

Moving Beyond Mitford



*A Guide to Literature and Theology
Designed to Broaden a Church's Worldview*

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Prologue

I've been in one church reading group, and it was with some trepidation that I joined in the reading of Jan Karon's Mitford series.

As the pastor leading the group turned to the back of the book and read the questions provided by the publisher, I knew we were in deep trouble:

"What role does Barnabas play in the life of Father Tim?"

It was clear that we would not be theologically challenged by the discussion in this book selection or any future selections.

This experience was a seed for this project, but it was not the only reason.

I am an incurable geek. When your prized possession from two summers in Washington, D.C., is your researcher's card for the Library of Congress, you know you're a geek. When you have to limit yourself to one Shakespeare play per week, you're a geek. When you decide you don't know enough about the world and then start studying by beginning with ancient Greece and Rome, you're a geek. And when you plan to read two books each by 150 authors of various nationalities and genres just because you haven't read enough, you're a geek.

When you can think of several fiction books off the top of your head that could be plumbed for theological depth, the Mitford books are a disappointment.

This project is what happened when I asked myself why it was that pastors would pick something like the Mitford books to read and discuss. My answer was that the books were easy and came with a reader's guide.

Consider this a reader's guide exploring a way to experience a particular genre of literature, a type of theology and the social context that spawned both of them.

I want to make it clear that by no means is this approach the only way to explore the novels presented. Nor am I attempting to provide definitive answers to what the

author is attempting to say.

A bit about my background should prove helpful in understanding my purpose in this project.

First, I am not fond of the methods of criticism used to analyze literature. I am a writer, and I realize that my intention in writing is read differently by each person who reads what I wrote.

An example of this is a poem I wrote about someone learning to dance barefoot. Someone reading it made the connection that the dancer did not wear shoes because she was poor. In fact, the reason the dancer didn't wear shoes was that I didn't wear shoes while learning to dance. My reason was that years of martial arts had toughened up my feet. Yet the dancer could have easily been bellydancing, which is also done barefoot.

So if I point out a detail with a historical corollary, it is not my way of saying that it is the only way to read it but that it might have been a historical fact that was in the mind of the writer — subconsciously or consciously.

Second, I am not an expert. I have a bachelor's in creative writing, I love history, and I am a master's of divinity student. I am a generalist and not a specialist.

Third, I have made a conscious effort to select materials written by insiders to the culture and not outsiders. I am an outsider to the culture attempting to view it through the lens of insiders. When possible I have selected native historians, but I am limited by the language that I speak so I only have what is available to me in English.

Fourth, this is a mission. I hope that pastors are able to use this methodology to expand their parishioners' definition of "neighbor" in the way that Jesus hoped the parable of the good Samaritan would.

I hope that through exploring the literature, history and theology of a particular region at a particular time we can come to better understand a different culture.

“One Hundred Years of Solitude”

Introduction

The novel by Gabriel García Márquez is a work of magical realism. I have paired it with liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez’s writings.

I will briefly explain magical realism as a genre and then briefly explain liberation theology, which have been selected because they both come from the Latin American context of the late 1960s.

After the introductions to genre and theology, we’ll look at each of them through four common themes that I have identified: “Love is the Important Thing,” “Ordinary Becomes Extraordinary,” “What are We Fighting For?” and “Memory and Historical Amnesia.”

I suggest that the introduction to genre and theology be read before reading the novel and then the themes explored during a discussion after reading.

Magical Realism

According to Maggie Ann Bowers, senior lecturer at University of Portsmouth, magical realism is also referred to as magic realism and marvelous realism. Bowers states it relies on the reader to accept “both realistic and magical perspectives of reality on the same level.” It is a literature of the oppressed in that it is written against totalitarian regimes and meant to encourage people to action by the literary attack on the “definitions and assumptions” that the regimes rely upon to oppress.

Bowers points to 1920s Germany as the source for magical realism as seen in magic realist painting. The era was a “period of political fragility” with left-wing and right-wing political groups battling on political and economic fronts. However, an early Latin American practitioner of magical realism, Alejo Carpentier, dismissed the European vein as having “cold artificiality and ‘tiresome pretension.’ ”

Latin American literary critic Angel Flores

points to the roots of magical realism in Miguel de Saavedra Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*, and Jorge Luis Borges is called the “father of modern Latin American writing.” In other words, Flores points to the influence of Spain and the Iberian Peninsula instead of Germany.

Bowers points out that the international recognition of Latin Americans like García Márquez has led people to “a misconceived assumption” that only Latin Americans write magical realism. Not wanting to get involved in the debate, I will only point out that the writers who have done it best in recent history have been Latin American.

I like to say that you know you’re reading magical realism when you are taken from a realistic situation and slowly moved beyond that to a moment that seems just as realistic yet is not probable. If you find yourself telling someone about the scene and stop yourself to say “that can’t happen,” but completely bought it at the time then you have read good magical realism.

In attempting to define magical realism, Bowers points to the presence of ghosts as a possible marker. However, in the Latin American context, ghosts are not all that unusual. This is a culture that celebrates the Day of the Dead and is more in touch with death than are people in the United States.

