here. There is a shift from the strictly racial struggle as to include other forms of struggle as well. The impression is given by Cone that racial and class struggle are not mutually exclusive but complement each other.

In South African Black theology, there is also a shift from viewing the struggle against oppression as a purely racial struggle to include also other forms of struggle such as class struggle. In Ghana,

in December 1977, Allan Boesak, during a conference of dialogue between Black Theology in the United States and Black Theology in South Africa, warned against an exclusively racial analysis which falls short of an economic analysis. Boesak states: "We must make a proper social analysis. I believe that as real and as ugly as racism is in our country, it is not the only question nor is it the ultimate question... But beyond the question of race lies the economic question... If we do not take cognizance of the economic question, liberation theology will fizzle out" (Boesak 1981:175).

Although Boesak here above does not clearly spell out the connection between racial struggle and economic struggle, he nevertheless raises the problem of capitalist economics' impact on the racial struggle. He does allude to the fact that a black theology of liberation centered solely on the evil of racial discrimination while permitting the survival of capitalism is an erroneous analysis of oppression.

The racial struggle of "the people" is a struggle against structures. Just as the form of economic oppression as we have heard earlier on is a structural one, racial oppression too is a structural one. Maimela reminds us that it makes a difference whether one is black or white in South Africa (cf. Maimela 1987:64). In Latin America Gutierrez also refers to racial oppression as a structural one which goes back to colonial times, when in his view, oppression and marginalization were directed to Indians originally (cf. Gutierrez 1983:187ff.).

"The people" then, are those who engage in a struggle against racial structures. In South Africa the racial structure of "apartheid" is almost defeated in the sense that it is not law anymore, but the struggle is long not over yet because the effects of this structure are still clearly visible in the South African society. Group areas are still predominantly occupied by one or the other race group. With the exception of a few open educational centers, these are still clearly racially demarcated.

The racial struggle of "the people" is a questioning of the deep entrenched racism still prevalent in society. "The people" seek to go to the very root of misery and injustice imbedded in struc-

tural racism. Their struggle is a struggle not interested in reformed racism but take the road of social revolution. "It is a project just underway, nourished by the daily struggle of the people to live in spite of oppression - and resist oppression and struggle for liberation" (Gutierrez 1983:192).

2.4.3 Gender Struggle

Oppressed women from a large part of "the people" insofar as they are oppressed. Yet it is alarming to note the invisibility of women in both liberation theology and black theology. The silence of women's experience in liberation theology is deafening. If women are a large part of "the people", how can the revolution and societal changes move ahead without participation of women on all fronts? The various levels of women's consciousness, participation in the struggle against oppression is imperative to distinguish the specific character of "the people", namely, subjects of history, of which they are a part. How can the concept of "the people" according to liberation theologians be explained adequately without women's experience of oppression? Women's participation should be a basic element in articulating "the people" as subjects of history. As we will gather later from liberation theologians, the revolutionary struggle of "the people" must be reformulated on the basis of the reality facing women.

As we have heard earlier on, there are various levels of social oppression, among others, gender oppression. Cone, a black theology theologian, acknowledges the lack of contribution in his writings towards the liberation of women from oppression. He states: "When I began writing about black theology, the problem of women was not part of my theological consciousness. When it was raised by others, I rejected it as a joke or as an intrusion upon the legitimate struggle of black people to eliminate racism" (Cone 1982:115-116).

The oppression of women is not a joke, as Cone might have thought before, neither is it a form of distraction from the real struggle of racial oppression according to many black theologians, but it is a reality. This reality, as time progressed, was made much clearer with the rise of contemporary feminism, an action by women themselves, who made their voices heard, Cone too, could not for long overlook this reality. He states: "So my first step in an openness to feminism was

the recognition of its legitimacy within the context of Union in particular and the white community generally. If black people are going to function effectively in a white context, then they must respond creatively to the hurts of all, even if some people's hurts seem very minor when compared with the oppression of blacks. When people make jokes out of someone else's pain, it is an insult to the humanity of all and thus cannot be tolerated. It does not matter how things appear from my vantage point, it is not legitimate for me to make my experience the final criterion for judging the nature and extent of somebody else's suffering. If I had not been a victim of sexism, how do I know that the pain of racism is greater than the one arising from sexism" (Cone 1982:117) ?

In Latin American liberation theology, Gutierrez too faces the reality of women's oppression when he states the following: "...Women in today's society - especially women who are members of the popular classes, are doubly exploited, marginalized and degraded" (Gutierrez 1983:102). Gutierrez not only acknowledges the reality of the oppression of women but simultaneously confirms the fact that women are part and parcel of the popular classes, therefore "the people". Gutierrez, by viewing women as members of "the people", sees their struggle as legitimate.

In South Africa, at a conference on feminist theology, in 1984 at Hammanskraal, the conference spelled out a four-fold subjugation of black women in South Africa. "They are discriminated against and oppressed as black people (racial). They are oppressed as workers (class). They are oppressed as women (sex). They are oppressed by one another as women both as individuals and as a group of the oppressed" (Hopkins 1989:175).

Sexism is not only a general problem among all women irrespective of race, colour or class, but it is in particular also a racial problem. Some women are particularly oppressed because they are black. Cone states: "Black men are often more insensitive and rude toward black women feminists than they are toward white women" (Cone 1982:118). Here, for the same form of oppression, namely sexism, black women are worse off than white women just because they are black, Cone implies.

Black women experience a unique oppression, namely that which is related to being both black

and women. This is an experience which marginalizes them, not only because they are women, but because they are black women. In the book, "We are one voice", edited by Simon Maimela and Dwight Hopkins, this is expressed in the following way: "Black women began to articulate the unique oppression connected to being both black and woman. They began to realize that to be black and woman in the United States too often means being unemployed in a disproportionate percentage to the rest of the population. In other words, black women have indeed been the "last hired and the first fired".

In addition, if a black woman is employed, it more than likely means she is earning substandard wages and, moreover, raising children alone on these meagre wages. It should be noted that still today, according to the 1980 United States Census, 70 percent of all black families that fall below the poverty line are headed by a woman" (Brown 1989:62-63).

In Latin America too, the oppression of women is also a racial one. Women are marginalized along racial lines. They are not assigned full dignity not only because they are women but because they belong to a despised race, Indian, mestizo or black. Cora Ferro, a Latin American woman herself states: "The native Indian woman, the mestizo woman, and the black woman suffer even greater discrimination because of their race. This only adds to the exploitation of these social groups" (Ferro 1981:26).

Earlier on we noticed an exposition of the kind of oppression women suffer within the secular world, organizations and within the black community. However, women also realize their marginal status within the church as black women (cf. Brown 1989:64). Brown further mentions the fact that black women have questioned their absence in the leadership of black congregations. Women are critical of the black theology of liberation, because as Cone already admitted earlier on, they do not feature. Brown states: "As black women began to critique the black church, the critique extended also to the theology which emerged from that church, that is, the black theology of liberation. Jacqueline Grant provided the earliest critique of black theology in her 1979 article, 'Black Theology and the Black woman'. In this article she accused black theologians of not seriously addressing the issue of sexism" (Brown 1989:64).

Latin American women suffer the same marginalization in their churches. According to Ferro, they are not part of the decision-making mechanisms in the church and yet they are the most active in church activities in terms of worship, social assistance and catechesis (cf. Ferro 1981:28).

Emanating from an earlier statement on the four-fold subjugation of black women in South Africa, they are also oppressed as workers (class). Roxanne Jordan, a black South African woman herself, mentions the following: "Black women are the lowest paid work force in South Africa. In boom times they are hired at low wages and fired during recession periods. They form 70% of the unemployed community" (Jordan 1989:53). For Jordan, because women are the lowest paid, it goes without saying that such a state of affairs affect their social, economic and legal status. With no economic power, how can they own property or even have adequate legal representation in any disputes? With women swelling the unemployment numbers any chances of access to goods and services are jeopardised, which render them permanent dependent on men. Not only are women the lowest paid or the biggest number of unemployed, but they don't even have access to certain jobs, just because of their sex. The very church they belong to, where everybody is suppose to be equal before God, in some denominations, Catholic among others, they cannot be employed as ministers.

In Latin America, for Ferro, women's oppression as a class takes on a specific character under capitalism. She explains that under this system, women are assigned a role of being dominated. She states: "In the family the woman has for her responsibility the task of daily restoring the strength of the laborer, reproducing sons as the labor-power of the future, transmitting an ideology of submission to the system, and channelling the consumption needs of the family. All this is to be done in the service of capital. As a result, the role assigned to women in the family leads to a set of conditionings that are profoundly oppressive for women" (Ferro 1981:25-26).

The conditionings that are oppressive according to Ferro are among others that women are made dependent on the male economy. It goes as far as the very domestic labour of women which has an economic value, but not recognised by men. Ferro observes that in the factory where women have to do cheaper labour, this is done under inhuman conditions. What is more oppressive to

women according to her is that for equal production with men, women are paid lower wages. Despite their high productivity, women do not have control over production (cf. Ferro 1981:26).

Women are also oppressed because of their sex. Maimela in his book, "Modern Trends in Theology" gives a brief history on the oppression of women by males and reminds us that male domination of women is the oldest and universal form of oppression. Maimela also shows how this oppression was justified by men. He states: "However, in order to make this exploitative sexist domination work and have respectability, patriarchal societies co-opted religion which was ready to justify the subjugation and oppression of women, not only on the basis of the frailty of the female body, but also on the basis of the divine punishment pronounced on women because of sin. Eve (and through her all women) in the Judeo-Christian religion is regarded as the gateway to the devil and the cause of permanent dependency of women who must now remain subordinate and obedient to their husbands, who are the heads of women. Women are thus created to be men's helpmate, to serve men as mothers, wives and sex objects" (Maimela 1990:201). This, on the part of males, is an extreme form of marginalization of women and even more so, to attempt to justify it with religion.

According to the above historical excerpt by Maimela, women are considered objects, decorations and frivolous pleasure. Hence we so often hear this myth, "women as the weaker sex" or "women as the second sex". With even a religious justification for women's oppression, men make sure that women are kept in a situation of marginalization, alienation and dependence. Ferro states the following: "The whole socio-cultural framework is male. A 'macho' ideology uses the existing structure as a vehicle for the submission of women, who are trodden underfoot by men at every level. 'Macho' ideology, which says that a man should have many women, leads to serious consequences: a great deal of irresponsibility and abandonment" (Ferro 1981:27). Ferro has more to say about the whole sociocultural framework that is male which is a source of women's oppression. For Ferro, women are caught up in a constant fear of not cooperating with perpetuating this male domination. She cites the following example: "Her pregnancy and maternity is perpetual perplexity, for she fears she will bear females instead of the males her husband wants" (Ferro 1981:27).

On the level of family life, Ferro maintains that the males take decisions. In many instances the father and male children exercise authority, leaving wives as unequal partners with their husbands. In this way the family unit serves to perpetuate the oppression of women (cf. Ferro 1981:27-28). Ferro also maintains that on the level of education, women are kept subservient. In rural areas particularly women are more oppressed where they have little or no chance of educational advancement. Very few women attain the scientific level in education according to Ferro. They rarely fill top-level posts in educational establishments (cf. Ferro 1981:28).

It is to be expected that persons, women who are victims of any injustice make their entry into the struggle for freedom, hence under this subheading we deal with gender struggle. For Maimela, this gender struggle is carried out through the feminist struggle for freedom, dignity and equality (cf. Maimela 1990:202-203). Through this struggle, women respond to the historical experience of their marginalization and oppression as sexual class in a male dominated world. Maimela states: "But the history of the feminist struggle for freedom, dignity and equality goes back to the nineteenth century, when women began to campaign for their civil rights: to vote; to inherit, manage and dispose of property; to represent themselves and to control their earnings" (Maimela 1990:203). Women themselves did something about their oppression, they became subjects of history, a very vital characteristic for the inclusion into "the people". This is why, as was seen earlier on, Gutierrez sees women as part of the popular classes. Only those who are aware of their oppression and do something about it, struggling against it, those who are subjects of history, are "the people". "The people" are those women who struggle against their oppression.

Ferro, citing examples from Vietnam, China, Cuba and Nicaragua enumerates on the contribution of gender struggle to the total struggle of "the people". She states: "The lower-bourgeoisie woman, won over to the people's struggle, notably helps the liberation process. She is a potential liberator when she takes the side of the exploited" (Ferro 1981:29). For Ferro, women give a profound human character to the struggle. In other words, in a struggle against oppression that can easily slip into an inhuman endeavour because of men's lust for power and control, women, with their gentle nature, humanize the struggle (cf. Ferro 1981:29ff.). She also maintains that women at the same time have the ability to endure suffering and can display great courage and

commitment, which according to her is vital for waging any struggle. What is also a great attribute of women towards the struggle is that they participate fully in the struggle without generally aspiring to power (cf. Ferro 1981:29ff.). This of course is very important for any struggle against any form of oppression. The objective must be to fight the evil resulting from oppression and not necessarily fighting for power by whatever means.

