LIBERATION THEOLOGY AND LATIN AMERICA’S TESTimonio AND NEW HISTORICAL NOVEL: A DECOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE

by

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With all my love and affection:

To my parents, to Cristina María, to Mariano and to Cristina

To Mari Carmen Núñez Sánchez, in memoriam
Abstract

This dissertation studies liberation theology and its dialogical interaction with Latin America’s testimonio and new historical novel from a cultural studies approach that pays special attention to the key issue of decoloniality. Chapter one proposes the idea that Latin American decolonial thinking begins with Father Gustavo Gutiérrez’s liberation theology in Peru establishing the connection with José Carlos Mariátegui’s precursive experience of articulating a decolonial indigenista socialism as early as in the 1920s. The genealogy of liberation theology as a concept is critically discussed in detail by paying attention to its success and problems from a socioanalytical, hermeneutic and praxical point of view that especially takes into account the crucial role played by Marxism.

Chapter two focuses on the origins, historical evolution and reception of liberation theology in the twentieth century as a part of the social, political and intellectual history of the Catholic Church in Latin America. This not only shows how liberation theology was repressed by the hierarchical Catholic sectors of Latin America and Europe from the start but also reveals how it is still alive and kicking today in connection with the figure of Pope Francis.

Chapter three offers an in-depth analysis of liberation theology’s epistemological evolution and also discusses how decoloniality was always an integral part of it by critically examining the famous controversy between Argentinian Evangelist liberation theologian José Míguez Bonino and German Evangelist theologian Jürgen Moltmann, who accused liberation theology of being a Eurocentric theological reflection that just imitated European political theologies and Western Marxism.
Chapter four shows how the fact that the deepest layer of liberation theology’s thought has to do with questions of race, gender, ecology, economics and globalization from a new interdisciplinary approach demands the discussion of liberation theology’s new epistemological discourses in the twenty-first century, which specifically focus on indigenous and African Latin American cultures, the environment, (eco)feminism and global economy.

Chapter five studies the relationship between liberation theology and Latin America’s testimonio and new historical novel by paying attention to the indigenous question through the key notion of “indigeneity” understood as Native agency and self-representation against the abuses committed upon the indigenous peoples in our globalized world. From the perspective of the theology of liberation, I analyze Ernesto Cardenal’s *The Gospel in Solentiname*, Elisabeth Burgos’s *I, Rigoberta Menchú* and Mario Vargas Llosa’s *The War of the End of the World*. The study of these works allows for a discussion of a decolonial reconceptualization of indigeneity in Cardenal’s and Burgos’s case as well as Vargas Llosa’s questioning of it.

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## Contents

Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1

Chapter One: “Liberation Theology: The Genealogy of a Concept” .................................................. 28

Chapter Two: “The Formation and Reception of Liberation Theology” ................................................. 121

Chapter Three: “Liberation Theology’s Decoloniality and Epistemological Evolution” ....................... 227

Chapter Four: “Liberation Theology’s Latin American Epistemologies in the Twenty-First Century” ........................................................................................................ 309

Chapter Five: “Liberation Theology and Latin America’s Testimonio and New Historical Novel: Decolonial Indigeneity vs. Imperialist Indianness” ......................................................... 396

Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 505

Works Cited ................................................................................................................ 512

Curriculum Vitae ........................................................................................................ 574
Introduction

Born in the late 1960s in Peru, liberation theology is a line of theological reflection that interprets the Christian teachings in terms of the liberation of the poor from the oppressive socio-economic and political structures of the capitalist system. Although its origins can be found in the base ecclesial communities of Brazil in the 1950s and 60s and in the Second Conference of the Latin American Bishops, which was held in Medellín in 1968, it was Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez that first articulated a liberation theology for Latin America in his paper “Toward a Theology of Liberation” (1968), and, especially, in his classical work *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (originally published in Spanish in 1971 and in English translation in 1973). Many other theologians like Leonardo Boff, Jon Sobrino, Ignacio Ellacuría, Ernesto Cardenal, Enrique Dussel, Giulio Girardi, José Comblin, Hugo Assman and Pablo Richard among others continued this fruitful line of theological reflection over the next decades to such an extent that it is still frequently practiced in Latin America today.

Using the contributions of Marxist thinking, liberation theology pays special attention to the key issue of “orthopraxis,” that is, the significance of action in Christian life, which has always defined its eminently economic-political discourse centered on the cause of the poor. Hence its interest in supporting the alternative Latin American political projects of the 1970s and 80s to transform society into a more just world. The influence of liberation theology and its preferential option for the poor soon began to be felt in the different spheres of Latin American intellectual activity. The consequence of this was the
emergence of a Latin American philosophy, pedagogy and psychology of liberation, as
can be appreciated in fundamental works in their field of study like Enrique Dussel’s
*Philosophy of Liberation* (originally published in Spanish in 1977 and in English
translation in 1985), Giulio Girardi’s *Por una pedagogía revolucionaria* (1977), Ignacio
Martín Baró’s *Psicología de la liberación para América Latina* (1990) and Raúl Fornet-
Betancourt’s *Transformación intercultural de la filosofía* (2001). Even Paulo Freire,
whose *conscientiçaço* method had been made known since the early 1960s, published
his influential work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in Portuguese one year before Gustavo
Gutiérrez’s *A Theology of Liberation* was published in Spanish. It is therefore necessary
to coin the term “liberation thinking” in order to refer to the different Latin American
fields of knowledge that use the fundamental category of liberation as their basis for
critical reflection on the Latin American reality in order to denounce the empowerment
of the popular and subaltern sectors by the logic of global capital.

This dissertation studies liberation theology and its dialogical interaction with
contemporary Latin American testimonial and historical narrative from a cultural studies
approach paying attention to its emergence in the late 1960s as the pioneering school of
decolonial thinking in Latin America. It was Chicana critic Emma Pérez and Maori
scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith that coined the terms “decolonial” and “decoloniality” in
the late 1990s due to temporal-historical reasons to emphasize that we are not past
colonialism and that only the active agency of the colonized will put an end to the
perverse legacies of the colonial and neocolonial eras.¹ Therefore, it is not historically or
chronologically accurate to speak of “postcolonialism,” “postcoloniality” or

¹ See *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* (1999), by Emma Pérez, and *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999), by Linda Tuhiwai Smith.
“postcolonial” when Latin America is still colonized by the West today. Some Latin American intellectuals like Walter Mignolo and Nelson Maldonado-Torres also began to use both terms in the late 90s and to develop a very productive, coherent and consistent line of “decolonial thinking” for Latin America in recent years.\(^2\) Latin American decoloniality, however, does not begin at the dawn of the twenty-first century but in 1968 with Father Gustavo Gutiérrez’s articulation of a theology of liberation.

Chapter one, “Liberation Theology: The Genealogy of a Concept,” studies the origins of decoloniality in Latin America in connection with the key issue of the reception of European Marxism. A critical analysis of the origins of Marxist thinking in Latin America shows how classical dogmatic European Marxism was being just copied and imitated in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. It is not until the 1920s that Marxism will be creatively adapted and resemanticized into Latin America’s specific social, political and economic conditions by the young Peruvian intellectual José Carlos Mariátegui. Mariátegui is therefore the first Latin American socialist thinker who adapts Marx’s ideas to the anti-imperialist cultural context of the Latin American periphery, and, more specifically, of rural indigenous Peru. It is precisely for this reason that Mariátegui’s *indigenista* socialism must be considered the first articulation of what I call “decoloniality” or “decolonial thinking” in Latin America. Decoloniality can be defined as all those Latin American theoretical currents that interpret the complex Latin American reality in its socio-political, economic and cultural dimension from an anti-

\(^2\) See Mignolo’s works *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (2000; new edition 2012) and *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (2011); see Maldonado-Torres’s work *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity* (2008); see also the essays collected in the volumes *Latin@s in the World-System: Decolonization Struggles in the Twenty-First Century U.S. Empire* (2005), edited by Ramón Grosfoguel, Nelson Maldonado-Torres and José David Saldívar, and *Globalization and the Decolonial Option* (2013), edited by Walter Mignolo and Arturo Escobar.
imperialist and anti-colonialist perspective that is usually greatly influenced by Marxist thought. Mariátegui’s premature death, however, prevented him from theorizing in depth the creative adaptation of Marxism to the Latin American reality from an anti-imperialist perspective, which is precisely why he must be regarded as a “precursor” of decolonial thinking. One of the main goals of chapter one is therefore to demonstrate how Latin American decoloniality is born with Father Gustavo Gutiérrez’s liberation theology in the late 60s taking into consideration the precursive decolonial experience of Mariátegui’s indigenista socialism, which gave rise to the emergence of a specifically Latin American “decolonial Marxism” whose creative and innovative nature contrasts with the dogmatic Eurocentrism of previous Latin American Marxist discourses. The originality of this approach must be noted since the points of connection between Gutiérrez’s and Mariátegui’s thinking from the perspective of decoloniality have never been studied before.

Using this frame as a starting point, the genealogy of liberation theology as a concept will be critically discussed in detail by paying attention to its success and problems from a socioanalytical, hermeneutic and praxical point of view that especially takes into consideration the crucial role played by Marxism and dependency theory in it. One of the crucial points of chapter one is to show how Gutiérrez’s use of Marxism in his theological discourse presents epistemological problems due to the fact that he tends to globalize and homogenize when using the terms “Marxism” and “Marxist thinking.” Although Gutiérrez certainly incorporates ideas from well-known Marxist intellectuals like Mariátegui, Marx, Engels, Che Guevara, Fidel Castro and Aníbal Quijano among others, a theorization of decolonial Marxism or an explanation of the main contributions
of all these thinkers for liberation theology is never present in his reflection. Another key point of chapter one is to refute the traditional critique that liberation theology does not have its own hermeneutic and epistemological methodology. Although it is a fact that the discussion of liberation theology in hermeneutic and epistemological terms is not present in Gutiérrez’s book, other liberation theologians like Juan Luis Segundo, Clodovis Boff, Carlos Mesters and Juan Carlos Scannone have analyzed liberation theology’s hermeneutics and epistemology in detail. Their contributions to the subject, however, are somewhat problematic, which is precisely why the need to approach liberation theology’s hermeneutic and epistemological methodology in bidirectional terms will be discussed as a theoretical alternative through the notion of “bidirectional hermeneutical dialectics.”

Chapter Two, “The Formation and Reception of Liberation Theology,” studies the origins of liberation theology in the late 60s as well as its antecedents in the colonial period, the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. The discussion of the historical evolution and reception of liberation theology in the second half of the twentieth century as a part of the social, political and intellectual history of the Catholic Church in Latin America not only shows how liberation theology was repressed by the hierarchical Catholic sectors of Latin America and Europe from the start but also reveals how it is still alive and kicking today in connection with the figure of Pope Francis. The first part of chapter two shows how the antecedents of liberation theology can be found in the Dominican missionary movement that stood up for the rights of indigenous peoples and took place in the sixteenth century, especially in Central America and the Caribbean. The figures of Antonio de Montesinos, Bartolomé de Las Casas and Antonio de Valdivieso certainly played a crucial role in the defense of Amerindians but many other
Dominican missionaries, who also became the first Latin American Catholic bishops, were also actively involved in this movement. The Jesuit Republic of the New World, inspired by the example of Las Casas’s indigenous settlements in Venezuela and Guatemala and the utopian thinking of Thomas More and Tommaso Campanella, is also discussed as one of the most important precursive experiences of contemporary liberation theology in which a society ruled by an economic system where all goods are shared among its members without the use of money became real.

After analyzing the antecedents of liberation theology in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century with Pope Leo’s encyclical *Rerum Novarum: The Condition of Labor* (1891) and Pope Pius’s encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno: After Forty Years* (1931), which include the first explicit statements on behalf of a preferential option for the poor coming from the magisterium of the Catholic Church, the origins of the Latin American base ecclesial movement in Brazil are discussed in detail. The most immediate antecedent of the theology of liberation, we can say that, many years before it was first articulated by professional theologians, a theology of liberation had already taken place in base ecclesial communities from the point of view of praxis as a consequence of the emergence of a popular theological reflection in them. It is the lack of vocations in the Church of Brazil that leaves no choice to the bishops but to entrust religious instruction to the laity as a consequence of the growing influence of the protestant churches, which compels the bishops to mobilize with the lay sectors. It is this process that gives rise to a sort of precursive liberation theology in praxis, which is the result of the popular movement within the Church in which the tradition of lived experience and communal praxis of the laity is articulated into a dialogue with the early teachings of the Church.
One of the most important insights of chapter two is how the Second Vatican Council, which signals a new stage of renewal for the Catholic Church despite its Eurocentric perspective, was resemanticized into the coordinates of the Latin American cultural context through the Second Conference of Latin American Bishops, which took place in Medellín, Colombia, in 1968. It is the assumption of one of Pope John XXIII’s main insights for the Council, the Church of the poor, as the foundation for theological reflection and its creative adaptation to the specific conditions of the Latin American cultural, historical and ecclesial reality that not only empowers and transforms the Council from a decolonial lens but also captures John XXIII’s main insight of the Church of the poor, which was neglected during the Council. It must be noted, on the other hand, that one of the most important consequences of the resemanticization process of the Council that took place through Medellín was precisely the strengthening of a Latin American Church of the poor through the base ecclesial movement that has been mentioned above, which was enthusiastically supported by the Latin American bishops present in Medellín. Medellín’s main theological insight was therefore the preferential option for the poor. All this suggests that if the base ecclesial movement was liberation theology’s precedent in praxis, Medellín was its theoretical precedent from the point of view of the Latin American magisterium of the Church. Although, for practical purposes, liberation theology was articulated as a theological reflection after Medellín, it was actually born in embryo a couple of months before the Conference with Gutiérrez’s paper “Toward a Theology of Liberation” (1968). The basic traits of liberation theology are already present in Medellín, which means that the Medellín documents constitute a decolonial theoretical discourse like that of liberation theology itself. All this shows how
the origins of Latin American decoloniality are marked by liberation theology and Medellín.

The second part of chapter two pays attention to liberation theology’s historical evolution and reception from the next few years after Medellín to the dawn of the twenty-first century. The development of liberation theology throughout four decades shows how an anti-liberationist campaign against it was organized by the hierarchical sectors of the Latin American church immediately after Medellín and coordinated by Bishop Alfonso López Trujillo from Colombia. The anti-liberationist measures implemented by López Trujillo since he was elected as general secretary of CELAM (Latin American Episcopate Conference) in 1972 and as its president in 1979 were perpetuated by his followers, who have consistently opposed liberation theology and the legacy of Medellín. Among these, Roger Vekemans, a Jesuit priest from Chile, and Bonaventure Kloppenburg, a Franciscan friar from Brazil, must be mentioned. Vekemans and Kloppenburg have been the main instruments used by López Trujillo to denigrate liberation theology through the anti-liberationist perspective of their books in addition to those written by López Trujillo himself. It is precisely for this reason that their anti-liberationist theological discourses are critically analyzed and unmasked in this chapter as examples of what Enrique Dussel has called a “developmentist theology,” which has never been successfully articulated, vis-à-vis liberation theology.

The documents of the next conferences of the Latin American bishops after Medellín (Puebla, Santo Domingo and Aparecida) are also discussed in depth in order to show how liberation theology was progressively and consistently repressed by the conservative sectors of the Latin American church, a policy that was fully supported by
Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI, as can be appreciated in the papers they read at these conferences. Both pontiffs put into practice a series of anti-liberationist measures that ultimately tried to strengthen and reinforce a developmentist theology like that of López Trujillo, Vekemans and Kloppenburg. It is only with Pope Francis, whose actions and words agree with those of liberation theologians and who also supports a form of non-Marxist liberation theology known as the “theology of the people” in Argentina, that liberation theology is supported by the magisterium again, thus becoming a hot topic at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

Chapter three, “Liberation Theology’s Decoloniality and Epistemological Evolution,” discusses the development of liberation theology in its epistemological tenets from what Enrique Dussel calls LT1 (the first stage of liberation theology in the 60s, 70s and 80s) to LT2 (the second stage of liberation theology that begins with the new millennium in the late 90s and in the year 2000). One of the main goals of this chapter is to show how the evolution of liberation theology from LT1 to LT2 empowers its decolonial potential, which becomes more prominent. The fact that liberation theology has not traditionally been considered a decolonial theoretical current from an epistemological point of view means that it is necessary to contrast this new interpretation with the traditional one, which is defined by its eurocentrism, in order to justify the former and question the latter. Therefore, the first part of chapter three questions German Evangelist theologian Jürgen Moltmann’s interpretation of liberation theology (LT1) as a Eurocentric theological reflection coming from Vatican II, new European political theology and Western Marxism and frames this critique within the
famous controversy between Moltmann himself and Argentinian Evangelist liberation theologian José Míguez Bonino.