Uruguayan journalist Eduardo Galeano reports on Holy Week processions as observed in Guatemala. People drag heavy crosses and re-create “the flagellation of Jesus step by step along the interminable ascent to Golgotha; with howls of pain they turn His death and His burial into the cult of their own death and their own burial, the annihilation of the beautiful life of long ago.” (Galeano, 50)

In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the ghost of Prudencio Aguilar, who haunts Ursula and her husband (the first José Arcadio Buendía) after her husband murdered Prudencio is “normal.” However, the

ghost's frequent visitations prompt the couple and several of their friends to move to a different town.

Years later, Prudencio's ghost returns because he has been waiting outside of heaven and asking each recently deceased person if they know where José Arcadio has gone because Prudencio misses José Arcadio and the ghost and his murderer resume a relationship until the José Arcadio's death.

Magical realist critic Amaryl Chanady points to this move being the fundamental difference between fantastical writers, such as Salman Rushdie and Toni Morrison, and magical realism because "the supernatural in magical realism does not disconcert the reader." (Bowers, 26) The supernatural is natural.

The social setting of magical realism is usually with people who do not have access to political power explored through García Márquez's fictional village of Macondo, which is frequently entered by traveling gypsies and later North American businessmen, is almost inescapable by the early inhabitants. It is a fictional representation of being denied access to the outside world, to political power.

One thing to consider as you read *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is that the timespan covered is not 100 years of Colombian history nor is it covered in a linear fashion. In fact, it spans the closing decade of the 15th century and into the second half of the 20th century.

Gabriel García Márquez

García Márquez is the winner of the 1982 Nobel Prize in Literature, yet he does not see himself as a novelist.

In a 1981 interview with the *Paris Review*, García Márquez told Peter H. Stone, "I've always been convinced that my true profession is that of a journalist. What I didn't like about journalism before were the working conditions." (Stone, 181)

García Márquez says the sources, material and language for journalism and novels are the same. He points to a protest in 1948

that raised his awareness of the kind of country he lives in. A political leader had just been shot and García Márquez ran to the location, but by the time he arrived the leader was already on the way to the hospital. On his way back to his apartment, he observed "people demonstrating, looting stores and burning buildings." He came to realize that was "the type of life I had lived, known, and wanted to write about." (Stone, 185)

Another source for his writing was a visit to the town he grew up in and listening to the stories of his grandmother, who told supernatural stories with a complete naturalness. García Márquez realized he was "experiencing it as if I were reading it. It was as if everything I saw had already been written, and all I had to do was sit down and copy what was already there and what I was just reading." (Stone, 185)

When asked the writing process, he responded: "It always amuses me that the biggest praise for my work comes for the imagination, while the truth is that there's not a single line in all my work that does not have a basis in reality." (Stone, 186)

A listing of García Márquez's major works:

Novels: *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967); *The Autumn of the Patriarch* (1975); *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* (1981); *Love in the Time of Cholera* (1985); and *Memories of My Melancholy Whores* (2004).

Novellas: *Leaf Storm* (1954) and *No One Writes to the Colonel* (1961).

Non-fiction: *The Novel in Latin America: Dialogue* (1968), with Mario Vargas Llosa; *When I Was Happy and Undocumented* (1972); *The Solitude of Latin America* (1982); *The Fragrance of Guava* (1982), with Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza; *News of a Kidnapping* (1996); *A Country for Children* (1998) and *Living to Tell the Tale* (2002).

Liberation theology

"To neglect the sociopolitical matrix of the theology of liberation is to close one's eyes to the new praxis, new consciousness,

and new relationship between God and humankind at the heart of the popular movement,” according to James B. Nikoloff, the editor of *Gustavo Gutiérrez: Essential Writings*. (Nikoloff, 3)

This is one of the unique markers of liberation theology. Most theologies come from a specific social, historic, political and economic context, yet it is liberation theology that acknowledges its reliance on context. Gutiérrez does not automatically assume that his theology can be placed into a different social context and still be applicable.

Liberation theology, like magical realism, comes from a situation of oppression and focuses on the Catholic “preferential option for the poor.” It tells people that there is something they can actively do to change their situation.

As Gutiérrez was developing the theology of liberation in the 1960s, he saw “significant breaks” in the histories of church and Latin America that indicated a willingness “to challenge the injustices of societies.” (Nikoloff, 3)

According to Galeano, in 1960-61 Latin American coffee production suffered because “the rich countries that preach free trade apply stern protectionist policies against the poor countries: they turn everything they touch - including the developing countries’ own production - into gold for themselves and rubbish for others. ... Instant coffee made in Brazil is cheaper and better than that made by the flourishing U.S. industry; but then, of course, in a system of free competition some are freer than others.” (Galeano, 101)

The “sacraments of God’s reign” are seen in this new era through the practices of “compassion, love, memory, repentance and forgiveness, music and beauty, gentle kindness, and redemptive suffering.” (Nikoloff, 17)

Many of these are words used by non-liberation theologians, but they are given a different definition by Gutiérrez because they are a call to action.