The gender struggle, the feminist struggle, like the concept of "the people", is not exclusive as to strictly consist of females only. The feminist struggle according to Ruether, a woman herself, includes both men and women to struggle for the wholeness of all human beings. No human being, be it male or female is whole when suffering any form of oppression. For Ruether both male and female are called upon to construct..."a new cooperative social order out beyond the principles of hierarchy, rule and competitiveness. Starting in the grass-roots local units of human society where psycho-social polarization first began, we must create a living pattern of mutuality between men and women, between parents and children, among people in their social, economic and political relationships..." (Ruether 1973:124-125). Maimela too, speaks of this new vision the feminist struggle presents - that of uniting men and women into a community of human justice, combining the experiences, insights and talents of all people (male and female) and reshape the course of history. For Maimela, the feminist struggle is an action whereby women are the subjects of history, so that together with men, in a combined struggle, they change a sexist and oppressive society into equality for all, justice for all and freedom for all (cf. Maimela 1990:204).

3.5. Power

"Power has to do with whatever decisions people make about the arrangements under which they live and about the events which make up the history of their times. In so far as such decisions are made, the problem of who is involved in making them is the basic problem of power" (Horowitz 1963:23). In this passage, Horowitz gives us an idea of the nature of power. In liberation theology, "the people" are those who have power. Gutierrez states the following: "But we also know that the poor, the masses of the people, are history's transforming power, the agents of liberating praxis" (Gutierrez 1983:105). However the "power" they have does not seem to be the "power" Horowitz is describing..

"The people" are not simply characterized by those who have the power to make decisions, but their power is a different power from the kind of power Horowitz describes. According to Gutierrez, they have a transforming power. It makes things new, and changes the course of history. The poor, "the people", are those who were "absent" from history, who now make their presence felt. He states: "This new presence of the poor and oppressed is making itself felt in the popular struggles for liberation and in the historical consciousness arising from these struggles. It is also making itself felt within the church, for there the poor are increasingly making their voices heard and claiming openly their right to live..." (Gutierrez 1990:8).

Gutierrez here above speaks about the poor and the oppressed, "the people", who display a show of power through their presence, fighting for their liberation. They demonstrate a power and force towards a new dispensation, the emergence of equality and justice for all. How else can an oppressed people's presence be felt if not through a fight they put up against their oppressors? Otherwise they would be quiet and submissive as it is in the case with those people who refuse to do something about their situation of oppression and become objects of history. According to liberation theologians, "the people" are not powerless and submissive, but they have power which they demonstrate through their struggles, by radically calling society into question and presenting a challenge to the oppressive forces. Gutierrez further maintains that "the people's" power, expressed through their presence is not only felt in popular movements but also in the church, through the rise of basic ecclesial communities. This is an indication that Gutierrez, "the people" have a Christian character of which we will hear more in the next chapter.

For Victoria Araya too, the transforming power of the poor, "the people", is demonstrated by their emergence as a force to be reckoned with. Absent from history until now, through their transforming power, they become present to it. Speaking about the poor, "the people", Araya states: "the exploited classes, oppressed cultures, and racial groupings suffering discrimination are awakening and raising their voices, shaking the yoke of their slavery from their necks with the power nurtured in history" (Araya 1983:20-21). For Araya this is a power not anarchical, in attempt to prescind from power, authority, and organization completely. But it is opposed to the power of the dominant classes that subject others to oppression. For him the power of "the people" is re-

flected in the fight they engage in, thereby transforming the system that continually reproduces the exploitation of the common majorities. In the statement "the people's" power is marked by resistance, in Araya's words, "shaking the yoke of their slavery from their necks...." (Araya 1983:21) Sergio Torres too speaks about "the people" as those who have power to resist, they do not passively accept their situation. He states: "Following a long tradition of struggle, which began with the indigenous peoples who resisted and continue to resist white domination, the people have a beautiful history of resistance and organization. Although it is true that in the seventies there was an increase in the repression that attempted to dismantle the popular organisations, the people were able to resist, to keep their hope alive, to keep intact their power for liberation, and to prepare new forms of struggle" (Torres 1981:5). Torres like other liberation theologians, views the power of "the people" not as the power of the elite, a corps of specialists who stand outside and above the community, but it is the power of "the people", the oppressed community.

Leonardo Boff shares the same view as regards power being a function of the community and not of individuals. Nobody can and must claim power according to Boff, lest it be erroneously applied for the benefit of some to the exclusion of others. Boff states: "Power and authority is the function of the community, not of one person. Power in itself is not rejected. What is rejected is the monopolistic expropriation of power and authority for the benefit of an elite" (Boff 1981:136) For Boff, power should be shared, among the community, "the people". When power is shared among "the people", it would be rather difficult to have this monopolistic expropriation of power and authority for the benefit of an elite as is expressed in the text. Boff's statement on power as a function of the community implies a people's power of working together in harmony and for the good of all. For people who share in an authoritarian power that dominates and oppresses others, people's power sounds chaotic, an indiscriminate unleashing of anger, hatred and revenge. But this is not the case according to Albert Nolan. "People's power is not mob rule, it is another word for grassroots democracy. In any true democracy there are elected leaders who represent the people at every level of society and in all its institutions. When the Freedom Charter says, "the people shall govern", it means quite obviously through elected or delegated representatives as the next sentence makes clear: "Every man and woman shall have the right to vote and stand as a candidate for all bodies which make laws. That is people's power" (Nolan 1988:164-165).

According to Albert Nolan, the power that "the people" have, is popularly known as "people's power". People's power is an assertion of "the people's" right to life. The oppression and exploitation that "the people" suffer means death: for many a premature and unjust death. Through exerting their power, "the people" take the option for life. Nolan describes people's power in the following way: " The singing and dancing, the speeches and slogans, the unity in action and the spirit of hope, the commitment and the courage, together with the memory of the past, have engendered in the people a deep sense of power. It finds its most emphatic expression in the clenched fist salute and the acclamation, Amandla!, with the response, Ngawethu! This frightens many whites and others who are outside of the struggle" (Nolan 1988:163-164). What it means to "the people" , is to have power, not necessarily the type of power the dominant sectors of society have in terms of a powerful army and ammunition, but simply a power demonstrated through protest, mass action, singing and dancing. Here it must be noted carefully, that for Nolan, the concrete identity to which the concept of "the people" refers to as having power, is that they have a more demonstrative power than a violent power of killing, assassinations that is at present the order of the day in South Africa.

"The people" are those who empower themselves for it is precisely this factor that designates them subjects of history. In his book, "Poor Yet Making Many Rich" , Dickinson makes this observation as regards the people of Israel who empowered themselves. He says that we learn from the Exodus that despite repeated promises under duress to the Hebrew people go, Pharaoh could never quite bring himself to do it when pressures were relaxed. The people had to take it upon themselves, empowered by God (cf. Dickinson 1983:61).

The empowerment of "the people" means that they take it upon themselves to free themselves from oppression, like Dickinson states here above. But it is not as simple as that. "The people's" empowerment is empowerment by God. Nolan describes the power of "the people" as the power of God and further elaborates that this power is unconquerable. He states: "People's power like the power of God is invincible. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the power of the people who are willing to suffer and die for the liberation of others. Nothing can destroy such power. The attempt to destroy the power of Jesus by killing him was a failure. The attempt of the Roman

Empire to destroy Christian faith by persecution and martyrdom was a failure. You can kill the body but you cannot kill the spirit. When a person is willing to die, he or she has nothing to lose. You can no longer tempt them, bribe them, fool them or threaten them. They are free and their captors are cornered" (Nolan 1988:166).

The fact that God shows his favour to "the people" by empowering them is a great sign of hope for them with the sure hope that with God on their side they need fear nothing. We need to look at the hope of "the people".

3.6. Hope

"The masses of the people have suffered cruel blows, but they have also learned important lessons. The popular movement is aware of its retreats, of the ambiguity of some of the path it has taken, and of the vagueness of some of its social stances. In these vagaries it is no different from any other historical process. But it is also firmly determined and full of hope" (Gutierrez 1983:82).

It may well be possible that through the setbacks, pain and sacrifice "the people" have suffered in the wake of the intensification of their struggles, they may feel helpless. They may feel that they have been abandoned by God, the kind of feeling Jesus had on the cross. But Gutierrez here above states that "the people" are those with a sure hope. Even more so, they are full of hope. For Gutierrez hope is that consciousness that there will be a brighter future inspite of what is happening at present. Gutierrez speaks about : "hard painful hope. Hope amid hardship. Hope amid struggles and failures" (Gutierrez 1983:75). It is this hope that is the driving force of "the people". This hope gives them the kind of power that was discussed earlier on. For Gutierrez "the people" as those who hope against hope demonstrate a magnificent show of power. It is a power-related hope that challenges the pessimism and the seemingly uselessness of the present situation of oppression.

In the struggle for liberation, nothing can be more hopeful than the emergence of "the people" taking history into their own hands and mapping out their own destiny. What is even more hope-

ful is that they strive for freedom, and an alternative society, not only for themselves, but for all human beings who so wish to be free and to be at peace with one another. The Kairos Document views "the people" as those who are full of hope. This is expressed in the following way: "Most of the oppressed people in South Africa today and especially the youth do have hope. They are acting courageously and fearlessly because they have a sure hope that liberation will come" (The Kairos Document 1986:26).

According to the Kairos Document, hope is enabling. Where in the past the poor and oppressed were doomed to fatalism and determinism, "the people" are those who inject not only themselves but the whole of society with a new tomorrow, a better future because of their hope. It is this hope that so powerfully enabled school children who during the "16 June 1976" uprising in Soweto, took history into their own hands by struggling for equal education, freedom and justice for all population groups in South Africa. These children were filled with so much hope that they, unarmed, courageously faced heavily armed soldiers. Since then, South Africa was not the same. People all over South Africa, injected with this hope, engaged in struggle as a sign of hope. Albert Nolan states: "The South African system must be the world's greatest destroyer of illusionary hopes and expectations. But that precisely is its weakness, that precisely is how it gives birth, unintentionally, to real hope" (Nolan 1988:139-140).

The real hope Nolan refers to but does not mention in the text is that "the people" hope for a future that is "...the opposite of racism, inequality, discrimination, domination and exploitation" (Nolan 1988:142). For Nolan an enormously hopeful sign is that "the people" are demanding full participation in the whole process of decision making in South Africa (cf. Nolan 1988:144). Hope spreads from the involvement of "the people" themselves. For Nolan it is clear that the hope of "the people" is not based on the dynamics of social change, but human responsibility, the involvement of the people is imperative. Hope for Nolan is not an automatic mechanism. Nolan puts it this way: "The signs of hope then are the favourable conditions and the human response. And God is present in both" (Nolan 1988:156).

For Sobrino hope is expressed in concrete terms: "The hope of the poor is demanded by sheer

being, merely in order to be that being: hope for housing, hope for employment, a hope in which 'having' is not yet oriented to consumerism and the tendency to oppression, but oriented simply to the constitution of 'being with dignity'. The hope of the poor is the novel conviction that it is possible to succeed in becoming a person - a genuine creature of God, and no longer the perennial victim of idols. The hope of the poor is the curious persuasion that it is possible to live in a society not composed exclusively of wolves and sheep. It is in this change in perspective, seemingly so simple, that the hope of the poor is expressed. For these poor history is no longer sheer fatalism. History becomes promise, and the possibility of the realization of the promise" (Sobrino 1988:163). Sobrino views "the people" as those whose being is characterised by hope, translated into concrete action. They hope for the sustenance of life, shelter and work in which they can find fulfilment. They simply want to be with dignity, with the right to exist and not to be at the mercy of the rich and powerful. They look forward to a situation in which they have the right to think. The hope of "the people," according to Sobrino, is to express themselves on their own terms and not to exist as an extension of the dominant sectors of society. They look forward to the right to a human life as Sobrino states in the text above.

According to Sobrino the hope of "the people" is a real hope. Their hope takes concrete forms, characterised by actions and victories already accomplished here and now. It is not "a pie in the sky hope". Gutierrez also expresses this real hope of "the people" as follows: "There is nothing less exact, or more laden with meaning, than a date on a calendar. And this is well, for meaning is motivating, whereas precision is not. The year 1978, then, invites us to draw up a balance sheet. The ledger of the last ten years is closed, awaiting an audit. Years of hope these surely were. Not euphoria, but hope" (Gutierrez 1983:75). For Gutierrez too the hope of "the people" is a hope based on actions and victories, already accomplished, a sign of greater things to come. These victories, reinforcing the hope of "the people", release even more hope, so that according to Gutierrez, they are not simply charged with shallow optimism but a sure and firm hope.

"The people's" hope extends to the liberation of their oppression too. Gutierrez states: "Yes, here are 'signs of struggle and hope', testifying in word and work to the mighty deed of all who fight and die for liberation, for love of their brother and sister, the mighty deed of all who rediscover

the Lord alive in the poor and oppressed" (Gutierrez 1983:76). For "the people", according to Gutierrez, no matter how dramatic their oppression and setbacks in their actions and struggles for liberation, their hopes remain high. Their hope is expressed in their consciousness of the irreversible axis of the process of liberation, for which they are even prepared to die.

