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A Psycho-Spiritual Approach to Mental Health for the Poor in Peru

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

A PSYCHO-SPIRITUAL APPROACH TO MENTAL HEALTH
FOR THE POOR IN PERU

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
FACULTY OF GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
DEPARTMENT OF PASTORAL COUNSELING

BY

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A mis padres
que me dieron a conocer la espiritualidad del pobre.

A Daniel mi amigo del alma
que me anima siempre a encontrar mi propia voz

A toda mi gente del Perú
de la que vengo y a la que voy.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

- A. Motivation and Rationale 2
- B. The Concept of Violence 5

CHAPTER I: VIOLENCE IN PERU: PAST AND PRESENT

- A. A Heritage of Violence 8
- B. A Typology of Violence 12
 - 1. An Economy of Violence 12
 - 2. Political Violence 14
 - 3. Urban Violence 18
 - 4. Racial Violence 20
 - 5. Domestic Violence Against Women 21

CHAPTER II: PSYCHOLOGICAL RESPONSES TO VIOLENCE

- A. Psychological Characteristics in the Midst of Violence 23
 - 1. Collective Frustration 23
 - 2. Depressive Mood 24
 - 3. Fear and Anxiety 25
 - 4. Resentment and Powerlessness 26
 - 5. Poverty and Its Effects 27
- B. Psychological Causes of Violence 29

CHAPTER III: INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO VIOLENCE

- A. Government 32
- B. Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) 33
- C. The Catholic Church 35
- D. Critique of the Institutional Responses 37

CHAPTER IV: MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS, VIOLENCE, AND THE POOR

A. Common Misconceptions	40
1. "Take Care of the Stomach First"	41
2. "Build Asylums for the Crazies"	43
B. Psychotherapy and Social Class	45
1. Psychoanalysis for the Chosen Few	45
2. Is Psychotherapy Wasted on the Poor?	47
3. Are the Poor Too Stupid for Psychotherapy?	48

CHAPTER V: THE POOR RESPOND TO VIOLENCE

A. The Value of Psychotherapy	51
B. Popular Strategies of Mental Health	53
1. Relational Value of the Community	53
2. Popular Organization and Personal Empowerment	55
3. Support Networks of Solidarity	57
4. Story Telling	59
C. Spirituality and Faith Tradition	61
1. Conversion to Solidarity	63
2. Gratuitousness and Efficacy	64
3. Joy Over Suffering	65
4. Spiritual Childhood	66
5. Community out of Solitude	67
D. A Pastoral Counseling Approach	68

CHAPTER VI: A NEW RESPONSE TO VIOLENCE

A. Justification	70
B. General Objective	74
C. Therapeutic Factors	74
D. Setting	75
E. Target Population	76

F. Approach	77
NOTES	79
BIBLIOGRAPHY	83

INTRODUCTION

This thesis concerns the widespread and extreme violence that characterizes Perú today, and the acute suffering that it inflicts on the Peruvian people, especially the poor. I will demonstrate that the psychological and spiritual dimensions of this violence and suffering have been largely ignored by those who claim to seek solutions to the problems of contemporary Perú. In an effort to better address the psychological and spiritual needs of the Peruvian people, I propose a theoretical approach and a concrete plan of action that draw on the insights of modern psychotherapy as well as the daily struggles of the Peruvian people with violence and suffering.

The first chapter presents the problem of violence in Perú, its historical roots and contemporary manifestations. The second chapter discusses some of the psychological responses of people to situations of extreme violence. The third chapter describes the way important Peruvian institutions -- the state, the church, and nongovernmental organizations -- have responded to the problem of violence. The fourth chapter analyzes and criticizes the practices of mental health professionals in Peru with respect to violence and its victims. The fifth chapter considers some promising methods and strategies used by the Peruvian poor and popular organizations to cope with violence and the suffering it inflicts. The final chapter develops a specific plan of action based on psychotherapeutic techniques and on the experiences and strategies of poor women in Peru.

In the remainder of this introduction, I will discuss my personal motivation for writing this thesis, and I will consider various ways of understanding the term "violence."

A. Motivation and Rationale

Faced with the choice between doing a case study or a thesis, I had to ponder which of the two would be more formative and ultimately more useful given the stage I am at in my life. A major question that has accompanied me during my years here at Loyola is, how do I put my studies to the service of the poor in Perú when I return home? How do I project the role of a pastoral counselor in such a reality? I have been conscious all along of the challenge awaiting me: Am I going to have to translate what I learned into Peruvian Spanish? Or will I have to go beyond a mere translation and creatively adapt what I learned here in such a way that it fits in Perú? Or, ultimately, is the task even a more radical one: Am I going to have to completely re-think and re-formulate the role of the pastoral counselor, the concepts, the tools, the methodology desde abajo (i.e., from the experience of the people themselves). I chose the thesis option in the hope of addressing some of these issues.

Perú is a complex reality, a violent reality. I would like to respond to that complexity with the skills that are appropriate to pastoral counseling, many of which I have learned here. The difficulty comes from the fact that Perú does not have, at present, a history of counseling, much less pastoral counseling. Obviously, to some extent it has been practiced there at parishes, hospitals, or in informal community settings, but no lay structures or professional institutions exist at the present time.

Moreover, the need for mental health tends to be ignored in the face of more tangible problems such as hunger or housing. Economic and political realities are almost automatically given priority over concerns relating to mental health. At first glance, this makes sense: in a country with so much poverty, it is necessary to focus on how to create jobs and new political structures of representation. But no country can lose sight of the fact that its major resource is its people. Part of the restructuring that must take place in Perú lies in our own way of perceiving ourselves, believing in ourselves, and discovering within ourselves the resources and the solutions that are called for. This is especially urgent for the poor because they have been scripted to value themselves poorly or as mere stomachs. The inner life, the deep desires and dreams, the aspirations and apprehensions of the simple people are not heard or heeded.

Listening is crucial for psychotherapy and to simple folk has a lot to do with the gospel. In light of this, an important component to take into consideration is the faith dimension that lies at the depth of every human experience, especially at the heart of those who suffer. Their stories, their worlds of pain, constitute a privileged place where there is a "sense" of God. Any psychotherapeutic approach to the reality of the poor needs to be cognizant of and sensitive to this level of experience and this language. By bringing pastoral counseling into a Peruvian context, I hope to implement a model that integrates psychology and spirituality.

As I envision the purpose of this thesis, it is a first attempt to formulate a coherent response to the mental health needs of poor urban dwellers. Moreover, the

purpose is find a model for doing psychotherapy in Perú, a model that treats together the material, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of the people. Given the drastic political situation in Peru, and taking into account the dramatic rise in violations against human rights over the past twelve years, this project acquires a special urgency. The prolonged environment of violence is threatening the emotional, psychological, and spiritual integrity of countless Peruvians, especially of children and youth.

As I conceive this essay, then, it seems to me that it can make a twofold contribution: one practical and another theoretical. The theoretical component lies in the effort to explore the shape of a psychotherapeutic model for a people who live in a context in which political violence pervades every aspect of daily living. The practical component consists in the hope that this model could one day be implemented in Perú and, thus, provide a direct service.

Given the nature of this project, this paper will be largely exploratory. Although it is not, strictly speaking, an empirical study, it will be based upon my existential and conceptual understanding of Peruvian reality. Furthermore, it will be based on previous studies that have been undertaken in similar situations of Latin America (Argentina, El Salvador, Chile, and Guatemala). Finally, because this research is not merely academic but one that involves my own search for a creative place within the complex tapestry that is Perú today, the tone and character of my writing will be rooted in my own faith experience and developing theology.

B. The Concept of Violence

It is important to work from a concept of violence in order to understand how violence affects and determines almost all aspects of Perú today. The study published by the Senate Commission of Perú offers one of the most complete examinations of the many dimensions of violence that characterize Peruvian society.¹ The concept of violence developed by the Senate Commission on Violence in Perú in 1989 will serve as the conceptual framework for understanding violence in the present study. But before we arrive at this concept, I'd like first to present different reflective approaches to the general concept of violence.

The word violence comes from the latin "violentia" which means "quality of violent," "action and effect to force," "violent action or against the natural way to behave." Also, from an always general perspective, violence is defined as "situations or state contrary to nature," "use of force to obtain consent," "force execution of something," "moral pressure, oppression, force," etc. These are some of the most accepted conceptual descriptions of violence, and they can be expressed in many different ways. In conclusion, violence is generally understood as "the utilization of force to alter the natural mode of behavior or conduct."

This dictionary definition of violence is very vague for the purpose of this work, and insufficient to understand the complexity of violence in Perú.

Galtung (a European sociologist who has long studied violence and from whom the Senate Commission draws its conceptualization) offers this general concept of violence: "Violence is found to be present when persons are perceived to be

influenced in such a way that their objective bodily and mental accomplishments are beneath their potential capacity."² From this general concept of violence we can infer that what causes the differences between the potential and the effective (real) is violence. Everything that increases such a difference or that prevents closing the gap, is seen to be the effects of violence. For example, an eight-year-old Quechua Indian child who is malnourished and denied a place to go to school is not just a sick illiterate but also a victim of violence. The structural organization of Peruvian society functions violently in regard to him, denying him fundamental human needs such as food, housing, safety, education, work, dignity. His physical and mental potential will never be realized, because he is a victim of structural and historical violence. We can then, arrive at our concept:

Violence is a kind of pressure of physical, biological, social, moral, spiritual force upon an individual or a group of individuals. This pressure diminishes or annuls the potential realization of the individual or the community.³

The object of this study is the kind of violence expressed in the acts done by human beings in their social relations. In this sense we want to understand that violence is more than just an individual act of aggression in which physical force is used. Social violence in its multiple forms is understood as the utilization of force by an individual or group of individuals against another individual or group of individuals in order to dominate them, to eliminate their free consent, or deny their human rights. Therefore, violence in society is often perpetrated and perpetuated by human beings who live in social systems, which have their own history and structures.

Social violence is directly related to the historical process of formation of any

society. The degree, form, and intensity that it takes come from the political, economic, cultural, psychological, religious, and racial dimensions. Therefore, it is important to recall the history of Peruvians in order to understand the deep roots of the violence that we suffer today.

CHAPTER I

VIOLENCE IN PERU: PAST AND PRESENT

Why is it important to study violence in a nation such as Perú? Violence is one of the most defining characteristics of contemporary Peruvian society. It is important because the violence is not new but old; not simple but complex. As a phenomenon, it requires that we investigate its ancient roots as well as its present modalities. Besides, we need to explore the different layers of violence, how they are interconnected, and ultimately in what ways this violence impacts on individuals, families, and institutions. Violence, we shall learn, is a dynamic reality that entails an ever-expanding spiral with a life of its own. Like a whirlpool, this violence displays the frightening capacity to pull everyone in and by so doing to perpetuate itself.

A. A Heritage of Violence

Modern Perú was born of an invasion.⁴ This invasion, the Spanish Conquest, began around 1525, was followed by fifty years of native resistance, and ended with the death of the last Incan king, Tupac Amaru, in 1572. His death marked the end of the Incan rule and the beginning of Spanish colonialism.

To maintain their hegemony, the Spaniards quickly established systems and structures that violently altered all aspects of daily existence. This colonial

reorganization of Perú destroyed the cooperative world of the Andean peasant. For instance, in the economic aspects forced labor became institutionalized. The colonial economy was based on mining for export, which linked Perú to the world economy as an exporter of raw materials and an importer of manufactured articles. For the Andean peasant this meant forced labor in the mines. This type of exploitation and diseases brought by Europeans resulted in a demographic disaster. When the Spaniards arrived, the Inca Empire held an estimated twelve to twenty million people; by 1600 the Indian population was reduced to two million.⁵ More than one author has said that this drastic decrease of population was not only the destruction of a culture, but a case of genocide (E. Galeano, 1973).⁶

In the political realm, the lives of the people were controlled by foreign rulers who lived across the ocean. The Spanish Crown replaced the Inca rulers and set up a colonial system ruled by viceroys. They created haciendas that were vast feudal estates. The "ayllus" (the basic social and economic unit of Incan society) were destroyed. The Indians worked the land for the Spaniards and received small plots of land in the less fertile highlands. Also, the remaining ayllus were merged into small communities to make them easier to control. Lima became the political and administrative center of the Spanish empire, launching the centralist tradition that persists to this day. The Indian communities were forced to provide labor service and pay tribute to the Spanish Crown in money or products. The colony existed to serve the Crown, as a major source of gold and minerals.