Gutiérrez points out that the Andean

mind is different from the Western mind because of the communitarian culture that shapes it. In the Andean mind, “the answer I give ... cannot be separated from the answer we give.” Lines cannot be rigidly drawn between the self and the community.

At the heart of liberation theology is the tension between fear and courage:

“While fear silences tongues and paralyzes hands, faith and hope, cultivated with courage, loosen tongues to protest the outrages of history and animate the hands to reshape that history.” (Nikoloff, 2)

Gustavo Gutiérrez

Gutiérrez experienced poverty growing up in Lima, Peru. At the age of 12, he suffered from osteomyelitis, which kept him in bed until the age of 18 and made him an avid reader. Nikoloff says Gutiérrez’s sensitivity to the physical, psychological and spiritual suffering of others came from this childhood experience.

Gutiérrez began his college career expecting to become a psychiatrist but decided to enter the seminary after three years of college. From 1951 to 1959, Gutiérrez studied at the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium, the University of Lyon in France, and the Gregorian University in Rome. He earned master’s degrees in philosophy, psychology and theology during this time. He did not receive a doctorate until 1985, when the degree was awarded based on his entire body of theological works “in recognition of the permanent mark he had by then left on twentieth-century Christian thought.” (Nikoloff, 2)

After being ordained in 1959, he began teaching theology to lay undergraduates at the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru, where he “encouraged his listeners to examine the meaning of human existence and the place of God in the world in which they lived.” (Nikoloff, 2)

He created a critical dialogue with the writings of Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, Karl Marx; the films of Luis Buñuel and Ingmar Bergman; and Peruvian writers José

María Arguedas and César Vallejo.

From 1962 to 1965, Gutiérrez closely watched the Second Vatican Council, even attending a session with Bishop Manuel Larraín of Chile as his assistant. But he also kept close tabs on the ecclesial and sociopolitical events of Peru and Latin America.

Gutiérrez referred to the upheaval he saw as the “irruption of the poor,” while social scientists have termed it *movimiento popular*. It is in this context that the theology of liberation was born.

Gutiérrez draws from the Hebrew prophets and the book of Job in his writings on liberation theology. But he also leans heavily on theological contemporaries that he was “in discussion with,” social scientists, literary giants, “the scorned and crushed of history,” and God.

A listing of Gutiérrez’s major works:

A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation (1971); *The Power of the Poor in History* (1983); *We Drink From Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People* (1984); *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent* (1987); *The Truth Shall Make*

You Free: Confrontations (1990); *The God of Life* (1991); *Las Casas: In Search of the Poor Jesus Christ* (1993) and *Sharing the World* (1997).

Reading guide

The introductions have purposely been on a surface level because if you have too much information then you are more likely to see something and latch onto that as the only possible meaning.

While reading *One Hundred Years of Solitude* listen to the stories of García Márquez and connect with the characters.

Gutiérrez refers to reading the Bible as an activity in which we also let the Bible read us. Be aware that you are bringing yourself to the reading of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

If you do not have a copy of the book that has a family tree in it, you might want to draw one and add details about each character. By the time you finish reading you will be trying to keep track of five José Arcadios, more than five Aurelianos and a pair of Amarantas and Remedios.

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Love is the Important Thing

In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, love and lust come together in an explosive way; at other times, love is delayed for many years or completely denied. In liberation theology, a different type of love is the motivating force behind needed social change.

Aureliano and Remedios

At roughly the age of 18, García Márquez visited his parents and met his future wife, the 13-year-old Mercedes Barcha Pardo, who pledged her undying love.

One Hundred Years of Solitude is said to have taken 17 years to write, but it was recorded in six years of active writing that began in an eighteen-month “concerted locked-away” effort. During the six-year span that brought them to the brink of poverty as their car was sold and appliances pawned, Mercedes cared for their two children and managed their finances as they lived on credit.

To get the book published, García Márquez had to pawn items to pay postage and mail the manuscript. It can easily be said that without Mercedes, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* would not exist.

Think about Col. Aureliano and Remedios Moscote as the future colonel waited for Remedios to reach a marriageable age. Aureliano accompanies his father, the original José Arcadio Buendía, to the office of the magistrate, Don Apolinar Moscote, to peacefully come to a compromise on the color that houses could be painted. Moscote introduces the Buendías to his 16-year-old daughter Amparo and his 9-year-old daughter Remedios.

“Everybody was at peace except Aureliano. The image of Remedios, the magistrate’s younger daughter, who, because of her age, could have been his daughter, kept paining him in some part of his body. It was a physical sensation that almost bothered him when he walked, like a pebble in his shoe.”

Amaranta

One of the saddest tales of love in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is that of Amaranta, the sister of Col. Aureliano and José Arcadio. It begins with her scheming to win the Italian Pietro Crespi from her adopted sister Rebeca. When José Arcadio, who left with the gypsies, returns and Rebeca discards the reserved Pietro for the lusty José Arcadio, Pietro is tossed to Amaranta.