Gutierrez implies in the text that the hope of "the people" is a hope that is not exclusive but includes all those who identify with the poor and oppressed. The Kairos Document states that at present those who do not belong to "the people" have false hope. "They hope to maintain the status quo and their special privileges with perhaps some adjustments and they fear any real alternative. But there is much more than that to hope for and nothing to fear" (The Kairos Document 1986:26). Because of this difference between the hope of "the people" and the hope of those who do not belong to "the people" as we have seen above, the way to the hope envisaged by "the people", however, will not be painless. "The conflict and the struggle will intensify in the months and years ahead. That is now inevitable - because of the intransigence of the oppressor" (The Kairos Document 1986:27). This is also the view of Sobrino in Latin American liberation theology that this hope will not be without pain. "The people" will suffer all kinds of ills, worst of all the crippling effects of poverty. "Despite all these years of oppression and repression, and the fact that a microstructural view only threatens the Third World with greater poverty still the poor of Latin America today are peoples filled with hope. Indeed, hope is one of the essential characteristics of their poverty, so that there is no understanding them apart from it" (Sobrino 1988:161).

Sobrino made the point that we cannot understand the hope of the poor apart from their poverty. The poor for Sobrino are those who manifest a remarkable joy in their struggle. This joy is a sign of hope. But Gutierrez expresses this hope of "the people" linked with their poverty in a more profound way: "The poor know that history is theirs. They know that if they must cry today, tomorrow they will laugh (cf. Luke 6:21). And they are discovering that 'laughter' is an expression of deep confidence in the Lord, the confidence we find in the songs of Hannah (I Samuel 2:1-10) and Mary (Luke 1), the confidence of the poor who live in the midst of a history they seek to transform. It is a subversive gladness - subversive of the world of oppression, and this is why it disquiets dominators. For it denounces the fear of waivers and reveals the love of the God of hope" (Gutierrez 1983:107).

We see here above the religious dimension Gutierrez gives to the hope of "the people". It is not simply a hope for a new political, social and economic dispensation, but it is also a "...profound hope of the people in God as their Liberator, as the 'Avenger of the Lowly', Rescuer and Vindicator of this exploited Christian people" (Gutierrez 1983:160). This is the divine dimension attached to the hope of "the people" alluded to earlier on. It is the hope that ultimately, God will reconcile this world to himself. And it is simultaneously an awareness that the fullness of a better life will not be reached in this world.

For Gutierrez the present and future are closely linked in the sense that the present efforts of "the people" here and now, are already an indication of what is to come. In the present struggle of "the people", fighting and dying for liberation, for love of their brother and sister, irrespective of who he or she is reflected the mighty deed of all who discover the Lord alive in the poor and oppressed. In this action, according to Gutierrez is the witness of those who proclaim Christ risen and alive in the very midst of death which seems to be the final end. The deeper meaning of hope is that what is presently occurring in South Africa and Latin America, is that in spite of tribulations and setbacks, in the end justice will reign supreme (cf. Gutierrez 1983:76ff.).

As we have seen above, "the people" are those whose hope is a combination of what is happening already now and what is to come. This keeps "the people" balanced in their outlook and aware that they are prone to error and mistakes. We are cautioned here that we have to distinguish very clearly between "the people" as symbolic reality which encompasses all that is good and right, and "the people" as concrete reality, who can go wrong at times and even lose hope for a while. But this distinction will be dealt with in greater depth when we come to the final chapter when we will give an evaluation of the concept of "the people".

"The people" are those who send into the world a powerful sign of hope, because in spite of their circumstances, they know how to celebrate life, by this gesture, taking history into their own hands. "A people that knows how to celebrate is a people with hope. They are no longer a wholly oppressed people but a people who march toward their liberation" (Boff 1985:130)

3. 7. Summary

It is beyond any reasonable doubt established that being subjects of history is the most central characteristic of "the people".

This chapter shows that the actions of "the people" effectively demonstrate that they are subjects of history. These actions take various forms according to the contributions of different theologians. For Gutierrez the actions of "the people" are actions of rebellion. He also mentions actions of resistance. Boff too speaks about "the people" as those who have the strength to resist and therefore organize themselves to transform their subhuman situation through their actions.

The actions of "the people", through which they show that they are subjects of history, are in addition to having a this-worldly dimension, also have a transcendent dimension. It is not only through their own actions that they are subjects of history but also through God's actions at work in them.

"The people" have a specific consciousness. They refuse to be condemned to the fate of being objects of manipulation and suppression. "The people" are conscious of their power to transform their conditions.

The fact that "the people" are those who engage in struggle is characteristic of them being subjects of history. We have seen in this chapter that "the people" are involved in different forms of struggle namely, class struggle, racial struggle and gender struggle.

"The people" are those who empower themselves. Their empowerment does not simply flow from their own human strength but from God.

Hope is a very important characteristic of "the people" being subjects of history. They are not simply those who have hope, but they are a sign of hope.

CHAPTER FOUR

BELIEVERS

4.1. Faith Attitudes

“The poor and oppressed who are breaking into the history of Latin America and its church constitutes a people who are simultaneously oppressed and believing. This twofold character of one and the same people is of major importance in trying to understand the import and function of the basic ecclesial communities” (Gutierrez 1981:112).

It was already indicated in earlier chapters that the poor, “the people”, have a collective connotation. They belong to social groups as was discussed earlier on. For Gutierrez, “the people” are also those who belong to another grouping, namely, “basic ecclesial communities”, through which they give expression to their faith. The question of ecclesial communities will be dealt with in more detail in the following section.

In the text, Gutierrez, when referring to “the people” as believers, means “the people” of Latin America. He therefore also has Christians in mind. Speaking of the poor, “the people”, Gutierrez states the following: “They are a people: poor, harassed, robbed of the fruit of their labour, and oppressed by injustice. It is to this complex and fecund notion of the poor that we are referring when we say that in Latin America ecclesial life and theological reflection find a concrete and richly consequential point of departure in the people who are simultaneously poor and Christian” (Gutierrez 1981:112).

Gutierrez explicitly expresses in his concept of “the people”, a two-fold dimension of “the people”, namely that they are both oppressed and believing. Any conception of “the people” according to him, is a conception of the two going together, “the people” as oppressed and believing.

“The people” as oppressed according to Gutierrez are those who are made poor, harassed, robbed

of the fruit of their labour by a system so designed to keep them in bondage. But they do not only denounce this system, they rise above this situation in the quest for radical change, by initiating the fight for their rights. Through their own power, the kind of power of "the people" discussed earlier on, they aim for a take over and replace it with the power of "the people". Gutierrez states: "One must also realize that this situation is creating the objective conditions that will allow the people to initiate the fight for their rights and ultimately aim for the takeover of power by the common people - in a society that refuses to recognize them as human beings" (Gutierrez 1981:113). According to Gutierrez, the believing character of "the people" is not only an appendix to their lives, but it permeates their lives as a whole.

When Gutierrez refers to "the people" as Christians he certainly does not have in mind a kind of religiosity that is used to deviate "the people" from addressing the evils of their oppressive situation. For Gutierrez, such a religiosity is often used by the oppressor to condone the existing social system of oppression. He states: "Often the religious factor has been, and still is unfortunately, an obstacle preventing the people from getting a clearer view of their oppressive situation. Much in it still mirrors the prevailing ideology. Often the religious element is used by the oppressor to justify the existing social order" (Gutierrez 1981:113).

Far from being an "opium of the people", for Gutierrez, the religious dimension takes the form of "liberative faith" in "the people" (cf. Gutierrez 1981:114). This liberative faith in Gutierrez's view is expressed in "both firm resistance to oppression and open action against it" (cf. Gutierrez 1981:114). According to Gutierrez, the oppression that is inflicted on "the people" is inflicted on a people who have faith in the God of the Bible. Thus he maintains that this oppression is also inflicted on the faith of "the people". It is not only a question of "the people's" struggle against their material oppression, but it is at the same time a struggle to develop the liberative potential of their faith. For Gutierrez, the oppression of "the people's" faith is a deprivation of God's message which he reveals through the poor and simple people (cf. Gutierrez 1981:114). He states: "The believing dimension of the people also implies, as is demonstrated in practice, the immense potentiality of a liberating faith. This faith has come to expression in different forms throughout history, inspiring dogged resistance to oppression, and even rebellion against it. Those who have

this faith - who believe in the God of the Bible - are oppressed. But their faith is also oppressed and imprisoned, in every real way, in a capitalistic, dehumanizing society. Faith has a liberating potential, but it must be developed" (Gutierrez 1983:97).

The text points out very clearly that although "the people" have faith, their faith attitudes must not be taken for granted, but it is something that needs to be constantly worked on and developed. These faith attitudes of "the people" are not necessarily permanent and immutable, therefore. "The people" are those who continually renew their commitment to the God of the Bible who constantly calls them to perfection. This ties in very well with an idea expressed earlier on, namely, that once a group have become "the people", it does not automatically follow that they will remain "the people", but they must struggle all the time to remain within the fold of "the people" through continuous struggle and identification with the ideals of "the people".

The liberative faith of "the people" Gutierrez refers to is a faith that inspires "the people" to resist oppression both covertly and overtly. He speaks of this faith as a faith that calls for truth and liberty. It is through this faith of the poor and simple that God reveals an understanding of himself to the world. God is a God of the poor and oppressed, the simple ones of society, those pushed to the margins. This is not an exclusive God, but rather those who refuse to believe in a God of the poor and oppressed, exclude themselves from God. According to Gutierrez, the notion of such a God of the poor and oppressed makes the dominators very uneasy. For the dominators it is difficult to see a God revealed through our concrete history. Gutierrez maintains that the dominators prefer to deny such a God that is revealed through our concrete history and it is in this way that they reject the God of liberation and thus exclude themselves from God. "This liberative faith disconcerts those exercising domination. They prefer not to believe in its existence or its ability to reveal God in our concrete history. Denying it, they reveal who they truly are: the fools of whom the Bible speaks, the atheists who reject the God of liberation" (Gutierrez 1981:114).

With reference to Gutierrez's statement in a previous text on the oppression of the poor's very faith it is imperative to note that the material oppression of "the people" does not exclude "the

people's" faith character. Gutierrez states: "The situation of oppression does not eliminate the people's character as believers" (Gutierrez 1981:114). In an earlier text Gutierrez speaks about the fact that God is revealed in our concrete history, by this implying that one cannot separate "the people's" historical oppression from their faith oppression. The oppression of "the people" in their concrete life circumstances is at the same time an oppression of their very faith. This is why Gutierrez speaks about the revolutionary potential as part of their liberative faith. The one is not divorced from the other. The question may now arise as to whether the faith dimension and the political dimension of "the people" are always enjoying this almost complete unity. Gutierrez states: "It is inevitable that the dimension of politics and the dimension of faith will be out of phase with each other at times. Sometimes one aspect will enjoy more growth than the other" (Gutierrez 1981:114). For Gutierrez this unity between faith and politics for "the people" is something to be constantly worked at. Because according to him there is always the temptation to over-emphasise one or the other dimension. He views that the requirement of unity between the two is imperative, rooted in the biblical message on the one hand and "the people's" situation of oppression on the other hand (cf. Gutierrez 1981:144).

As an attempt to bring about this harmony between the life and faith of "the people", Gutierrez is of the opinion that one should avoid an exclusively political activism to the detriment of the reality of faith and vice versa. Gutierrez states: "It has to do with encountering God in the poor, in solidarity with the struggle of the oppressed, in a faith filled with hope and joy that is lived within a liberation process whose agent is the poor people" (Gutierrez 1981:115).

Comblin too, gives a faith dimension to "the people". He particularly gives this faith dimension to "the people" as "subjects of history". Comblin emphasises that it is this believing dimension that brings about a "people". It appears that "the people" only rise up after this call to faith. Hence for him it is a condition for being constituted "the people". For Comblin, the call of "the people" to concrete action to do something about their situation of poverty and oppression is linked with a call to faith. He states: "The people of the poor rise up at a call. The people spring into being as a people from a genuine collective vocation, out of a call to faith and a challenge to the accomplishment of a historical task. This call does not come from human beings alone. It

comes from the Holy Spirit. It is a sign of the power of God at work. The Spirit rouses this collective faith precisely that a people may commence to act as a people. In this new people, the power of the Spirit becomes present in history" (Comblin 1990a:172).

From Comblin's viewpoint, "the people", facing the Latin American situation of oppression, in addition to rising up at a revolutionary call to challenge it, also rise up at a call from God. In the text we find a language about God that grows out of the situation created by the poverty and misery which "the people" struggle against. Comblin sees "the people" as a collective entity, hence he speaks of them springing into being as a collective vocation. We have already seen in an earlier chapter what "the people" as a collective entity consists of, namely, despised races, exploited social classes, marginalized cultures, oppressed women. It is in this context that Comblin speaks about "the people's" call not only coming from human beings alone, but that there is a faith connotation. For him, in the situation of oppression and suffering of "the people", faith is being born, hence he speaks about the call of "the people" as a call from the Holy Spirit. Comblin appears to imply in the text with "the people's" call from the Holy Spirit, a faithfulness to the Lord's will. "The people" according to him can therefore be seen as those whose behaviour and lives are stimulated by their faith.