It was Míguez Bonino’s critique of Moltmann’s theological method that gave rise to Moltmann’s furious reaction in an open letter to the Argentinian theologian. The critical analysis of Míguez Bonino’s critique of Moltmann’s theological method and of Moltmann’s response through his famous letter shows how Moltmann’s Eurocentrist thesis overlooks the fact that liberation theology is a theological discourse coming from the periphery, which means that its articulation takes place from Latin America’s subaltern and peripheral locus of enunciation. Due to the fact that liberation theology denounces the exploitation of the poor and the oppressed of the periphery by the imperial powers of the center allied with the subaltern elites, liberation theology is an anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist theoretical current, and therefore, a critico-theoretical discourse belonging to the school of Latin American decolonial thinking. Hence why it has always been repressed by the imperialist conservative sectors of the center and the periphery alike. The in-depth discussion of Moltmann’s and Míguez Bonino’s controversy shows that although liberation theology may have been influenced by some of the insights of Vatican II and European progressist theologies, Moltmann’s perception of liberation theology as their copy or imitation is a dangerous and fatal misinterpretation. One of the most important insights of this chapter is therefore to underline the significance of the contributions of the Protestant school of Latin American liberation theology represented by Míguez Bonino to the discussions on liberation theology’s originality as a decolonial theological reflection different from European political theology.
The analysis of the theological discourse of Catholic German theologian Johann Baptist Metz strengthens my thesis about liberation theology’s decoloniality. Metz is the only European theologian who has admitted liberation theology’s critique of his theological method and has incorporated the decolonial dimension into the final stage of his theological discourse. Nevertheless, the fact that liberation theology has enriched Metz’s thought does not mean that the German theologian has abandoned a Eurocentric perspective. This is due to the fact that decoloniality is never the basis of his theological reflection but just a secondary mediation that is added to it. This means that although decoloniality becomes a part of his thinking, this process only takes place from a Eurocentric stance that Metz is never able to transcend. The consequence of this is that, unlike liberation theology, whose reflection moves in the sphere of non-Being and the Other, that of Metz still belongs to the sphere of Being and the European Self. The comparative study between European political theology and liberation theology, on the other hand, not only shows their points of connection and differences but also stresses the need for more dialogue between the theological discourses of the center and the periphery today, especially as far as the key issue of St. Paul’s writings and political theology is concerned, which is dealt with differently in Europe and Latin America.

Once LT1’s decoloniality has been discussed, the second part of chapter three studies liberation theology’s epistemological evolution from LT1 to LT2 by critically examining the thirteen epistemological transformations proposed by Enrique Dussel. As has been mentioned before, the passage from LT1 into LT2 involves the empowerment of liberation theology’s decolonial potential. The critical analysis of Dussel’s thirteen epistemological transformations, however, shows how the Argentinian philosopher
neglects the question of decoloniality, which is never mentioned in his reflection. One of the main goals of chapter three is to demonstrate that the decolonial dimension is essential to understand the evolution of LT1 into LT2. LT1’s decoloniality always takes place in socio-political terms due to its assimilation of the alterity of the victims to the homogeneous and totalizing category of the poor. Unlike LT1, LT2 always individualizes and respects the alterity of the victims, which gives rise to many different theological discourses produced from multiple subaltern and peripheral loci of enunciation like those of indigenous and African Latin American cultures, women and the environment. This means that LT2’s decoloniality is always based on ethnic, gender, environmental, economic, intercultural and interreligious criteria due to the fact that, unlike LT1, its point of departure is the plurality and diversity of the victims of the system. The originary socio-political decolonial potential of LT1 is therefore altered and affirmed from a new horizon in LT2 through its multiplicity of decolonial criteria. The consequence of this is that liberation theology understood as a decolonial theoretical discourse is defined by the presence of different layers or levels of decoloniality. This is due to the fact that LT1’s decoloniality, which only has a totalizing socio-political dimension, becomes more prominent, heterogeneous and diverse in LT2, in which the basic epistemological insights of LT1 are still present.

It is precisely as a result of its intrinsic heterogeneity that the study of the historical evolution of LT2 shows a wide range of theoretical discourses. The second part of chapter three also presents a classification of LT2’s epistemologies into two categories: The theological reflections coming from the subaltern sectors of the USA (African American, Native American, Latino and Asian American) and the theological
reflections coming from the poor countries of the periphery in Latin America, Africa and Asia. The comparative study of both categories shows how the Latin American theological discourses of LT2 are defined by an anticapitalist perspective that does not appear in the LT2 theological reflections articulated in the US with a few exceptions. The antiglobalization perspective of Latin American LT2 is probably due to the fact that LT1’s socioanalytical mediations of Marxism and dependency theory, which help to unmask the injustice of capitalism on a national and international scale, are still present in it and that its theological discourses are theorized from the locus of enunciation of the periphery. This means that the Latin American epistemological discourses of LT2 incorporate the radical socio-political consciousness of LT1 as the foundation for a new theological reflection articulated around the new ethnic, gender, environmental, economic and interreligious questions they are concerned with.

The discussion of the historical development of LT2 also shows at the end of this chapter how its first theological discourses were theorized in the USA in the 1970s (Black, womanist, Native American, Latino, mujerista and Asian American theologies among others). LT2, however, only emerges in Africa and India in the 80s and in Latin America in the late 80s and 90s. Unlike the Latin American theological reflections of LT2, the LT2 theological discourses produced in the US show a bourgeois liberal perspective that comes from nineteenth century American liberal theology. This means that they move within a neoliberal framework that is never questioned with the exception of Native American liberation theology, which, probably due to its main concern with ecological degradation, endorses the anticapitalist perspective of Latin American LT2. One of the key ideas of this chapter is therefore that US liberation theologies are not truly
revolutionary but just reformist, which contrasts with Latin American liberation theology, the most critical and radical theological current of the last four decades.

Chapter four, “Liberation Theology’s Latin American Epistemologies in the Twenty-First Century,” studies the most recent and innovative theological discourses of LT2 in Latin America. Among these, indigenous and African Latin American theologies of liberation certainly play a crucial role and are the future of Latin American liberation theology. The first part of this chapter discusses the different evolution of these two theological reflections. The first stage in the theorization of an indigenous theology of liberation in Latin America shows a lack of indigenous intellectual and theological agency, which means that this form of theological reflection was first articulated from a nativist perspective by European American theologians like Giulio Girardi, Paulo Suess, Diego Irarrázaval and Clodomiro Siller, who favor the inculturation of native spirituality with Christianity. The second stage, however, is characterized by the presence of native theological agency and also presents an inculturated perspective. Its main representative is Father Eleazar López Hernández, a Zapotec Catholic priest from Mexico. Unlike indigenous theologies, African Latin American theologies of liberation are defined by the presence of black intellectual and theological agency from the start. This can be seen in the works of the two main African Latin American liberation theologians: Antonio Aparecido da Silva and Marcos Rodrigues da Silva. The fact that black theological agency was present from the beginnings of African Latin American theology is probably due to the fact that African Latin Americans had not so many difficulties as indigenous populations to have access to culture and education.
After discussing the theological reflections of the most important indigenous and African Latin American liberation theologians paying attention to their good points and problems, the second part of chapter four studies all the other theological discourses of LT2 in Latin America at the dawn of the twenty-first century: Feminist theology, eco-feminist theology, African Latin American feminist theology and eco-theology among others. Each theoretical current is discussed in detail paying attention to its main representative and to its good points and challenges for the future. This part of the chapter tries to show how the fact that the deepest layer of liberation theology’s decoloniality has to do with questions of race, gender, ecology, economics and globalization from a new interdisciplinary approach means that our discussion reaches into indigenous and African Latin American cultures, the environment, (eco)feminism and global economy, which shows liberation theology’s validity and topicality in the twenty-first century. Special attention will be paid to Jung Mo Sung’s economic theology of liberation, one of the newest and most original epistemologies that is a special case within LT2 in Latin America.

Two alternative approaches to Dussel’s theory of liberation theology’s epistemological evolution from LT1 to LT2 are also discussed in detail: Juan José Tamayo’s notion of a “new theological paradigm” and Iván Petrella’s concept of the “next generation.” The critical analysis of these alternative proposals to explain the epistemological changes experienced by Latin American liberation theology in the twenty-first century demonstrates that both are ultimately problematic for different reasons, and therefore, that only Dussel’s proposal has a solid theoretical basis. One of the crucial ideas of this chapter is that a new prophetic and charismatic theological voice
is needed since the liberation theologians of LT1 are too old now and the younger liberation theologians of LT2 have been repeating the same ideas for too long or their reflections are highly sophisticated from a theoretical point of view and lack a praxical horizon. The ecumenical and praxical dimension of indigenous and African Latin American liberation theologies suggests that they are the future of Latin American liberation theology in the twenty-first century and that only they can provide the young, prophetic and charismatic theological voice that is so much needed in Latin America today and that must be found among the wretched of the earth.

The dialogical interaction established between liberation theology and Latin American literature has not received the critical attention it deserves. José Luis Gómez-Martínez, a Professor of Hispanic Thought at the University of Georgia, and his group of students were the first ones to explore this relationship in the 90s. It was Gómez-Martínez who edited the volume *Teología y pensamiento de la liberación en la literatura iberoamericana* (1996), a collection of essays on the subject written by some of his students and other professors from American universities that includes a contribution by Gómez-Martínez himself and an introduction by Mexican philosopher Horacio Cerutti Guldberg. Gómez-Martínez studies in some of his essays the contextualization of liberation theology both in Latin American narrative and, more specifically, in the *indigenista* novel.3 This contextualizing, historical and thematic approach is also present

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3 See Gómez-Martínez’s introductory essay to his book “Contextualización de la teología de la liberación en la narrativa iberoamericana” (1996) and his pioneering article “Hacia una iglesia de la liberación: La religión y el sacerdote en la novela indigenista” (1987); other important essays by Gómez-Martínez are “Discurso literario y pensamiento de la liberación: La cruz invertida en la contextualización de una época” (1993) and “El discurso de la liberación en la narrativa iberoamericana: Un proceso de contextualización” (1995). Another important early contribution is Nieves Pinillos’s article “Repercusión de la teología de la liberación en la narrativa iberoamericana” (1988). Three other important early essays are “Kingdom of God on Earth: Ernesto Cardenal’s Salmos” (1994), by Terry DeHay, “Biblical Justice and the Military Hero
in the other essays of his book. Manuel García Castellón, who was also Gómez-Martínez’s student at the University of Georgia, also uses this focus in his book *Guaman Poma de Ayala: Pionero de la teología de la liberación* (1992) in which he studies the connection between Gustavo Gutiérrez’s liberation theology and Guaman Poma’s inculturated Christianity in his *First New Chronicle and Good Government*. This work has the merit of being the first book that has ever been published on the relationship between liberation theology and Latin American literature.4

Although Gómez-Martínez’s approach has undoubtedly been very productive, it is necessary to problematize the subject more in depth. The mere contextualization of the theology of liberation in some works or even in Latin American narrative involves a thematic, historical, structural and mechanical perspective that ultimately weakens liberation theology’s decolonial critico-theoretical potential and its social compromise with the subaltern subject. This means that liberation theology becomes ineffective as a theoretical discourse when being used as a mere contextualizing and thematic artifact. According to this approach, liberation theology becomes an episteme or monological structure that can help us to understand the subject of some works but only without

entering into a critical dialogue with them from a decolonial theoretical perspective, which is precisely that of liberation theology. The main problem with Gómez-Martínez’s method is therefore the eclipse of liberation theology’s decoloniality, which is completely overlooked. Another problem is that the relationship between testimonio, a very important genre of contemporary Latin American narrative, and liberation theology is not even discussed in his book or articles. Only Lizbeth Sousa Carvalho, another of Gómez-Martínez’s students at the University of Georgia, studies the interaction between liberation theology and some Brazilian testimonial works in a section of her dissertation *A teologia da libertação e a narrativa brasileira do século XX: ‘Canaã’ ‘Quarup’e obras de testemunho* (1993).

The approach of Sousa Carvalho’s study, however, is very limited and superficial since the dialogical interaction established between liberation theology and testimonio within contemporary Brazilian narrative is never problematized or discussed in depth. Like Gómez-Martínez, the author just contextualizes liberation theology in a thematic, mechanical and structural way. This deprives liberation theology of its critical potential as a decolonial theoretical instrument and discourse, which could have entered into a fruitful dialogue with other decolonial and subaltern theories applied to the texts studied. Another important genre of contemporary Latin American narrative that is never discussed in connection with liberation theology by Gómez-Martínez and his group of students is that of the new historical novel. Important works belonging to this genre like Abel Posse’s *Daimon* (Spanish original, 1978; English translation, 1992), *The Dogs of Paradise* (Spanish original, 1983; English translation, 1989) and *The Long Twilight of the Wanderer* (Spanish original, 1992; no English translation), Eugenio Aguirre’s *Gonzalo*
Guerrero (Spanish original, 1980; no English translation), Mario Vargas Llosa’s *The War of the End of the World* (Spanish original, 1981; English translation, 1984) or Marcio Souza’s *The Emperor of the Amazon* (Portuguese original, 1977; English translation, 1980) and *Mad Maria* (Portuguese original, 1980; English translation, 1985) are not among the texts studied.

The essays collected by Gómez-Martínez in *Teología y pensamiento de la liberación en la literatura iberoamericana* focus on various subgenres of Latin American narrative like the *neoindigenista* novel and on contemporary Brazilian, Chilean, Colombian and Puerto Rican fiction from the perspective of liberation theology and philosophy. The authors discuss the work of a wide range of Latin American writers like Marcos Aguinis, Rosario Ferré, Isabel Allende, Demetrio Aguilera Malta and Antônio Callado among others. There is a corpus of articles written by other critics who also explore the connection between liberation theology and Latin American literature in the works of Juan Carlos Gené, Bartolomé de Las Casas, Vicente Leñero, Moisés Sandoval, Federico García Lorca, Laura Esquivel, Manlio Argueta, Graciela Limón, Demetria Martínez, Marcos Aguinis, Samuel Rovinski and Maruxa Villalta among other writers. Though certainly invaluable, all the contributions coming from Gómez-Martínez, his students and other critics just follow a thematic approach and pay no attention to the dialogical interaction established between Latin America’s *testimonio* and new historical novel and liberation theology. It is precisely these two problems that are the focus of the last chapter of this dissertation.

Chapter five, “Liberation Theology and Latin America’s *Testimonio* and New Historical Novel: Decolonial Indigeneity vs. Imperialist Indianness,” studies the
relationship between liberation theology and Latin American testimonial and historical narrative in connection with the key notions of “indigeneity” and “Indianness.” Having liberation theology’s decolonial potential as its point of departure, this chapter discusses the interpretation of two testimonial works, Ernesto Cardenal’s *The Gospel in Solentiname* and Elisabeth Burgos’s *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, and of a new historical novel, Mario Vargas Llosa’s *The War of the End of the World*, from the perspective of liberation theology in order to demonstrate the articulation of new decolonial reformulations of the notion of “indigeneity” in the former, which contrasts with the legitimation of the old imperialist concept of “Indianness” in the latter. The notion of indigeneity understood as Native active agency and self-representation vis-à-vis the colonizer’s traditionally imperialist and passive image of the indigenous subaltern subject conveyed by the concept of Indianness shows how liberation theology’s influence on contemporary Latin American narrative takes place from a liberationist or anti-liberationist stance that depends on the author’s support or condemnation of liberation theology and the cause of the poor in Latin America.