After a long courtship, Pietro proposes to Amaranta who tells him yes, but “when we know each other better.” After Pietro realizes that he truly loves Amaranta, she tells him she wouldn’t marry him if she were dead. Pietro commits suicide and then Amaranta does something that seems unthinkable: “... Amaranta went into the kitchen and put her hands into the coals of the stove until it hurt her so much that she felt no more pain but instead smelled the pestilence of her own singed flesh.”

González writes that this type of penance was acceptable in Spanish cultures: “Spanish society ... seemed to have passed straight from the tortured ascetism of the mediaeval to the convolutions of the baroque, without experiencing the humanizing influence of the Renaissance.” (González, 82)

García Márquez may have had Rosa de Lima in mind when writing about Amaranta. Influence was placed on Rosa to marry by her social status, but marriage was not to Rosa’s liking. In an attempt to purify herself and live a life for Christ, Rosa “rubbed her face with red pepper and washed her hands in lye.”

While Rosa de Lima is unheard of in the United States, it took less than 70 years after her death for her to become the first American-born saint of the Roman Catholic Church in the late 17th century.

José Arcadio and Rebeca

It is clear in Rebeca’s relationship with Pietro that she is the more aggressive of the

two. However, when José Arcadio returns after traveling with the gypsies, he is clearly the more aggressive one.

Rebeca's memories of his return are painted in contrast to Pietro: "she thought that Pietro Crespi was a sugary dandy next to that protomale whose volcanic breathing could be heard all over the house."

Yet she lost control of herself when "José Arcadio looked at her body with shameless attention and said to her: 'You're a woman, little sister.'"

During a siesta, they have sex for the first time and then make plans to get married. Pietro protests by saying "It's against nature ... and besides, it's against the law."

Yet Father Nicanor announced in church that they were not brother and sister, and they were married during the Mass despite the family's love for Pietro.

The church in Latin America before the late 18th century was completely in control of marriage. "In fact, the power of the church to determine who could or could not marry, who could seek and be given annulments, and who could separate from a spouse was so strong that it routinely ignored secular efforts to intervene." (González, 84-85)

While normal practice included the upcoming marriage being announced on three Sundays before the wedding, this custom could be discarded by the priest.

The story of Luisa de Avila and Pedro Hernández of Mexico City in 1584 is an example cited by González. Pedro's sister wanted to stop the wedding, so they wrote to their father in Acapulco. Fearing undue hardship should the father get involved, the couple pleaded with the priest to suspend the bans and proceed with the wedding. A secret wedding was performed, and the father had no say in preventing the marriage.

Love of neighbor

An overriding principle in liberation theology is the "gratuitous yet demanding, universal yet preferential, love of God."

In "Conversion to the Neighbor" from *Theology of Liberation*, Gustavo Gutiérrez writes: "To be saved is to reach the fullness of love; it is to enter into the circle of charity which unites the three persons of the Trinity; it is to love as God loves. The way to this fullness of love can be no other than love itself, the way of participation in this charity, the way of accepting, explicitly or implicitly, to say with the Spirit: 'Abba, Father' (Gal. 4:6). Acceptance is the foundation of all communion among human persons. To sin is to refuse to love, to reject communion and fellowship, to reject even now the very meaning of human fellowship."

While there is much made of the difference between eros and agape, Gutiérrez does not separate them: "Charity, the love of God for human beings, is found incarnated in human love — of parents, spouses, children, friends — and it leads to its fullness." (Nikoloff, 149-155)

In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Col. Aureliano goes to a mulatto prostitute who has been with sixty-three men before he enters the room. She is being sold by her grandmother for 20 cents per man because she had left a candle burning overnight and their home had burned down. Aureliano is unable to perform with her, but pays extra on his way out so she can be freed from her debt sooner. "That night, he could not sleep, thinking about the girl, with a mixture of desire and pity. He felt an irresistible need to love her and protect her." Aureliano returns the next day intending to marry her, but she has already left.

Thoughts

1. None of the courtships in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* conform to what we would think of as "normal," yet in each there is a lifelong commitment to the other person. How does this relate to your experience of love?

2. How is your love toward your family reflected in your love of God?

3. What does it mean to be moved by God's love to help your neighbor in love?

Ordinary Becomes Extraordinary

For anyone who has read *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the scene of Remedios the Beauty hanging out laundry and then ascending to heaven is memorable. It is a prime example of when an ordinary task suddenly becomes extraordinary.

“When I was writing the episode of Remedios the Beauty going to heaven, it took me a long time to make it credible. One day I went out to the garden and saw a woman who used to come to the house to do the wash and she was putting out the sheets to dry and there was a lot of wind. She was arguing with the wind not to blow the sheets away. I discovered that if I used the sheets for Remedios the Beauty, she would ascend,” said García Márquez told the *Paris Review*. (Stone, 189)

José Arcadio’s mysterious death

José Arcadio has conspired with his son Arcadio by Pilar Ternera to gain title to land that his father, the founder of Macondo, had distributed when they arrived. The titles to the land are being honored by the Conservative government. One day he comes home earlier than usual and with his wife in the bathroom when he enters the bedroom he is shot as soon as the door closes.