Comblin also gives a faith dimension to the "power" of "the people". Like Albert Nolan, he links the power of "the people" with the power of God. For Comblin, the power at work in "the people" is the power of God.

According to Comblin, just as "the people" is a collective entity, their faith is also a collective faith, as is expressed in the text. This is a collective faith that is a communion with God and others, expressed collectively, as an act of the faith of "the people".

The believing character of "the people" is also taken up by Nolan, a South African liberation theologian. He states: "God is at work through the faith of the people" (Nolan 1988:137). Nolan here implies that "the people" become a site of God's activities here on earth. They are instrumental in proclaiming God's message. They are symbols of God's nearness and presence to hu-

manity, because as Nolan puts it in the text, "God is at work through the faith of "the people". Gutierrez too, in line with Nolan, expresses God's nearness to "the people" of Latin America. "One must be very far removed from the life of the people to fail to be able to perceive - here in this profession of faith in Christ's nearness as manifested in the expression 'the poor Christ' - a profession of the presence of God in the concrete history of humanity, a profession that Jesus is the Son of God. I do not mean an external profession, with lips, but one that springs from the everyday sufferings, struggles, hopes of the poor; not an 'orthodoxy' that exhausts itself, but the affirmation of a vital, extremely intimate, and yet conscious and reflective truth. The masses receive but very little from those obsessed with the formal theses of the Christian faith. For Christ's poor in Latin America, these professions are part of daily life, prayerful practice, and of authentic theological reflection" (Gutierrez 1983:143).

In the text Gutierrez is unpacking all the implications of Jesus' own identification of himself with the poor and suffering. Jesus' identification with the poor and suffering here implies his nearness to them, which means that through humanity's nearness to the poor and suffering, we experience God's nearness. Gutierrez's central point is Jesus' identification with the poor and suffering as we read in the account of Matthew 25:33-46. This identification of Christ with the poor is made clearer by Gutierrez by going a step further. Because of this central place Christ occupies among "the people", God permeates them, hence they are not mere spiritual escapist, fleeing from the world, expressing their faith in doctrines and with their lips only, who now and then can slip into hardened atheists, revolutionaries and political activists when it suits them, but instead, "the people" are very aware that they are poor and oppressed who simultaneously believe in God. Gutierrez then, presents "the people" as a group that believes in a God who saves, who helps to transform their present miserable situation and who instills in them hope for a new destiny. God is not just an uninvolved bystander an object of history. But a God involved with his people, touching every area of their lives.

Coming back to Nolan as regards his statement earlier on we need to see why he makes the statement that "the people" are those through whose faith God is at work. For him the conditions of faith are present in "the people". He states: "The faith of the poor, the faith of those who were

regarded by the system as 'mere children', was also manifested in their ability to hear and welcome the news of God's salvation as good news. 'I thank you, Father, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children' (Matthew 11:25par). Those who did not benefit from the system, those who suffered under it and were rejected by it, and those who felt overburdened by all its prescriptions (Matthew 11:28; 23:4) were in the best position to accept what Jesus had to say about sin and salvation. The conditions for faith were present in this social group rather than in 'the learned and clever', the upholders of the system" (Nolan 1988:137).

Nolan maintains that "the people", because they are poor, oppressed and belittled, are able to hear the "good news". For Nolan they are able to hear the good news, because in a system where the rich become richer and the poor poorer, they undoubtedly can rely on no one else for help except God. Nolan states: "It was this yearning and this trust or faith that made the poor so ready to hear the good news" (Nolan 1988:138). For Nolan, God chooses such people to work through. Drawing from scripture Nolan speaks of the powerful, the scribes and pharisees as those who refused the salvation offered to them therefore God turned to the poor and little ones of society to make his presence felt in this world (cf. Nolan 1988:138). "The people" are believers because their situation is conducive to faith, they long for liberation and actually trust that this will come about.

We notice in an earlier text that Nolan, like Gutierrez, in an earlier chapter, also refers to "the people" as a social group. Nolan expresses "the people" as a social group not in racial, ethnic, colour and sex terms, but in a unified way. For him "the people" include all those who work and fight for an undivided nation. He states: "...The system has gone to such bizarre lengths to separate people, to retribalise them, to force them into homelands, to insist on ethnicity and multiracialism, that the people have deepened their aspiration not only for non-racialism but also for one undivided nation. The more the system tries to destroy this, the more determined the people become to build it" (Nolan 1988:143).

In minjung theology "the people", minjung, are described as having a transcendent dimension. It

is this transcendent dimension of "the people" in minjung theology that is referred to as an expression of a religious form. Minjung theologian Kim Yong-bock speaks of "the people" as having a close relationship with religion. Kim Yong-bock expresses this as follows: "Minjung history has a strong transcendental or transcending dimension - a beyond history - which is often expressed in religious form. There is a close relationship between religion and the minjung's perception of history" (Yong-bock 1983:98).

In minjung theology "the people", minjung, are explicitly Christian believers. The notion, minjung, "the people" according to Suh Kwang-sun David, stems from the particularly Christian experiences of "the people". He states: "Minjung is a term which grew out of the Christian experiences in the political struggle for justice over the last ten or more years" (David 1983:16). "The people" are not those who have an exclusively Christian faith experience, but a faith experience within their political struggle for justice. It is a faith expressed within the contexts of being students, workers, academics, politicians, prisoners et cetera (cf. David 1983:16). "The people" are those who live out their Christian commitment in whatever situation and circumstances they find themselves. Suh Kwang-sun David states: "Theology of minjung is a creation of those Christians who were forced to reflect upon their Christian discipleship in basement interrogation rooms, in trials, facing court-martial tribunals, hearing the allegations of prosecutors, and in making their own final defense" (David 1983:16).

The faith dimension of "the people" in minjung theology, like in Latin American and South African liberation theology is linked with their concrete social and political oppression. The oppressed minjung and those who have the Christian faith are one and the same people. These two dimensions, Christian faith and oppression go together. For Suh Kwang-sun David, together with its spiritual growth, "the people's" faith has also matured politically and socially. He states: "Korean Christianity has grown as the religion of the oppressed nation or race or the people. We may, therefore, say that Korean Christianity has grown in the context of the politics of nationalism and the politics of the oppressed people, since Christians in Korea took the essence of the Christian gospel to be political" (David 1983:19).

We notice in the text that David refers to “the people” also as an oppressed nation or race. We came across the notion of “the people” that is inclusive of an oppressed race in Latin American and South African liberation theology, but not of nation. In Latin American liberation theology Boff states: “The term ‘people’ is not taken in the sense of nation, lumping everyone together indiscriminately and thus hiding internal differences, but rather in the sense of people, lower class, defined as those who are excluded from participation in society and reduced to the mass, a thing instead of persons” (Boff 1985:117). In Korean liberation theology the concept of “the people” is even more inclusive as to include an oppressed nation. This makes the concept of “the people” in minjung theology even more difficult to define than in Latin American and South African liberation theology. It is dynamic and extremely difficult to be explained in concepts and ideas. Suh Kwang-sun David gives the impression that “the people” in Korea fight their political liberation through their religious beliefs. He sees “the people” as those who interpret their faith politically.

For Kim Yong-bock too, “the people’s” belief is related to their political liberation. Their belief is their power and tool to attain liberation. He states: “Thus Christian belief, for Korean Christians, is the power with which ‘the people’ can be saved” (Yong-bock 1983:107). For Yong-bock the political and religious liberation of “the people” go hand in glove. He identifies “the people” with the people of Israel.

According to Yong-bock, the historical experience of “the people” of Korea is linked with the history of the people of Israel. He sees a link between the destiny of “the people” with that of Israel. “The people” identifies their plight of oppression and suffering with that of Israel. For Yong-bock the people believe that their situation of political weakness has a biblical significance. They believe that God will ultimately deliver them. Yong-bock states: “Korean Christians applied the analogy of Israel to the Korean situation extensively. Korea was to Korean Christians the Oriental Israel with a similar political fate; Israel’s relationship with God and its people’s suffering and humiliation under foreign rule was like the destiny of the Korean people. The most striking analogy was the comparison of Exodus under Moses to Korea’s struggle for national liberation from the Japanese colonial power and Jesus’ struggle under the Roman domination of Israel” (Yong-bock 1983:109).

Before we proceed to "the people" as "people of God", we need to determine as to whether liberation theologians when viewing "the people" as believers, specifically refer to Christian believers. Gutierrez states clearly: "It is to this complex and fecund notion of the poor that we are referring when we say that in Latin America ecclesial life and theological reflection find a concrete and richly consequential point of departure in the people who are simultaneously poor and Christian" (Gutierrez 1981:112).

Sergio Torres speaks of "the people" as those who are best prepared to listen to the Word of God, meaning the Christian God (cf. Torres 1981:2ff.).

Cora Ferro speaks about the poor, "the people" in relation to church as explicitly Christian believers. He states: "The people-oriented basis of the church goes back to its very source and foundation: Christ the poor person" (cf. Torres 1981:30).

Enrique Dussel too, relating the poor, "the people" to church, views them as Christian believers. He states: "In and through those groups that united as a people, as the authentic people of God, the church has borne witness to the gospel message in a way that marks deep and profound growth. It can be truly said that this period, steeped in pain, bloodshed, and killing, marks a glorious epoch for Christianity in Latin America" (Dussel 1981:83).

Leonardo Boff speaks of "the people" as believers, becoming the people of God, meaning the Christian God (cf. Boff 1981:134 ff.).

In the following text by Jose Bonino there is an indication that "the people" in Latin America are Christian believers. "At the present time in Latin America, Christian communities of the common people - or base-level ecclesial communities, as they want to be called - are basically a Roman Catholic Phenomenon" (Bonino 1981:145).

In Ronaldo Munoz's words: "Thus it is from the poor and by the poor that the gospel is announced to all human beings: to the poor themselves, first of all, but also to human beings of every class

and social condition" (Munoz 1981:154). The reference here is to the Christian Gospel.

When Nolan speaks of signs that God is at work through the faith of "the people", he refers to the Christian God (cf. Nolan 1988:137).

Liberation theologians in their usage of "the people" as a theological concept, make no explicit reference to "the people" as non-Christians or even atheists for that matter.

4.2. People of God

The notion "people of God", follows from "the people" being believers. This is particularly clear in the following statement of Gutierrez on "the people" as believers. "In the world of the people, it is doubtless difficult to understand the fertile, creative spiritual reality that, eschewing the escapism of purely formal, superficial 'prayer and celebration', surges up from the struggles of the poor. Nowhere is the living God sung with more faith, hope, and joy than in the world of the masses. It is not easy, of course. 'How could we sing one of Yahweh's hymns in a pagan country?' asked the people of Israel, overwhelmed by the weight of the Babylonian captivity (Ps.137:4). The people of God in Latin America ask themselves the same question today. They too are in exile - in their own land. But at the same time they know they are on the road to exodus. They are on the road to freedom" (Gutierrez 1983:106).

For Gutierrez this kind of spirituality displays a new kind of spirituality. This deduction must be viewed in the light of what Gutierrez states in a later quotation. He states: "This same encounter also comes to expression in one of the richest and deepest phenomenon to the observed today in christianity sectors involved with the popular struggles: the birth of a new spirituality. This new spirituality is disquieting and disturbing to those who prefer to cut themselves off from the reality of the poor" (Gutierrez 1983:106).

The newness of this spirituality is that it springs from the struggles of the poor people.

For Gutierrez the outstanding character of "the people" is that they are a new phenomenon which has connotations of being different and yet simultaneously have some aspects in common with Israel, the old people of God. 'They too are in exile - in their own land' as was quoted earlier on. The difference however, is that "the people" are conscious, in fact they know that they are on the road to liberty. Gutierrez seems to imply that "the people" as the people of God have no doubts about the path they are on, whereas Israel was riddled with doubts. In other words, the concept of "the people" in liberation theology is filled with confidence and direction. "The people" know what they want and actually move towards attaining what they want and what they want is liberation.

"The people" who are identified with the biblical notion of the people of God, following from "the people" as believers may spark off spiritual connotations. This even more so in the light of Gutierrez's statement mentioning the spiritual reality of "the people". The impression might be given that "the people" as the people of God, are those who busy themselves with "other worldly" (heavenly) matters only. But this is not the case according to Comblin. "The people" as the people of God, is a balanced concept. He states: "The people manifest themselves by means of historical movements: unions, parties, local civic associations, liberation movements: ideologies, schemas of organization, methods of action, psycho-social dynamics, and so on, none of which is a constituent of the people of God as such, but rather all are creations of human beings of every category. Indeed the means by which the people of God are enabled to act are generally bestowed on them by members of the governing classes of established society. Beneath all these structural elements, however, is a basic movement: the faith of the people, their will to live, their goal of a new society. This is the substance and essence of the people of God a people" (Comblin 1990a:171).