The interest in the literary representation of the indigenous question in Latin American narrative in connection with liberation theology is already present in Gómez-Martínez’s book from a thematic approach. The novelty of this chapter is therefore not only to discuss the above mentioned texts from the lense of liberation theology

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5 Three of Gómez-Martínez’s students have studied liberation theology and Latin American narrative in connection with the indigenous question in their contributions on *neoindigenista* fiction. See the articles “La teología de la liberación en Siete lunas y siete serpientes de Demetrio Aguilera Malta” (1996), by Teresa Smothermann; “Expresión de inferioridad en Por qué se fueron las garzas” (1996), by John T. F. Fagg; “El indio como protagonista de su propia realidad en tres novelas brasileñas contemporáneas” (1996), by Lizbeth Sousa Carvalho; and Smothermann’s dissertation *Desde el indigenismo al pensamiento de la liberación: La obra de Demetrio Aguilera Malta* (1996). See also García Castellón’s book on Guaman Poma and Gómez-Martínez’s article on the *indigenista* novel mentioned in note 3.
understood as a decolonial theoretical current but also to approach the indigenous issues posed by these texts in reference to the theoretical notions of indigeneity and Indiannes, which are defined by Tracy Devine Guzmán in her recent work *Native and National in Brazil: Indigeneity After Independence* (2013), and are another starting point of this chapter. The fact that the texts discussed belong to two genres of contemporary Latin American narrative that have never been discussed in connection with liberation theology must also be noted.

The first part of chapter five studies the genre of Latin American *testimonio* and also discusses Ernesto Cardenal’s work *The Gospel in Solentiname* from the lense of liberation theology in comparison with Reynaldo Reyes, J. K. Wilson and Tod Sloan’s *Ráfaga: The Life Story of a Nicaraguan Miskito Comandante* in order to show how different notions of indigeneity existed in Nicaragua before and after the triumph of the Sandinista revolution in 1979. The analysis of Cardenal’s *The Gospel in Solentiname* from the perspective of Gustavo Gutiérrez’s and Jon Sobrino’s ideas on the Kingdom of God and the anti-Kingdom gives rise to a decolonial concept of indigeneity founded on the enlightening interpretation of the gospel carried out by the indigenous peasants of Solentiname from a Marxist perspective. Their decolonial indigeneity is therefore the fruit their active agency, participation and support of the Sandinista revolution against the historical mediations of the anti-Kingdom embodied by the abuses of Somoza’s dictatorship and US imperialism with the aim of establishing the Kingdom of God on earth through the historical praxis of revolutionary love. One of the main insights of this chapter, however, is to show how the agency and self-representation of the indigenous peasants of Solentiname not only takes place from an ethical-political point of view but
also from a popular theological-hermeneutic one. This can be appreciated in their discussions of the gospel, which show how they are able to perceive the points in common between socialism and the Bible, which is precisely what motivates them to join the Sandinista struggle as revolutionary Christians. The fact that their discussions always involve an anti-imperialist Marxist perspective also suggests that their religious thinking can be interpreted as a sort of popular decolonial Marxism that agrees with the program of the Sandinista revolution, which underlines the bond of their concept of indigeneity with the goals of Sandinism.

The study of Ráfaga, on the other hand, shows how the struggle of the Miskito people against the Sandinista government as a result of the violation of human rights committed by the Sandinista army upon innocent Miskito women, men and children gives rise to an alternative notion of indigeneity during the first years of the Sandinista revolution. It is precisely the fight of Miskito guerrilla fighters like Ráfaga against the imperialist and exterminating actions of the Sandinistas, which also reveal the contradictions of their revolution on behalf of the poor, that shows the decolonial nature of this new reconceptualization of indigeneity in Nicaragua. One of the key points in the analysis of Ráfaga’s narrative, however, is the initial politicization of this alternative notion of indigeneity on behalf of the neoliberal project represented by the United States and the somocistas until the contra movement and its allied Miskito sectors were finally questioned by Ráfaga as a result of the crimes they also committed upon the Miskito people. In this sense, Ráfaga’s decision to favor a peaceful dialogue with the Sandinista government only in order to secure the rights of his people shows how his concept of indigeneity becomes politically neutral in the end. This means that its decolonial potential
not only questions the abuses committed by the Sandinistas but also those committed by
the US, the somocistas and their Miskito allies even though he may still sympathize with
the conservative political ideologies of his country in the early 90s.

The second part of chapter five discusses another testimonial work, Rigoberta
Menchú and Elisabeth Burgos’s *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*,
from the perspective of liberation theology, studies the genre of Latin America’s new
historical novel, and also discusses a new historical novel, Mario Vargas Llosa’s *The War
of the End of the World*, from the point of view of the theology of liberation. The analysis
of *I, Rigoberta Menchú* using Paulo Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed and Giulio
Girardi’s revolutionary pedagogy as liberation theology’s decolonial theoretical
framework shows how a notion of indigeneity based on a revolutionary pedagogy of the
oppressed is first theorized in the sphere of micropolitics at a local, regional and national
level. It is only when the revolutionary pedagogy of the Maya-Quiché people from
Guatemala is articulated at an international level towards the end of the text that the
sphere of macropolitics becomes present as well. The origin of this revolutionary
pedagogy, which gives rise to the theorization of a decolonial reformulation of
indigeneity in Rigoberta’s narrative, is the orthopraxis of the Maya-Quiché base ecclesial
movement. This emerges as a result of a popular and decolonial interpretation of the
Bible from the lense of Maya culture that enters into a dialogue with the experience of
poverty of the Maya-Quiché, a sort of originary praxis, and with Maya traditional
spirituality but that, unlike that of the indigenous peasants of Solentiname, is not
influenced by Marxist thinking. This decolonial notion of indigeneity is especially
founded on Maya female agency and self-representation since the role of Maya women as
catechists in their base ecclesial communities is especially significant for the revolution as well as their participation in socio-political organizations like the United Peasant Committee.

The fact that the women belonging to the Maya-Quiché base ecclesial movement identify with the socio-historical context and actions of some episodes of the Old Testament explains that their Christian revolutionary praxis, which can be the just war of the guerrilla movement or Rigoberta’s peaceful social activism, is guided and inspired by the biblical example of resistance to domination and oppression. The Christian revolutionary orthopraxis that is learned by the Maya from the Bible through women educators and catechists like Rigoberta herself and is also the basis for the decolonial notion of indigeneity that is developed in the text can therefore be identified with the construction of the Kingdom of God, which must begin here and now. The Maya-Quiché base ecclesial movement is also identified by Rigoberta with the emergence of the Church of the poor vis-à-vis the church of the rich. The latter must be fought through the Christian organization and practice with the people in the light of the Sacred Scriptures so that the people’s church becomes real here and now in our hearts. One of the crucial ideas of this chapter is therefore that the theorization of a decolonial notion of indigeneity in Rigoberta’s narrative rests on her belief in the power of the indigenous masses to transform the world by means of a Christian orthopraxis.

The analysis of Mario Vargas Llosa’s The War of the End of the World from the perspective of liberation theology shows how, unlike the other works discussed in chapter five, the imperialist notion of Indianness is privileged over that of decolonial indigeneity in this text, which is probably the best example of the anti-liberationist tendency in
contemporary Latin American narrative. The articulation of the concept of Indianness in the novel, which is represented by native, African and mestizo subjects as well as by those white people who support their cause, is the result of the misrepresentation of the indigenous subaltern subject since the poor people living in Canudos, in the Brazilian backlands, are distorted and deformed by the author as beasts and cannibals who must be conquered by the Republican army, a symbol for the civilizing project of the white man. The interpretation of the novel in the light of Pablo Richard’s reflections on the idols of death and of Franz Hinkelammert’s notion of “entrepreneurial metaphysics” shows how its main conflict is not atheism or fanaticism but idolatry. It is the clash between the God of life, represented by the Counselor’s primitive Christianity through the symbol of the Blessed Jesus, and the idols of death, represented by the oppressive violence of the Republic’s bourgeois liberal project, that gives rise to a battle between the forces of good and evil that is full of apocalyptic echoes.

The analysis of this battle from the perspective of entrepreneurial metaphysics shows how the intrinsic violence and violation of human rights that defines bourgeois thinking will always reject any political alternative to the bourgeois order even though this is peacefully created and instituted, as is the case with the Canudos community in the novel. This entrepreneurial metaphysics agrees with Vargas Llosa’s conservative political project, which becomes even more conservative in the novel through his legitimation of a monarchichal, imperialist and feudal ideology embodied by the Baron de Canhabrava, one of its main characters. Imperialist Indianness is therefore articulated in the text as a result of Vargas Llosa’s justification of a feudal and entrepreneurial metaphysics mentality. The consequence of this is the emergence of an ultraconservative ideological
project that also has a theological dimension that follows the steps of Carl Schmidtt’s authoritarian political theology. It is precisely the projection of Vargas Llosa’s conservative ideology upon the historical events of Canudos and their connection with Latin America’s history in the late 70s and early 80s, even from a theological horizon, that accounts for the eclipse and distortion of the social compromise of the poor peasants of the Brazilian backlands as well as of liberation theologians and Latin American revolutionaries in the present of the publication of the novel.

The study of liberation theology in this dissertation from the approach of cultural studies shows how liberation theology is a decolonial theoretical discourse that first emerges in Latin America in 1968 and is articulated more in depth from the 1970s on. One of the main insights of this dissertation is therefore the need to carry out a revisionist analysis of liberation theology as a category from a decolonial lense. Hence why, first of all, its success and problems as a concept must be discussed from a socioanalytical, hermeneutic and praxical perspective that pays special attention to the crucial role played by Marxism and dependency theory in it as two of its most important mediations. The discussion of the historical and epistemological development of liberation theology, on the other hand, traces its reception through the decades and also its evolution from LT1 to LT2, which is inexorably linked to the growth and maturity of its decoloniality. Only after this genealogical, historical and epistemological analysis of liberation theology from a decolonial revisionist lense can its dialogical interaction with Latin American testimonial and historical narrative be discussed in connection with indigenous issues. Liberation theology’s decolonial potential as well as the theoretical concepts of “indigeneity” and “Indianness” must be our points of reference so that our analysis of this
dialogical relationship can contribute something new and original to the study of liberation theology and Latin American literature.
CHAPTER ONE

Liberation Theology: The Genealogy of a Concept

Part One

Published in 1971 in Spanish, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (English translation, 1973) is the foundational work for the articulation of a liberation theology for Latin America. Written by Gustavo Gutiérrez, a Peruvian priest, this work became the springboard for a fruitful school of theological reflection that became very popular in Latin America in the 1980s and is still commonly followed today not only in Latin America but also in other parts of the world.¹ Although the initial insights of liberation theology, with its eminently economic-political discourse centered on the poor of the earth and its emphasis on the liberating historical praxis to transform the unfair structures of our world, have always been its solid foundation, liberation theology as a critico-theoretical discourse has experienced a complex transformation and evolution since its emergence in the early 1970s.

Liberation theology is defined by Gustavo Gutiérrez as “a critical reflection on Christian praxis in the light of the Word” (*A Theology of Liberation* 11) or as “reflexión crítica en y sobre la praxis histórica en confrontación con la palabra del Señor vivida y aceptada en la fe” (*La fuerza histórica* 257). Enrique Dussel, however, is more explicit and defines it as “momento reflexivo de la profecía, que arranca de la realidad humana, social, histórica, para pensar desde un horizonte mundial las relaciones de injusticia que

¹ Liberation theology is also currently practiced in Africa, Asia and even in Europe and the USA.
According to Dussel, that injustice is thought of “teológicamente a la luz de la fe, articulada gracias a las ciencias humanas, y a partir de la experiencia y el sufrimiento del pueblo latinoamericano” (“Historia de la fe cristiana” 93). The starting point for liberation theology is therefore the structural poverty and injustice of the Latin American reality as well as a new element that was not present in previous theological reflections: The historical praxis. As has been noted by Spanish liberation theologian Juan José Tamayo-Acosta, the historical praxis is not so much the object of liberation theology but the locus from which the theological reflection is articulated. This means that liberation theology offers a new hermeneutical perspective of faith due to its innovative theological methodology (Para comprender 60). According to Gutiérrez, this new method is based on the idea that theology is a secondary act preceded by the Christian charity commitment, which is the first act (qtd. in Tamayo-Acosta, Para comprender 60). That is why Tamayo-Acosta reminds us that “esta observación que parece obvia y a primera vista ingenua e intrascendente, constituye el punto decisivo de la TL y supone una verdadera revolución en la metodología teológica” (Para comprender 60). The revolutionary hermeneutics of liberation theology contrasts with academic theology. The latter has traditionally privileged reflection from faith over compromise, which is irrelevant or just a moral derivation. Therefore, the starting point of academic theology is not reality but the theological certainties and dogmatic statements of the revelation (Tamayo-Acosta, Para comprender 60).

The historical praxis and the Bible on their own, however, are not enough to interpret the complex Latin American reality. That is why the methodology of liberation
theology is structured on the basis of the so-called mediations: Socio-analytical, hermeneutic and practical. The socio-analytical mediation departs from the idea that theology needs to make use of Marxism and the social sciences in order to uncover the deep recesses and hidden mechanisms of the Latin American reality that are eclipsed by mainstream capitalist ideology.² In other words, the theological discourse of liberation theology has to become hybridized with the best contributions from sociological and Marxist thinking if it wants to be truly critical and unmask Latin America’s situation of exploitation, oppression and neocolonization. Marxism and the social sciences are therefore secondary tools or instruments that can help liberation theology to critically apprehend the causes behind Latin America’s structural poverty and violence. This, in fact, is nothing new in the history of theology as a discipline if we remember the crucial influence of some elements of Aristotle’s and Plato’s Hellenistic thinking upon Christianity many centuries ago. If Christian thinking became hybridized with Greek philosophy in the past, why should it not become hybridized with Marxism and the social sciences in the present? The key role of the socio-analytical mediation, however, does not mean that the social sciences and Marxism are the starting point for liberation theology. As has been pointed out by Tamayo-Acosta, “su punto de arranque es la praxis histórica, la realidad latinoamericana, pero esa realidad, como muestra Ellacuría,³ ‘es mediada

² All these mechanisms may be very obvious for us today but they were not so in the 1960s and 70s when they were eclipsed by the “developmentalist” ideology. The term “developmentalism” questions the development policies implemented by the rich countries of the world so that the poor countries could leave their situation of underdevelopment. Those policies turned out to be ineffective modernizing and reformist measures that, in the long run, only contributed to perpetuate and make worse the state of underdevelopment. The reason for this is the colonization in the past and the neocolonization in the present of underdeveloped countries by the developed nations. That is why, following Cuban critic Roberto Fernández Retamar’s “vampirical metaphor,” it is more accurate and realistic to speak of “underdeveloping” and “underdeveloped” countries.

³ Ignacio Ellacuría was a Spanish Jesuit priest and liberation theologian and philosopher who was also rector of the University of Central America of San Salvador. He was murdered by the Salvadoran army on
criticamente por un determinado análisis sociológico, dentro de un marco interpretativo general’” (Para comprender 73). Mexican liberation theologian R. Vidales also observes that the social sciences give liberation theology “mayor lucidez histórica, más criticidad e instrumental analítico” (48). Le tus see how.