“A trickle of blood came out under the door, crossed the living room, went out into the street, continued in a straight line across the uneven terraces, went down steps and climbed over curbs, passed along the Street of the Turks, turned a corner to the right and another to the left, made a right angle at the Buendía house, went in under the closed door, crossed through the parlor, hugging the walls so as not to stain the rugs, went on to the other living room, made a wide curve to avoid the dining room table, went along the porch with the begonias, and passed without being seen under Amaranta’s chair as she gave an arithmetic lesson to Aureliano José, and went through the pantry and came out in the kitchen, where Úrsula was getting ready to crack

thirty-six eggs to make bread.

“ ‘Holy Mother of God!’ Úrsula shouted.”

His mother, Úrsula, then traces the blood back to his body where he is still lying face-down, undiscovered by his wife, in the closed bedroom.

As in the scene of Remedios the Beauty, García Márquez has used exquisite detail to make the blood searching for his mother seem like a normal occurrence. Yet it is the ordinary occurrence of a landowner taking advantage of the peasants and someone taking justice into their own hands.

From 1948 to 1957, Colombia was in the grips of *La Violencia*, an especially bloody time in Colombia’s history. According to Galeano, “small and large plantations, desert and farmland, valley and forest and Andean plateau were engulfed in peasant war; it put whole communities to flight, generated revolutionary guerrillas and criminal bands, and turned the country into a cemetery: it is estimated to have left a toll of 180,000 dead.” (Galeano, 102-103)

The violence began with what Latin Americans call the *bogotazo*, which was the assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán that started García Márquez on his writing career. According to Bushnell, Colombians refer to it as *El nueve de abril*, or the Ninth of April.

The assassination coincided with the 1948 inter-American conference taking place in Bogotá. This conference led Colombia to “make clear that the trouble was somehow caused by outside Communist instigation.” According to Bushnell, this theory gained credibility when it was discovered Fidel Castro was in Bogotá at a Latin American student conference on that day. No evidence has been found to support the theory of a Communist-Liberal conspiracy. More widely blame for the assassination is placed on the Conservatives trying to rid themselves of a “potentially dangerous rival.” Bushnell finds this theory implausible as well. (Bushnell, 201-204)

Conflict in History

“[The subject of conflict in history] is a sensitive area, one in which it is difficult at times to see our way clearly; it stirs strong feelings. At the same time, however, it is a subject that cannot be avoided,” wrote Gustavo Gutiérrez in “The Truth Shall Make You Free.”

Because liberation theology recognizes that it is grounded in the social context surrounding it, Gutiérrez finds it impossible to ignore the class conflict that is occurring around him. He heard criticism from some that it should be ignored, but he responded that to ignore it created a pastoral problem and denied the universality of love.

“Conflict is undoubtedly one of the most painful phenomena in human life. We should like things to be different, and we ought to look for ways of getting rid of these oppositions, but on the other hand — and this is the point I want to make — we cannot avoid facing up to the situation as it actually is, nor can we disregard the causes that produce it.”

Gutiérrez draws from Pope Paul VI’s writings on the relationship between peace and justice, which proposes that true peace must be an authentic, permanent and just peace. In other words, it is not simply that the killings stop but that the social situation changes so the “causes” of the conflict are addressed.

The specific causes that Gutiérrez wants to see addressed are the economic disparity and near poverty conditions that he sees among his parishioners. As their pastor, he sees the need to promote their welfare and not take sides in the conflict.

Gutiérrez equate the violent class struggles that he was seeing with war, which European theologians have struggled with but their answers have been found unsatisfactory especially in the light of the Holocaust. Gutiérrez states “Theological reflection on war is always tentative and in process.”

Because of his direct experience with the Latin American conflict as a pastor,

Gutiérrez sees a need to discuss the problem: “One conviction presided over my thinking in this area: There are no situations, however difficult, that amount to an exception or a parenthesis in the universal demands of Christian love.”

For Gutiérrez, thinking about the situation is not enough — adequate answers to the concrete situation must be found. “The question, therefore, that theology must answer is this: If there is a struggle (as one, but not the only form of historical conflict), how are we to respond to it as Christians?”

Gutiérrez has been criticized for saying that neutrality in the face of conflict is impossible and active participation is called for. However, he sees it as “neither ethical or Christian” to stand by and watch the conflict without responding in Christian love.

Pope John Paul II wrote “In order to achieve social justice in the various parts of the world, in the various countries and in the relationships between them, there is a need for ever new movements of solidarity of the workers and with workers.”

Gutiérrez’s final point in conflict is that we are called to love our enemies. In conflict there may be a “de facto opposition between persons, but even amid this opposition the Christian ethos does not allow hatred.”

Fundamental for Gutiérrez is “both the universality of love and the preferential option” for the poor. (Nikoloff, 115-121)

Thoughts

1. Both García Márquez and Gutiérrez saw the situations around them and felt compelled to write about or discuss the problem. How are their responses the same and how are they different?

2. When José Arcadio is murdered, his blood searches the town and his parents’ home for his mother. What do you think it was searching for?