In such a context rebellions against Spanish rule were not uncommon in attempting

to restore the Incan Empire. The largest rebellion occurred in 1780. It was led by Jose Gabriel Condorcanqui, who claimed Inca descent and called himself Tupac Amaru II. This rebellion was severely punished by the Spanish Crown, which unleashed brutal repression, and it brought detrimental consequences to an already oppressed nation. The historian Alberto Flores Galindo said:

Because the colonial administration attributed the explosion of the rebellion not only to economic factors but also to cultural factors, it began an assault on everything that could be considered part of Andean culture: it prohibited indigenous theater and art... the use of Quechua, traditional clothing. Was this ethnocide? What is certain is that the Indian began to be despised and feared by those who were not Indian.⁷

In social and racial terms, a rigidly stratified society was configured on the basis of the "purity" of one's blood. One's place in society was determined by the color of one's skin. The Spaniards understood themselves to be more intelligent and naturally gifted by God to rule over the Indian population. The criollos (people of Spanish descent born in America) became the elite in the new world. The Indian was seen as ignorant, lazy, and immoral. To be a mestizo (mixed blood of Spanish and Indian descent) was to take on a Spanish mindset and to disown the cultural and historical heritage of one's Indian blood. These prejudices became a permanent factor of Peruvian society. The criollo elites regarded the Andean peasants as ignorant and lazy, useful only as beasts of burden. Flores Galindo, a Peruvian historian, quotes an intellectual of criollo descent writing in 1897,

The Indian race is a degenerated old branch of the ethnic trunk from which all inferior races emerged... It is ... decrepit and inept for civilized life. With almost no mental life, apathetic, without aspirations, it is unadaptable to education.⁸

Finally, even religion justified both the conquest and the colonial oppression of the indigenous peoples. When Pizarro killed the Inca, it also meant that the god brought by the Europeans was more powerful than the Incans' gods. God was presented as an outsider of whom the Indians were not completely worthy. The loss of the Inca religious cosmovision shattered the Inca world.

Catholicism was imposed upon the people and used to justify their enslavement. It has been said that: "The religious conquest of the New World was more a process of spiritual colonization than true evangelization."⁹ Great numbers were baptized; magnificent churches were erected on the ruins of Indians temples. Catholicism, and its message of fatalism for the poor, was a key factor in the ideology of power in the Spanish colonies, since the interests of the Church and Crown usually coincided and strengthened one another.

However, some members of the clergy defended the indigenous people. For example, Bartolome de las Casas had been the owner of extensive encomiendas and had seen the abuses of the colonial system. After becoming a priest he devoted his life to defending the Indian people. He argued that the Indian did have a soul and was a full human being and deserved to be treated as such.

Without necessarily subscribing to the "Black Legend," we can state the truth, that the legacy of the Conquest has been violent and even traumatic for the native inhabitants of the Andes. And though these structures were modified over time and, in principle, abolished by the War of Independence in 1821, in reality, contemporary Peruvian society has still not shed the colonial mentality. In fact, colonialism continues in the violent

attitudes now internalized in the people of Perú.

B. A Typology of Violence

In contemporary Perú, violence has many causes and many manifestations, including economic, political, social, cultural, and personal.

1. An Economy of Violence

The last twenty years has been a period of severe economic decline in Perú. At the macro level, Perú exhibits a foreign debt that is out of control, an increasingly poor balance of trade, and a reduction in the international commercial value of Peruvian natural resources. In the internal economic life of the country, we find that over 50 percent of the work force is unemployed, inflation is skyrocketing, and, consequently, a harsh and impoverished life-style (survival) is characteristic of the majority today. The economy is a form of institutionalized violence in which the majority of Peruvians are denied the basic necessities of life. This complex situation reflects the fact that Perú is part of an unjust international economic order and is plagued by a national history of economic injustice and corruption. The following statistics drawn from the Institute of Statistics of Lima by Aldo Panfichi and JoMarie Burt illustrate the desperate situation of Peru.¹⁰

- The foreign debt reached \$21,178 billion in July 1990, nearly \$1,000 for every man, woman and child; since the population of Perú in 1989 was 21.8 million.
- The monthly minimum wage in August 1991 was 38 new soles (US\$47). The cost of a monthly family food budget for a family of six (486.11 soles) is approximately thirteen times the minimum wage.

- Perú has one of the most unequal income distributions in the world. While the top 5 percent of income earners receive 24.28 percent of the national income, the lowest 60 percent receive almost the same proportion, 24.93 percent. Only 15 percent of the population lives above the poverty line; in the United States, only 15 percent of the population lives below the poverty line.
- Regarding employment, at the end of 1989, only 17 percent of the working class was fully employed. Unemployment was at 11 percent, while 72 percent of the population was underemployed (an income less than a third of the officially recognized minimum necessary to live). By mid-1991 only 5 percent of the economically active population was fully employed. Unemployment is now 8.6 percent, and 86.4 percent are underemployed.
- Thirty-eight of Perú's population is composed of minors under fifteen years of age. Those under eighteen years of age constitute 48 percent of the country's inhabitants. It is estimated that in Lima alone, 650,000 children work. It is also estimated that 325,000 children are at high risk of abandonment and/or mistreatment. The infant mortality rate in 1990 was 81 deaths per 1,000 live births. In the poorest departments, the number rises to 113 per 1,000 live births. This represents the third highest rate of infant mortality in the hemisphere, after Bolivia and Haiti.
- Malnutrition affects 65 percent of all children in Peru; 32 percent of children in urban areas are malnourished, while 82.6 percent suffer malnutrition in world rural areas.
- Only 50 percent of the population has completed primary education. 15 percent have

secondary education and 9 percent post-secondary education. In 1990, one third of Peru's children did not register for school."

The Senate Commission on Violence defines economic violence as that which excludes people who need and want to work, that which deprives or impedes access to basic goods or services, and that which denies people the adequate means to achieve the necessary requirements of life.¹¹

It is evident that this economic order is violent, leads to premature death, and scars people for life. Behind each statistic, there is a face, a family, and a future called into question. Anguish is omnipresent; it permeates not only the adult world, the world of "breadwinners," but even that of children and youth. Unfortunately, the worst part of this painful picture is that there is no end in sight. How long can the already long suffering of Perú's people continue?

2. Political Violence

It would be wrong to conclude that Perú is simply poor. In fact, poverty, in itself, need not be inherently violent. What makes Perú's situation so violent is the unjust distribution of land, the unfair sharing of wealth, the unequal access to social services, and the unbalanced participation in decision making. Sooner or later, inequality erupts. The cauldron of economic differences translates into political conflict. It is a historical fact that there is a proportional relation between the socio political system and the increase or decrease of political violence. Bernales supports this in his analysis of political violence by asserting that as a system of government is better able to attend to the needs of the governed, there will be a lessened tendency toward social violence. He

further affirms that the inverse is true. When a system selectively attends to the needs of the few, and defends itself with the use of illegitimate force, there is a greater possibility of the increase of mass political violence.¹²

Over the past twelve years, two armed leftist guerrilla groups (Shining Path and Tupac Amaru) have appeared on the scene with prescriptions for change. These prescriptions are defective not because of their motivation but on account of their extreme idealism and their violent means. Instead of attempting to change Perú "from below" (together with the people), these groups import ideological solutions and then try to impose these on the country as a whole. Anyone who disagrees with them is an enemy of their cause and, therefore, to be eliminated. This intolerance, not surprisingly, has generated the violent response of the government, particularly of the armed forces, who today occupy nearly three-quarters of the national territory. A virtual war, thus, is being waged in Perú. In this last decade twenty three thousand people, mostly unarmed civilians, have been killed. Another three thousand have been detained and subsequently "disappeared" at the hands of security forces. According to the United Nations, for the last four years, Perú is the country with the highest number of reported disappearances in the world. Also, this situation has placed nearly two-thirds of the country under a state of emergency with suspension of basic civil rights.¹³

Perhaps the most dreadful protagonist of this war is Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path), a unique phenomenon never before seen in Latin America and not anticipated in Perú. Shining Path is a Maoist guerrilla movement that since 1980 has begun its "prolonged popular war" against the Peruvian state. Their vision of Peru is based on a

fundamentalist reading of Maoism. The peasantry is the primary force of their revolution, guided by the proletariat, of which Sendero proclaims itself the "guiding light." The most accurate comparison of this political group would be what Pol Pot was in Cambodia. Violence and terror are not just strategies of Shining Path but rather their essential mode of action. Sendero militants usually threaten, torture, mutilate, and murder their enemies, often after summary public trials. They carry out selective campaigns of assassination against local authorities, government representatives, and members of the security forces. They also have targeted countless developmental organizations and killed foreign workers and church people whose activities they see as palliative that undermine the people's "revolutionary consciousness." Their dogmatic ideology can be illustrated in these quotes taken from an interview with the leader of the party, Abimael Guzman in July of 1988.

We have to teach the masses with resounding acts, and with these pound into them these ideas... the masses in the country need the direction of the Communist Party; we expect, with more revolutionary theory and practice, with more armed actions, with more popular war, with more power, to arrive at the very heart of this class and the people and really win it over. Why? To serve them, that is what we want.¹⁴

Referring to trade unions, peasant confederations and neighborhood committees, he said: "These organizations sell out the revolution for a plate of beans. We must create new organizations, even if that means going over the heads of the scabs and the ellouts."¹⁵ For Abimael Guzman, violence is not just the midwife of history, but rather its mother and father. Three characteristics of Shining Path are important to keep in mind. One is the absolute need for violence to bring change into Peruvian society. Violence is glorified not only as a means of destroying the old order but also

for purification purposes. The second is the fanatic cult of the leader Abimael Guzman, or "Presidente Gonzalo" (his war pseudonym) that sustains the movement. And the third is the "messianic" conviction that they are the social redeemers, who are saving the people.

The attitude of the militants of Shining Path is characterized by self-sacrifice. In the words of Guzman, "llevar la vida en la punta de los dedos" (carry life in the fin ger tips). This is to say, be ready to give it to the revolution. Gustavo Gorriti, an astute journalist who has studied Sendero, points out that Guzmán manipulates his followers with a religious fervor to sacrifice their lives for the cause of the revolution.¹⁶ Among the followers of Guzmán one find the fanaticism of the recently converted fundamentalist combined with the blind loyalty of a young gang member. For many young people for whom life is so desperate and hopeless, Sendero offers a cult to which to belong, and a myth of being the chosen ones who will create history.

This war carries with it the usual litany of human rights violations such as indiscriminate arrest, torture, and physical disappearance or murder, and these practices are committed on both sides. To live under such a crossfire for twelve years creates a psychological dynamic of fear, distrust, and insecurity. It also encourages forms of behavior that are aggressive. Everyone, one way or another, ends up participating in the rampant and recurrent violence.

3. Urban Violence

The characteristic of urban violence, before its cause or modality, is determined by the physical context in which it takes place, that is the cities or big urban centers and their surrounding areas of influence.

The general idea about urban violence is in direct relation to acts penally sanctioned such as homicide, attacks, stealing, traffic accidents due to negligence. However, we have to keep in mind that this falls short in relation to underdeveloped, structurally violent societies such as Peru. For instance; urban violence, in relation to the economic aspect, has as its objective property. This is manifest in acts such as invasion of land, extortions, robberies, etc., in which the poor tend to be held responsible. However, the social sectors with more resources also express their violence in many ways: mistreatment, discrimination, frauds, abuse of trust or authority, corruption, etc. Parallel to this exists what is called organized crime. The latter constitutes a way to live and a professional activity that cannot simply be explained by a situation of poverty within the society.