First of all, the interaction between Marxism and liberation theology is quite complex and problematic and certainly demands its concrete historicization and theorization from a specifically Latin American perspective that is never clearly present in Gutiérrez’s reflection and contrasts with his tendency to generalize, totalize and homogenize the diversity of the vast field of Marxist theoretical production under the vague terms “Marxism” and “Marxist thought.” In fact, the relationship between Marxism and Latin America was very difficult from the start. In the words of Marxist critic Ronaldo Munck, “the original Marxist engagement with Latin America was anything but felicitous, with Karl Marx having a singular misencounter with the continent as we shall see” (154). Marx’s article on Simón Bolívar, published as an entry in The New American Cyclopaedia in 1858, shows a Eurocentric, imperialist and prejudiced approach to the figure of the liberator that completely distorts and deforms his image and persona. Bolívar is depicted by the German philosopher as a dictator, a despot and a tyrant who is also a coward lacking political and intellectual agency, thus becoming a puppet manipulated by his political allies.¹⁴ On the other hand, Engels’s 1848 article

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¹¹ Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez points out in connection with Marx’s interpretation of Bolívar that “Marx asimila a Bolívar al fenómeno del bonapartismo, pero al hacerlo su enfoque eurocéntrico le hace perder de vista la especificidad de las sociedades latinoamericanas” (121). According to the Argentinean critic,
praising and legitimating the conquest of México by the USA also reveals the same imperialist perspective. Marx’s and Engels’s early writings on Latin America therefore present the Eurocentric stance of the countries of the center, which was philosophically and intellectually sanctioned by the prejudiced Hegelian view of the savagery and barbarity of non-European societies, which were considered to be “peoples without history.”

It would be a serious mistake, however, to reduce Marx’s and Engels’s thinking on Latin America to their early writings on the subject. As has been noted by Carlos Franco and José Aricó, there is a vast corpus of articles, essays and letters written by Marx and Engels from the 1860s on dealing with Russia, India, Ireland, Latin America and other non-Western peripheral nations. All these texts show a radical change of perspective. Those about the Russian, Irish and Indian agrarian commune reveal how
Marx’s method to move towards socialism is only valid for Western countries and cannot be applied to non-Western societies or marginal agrarian Western nations like Ireland. Following Franco, one can see that Marx shows in his late writings a rejection of the attempt to transform “su teoría del capitalismo en Europa Occidental en una teoría histórico-filosófica que predice los procesos de desarrollo en todas las sociedades, en cualquier situación histórica en que se encuentren” (19). There are some rural communal societies, like those of India, Ireland and Russia, in which the main working force of the people is represented by the peasantry and not by the urban proletariat. Peasants, of course, may join forces with other social groups like the urban workers and intellectuals. Marx contends in some of his late texts that these societies can reach socialism without going through a previous capitalist stage, as is the case with Western countries.

One cannot help but agree with Franco that there are two interpretative paradigms in Marx’s view of the non-Western world: The Eurocentric paradigm, which is present in his early works, and the decentering of history paradigm, which appears in his examination of the national experiences of Russia, India, Ireland and China many years later (16-22). According to Franco, the passage from the first to the second paradigm took place due to the fact that “la concepción centralizadora de la historia del desarrollo capitalista en el mundo, a partir de un modelo europeo occidental que se generaliza y somete al oriente a su regulación, cedió paso a una concepción por la cual se descentra la historia del desarrollo industrial y los procesos nacionales son reconocidos en su...
pluraldad” (21). The specific national conditions for the emergence of a socialist state are therefore not universal but depend on the socio-economic, political and historical coordinates, which, in the case of non-Western countries or peripheral Western nations like Ireland, are different from those of the West. It would be very tempting to say that the passage from the Eurocentric to the decentering of history paradigm demonstrates how Marx and Engels finally overcame their Eurocentric mentality. This is precisely Aricó’s position. Things, however, are not so easy. Aricó’s thesis is that Marx cannot be criticized too much for being Eurocentric since he modified his perception of Latin America and all the other countries of the periphery. Nevertheless, he can certainly be accused of following Hegel’s philosophy of universal history. The Argentinean critic, however, contends that it is a fact that the economic, political and historical development of Latin America was quite different from that of the Europe known by Marx. Therefore, it was inevitable for Marx, just as for any other man of his time, to follow Hegel’s theory of the “peoples without history” not so much because he were Eurocentric but because of the different socio-economic and political conditions of late nineteenth-century Europe and Latin America.

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7 This is the main idea on which Marx’s second interpretative paradigm on the non-Western world is founded. According to Franco, other important features of this second view are: The acknowledgement of the heterogeneity of the economic developments of the Western and non-Western world and of their conflicting interdependence; the displacement of the center of the revolutionary process from Western to non-Western societies and the development of the national revolution of the latter in the conditions of the social revolution of the former; the historical possibility for oriental societies to reach socialism without experiencing a preliminary capitalist phase, and, in the case of Russia, the foundation of its socialist revolution on communal peasant institutions; the existence of different historical subjects of the revolutionary movement in Asian and/or colonial societies (peasantry, urban proletariat, little bourgeoisie and intellectuals) vis-à-vis those of the socialist revolutions of Western capitalist countries; and the different nature of the necessary tasks to transform Asian and/or colonial societies (political independence, agrarian revolution and industrial and commercial protection) in comparison with those taking place in capitalist European nations (19-20).
Was Marx able to overcome his Eurocentrism in the second stage of his thinking, as is asserted by Aricó? It is true that his articles against imperialist actions like the annexation of Texas and California to the USA, the Anglo-French-Spanish armed conflict in Juarista México, the practice of slavery by England and the USA and the Spanish and British repression in Cuba, Jamaica and other islands of the Caribbean seem to reveal the emergence of what could be called an “anti-imperialist consciousness.” Marx’s Eurocentrism, however, is still present in the particular case of Latin America since the communal lands of the Indians of Peru and other parts of the subcontinent are never discussed in his writings in connection with the experience of the Russian, Indian and Irish commune when the socio-economic, political and historical conditions of the former were very similar to those of the latter. The consequence of this is that, unlike Russia, Ireland or India, Marx does not believe that a country like Peru, with a mainly agricultural economy tied to the indigenous rural communism coming from the time of the Incas, can experience a socialist revolution without previously going through a capitalist stage. The only possible explanation for this is that, towards the end of his life, Marx still perceived Latin America in Hegelian terms as an instance of a “people without history.” This, contrary to Aricó’s thesis, demonstrates that he was never really able to go

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8 The volume *Materiales para la historia de América Latina*, edited by Pedro Scarón, shows that, besides the articles on Bolívar and the conquest of México by the USA, Marx and Engels wrote many other later texts on Latin America in which they criticize European and American imperialism. Among the most significant of these are those about slavery in the USA, slave-trafficking and the British government, the Antilles and Guayanas, the Anglo-Franco-Spanish invasion of Juarista México and the Panama scandal. The book, which includes many articles that have never been translated into the English language, is certainly the best source to study the interaction of Marx’s and Engels’s thought with Latin America. An English-language edition of this excellent anthology would be most welcome.

9 Carlos Franco observes at the end of his discussion of Marx’s writings on Russia that “si nos hemos detenido en el enfoque de Marx sobre las comunidades campesinas no sólo es porque ello nos permitirá más adelante comprobar la extraordinaria similitud que tiene con aquél desarrollado por José Carlos Mariátegui . . . sino también por las bases que ofrece para el estudio del desarrollo en los países andinos” (62).
beyond Eurocentrism although it is true that he sometimes had some anti-imperialist insights. Aricó’s argument, on the other hand, is quite innocent, for what can be more imperialist, biased and Eurocentric than following the Hegelian philosophy of history in the case of Latin America? A great thinker like Marx should have questioned and refuted it since, like any other part of the world, Latin America has its own history even though its historical evolution may take place in quite different socio-economic and political terms from those of Europe. That would be precisely the challenge for Marx’s writings on the indigenous commune in Latin America, which was never historicized or theorized by him. It is difficult to imagine something more Eurocentric than this.

Carlos Franco, on the other hand, follows Aricó’s position but believes that, although Marx’s conception of the Irish development emerges from the study of a European colonial reality, it contributes enough theoretical elements to set the foundation for a perspective from which to analyze the main features of Latin America’s historical evolution (49). Nevertheless, Franco, pretty much like Aricó, notes how Marx could not possibly avoid the Hegelian thesis of the “peoples without history” in the case of Latin America. This was due to the fact that, unlike Ireland, “en América Latina, en cambio, la fragmentación, superposición y conflictos entre los grupos étnicos impedían la posibilidad de su convergencia ‘nacional’ ” (50). What Franco forgets is that, in fact, there was a national political project in Latin America: That of the Creole elites, which eclipsed the alterity of the indigenous and African Other through exploitation, slavery and extermination in the name of the economic interests of bourgeois white men. It is true that, as is noted by Franco, the historical development of national identity in Latin America took place in different terms from those of Europe. A collective national identity
was certainly more vital and viable in Ireland through its pretensions to become an independent state with an emergent industrial development in the past before the English oppression (Franco 49-50). This, however, does not mean that Latin American national identity does not have its own history but that it has a different history, that is, another history.

One of the main features of this Other History outlined by Franco is quite debatable. It is true that the formation of Latin American national identity is defined by a progressive process of métissage, which would be much better conceived in terms of the notions of transculturation, cultural hybridity and colonial semiosis, and also by the constitution of a socio-political movement against the foreign oppressor and the self-centering of economic and political institutions as well as fundamental decisions (Franco 50). Nevertheless, Franco’s observation that a national unitary collective conscience is constituted out of the fragmentation of the various group consciences is actually quite problematic. Such a national conscience was almost always the result of Creole bourgeois-liberal ideology, which was not always supported by indigenous and African social groups. Even when it was, one cannot help seeing here a manipulation of these subaltern sectors by the white man, as was the case with Hidalgo in México and even with Bolívar. The consequence of this is that, unfortunately, the national political project of the emergent Latin American republics was patriarchal, white and bourgeois.

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10 It is interesting to remember how Bolivar had an African-descended man called Piar shot dead after he became the leader of an alternative revolutionary movement to his own. In his article on the liberator, Marx observes that “Piar, un hombre de color, originario de Curazao, concibió y puso en práctica la conquista de la Guayana, a cuyo efecto el almirante Brion lo apoyó con sus cañoneras” (“Bolívar y Ponte” 84). According to Marx, “bajo las falsas imputaciones de haber conspirado contra los blancos, atentado contra la vida de Bolívar y aspirado al poder supremo, Piar fue llevado ante un consejo de guerra presidido por Brion y, condenado a muerte, se le fusiló el 16 de octubre de 1817” (“Bolívar y Ponte” 85).
Another problem with Franco’s argument is the distinction he tries to make about the evolution of the phenomenon of colonialism in Ireland and Latin America. His belief that the construction of national identity in the former, which goes against English governmental administration, was not present in the latter is certainly quite mistaken. It may be true that, as is observed by Franco, “en América Latina, el Estado ‘independiente’ (administración, ejército, fronteras, legislación, etc.) se constituía en el frágil y parcial soporte del proceso de construcción de la nación” (50). The Latin American Creole elites, however, also had a national project, mainly defined by their emancipatory economic and political interests, that threatened Spanish domination a few decades before. In other words, Latin America also had a colonial past pretty much like Ireland or India though the historical context and time frame were not the same. Franco, on the other hand, is quite contradictory when admitting that “sin embargo, resulta claro que en su reflexión sobre Irlanda, Marx abre la posibilidad de pensar la nación en términos de una estructura económica y política autocentrada que es una de las problemáticas constitutivas del fenómeno nacional en América Latina” (51). This means that Franco ends up questioning Marx’s Eurocentric conception of Latin America in Hegelian terms as a “people without history,” which he had previously legitimated at the beginning of his discussion on Marx’s writings on Ireland.

Pedro Scarón explains in a note to Marx’s article that “Piar habría instado a varios jefes pardos a proclamar una ‘republica de hombres libres e iguales’ ” (Materiales 113). Scarón explains that Bolívar accused Piar of defending the principles of the war of colours to destroy the equality instituted since the early days of the insurrection against the Spanish. Scarón, however, believes that Piar’s execution had nothing to do with the war of colours but was due to Bolívar’s wish to introduce more discipline into his army. Piar, in fact, was organizing a national African liberation movement as an alternative to that of Bolívar. Therefore, it seems more likely that Bolivar wanted to get rid of the leader of a new revolutionary movement that truly defended the interests of the subaltern sectors of society instead of those of the Creole elites disguised as the interests of the people.
The critical analysis of Aricó’s and Franco’s ideas on the complex relationship between Marx’s thought and Latin America shows how we cannot be so sure about the disappearance of the Eurocentric trace in Marx’s later writings. The fact that Marx never included the Latin American case in his analysis of the Russian commune or the agrarian reforms in India and Ireland in spite of the similarity, without forgetting the differences, with the communal lands of Latin America’s indigenous peasants seems to point in this direction. Therefore, one cannot help but draw the conclusion that Marx’s exclusion of Latin America from his discussions on Russia, India and Ireland because of the influence of Hegel’s philosophy is a clear instance of the Eurocentrism of his later years. The consequence of this is that the question of Marx’s Eurocentrism concerning Latin America in his second interpretative paradigm on the non-Western world is not just ambiguous, as can be deduced from Franco’s inconsistent position, but a real fact. The best proof for this is Marx’s contradiction between what can be called the Eurocentric trace of his thinking and the anti-imperialist insights that have been mentioned before.

Unfortunately, the beginnings of the influence of Marx’s thinking on Latin America in the late nineteenth century are tied to the major works of the first stage of his thinking or Eurocentric paradigm and not to the emergent anti-imperialist consciousness, which, though ultimately eclipsed by the Eurocentric trace, defines the decentering of history paradigm of the second stage of his philosophical reflection. This means that Latin America’s first experience of Marxism was that of the Eurocentric Marx. As has been noted by Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, the Marx that came to Latin America was that of the texts that first circulated in the continent, “el del Manifiesto Comunista, primer tomo de El Capital y el Prólogo a la Contribución a la crítica de la economía política, textos
leídos desde la década del ochenta del siglo pasado en clave social demócrata y, desde los años veinte del presente siglo en clave leninista de la Tercera Internacional” (119). The consequence of this is that Latin American Marxism was conceived in its initial stages as a copy and imitation of European dogmatic Marxism instead of being resemanticized and adapted to the national historical, socio-economic and political contexts of the Latin American countries.\textsuperscript{11}

Sánchez Vázquez points out how it is the Marxism of the most important section of the Socialist International, the German Social Democrat Party, that comes to Latin America and influences the first Latin American socialist parties (125). This social democrat version of Marxism reviews and reforms Marx’s main theses, and, as far as colonized and dependent countries are concerned, follows the most Eurocentric writings by Marx and Engels. According to these, their fate is subjected to the logic of capitalist expansion, which condemns them to be sacrificed in the name of the historical progress embodied by Western nations (Sánchez Vázquez 125). The Argentinian critic cannot help but draw the conclusion that “habría, pues, un Marx ausente en América Latina: el de sus escritos sobre Irlanda y la comuna rural rusa” (123-24). And it is precisely the Latin American copy of the Marxism imposed by German social democracy in the Second International that overlooks “una cuestión fundamental con la que tendrá que bregar el marxismo, teórica y prácticamente, en el continente: la lucha anti-imperialista de los pueblos latinoamericanos por su autonomía y verdadera liberación nacional” (Sánchez

\textsuperscript{11} Sánchez Vázquez notes how “el primer marxismo de América Latina es el que llega de Europa a través de núcleos de trabajadores europeos inmigrados y transplantados miméticamente, como había sucedido con otras ideologías políticas europeas como la del liberalismo” (124). According to Sánchez Vázquez, Marxist socialism was born in Argentina with the foundation of the Argentinian Socialist Party by Juan B. Justo in 1895. The first Spanish translation of \textit{El Capital}, carried out by Justo himself, was also published in Madrid that year (124-25). Vázquez also calls attention to the rivalry between Latin American Marxists and anarchists from the late nineteenth century to the 1920s, especially in South America and México.
Vázquez 126). Carlos Franco, on the other hand, believes that the exclusive knowledge of Marx’s Eurocentric vision by the first Latin American Marxists not only made them lose popular leadership “frente a movimientos que, como los populistas, tenían una perspectiva política endógena, sino que al impedirles una visión más certera de la realidad en la que operaban los inhabilitó por largas décadas como promotores teóricos y prácticos del desarrollo económico, la articulación de la nación y la construcción del socialismo” (63-64).

It is not until José Carlos Mariátegui in the 1920s that a truly Latin American Marxism emerges as a result of the reformulation of Marx’s thinking to the specificity of Peru’s historical, socio-economic and political conditions. Mariátegui’s Marxism is the fruit of the resemanticization of the ideas of Marx and Lenin, with a marked influence of Sorel’s Bergsonian philosophy, that of Gobetti and Benedetto Croce and possibly Gramsci’s thinking, to the concrete situation of the Peruvian indigenous reality.