It is reflected in the text, in line with what we have seen in the section on "the people's" faith attitudes, that there is harmony and balance between their faith and life. "The people" as the people of God who have faith, are also an historical people, who live in this world. Munoz expresses this continuity between "the people" as the people of God and their historical circumstances in the following way: "...In the light of faith we can sense a line of continuity between the people in our

midst who were suffering and looking for liberation and the intervention of Moses". This line of continuation further expands when Munoz refers to the people as "the same people whom the prophets, as men of God, championed long ago: the same poor and alienated people whom Jesus of Nazareth, referred to, shared his life with and who were proclaimed heirs of the kingdom of God" (Munoz 1979:154).

For Munoz then, "the people" in liberation theology is a continuation of the biblical people of God. Following Munoz's line of argument, this would mean that the people in South Africa, Latin America and Korea, the *minjung*, are coming into being as a people of God. As Comblin states: "...Some raise the objection that the biblical concept of the people of God is too broad to be 'reduced' to an incarnation in the political and social activity of the Latin American people". One should add: the South African people and the Korean *minjung*. But then Comblin swiftly raises questions in reply to this objection. "But are the people of God outside history? Are the people of God not composed of human beings? Are the people of God not a yeast and ferment? Then they must be present somewhere. Where? Precisely in those places, surely, where the poor gather together to act as a people" (Comblin 1990a:170-171).

We notice that the people of God has both sacred and historical aspects. They are human beings who are influenced and directed by God. The concept of "the people" as we can deduce has sacred aspects as well, it is not purely political. It seems that the point Comblin wants to make is that if "the people" are also human beings, like human beings they will however also make mistakes, which just shows that "the people" has a concrete reality as well and therefore can go wrong at times. We therefore cannot always unconditionally hail all actions of "the people" as good and right. We will later go into an in depth discussion on "the people" as concrete reality and show its relation to "the people" as symbolic reality.

"The people" as the people of God however viewed, according to Boff is not simply an automatic occurrence following from their being believers. "The people" are those who become the people of God through some process which he calls a liberational strategy. He states: "The liberational strategy of the people is rooted in the overcoming of the present monopolistic structure of civil

and sacred power and directed toward a new society with the greatest possible participation. The people become the people of God in the measure to which forming communities of faith, hope, and love inspired by Jesus' message of complete fraternity, they try to make concrete the reality of a people comprising of free fraternal, and participating individuals. This historical reality is not only a product of a balanced social movement, but theologically it signifies the anticipation of and preparation for the kingdom of God and the eschatological people of God" (Boff 1985:117). For Boff then, "the people" become the people of God by becoming involved in forming communities of faith and hope, not only on a spiritual or religious level, but at the same time, forming communities struggling against oppressive social structures. Hence he calls this a balanced social movement, a movement towards becoming the people of God.

For Boff, this movement towards the people of God seems to imply many things. According to him a liberational strategy aimed at the overcoming of the monopolistic structure of civil and sacred power could among other things mean the struggling against cultural and ethnic monopolistic control, the struggling against male domination, political, social and economic control of one group over another. As he stated earlier on, the people of God are those who consist of free fraternal and participating individuals. No one should be in bondage, of whatever form, not even religious bondage whereby certain Christians lord it over others. For Boff it is clear that it is in these communities of faith and hope where "the people" give expression to their designation as people of God. In Latin America and South Africa, these communities of faith, hope and love are better known as "base communities" or in South Africa, "Small Basic Christian Communities", which are derived from the Latin American "base communities". We need to deal with the question of "base communities", also known as "ecclesial communities" in the next section.

4.3. "The People" as Church

As we have noticed from earlier discussions, "the people" are those who are organised. "The people" in their expression of their faith attitudes come together as an organized community in the form of church, known as "church of the poor", "church of the people", "people's church" or "base christian communities". Gutierrez states: "The Comunidades Cristianas de Base are one of

the most fruitful and significant events in the present-day life of the Latin American church. Their growth throughout our continent has helped to raise the hopes of the poor and oppressed. They are a privileged meeting place for a people trying to familiarize itself with its situation of misery and exploitation, to fight against that situation, and to give an account of its faith in a liberating God" (Gutierrez 1981:115).

"Comunidades Cristianas de Base" in English is translated as "base Christian Communities". "Base" means poor, oppressed, believing people: marginalized races, exploited classes despised cultures, et cetera (cf. Gutierrez 1981:116). The concept "base communities" seems to sum up what Gutierrez means by "the people" as poor and oppressed and simultaneously believing. In these base communities, "the people" are not only made up of individuals, but they form a collective entity, they form a church. This kind of church is a sign of definite direction and hope for the liberation of the poor and oppressed. For Gutierrez, the base communities, made up of common people, the lowly and marginalized, are nevertheless privileged meeting places. Gutierrez seems to imply that these base communities are privileged places because of God's involvement. Here they are not simply meeting as "the people" but also as God's people. For Gutierrez, "the people" in these communities do not only work for human liberation, but simultaneously for divine liberation, hence he speaks in the text about their faith in a liberating God.

These questions may now arise. What about the institutional church? Do the base communities refer to those without an authoritative function in the institutional church? Is the base community in conflict with the institutional church? Gutierrez seems to offer some answers to these questions. For him it is clear that the formation of the base communities does not bring into serious question the institutional church, hence according to him, the base communities do not only consist of those without authoritative functions in the institutional church. He states: "...The word 'base' does not primarily refer to persons without authoritative functions in the church who come together, perhaps even in opposition to church authority. To view it thus would be to remain confined within a mistaken intraecclesiastical formulation of the issue: ie., base and apex of the church pyramid. That does not accord with the experience of such Christian communities. To understand the word 'base', we must realize that the first point of reference, strictly speaking, lies

outside such intraecclesiastical boundaries. It is to be found in the world, where the church is present and where it must witness to the love of the Father" (Gutierrez 1981:116).

The base communities, also known as church of "the people", is a creation of those who are "the people". Segundo states: "Among other reasons, on the Latin American scene, this Church has rightly been called 'of the people', not because liberation theologians have baptized it with that name after creating it but because it arises out of the popular culture itself" (Segundo 1970:139). Segundo here touches on the most central characteristic of "the people", namely, their character as subjects of history. We already dealt with this in detail in the previous chapter. It could be mentioned here that according to Segundo, "the people" as church is a spontaneous motivation and mobilization among "the people" themselves. It is not a creation of "armchair" liberation theologians or even of Marxist analysis. But it is a creation of those who are "the people", as one of the forms through which they express their faith.

Munoz draws our attention to the difference between the "people's church" and the institutional church. It must however be noted according to Munoz that the difference must not necessarily be viewed in terms of conflict. He states: "Perhaps the strongest and most shocking feature of the church's self-criticism in the period under review here is the assertion that it has become a church of the rich, far removed from the world of the poor who make up the majority of the population" (Munoz 1979:153). Although Munoz contrasts the institutional church and the church of "the people" very strongly, it should nevertheless not be interpreted as a conflict, but rather as a call for a shift of the church's emphasis towards leaning more towards a service to the poor and oppressed, not excluding the rich.

"The people" then, in the expression of their faith, coming together in their "people's church", "base communities", are those who call the institutional church to align herself with the struggles of the poor. They challenge the Church to oppose the system of oppression. Gutierrez states: "For the Latin American Church, it is becoming increasingly clear that to be in the world without being of the world means concretely to be in the system without being of the system. It is evident that only a break with the unjust order and a frank commitment to a new society can make the

message of love which the Christian community bears credible to Latin Americans. These demands should lead the Church to a profound revision of its manner of preaching the Word and living and celebrating its faith" (Gutierrez 1973:138).

For Gutierrez, "the people" as church are those who share actively in discussing the word of God in their lives. They are a church present in the world, witnessing to love, sisterhood and brotherhood. Gutierrez describes this sisterhood and brotherhood in terms of a community of the poor, encountering themselves on the basis of their human and Christian values (cf. Gutierrez 1981:116ff.). According to Gutierrez "the people" are a church, brought to birth by their faith, in an environment of exploitation and the struggle for liberation (cf. Gutierrez 1981:116). They are a church who seek to live their faith in the form of breaking bread together (cf. Gutierrez 1981:116). This church according to Gutierrez, is a different way of being church, different from being mere passive listeners. It can be implied that this new way of being church, if it is different to the institutional church, is a shift from clericalism to involvement of "the people"; a shift from an overly spiritualist approach to a broad comprehensive view that incorporates human material needs as well; a shift from treating persons as objects of evangelization to respecting them as active subjects of their own spiritual development; a shift from an institutional church to a people's church.

"The people" then, are a new way of being church. The Dogmatic Constitution on The Church in the Vatican II Documents, chapter three, states the following: "In order to shepherd the People of God and to increase its numbers without cease, Christ the Lord set up in his Church a variety of offices which aim at the good of the whole body. The holders of office, who are invested with a sacred power, are, in fact, dedicated to promoting the interests of their brethren, so that all who belong to the People of God, and are consequently endowed with true Christian dignity, may, through their free and well-ordered efforts towards a common goal, attain salvation" (Flannery 1988:369). Gutierrez maintains that through the poor, God is revealed in history. According to him this is a new way of seeing church. He is of the opinion that it is to the poor that God's love is revealed and that they have the capacity to accept, internalize and proclaim God's message (cf. Gutierrez 1981:120). Whereas in the hierarchical church the people look at the hierarchy as the

primary evangelizers, "the people" are the primary evangelizers according to Gutierrez. He states: "Viewed in this light, the task of evangelization consists in involving oneself in the process of proclamation carried out by the poor. The latter are not just the privileged addressees of the Gospel message. They are also its bearers by the very fact of who they are" (Gutierrez 1981:120). "The people" for Gutierrez do not simply evangelize in abstraction, but they evangelize by liberating themselves (cf. Gutierrez 1981:120). Gutierrez expresses this evangelization as a reciprocal relationship. This is between evangelization and liberation. He implies that evangelization and liberation take place in the historical lives of the poor, in their lives of suffering and oppression and simultaneously Christian (cf. Gutierrez 1981:120).

Gutierrez, in the text, raises the issue of "the people" as having a privileged role. He calls them "privileged addressees of the Gospel message". This issue we will deal with in the next section.

A new way of being church which was mentioned earlier is also taken up by Leonardo Boff in his book "Ecclesiogenesis". He develops this notion of a new way of being church by contrasting the people's church in base communities as community, and the church as institutional. For him the institutional church operates from top down, whereas the people's church operates from the bottom up. Boff overtly prefers the people's church with the community model which views all members as equal, sharing with each other their gifts and charisms. But again it should be noted that even Boff does not desire the elimination of the institutional church but rather that the church be more community oriented (cf. Boff 1979:26-27).

"The people" are a new way of approaching scripture. We have to approach scripture in a new way, Gutierrez maintains, from the point of view of the poor, "the people". He states: "Let us consider Matthew's Gospel. Its first four chapters deal with the birth of Jesus and the preparation for his mission. Its last three chapters deal with his death resulting from that mission and with the resurrection; through the resurrection the Father confirms the meaning of Jesus' task. The twenty-one chapters between these two sections give us the preaching of Jesus. They begin with the blessing of the poor (Matthew 5); they end with the assertion that we meet Christ himself when we go out to the poor with concrete acts (Matthew 25). So the teaching of Jesus is framed in a context

that moves from the poor to the poor. This shows us that only in such a perspective can we comprehend the meaning of the Kingdom promised to the poor. The poor and the Kingdom are linked realities. It is in their relationship that the Father's gratuitous love is revealed" (Gutierrez 1981:121). For Gutierrez, scripture seen in a new way is that it gives force and vitality to the concrete situation of the poor. He is of the opinion that in scripture, Matthew's Gospel for example, we see that in "works of mercy", "good works" on behalf of the poor we meet Christ (cf. Gutierrez 1981:121).

Nolan too, sees the poor, "the people", as a new way of approaching scripture. For him, Jesus made it his primary task to turn to the poor and oppressed. In fact, this is how he started his ministry according to scripture: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 13:18-19). According to Nolan we here have an undeniable clue to the thinking and plans of Jesus. For Jesus, his intention was not to bring Israel to repentance by baptizing everyone in the Jordan. For him his primary intention was to go to the poor (cf. Nolan 1976:21). Jesus had a different mission to what was expected of him we are told. His mission was to the poor.

"The people" are a new way of understanding mission. For Leonardo Boff, the mission of the church is not simply seen in hierarchical or institutional terms, but it is also seen in relation to the poor and oppressed. He states: "That mission is to ponder and live the faith in a liberating way, to commit oneself to the oppressed, to fight for their dignity, and to help build a societal life more in conformity with the gospel standards" (Boff 1981:140). For Boff, Christianity is not simply an abstract appeal to divine truths, but a religion of "the people", which also involves human liberation. Boff sees faith as the motivation for political involvement and commitment. For him it is their life of faith which leads them to liberation (cf. Boff 1981:138).

According to Gutierrez, "the people" are a new way of seeing reality. He expresses "the people" as a new way of viewing reality in terms of "the irruption of the poor". For him, "the people"

from having being subjected to poverty and oppression, irrupted into protagonists of history. He states: "Working in the midst of the poor, exploited people, whom we were supposedly going to evangelize, we came to realize that we were being evangelized by them" (Gutierrez 1981:120). As was noted earlier on, it is the poor who are doing the work of evangelization. According to Gutierrez, this new reality is marked by "the absent ones" who make their presence felt in history. For Gutierrez, it is not so much that the poor was at a certain time absent from history but that history was not fashioned in terms of the poor and oppressed. He states: "So we talk about a presence in the strong sense when the poor move to center stage in society and the church, claiming their rights, calling attention to their interests, and launching a challenge through their struggles and their hopes" (Gutierrez 1981:108).

