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The *University of Edinburgh Journal* is published twice a year and is sent to all members of the Graduates' Association. Tel. 0131 650 4292/3; Website: www.uega.co.uk; Email: gradassoc@ed.ac.uk The price to others is £14.00 each number, payable in sterling. Full payment details can be found on page 79.

Submissions to the *University of Edinburgh Journal*

Members of the Graduates' Association, and other readers, are reminded that the Editor is always pleased to receive submissions. This can be in the form of a piece of creative writing or a serious article, and will be considered for possible publication in a future issue of the *Journal*.

Notes for contributors and editorial advice can be found on the Outside Back Cover, or by e-mailing us at:

gradassoc@ed.ac.uk

Monthly Coffee Mornings

The Association meets for coffee at the
National Museum of Scotland,
Chambers Street, Edinburgh EH1 1JF

We meet in the Balcony Café on Level 3 from
10.30am to 12.00pm
on the following Saturdays in 2019:

**6 July, 3 August, 7 September, 5 October,
2 November, 7 December**

Guests are most welcome. Do join us!
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Of Freedom and Human Agency: An Analysis of Luther's and Gutiérrez's Understanding

by Ann Gillian Chu

Ann Gillian Chu grew up in Hong Kong as a Canadian and graduated from the University of Edinburgh with Master of Arts (Honours) in English Language. In a turn of events, she became a Chartered Accountant by profession. She graduated from Regent College in Vancouver, BC, with a Master of Divinity, and is now completing her Doctor of Philosophy (Divinity) with the University of St. Andrews.

Editorial note: When it was founded in 1583, Edinburgh's College of King James VI (later to become the University of Edinburgh) was the only Reformation university in Scotland or, indeed, in the whole of Great Britain; and would remain so for over one hundred years. By an Act of Parliament in 1621, King James formally recognised the College, which had begun branding itself as the country's Reformation college. The continuing interest in and study of Reformation theology at Edinburgh is a welcome reminder that the University's Reformation tradition is with us still.

Martin Luther, the German theologian who initiated the Reformation, argues that humans cannot achieve freedom for themselves because they do not understand free will (Luther, 175–179). Conversely, Gustavo Gutiérrez, the twentieth-century Latin American liberation theologian, argues that human progression begins with the awareness of freedom, and that critical thinking leads to real freedom (Gutiérrez, 17–22). This essay will argue that the primary difference between Luther's and Gutiérrez's approaches to freedom is each theologian's approach to human agency: Luther theorises that humans have no agency as they cannot fully comprehend their own actions, while Gutiérrez argues that it is human agency through action that leads to theological reflection. Nonetheless, this comparison is limited by each theologian's definition of 'freedom', which differs with each of their personal context and is therefore not strictly comparable.



First, summaries of Luther's and Gutiérrez's arguments. Luther argues that freedom is possible only through the Word of God. This is why, in Luther's view, faith does not induce humans to wickedness, but leads instead to complete trust in God's truthfulness and righteousness to do the right thing (Luther, 53–60). His argument raises the question: Can humans *only* obey authority without free will? Are obedience to authority and free will incompatible? By contrast, Gutiérrez understands theology as a critical reflection of church and society, both of which are subject to change, which is why the focus should not be on one historical interpretation of orthodoxy. For Gutiérrez, human action is the point of departure for reflection; therefore, actions are as important as the formulation of truths. Hence Gutiérrez argues that communion with God means service to others, and theology entails critical reflection of human principles (Gutiérrez, 3–12).



Ann Gillian Chu

Second, a comparative analysis of how Luther and Gutiérrez understand human agency. There are similarities in how they understand human agency: both of them emphasise sin in relation to the human freedom to love God and others (Luther, 489–500, Gutiérrez, 3–25, 83–105). Luther argues that pretending to keep the peace is less important than telling the truth, as the Word teaches freedom in all matters and must not be confined (Luther, 42–85). Gutiérrez argues that salvation emphasises the importance of achieving justice in this world (Gutiérrez, 83–105). Moreover, Luther argues that there is no contingency in God (Luther, 180–184). Gutiérrez rejects the possibility of things happening by chance, and argues that behind an unjust structure there must be personal or collective evil that rejects God and neighbours (Gutiérrez, 22–24).

While Luther and Gutiérrez both emphasise sin and freedom, truth and justice, and lack of contingency, there are differences in how the two theologians understand human agency. Luther's understanding of freedom is soteriological: he argues that faith unites human souls with Christ through salvation, which depends on God's free will rather than on human will, as God's will is immutable (Luther, 83–105, 175–179, 199–202). This is why Luther argues that free will can only be used to describe God, as human will can, ultimately, be overruled by God's free will (Luther, 187–190, 199–200). Conversely, Gutiérrez's understanding of freedom is political and socio-theological: he understands political liberation as humanity's self-creation in individual contexts (Gutiérrez, 17–22, 83–105).

Moreover, Luther focuses on internal change, arguing that it is the result of believers' personal faith and relationship with God and His church (Luther, 489–500). In contrast, Gutiérrez focuses on external change, arguing that the attempt to eradicate sin through external change is a process of bringing justice to the world (Gutiérrez, 13–25). Luther emphasises God's agency and argues that God knows nothing contingently, and that God's will is changeless, while human will is mutable (Luther, 180–184). Meanwhile, Gutiérrez places the emphasis on human agency by exposing corruption and liberation as human political actions (Gutiérrez, 83–105). Luther argues that God's justice differs from human justice, and that only God can judge the meaning of justice (Luther, 200–202). By contrast, Gutiérrez argues that theological reflection on human agency through history is an effort to understand faith in life and action for both individuals and communities (Gutiérrez, 3–12).