12 Mariátegui believed that Marxism was a fundamentally dialectical method, that is, a method integrally founded on the facts of reality. According to the Peruvian intellectual, “no es, como algunos erróneamente suponen, un cuerpo de principios de consecuencias rígidas, iguales para todos los climas históricos y todas las latitudes sociales. Marx extrajo su método de la entraña misma de la historia. El marxismo, en cada país, en cada pueblo, opera y acciona sobre el ambiente, sobre el medio, sin descuidar ninguna de sus modalidades” (“Mensaje al congreso obrero” 168-69). Sheldon B. Liss observes how Peruvian historian and philosopher Augusto Salazar Bondy considered Mariátegui’s greatest achievement to be the application of Marxist methodology to a comprehension of Peruvian history and society (129). According to Liss, Salazar Bondy viewed Mariátegui “as an exponent of ‘open Marxism,’ the idea that Marxist thought should be revisable, undogmatic and adaptable to new situations. Mariátegui knew that Latin America faced different problems from Europe, to which Marx’s thinking was tuned” (129-30). Ronaldo Munck points out that for Mariátegui, “Marxism was not a universal truth to be ‘applied’ in Peru but rather needed to become a true expression of Peruvian social reality” (157). Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez calls attention to the fact that in his Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality, Mariátegui faces an unknown experience in Latin American Marxism: “Definir en términos marxistas la realidad nacional. Lo habitual era subsumir esa realidad en el marco de las categorías generales de un marxismo eurocéntrico en las que se borraba lo específico de las categorías nacionales” (160).

13 José Aricó observes how Mariátegui’s antieconomicist and anti-dogmatic interpretation of Marx was possible thanks to the key influence that the Italian idealist tradition of left-wing Crocean and Marxist revolutionary currents had on his thought (“Introducción” XIV-XV). According to Aricó, “Mariátegui leyó a Marx con el filtro del historicismo italiano y de su polémica contra toda visión transcendental,
establishing the connection and points of contact with the ancient Inca agrarian communes.\textsuperscript{14} It was Mariátegui’s belief that Inca and Western socialism shared a common essence even though their realization and specific conditions might be different.

\textsuperscript{14} Mariátegui believed in the existence of an Inca communism, which was based on the collective property of the land divided into single lots cultivated by the ayllu or group of related families, on the collective property of water, land for cattle and forests as well as on communal cooperation as far as work and harvests were concerned. It is for this reason that Inca communism is considered by Mariátegui to be an “agrarian communism” (“El problema de la tierra” 71). Mariátegui observes how private property was unknown, the lands were divided into three parts (one for the Sun and the other two for the Inca and the People), and were cultivated by the People. He also underlines the fact that, after giving preference to the cultivation of the lands of the Sun, those of the old men, widows, orphans and soldiers on duty were cultivated. After that, it was the People itself that cultivated its own lands and had the obligation to help each other (“El problema de las razas” 240). The great social welfare of Inca agrarian communism is often praised by Mariátegui, who reminds us that “la economía del gobierno producía sobrantes. Éstos se destinaban a los almacenes, que en la época de escasez, eran proporcionados a los individuos sumidos en la miseria por sus enfermedades o por sus desgracias. Así se establece que gran parte de las rentas del Inca, volvían después, por uno u otro concepto, a las manos del pueblo” (“El problema de la tierra” 240). Another interesting point is Mariátegui’s observation that “es de advertir que el estado incaico no conocía la miseria por sus enfermedades o por sus desgracias. Así se establece que gran parte de las rentas del Inca, volvían después, por uno u otro concepto, a las manos del pueblo” (“El problema de la tierra” 240). Mariátegui’s conclusion on Inca agrarian communism is that “todos los testimonios históricos coinciden en la aserción de que el pueblo incaico laborioso, disciplinado, panteísta y sencillo—vivía con bienestar material. Las subsistencias abundaban; la población crecía” (“Esquema de la evolución económica” 45). Mariátegui, however, also underlines that, although it is a fact that agrarian communism took place under the autocratic regime of the Incas, its origins can certainly be found in pre-Incaic times (“El problema de la tierra” 70; “El problema de las razas” 239).
In this sense, the *ayllu* structure, which was the basis for Inca agrarian communalism, certainly contrasts with the Western collectivization of industrial production.

Mariátegui, however, believed in the great potential of the *ayllu*, still present today in some communal structures of Peru’s indigenous cultures, as the foundation for Marxist communism. This can be appreciated in his observation that, among underdeveloped populations, “ninguna como la población indígena incásica, reúne las condiciones tan favorables para que el comunismo agrario primitivo subsistente en estructuras concretas y en un hondo espíritu colectivista, se transforme, bajo la hegemonía de la clase proletaria, en una de las bases más sólidas de la sociedad colectivista preconizada por el comunismo marxista” (“El problema de las razas” 244). It must be noted, however, that, as has been pointed out by Sara Castro-Klarén, the Andean *ayllu* structure is much older than the Inca agrarian communalism based on it.\(^{15}\) According to Castro-Klarén, this means that the Andean *ayllu* structure is a “history of fact” that contrasts with Marx’s collectivist utopia although the former may have been considered by Mariátegui as the basis and source of inspiration for the latter. It is therefore necessary to make a difference between the historicity of the *ayllu* and Marx’s communist utopia, something that was perceived in rather ambiguous terms by Mariátegui himself.\(^{16}\)

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\(^{15}\) Hildebrando Castro Pozo points out in connection with the *ayllu*’s origins that “la raíz originaria del ayllu prehistórico fue, pues, el clan o los grupos hórdicos constituidos y organizados por vínculos de consanguinidad, en una sola unidad económica, al principio de calidad sólo consumitiva y defensiva, y con posterioridad esencialmente productora” (61). Castro-Klarén’s point agrees with Castro Pozo’s observation that “y ésta es la razón de ser de nuestros *ayllus* agrícola-ganaderos en la Costa de la Sierra, y la de la organización imperial posterior, sobre aquellas bases, que perduró muchos siglos, hasta que nuevos factores económicos la destrozaron por la Conquista” (11-12).

\(^{16}\) I would like to thank my advisor, Professor Sara Castro-Klarén, for her valuable comments and observations on the *ayllu* in one of our long conversations on Mariátegui’s socialist project for Peru.
The difficulty of defining the *ayllu* as a concept is an old problem that has originated a controversy between contemporary anthropologists and indigenous leaders and writers in which *indigenista* intellectuals like Mariátegui and Hildebrando Castro Pozo also play a crucial role. Present-day anthropologists focus on the transformation of the *ayllu* as a result of the impact of Western Modernity upon it. This means that they only pay attention to the interaction of the *ayllu* structure with the forces of Modernity and globalization and how it was radically transformed by both but they forget the *ayllu’s* history of fact, which begins in pre-Incaic times and continues up to the present in spite of its modifications. Present-day anthropologists believe that the fact that the *ayllu* was repeatedly refashioned through multiple transformations under Incaic, colonial, republican and modern states makes defining the term difficult and renders its concept useless (Weismantel 84). Contemporary indigenous leaders and writers, however, underline the continuity of the *ayllu* from its pre-Incaic origins to the present as opposed to Western Modernity. This does not mean that the *ayllu* is conceived as a refuge from the latter but rather “as a force that could actually deconstruct Western cultural hegemony” (Weismantel 92) through indigenous socio-political agency. The fact that the *ayllu* has actually been preserved but has also been drastically altered by the modern world suggests that the best thing to do is to combine both approaches. What we must do is therefore to gather what has been preserved and use it in order to forge an alternative to Western Modernity and capitalist globalization without forgetting how the *ayllu* was seriously modified by both. This means that, whether we like it or not, indigenous

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17 Weismantel highlights the fact that “each successive political regime tried to destroy the *ayllu’s* political power and wrest away its resources; even rare state attempts to preserve or reconstruct the *ayllu* transformed it, regularizing disparate local systems into conformity with an externally imposed order” (84).
cultures, and therefore the *ayllu*, are also a part of Modernity and globalization, which underlines their transcultural nature.

Contemporary indigenous leaders and writers are basically right in their approach. Their mistake, however, is to idealize and essentialize the *ayllu* structure by trying to isolate it from neoliberalism as a category from quite an ethnocentric perspective. Their problem is therefore to forget the dialogical interaction established between the *ayllu* and the forces of Modernity as a result of the former’s variability observed by anthropologists. On the other hand, the problem with the concept of the *ayllu* present in *indigenista* intellectuals like Mariátegui and Castro Pozo is to conceive it in communist terms by eclipsing the *ayllu* structure with the Western Marxist ideology instead of making a difference between *ayllu*’s history of fact and Marx’s communist utopia, as is suggested by Castro-Klarén. The eclipse of the *ayllu* by Marxism is present in Mary Weismantel’s observation that “Latin American intellectual life has been profoundly influenced by Marxian theory; in the Andes, indigenismo developed out of the ideas of communist writers such as Hildebrando Castro Pozo (1924), who asserted that the *ayllu* was a communistic institution. Mariátegui forcibly underlined the political origins of his work” (93). Weismantel’s conclusion, however, is that, like world systems theory, the origins of the *ayllu* lie in Marx, which shows how the American anthropologist completely overlooks the *ayllu*’s historicity underlined by Castro-Klarén. The concept of the *ayllu* may well have been influenced and even distorted by Marxist thought but its historical origins are certainly in pre-Incaic times and not in the early twentieth century.

The distinction between the *ayllu* structure and Marxist communism, in spite of their points of connection, is not incompatible with the great potential of the *ayllu* as the
basis and point of departure for Mariátegui’s decolonial \textit{indigenista} socialism. It must be noted, however, that Mariátegui’s conception of the \textit{ayllu} is somewhat ambivalent. As has been pointed out by Weismantel, “Mariátegui’s ayllu is twofold: in his polemical essays it is celebrated as a still-vital direct survival from ancient times, while in his analysis of Peruvian history it appears in a more realistic guise, subject to the vicissitudes of history” (87). This shows that, pretty much like contemporary indigenous writers and other \textit{indigenista} intellectuals of the 1920s like Castro Pozo, Mariátegui sometimes tends to idealize and essentialize the \textit{ayllu} structure. In this sense, it is not a coincidence that, as has been underlined by Dutch anthropologist Arij Ouweneel, “Marxist political activist José Carlos Mariátegui . . . is mentioned as the innovator of the term [\textit{ayllu}] in Peruvian political and social science. However, he borrowed his wisdom from Peruvian writer Hildebrando Castro Pozo’s \textit{Nuestra comunidad indígena} (1928)” (81). On the other hand, the tendency to essentialize the \textit{ayllu} as a result of the influence of Marxism is also present in the classical functionalist studies of important anthropologists like John V. Murra as well as in contemporary indigenous thought.\footnote{Weismantel notes that “working in a Marxian framework, Murra (1975, 1978) built a picture of Andean political economy under the incas that challenged conventional political thinking by breaking with the assumption that polities inevitably control contiguous, bounded territories” (82-83). According to Weismantel, Murra’s great contribution was to argue that “the great ayllus of the southern Andes—as large independent states—were organized according to a principle of territorial dispersal into ‘vertical archipelagos’ to allow better exploitation of the sharply differentiated ecologies of the high Andes” (83). Murra’s work therefore represents the fusion of economic anthropology with the nascent field of ecological anthropology. Weismantel also highlights the fact that Murra’s findings are only of historic interest for many American anthropologists today since “changing demographic patterns, a depressed rural economy, and greater dependence on imported foods make agricultural systems seem less important now” (83). On the other hand, R. Tom Zuidema, a Dutch anthropologist working within a European structuralist tradition, carried out in the 1970s analyses of Incaic mathematical and spatial thinking, which “were as important in symbolic anthropology as Murra’s had been for political economy” (Weismantel 83). This was due to the fact that Zuidema studied “the peculiar scalar nature of the ayllu . . . both in terms of function and symbol” (Weismantel 83). See Murra’s works \textit{Formaciones económicas y políticas del mundo andino} (1975) and \textit{La organización económica y política del estado inca} (1978), and Zuidema’s article “The Inca Kinship System: A New Theoretical View” (1977).}
As has been mentioned before, Mariátegui believed in the capacity of the Inca indigenous population to transform the ayllu structure, which had been preserved from old times, under the hegemony of the proletarian class into one of the most solid foundations of the collectivist society announced by Marxist communism. This means that, pretty much like Marx in his writings on the Russian commune and the Indian and Irish agrarian reform and Gramsci in his book on the revolutionary potential of the peasants in southern Italy, Mariátegui believed that Peru’s indigenous peasantry could experience a socialist revolution without going through a previous capitalist stage by joining forces with the urban proletariat. Mariátegui is to be admired for developing this specifically Peruvian socialist project without ever having access to Marx’s texts on Russia, India and Ireland, which were first published many years after his death. It is very likely that, as has been pointed out by Aricó, the connections between Mariátegui’s Marxist project for Peru and Gramsci’s for Italy are not the fruit of the influence of the latter on the former but rather of their ideological affinity as non-dogmatic Marxists, which made them face a similar situation with similar theoretical instruments (“Introducción” XLII).

It is Mariátegui’s relationship with Peruvian indigenista intellectuals that made it possible for him to reassess the indigenous question in an original and innovative way.  

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19 *Indigenismo* was a political, intellectual and artistic movement that, from the 1920s to the 1960s, questioned the exploitation and oppression of Latin America’s indigenous peoples, celebrated their cultures and sought to help them by improving their conditions through educational and development programs. *Indigenismo* especially flourished in those Latin American countries where the majority of the population was made up by Indians like Mexico, where it became a nation-building strategy, Guatemala and Peru. Its presence, however, was also felt outside Latin America in other countries with indigenous populations like Canada and the USA. Though well-intentioned, *indigenismo* was not an indigenous but a bourgeois intellectual movement that was ultimately rather paternalistic and colonialist. Literary *indigenismo* had a strong impact in Peru with important writers like Mariátegui himself, Enrique López Albújar, Ventura García Calderón, José Ángel Escalante, César Vallejo and José María Arguedas as its main
As has been noted by Aricó, Mariátegui moved away from the humanitarian and philanthropic positions of the first indigenistas, and, after the imperialist and capitalist penetration became more prominent, from understanding the indigenous problem just as a “national question.” Mariátegui’s originality was to approach the Indian question in economic and political terms from the perspective of the problem of the land, which is that of production relations (Aricó, “Introducción” XLVI). That is why the Argentinian critic underlines that linking the indigenous problem with that of the land “Mariátegui encuentra en la estructura agraria peruana las raíces del atraso de la nación y las razones de la exclusión de la vida política y cultural de las masas indígenas” (“Introducción” XLVI). This means that, for Mariátegui, the problem of the Indian is that of the feudal structure of the land from the Colony to the present. A socialist revolution led by indigenous peasants in alliance with the urban proletariat is therefore necessary to put an end to the oppression of agrarian feudalism. According to Aricó, pretty much like Gramsci but without knowing it, “Mariátegui entendió como ningún otro que la ‘cuestión campesina’ en Perú se expresaba como ‘cuestión indígena’, o dicho de otra manera se

practitioners. A famous controversy on literary indigenismo took place from 1927 to 1928 in Peru. Although Mariátegui and Luis Alberto Sánchez were the two main polemists, other Peruvian intellectuals and artists like López Albújar, García Calderón, Escalante, Luis E. Valcárcel, Manuel M. González and Manuel A. Seoane were also involved in it. All the texts of the controversy have been collected by Manuel Aquézolo Castro in the volume La polémica del indigenismo. Aricó, on the other hand, points out that it was Mariátegui’s ties with the indigenista movement that allowed him to approach the forbidden world of the “real” Peru, that Peru whose “reemergence” is essential for the national realization. It was through his reading of the works of Castro Pozo, Uriel García and Luis E. Valcárcel that Mariátegui acquired the knowledge of the Peruvian rural world (“Introducción” XLVIII). The key role of Amauta is also underlined by Aricó since it allowed the establishment of an organic link between coastal intellectuals, influenced by the urban labour movement, Marxist socialism and the new currents of European culture, and the Cusco intelligentsia, the emblem of the indigenista movement (“Introducción” XLVIII). According to the Argentinian critic, Amauta “se constituyó en una plataforma única de confluencia y confrontación de ambas vertientes del movimiento social, en una suerte de órgano teórico y cultural de la intelectualidad colocada en el terreno de las clases populares urbanas y rurales” (“Introducción” XLVIII-XLIX). For an in-depth study of Andean indigenismo including Mariátegui’s contribution to the subject, see Jorge Coronado’s book The Andes Imagined: Indigenismo, Society and Modernity.
encarnaba en un movimiento social concreto y determinado, y que de su capacidad de irrupción en la vida nacional como una fuerza autónoma dependía la suerte del socialismo peruano” (“Introducción” XLVI).