For Gutierrez then, a new way of being church is an involvement of the poor themselves who bring about this church. This means that they take an active role in liturgies and in evangelization. It involves a new way of approaching scripture by a discussion around the real problems affecting the lives of "the people" in the light of scripture. This is a recognition of the fact that the stories of the bible are also their life stories. A new way of understanding mission relates to an option for the poor which we have heard about earlier on. From our discussion we can deduce that "the people" as church by and large reflects a constitution of the poor, simple, and marginalized persons in society. A new way of seeing reality seems to involve that "the people" are at the forefront of history. Whereas before the poor have felt fatalistic, now their new reality as "the people" in a people's church empowers them to effect change. "The people" as church are those who develop their own ideas on praxis and take responsibility for their own lives.

We are told then, "the people", enlightened by their faith in God, point beyond themselves and beyond this world. Their liberation strategy seeks to get beyond the existing monopolistic structure of civil and sacred power; it aims toward a society of justice, freedom and love. This people form a church insofar as it forms communities of baptized people, communities of faith, hope and love that are inspired by Christ's message of absolute fraternity. This reality is not just a result of a social process, but signifies an anticipation of, and a preparation for, the Kingdom of God (cf. Gutierrez 1981:121-123).

Up till now, as concrete expressions of "the people's" faith dimension we have discussed "the people" as church. Earlier on we had a discussion on "the people" as the people of God. Before we move on to a discussion on "the people's" eschatological dimension, the final section of this chapter, we need to discuss the privileged role of "the people" which will throw more light on the eschatological significance of "the people".

4.4. Privileged Position of "The People"

Liberation theologians speak about a special care God has for the poor, "the people". They have a privileged position. Gutierrez states: "The reality of poverty, misery, and exploitation in the life of the vast majority of Latin America doubtless constitutes the most radical challenge to the proclamation of the gospel. After all, as Puebla repeatedly stressed, this is a society that is supposed to be Christian. But the gospel reveals to us a God who - as Karl Barth put it, echoing the message of Scripture - takes sides with the poor" (Gutierrez 1986:22).

For Gutierrez, God chooses sides with "the people" due to their disadvantaged position. Gutierrez, reflecting the church document of Puebla states the following on the disadvantaged position of the poor: "The vast majority of our people lack the most elementary material goods. This is in contrast to the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a small minority, frequently the price being poverty for the majority. The poor do not lack simply material goods. They also miss, on the level of human dignity, full participation in socio-political life. Those found in this category are principally our indigenous peoples, peasants, manual labourers, marginalized urban dwellers, and, in particular, the women of these social groups. The women are doubly oppressed and marginalized" (Gutierrez 1983:137). These are "the people" for Gutierrez who are not to be trampled on, they are to be protected. This is why for him, in the struggle for justice, the poor, "the people" have a privileged role to play.

In the text we once again come across the notion of the poor, "the people" as the materially poor as we have already seen in an earlier chapter. These are "the people", who have a privileged position. "The people" are also privileged because their dignity is violated. The privileged role

of "the people" extends to racial, cultural groupings and includes exploited classes and oppressed women. Here again, we notice the inclusion of women into "the people".

Another liberation theologian, Elsa Tamez also reflects the view of Gutierrez on the privileged position of "the people". For her too, in the struggle for justice, "the people" have a privileged position. She maintains that as children of God, "the people" have basic human rights, a fair share in the material prosperity and a right to participate in setting society's direction through their struggle for justice as we have also seen under the section on the struggle of "the people". Tamez states: "God, of course, is not indifferent toward situations of injustice. God takes sides and comes on the scene as one who favours the poor, those who make up the masses of the people. The Bible makes perfectly clear this divine predilection and option for the poor" (Tamez 1986:194).

Boff sees the poor, "the people", as very close to God and uses the following analogy: "The Crucified (Jesus Christ) in these crucified persons (the poor) weeps and cries out: "I was hungry...in prison...naked" (Matthew 25:31-46)" (Boff 1986:4). Here we see Boff implying that God loves the poor with a special love because they are poor and not necessarily because they are good. In this text we are told more about God's goodness than about the goodness of the poor. We here have a revelation of a God who is a defender and protector, in line with what we have seen earlier on that "the people" are not to be trampled on but protected. It is the marginalized position of "the people" that makes them the preferred people of God.

Gutierrez, Boff and Tamez make it clear that the basis for the privileged position of the poor, "the people", is not to be found in an idealized conception of poverty, not in them and not in the spiritual dispositions attributed to them, but in God who through his own initiative takes special interest in the poor. Gutierrez states: "The Beatitudes are less a revelation about the poor than they are a revelation about God. They tell us who God is. They tell us what his kingdom is like. They tell us of God as defender of the poor, as the protector, the liberator, of the poor. Then secondarily and derivatively, they tell us something as well about the privileged role of the poor - the physically, concretely poor, the dispossessed and oppressed - in God's kingdom" (Gutierrez 1983:95).

From the text emerges a caution against glorifying the status of the poor, “the people”, as those who are good and morally blameless, who therefore cannot go wrong, and hence a status to be aspired for. According to Gutierrez, “the people” are those who have come a long way with their struggle for liberation but not without “error and impasse” (cf. Gutierrez 1983:75). Furthermore Gutierrez maintains that “the people” are not those whose poverty is first and primarily a spiritualized poverty thereby spiritualizing the concept of “the people”. But for him, “the people” are plainly and simply the materially poor. Gutierrez here speaks about God’s love for “the people” simply because they are poor, literally and materially poor (cf. Gutierrez 1983:95).

Pixley too, in full agreement with Gutierrez states that the basis for the privileged role of the poor is not to be found in an idealized conception of their poverty, but an ideal of the royal function. “The ‘privilege’ of the poor and the unfortunate has its real basis, not in them, not in the spiritual dispositions attributed to them, but in the nature of the Kingdom which comes in the dispositions of God who wants to exercise his royal power in favour of the most disinherited” (Pixley 1980:305). Here we see the power of the poor, “the people”, as God’s power, “the people” deriving their selfempowerment from God. We here notice that “the people’s” power, God’s power and the privileged role of “the people” are interrelated.

“The people” are not only privileged but they are blessed. Pixley states: “The poor are declared blessed by Jesus, they are the privileged destinees of the kingdom of God” (Pixley 1980:301). According to the Old Testament, “blessed”, when referred to man denotes a state of happiness. In the New Testament the emphasis is on the spiritual content of “blessed” as revealed in the Beatitudes (cf. Douglas 1962:160). It must be noted that in the New Testament the notion “blessed” outwardly has connotations of those who are much to be pitied, but from the higher and therefore truer standpoint they are those who are to be envied, congratulated and imitated (cf. Douglas 1962:160). Here needless to say is that from what we have seen from the chapter on the poor and oppressed, the outward picture of “the people” is indeed something to be pitied, so often unimaginable misery to the point of frequently resulting in death.

What should be envied is not the poor’s personal disposition as blessed, but their privileged posi-

tion as God's doing. In keeping with what has been said earlier on, it is not the poor in their concrete constitution that designates their privileged and blessed position, but it is God's doing. By themselves, without God's favour they are not blessed. One can therefore not aspire to the privileged position of the poor, because it is God's initiative as we have seen earlier on. For Dickinson too, "the people", however defined, are blessed. He too stresses, not their state of being, but the quality of relationship initiated by God, because of their longing for justice and their hope for liberation (cf. Dickinson 1983:144). For Dickinson, because of the poor's openness to the acceptance of God's promises, they accept the promise that God has come to rescue, and so discover in his promise their hopes for liberation and a life of human dignity (cf. Dickinson 1983:144). This makes the poor, "the people", special agents of God's redemptive work in history according to Dickinson. He states: "The poor are not extolled because some day they will reap the after-life reward of simple living, but because they have a special role to play in God's redemptive work upon earth" (Dickinson 1983:61).

On this note on "the people's" special role in God's redemptive work, we need to look at "the people's" eschatological dimension.

4.5. Eschatological Dimension

From what we have discussed above, there are connotations of an eschatological dimension attached to the concept of "the people" as used by liberation theologians.

To be "the people" is not simply limited to membership of one or the other revolutionary pressure group, working for political ends. But to be "the people" involves serious lasting consequences. It is eschatological.

Broadly speaking, eschatology has to do with the last things. This means that the present world and its history are moving towards a fulfilment. All this is God's work. In other words, eschatology has to do with a salvation history in which God willed a creation for the intention of arriving at the kingdom of justice and peace. God carries out the divine will of justice in history. He rules

and controls history for the kingdom of justice.

The eschatological dimension of "the people" is that they are a people with great faith in a God who assures their ultimate triumph. For "the people", their present situation of oppression and violence are not the final word.

Nolan states: "The people of South Africa, on the whole, are convinced that victory is certain" (Nolan 1988:184). Here Nolan refers to a future event that is sure to come. This event is not simply a possibility but a certainty. He hereby not so much implies a political (although inclusive) victory but the victory of God. It seems why Nolan not so much refers to a political victory or a human victory is that these can never be final, definitive or determinative. Things can always go wrong. A human victory is never complete.

According to Gutierrez, for "the people", the final word belongs to Jesus, who, by virtue of his message of God's reign and resurrection, points at a beyond, a way out of the impasse of oppression. Gutierrez states: "The poor know that history is theirs. They know that if they must cry today, tomorrow they shall laugh (cf. Luke 6:21). And they are discovering that that 'laughter' is an expression of deep confidence in the Lord, the confidence we find in the songs of Hannah (1 Sam.2:1-10) and Mary (Luke 1), the confidence of the poor who live in the midst of history they seek to transform. It is a subversive gladness - subversive of the world of oppression, and this is why it disquiets dominators. For it denounces the fear of waverers and reveals the love of the God of hope" (Gutierrez 1983:107).

Gutierrez speaks of a confidence of "the people" that is eschatological. They do not simply concentrate on their present situation of wretchedness, repression and premature death seeking to release themselves from it here and now. They also have confidence in the future, that which God will bring about. According to Gutierrez, "the people" are not simply relying on human liberation, but at the same time a liberation effected by God. For him, God gives coherence to the historical struggle of "the people" for full humanity. God is the unsurpassable paradigm and symbol of liberation which gives full meaning to filiation, which in its turn is the basis for human fellow-

ship (cf. Gutierrez 1984:38). Through their faith in God “the people” have confidence in a future that God will bring about, the fullness of life, the mysterious reality of God.

The poor, “the people” are described by Gutierrez as those who live in terms of tomorrow, oriented towards the future, as he stated earlier on, “they know that if they must cry today, tomorrow they shall laugh” (Gutierrez 1983:107). For Gutierrez, “the people” are fascinated by that which does not exist yet. The condition of “the people” today is more and more determined by the model of “the people” tomorrow. Gutierrez implies that “the people’s” awareness of themselves are affected by their knowledge that they are outgrowing their present condition and entering a new future that is with God.

Gutierrez’s indication of “the people’s” actions as those which are directed toward a new society yet to be built, leads us to the notion of realized and unrealized eschatology. Gutierrez states: “But this situation does lead us to recognize the existence of other realities, of a transitional situation, and to specify that this thrust toward the future occurs above all when one participates in the building up of a just society, qualitatively different from the one which exists today” (Gutierrez 1973:214).

In relation to “the people”, the notion of realized and unrealized eschatology according to Gutierrez is different from the eschatologist theologians two decades ago. For him, the notion of eschatology is an opening to the future which is connected with the present historical circumstances. He states: “But, as we have noted before, this opening of eschatology to the future is inseparably joined with its historical contemporaneity and urgency. This notion of eschatology is diametrically opposed to that which 'eschatologist' theologians upheld some twenty years ago in opposition to the 'Incarnationalists'. For them the eschatological tendency expressed the wish for a disengagement of the Christian faith from the powers of this world; the basis for this was a lack of interest in terrestrial realities and a historical pessimism which discouraged any attempt at great tasks” (Gutierrez 1973:215).

Comblin too, touches on the notion of realized and unrealized eschatology. For him too, “the

people” are those for whom the present points to the future. In his view, eschatology and history are not two parallel dynamisms. Eschatology and history overlap. For Comblin, unlike the “eschatologist’ theologians cited by Gutierrez here above, “the people’s” eschatology does not endorse inaction as regards their present situation of poverty and oppression simply as an excuse for neglecting the present world. “The people’s” eschatology consists of an active engagement in present transformation which points to the future. According to Comblin, the hour is now, precisely because of the real future which they await, but which is already dawning in the present. In Comblin’s view, for “the people”, the present time is not a time without salvation, or a time of waiting, but one of action that has a future significance. Comblin states: "Wherever the hungry are fed, the weeping consoled, the poor exalted or the rich brought low, eschatology has already entered our world" (Comblin 1990a:174). For Comblin, through the actions of “the people”, signs of eschatology are portrayed.