Forty years ago, the majority of Peruvian lived in the rural Andes, but this picture has been inverted due to two factors: economically motivated migration, and politically motivated migration. Two-thirds of Peruvians now live in cities. To give a numeric idea of this reality, Lima offers a good example. The capital city was designed for two million people, and presently more than seven million Peruvians live there.¹⁷ Besides the economic privation immigrants have to face, there are also severe psychological difficulties inherent in the process of acculturation. The violent,

abrupt change of life-style, the challenges of speaking Spanish, the loss of their homes, the longing for relatives, the physiological adaptation due to the change of altitude and weather, the marginalization of which they are victims, etc., generate frustration, hopelessness, stress, and psychosomatic problems.

Urban violence has many features: overcrowding, lack of basic services (such as water and sewage), insufficient health care facilities, etc. In addition to these structural deficiencies, the lack of jobs promotes widespread delinquency and a host of illicit practices that generally include some form or other of violence. Not surprisingly, urban density is by itself cognate with violence but, in this case, just adds one more ingredient of violence on to an already violent scenario. Ignacio Martín Baro studied density and crowding among poor urban Salvadorans.¹⁸ He found that high density and crowding have a negative effect on reported satisfaction with family life and in this sense have damaging effects on the most important social group within which lower-class Salvadorans organize and develop their lives. Perú's urban reality is analogous. A great deal of energy is spent in overcrowded homes. Relationships become tense, and artificial barriers are created to defend the little space one has. Finally, streets become less friendly and terribly dangerous. In public, an individual must live constantly on the lookout, clinging to his or her own precarious safety. Hostility becomes a spontaneous defense mechanism. In time, after being bombarded by so many painful images, a person finds himself or herself becoming insensitive, callous, and less than humanly responsive.

4. Racial Violence

The racial question is a real issue in Perú but one that defies clear categorization. At first glance, Perú is a mestizo nation: no longer purely Spanish nor purely Indian but the synthesis of the two. While this common racial base could provide a common identity, we see that the racialist colonial heritage still persists and is a way of differentiating and distancing one individual or group from another. These differences, often not explicitly treated, have generated a complex set of implicit rules that govern human interaction and communication between people. These rules keep people apart and even keep a given individual from his or her own identity. What is considered to be "Indian" is cognate with inferiority and negativity. True, the Indian ("lo andino") is abstractly romanticized in intellectual and elitist circles, but in ordinary, real-life, relations, to be "Indian" is not desirable; rather, it is to be negated (when found in others) and denied (when discovered in oneself). This generates a very unhealthy way of relating to one's own tradition and an equally unhealthy stance toward others coming from different traditions.

Tacit racism is ever-present in Perú. The media, for example, present white faces enjoying consumer items that are out of the reach of the poor. The image that becomes internalized is that in order to enjoy life and have access to consumer products one must be "white." Another example is found in job discrimination on the basis of color. In Lima it is well understood that a job advertisement that includes the phrase "buena presencia" (good presence) really means "whites only." Understanding these racial codes could provide access to understanding the psychological dynamics

of low self-esteem and alienation that are so common in Perú and that forms an essential, but often overlooked, part of the problem.

5. Domestic Violence Against Women

In addition to the forms of violence already discussed, it is important to point out that there is a particular modality of violence that is directed specifically toward women, particularly in the home. Often this facet of the violence, this machismo, is ignored because it is accepted as the normal state of affairs. Although matters are slowly improving in this area, it still is fair to state that gender inequality is like the air we breathe. It is inculcated at a very early age. At home, boys have privileges that girls are denied. This pattern of unequal power is later reflected in the relationship between men and women. In many cases, this issues in physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. In a country like Peru where there are several sources of oppression, women constitute a special challenge and also a special opportunity because, women constitute the crucial link in the chain of oppression in Perú and, therefore, the crucial factor in any resolution of this oppression. Their long history of oppression has also blessed women with additional resources of hope and creativity that are extremely useful for confronting situations of pain and suffering. These resources, however, are not always respected for what they are, as real strengths.

CHAPTER II

PSYCHOLOGICAL RESPONSES TO VIOLENCE

It has been necessary to approach this analysis of violence from different perspectives--historical, economical, sociological, and cultural--in order to bring a better understanding of the reality of violence that people of Perú suffer today.

After presenting these diverse dimensions that describe violence in Perú, it will be appropriate to conclude that violence is comprised of many layers that overlap each other in a spiral that reproduces itself in a automatic way. We can say that violence has become chronic in Perú, and, like a disease, has entered many facets of life, affecting not only the social coexistence and the political life of people but also each individual person, whose emotional needs, anguishes, fears, and dreams often remain unvoiced because the primary concerns are for the socio-political realities.

We want to start listening to these silent screams that will reveal--we believe--aspects of suffering that are often overlooked in Perú and that are important to understand the complexity of our violent reality. This will help us to incorporate the personal dimension into the necessary actions that such a situation calls for. We believe that at the very core of suffering we can find hope, much needed hope.

A. Psychological Characteristics in the Midst of Violence

Now we want to describe the general psychological characteristics that we find common among Peruvians in this context of violence. In order to do this we will have to somehow artificially group those different traits, not without advising the reader to keep in mind that this claims to be an initial approach to the inner world of children, the elderly, men, and women who are living their lives in constant fear.

1. Collective Frustration

The concept of collective frustration refers to a psychological situation of dissatisfaction that is persistent and that involves many individuals.¹⁹ The biological, psychological, and social needs that are not satisfied (food, housing, safety, respect, work, education), the promises that are not kept, and the conditions of extreme poverty constitute examples of this situation of frustration. Every president for the last twenty years has promised rapid economic and social change. None of them has kept his promise. To the contrary, there is a sense that each government has betrayed the trust of the people and has ended its term in the midst of accusations of economic mismanagement and corruption. The roller coaster of raised expectations and shattered dreams has caused in the people of Perú a sort of skepticism of the possibility of change. Along with this there is an internalized sense that the people themselves have failed and deserve their plight. This is quite real in Peru today, when people struggle to acquire basic services, or when the youth are denied the possibility of a future because there is no way that they could realize their dream of a career, or

when a child of ten years of age is the sole support of his family and has to work twelve hours a day to make a living. This often blocks and shatters the inner world of the person. One's energy is spent in meeting survival needs, but the psychological needs are present, repressed and unarticulated.

2. Depressive Mood

The current situation of poverty and violence has caused Perú to be not only an economically depressed country but also a psychologically depressed nation. It is common to hear people saying, "Ay, life is too hard" "things are worse, year after year... governments change, but poor remain poor." This depression is visible in the way people look, walk, interact, etc. All of this manifests symptoms of depression, which in the case of the poor is coupled with the exhaustion of hard work and poor nutrition. These kinds of responses are not simply circumstantial but are established modes of behavior. People feel sad and discouraged. After many disappointments they experience depression and feel that their existence is in vain. Another of the main causes of this depression is the experience of loss that many Peruvians presently face. Many families today have experienced significant losses. Let us take the example of the "desplazados." There are perhaps half a million displaced people in the cities from the rural areas, who have left their lands and villages because of the political violence. Often they have had relatives killed by both the guerrilla forces and the military forces. They have lost everything. The process of mourning for the loved ones interacts with the loss of their culture, livelihood, and ancestral homes. Martin

Baro has found that internal refugee children in El Salvador carried two types of traumatic experiences:²⁰ The first due to witnessing the violent destruction of their homes and the murder of their families; the second due to being uprooted from their rural homes and worlds and dropped into the foreign world of the cities. This experience of separation and adjustment to a new setting was often as traumatic as the first.

In the same way, the general population has experienced the loss of a future. A Peruvian psychologist, Rodriguez Rabanal, in his book Cicatrices de la Pobreza (The Scars of Poverty), points out that poverty in Peru has caused permanent damage in people, and that if it were possible to change the present situation, we would need at least three generations to heal the wounds of poverty.²¹ The acknowledgment of the loss caused by this endemic economic crisis, as well as the violence of the war, results often in depression. Besides this, most poor people lack psychological space and support systems to process through these losses, and this provokes feelings of anguish, frustration, fear, hopelessness, anger and rage, pessimism, and powerlessness to take on reality.

3. Fear and Anxiety

Fear is a emotion felt in response to something threatening. Anxiety, on the other hand, is an emotion in the face of an undefined threat. Both are very present in the life of Peruvians. The prevalence, degree, and intensity of such emotions depend on each individual's resources to cope with this situation, as well as the level

of exposure to more violent contexts. For instance, the people who live in zones directly affected by the military actions will react more typically with psychological problems related to fear, while the people who live in areas of partial or eventual armed confrontation will tend to show problems related to anxiety. Living under these constant emotional states often results in attitudes of distrust, generalized irritability, sensitivity to any sudden noise, as well as multiple psychosomatic symptoms.²²

Studies of people living under such circumstances found that fear and anxiety are often expressed physically. José Cabrejos, who has done extensive clinic work with poor people in Perú, stresses that the body becomes a receptor of the anguish.²³ The language of the body hides the moral and psychological pain, the sadness and the interior emptiness of people. In part because they lack the ability to articulate their internal difficulties, they manifest physical symptoms instead. Stomachaches or inflammations are generalized symptoms among the poor that serve to express feelings such as fear and anxiety. People often express complaints such as, "my body is trembling and I don't know why." Finally, this system produces feelings of abandonment rather than security. We can assert that generalized paranoia and fear pervade people's lives in Perú.

4. Resentment and Powerlessness

Resentment is often a sense of having been betrayed or not having received what one deserved. The world of expectations of most Peruvians is impossible to realize;

this leads to feelings of anger and resentment. There is a massive anger in the realization that a typical Peruvian is poor, and that racial and social prejudices trap one in a situation that offers little possibility of solution. The poor experience much of resentment, particularly the children and youth who see their future as a bad promise of endless suffering. We witness this resentment among young people in their increased use of drug, involvement in delinquency, and participation as members of Shining Path. This last mechanism constitutes the biggest temptation to act out their internal rage. This rage of the youth toward the social system cannot be separated from the resentment and anger of growing up in a family setting in which parents could not offer sufficient love, and care and often vented their own anger on their children.

This resentment shows an internal part of a sense of powerlessness: ultimately, one cannot change the social situation or one's own life. The overwhelming chaos of the social situation becomes the setting of individuals who feel they are victims without the power to change or better their own lives. In psychological studies of poor adolescents in Perú, María Angela Canepa found increasing characteristics of apathy, low self-image, and distrust. She points out that this sense of internalized powerlessness is more limiting and dangerous than the external obstacles that confront the Peruvian people.

5. Poverty and Its Effects

Here we have traced some of the main psychological characteristics that are

found among the poor people of Perú today. We have learned how external reality can have an impact on people, creating painful personal processes of stress, brokenness, withdrawal, aggression, ruptures of solidarities and inhibition of creativity. However, it is also important to stress another perspective of this reality. It is true that poverty makes personal human development difficult. It is a painful and profound experience that sometimes is overcome and other times blocks this development. We believe that the effects depend on many factors: affective conditions, continence level, personal integration that takes place within a world of deprivations, the quality of the relationships that each one experiences, and the socialization that is specific to the person. We believe that, in general, the socialization of people in conditions of poverty makes more difficult the achievement of autonomy and self-esteem. In the same way, it is harder to assume the existence of a personal nucleus, a self that reflects, make decisions, and takes action or not. Poverty, like other life experiences, provokes and accentuates in human beings a tendency to see in others the causes of problems, to project aggression onto others, and to impose power, knowledge, will on others. All of those constitute defense mechanisms that express how difficult it for some people -- given the reality of privations -- to assume the dimension of "the self;" a dimension that carries the identity, resources, will, and that stresses the fact that poverty and violence don't have the last word.