3. In retrospect, German theologians realized they should have spoken out against the Holocaust more than they did. Are there situations that you see that need to be addressed but aren’t being addressed?

What Are We Fighting For?

Col. Aureliano Buendía

Col. Aureliano Buendía, before becoming a revolutionary leader, spends nights playing dominoes with his father-in-law, the magistrate Don Apolinar Moscote. He tries to figure out the difference between Liberals and Conservatives. Moscote told him:

“The Liberals ... were Freemasons, bad people, wanting to hang priests, to institute civil marriage and divorce, to recognize the rights of illegitimate children as equal to those of legitimate ones, and to cut the country up into a federal system that would take power away from the supreme authority. The Conservatives, on the other hand, who had received their power directly from God, proposed the establishment of public order and family morality. They were the defenders of the faith of Christ, of the principle of authority, and were not prepared to permit the country to be broken down into autonomous entities.”

Aureliano watches as the political process occurs peacefully in Macondo. When the votes were counted that night while he played dominoes with Moscote, the votes were evenly split between the Liberals and the Conservatives. However, a sergeant removed all but 10 Liberal votes and made up the difference with Conservatives. “Aureliano understood the disadvantages of being in the opposition” and predicts the Liberals will go to war. Moscote informs him that if he was a Liberal, he wouldn’t know the ballots had been switched.

Yet what led to war was the magistrate’s refusal to return kitchen knives that had been taken to “as proof that the Liberals were preparing for war.” Asked by friends if he was Liberal or Conservative, Aureliano finally makes his decision: “ ‘If I have to be something I’ll be a Liberal,’ he said, ‘because the Conservatives are tricky.’ ”

Aureliano, recovering from an attempted poisoning during the second uprising, would ask his friend, Colonel Gerineldo Márquez:

‘Tell me something, old friend: why are we fighting?’

“ ‘What other reason could there be?’ Colonel Gerineldo Márquez answered. ‘For the great Liberal party.’

“ ‘You’re lucky because you know why,’ he answered. ‘As far as I’m concerned, I’ve come to realize only just now that I’m fighting because of pride.’ ”

And later Aureliano has an improbable friendship with a Conservative general, José Raquel Moncada. They speak after Moncada has been sentenced to death:

“ ‘You know better than I,’ (Aureliano) said, ‘that all courts-martial are farces and that you’re really paying for the crimes of other people, because this time we’re going to win the war at any price. Wouldn’t you have done the same in my place?’ ...

“ ‘Probably,’ he said. ‘But what worries me is not your shooting me, because after all, for people like us it’s a natural death. ... What worries me ... is that out of so much hatred for the military, out of fighting them so much and thinking about them so much, you’ve ended up as bad as they are. And no ideal in life is worth that much baseness.’ ”

After the end of the violence, Aureliano was heard to say: “ ‘The only difference today between Liberals and Conservatives is that the Liberals go to Mass at five o’clock and the Conservatives at eight.’ ”

La Violencia

The era of *la Violencia* is dated to 1946-1957, prompted by a change in administration and a “shocking electoral defeat” of the Liberals. The following election was won by a Conservative who ran unopposed because the Liberals withdrew from the race “claiming that in the reigning climate of violence it was unsafe for them to come forth and cast their votes.” Liberals did not see Laureano Gómez as a legitimate ruler and were thus “justified” for any acts of violence against Conservatives.

According to Bushnell, during the “Liberal Republic” that preceded *La Violencia*, parish priests in the countryside sometimes refused to give communion to someone known to vote the Liberal ticket. (Bushnell, 182)

According to Galeano, “The bitter taste of hatred, long in the peasants’ mouths, provoked an explosion; the government sent police and soldiers to cut off testicles, slash pregnant women’s bellies, and throw babies in the air to catch on bayonet points — the order of the day being ‘don’t leave even the seed.’ ” (Galeano, 103)

“All in all, it makes a gruesome story, in which eventually between 100,000 and 200,000 Colombians died, often in quite unpleasant ways.” According to Bushnell, the violence usually took place between peasants while larger landowners, professionals and politicians kept safe in the cities. (Bushnell, 205)

Galeano reports “The first guerrilla leaders, determined to take revenge but without clear political vision, took to destroying for destruction’s sake, letting off blood and steam without purpose.” (Galeano, 103)

Yet, while the death rate was increasing there was also an era of economic growth with the gross domestic product of Colombia increasing five percent annually between 1945 and 1955. Not surprisingly with most violence occurring in the countryside, the population of the towns and cities increased. In 1938, 31 percent of Colombia lived in cities, but by 1964 that had increased to 52 percent of the population. There was also an increase in foreign investment in manufacturing although most manufacturing was still owned by Colombians. (Bushnell, 207-208)

Galeano writes: “The bloodbath coincided with a period of economic euphoria for the ruling class. But is the prosperity of a class really identifiable with the well-being of a country?” (Galeano, 103)

According to González, violence in the countryside took on a religious bent with Protestants being associated with Liberals

and Catholics with Conservatives. Between 1948 and 1955, more than 165 Protestant schools were closed, 42 churches destroyed and 112 were murdered. As late as 1955, police were evicting Protestants from homes and farms. “The difference between political violence and religious persecution was difficult to determine in the rural areas.” (González, 170)

Liberation Theology

In 1969, Gutiérrez presented a lecture on “Eschatology and Politics” at Cartigny. Gutiérrez wrote of the connection between the past and Latin Americans claiming they had a “fixation” that caused them to over-value the past.