Mariátegui’s articulation of a specifically Latin American Marxism is therefore the result of the interweaving of Marxism and indigenismo from an anti-imperialist perspective that gives rise to what can be called a “decolonial Marxism.” I use this term to refer to the various anti-imperialist readaptations and resemanticizations of European Marxism to the Latin American cultural and historical reality, which take place in different terms according to the specific socio-economic and political context of each Latin American country. If there is something that defines Latin American decolonial Marxism, this is precisely its intrinsic liminality. As has been pointed out by Ronaldo Munck, “Latin American Marxisms have always been in a ‘liminal’ situation, part European but also, arguably, distinctly American, and it is thus no coincidence that the concept of hybridity has had great resonance in Latin America” (154). The liminality of Mariátegui’s decolonial Marxism was captured by Mariátegui himself, who understood it in the following terms:

Lo que afirmo, por mi cuenta, es que de la influencia o aleación de “indigenismo” y socialismo, nadie que mire al contenido y a la esencia de las cosas puede sorprenderse. El socialismo ordena y define las reivindicaciones de las masas, de la clase trabajadora. Y en el Perú las masas —la clase trabajadora— son en sus cuatro quintas partes indígenas. Nuestro socialismo no sería, pues, peruano, —ni sería siquiera socialismo— si no se solidarizase, primeramente, con las reivindicaciones

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20 It must be noted that Mariátegui’s socialist project does not only involve the hybridity of Marxism and indigenismo but also that of Marxism itself, which, as has been mentioned before, is the fruit of the intertwining of Marx’s and Lenin’s thinking with that of the Italian Marxists of the Ordine Nuovo group (especially Gobetti and Benedetto Croce) along with Sorel’s Bergsonian philosophy. Mariátegui’s Peruvian socialism therefore involves what can be called a “meta-hybridization,” that is, a hybridization of hybridizations.
indígenas. En esta actitud no se esconde nada de oportunismo. Ni se descubre nada de artificio, si se reflexiona dos minutos en lo que es socialismo. Esta actitud no es postiza, ni fingida, ni astuta. No es más que socialista. ("Intermezzo polémico" 75-76)

Mariátegui’s conception of Peru’s indigenista Marxism\(^2\) as the “confluence” or “amalgamation” of indigenismo and socialism is not without its problems due to its totalizing and homogenizing connotations. Like Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz’s notion of “transculturation,” Mariátegui tends to globalize and synthesize the actual liminality, heterogeneity and indefinite nature of the product, which, in fact, cannot possibly have a final definition or revision. The result of the interweaving of indigenismo and socialism must therefore be understood as the adaptation or resemanticization of those structures of agrarian communism that have survived up to the present to the historical, socio-economic and political coordinates of a Marxist-Leninist socialist revolution. The starting point of this would be the preserved structures of ayllu, so that, always within a hybrid indigenous and socialist conceptual framework, the transformation of feudal agrarian property into communal lands shared by the indigenous peasants can take place as the main element of a Marxist-Leninist socialist revolution always understood in indigenous economic and cultural terms.

\(^2\) Although some critics speak of Mariátegui’s “indigenous socialism” and Mariátegui himself referred to it as “Indo-socialism,” it is more accurate and exact to call it “indigenista socialism.” This is due to the fact that, although Mariátegui was quite aware that the last stage of his socialist project involved the agency of indigenous peasants themselves as subjects of history and the revolution, this was not present in the late 1920s yet. In other words, Mariátegui and all the other Peruvian socialist intellectuals of the 1920s did not belong to the rural proletariat but to the bourgeoisie even though they were Marxist thinkers who disagreed with the official ideology of their social class. Therefore, Mariátegui’s socialism was not made by Indians but for them by a Marxist activist and intellectual who, though with bourgeois origins, had the courage to question the values of his social class and become supportive of the plight of the Indian in his country. The fact that Mariátegui himself speaks of the amalgamation of indigenismo, instead of “indigeneity,” and Marxism reinforces this idea and also underlines his own contradictions when speaking of “Indo-socialism.”
The complexity, heterogeneity and indeterminacy of this process is also defined by its bidirectionality since Western Marxism must also be adapted and resemanticized to the socio-economic, political and historical context of Peru’s indigenous cultures, thus taking into consideration their worldview, myths and traditional spirituality dating back to Incaic and pre-Incaic times. Mariátegui’s *indigenista* socialism is therefore the fruit of the interweaving of Western Marxism and Andean thought from a political-ideological, socio-economic and cultural point of view. The result of Mariátegui’s interweaved decolonial Marxism is therefore far from being a synthesis due to its complex, unstable and open nature, which is the consequence of being always in progress or, even better, at the beginning of that fluid, heterogenous and unfinished process that characterizes it. It is precisely for this reason that Mariátegui, in a famous editorial published in number seventeen of his magazine *Amauta*, underlined the idea that Peruvian socialism has to be a creation and not just a copy or imitation of that of Europe: “No queremos, ciertamente, que el socialismo sea en América calco y copia. Debe ser creación heroica. Tenemos que dar vida, con nuestra propia realidad, en nuestro propio lenguaje, al socialismo indio-americano. He aquí una misión digna de una generación nueva” (“Aniversario y balance” 127). In fact, Mariátegui’s belief in the crucial role played by the *indigenista* element in his socialist project is due to the inability of the local bourgeoisie to put an end to the feudal organization of the land:

Descendiente próxima de los colonizadores españoles, le ha sido imposible [a la burguesía] apropiarse de las reivindicaciones de las masas campesinas. Toca al socialismo esta empresa. La doctrina socialista es la única que puede dar un sentido moderno, constructivo, a la causa indígena, que, situada en su verdadero terreno social y económico, y elevada al plano de una política creadora y realista, cuenta para la realización de esta empresa con la voluntad y la disciplina de una clase que hace hoy su
Mariátegui’s articulation of the first Latin American decolonial Marxism from a specifically Peruvian context introduces the category of “decoloniality” in contemporary Latin American thought. I understand as decoloniality the different critico-theoretical discourses produced in Latin America from a socio-economic, political, anthropological, philosophical or theological perspective, which usually becomes interdisciplinary, that approach the complexity of the Latin American reality from the point of view of the colonized vis-à-vis that of the colonizer, that is, from an anti-imperialist epistemological locus of enunciation, which is that of the subaltern subjects of the poor countries of the periphery. Mariátegui therefore represents the first experience of a decolonial Latin American Marxism in its Peruvian indigenista version. Although the Cuban revolution and the Zapatista movement can certainly be considered the summits of decolonial Marxism in Latin America after Mariátegui, decolonial Marxism has still had a significant presence in Peru through revolutionary leaders on behalf of the rights of the indigenous peasantry like Hugo Blanco and thinkers like political activist Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, sociologist Aníbal Quijano and Gustavo Gutiérrez himself. Latin American decoloniality therefore continues after Mariátegui’s death with significant Marxist contributions. Other theoretical discourses of Latin American decoloniality are those of dependency theory —the fruit of applying Marxism to the social sciences—, Frantz Fanon’s philosophy of decolonization,\textsuperscript{22} and, especially, liberation theology and

\textsuperscript{22} It must be noted that the terms “decoloniality” and “decolonization” are not the same. The former designates the different theoretical currents produced in Latin America from an anti-imperialist perspective from Mariátegui on in which Marxist thinking has usually played a key role. The latter is a
philosophy. All decolonial critico-theoretical currents like liberation theology and philosophy and, many years later, Néstor García Canclini’s theory of cultural hybridity, Walter Mignolo’s decolonial thinking and Nelson Maldonado-Torres’s decolonial ethics are usually heavily influenced by decolonial Marxist thinking.

How does Gutiérrez use Marxism in his theorization of a theology of liberation for Latin America? As has been mentioned before, Gutiérrez’s incorporation of Marxism into his theological reflection is not without epistemological problems due to his tendency to globalize and synthesize when speaking of “Marxism” and “Marxist thinking.” The Peruvian priest makes use of some loose ideas from, among other Marxist intellectuals, Mariátegui, Marx, Engels, Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, Aníbal Quijano, Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg and Bhukarin in connection with the Latin American reality but never offers his own coherent theory of a decolonial Marxism or explain what the main contributions of these thinkers for liberation theology are. In fact, liberation theology is all about decolonial Marxism but Gutiérrez just takes it for granted instead of going into it and problematizing it from a historical and theoretical point of view. A close reading of A Theology of Liberation shows how the Marxism used by liberation theology is quite hybrid and heterogeneous and how Mariátegui’s decolonial indigenista socialism adapted to the specific conditions of Peru is its point of departure empowered by Che Guevara’s concept of the “new man” and Marx and Engels’s idea of man as a subject of history and agent of his own destiny adapted to a Latin American cultural context. The decoloniality

particular theoretical discourse that is an instance or possible realization of the category of decoloniality. Nelson Maldonado-Torres, one of the most important Latin American theoreticians of decoloniality today, understands Fanon’s thinking in this way when using it as the starting point for his Latin American decolonial ethics. For a discussion of the significance of Fanon’s ideas for the articulation of a decolonial ethics, see Maldonado-Torres’s work Against War: The Underside of Modernity.
of liberation theology’s Marxism is therefore present from its foundations. Although Mariátegui, Che Guevara, Marx and Engels are the main influences of Gutiérrez’s Marxism, some isolated but interesting contributions from other critics like Aníbal Quijano, Gramsci and Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez and guerrilla fighters like Néstor Paz Zamora, Camilo Torres and Che Guevara himself are also present.

The intrinsic hybridity of liberation theology’s Marxism can be quite problematic in spite of its Latin American decolonial basis. Gutiérrez, for instance, never notes that, although its point of departure is Mariátegui and his adaptation of European Marxism to Peru’s historical, political and socio-economic context, this is not the same in the rest of Latin America but varies according to each country. This means that there is not one single realization of decolonial Marxism in liberation theology but many depending on the specific differences of the adaptation process to the particular reality of each Latin American nation. Like Gutiérrez’s Marxism, his theology of liberation tends to totalize and homogenize even though the Latin American historical reality of misery and poverty is a shameful fact. That must certainly be liberation theology’s point of departure but not of arrival, which must be theorized and historicized in depth according to the national context of each country. In Gutiérrez’s case, this would be his native Peru. Gutiérrez’s book, however, never includes the theorization and historicization of a specifically Peruvian theology of liberation. Another problem is that the ties and points in common between liberation theology and the thinking of Mariátegui and all the other intellectuals who contribute to liberation theology’s hybrid Marxism are never discussed by Gutiérrez either. Let us see what those points of connection are.
The influence of Mariátegui’s thinking on liberation theology can first be appreciated in Mariátegui’s emphasis on revolutionary action, which agrees with the key role of the historical praxis or orthopraxis in Gutiérrez’s reflection. One cannot help noticing the connections between Mariátegui’s observation that “la vida, más que pensamiento, quiere ser hoy acción, esto es combate. El hombre contemporáneo tiene necesidad de fe. Y la única fe, que puede ocupar su yo profundo, es una fe combativa” (“Dos concepciones de la vida” 8) and Gutiérrez’s orthopraxis, which emphasizes “the work and importance of concrete behavior, of deeds, of action, of praxis in the Christian life” (A Theology of Liberation 8) and is defined in the following terms:

Indeed, if human history is above else an opening to the future, then it is a task, a political occupation, through which we orient and open ourselves to the gift which gives history its transcendent meaning: the full and definitive encounter with the Lord and with other humans. ‘To do the truth,’ as the Gospel says, thus acquires a precise and concrete meaning in terms of the importance of action in Christian life. Faith in a God who loves us and calls us to the gift of full communion with God and fellowship with others not only is not foreign to the transformation of the world; it leads necessarily to the building up of that fellowship and communion in history. Moreover, only by doing this truth will our faith be “verified,” in the etymological sense of the word. (A Theology of Liberation 8)

Mariátegui’s belief in the need of faith, which becomes a sort of religious myth, for the success of the revolutionary praxis can be seen in his observations that “el mito mueve al hombre en la historia. Sin un mito la existencia del hombre no tiene ningún sentido histórico” (“El hombre y el mito” 10) and that “la fuerza de los revolucionarios no está en su ciencia; está en su fe, en su pasión, en su voluntad. Es una fuerza religiosa, mística, espiritual. Es la fuerza del Mito” (“El hombre y el mito” 12). This is connected with Mariátegui’s belief, founded on Sorel’s thinking, that there is a similarity between
religion and revolutionary socialism. Mariátegui follows here Sorel’s reading of Bergson, who thought that the region of our deep self can not only be occupied by religion but also by revolutionary myths (“El hombre y el mito” 12). The novelty of Gutiérrez’s use of Marxism, with the only precedent of Camilo Torres, is precisely the confrontation of his Latin American decolonial Marxism, which is quite complex, heterogeneous and indefinite, with the Christian teachings. According to Gutiérrez, “contemporary theology does in fact find itself in direct and fruitful confrontation with Marxism, and it is to a large extent due to Marxism’s influence that theological thought, searching for its own sources, has begun to reflect on the meaning of the transformation of this world and human action in history” (A Theology of Liberation 8). Liberation theology is, in fact, the fruit of this confrontation.

Gutiérrez certainly considers Christian faith and love essential for Latin American revolutionary Christians to carry out liberation theology’s historical praxis. The point of connection with Mariátegui is therefore the need of the faith and myth of religion for the triumph of revolutionary praxis. The difference is that the myth for Mariátegui’s revolution is the socialist faith or mystical force of the indigenous peasants and the urban proletariat. The myth for Gutiérrez’s liberation theology, however, is the decolonial interpretation of the Exodus biblical episode, which feeds the faith and mysticism of all the revolutionary Christians engaged in the historical praxis (indigenous peasants, proletarians, mestizos and blacks). In other words, the idea of religious myth and faith is

23 Camilo Torres Restrepo was a Colombian Catholic priest who joined the National Liberation Army of Colombia guerrilla group in the 1960s. He was probably the first member of the Latin American church who interpreted the Sacred Scriptures from a decolonial Marxist perspective reflecting on the points of contact between Marxism and Christianity. That is why he is considered to be a precursor of liberation theology. For an in-depth study of his life, works and legacy, see Camilo Torres (1969), by Germán Guzmán Campos, Camilo Torres: A Biography of the Priest-Guerrillero (1975), by Jo Broderick, and Revolutionary Priest: The Complete Writings & Messages of Camilo Torres (1971), edited by John Gerassi.
just abstract and symbolic in Mariátegui but becomes specifically Christian in concrete terms in Gutiérrez. Mariátegui’s identification of socialism and religion is therefore mirrored by Gutiérrez’s confrontation of Marxism and theology. This, however, could be apparently contradictory. After all, what can Marxism, a symbol for atheism, have in common with the Christian religion?