Because we believe that poverty doesn't necessarily determine a fatal destiny or generalized psychic impoverishment, we believe that it doesn't condemn people to an

irreversible stage of being. The material, artistic, and cultural creations; the mechanisms of self-maintenance, the generation of resources almost from nothing; the transforming of physical spaces; and the differentiated productive life within poverty belie the apparent desperation. Finally it could be dangerous and reactionary to point out that it is in poverty that we find the most critical elements of our society, as well as to idealize poverty as a special condition. These and other visions reinforce suffering as a destiny, and not as a human experience like many others.

B. Psychological Causes of Violence

It is well known that violence may have severe psychological effects such as those discussed above, but it is less well known that certain psychological dispositions may contribute to a climate of violence. Given the history of Peru and given the political and economic inequality that is part of the fabric of social relations in Peru, we can see the development of a violent personality. By violent personality I am referring to a set of motivations, behavioral responses, and attitudes that have become solidified in a violent fashion. This violent personality is not inherently so, nor is it genetically determined, but nevertheless this entity exists and is at this point one of the many causal factors in the puzzle.

Joaquin Samayoa in his book Guerra y Deshumanización (War and Dehumanization) offers a psychosocial perspective on the reality of El Salvador.²⁴ He maintains that the cognitive and behavioral changes resulting from a situation of violence bring a process of dehumanization. He understands this as the

impoverishment of four important capacities of the human being: to think lucidly, to engage in truthful communication, to be sensitive to the suffering of others, and to maintain hope. This is manifested in the lives of individuals who seem to have lost a sense of life. The indifference and the hardness of people are an expression of this slow and frightening process of dehumanization. It is not unusual to experience this often in oneself. When one has to witness oppression, pain, brokenness, it becomes easier to get used to it. This will result in behavioral and cognitive changes established out of a need to cope with a situation of violence that precipitates the dehumanization. He points at five clear changes: Inattentiveness and attachment to prejudices, absolutization, idealization and ideological rigidity, evasive skepticism, hate and desire for revenge. These changes become configured within a dynamic of adaptation and survival. Often these mechanisms of adaptation involve insecurity in the face of one's destiny, the lack of purpose and meaning, and the need to participate in and belong to a group. All of this affects the personality.

Another relevant aspect is that the militarization of social life can cause a progressive militarization of the mind. Once again, it is not a simple and mechanical effect, but certainly this compulsive violence takes over interpersonal relationships, even the most intimate ones. An example of this is the destructiveness of the sociopath, often found in members or ex-members of the armed forces. These militarized traits are found increasingly in the way people think, feel, and act in social life. Martín Baro points out that the most dangerous aspect of psychosocial militarization is when it gets converted into a normal way of being and behaving

transmitted by the socialization process.²⁵ An example of this is the statement of children who ingenuously affirm that to end the problem of poverty we have to eliminate all the poor. Also, people that continue forming themselves in this context are going to assume as natural the scorn of life, the law of the strongest, and corruption as life-style, perpetuating violence in its objective and subjective aspects. The prolongation and endurance of the violence suppose the normalization of this type of dehumanizing social relations, which precipitates the vicious cycle in which subjective violence feeds back into structural violence. Therefore, the need to address the psychological dimension will not be just an attempt to cure the symptoms or to work on the effects but also to understand the type of personality that contributes to causing violence. In fact, psychological intervention cannot be satisfied with attending to the posttraumatic situation, but attention needs to be expanded toward this "normal abnormality" that dehumanizes oppressors and oppressed, soldiers and victims, dominators and dominated. Paul Tillich stresses in his book The Meaning of Health, the need for a complete view of health that involves healing under all life's dimensions: biological, psychological, spiritual, and historical: "Clearly, particular healing is unavoidable, but unless all the dimensions are cared for, the sickness is likely to reappear in other realms." ²⁶

CHAPTER III

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO VIOLENCE

Peruvians have not been passive in the face of this dramatic situation. In this section, I want to examine the different strategies that they have employed to deal effectively with the problem of violence. The aim is to evaluate the positive achievements of different groups within Peruvian society as well as to uncover the unattended aspects or dimensions. This examination will place us on solid ground that then will permit us to formulate the central hypothesis of this paper.

A. Government

Over the past twelve years, Perú has experienced three presidential elections and, with these, three different parties in power. Although each one has had its own political plan of action regarding the problem of violence, by and large the three regimes (Fernando Belaunde from 1980 to 1985, Alan Garcia from 1985 to 1990, and Alberto Fujimori from 1990 to the present) have demonstrated similar thrusts. The first characteristic of the governmental response to the violence is that it gave priority to the political, that is, to counter insurgency against Shining Path.

The basic belief, shared by all three of the above-mentioned governments, is that groups that have taken up arms can be eliminated by violent military repression. Their

methods include the establishment of the state of emergency, forced entry into homes and public centers such as universities, torture. This approach has achieved little; first, because it failed to appreciate the economic origin of much of the political violence. In other words, until there is a radical redistribution of wealth in Peruvian society, there will always be expression of violence. Second, because it closed off channels for a negotiated peace, one that could have been coordinated and supported by vast sectors of Peruvian society. The government never really tried to convoke the citizenry in a collective effort toward pacification.

These attempts on the part of the government have not really done any good toward resolving the problem of violence in Perú. On the contrary, they have increased violence and have failed to address the depths of the present situation.

B. Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs)

Over the past twenty years or so, the response of committed professional people to the problem of violence has been quite significant. In contrast to the government, these entities approached the problem bringing to bear their technical skills and their awareness of the need for social organization. NGOs have made a significant contribution to economic and social development of the poor over the last twenty five years. In rural and urban areas institutions for social change and development have engaged in extensive research and have been a key support for the poor through programs of popular education. Relying on financial support from outside the country (primarily from international Catholic networks), these institutions enjoy a degree of autonomy that

allows them to launch projects in accordance with their own objectives. The kinds of projects fostered by these NGOs are those dealing with food, housing, primary health care, and the installation of basic services such as running water, sewage and electricity. By attending to the basic material needs of the people, the NGOs respond to the structural causes of violence and, thus, break the vicious cycle of poverty and violence. Most of these institutions, moreover, have been committed to working among the poor, but not in the traditional form that simply provided material assistance but without challenging the status quo. The best nongovernmental organizations have acquired enlightened strategies and liberating methodologies geared toward empowering the very people they serve. Their goal is to support the people in their efforts to improve the quality of their communal life. For example, in the rural areas technical agricultural education has been accompanied by the teaching of organizational skills that have improved the life of the rural peasant movements. In the "barrios" of Lima NGOs have been active in support of the struggle to obtain water, electricity, and land titles. Also, since 1980 many NGOs have closely supported the growing networks of communal kitchens, offering economic assistance and providing leadership training for women. In the process, these institutions have facilitated the creation of important networks of popular organization, networks which have become real social actors in the political scenario.

Certainly these institutions have contributed greatly to bring alternatives to the situation of violence. By standing among the poor, many have supported important processes of transformation. However, it is important to clarify that these approaches

to the problem of violence have prioritized the socio political reality, making clear the imbalance in taking care of the subjective, the personal, the individual. Until very recently, there has been an increasing concern for these issues. Probably the element that is bringing this new interest is the force and intensity of suffering of the people of Perú. Perhaps one of the harder learning experiences for many in Perú such as these committed professionals, political parties, and intellectuals has been that in their supposed concern for a new humanity for Perú, they forgot the human beings. The big discourses about power and revolution have lost sight of the very center of people, and in doing so people have been denied their emotional needs, feelings, will, dreams, and identities. Perhaps today the frustrating experiences of many Peruvians will generate a desire to search within in the internal world for new sources of inspiration, energy, and comprehension.

C. The Catholic Church

Given the history of the Catholic Church in Latin America, it is surprising to recognize the prominent role it plays in the life of a country such as Perú. This is not to say, however, that the Church is a seamless garment. As is the case everywhere, the Church is a complex institution with a variety of theologies and practices. However, ever since 1968 (when the Second Episcopal Conference was held at Medellín, Colombia), new perspectives in the Church have been opened, particularly regarding the reality of the poor.

In fact, in 1969 the Latin America Episcopal Conference at Medellín recognized the

structural injustice of Latin American society and placed the Church at the service of the poor. From this point on, the Church became closer to the poor, with a new attitude and a new pastoral action. This proximity has allowed Church members access to the everyday violence experienced by the poor and oppressed. This encounter became a conversion to the poor and their cause.

This process found expression and guidance in the emergence of liberation theology; which at the same time was both informed and shaped by pastoral models that addressed the needs of the poor. Gustavo Gutierrez -- a native of Perú -- defines theology as "the critical reflection on praxis in light of the word of God."²⁷ In fact, many pastoral ministers incorporated the model of conscientization developed by Paulo Freire. Learning takes place in the struggle for social change. The quest for liberation invites the poor to discover themselves as persons working together to seek liberation. Many religious began to see themselves as facilitators rather than providers of religious services. This social mission of the Church opened up dialogue and collaboration with popular movements, nongovernmental organization, and political parties. Gradually, the Church began to define and shape her identity and task around the need for peace with social justice.

Presently, the Church has assumed the role of public advocacy in the defense of human rights, speaking out against torture, extrajudicial executions, and forced "disappearances." It also has created an active program to assist the tens of thousands of Quechua and Aymara peasants who have been forced to leave their homelands by the political violence in the countryside. This kind of work often means that Church

members find themselves accompanying victims of political violence and attempting, not always systematically, to provide some form of psychological and spiritual support. Recently this has led to growing assaults on the Church by Shining Path.

Just as political and community organizers have tried to explain all reality in socio political terms, so some pastoral ministers have left out the psychological dimension of suffering and hope in the people. A factual aspect of this reality is that many pastoral ministers are so caught up in pastoral and social programs that they do not arrange for time or energy to deal with the overwhelming amount of personal pain. The overriding emphasis on social commitment and the lack of counseling skills lead them to overlook or distrust the psychological dimensions of their pastoral work. Perhaps religious women are the ones who have done the job of addressing the personal pain of the poor. Their houses often became some of the few places in the "barrios" where persons could be received with respect and allow to share their personal lives.

D. Critique of the Institutional Responses

In all of the responses seen above, we have noted important achievements and alternatives. Much creativity has been displayed by Peruvians in their efforts to stop the reality of violence that hovers over the country. This creative energy should be underlined because it has been demonstrated time and time again despite very limited material resources. Without dismissing these heroic achievements, it is still fair to point out absences, lacunae, areas not covered adequately by any of the agencies mentioned above.

My concern here is not to "take shots" at the good efforts of others but to point out that the psychological has been overlooked.

Until Peruvians incorporate a sensibility toward the internal dehumanization of the individual person, and take responsibility for integrating this in to their efforts to overcome violence, we will carry the sickness somewhere else.

CHAPTER IV

MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS, VIOLENCE, AND THE POOR

So far we have looked at the multifaceted reality of violence in Perú. We have examined the most significant institutional responses to that violence and have found them lacking in psychological sensitivity. Having demonstrated the need to incorporate such sensitivity, I now have to clarify what is meant by the psychological dimension. Perhaps the best way to proceed is by giving a negative as well as a positive definition.

The first part of my hypothesis is that there is a lack of concern for the psychological dimensions of human existence in Perú. This lack of concern stems from two misconceptions: the first is that economics takes priority over the other dimensions of human existence. The second misconception is that psychology is considered as merely the last recourse for those who are severely mentally ill. The second part of my hypothesis is that the positive conditions for a proper alternative understanding of mental health are present in the current life of Perú. These spontaneous conditions I am referring to are best found among the poor. Finally, I will argue in this section that the future of psychotherapy will depend on listening to and learning from the poor.