“Going deeper into the matter, one moreover gets the impression that many in the developed countries do not have an intense experience, in political matters, of this typical characteristic of the contemporary human person, because they are so attached — in both the East and the West — not to the past but rather to an affluent present which they seek to preserve and defend in any way they can.”

Gutiérrez’s writes that we have to be open to accepting the future as a gift “accepted in the negation of injustice, in the protest against trampled human rights, and in the struggle for peace and fellowship.”

He agrees with Ludwig Feuerbach, who said “Faith is the opposite of hope.” Gutiérrez explores this by saying that “Human love is ‘the truth’ (in the Hegelian sense of the word) of Christianity. Faith begins with the affirmation while love begins with the affirmation of men and women. Faith separates; love unites.” (Nikoloff, 197-206)

Thoughts

1. How do García Márquez, Galeano, Bushnell, González and Gutiérrez answer Col. Aureliano’s question? Which one has more resonance with you?

2. Could love have brought José Raquel Moncada and Aureliano Buendías together?

Memory and Historical Amnesia

In the midst of the insomnia plague it becomes necessary to remind people what a cow is and what the cow's purpose is in their daily lives. Yet in their dire circumstances they only need to be reminded that "GOD EXISTS" in large letters on a billboard, they don't need to be reminded of the concept of God. While that has plenty of existential debate potential, we will focus instead on the later case of "forgetfulness" — the incident with United Fruit Company and the banana workers strike.

The Banana Workers Massacre

The incident begins when José Arcadio Segundo becomes a union worker and organizes demonstrations throughout the banana region. "The protests of the workers were based on the lack of sanitary facilities in their living quarters, the nonexistence of medical services, and terrible working conditions."

Presenting a unanimous petition to the United Fruit Company proved near impossible when the company representatives all left town. One was found naked in a brothel and made to sign the paper. Lawyers proved the man was not with the company and even had him jailed as an impostor. Denied access to the legal system, the workers resorted to a strike.

The government responded by sending three regiments to Macondo. "Martial law enabled the army to assume the function of arbitrator in the controversy, but no effort at conciliation was made." Instead, the army replaced the banana workers.

Then the authorities called the workers to gather in Macondo, where an end to the conflict was promised. José Arcadio Segundo "noticed that the army had set up machine-gun emplacements around the small square and that the wired city of the banana company was protected by artillery pieces." More than 3,000 people were in the space in front of the train station and surrounded by the machine guns.

An army lieutenant read Decree No. 4, which stated the strikers were hoodlums and authorized the army to shoot to kill. They were then given five minutes to "withdraw."

The order to fire was given and 14 machine guns "answered at once." José Arcadio Segundo is wounded and comes to "lying faceup in the darkness. He realized that he was riding on an endless and silent train and that his head was caked with dry blood and that all his bones ached. He felt an intolerable desire to sleep. Prepared to sleep for many hours, safe from the terror and the horror, he made himself comfortable on the side that pained him less, and only then did he discover that he was lying against dead people."

José Arcadio Segundo makes his escape and sees the longest train "he had ever seen, with almost two hundred freight cars and a locomotive at either end and a third one in the middle. ... On the top of the cars there could be seen the dark shapes of the soldiers with their emplaced machine guns."

He makes his way to the home of a woman he recognizes. She wraps him in a blanket, bandages his wounds and gives him a cup of coffee before he can speak more than his name.

" 'There must have been three thousand of them,' he murmured.

" 'What?'

" 'The dead,' he clarified. 'It must have been all of the people who were at the station.'

"The woman measured him with a pitying look. 'There haven't been any dead here,' she said. 'Since the time of your uncle, the colonel, nothing has happened in Macondo.' "

This happens to him four more times on his way home. His twin brother doesn't even believe him but believes "an extraordinary proclamation" that said the "workers had left that station and had returned home in peaceful groups. The proclamation also stat-

ed that the union leaders, with great patriotic spirit, had reduced their demands to two points: a reform of medical services and the building of latrines in the living quarters.”