The point of connection with socialism is the preferential option for the poor, the exploited and the oppressed of some Christian sectors as well as their recognition of the revolutionary potential of religion, which not only belongs to the past but also to the present. Michael Löwy contends that an attentive reading of the paragraph including Marx’s well-known phrase “religion is the opium of the people,” which appeared in his article on Hegel’s Philosophy of Right (1844), not only shows how Marx is critical of religion but also how he takes into account the “dual character” of the religious phenomenon in “dialectical” terms (5-6). According to Löwy, Marx’s analysis of religion “was therefore ‘pre-Marxist’, without any class reference, and rather ahistorical. But it had a dialectical quality, grasping the contradictory character of the religious ‘distress’: both a legitimation of existing conditions and a protest against them” (6). Löwy also notes how Engels paid more attention to religion than Marx through his analysis of the relationship of religious representations to class struggle (8). Although a materialist, an atheist and an irreconcilable enemy of religion, Engels “nevertheless

24 Michael Löwy reminds us that “in any case, it should be clear that Mariátegui did not want to make of socialism a Church or a religious sect, but intended to bring out the spiritual and ethical dimension of the revolutionary struggle: the faith (‘mystical’), the solidarity, the moral indignation, the total commitment at the risk of one’s own life (what he called the ‘heroic’)” (18).

25 The key section of the paragraph Löwy refers to is Marx’s observation that “religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and the protest against real distress. Religion is the sight of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of an unspiritual situation. It is the opiate of the people” (“Toward the Critique” 263).
grasped, like the young Marx, the *dual* character of the phenomenon: its role in legitimating the established order but also, according to social circumstances, its critical, protesting and even revolutionary role. Furthermore, most of the studies he wrote concerned the *rebellious* forms of religion” (Löwy 8).

Löwy reminds us how Engels was interested in primitive Christianity, which he defined as “the religion of the poor, the banished, the damned, the persecuted and the oppressed” (8). According to the Brazilian critic, the German philosopher also perceived the points of contact between this primitive Christianity and modern socialism: The two great movements are not the product of leaders and prophets — although many prophets are present in both — but are mass movements; they are movements of the oppressed, who are prosecuted and hunted down by the ruling authorities; and both preach imminent liberation from slavery and poverty (8-9). This means that, for Engels, “the parallel between socialism and early Christianity is present in all movements that dream, throughout the centuries, of restoring the primitive Christian religion — from the Taborites of John Zizka (‘of glorious memory’) and the Anabaptists of Thomas Münzer to (after 1830) the French revolutionary communists and the partisans of the German utopian communist Wilhem Weitling” (Löwy 9). The difference is that “the primitive Christians transposed deliverance to the hereafter whereas socialism places it in this world” (Löwy 9). That distinction, according to Löwy, becomes blurred in Engels’s analysis of the great peasant wars in Germany if we remember how Thomas Münzer himself, the theologian and leader of the revolutionary peasants and heretic (Anabaptist) plebeians of the sixteenth century, wanted “the immediate establishment on earth of the Kingdom of God, the millenarian Kingdom of the prophets. According to Engels, the
Kingdom of God for Münzer was a society without class differences, private property and state authority independent of, or foreign to, the members of that society” (Löwy 9). This is another point of connection with liberation theologians, who believe that, although the culmination of the Kingdom of God takes place in the afterlife, it already has a partial realization or first manifestation here on earth through the historical praxis of Latin American revolutionary Christians.

Marx and Engels were therefore aware of the revolutionary potential of religion, which is precisely its point of contact with Marxism. Their only mistake was to believe that this revolutionary potential was confined to the past for good, and therefore that “[it] no longer had any significance in the epoch of modern class struggle” (Löwy 18). Although Löwy believes that this forecast was more or less historically accurate for a century until the emergence of liberation theology, he forgets the Brazilian experience of Canudos (1898), which, through a sort of primitive Christianity having nothing to do with Marxism, already demonstrates the revolutionary potential of religion some years after Marx’s death. Löwy certainly observes a few important exceptions in France like the Christian socialists of the 1930s, the worker priests of the 1940s and the left wing of the Christian unions (the Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens) in the 1950s but, once again, overlooks important Latin American examples like the Argentinian worker priests and the first base ecclesial communities of Brazil in the 1950s. The Brazilian critic, however, is to be admired for noting that “socialism for Mariátegui was inseparable from an attempt to re-enchant the world through revolutionary action. Little wonder that he became one of the most important Marxist references for the founder of liberation theology, the Peruvian Gustavo Gutiérrez” (18).
The use of Marxism by liberation theology has been especially criticized by the Vatican due to its supposedly atheist connotations.\(^{26}\) Liberation theologians, however, have justified in different ways liberation theology’s intersection of Marxism and Christianity as an integral part of its methodology. Uruguayan liberation theologian Juan Luis Segundo, for instance, contends that most Marxists who are atheists do not consider their atheism a key element of Marxist thinking. Therefore, Segundo cannot help wondering “will the Church be able to teach them what they should believe in order to be fully Marxist?” (Theology and the Church 99). Ignacio Ellacuría, on the other hand, insists on the idea that atheism, which is often professed by dialectical materialism, is not necessary for historical materialism (“Estudio teológico pastoral” 85). The most original view, however, is that of Chilean liberation theologian Pablo Richard, who believes that atheism is not interpreted in religious terms by all Marxists since it has an eminently political dimension.

The main point of Richard’s thesis is that “el ateísmo marxista no se define teológicamente en oposición al mundo creyente sino políticamente en oposición al mundo dominante” (La iglesia latinoamericana 88). Marxism is certainly a political problem for Richard, and therefore a dimension of the political practice of liberation. Richard’s main insight is that Marxist atheism does not deny God directly but the divinization and fetishization of the capitalist system. The practice of atheism is therefore inevitable for the political practice against fetishized capitalism (La iglesia latinoamericana 89). That is why the Chilean theologian notes that “toda práctica de

\(^{26}\) The 1984 Roman Instruction on liberation theology states that “atheism and the denial of the human person, his liberty and rights, are at the core of the Marxist theory. . . . Moreover, to attempt to integrate into theology an analysis whose criterion of interpretation depends on this atheistic conception is to involve oneself in terrible contradictions” (VII, 9).
liberación es por sí misma anti-fetichista y anti-idolátrica. Éste es el hecho político fundamental, al interior del cual el ateísmo marxista adquiere su sentido original y fundamental” (La iglesia latinoamericana 89). Juan José Tamayo-Acosta, on the other hand, also reminds us that, independently of whether atheism may play a key role in Marxism or not, all liberation theologians agree in the rejection of an interpretation of Marxism “en cuanto Weltanschauung omniexplicativa, que niega toda referencia transcendente al hombre y a la historia (ideología atea), y en la imposibilidad de conciliación de dicha ideología con el cristianismo” (85). In Gustavo Gutiérrez’s words, “ese rechazo lo hacemos desde nuestra fe y también desde un sano análisis social” (qtd. in Tamayo-Acosta, Para comprender 85).

As has been mentioned above, the myth and faith in the revolution of Mariátegui’s indigenista socialism has a similarity with the myth and faith in the historical praxis of Gutiérrez’s liberation theology. For Mariátegui, the revolutionary’s strength is in his faith in the socialist revolution, which gives him a religious, mystical and spiritual power. For Gutiérrez, the strength of a Christian is in his faith in God and the cause of the poor, which sets in motion the historical praxis. Myth is a possible utopia for Mariátegui that corresponds to a concrete historical reality like that of his native Peru. The myth of the power of the oppressed in history, which is inspired by a liberating interpretation of the book of Exodus, is a possible Christian utopia for Gutiérrez founded on the Latin American historical reality of poverty and injustice. Gutiérrez’s notion of the historical praxis, however, is also influenced by Marx’s reflections on humankind as the agent of its own destiny. Following Marx’s thinking in his Theses on Feuerbach, Gutiérrez notes that “Marx situated himself equidistant between the old materialism and
idealism; more precisely, he presented his position as the dialectical transcendence of both. Of the first he retained the affirmation of the objectivity of the external world; of the second he kept the transforming capacity of human nature” (A Theology of Liberation 19). Knowledge for Marx was therefore indissolubly linked to the transformation of the world, which “made humankind more aware of the socioeconomic determinants of its ideological creations and therefore freer and more lucid in relation to them. But at the same time these new insights enabled humankind to have greater control and rational grasp of its historical initiatives” (Gutiérrez, A Theology of Liberation 19-20). Gutiérrez’s conclusion is that “these initiatives ought to assure the change from the capitalistic mode of production to the socialistic mode, that is to say, one oriented towards a society in which persons can begin to live freely and humanly” (A Theology of Liberation 20).

Gutiérrez expresses the idea of humankind as the agent of its own destiny in Latin American terms in the next section of his book. Although Latin American revolutionary Christians in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed become subjects of history through the historical praxis, Gutiérrez never explains this process in the concrete and specific context of Peru or any other Latin American country. He has a tendency to totalize and generalize when speaking of Latin America without paying attention to Peru’s historical, socio-economic and political coordinates. This problem is also present when Gutiérrez deals with the key question of violence in the historical praxis in connection with the Latin American church. Gutiérrez points out that, due to the fact that institutionalized violence violates fundamental rights in Latin America so patently, “an important part of the Latin American clergy request, moreover, that ‘in considering the problem of violence in Latin America, let us by all means avoid equating the unjust
violence of the oppressors (who maintain this despicable system) with the just violence of the oppressed (who feel obliged to use it to achieve their liberation)” (*A Theology of Liberation* 64). Gutiérrez’s point is that violence can be legitimate in some cases if it is a defensive violence or counterviolence. Gutiérrez, however, never contextualizes or analyzes the just violence in Peru in relationship to the guerrilla experience represented by the figure of Hugo Blanco in the 1960s, which had to be known by him and whose Trotskyist influence is probably present in Gutiérrez’s general reflections on just violence in Latin America quoted above. It was Blanco himself who said, a few years before *A Theology of Liberation* was first published, that the violence of guerrilla warfare is never a permanent strategy but just a temporary tactic that must inevitably take place in certain situations. This idea has been clarified by Blanco in the following terms:

It is also necessary to explain that we are not against guerrilla warfare in principle, but we are certainly against using it artificially, out of context. We believe that guerrilla bands will arise fundamentally as ours did, that is, as a result of the political development of the local peasants. If our work is integrated into the development of mass political consciousness, there is no reason to turn to artificial guerrilla activity; it appears to us that if we need to use such activity, it will be as an exception, not the rule.

In summary, for us, the Trotskyists, guerrilla warfare is a tactic that may be used in a particular country under particular conditions, but it is not a strategy. (*Land or Death* 63-64).

One cannot help connecting Blanco’s explanation not only with Gutiérrez’s considerations on just violence but also with his critical reflections on guerrilla warfare in Latin America. According to the Peruvian priest, “guerrilla groups appeared, intending quickly to mobilize the masses: they did this by urging them to follow a radical line more than through an organization really representing their interests. Military defeats followed each other. The political lessons are nevertheless important” (*A Theology of Liberation*...
Although there are obvious connections, it is not clear, however, whether Gutiérrez is influenced by Blanco or if both thinkers just happen to share a similar opinion on the subject. Even so, one cannot help wondering why Blanco is never mentioned by Gutiérrez in his book to support his ideas on the just violence of the oppressed. Perhaps this has to do with political reasons, for dealing with such a controversial figure as Blanco in the early 1970s could have made things difficult for the Peruvian priest before the Latin American Episcopal Conference and the Roman curia. Blanco’s absence from Gutiérrez’s book is even more shocking if we remember that they had a common friend: José María Arguedas. It is a fact that Blanco and Arguedas kept up correspondence admiring each other. It is also well known that Gutiérrez and Arguedas were very good friends and shared an ideological affinity as far as the plight of the indigenous peasants of their country was concerned. In this sense, it is not a coincidence that one of the two dedications of *A Theology of Liberation* is for Arguedas himself or that Gutiérrez chose to include an illuminating excerpt from Arguedas’s novel *Todas las sangres* (*All the Bloods*, 1964) after both dedications. Moreover, Gutiérrez and Arguedas also

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27 The case of the possible influence of Blanco’s thinking upon Gutiérrez’s is similar to that of the possible influence of Gramsci’s thinking upon Mariátegui’s. In both cases, we do not know for sure whether this influence ever took place or not. I believe, however, that, independently of this, new studies that explore in depth the points of contact between Hugo Blanco and Gutiérrez as well as those between Gramsci and Mariátegui are very much needed.

28 This epistolary exchange has recently been collected by Hugo Blanco himself in his recent book *Nosotros los indios* (2010).

29 This long passage contains the conversation between a priest, who represents the church of the rich, and an old sacristan, who represents that of the poor. The main idea is that the God of the rich is not that of the poor and that, as is demonstrated by the old sacristan, God cannot possibly be everywhere. Can God be in the caciques and the agents of imperialist penetration, mainly the big transnational corporations, who exploit and oppress the Indian? The religious hypocrisy of the colonizing and subaltern elites is thus underlined by the passage. Surprisingly, this novel has never been translated into the English language.
exchanged some letters in which Hugo Blanco was mentioned and Gutiérrez even wrote a famous essay on Arguedas.  

Gutiérrez’s reflections on guerrilla warfare not only show points in common with Blanco’s thinking but also seem to suggest that the influence of Che Guevara’s and Fidel Castro’s ideas on liberation theology’s Marxism has more to do with the “new humanity” ideology, which is adapted by Gutiérrez from a liberationist Christian perspective to Latin America, than with the central role played by guerrilla warfare in Che Guevara and the Cuban revolution. The concept of the “new humanity” is incorporated by Gutiérrez into his theological reflection followed by an illuminating passage quoted from Che Guevara:

There is also present in this process of liberation, explicitly or implicitly, a further ramification which it is well to keep in mind. The liberation of our continent means more than overcoming economic, social, and political dependence. It means, in a deeper sense, to see the becoming of humankind as a process of human emancipation in history. It is to see humanity in search of a qualitatively different society in which it will be free from all servitude, in which it will be the artisan of its own destiny. It is to seek the building up of a new humanity. Ernesto Che Guevara wrote: “We revolutionaries often lack the knowledge and the intellectual audacity to face the task of the development of a new human being by methods different from the conventional ones, and the conventional methods suffer from the influence of the society that created them.” (A Theology of Liberation 56)  

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30 See Gutiérrez’s book Entre las calandrias (1982), especially the 2014 Peruvian edition, which includes two new essays on Arguedas by the author to commemorate the centennial of his birth.

31 Che Guevara’s quotation is taken from his famous essay “Man and socialism in Cuba,” published in the volume Venceremos! The Speeches and Writings of Che Guevara (1968), edited by John Gerassi. Gutiérrez also quotes another important passage from this essay to illustrate the connection of the Christian love that defines the historical praxis with the altruistic feelings of love that guided young Latin American revolutionaries like Guevara himself or Néstor Paz Zamora in the 1960s: “Let me say, with the risk of appearing ridiculous, that the true revolutionary is guided by strong feelings of love. It is impossible to think of an authentic revolutionary without this quality . . . In these conditions the revolutionary leaders must have a large dose of humanity, a large dose of a sense of justice and truth, to avoid falling into dogmatic extremes, into cold scholasticism, into isolation from the masses. They must struggle every day.
Another point of contact between Mariátegui’s and Gutiérrez’s thinking is the former’s belief that the subject of the socialist revolutionary praxis in Peru must be the fruit of the collaboration of the indigenous peasants with the urban proletariat. Mariátegui noted in 1928 that “la organización de los obreros y campesinos, con carácter netamente clasista, constituye el objeto de nuestro esfuerzo y nuestra propaganda y la base de la lucha contra el imperialismo extranjero y la burguesía nacional” (“Principios programáticos” 157). This idea was deepened by Mariátegui one year later in the following terms:

Los indios y negros que son en común, y por igual, objeto de la explotación más intensa, constituyen por estas múltiples razones, masas inmensas que, unidas a los proletarios y campesinos explotados, mestizos y blancos, tendrán por necesidad para insurgir revolucionariamente contra sus exiguas burguesías nacionales y el imperialismo monstruosamente parasitario, para arrollarlos, cimentando la conciencia de clase, y establecer en la América Latina el gobierno de obreros y campesinos. (“El problema de las razas” 234)

This idea agrees with Gutiérrez’s thesis that it is the poor of Latin America that have to become subjects of history and agents of their own destiny through the historical praxis. The category of the poor, which is used by Gutiérrez in rather homogeneous and assimilationist terms, refers to all those subaltern sectors of the Latin American reality both in the countryside and in the city. Therefore, the poor for Gutiérrez are the urban proletarians and the peasants, who can be white, black, indigenous or mestizo. Gutiérrez, however, knows too well that, in the case of Peru, to say poor is to say Indian. This means that, when speaking about the poor, he especially has in mind the indigenous peasants. This also agrees with Mariátegui’s idea that, in the case of Peru, the Indian is

so that their love of living humanity is transformed into concrete deeds, into acts that will serve as an example, as a mobilizing factor” (“Man and Socialism in Cuba” 398).
the nation and the nation is the Indian. Moreover, Gutiérrez’s identification with the plight of the Indian is not surprising if we remember his own indigenous ascendancy as a mestizo. On the other hand, the fundamental category of liberation, which is understood by Gutiérrez as the fruit of the transformation of reality through a qualitative change in the system that opens the way to a socialist society, reminds one again of Mariátegui’s emphasis on the praxis of the social transformation. This is especially important if we take into consideration how the union of all the Latin American subaltern sectors proposed by Gutiérrez agrees with the crucial role played by the common front of indigenous, black and mestizo peasants and proletarians in Mariátegui’s transforming praxis of the Peruvian reality.