A. Common Misconceptions

It seems obvious that highly developed societies and underdeveloped societies will bring about different psychological problems in people that belong to them. Therefore, the psychological problems as well as the research that psychologists do should be of a diverse nature. This seems logical if we accept the hypothesis that culture and society significantly configure the personality and the problems of a community. Now, if psychologists are to serve their people, they must confront the problems that their societies present. This heterogeneity of these societies presents a paradox: while some societies demand that psychology respond to the problems of their abundance, others struggle with problems of generalized deprivation and expect little, if nothing, from psychology. This paradox is extreme in Perú, where a small group of people achieve optimal development while the majority live in misery. The unfortunate consequence of this situation is that psychology and psychologists in Perú -- with few exceptions -- have limited themselves to serving the elite or upper classes, while most of the time they neither can nor even know how to confront the problems of the poor. This has left psychology marginalized from the suffering and longings of the oppressed. Ardila stresses this aspect by saying: "Psychology in Latin America will have to leave its ivory tower to submerge itself in the conflictive realities that have surrounded us all the time and that we haven't dared to learn about yet."²⁸

To understand the current state of mental health in Perú, we want to point out the different elements that have shaped this reality.

1. "Take Care of the Stomach First"

First of all, psychology has a history in Perú. It is above all an imported psychology, that is, a psychology that has borrowed many elements and strategies from other contexts very different from our own. For decades we have tried to imitate models and methods that worked in other latitudes such as Europe or the United States. Psychology in Perú is certainly a psychology that is supported by findings obtained in Europe and North America. This has resulted in a psychology typically ethnocentric. Regarding this ethnocentricity Reynaldo Alarcón says:

The generalizations and principles of psychology are based on the way to behave and react of people of different cultures than our own. In sum: the knowledge, concepts, tools, and techniques are imported from foreign realities. All of this contributes to making our psychology a dependent one. It is necessary to overcome this dependency.²⁹

Certainly the phenomenon of dependency crosses many spheres of Peruvian culture. Perhaps in psychology more than in any other science, we can observe clearly the signs of this cultural dependency. In fact, what we know about human behavior comes from countries with industrial societies in which extensive psychological development has been achieved. The psychology of the child, youth, adult is the psychology of individuals from Germany, Russia, North America, etc.

This observation does not pretend to dispute the general principles about human behavior achieved by the research and theorists of these latitudes but rather to question the blind generalizations of aspects that don't always correspond to the experiences of people from our culture. Also, we want to call attention to the way in which psychologists from Perú approach their own culture. One of the greatest challenges for

psychologists of countries like Peru is to try to define categories and new conceptual frameworks that can help them to understand the peculiarities of its people. As R. Alarcón points out:

One of the invasions most difficult to overcome in Latin America is the invasion of concepts previously defined in another culture. And we have to accept these concepts until we define others that will be inspired by the idiosyncracies of our people.³⁰

An illustrative example of this reality is the psychological testing so widely used in Perú. As Alarcón explains, these tests to evaluate intellectual abilities, personality, aptitudes, vocation, and other forms of behavior come from the United States and Europe. In order for Peruvian psychologists to apply them they need to be adapted to the reality of people who experience life differently. One of the most false consequences of this ethnocentric psychology is the attribution of low intellectual proficiency to people who live in underdeveloped areas.

In general, we have tended to turn north to find answers; we have not, at least until recently, turned inward, toward ourselves, our own reality, or toward other Latin American countries. In contrast with theology, which has reached its maturity and indeed is now a source of inspiration for other continents, psychology remains dependent and mimetic.

This delayed development of a native psychology reflects our precarious economic situation. Under such circumstances, the economic priority means "taking care of the stomach first and foremost." But, of course, people are more than stomachs. And, moreover, psychological needs cannot be postponed until after the revolution. People need to be taken in their existential wholeness and not chopped up into gradations or

parts. Some time ago, Weber demonstrated the close nexus between the subjective ethos of a people and their economic development.

2. "Build Asylums for the Crazyies"

A country such as Perú, particularly with its typically tight national budget, falls into the easy solution of building asylums instead of therapeutic programs of prevention and intervention. And these asylums, by and large, function mostly as warehouses for those who are severely mentally ill.

There are several elements that need to be taken into consideration to observe this reality:

First, we find very little understanding of psychological processes and knowledge of mental illness. This leads to a bias toward mentally ill people or psychologically disturbed people. For instance, alcoholism, which is known by now to be an illness, is still commonly seen as a "vice" and a moral failing in Perú. Psychological processes are almost unknown, and maladaptive behavior or symptoms of psychological stress are ignored or criticized as a moral shortcoming. There is a common expectation that after a pep talk, one should be able to change one's conduct and attitudes. This simplistic approach fails to perceive the complex psychological reality of each person. In large part, this lack of understanding exists in Perú because there is no information or formation regarding these matters. For instance, psychiatric illness and mental retardation are poorly understood and seldom treated in Perú. This lack of sensitivity toward the mentally ill becomes expressed in the popular expression of "psychology is

only for crazies." On the other hand, there is a reluctance to admit that one needs help from a professional; it is not regarded favorably in Peruvian culture to seek help for such problems. Mental illness or emotional problems are understood as "weakness." In addition, the prevalence of a very orthodox medical model of psychiatry that fundamentally understands mental illness as a "disease" reinforces those popular prejudices. In this model medication is necessary to suppress the symptoms, without dealing with the in-depth problems.

In general, psychological treatment is not understood as therapy that leads to insight, growth and integration, but as a drug treatment for those who are "too weak to cope." It is a very common experience for poor people to be treated by doctors as if they were children who cannot understand the reason for their pain. A doctor seldom explains the reason for physical illness; this is even more true when a person presents symptoms that are due to anxiety, depression, etc. And since tranquilizers and sedatives are available without prescription in local pharmacies, many people prefer to self-medicate as a way to repress symptoms and cope with stress, rather than seek fuller understanding, thus also avoiding the shame that comes with a visit to the psychiatrist.

Second, it is not hard to understand that, in a country that cannot provide schools, mental health institutions are almost nonexistent. In Lima, for instance, there are only two public mental hospitals. At present, to admit a person to a mental hospital, one must pay up to two hundred dollars to cover the cost of food and medicine. For most of the poor this is an unaffordable amount. It is common to find severely disturbed and even violent people kept at home because of the lack of facilities. And even when finances

are not the reason, many people don't trust these hospitals.

B. Psychotherapy and Social Class

1. Psychoanalysis for the Chosen Few

As was stated before, in Perú -- as in many parts of the world -- people have unequal access to quality services. While the poor, in the best of cases, are relegated to ill-equipped hospitals, a very small elite enjoys the benefits of psychoanalytic therapy. There are reasons why psychoanalysis seems unsuitable for the majority: (1) it is prohibitively expensive; (2) it requires too much time (3) it presupposes a relatively high level of verbal and conceptual abstraction. These conditions are not commonly found among the poor. Not only do they lack the financial resources and the physical and psychological space that is called for, but they tend to express themselves in more narrative and metaphorical categories, always keeping their feet close to the ground. The poor therefore do not find therapy available, or appropriate, and the majority are not even aware of it.

The following example may illustrate this disproportionate reality. In the 400 page entitled book The Multiple Interest of Psychoanalysis in Perú, 77 Years Later, published after the last annual convention of psychoanalysts in Perú, no more than thirty pages are devoted to the psychological situation and needs of the poor.³¹ The book could easily have been written in any First World country, it appears so foreign to Perú and to the national context. It seems very ironic that therapy in Perú is restricted to small segments of the middle and upper classes, while the most serious mental and emotional disorders

are prevalent among the poor. If we consider, for example, the horror of the "displaced" and their children: the health hazards, their powerlessness, isolation, exploitation etc. - the list of risks is endless -- this reality seems disproportionate and unjust.

Psychologists who enter the psychoanalytic circle are an elite who come from the upper classes and treat almost exclusively people from their same social status. In a country like Perú, this shows the contrast between small groups of society that enjoy the exclusivity of sophisticated psychoanalysis and the majority who don't receive the most basic mental health services.

The very high cost of these one-to-one interventions makes them available only to the affluent. One of the factors that determines this reality is the training of psychoanalytic therapists, which makes them unprepared for most kinds of interventions, except one-to-one psychotherapy with middle- or upper-class people. Also, since most psychotherapists are drawn from the middle and upper classes and are familiar with problems of people of their same status, class and cultural differences often impede them from becoming closer to the psychological world of the poor. They simply don't know this world and lack understanding of it.

But psychoanalysis is just one form of psychotherapy. What about other ways to do psychotherapy? It seems that, in general, psychotherapy with the poor is not encouraged. Why? Is psychotherapy definitively out of the experience and possibility of the poor, and therefore to be discarded?

2. Is Psychotherapy Wasted on the Poor?

We would like to examine what rationale underlies the almost tacit assumption that psychotherapy for the poor is impossible. It seems important to explore the views that mental health professionals have of the poor. We will classify them as having one of two basic views or ideologies: (a) those who perceive the problems of the poor person as primarily economic and reality-based and who recommend for their amelioration not psychotherapy but social and political action "only" aimed at securing food, jobs, housing and political power for their clients ³² (b) those who view the problem as residing more in the personality and interpersonal spheres and who may advocate some form of psychotherapy but who call into question the appropriateness and utility of psychodynamic approaches.³³

On the one hand, those who claim that psychotherapy for the poor is not good and is even a "waste" of resources, because their emotional problems are a result of their economic deprivation. Without realizing it, such opponents are falling into a stereotype of the poor, that is in part responsible for the injustice that they are apparently trying to prevent. One may speculate briefly on the origin of the idea that the poor have only economic and physical needs but not psychological needs. It is almost the mentality of eighteenth-century England, where the predominant view of the poor person was of a simple, primitive being needing only food and sex to be content. Even in our present times there are still people who view the poor as simple, incapable of complex thinking, naive, and at the mercy of their environment.

In fact, to assert that the poor suffer only from economic deprivation has the force

of denying -- by implication -- that they too have interpersonal lives, intrapsychic worlds, and individual differences that are consequent upon their humanity and that therapy attempts to address. Certainly economic help alone is very unlikely to eradicate mental illness among the poor or to resolve all the emotional burdens of their lives. In stating this we don't want to deny the importance of the economic factor in the lives of the poor; that would be not only naive but blind. Even less are we denying the necessity of meeting needs such as housing, employment, civic participation, etc. But we want to state that the economic aspect cannot be seen as a substitute for the provision of psychotherapeutic treatment to attend to emotional problems present in many people, including the poor. This is to conclude that there is no necessary antagonism between attention to the economic needs 'per se' and attention to psychological needs and problems.

3. Are the Poor Too Stupid for Psychotherapy?

The second common view lies in the characterization of the poor patient as verbally inarticulate, reluctant to postpone immediate gratification for long-term gains, suspicious of intellectuality, and unable to share the middle-class view that: "problems can be solved by discussion." Instead, the poor are depicted as wanting medication, direction, and advice to be offered through action-oriented, judgmental, and persuasive therapy. Without denying the good that can come from these approaches and consequent techniques, the truth is that the poor are seen as "not bright enough to do psychotherapy." One of the most frequently stated prerequisites for successful

psychotherapy has been intellectual ability, particularly verbal prowess. Since the poor are seen as having lower intelligence, have been considered inadequate for the verbal process of psychotherapy. The importance attributed to verbal skills has its roots in Freud's original psychoanalytic technique. However, with the advance in psychotherapy has come a relative shift in the type of insight that is most favorable from cognitive and primarily intellectual awareness to a deeply personal emotional experience.³⁴ In this regard, Singer points out:

The implications of the statement that the poor and uneducated neither desire nor are capable of benefit from psychotherapy merely indicates the pretentiousness of [the one] who makes the statement and his preference for the detachment of explanation over sharing of experience during therapeutic sessions. It is the height of pretentiousness to assume that members of "lower classes" are not interested in coming close to the nature of their experience or that the capacity to develop insight is dependent on economic or educational status.³⁵

None of this is to deny that intellectual ability can be an asset for psychotherapy, but rather to emphasize that there is a broader permissible range of cognitive abilities than is often supposed. Perhaps, other traits associated with the poor will often make them difficult to work with. For instance, that a higher proportion among the poor see events as due to luck, chance, and the capriciousness of others' acts.