Gutierrez sees “the people” as those whose eschatological perspective is inclusive of present attempts of struggling against an unjust society and a creation of a new society in a future determined by God. A concept central to a future determined by God is salvation. He states: “The absolute value of salvation - far from devaluing this world - gives it its authentic meaning and its own autonomy, because salvation is already latently there” (Gutierrez 1973:152).

The salvation Gutierrez refers to is a salvation revealed through Jesus (cf. Gutierrez 1983:13). For him Jesus is the incarnation of God’s promise of salvation that is already fulfilled in historical events, but not yet completely. Gutierrez highlights the eschatological dimension of “the people” by identifying Jesus with the poor. He states: “Jesus Christ is precisely God become poor. This was the human life he took - a poor life” (Gutierrez 1983:13).

For Gutierrez, Jesus’ life, identified with that of the poor, gives a new definition and inner logic to the oppressed people’s search for liberation. He sees the people’s struggles of the past, present and future as part of the salvific process of history. “The political is grafted into the eternal” (Gutierrez 1973:232)

For Gutierrez, there is only one history and that is that every dimension of life, our historical and social existence finds its ultimate point of reference in Jesus, who is God's invitation to participate in the salvation of not only "the people", but all of humanity. He states: "...There are not two histories, one profane and one sacred, 'juxtaposed' or 'closely linked'. Rather there is only one human destiny, irreversibly assumed by Christ, the Lord of history. His redemptive work embraces all the dimensions of existence and brings them to their fullness. The history of salvation is the very heart of human history" (Gutierrez 1973:153).

It seems that according to Gutierrez, "the people's" eschatology includes all humanity. It does not polarize elites and "the people". For Gutierrez, "the people", when it comes to their eschatological dimension, become all inclusive. "The people" for Gutierrez are part of a single all-encompassing salvific process of all of humanity. He states: "It is the same God who, in the fullness of time, sends his Son in the flesh, so that He might come to liberate all men from all slavery to which sin has subjected them: hunger, misery, oppression, and ignorance, in a word, that injustice and hatred which have their origin in human selfishness. This is why the Christian life is a passover, a transition from sin to grace, from death to life, from injustice to justice, from the subhuman to the human. Christ introduces us by the gift of his Spirit into communion with God and with all men" (Gutierrez 1973:176).

Gutierrez, though spelling out an eschatology of "the people" that is all inclusive nevertheless, when referring to the ultimate design for "the people's" history to come to realization in the kingdom of God, puts liberation as a precondition. For him faith and hope must be maintained in practice in the struggle for a kingdom that is never completely attainable in history, but foreshadowed and given concrete expression in historical liberations. According to Gutierrez, the kingdom pervades human liberations; it manifests itself in them, but it is not identical with them. Historical liberations, we are told, by the very fact that they are historical, are limited, but are open to something greater. The kingdom transcends them according to Gutierrez. He states: "The growth of the Kingdom is a process which occurs historically in liberation, insofar as liberation means a greater fulfillment of man. Liberation is a precondition for the new society, but this is not all it is. While liberation is implemented in liberating historical events, it also denounces their limitations

and ambiguities, proclaims their fulfillment, and impels them effectively towards total communion. This is not an identification. Without liberating historical events, there would be no growth of the Kingdom. But the process of liberation will not have conquered the very roots of oppression and the exploitation of man by man without the coming of the Kingdom, which is above all a gift. Moreover, we can say that the historical, political liberating event is the growth of the Kingdom and is a salvific event; but it is not the coming of the Kingdom, not all of salvation. It is the historical realization of the Kingdom and, therefore, it also proclaims its fullness" (Gutierrez 1973:177).

As eschatological people then, "the people" consist of those with both a historical and faith dimension. In this sense, from our discussion we can derive that without the absolute meaning of life, of service, of love, there can be no talk of "the people" as having faith and likewise "the people" without concrete action, works of love and service are not "the people". It is the faith of "the people" which furnishes them with their eschatological dimension.

4.6. Summary

"The people" are those who are not only oppressed but also believing. It is imperative to note that for liberation theologians "the people" are Christian believers.

The believing character of "the people" takes a liberative form. It is not simply an abstract theoretical profession of faith but a living faith expressed in the concrete lives of "the people".

"The people" have a dynamic faith marked by a constant renewal of their commitment to God. The faith expression of "the people" is an active engagement of "the people" themselves whereby they concretely respond to a call from God to be involved in a process of liberation. They are involved in the execution of God's liberation of humanity. They are cooperating with God.

The faith dimension of "the people" is not simply an expression of isolated individuals but it is a collective expression of faith. Hence liberation theologians do not just speak of the faith of indi-

viduals as we so often hear in religious circles, “the faith of Abraham”, “the faith of St. Paul” et cetera, but they speak of the faith of “the people”.

The collective notion of the faith of “the people” is more vividly expressed as the people of God. As the people of God, “the people” penetrate society as a whole, they are involved in unions, organizations and movements et cetera, where they effect God’s influence through their own faith.

“The people”, in the expression of their faith also form an even more concrete collectivity in the form of church. They come together in small Christian communities as an effective strategy to strengthen their faith and to reach others with their faith on a more informal basis, unlike the strategy of the institutional church with strictly organized programmes of evangelization through formal church services and liturgies. Hence liberation theologians speak of “church of the people”, or “people’s church”. “The people” according to liberation theologians are a new way of being church.

In the expression of their faith, “the people” are a new way of approaching scripture. They see scripture through the eyes of poor and oppressed people.

“The people” are a new way of understanding mission. Instead of a missionary approach of formally trained and well educated missionaries. The poor and oppressed themselves with their own resources become missionaries to themselves and others. This is a new way of viewing reality. Not from the point of view of the rich and powerful but from the point of view of the poor and oppressed.

“The people” as believers have an eschatological dimension. Their final destiny is not confined to social and political liberation but their final fulfillment is in the kingdom of God.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION

5.1. Introduction

In our discussion of the concept of "the people" in liberation theology there have arisen several questions. The first is of the lack of clarity of the concept of "the people": can this concept be simply identified with the proletariat in Marxism? The second is about the social determination or definition of "the people". The third is whether or not "the people" have been "glorified" into an ideal notion.

We have an obligation to clarify these questions, but before we do so we should indicate our basic position. "The people" is not a concept which can be easily explained or defined by the way liberation theologians use the term in their writings. "The people" signify a living reality which is dynamic, changing, and complex. This living reality defines its own existence and generates new acts and dramas in history and is therefore very difficult to be defined distinctly conceptually.

5.2. Ambiguity of the Term

As we have noticed in chapter one, various liberation theologians, Gustavo Gutierrez, Jose Comblin, Ronaldo Munoz and Jose Bonino use the term "the people" as if it is a synonym for "the poor". Gutierrez states: "The gospel read from the viewpoint of the poor, the exploited classes, and their militant struggles for liberation, convokes a church of the people" (Gutierrez 1983:21). Gutierrez expresses the term "the people" in very broad terms, for example, "poor" is such a general term on which one can write endless pages and come up with various aspects, which at times might even be contradictory, such as is expressed in the following passage: "If you get thirty people who are not poor together, they will debate interminably and never agree on the notion of 'poor'. Each has his or her own idea, the qualifications are endless, and the result is confusion" (Gutierrez 1981:111). To describe "the people" as poor is too general and not precise

enough as to limit ambiguity. There seems to be no clear yes or no to the following questions as to arrive at a clear and distinct meaning of “the people”. Are “the people” only the materially poor or the spiritually poor? Are “the people” a particular race, culture or class?

Are “the people” the proletariat in Marxist terms?

Liberation theologians, with special reference to Gutierrez describe the term “the people” in broad categories not simply as a synonym for “the poor” but they also refer to “the people” as a collective group, an exploited class. This notion of “the people” as an exploited class reflects a Marxist influence. In a later section we will expand on this Marxist influence of the concept of “the people”.

Dussel too, another liberation theologian, also speaks of “the people” in broad terms. He refers to them as “the oppressed”. In chapter one, he speaks about “the people” as those who are oppressed. He states: “Thus a “people” is the communal bloc of a nation’s oppressed” (Dussel 1988:81). While Dussel defines “the people” as the oppressed, he does so with qualifications. For him, not only are “the people” those who are oppressed, but they are also inclusive of those, who while not existentially oppressed yet side with the oppressed in their struggle for liberation are also “the people”.

In its common usage by liberation theologians the term “the people” is characterized by ambiguity. Dussel acknowledges this ambiguity in the following quotation: “The people is a more concrete, synthetic category than that of the more abstract, analytic 'class'. The term 'people' is ambiguous. A whole nation may be called a 'people' - for example, if it is engaged in a struggle with foreigners. This is the populist sense of the word 'people': the dominant classes are part of the 'people'. Or the word the “people” may denote only the oppressed of a nation, and the oppressing classes will not be part of the people” (Dussel 1988:81).

As is expressed by Dussel here above, “the people” could on the one hand encompass the whole nation indiscriminately, meaning both the oppressed and the oppressing sectors of society. And on the other hand, “the people” may include only the oppressed of a nation. The ambiguity is still

there even though Dussel gives some indication of the circumstances under which “the people” are inclusive of the whole nation, namely, when a whole nation “is engaged in a struggle against foreigners”. An example of such a struggle would be if the United States of America had to invade Brazil, with the aim to colonize, the whole nation of Brazil in their struggle to resist colonialism, would be called “the people”.

According to Dussel “the people” can be the oppressed only as opposed to the oppressors, or “the people” may be the whole nation which would include both the oppressed and the oppressors. It is very difficult in such a case to determine a clear and precise meaning of the term. In the following quotation from Gutierrez, the same ambiguity is reflected in the way he describes the term “the people” in broad categories: “The Latin American people - this poor, exploited, believing people - has taken a great stride forward in these past ten years. The price has been error, impass, and martyrdom. But this is ever the case when history moves forward. And the trophy has been triumph, and the apprenticeship of the popular masses in the craft of their own liberation. It has been a decade of precious experience, during which the masses have promoted their own march forward themselves, their own historical alternative” (Gutierrez 1983:75).

In our discussion the term “the people” is expressed not only as the poor or the oppressed, but it is described in terms of the exploited, a notion also marked by the Marxist influence. This makes the definition of the term even more general. The question may now arise: can the concept of “the people” be simply identified with the proletariat in Marxism?

5.3. Marxist Influence

The major controversy in the above question is the difference between “the people” and the Marxist proletariat. The difference between “the people” and the proletariat consists of different views of history. “The people’s” history has a strong divine dimension which goes beyond our present history, expressed by liberation theologians as the faith dimension. There is a close relationship between faith and “the people’s” perception of history. For the Marxist proletariat history has a strong materialist dimension whereby everything is related to material conditions. “...Conscious-

ness, selfunderstanding, social and political relations all arise, or should arise, from the circumstances of labour, which in turn are determined by the mode of production of the period” (Kee 1990:90).

For a better understanding as to how exactly liberation theologians are influenced by Marxism, it is imperative to note that liberation theologians make it very clear that they make use of Marxist concepts but these concepts do not retain the same meanings they have in classical Marxism. Hugo Assmann brings to our attention that liberation theology confronts problems arising from dependence, exploitation, and imperialism. “For most of those who use this language, this implies the use of a sociological analysis derived from Marxism” (Assmann 1976:116). Even though in the early days of liberation theology Assmann was considered one of the most Marxist of the liberation theologians his writings do not align him with classical Marxists.

When dealing with the Marxist influence on the concept of “the people”, liberation theologians use Marx in a selective way. The use of Marxism therefore is more illustrative than inherent in the concept of “the people”.

In the use of the phrase “church of the poor” as used by Boff, Sobrino and others, one can detect a Marxist influence. If one had to talk of “church for the people”, one would invariably give the impression of the hierarchical church taking up the cause of the poor in particular respects. But liberation theologians’ explicit reference to “church of the poor” or “church of the people”, is an application of Marxist premises to society at large. They see the church therefore as a class society in which they see the pope, cardinals and bishops as a ruling class and the laity with women as the oppressed class always subject to domination and discrimination. Boff states: “The faithful in the church occupy objectively different social positions according to their social class. They perceive reality in a way that corresponds to their social condition, and so they interpret and live the gospel message out of the needs, interests, and behaviour of their particular class” (Boff 1985:111).

For Boff, the church must be understood as an institution located within a class society. For him then, if the church is itself an example of a class society, then Marx’s analysis of secular society

can be applied to the church. Boff quoting Pope Pius X, states: "Only the college of pastors have the right and authority to lead and govern. The masses have no right or authority except that of being governed, like an obedient flock that follows the Shepherd" (Boff 1985:142). For Boff, "the people" in the base communities are not located according to classes, or hierarchy, but they are essentially democratic.

A further influence of Marxism on Boff's perception of "the people" is the premise from Marxism concerning the division of labour. Boff sees a division of labour within the church. According to him, "the people's church" is a concrete request by the grassroots for a new structure, a new church division of labour of religious power. He states: "The bishops and priests receive all religious 'capital', produce the religious 'goods', and the people consume them. This is a monarchical model, common in the history of the Church" (Boff 1985:133). For Boff the hierarchy controls the means of religious production. According to him only those who have been licensed by Rome can produce the religious goods. This is how Boff sees the church as having adopted the means of production characteristic of the ancient world, the feudal world, and now the modern capitalistic world.

