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## Comments--Quaker Religious Thought, no. 63&64

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## Comments

DOUGLAS V. STEERE

My first reaction to Philip Boroughs' fine paper is that the title, "Social Spirituality in John Woolman and Gustavo Gutierrez," has a quaint ring. Although I have never seen an article called "Social Spirituality in Jesus in the 25th Chapter of Matthew," there could certainly be one. The content is unmistakably there. If it were not, there would be no such thing as Christian witness. One can almost make the same claim here.

### THE SPIRITUALITY OF JOHN WOOLMAN

The portion that deals with Woolman is drawn from his famous *Journal* and the less known essays on keeping Negroes and a plea for the poor. It is carefully developed and may draw new readers to Woolman's remarkable book for greater insight into what an 18th-C Quaker at his deepest level of commitment could do for the "social side" of his spirituality. Woolman did it in a swift lifetime that was over when he was only 52.

In a way, a reader may be surprised to learn that Woolman's witness against the keeping of slaves was carried out almost exclusively within the membership of the Quaker community; and, perhaps, to learn also that his *Journal* and essays were highly personal. They were records of his own inward calling, his failures, and his ordering of his own and his family's life to a high degree of simplicity in order to be liberated for carrying out his concerns.

There is little mention of something else that must have been involved. That is, the intense pain and inner changes that were required of Woolman's fellow-Quakers if his witness to the release of the slaves was to be carried out. The uniqueness of this spirituality lay in the fact that it was not an attack on the Quaker slaveholders, but rather a quiet witness to their consciences, which his moving presence reached out to and touched. His own costly involvement in tiring journeys on foot covering hundreds of miles, and his genuine caring for his fellow Quakers were all laid in the scale-pan.

This intensely spiritual witness was marked by frank accounts of his own failures and embarrassments which helped to make up the "social" aspect of his spirituality. He cared! The John Woolman portion of this comparison of the spirituality of two Christians

chronologically and culturally separated is well told. The sprinkling through it of incidents of Woolman's inner struggle along with the account of his unflinching carrying out of the messages he received from his Inward Guide contribute greatly.

### THE SPIRITUALITY OF GUSTAVO GUTIERREZ

In the description of the Social Spirituality that marks the witness of Gutierrez, there are admirable accounts of the academic preparation of this Roman Catholic scholar not only in his native Peru, but in the best Roman Catholic universities in France, Belgium, and Rome. There is also word of his daring to take seriously -- and insist on using -- the whole new dimension of service for the poor that Vatican II had helped to kindle.

Gutierrez' key books: *A Theology of Liberation*, *The Power of the Poor in History*, and *We Drink from Our Own Wells* are skilfully sketched; and each of these volumes is pinned as a theological must for our time. One yearns to know something more about Gutierrez' personal social contacts, both with the political powers and the poor. Our hunger for this comes from reading of Woolman's very personal approach not only to slaveholders on behalf of their blacks, but the risk he and a companion took. Their very lives were in danger when they passed through territory inflamed by uprisings in order to visit remote friendly Indians. We are eager to see this personal dimension when we learn of Gutierrez' brilliant theological writing and see it matched with Woolman's classic.

Like Woolman, Gutierrez has been effective in bringing about changed lives. There are said to be more than 50,000 small communities of Roman Catholic peasants in Latin America who are already at work in this self-transformation. The reader of this fine comparison of the Social Spirituality of these two men wonders how far they would differ on the use of the violent Marxist way of seizing land at the point of a gun. He or she wonders, too, how the creative inner and outer growth of the eager poor in these communities can be most effectively encouraged. One yearns for an account of some specific incidents where Gutierrez has served in these self-help communities, incidents of the kind that transformed his own life paralleling Woolman's very personal experiences.

### CONCLUSION

In closing, I can only say that this article rings true in emphasizing the fact that true spirituality, like true devotion, must pass the