Maybe the question is not whether psychotherapy should or should not be appropriate for the poor but rather how psychotherapy has been done that make it suitable or not. And what the perspective of the poor is, and whether or not this make sense to them.

To conclude, we don't agree with those who radically argue that psychotherapy among the poor is futile and who stress that only solution for them is the radical

modification of structures; nor do we support the actual ways in which psychotherapy is currently used, particularly for the poor, who experience the almost complete lack of this kind of service to attend to their psychological needs and for whom the time in which therapy has been available hasn't necessarily been appropriate.

CHAPTER V

THE POOR RESPOND TO VIOLENCE

A. The Value of Psychotherapy

But what is the value of psychotherapy from the perspective of the poor?

First of all, psychotherapy is an important tool that can reveal the human effect of an economic system that negates the most basic needs or fundamental rights of a person. It is also gives us access to understanding the damage done to children who are victims of uncaring and disturbed parents. Therapy also reveals to us the devastating personal consequences of both: the perpetrators and the victims of machismo, racism, ethnocentrism, exploitation, torture, etc. So it is certain that we need therapy in Perú to help us uncover the individual and collective damage done by all of these social problems. However, treating the victim "only" does not contribute to correct the basic causes of this reality. In other words psychotherapy can not just conform to cure, or relived symptoms that are caused by concrete social and economic structures, but rather must aspire to translate the knowledge and findings of the field into action that corrects or even changes completely the world of inequality that in Perú as in other places in the world, continue producing more victims than the ones who are helped. Martín Baro states this clearly:

The problem consists not only in seeing how to develop a psychology that accuse social relevance or how to get to bring services to the marginated; but also reach understanding of such problems, and contribute to their solution.³⁶

The partiality of psychotherapy and its lack of relevance for the poor need to be overcome, in order to bring a tool that will contribute to integrate the reality of the socio-political spheres with the inner world of people who suffer margination, oppression and that are often denied their holistic nature. Only then psychotherapy will make sense for the poor. I. Martín Baro proposes three elements to develop a psychology for liberation from the perspective of the oppressed in Latin America³⁷:

- a) Psychology must change its attention from itself or its status to be able to attend to the problems of the poor.
- b) Develop a new way to seek the truth from below.
- c) Start a new psychotherapeutic praxis that can contribute to the transformation of the individuals and the society as a whole.

In the second part of this chapter we will offer a set of suggestion and guidelines that will serve us as a starting framework to identify the elements that a coherent model of psychotherapy for the poor in a context like Perú should take. What elements should comprise a coherent model of psycho-therapy within a context such as Perú.

B. Popular Strategies of Mental Health

1. Relational Value of the Community

Peruvian culture is enriched with a strong sense of community expressed in the basic concepts of "reciprocity " and "redistribution." These have been actively practiced since the precolombian times. These concepts are rooted in the need for survival of the Andean people. The complexity of the Peruvian geography determines the impossibility of cultivating a variety of products at the same altitude. This led the andean people to organized their economy around the cultivation of products at different ecological floors. Community life then, was organized around this basic interchange of products necessary for survival. In fact, not only the economic aspect was shaped by these principles; but the social organization of the Andes.³⁸ For instance, the concept of "Aymi" in which a family helps another family with a "faena" (work), to build their house. This led the family who received the support to reciprocate with a product/service of more or equal equivalence. This rationality is still part of the Andino culture and assures the coexistence of everybody. Upon these ancestral traditions rests the very center of people's sense of identity. Despite inculturation due to the migration phenomena, the people of Perú have developed creative ways to hold onto their traditional ways to be in the world. It is among the poor, where we found more clearly the existence of such values. In the execution of "faenas" such as the construction of the school, the medical post, the communal house etc., we encountered the relational value of community. Moreover, these values get expressed in the way people carried their own pain and mourning as they work in solidarity for the betterment of themselves and their "barrios;"

or when they gather around "pachamancas" (traditional and collective celebrations to prepare meals and to drink and dance) to share the joy and the "fiesta."

Among the poor we found communities highly interdependent and cooperative. We can speculate that the poor know that they are poor. They accept their condition and often realize that change always calls for a good deal of effort. They rely on their interdependence with one another, and in real life they place their security on people rather than possessions. This stays in clear contrast with the western idea of individuation that from the perspective of the Peruvian culture seems so foreign. For instance the values of autonomy and independence so rooted in the American culture are not encouraged among people from Peruvian culture. An example of this is the fact that families remain together, even when the children are growing up. There is not the expectation of one having to leave the household or the community. Rather, one will have to join the larger family and contribute to the development of the whole community.

The relational values of the community is also expressed in the emotional and physical closeness characteristic of Peruvian culture. This is particularly true among relatives, neighbors, "paisanos" (a word that defines the bond that results from being born and raised in the same town), or "compadres." This last word is of special importance, among Peruvians. In fact the "compadrazgo" (godparenting) defines the relationship that for excellence implies important responsibility for the spiritual guidance and emotional support in a life-long commitment. The compadre/comadre, is immediately considered a member of the family, and is expected to assume responsibility in the raising of children, as well as given authority over the godson/daughter to orient

their lives.

The wisdom of the poor people of Perú lies at the very core of their values. The potential to deal with the problems as well as the strengths to overcome them need to be found and encouraged in any kind of psychotherapeutic work.

2. Popular Organization and Personal Empowerment

The poor have not been passive in front of their lives. They have found a lot creativity in order to cope with the demands that each day brings to them. In this way, they have discovered within themselves the need to not just be interdependent with "my next door neighbor", but to organize their lives around common purposes for the sake of the whole community. In Perú there's a long history of popular organization that show this reality. In fact, popular organization in Perú are the oldest and the most consistent ones in Latin America. Behind these popular organizations lies the realization that the poor live within a society that denies their existence as human persons. Therefore, in order to be listened and to vindicate their existences, they have to develop efficient strategies to accomplish that, while improving their life on a day-to-day basis.

This organized participation, however, not only serves to practical reasons: "we is more than I," in order to achieve social vindication, nor it can be explained, in marxists terms, as only a social class issue. Participation in popular organization are more than that. They constitute a strategy and a process for conquering existential spaces. Throughout the process of participation the poor strive to develop their humane capacities and discover their identities as a social group, as a community and as individual persons.

Here is where they learn what schools don't give to them, where they struggle with being 'persona' with a voice that demands to be listened to, where they become in the words of Freire "agents of their own destiny."³⁹ Therefore, popular organizations are a powerful strength that they have incorporated to provide themselves with an alternative way to exist in the world.

A popular organization is more than a transitory experience to get electricity or water, or to learn how to read and write, but it is also the process in which they have become who they are as persons. For example, one of the relevant functions that popular organizations serve with regard to the mental health situation is to provide a space in which individuals can find support in one another not only by means of meeting material needs, but also as a socialization space, and in that sense it works as a system of relationships between individuals. A good example of this is illustrated in the creation of popular libraries, run by the youth of the barrios with the support of the local parishes. Besides serving as a supplement for the lack of resources of the educational system, these libraries constitute a place of encounter and recreation.

Popular organization, depending on the structures on which they relies as well as the methodologies that they uses, constitute a liberating experience for many individuals whose needs for caring support, entertainment, display of creativity, sense of belonging and practice of their faith, get met through the participation in organized communities.

Also the fact that popular organizations have a purpose that transcend the individual, such as: providing better nutrition for the kids in the neighborhood (in the case of a communal subkitchen), or providing education to the youth (in the case of the popular

libraries, or the communal construction of schools in the barrios), fundraising for a family in case of accident (first aid committees); constitute an important resource of healing for people who experience isolation due to losses or discouragement and that are in need for support and belonging. Also in the case of people that experience lack of meaning in their lives, involvement in this kind of group can enable them to discover a new purpose for their own individual lives. Also these popular organizations constitute spaces for recreation of the adult population, where parties are offered, where jokes are shared, where people express the most creative aspects of their lives, where traditional food and music are orchestrated in a ritual of preservation of their traditional values.

From the perspective of mental health these popular organizations are a way in which the poor meet at their best their psychological needs, generating creative efforts as well as efficacy to cope with the daily challenges of being poor. In this process the poor empower each other to transform their personal and collective lives.

3. Support Networks of Solidarity

Many of these popular organizations have become mature and strong in Perú. They have proven themselves to be able to endure prolonged crisis. In fact the experiences of building participation has started in many places to transcend the local boundaries of the "barrios", to give existence to large networks of solidarity. These new networks of solidarity are a new model of support and assistance for the poor. These networks represent in a way the cornerstone for a new socio-political structure.

The situation of extreme crisis in Perú, has impelled through participation many

organized groups such as human rights groups, religious communities, and university student unions, among others, to act collectively in their search for new models of participation and representation that seek to change the present oppressive political structures, bringing alternative ways to respond to the structural problems of Perú.

The network model promotes a concrete alternative to coexist based on collaboration, support, empowerment, sharing, redistribution, self-defense; in other words, a more just coexistence. Networks are demonstrating that first of all, it is possible among not only people, but institutions in society to be interdependent on one another, and secondly that socio-political action is something that needs to be done by all, in order to achieve a healthier world.

This innovative and relatively new way of participation and support contains a potential force that needs to be incorporated in a psychotherapeutic approach to the poor in Perú. In this regard Margot Breton offers a good justification:

It is in the extra-group, political dimension of conscientization that we are less familiar with or less inclined to digest. This dimension requires that individuals intensify not only with a small group in which they feel they belong and in which their direct influence attempt result in a sense of greater personal well-being. The political dimension requires that individuals identify with those people outside the group who share their situation. It requires that they interact with the community of which they and the group are part attempting to influence its institutions in order to bring about social change and greater social justice and well-being.⁴⁰

Certainly we have to keep in mind that working with the poor is also working with the oppress of socio political structures inside and outside of Perú that they need to be freed from. In that sense it is important to turn to these strategies, that the poor in Perú are starting to develop. Only in that way will we revindicate this larger dimension in the

psychotherapeutic work and in the search for health.

4. Story Telling

We are all immersed in a world of stories and these stories inform our options and our actions. John Shea⁴¹ writes in his book Stories of God that what we know of God derives either from stories God has told us or the stories we tell to each other. It is sometimes miraculous that we are able to tell our stories; unless we do, however, we will forget how to turn our pain into narrative so that we can bear it or how to turn our ecstasy into narrative so that we can prolong it. Unless we share our stories, however, we will never know when we are being held by them and healed by them.

A widespread practice among the poor as they face suffering is to tell a story. At the root of these stories lies an answer. Unlike theories, which tend to be cold and aseptic, the telling and retelling of stories within the barrios and villages of Perú "preserves dangerous memories, awakens liberating hopes and provides a framework for discovering a coherent identity."⁴²

Here narrative is not understood as a literary form, but as "a process that builds personality and community."⁴³ In this sense all human experience is inherently narrative. Experience itself is configured in a storied form: we perceive in narrative, we remember in narrative, we dream in narrative. Narrative, in other words, is our primary way of organizing and giving coherence to our lives.

The narratives of the poor often take the form of myths. Rollo May says that "myth is a way of making sense in a senseless world."⁴⁴ Certainly this resonates with

the need of any person to explain to themselves their existence, especially of the poor people who encounter greater suffering at the very core of their lives. Stories and myths are a way to find meaning to life.