Truth to Fiction to Fact

As García Márquez told the *Paris Review*: “The massacre in the square is completely true, but while I wrote it on the basis of testimony and documents, it was never known exactly how many people were killed. I used the figure three thousand, which is obviously an exaggeration. But one of my childhood memories was watching a very, very long train leave the plantation supposedly full of bananas. There could have been three thousand dead on it, eventually to be dumped into the sea. What’s really surprising is that now they speak very naturally in Congress and the newspapers about ‘three thousand dead.’ I suspect that half of all our history is made in this fashion.” (Stone, 190-191)

Galeano reports that while the Koran mentions the banana as a tree of paradise for much of Latin America it is a “tree of hell.” United Fruit Company “became owner of the biggest latifundio (plantation) in Colombia when a big strike broke out on the Atlantic coast in 1928. Banana workers were mowed down with bullets in front of a railroad station. ‘The forces of public order are authorized to punish with the aid of appropriate weapons,’ it was officially decreed, and not further decree was necessary to wipe the massacre from official memory.” (Galeano, 108-110)

Bushnell records that the government “lost far more than prestige” during the strike. The commercial export of bananas was 6 percent of Colombia’s exports at the end of the 1920s. “The industry was wholly controlled by the United Fruit Company of Boston, Massachusetts, whose extensive holdings in Central America and the Caribbean and intricate shipping and marketing network made it a model of successful horizontal and vertical integration.” (Bushnell, 178-9)

The banana workers strike is seen by

Bushnell as the “culmination of years of rising labor tension,” with “foreign anarchists” and the Colombian Community Party active in the banana zone. The actual massacre occurred in Ciénaga and the official death count is 13, while 60-75 “seems to be the most authoritative estimate of the death toll.” Bushnell does point out that the massacre was the “start of an all-out campaign of repression” that led to an unknown number of deaths and arrests. (Bushnell, 180)

Liberation Theology

Gutiérrez explored what he calls “historical amnesia” in “The Power of the Poor in History,” for him it is necessary to avoid historical amnesia because it prevents people from seeing the history of oppression and encourages them to think of their situation as an isolated situation.

The 17th century Huguenot Pierre Jurieu undertook a re-interpretation of Revelation 11 because “there are so many things singular and irregular in this Persecution, that without prophaness and a denial of Divine Providence, we cannot but acknowledge the hand of God therein.” In other words, his community developed an apocalyptic theology because they didn’t see their struggles in the context of history.

“We are told that we are faced with an entirely and radically new situation. But our interlocuters and their ‘realism’ are doubly in error. Actually, there was neither such optimism before, more are things now as bad as they think,” writes Gutiérrez.

“The dominant sectors take the occasion of this variety to allege that liberation struggles are the work of minority factions — little groups of radicals, students, and a few priests out of touch with the people — thus altogether ignoring the significance of these struggles.” By accepting the dominant group’s story they then “fail to grasp what is really at stake here today” and do not disturb the social order that privileges the dominant group.

Gutiérrez points out that armed forces, political power and public media under the

control of the “dominators have sought to dismantle all organized protest against the economic exploitation that lies at the base of the system from which they reap their profit of lordship.” These dominators are concerned to display to the “Western Christian civilization” that there are not systemic problems in Latin America, but fringe radicals.

“The theology of liberation is rooted in this historical, popular process. It has its roots in the faith as lived in this social experience — the experience of following Jesus in the defense of the rights of the poor, in the proclamation of the gospel in the midst of the struggle for liberation.”

Gutiérrez alleges the dominators attempt to maintain social control by cutting off people’s memories “and so keep them from perceiving what the battles they are waging owe to the battles of a few years back.”

Not participating in historical amnesia, then “is a subversive memory, and it lends force and sustenance to our positions, refuses to compromise or equivocate, learns from failures, and knows (by experience) that it has the capability of overcoming every obstacle, even repression itself.”

Gutiérrez points out that memories of the “good old days” are an attempt to

“undermine the significance of the involvement of Christians in the liberation process.”

Thoughts

1. The 1928 banana workers strike is an intersection of fact and fiction in that García Márquez researched the event, yet he is the source cited for the number even though he admits the number is invented. How does this affect your understanding of “truth”?

2. What happens to the banana workers strike if it is viewed as part of a long struggle of resistance? What happens if it is a single event?

3. Do you agree with Gutiérrez that history is important for theology? Is it more important in liberation theology than classical theology?

4. Think about your knowledge of U.S. history. How was your church involved in the abolition of slavery; alcohol temperance; labor unions; the Civil Rights Movement; anti-war efforts; women’s rights, etc.?

5. Gutiérrez clearly sees that the church has a role in the public sphere based on the Roman Catholic “preferential option for the poor.” How is this similar or different from your church? Do you agree with Gutiérrez?

Epilogue

I first read *One Hundred Years of Solitude* about 10 years ago, while a creative writing student in the Southwest. I had been exposed to magical realism by my professors and in the works of other writers, such as Mexico’s Laura Esquivel and Chile’s Isabel Allende. I remember the beautiful writing of each of these authors and the way that something could slowly become extraordinary.

When *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was selected by Oprah Winfrey’s book club, I remember thinking how there was much more to the literary genre than many would understand. And when reading Bowers’ description of magical realism, I realized not

understanding the history or culture of the region could lead to confusion about what was happening in the genre.

Now, thanks to this project, I have finally had the opportunity to read Gustavo Gutiérrez and explore how literature, history and theology can inform each other.

In the prologue, I mentioned that this was a mission. I believe Volunteer in Mission trips are focused on the experience, but we don’t always understand what we see so we can’t effect needed change after we return.

Gutiérrez points to love as the important thing in choosing social change. I believe we will love our neighbor better when we see them with wiser eyes.