Third, an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the two positions. The strength of Luther's position is his emphasis on trust in God's providential guidance (Luther, 190–192), which contrasts with that of Gutiérrez, who places too much power in the hands of those who control the economy: he argues that those in control encourage change without challenging that system, discouraging genuine transformation. The weakness of Luther's position is that, as a product of his time, he was bound by the world view of the feudal system, and therefore did not consider issues of oppression and liberation, as does Gutiérrez in his post-colonial society (Gutiérrez, 13–25).

The strength of Gutiérrez's position is his discussion of the oppression and liberation of post-colonial society, which was not a consideration in Luther's time. Moreover, liberation theologians' use of Marxist humanistic approaches in conveying Christian concepts reflects similar uses of Greek philosophy by early church fathers (Gutiérrez, 13–25). The weakness of Gutiérrez's position lies in his claim that Latin America needs a unique theology while, in fact, Latin America and the contemporary Western world have much more in common than, say, the contemporary Western world and the early church period (Gutiérrez, 3–12). Furthermore, Gutiérrez primarily



draws his source materials from Roman Catholic encyclicals, which are part of the Western theology (Gutiérrez, 13–25). As doctrine develops from the ecclesiastical tradition of interpreting scripture to visualize the central confessions of the Christian faith, there is no need for each geographic location to develop its own theology. Instead, contemporary theologians

should consider the work developed over centuries by the Christian tradition when entering into a new dialogue within their contemporary context.

In conclusion, the primary difference between Luther's and Gutiérrez's understanding of freedom lies in each theologian's views on human agency. Luther emphasises God's agency in order to demonstrate human helplessness and the need to turn to God, while Gutiérrez emphasises the way in which human action affects theological reflections and political liberation, as humans participate in the continuation of God's creation. Both manners of understanding human action are important as a system of checks and balances in the Christian life: Christians must rely on the omnipotence of God while understanding that they are also active agents in the world, and that their actions have consequences.

References:

1. Martin Luther. *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*. Edited by John Dillenberger. New York, NY: Anchor, 1961.
2. Gustavo Gutiérrez. *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*. Revised edition. Translated and edited by Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988

Images:

Page 41: Photograph of Martin Luther Statue. Photography courtesy of Alex Strohschein.

Page 43: Public domain photograph of Gustavo Gutiérrez, taken from Wikipedia. Created by user Mohan, October 2007.

In the Winter 2019 issue of the *Journal* we shall continue our occasional tradition of printing inaugural lectures. The next will be that of:

Celeste-Marie Bernier

Professor of United States and Atlantic Studies,

who delivered her inaugural lecture

Suffering, Struggle, Survival:

200 Years of African Atlantic Art and Authorship (1818-2018)

on 5 October 2018 in the Playfair Library Hall, Old College

Prof Bernier explores how artists and writers on both sides of the Atlantic address the themes of slavery, the slave trade and their legacies in today's world. Associated with her lecture was the publication by Edinburgh University Press of her and Andrew Taylor's book:

If I Survive: Frederick Douglass and Family in the Walter O Evans Collection

We are please to inclue a review by Prof Sir Geoff Palmer in this issue of the *Journal* on page 64.



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Editorial Statement

The *University of Edinburgh Journal* is published twice a year, in June and December, by the University of Edinburgh Graduates' Association. It is distributed to all members and associate members as part of their subscription, to all Honorary Members, and to subscribing libraries and organisations. It has been published continuously since 1925, and its back volumes constitute an important archive on the history of the University. It is now published in digital as well as in printed format; the complete back run is also being digitized and will be available online.

Contributions are welcomed from members and from all University staff, students and alumni, as well as from external authors with an interest in the University, and should have a connection with the University. Articles should be 2,500 words in length, but shorter and longer ones may exceptionally be considered. Reviews (of books, journals, CDs or DVDs associated with the University) should be 750 words, and notes for obituaries 150 words; items for review should be sent to the editorial address below. Copy deadlines are normally 31 March for June issues and 30 September for December issues; later ones will exceptionally be agreed in advance by the Editor.

Contributions should conform to the Modern Humanities Research Association Style Guide (via the MHRA website www.mhra.org.uk) or the Modern Languages Association Handbook (via the MLA website www.mla.org), and the Harvard style of reference citation may be used when appropriate. Articles may be accompanied by colour and black-and-white illustration images in high-resolution and of a quality no less than 300 dpi. Contributions should preferably be submitted as e-mail .doc, .docx, .rtf, or .txt attachments, with illustrations as separate .jpg, .png, .tiff, or .bmp attachments. Exceptionally and by prior arrangement, typescripts may also be considered. If accepted, authors will be asked to supply a brief biographical statement (75 words maximum) and a portrait photograph in high-resolution. Copyright in the *Journal* is held jointly by the Graduates' Association and individual contributors.

On publication, each contributor will be sent one free copy of the issue that contains their work, in addition to subscription copies where taken. The *Journal* does not offer fees to contributors, but reviewers retain copies of items reviewed for their own use.

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