Here lies the importance of incorporating a psychological work that will have to be done with special attention to those collective narratives, in order to uncover the answers that are lying at the very core of them. R. May says: "Myth making is essential in gaining mental health, and the compassionate therapist will not discourage it."⁴⁵

In Perú it is more important than ever that the poor tell their stories to each other, since they have been always told who they are and what they need or what they can or can not have. For them to tell stories is the way to preserve their culture and to discover their own identity often shattered by the rest of society. Education and the media tell the story of the elite or of the dominant culture. However it is not enough that the poor tell each other these stories, but it is more important than ever that we listen to those stories where many truths are awaiting to be believed for the rest of the Peruvians. In a time of cultural transitions, we need to affirm the traditional values of Peruvian culture. The identity is not an isolated unit but is a part of a larger fabric of culture, history and society. It is important that this bridge between the person and the community be affirmed in psychological work with the poor. Through the affirmation of their stories, we also can elicit the understanding of the past, that allows one to grasp the present and dream of what the future can be for each individual as well as for the society as a whole.

The life of the poor within their organizations, becomes a collective narrative that denounces the injustice of the dominant reality. At the same time, hope is announced

as the poor increasingly become aware of their oppression and seek liberation. The present is a time of crisis as the poor become conscious of their collective identity and situation. Within the hunger and suffering of the poor is the search for a God of life, the search for justice and the possibility of life for all.

C. Spirituality and Faith Tradition

One of the greatest strengths among the poor people of Perú, is their spirituality and their religious traditions. In Perú we found the synthesis of two world views rooted in two important religious traditions: The Andean religion and the Christian Tradition. The first one is impregnated with an understanding of the close relationship between people and nature, expressed strongly in the "**Pachamama**" (quechua word that means mother earth), or in the veneration of *huaca*. *Huaca* refers to a sacred site (a mountain, a lake, a rock) or holy object (cloth, a vase, a plant) as well as refer to someone who had otherworldly powers such as a legendary warrior or a wise leader, a dedicated healer all of whom might be said to be *huaca*. In all *huaca* was the spirit of life and the power of survival.⁴⁶

The Christian tradition entered the Andean world a long time ago, and incorporated a new cosmovision as well as a new way to live the faith, and to experience God. The original way in which Christianity was experienced by the people of Perú in the colonial age has changed, to give room to a Christian tradition impregnated by paradox.

Especially today in Perú when violence and suffering are present in every aspect of life, and where the reality of poverty make it even harder for people to improve their

most basic individual and collective lives, we witness the spiritual resources of people, particularly the poor whose religious practices accompany every aspect of their lives. It has been well said that:

Religion is the structuring element in the consciousness of the people in the Andes. Life becomes human and meaningful in Perú -- especially for the poor -- through fundamentally religious paradigms. To be poor and struggling in Perú today, to make sense of the chaos and violence is itself a religious act.⁴⁷

In fact, the daily life of most Peruvians is in the truly genuine sense of the word, an act of faith. It is within these circumstances that it shows strongly the old and profound religious tradition of Peruvians. The processions of "El Señor de Los Milagros" (Lord of the Miracles) is a good example of this as well as the communitarian adoration of saints.

Along with this, the spirituality of the poor not only sustains people's lives but also gives meaning to their personal and community suffering. This we believe has been the greatest resource of the poor in Perú to cope with the pain, the loss, the frustration of the present situation of violence. At the same time this spirituality is strength and encouragement for the transformation of their reality. When one approaches closely the world of the poor, one finds an inexplicable capacity to endure suffering as well as to experience solidarity.

The spirituality of the poor is strongly rooted in their realization of being oppressed and in their sense of community and solidarity as the way to seek liberation. Spirituality here is not understood as a private relationship between myself and God, or an intimate relation of myself and others; rather it is at the very center of the struggle of people for

liberation. This liberation touches every dimension of life. Therefore, life need to be restored, there where death is imposed. Gustavo Gutierrez has said "poverty means death." And as Christians we are call to transform and heal life in every dimension.

Perhaps the traits described by Gustavo Gutierrez in his book, We Drink From our own Wells,⁴⁸ describe this new spirituality born out of the journey of a people who struggle for life.

1. Conversion to Solidarity

The spirituality of liberation is centered in conversion. Conversion is the turning towards God and neighbor in a commitment to solidarity as the "concrete expression of Christian love today."⁴⁹ In learning to see the forces of death that are revealed in the massive situation of poverty one comes to recognize one's own complicity in social sin. Egoism, individualism, and false idols do not just exists in the social reality. They are located in the human heart that needs to be converted to life. The choice for inner liberation intertwines with the option for life that signifies "solidarity in the struggles against poverty and for a just and human social order."⁵⁰ Conversion, however, doesn't occur in isolation, but as the entrance into community of liberation. The solidarity of the poor in Perú is the communal struggle against death and for life. It is in the poor seeking life that God is revealed. Solidarity, the expression of effective love, is not undertaken on an individual basis, even though it reshapes the life of the individual. Solidarity with the poor becomes the locus for the integration of the material and spiritual dimensions of Christian life.

Conversion is necessary at the personal, interpersonal and social level. On a

personal level one accepts the place of sin in one's life and the need for repentance. In the interpersonal sphere one begins to examine attitudes, values, and ways of seeing others that are expression of our unfaithfulness to the love of God. The conversion implies the daily practice of love for those who share one's life. In the home and in the local community there is an effort to shape relationships that express the values of the Gospel. The social dimension is the challenge to develop a critical consciousness of how society is structured and functions. The commitment to solidarity with the struggle of the poor shifts how one sees oneself, others and society.

2. Gratuitousness and Efficacy

The second characteristic of this emerging spirituality is gratuitousness which grounds prayer and action in the experience of God's love. Today in Perú there is a urgent demand for effective action to bring justice. The limited number of available resources in a situation of massive needs demands that action for liberation be as effective as possible.

The gratuitousness comes from the realization that "God first love us". God's love for us is gratuitous. We do not merit. "True love is always a gift, something that transcends motives and merits."⁵¹ The only way we can respond to this loving initiative by God is by loving others. Gutierrez described it in "A Theology of Liberation" :

A spirituality of liberation must be filled with a living sense of gratuitousness. Communion with the Lord and all men is more than anything else a gift... the knowledge that at the root of our personal and community existence lies the gift of the self-communication of God, the grace of his friendship, fills our life with gratitude.⁵²

The gratuitous experience of God occurs through a twofold encounter: in prayer

and in the poor. The first encounter opens up the mystery of God that transcends temporal reality, the second "incarnates the first, and give a historical dimension to the encounter with God and to our life of prayer."⁵³

This spirit of gratitude is captured by Nouwen in the conclusion of his journal of time shared with the poor in Perú:

And I slowly learned...that everything that is, is freely given by the God of Love. All is grace. Light and water, shelter and food, work and free time, children and parents, and grandparents, birth and death -- it is all given to us. Why? So that we can say gracias, thanks: thanks to God, thanks to each other, thanks to all and everyone.⁵⁴

Prayer is the vital dimension in the life of the poor committed to liberation. The poor reach out to God who share their hopes and sorrows. In fact, in communities of the poor prayer ranges from the rosary to prayer and reflection on the meaning of a local strike. Words and songs give expression to praise and thanksgiving as well as petition and lament.

3. Joy over suffering

Joy is born in the midst of suffering. The experience of suffering, persecution, and martyrdom of the poor is the sharing in the paschal mystery. Most of the intermeshing afflictions are set within, and caused by the unjust social order. Yet, even in the midst of the struggle for life there is hope breaking into joy. Gustavo Gutierrez remarks that the opposite to joy is not suffering but sadness. Suffering is not senseless suffering if it is lived in the spirit of the Gospel. Although crucifixion is an all too common experience in Perú, there is a firm belief in the Christian Community that the ultimate destiny is resurrection and not death.

The capacity to celebrate life in the midst of death is expanded by "the hope that death is not the final word of history."⁵⁵

4. Spiritual Childhood

Gutierrez equates spiritual childhood with spiritual poverty, which was defined at Medellin as "the attitude of opening up to God, the ready disposition of one who hopes for everything from the Lord." It is this attitude that leads the Christian to serve the poor as an effective expression of faith.

Spiritual poverty, as spiritual childhood, means far more than a detachment from material wealth. It is the total availability of the person to God that defines one's relationship to God, others, and material goods. Spiritual poverty is the fundamental attitude of receptivity to God that, as Galilea states, shapes the whole way of living.

The poor in Spirit are those who humbly place all their confidence in God, who commit their lives into his hands, who refuse to rebel against his will in the face of life's vicissitudes and contradictions.⁵⁶

The process of staying with the poor calls for a decision rooted in and sustained by faith. In the midst of the struggle of the poor Galilea points out that one begins to see the gospel in a new light. From the poor one learns:

...to share the meaning of celebration, religious symbols, of the fiesta as the complement to work, the meaning of God without complications; to share in forms of solidarity, hospitality, and attention to the weak that ones does not find in other settings.⁵⁷

In this process, any romanticism of the poor quickly disappears. The poor are neither saints nor sinners, but flesh and blood people. They bear the burden of poverty and exploitation, but they also can inflict horrible pain upon one another. The abuse, alcoholism, and violence in the homes of some of the poor reflect the injustice of the

social situation, but also demonstrate the need of every human being for conversion. The poor are called to make an option for themselves that is an act of faith and trust in themselves and those who share their situation. It is the choice to struggle as a member of a family, a neighborhood, a union, in short, as a member of a social class for a society where justice will exist for all people.

5. Community out of Solitude

The final characteristic of liberation spirituality is community. The communal dimension is forged by a collective and personal "passage through a painful experience of profound solitude or loneliness."⁵⁸ As with the other traits, community is explored in relation to the setting and experience in which it is lived. There is a progressive double movement between solitude and community. The degree to which one experiences solitude is the degree to which one can enter into community. At the same time, the unfinished project of community is the invitation into the desert where God shapes a people and frees the human heart from egoism. The journey through the desert becomes the place of encounter with God who guides a people towards the fullness of freedom and communion.

Solitude is the experience of the desert which is present in Scripture and the writings of the mystics. The desert is far more than a geographical place, it is the attitude of learning to let go of all that blocks the encounter with God.

Community in Perú begins at the local level with immediate needs. It is formed in base communities and cooperatives where people seek to share their work and prayer. As the local community seeks to build a school, clinic, chapel, etc. it experiences God's

invitation to share in liberation. At the same time, through self-organization and cooperation, the members of the community experience themselves as responsible persons capable of shaping their own future. Community becomes the experience of sharing all of one's life in times of sorrow and struggle as well as times of joy and celebration.

Conversion, gratitude, joy, spiritual childhood, and community are movements of the Spirit that are found in all Christian spiritualities. Through the commitment to liberation, they open up a unique, communal experience of God rooted in the unfolding history of the poor in Perú. The renewal of the Christian community is the Spirit guiding a people to freedom through the ever-deepening encounter with the God of Jesus who preferentially loves the poor. The following of Jesus in Perú, is the journey into solidarity with the poor where the Christian community shares in the death and resurrection of the Lord.

D. A Pastoral Counseling Approach

After describing some of the resources that we found currently present among the poor in Perú, it seems to us that they constitute potential conditions to develop a coherent model of doing psychotherapy that can help to balance and integrate the psychological, the spiritual and the social dimension of the human person. In fact, the future of psychotherapy for the poor in Peru will depend upon the integration of the already existing popular strategies of seeking health, as well as the spirituality of liberation deeply rooted in their experience.

Considering this, it seems to us that a Pastoral Counseling approach involves a

holistic view of health which attempts to address the personal and social aspects of therapy. Pastoral Counseling understands the psychological dimension in the light of a spirituality that is rooted in God who calls people to further life through the creation of a more just and fraternal society.

CHAPTER VI

A NEW RESPONSE TO VIOLENCE

Although I know the only final proof for my thesis will have to await the application of this model; what I can do now, is to delineate the basic features of the project I hope to implement upon my return to Perú. To the best of my ability, I will try to imagine the concrete operation of this idea and the different resources that will be required to carried this out.