Detecting another influence of Marxism on the concept of "the people", Bonino, speaking of the masses, by which he means "the people", uses the Marxist analysis when he speaks of the masses as those who call for a radical change of society. He states: "The Latin American revolutionary is confronted with a state of consciousness in the masses (particularly but not exclusively in the rural population) in which the slave relationship of traditional society, the cultural alienation imposed by imperialism and the magical forms of folkreligion have produced a lag in the revolutionary consciousness in relation to the demands of the objective situation. In the effort to change this situation, the Marxist revolutionary has found himself side by side with a number of active revolutionary Christian fold, the potential motivating and mobilizing power of the Christian faith for revolutionary change" (Bonino 1976:19).

So far we have seen the work of liberation theologians who have been influenced by Marx, or who have consciously made use of Marx in a selective way. It may still be difficult for some

people, or even shocking to many in the churches to see liberation theologians making use of Marx. Bonino recognizes the sincerity of those who feel that they cannot use Marx at all. But for him, without the rigorous, scientific analysis we will end up with merely ethical guidelines which are inevitably reformist. But he also cautions that the other extreme is to embrace Marxism in its ideological form with a sort of religious fervor. According to him that is to surrender the historical content of faith. For him we have to accept the Marxist analysis within limits. Marxism for him, arises in historical circumstances therefore has to be corrected and developed in the light of praxis. But nevertheless, Bonino sees Marxism as the best instrument available for an effective and rational realization of human possibilities in historical life. He states: "Our assumption of Marxism has nothing to do with a supposedly abstract or eternal theory or with dogmatic formulae - a view which is not absent in certain Marxist circles - but with a scientific analysis and a number of veritable hypotheses in relation to conditions obtaining in certain historical moments and places and which, properly modified, corrected, and supplemented, provide an adequate means to grasp our own historical situation..." (Bonino 1975:95-96).

5.4. Collectivity of "The People"

Liberation theologians define "the people" as a collective entity. Gutierrez and Dussel use the term in such a way that it has connotations of collectivity, in the sense that "the people" are those who act, theoretically or practically as a collective group. For Gutierrez, as we have heard earlier on, "the people" is a collective group. And Dussel states the following: "This mass, this people, not only forms a bloc of oppressed, a social bloc; it engages in communal practices..." (Dussel 1988:83). For Dussel "the people" constitutes the "community bloc" of the oppressed. Looking at the concept of "the people", as used by liberation theologians as a collectivity, the impression is given that "the people" are those who always act or speak in collectivity. Gutierrez, speaking about the poor, "the people", states very clearly: "Poor...is a term that always implies collectivity..." He continues and gives an example of the poor as a collectivity: "The 'poor' in the Bible are a social group, a whole people, poor of the land" (Gutierrez 1983:96). But do they really in actual fact act or speak as a collective group? One could debate endlessly about what constitutes an act of "the people"; voice of "the people" or "will of the people".

Not so long ago in South Africa, there was talk of disinvestment and sanctions. Allegedly this was coming from the voice of "the people". How many among "the people" in actual fact have such a broad perspective of economics as to be able to in one voice, as a collective group, call for such an action? As used by liberation theologians, the term "the people" is vested with a lot of power only in theory. "The people" as a collective group very seldom exercise power directly. Very often the term "the people" as used by liberation theologians depends on what they are trying to prove. It is imperative to realize how commonplace this practice has become. One appeals to "the people" to make revolutions or to justify oppressive dictatorships. One can understand when "the people" call for mass action, but is it really all "the people" who do this, when many individuals among "the people" themselves have very little or almost no idea of what it is all about? When the term "the people" in our South African context is used, one has very little or almost no chance of contradicting what is supposedly demanded by "the people". Even though, as already expressed by some liberation theologians earlier on, "the people" are those who stand for democracy and justice values, but sometimes in practice there are many irregularities in this regard.

By the way liberation theologians use the term "the people" one may suppose that "the people" who suffer various painful disabilities just because they are "the people", are likely to voice their real grievances. Furthermore, their suffering should be eased. And their legitimate grievances should be rectified. But it is sometimes also claimed, at least implicitly, that what "the people" say is true, and that the "analysis" of the situation given by "the people" is a true analysis. For this claim there is not the slightest shred of evidence. What "the people" cry out deserves to be sympathetically heard. It does not however, suffice to still critical inquiry. "The people" may have things wrong. Their opinions are not necessarily God's nor do they necessarily carry ontological warrant. No matter what social reforms or revolutions may be successfully carried out, people will always be prey to powerful forms of selfishness. "The people" as a collectivity can easily be turned into an overly romantic view, therefore there is a need to distinguish between "the people" as a concrete reality and "the people" as a symbolic reality.

5.5. "The People" as Concrete Reality

There is certainly no simplistic way of describing "the people" no matter how much liberation theologians attempted to do so. "The people" can less so be simply defined in statistical terms as an attempt to do so exactly determine how many people there are or who exactly make the decisions among them as to speak as "the people", as an undivided collective group.

Generally speaking, liberation theologians, when they speak of "the people", feel no need to distinguish between "the people" as concrete reality and "the people" as symbolic reality. Gutierrez is one liberation theologian who implicitly pays some attention to this point in the following passage. Even though this text was quoted earlier on, it will be worth our while to quote it again. He states: "The Latin American people - this poor, exploited, believing people - has taken a great stride forward in these past ten years. The price has been error, impasse, and martyrdom. But this is ever the case when history moves forward. And the trophy has been triumph, and the apprenticeship of the popular masses in the craft of their own liberation" (Gutierrez 1983:75). Here it seems that Gutierrez is careful not to "glorify" "the people" as those who are always right and victorious. According to Gutierrez, "the people" as a symbolic reality are engaged in a just struggle, and therefore their victory is certain. In this symbolic sense, "the people" have unlimited power for transforming history, because, as we have seen earlier on, they are empowered by God. "The people" as symbol therefore, is an ideal everybody should aspire for. But he points out that "the people" as a concrete reality are not without faults and shortcomings. As concrete reality "the people" have not unlimited power and are capable of making mistakes.

"The people" as concrete reality according to Gutierrez should not be interpreted as referring to a nation that takes in everyone indiscriminately concealing the internal dissymmetries. He seems to mean that an oppressed class is a class that is defined by its exclusion from participation and its subjection to a process of massification. In this sense Gutierrez would describe "the people" in terms of one group over against another group, as, the poor, suppressed and lowly as against the dominant sectors of society.

Let us now begin by asking what it is that gives to a company of human beings such as “the people”, the cohesion and solidarity that constitute them “the people”. There is no single answer to this question, for there are many kinds of communities, peoples and associations.

Sociologists have often made the distinction between groups in which the bond is natural, and those in which it is conventional. In the traditional sense of the word, a people is a natural community. It is most commonly bound together by the kingship of race or clan, and even today this kind of bond evinces itself in powerful feelings of racial and national consciousness. But the bond of “the people” is entirely different. “The people” in New Testament biblical language so to speak embrace both Jew and Greek and barbarian. It is precisely this transracial and transnational character of “the people” that is a unique distinguishing feature of a description of “the people”.

“Thus a 'people' is the “communal bloc” of a nation’s oppressed. A people consists of the dominated classes (the working or industrial class, the campesino class and so on). But it is also constituted of any human group that is either non-capitalistic or that performs class practices only sporadically (marginal groups, ethnic groups, tribal groups). This entire 'bloc' - in Gramsci’s sense - constitutes the people: a people is the historical 'subject' or agent of the social formation of a given country or nation. The 'Cuban people', the 'Nigaraguan people', the 'Brazilian people' and so forth, are composed of the persons who permeate the respective history of the various practico-productive totalities. Thus we have the pre-Hispanic Amerindians, the colonials, the neo-colonials, and even the members of post-capitalistic societies. Each of these groups is a people” (Dussel 1988:81-82). According to Dussel concretely “the people” consist of those groups whose common interests are opposed to the interests of the dominant class at any given point in the history of a country and its political conjuncture. In South Africa, one may find that at present, to take an isolated incident, those who are the dominant class are overwhelmingly the whites with a small minority co-opted from other race groups, with the dominated classes being black with a few committed whites to the struggles of the poor, who would now be considered “the people”.

But this situation is already rapidly changing where many of those who were oppressed have moved up to the dominant classes. And so the concept of “the people” viewed concretely, is a

rather changing dynamic concept whereby those who constitute “the people” may change positions as opportunities and temptations to prosperity present themselves. Examples of such situations are evident where most of those who in the past were seen as “the prominent people”, now that they have returned from exile, prefer to live in areas in South Africa that is occupied by those who are the dominant class.

We see then that in its concrete constitution “the people” are those who can go wrong at times. Just as “the people” are able to create its own unity, so they can also have the ability to create disunity and division.

5.6. Symbolic Reality

As a symbolic reality, “the people” are those who stand for a value that is to be lived by all. “The people” as a symbol are without fault. This means that everyone who subscribes to that value not just the poor, oppressed, lowly and dominated class, is called to be “the people”. According to liberation theology, the dominated class is responsible for turning “the people” into a reality insofar as it, through the mediation of communities ceases to be a mere mass, develops self-awareness, draws up a historical project of justice and participation for all, and undertakes practices that point toward the approximate realization of this ideal (cf. Boff 1985:117).

Thus understood then, according to liberation theologians, “the people” effectively symbolize the oppression that is suffered by all. They effectively symbolize the gratuitousness of liberation that is for all, and everyone can contribute towards this liberation. However, the form and degree of liberative power will depend on the type of oppression from which one suffers. The dominant classes, in order to make a contribution to the liberative process must cease their oppression, they must “die” to their exclusivism and their absolutization and become part of “the people”. “The people” as symbolic reality must remain true to itself by not falling prey to arrogance and discrimination but symbolically, designate all those who share in the historical project of liberation, whatever place they may occupy in the production process (cf. Scannone 1979:217).

For liberation theologians, “the people” as symbolic reality is a dynamic element in the historical becoming of humanity. Without “the people”, who reject an unjust an alienating social order, who throw themselves into the struggle for a new society, liberation is not possible (cf. Gutierrez 1973:135).

“The people”, we are told, means a denunciation of the existing order. They want a new order, an annunciation of what is not yet, but will be. They are a forecast of a different order of things, a new society. As symbolic reality “the people” are always on the move, a projection into the future, a dynamic and mobilizing factor in history.

Symbolically “the people” are those who believe that somehow, somewhere, God is in control of all events. God is overthrowing the existing order. This is why they represent strong protest against the present situation. They denounce the negative aspects of things as they are. “The people” look forward to the absolute meaning of life, service and love. The absolute is the divine, that which corresponds to God, to eternity, to holiness of something that will rise never to die again.

Finally, an understanding of the concept of “the people” as used by liberation theologians is that it is a dynamic changing concept inclusive of a class of people that are exploited, the whole social group of the oppressed in any society. The working class in the Third World can be a constitutive part of “the people” but not always the vanguard in the revolutionary process. A race is “the people” when it is dominated and discriminated against, simply for being a different race. A cultural group of people are “the people” if they are trampled upon and degraded. Women belong to “the people” if they are discriminated against simply because they belong to this particular gender. Those who side with “the people” and are committed to their struggle are “the people”. In its symbolic sense, we are all called to be “the people”.

As used by liberation theologians, the concept of “the people” is not a self-contained or completely defined concept, but a living entity, which has an ever-unfolding meaning. It can be defined on various levels, social economic, cultural, ethnic, gender and even on a religious level. In describ-

ing any concept, the unfortunate limitation is that one has to resort to the human expressions of philosophical, and ideological views of history which reduce the whole record of socio-economic and religio-political experience of "the people" to an ambiguous conceptualization of the term. A dynamic, changing and inclusive concept such as "the people" needs to be described in such a way that it clarifies the pain and suffering as well as the hopes and aspirations of "the people".

5.7. Conclusion

The concept of "the people", especially in recent writings of liberation theologians is increasingly emerging as a new theological concept which calls for a more careful and precise definition if it is to carry a distinct and clear meaning.

On the surface it seems that liberation theologians use the concept of "the people", as an exclusive term but in fact they use it as an inclusive term. The lack of proper definition by liberation theologians creates this false impression on the surface. As long as liberation theologians do not take the trouble to clearly define the term when they use it, their readers will simplistically identify "the people" with the poor or oppressed without qualifications.

The concept of "the people" as a theological concept is a term of great significance in the sense that it draws our attention to the sufferings of the poor in Latin America, Korea and South Africa. "The people" challenge us to rethink the ways in which we understand and live out our faith. They have brought pride to the church particularly in Latin America with the establishment of basic Christian communities and have made theology a subject of vital interest. In a real way "the people" have made visible the words of scripture: "The poor have the good news preached to them" (cf. Luke 4:18). "The people" keep alive the hopes embodied in Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God. It is in "the people" that we see God's powerful sign of making all things new.

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