A. Justification

The relation between the condition of poverty and violence and the impact in the level of mental health among the poor, has been explicitly stated in the previous chapters. Also the need for a coherent model of psychotherapy to respond to the need of the poor in Perú has been explored. The present project will attempt to spell out the concrete ways in which we can implement this.

The application of this idea will involve concrete people in Perú. We have chosen to bring this program to the women of Perú; more concretely to the organized poor women of the network of communal kitchens. By offering psychological services to these women, this program seek to respond to the individual and social needs of the community.

As we stated before, women in Perú have to struggle with an additional kind of violence, besides the ones that already exist in Peruvian society. The profound character of the culture of machismo in Perú denies their right to participate and to share the power, keeping them in an oppressive situation.

In spite of this situation women's presence in Peruvian society seems to be gaining ground. Perhaps the failure of men in the political realm is giving more credibility to women than they had in the past. Also the need to contribute financially to the support of the family because of the economic crisis has given women the chance to become more active in the economic life of the country. This reality undoubtedly shows this to be a time of transition and cultural change, when women begin to gain awareness of the need to take on new roles in society.

These are difficult times for women as they struggle to gain recognition at the societal level, while at the personal level they try to define their individual and collective identities. More than ever women need support and validation of their contribution and creativity. This is also a rich time in the collective life of women in Perú, as they discover their potential capacities to participate and better their present reality, finding collective ways of solidarity to solve problems.

Why a program for Poor Women? Poor women in Perú are at the bottom of the chain of oppression. They are oppressed in two ways, for being women and for being poor. This means they do not have the right to participate in decision making, are denied access to education, are victims of exploitation etc. In addition, the majority of poor women came from an Andean background and suffer the effects of racial

discrimination.

Poor women do not have access to any kind of psychological services at the present time. Even though they are exposed to greater difficulties such as political repression, and domestic violence, among others.

However, in spite of this poor women in Perú more than any other social group have reached a level of organization that has granted them the largest and strongest popular organization in Perú today. The need for survival has made women sort out creative ways to face the crisis, pushing them away from the ancestral chains of the domestic work of raising children, in order to find collective and solidary ways to solve the problems of nutrition. In fact, the searching for direct and concrete solutions to the problems of the crisis has taken women away from their homes and, turning their organizations not only into alternative ways to cope with the problems of nutrition and health, but also into places where these poor women learn to demand, and assume political representation. In doing so, they also develop their feminine identity, confronting the machismo and authoritarianism, dominant traits of our society. In this way women from the "barrios" have gained important social spaces.

At present there are more than 5,000 communal kitchens in Perú. The "kitchen" usually is operated by 40 mothers who take turns to produce a daily meal for their families. The mothers form a local organization and often receive organizational support and some financial help from NGOs and Church. The local communal kitchens are linked together at the district, municipal, and national level. These women's organizations respond to the crisis of malnutrition. However, they also have become

women's groups that raise consciousness, promote political participation, and redefine the role of women in the Peruvian family and society.

In this way the communal kitchens offer a place for the development of interpersonal relationships and an altruistic concern for the community. The nurturing attitudes of these mothers gives them a unique vision of the needs of the community.

Another important reason for choosing specifically women's organizations is their unique style of functioning. In contrast to male organization which tend to be more ideological and hierarchical, women's groups are characterized by greater mutuality and interdependence. Gilligan would say that this reflects the feminine personality which "comes to define itself in relation and connection to other people more than masculine personality does."⁵⁹ This capacity for mutuality constitutes a real asset for the present project, since it will draw strongly on the relational strengths of these women.

We believe that the psychological dimension is best served by working within the structures of the women's organization. This approach thus will meet the psychological needs of women and strengthen their organization which respond to the social demands of the poor.

The overall purpose of this project is to elaborate a program oriented to:

- a) Reflect about problems of mental health among poor women from urban areas.
- b) Develop a didactic approach to educate people in the psychological dimension of their lives.
- c) Develop a therapeutic action to address the intrapsychic, interpersonal, and collective aspects of mental health for women.

B. General Objective

Provide counseling services to women of the Agustino, in order to improve the quality of their personal, interpersonal and collective lives.

We are interested in understanding how women internalize their present realities as women and as members of their communities. How do they experience poverty and how is it shaping their subjective existence (ways of understanding the world, styles of interpersonal relation). We also want to support women with therapeutic resources to deal with their psychological problems and to gain a healthier life- all of this within a larger concern to support women in their struggle for liberation.

C. Therapeutic Factors:

- a) The didactic actions will allow for the sharing of information in order to educate women in the knowledge about themselves and the importance of mental health. The new information will allow for insights that will stimulate reflection and the exchange of ideas and experiences.
- b) The interpersonal communication will be addressed in the context of the group and as a process of self-disclosure and listening skills in order to create an environment of intimacy and respect for oneself and others.
- c) The self-recognition of these women will come through the validation of their experiences, particularly as organized women and as leaders of their communities. This process will help women break through their sense of isolation and alleviate feelings of despair; while they build their self-esteem as individuals and as members

of their organizations.

- d) Altruism is the last therapeutic factor as women discover how to give, but also how to receive. Their roles as givers to their families and community will be redefined as they learn to receive care and attention at the interpersonal and collective levels.

D. Setting

The Agustino is one of the oldest district in the poor urban area of the city of Lima. The population of around 200,000 is divided in 80 neighborhoods. It is one of the poorest districts of Lima, and has a strong tradition of popular organizations and struggle.

The Agustino is the area where the first urban land invasion took place in Peru, in the year of 1945 in the "Cerro San Pedro." The first communal kitchen in Perú was begun in 1979 here as a response to the death of children due to malnutrition.⁶⁰

It is necessary underline that this is one of the districts where the largest number of women participates in different organizations. Certainly this is not gratuitous, but rather the product of the struggle, creativity and faithfulness.

The feminine population represents 49% of the total population. Two of three women have 15 or more years of age. The majority are mothers, who range from 20 to 39 years old. While illiteracy is practically overcome among men; it runs at 18% among adult women. This added to the ones that never completed primary school gives us more than 46%.⁶¹

Regarding the concrete setting where the meetings will take place, we will use the already existing infrastructure facilities of an NGO (Servicios Educativos El Agustino),

as well as the local Parish (Virgen de Nazareth). Both provide with appropriate spaces in terms of privacy and resources, as well as the necessary safety to share freely the information and the themes discussed in these sessions.

E. Target Population

This program will be addressed concretely to women in leadership positions of the communal kitchen network of the Agustino. This means approximately 8 to 10 women who share the responsibility to represent their organization at the district level. Their task involves educative, administrative and political action.

All of these women are mothers of families, either married, single or widows. Their ages range from 25-45 years old. This condition will facilitate the sharing of a wider range of experiences due to differences in developmental process.

Most of these women belong to the first generation of immigrants from the Andean region of the country to Lima. Although all of them speak Spanish, for many of them "Quechua" or "Aymara" (indian languages) were their native languages.

The educational level of these women varies from illiteracy to only primary education, and in the best cases complete high school or some technical education. In addition to this, many of them, besides their house and community responsibilities, work outside to make some money. They work as street sellers, or in the market, as well as cooking or washing for private homes.

F. Approach

This approach will be based on the liberation model, and it will have two main focus. One is educative and the other is therapeutic. The first one aims to bring the group experience to a process of becoming aware of their oppression, both individual and collective, and to facilitate the development of a praxis. The second will address the situation of each of these women: the history of interpersonal relationships in their families and culture. This double focus will be directed to generate responses oriented to transform the experience of oppression, as well as to reinforce the already existing initiatives of empowerment taken by these women in their organizations.

Certainly one of the main problems of the impoverishment of the quality of the mental health among the poor, consists in not having awareness of its deterioration. An important emphasis of this approach will be reflection on the problems that women experience in their lives: depression, pessimism, anxiety, frustration, irritability, etc., and establish the correlation with the structural causes of such problems; such as: lack of jobs, marginalization, racism, sexism, political violence.

In terms of the methodology, the group will draw elements from the Popular Education proposed by Paulo Freire. He understands education as the process through which the oppressed and marginalized become subjects and not objects of their own destiny. This process occurs while people gain critical consciousness of the reality of oppression. Through the practice of critical consciousness, the individuals can overcome the magic and fatalist traits of their belief system. Freire's methodology rests upon the conviction that without a change in consciousness there is no liberating praxis.

This approach also seeks to overcome the traditional idea of the "expert" who possesses the knowledge vs. the "recipients" or people who lack knowledge, and are considered ignorant and mere receivers of the process. The facilitator is understood as an educator who is co-participant of the process. Therefore it will be necessary to actively engage in dialogue and relationships.

This approach obeys the need to understand the subjective world of women: their attitudes, behaviors, coping mechanisms; as well as the relation between those and the socio-economic and political reality of oppression that they experience.

Finally this approach embraces the conviction that with the recovery of their voice the oppressed people are likely to own their experience, and to consider transforming actions to modify internal and external structures of oppression.

NOTES

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2. Quoted in Comision Especial, p. 32.

3. Comision Especial, p. 32. This and all other direct quotations in Spanish have been translated into English by the author of this thesis, unless otherwise noted.

4. The information in this section is based on Alberto Flores Galindo, Buscando un Inca: Identidad y utopia en los Andes (Lima: Editorial Horizonte, 1988); and Jose Matos Mar, Desborde popular y crisis del estado: El nuevo rostro del Peru en la decada de 1980 (Lima: CONCYTEC, 1988); and other sources.

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6. Eduardo Galeano, Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pilgrage of a Continent, trans. Cedric Belfrage (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), p. 23.

7. Flores Galindo, p. 30.

8. Quoted in Flores Galindo.

9. Kevin H. Flaherty, "Liberation and Spirituality in Latin America," unpublished dissertation, Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley, 1987, p. 16.

10. Statistics abstracted from Jo-Marie Burt and Aldo Panfichi, Peru: Caught in the Crossfire (Jefferson City, MO: Peru Peach Network-USA, 1992), p. 3.

11. Comision Especial, p. 41.

12. Comision Especial, p. 41.

13. Burt and Panfichi, p. 21.

14. Abimael Guzman, interview in El Diario (Lima), 31 July 1988, quoted in Burt and Panfichi, p. 23.

15. Ibid.

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17. Matos Mar, pp. 71-72.

18. Ignacio Martin-Baro, "Overcrowding and Housing Density in Poor Salvadorans," unpublished dissertation, University of Chicago, 1979, p. 47.

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23. Jose Cabrejos, "Psiquismo y pobreza," Paginas (Lima: Centro de Estudios y Publicaciones, April 1991), vol. 16, no. 180, p. 21-29.

24. Joaquin Samayoa, "Guerra y deshumanización: Una perspectiva psicosocial," Estudios Centroamericanos (San Salvador: Universidad Centroamericana José Simeon, 1987), no. 461, p. 215.

25. Martin-Baro, "Psicología para la liberación," pp. 143-86.

26. Paul Tillich, The Meaning of Health: Essays in Existentialism, Psychoanalysis, and Religion (Chicago: Exploration Press, 1984), p. 172.

27. Gustavo Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, Caridad Ina and John Eagleson, trans. and eds. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1973).

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29. Alarcon, p. 56.

30. Alarcon, p. 55.

31. Moises Lemlij, compilador, El Múltiple Interés del Psicoanálisis - 77 años después (Lima: Biblioteca Peruana de Psicoanálisis, 1991).

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35. Quoted in Siassi and Messer, p. 36.
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41. John Shea, Stories of God (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1978).
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43. Hartnett, p. 164.
44. Rollo May, The Cry for Myth (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991).
45. May, p. 15.
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48. Gustavo Gutierrez, We Drink from our own Wells, translated by Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985).
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52. Gutierrez, A Theology, pp. 205-206.
53. Segundo Galilea, Liberation as an Encounter, p. 23.
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