Mariátegui’s concern with the peculiarities of the Peruvian context also mirrors the significance of the social, economic and political coordinates of the Latin American historical reality, a reality of poverty and injustice, for liberation theology’s reflection. The specificity and particularity of Mariátegui’s analysis, however, contrasts with the globalizing and synthesizing nature of Gutiérrez’s since the Peruvian priest never focuses on the concrete case of Peru or any other Latin American nation. Gutiérrez’s liberation theology should theorize and historicize the historical praxis paying attention to Peru’s socio-economic, political and historical conditions, which are the ones he knows first hand for having lived them in his own flesh. As has been mentioned before, there is not just one but various theologies of liberation as a result of the peculiarity of historical, socio-economic and political factors in the different Latin American countries. It is precisely because of his totalization and homogenization of the historical praxis that, unlike Mariátegui, Gutiérrez never clarifies what the specific relationship between Latin
American revolutionaries and a socialist political project is. In other words, what is the alternative political project favoured by liberation theology?

This is something ambiguous that becomes a loose thread in Gutiérrez’s book. Although at one point he seems to sympathize with a democratic socialism, it is not clear whether this project takes place within a capitalist or anticapitalist framework. Most of his book, on the other hand, presents different situations and contexts in which he privileges a historical praxis taking place in specifically anticapitalist terms to the point of legitimating the so-called “just violence” through an anticapitalist armed struggle such as Hugo Blanco’s. Perhaps Gutiérrez believes that different conditions do require different socialist political projects even though democratic socialism may be the most desirable. If that is the case, those Latin American situations and contexts should be theorized and historicized in dialogue with the key question of the historical praxis in liberation theology instead of being eclipsed and taken for granted.

The question of “just violence” in liberation theology can be connected with Mariátegui’s ethical vision of revolutionary action, which is influenced by Sorel’s thinking. The ethics of Gutiérrez’s historical praxis on behalf of the poor, which may justify the use of defensive violence or counterviolence in certain situations, from the perspective of a decolonial interpretation of Christianity is therefore another point of connection with the Peruvian intellectual. Therefore, Mariátegui’s ethics understood as a collective creation through the struggle against capital certainly has echoes in Gutiérrez’s

32 Gutiérrez’s preference for a democratic socialism is probably influenced by the example of Salvador Allende in Chile in the early 1970s. Surprisingly, Allende, like Hugo Blanco, is never mentioned by Gutiérrez in A Theology of Liberation. Once again, this probably has to do with political reasons connected with the conservatism of the Latin American Episcopal Conference and the Vatican. Allende was considered too much of a subversive figure in 1971 by ecclesiastical authorities both in Latin America and Rome for Gutiérrez to openly dare to sympathize with his democratic Marxist political project.
liberating Christian ethics conceived as a collective creation to transform society into a new world of peace, love and justice. On the other hand, Mariátegui’s characterization of the Peruvian bourgeois class as unable to carry out the national liberation of peasants and proletarians also agrees with Gutiérrez’s belief in the incapacity of the Latin American conservative sectors—the political, economic and religious elites—to liberate the poor from exploitation and oppression.

Liberation theology reinterprets Mariátegui’s decolonial Marxism from a Christian dimension in order to incorporate it into its reflection as a secondary socio-analytical mediation. It must be remembered that, in spite of the influence of Mariátegui’s ideas, liberation theology’s starting point is still the Latin American reality in confrontation with the Sacred Scriptures interpreted from a decolonial lense. Only then can Marxism be used as a secondary theoretical instrument that empowers liberation theology’s reflection, especially its decolonial nature. Therefore, another link between liberation theology and Mariátegui’s thinking is how both discourses incorporate elements from other critico-theoretical currents. Like Mariátegui’s indigenista socialism, which needs to be enhanced and empowered in dialogue with other currents of thought like Sorel’s philosophy, Gutiérrez’s theological reflection needs to be empowered by entering into a dialogue with Latin American decolonial Marxism understood not just as a philosophical discourse but also in its application to the social sciences through dependency theory.

Dependency theory is a decolonial theoretical current, which, as a result of applying liberal reformist and Marxist thinking to the field of the social sciences, tries to demonstrate how the situation of underdevelopment of the poor countries of the world is
not due to their own flaws and inability for progress but to the historical fact of being colonized by the European powers in the past and neocolonized from an economic and political point of view by the rich countries of the West in the present. According to Gutiérrez, the starting point for dependency theory is that “the underdevelopment of the poor countries, as an overall social fact, appears in its true light: as the historical by-product of the development of other countries” (*A Theology of Liberation* 51). Dependency theory was developed by Raúl Prebisch, Enzo Faletto, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Theotónio dos Santos, Aníbal Quijano and other Latin American social scientists between the 1950s and 70s. These intellectuals wanted to find the true cause for the underdevelopment of Latin American countries. The only way to do this was to carry out their economic and political analysis of the international situation from the point of view of the periphery vis-à-vis that of the center. Gutiérrez reminds us how Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg and Bujarin were the first ones to formulate the theory of imperialism and colonialism “but despite occasional references (especially in Lenin), their perspective was fundamentally that of the capitalist countries” (*A Theology of Liberation* 52). The Latin American theorists had to reformulate this theory from the point of view of the periphery, which was never present in classical Marxist thought: “Latin American social scientists are determined to study the problems from the point of view of the dominated countries, which will allow them to illuminate and to deepen the theory of dependence. This perspective has been overlooked until now; it should lead to a reformulation of the theory of imperialism” (*A Theology of Liberation* 53).

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33 It should be noted that dependency theory has not only been theorized by Latin American intellectuals. Some of its most important theorists from outside Latin America are German-American economic historian and sociologist Andre Gunder Frank, German political theorist Susanne Bodenheimer and American sociologist and world-sytems analyst Immanuel Wallerstein.
It must be noted that the intellectuals of dependency theory form a very heterogeneous group that includes both liberal reformers and Marxist thinkers with Brazilian Marxist economist Theotónio dos Santos as the most influential figure. As has been pointed out by American political theorist Vincent Ferraro, “the debates among the liberal reformers (Prebisch), the Marxists (Andre Gunder Frank), and the world systems theorists (Wallerstein) was vigorous and quite challenging. There are still serious points of disagreement among the various strains of dependency theorists and it is a mistake to think that there is only one unified theory of dependency” (59). Dependency theory, on the other hand, emerged as a reaction to the “developmentist” ideology. This is interpreted by Prebisch as “the refusal to believe that major changes are necessary in order to accelerate the present pace of development, and the trust that social disparities will gradually be smoothed out by the dynamics of development itself” (19). The non-critical position of “developmentism” overlooks the fundamental category of dependency, which is defined by Theotónio dos Santos in the following terms:

[Dependency] is . . . an historical condition which shapes a certain structure of the world economy such that it favors some countries to the detriment of others and limits the development possibilities of the subordinate economies . . . a situation in which the economy of a certain group of countries is conditioned by the development and expansion of

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34 Among the liberal reformers are Argentine economist Raúl Prebisch—who was the first one to formulate a dependency theory—, Chilean sociologist Enzo Faletto and Brazilian social and political scientist Fernando Henrique Cardoso—who would be president of Brazil from 1995 to 2002. Among the Marxist critics are Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano, Andre Gunder Frank, Immanuel Wallerstein and Theotónio dos Santos himself. Dependency theory evolved into the world-systems theory in the 1980s and 90s, some of whose main representatives are Wallerstein, Quijano, dos Santos, Italian sociologist Giovanni Arrighi and Argentine philosopher Walter Mignolo. Some of the key works on dependency theory are Prebisch’s Change and Development—Latin America’s Great Task: Report Submitted to the Inter-American Development Bank (1971), Faletto and Cardoso’s Dependency and Development in Latin America (1979), dos Santos’s “The Structure of Dependence” (1970), Quijano’s Dependencia, cambio social y urbanización en Latinoamérica (1967), Gunder Frank’s Dependence and Underdevelopment (1972) and Wallerstein’s The Modern World-System, vol. I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century (1974).
another country, to which their own is subjected. (“The Structure of Dependence” 226)

Enzo Faletto and Fernando Henrique Cardoso also call our attention to the fact that “what happens ‘internally’ in a dependent country cannot be fully explained without taking into consideration the links that internal social groups have with external ones. Dependence should no longer be considered an ‘external variable’; its analysis should be based on the relations between the different social classes within the dependent nations themselves” (22). In spite of the lack of unity within dependency theory mentioned above, Ferraro points out three common features that are shared by most dependency theorists:

First, dependency characterizes the international system as comprised of two sets of states, variously described as dominant/dependent, center/periphery or metropolitan/satellite. The dominant states are the advanced industrial nations in the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The dependent states are those states of Latin America, Asia, and Africa which have low per capita GNP s and which rely heavily on the export of a single commodity for foreign exchange earnings.

Second, . . . external forces are of singular importance to the economic activities within the dependent states. These external forces include multinational corporations, international commodity markets, foreign assistance, communications, and any other means by which the advanced industrialized countries can represent their economic interests abroad.

Third, the definitions of dependency all indicate that the relations between dominant and dependent states are dynamic because the interactions between the two sets of states tend not only to reinforce but also intensify the unequal patterns. Moreover, dependency is a very deep-seated historical process, rooted in the internationalization of capitalism. Dependency is an ongoing process. (59-60)
According to Ferraro, there are also a number of propositions, all of which can be contested, that form the core of dependency theory. The first one is the contrast between the conditions of “underdevelopment” and “undevelopment.” While the former refers to “a situation in which resources are being actively used, but used in a way that benefits dominant states and not the poor states in which the resources are found” (Ferraro 62), the latter “simply refers to a condition in which resources are not being used” (Ferraro 62). The second one is the profoundly different historical context of the poorer countries of the world as a result of the distinction between “underdevelopment” and “undevelopment.” Ferraro points out that, for dependency theorists, these countries are not poor because they are catching up to the rich countries or because they lagged behind the scientific transformations and values of European Enlightenment but “because they were coercively integrated into the European economic system only as producers of raw materials or to serve as repositories of cheap labor, and were denied the opportunity to market their resources in any way that competed with dominant states” (62). The third proposition is that alternative uses of resources are preferable to the resource usage patterns imposed by dominant states. Ferraro notes how export agriculture is one of the dominant state practices most frequently questioned by dependency theory. Due to the high rates of malnutrition in underdeveloped countries, “many dependency theorists would argue that those agricultural lands should be used for domestic food production in order to reduce the rates of malnutrition” (Ferraro 62).

The fourth proposition amplifies the previous one: A “national” economic interest can and should be articulated for each poor country. According to Ferraro, “this national interest can only be satisfied by addressing the needs of the poor within a society, rather
than through the satisfaction of corporate or governmental needs” (62). The American political theorist, however, underlines the difficulty of determining what is “best” for the poor in the long run. That is why “dependency theorists have not yet articulated an operational definition of the national economic interest” (Ferraro 62). The fifth and last proposition contends that the diversion of resources since the emergence of dependent relationships with the European expansion in the fifteenth century is preserved not only through the power of the dominant states but also through that of the subaltern elites of the dependent states. Ferraro reminds us that “dependency theorists argue that these elites maintain a dependent relationship because their own private interests coincide with the interests of the dominant states” (62). The unfortunate consequence of this is that “the elites in a dependent state are consciously betraying the interests of their poor; the elites sincerely believe that the key to economic development lies in following the prescriptions of liberal economic doctrine” (Ferraro 62).

Dependency theory and liberation theology represent the continuation of Latin American decoloniality after Mariátegui and Haya de la Torre. Liberation theology, however, is not the product of dependency theory, which is another of its secondary socio-analytical mediations. Tamayo-Acosta observes that dependency theory makes it

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35 Carlos Franco notes the similarity of Mariátegui’s and Haya de la Torre’s points of view with those of Marx’s decentering of history paradigm. According to Franco, the fact that both Peruvian intellectuals never knew the works of the second Marx signals “un proceso creativo e intelectualmente independiente de formulación teórica” (77). Franco contends that this intellectual creativity and originality gave rise to a first Latin American version of dependency theory: “Mariátegui y Haya estuvieron en condiciones de fundar una aproximación inquisitiva y elaborar un interrogatorio consistente a la realidad latinoamericana que se expresó en la construcción de una primera teoría marxista de la dependencia, cuya calidad es, por lo menos para mí, claramente superior a otros intentos realizados en el Tercer Mundo en la misma época” (78). It is not a coincidence that the question of imperialism in the definition of political and economic dependency plays a key role in both Mariátegui’s and Haya de la Torre’s thinking. Therefore, the antecedents of a Latin American dependency theory can be found in both theoreticians. For a detailed study of the different ways in which Mariátegui and Haya approach the issue of imperialism in Peru, see pages 78-83 of Franco’s book.
possible for liberation theology to know Latin America’s situation of dependency, and also provides it with a sociological and political language of reality and helps it discover the liberating dimension of the Christian teachings (Para comprender 76). The Spanish theologian also clarifies in connection with dependency theory that “ahora bien, los teólogos de la liberación consideran que el recurso a las ciencias sociales y la asunción de sus aportaciones más relevantes no significa que la reflexión teológica haya de someterse ciegamente a los datos y a las interpretaciones de esas ciencias” (Para comprender 74). This is connected with the key idea that social analysis, because of its scientific pretensions, must never be accepted as an unquestionable dogma but requires a critical examination and a permanent confrontation. In this sense, theology cannot possibly be neutral like a dumb witness but must judge what is the most appropriate analysis of reality (Tamayo-Acosta, Para comprender 74). Dependency theory is therefore just a secondary mediation for liberation theology that will always be supervised by the theological task, orientation and sources, which, in Ignacio Ellacuría’s words, must signal “una cierta distancia critica del análisis” (“Tesis” 338).

All this suggests that dependency theory is a precious tool for the critical analysis of the Latin American reality that can help liberation theology to illuminate and reveal the most hidden and undercover aspects of that reality in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It is significant to note that both liberal reformist and Marxist dependency theorists are quoted by Gutiérrez in A Theology of Liberation and that Theotónio dos Santos, Enzo Faletto, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Andre Gunder Frank and Gonzalo Arroyo36 have

36 Gonzalo Arroyo is a Chilean Jesuit priest who, following Löwy, “rejected the dominant conception of development as a transition from ‘traditional’ to ‘modern’ society, modernity being ‘implicitly identified with the modern type of industrial capitalism’ ” (148, n. 69). Arroyo’s most important works on Latin
been the most influential on his thinking. Dependency theory, on the other hand, has always been critically assumed by all liberation theologians. Tamayo-Acosta points out how Gutiérrez himself, following Gonzalo Arroyo’s ideas, “detecta elementos intuitivos e ideológicos que pueden hacer peligrar su carácter científico, y sugiere la necesidad de eliminar los aspectos menos científicos, de precisar más los conceptos empleados y de aplicar las grandes categorías a realidades cada vez más complejas y en permanente evolución” (Para comprender 75). Leonardo Boff, on the other hand, highlights the fact that, although dependency is the determinant cause, it is not the only one since there are also historico-cultural factors operating in a critical analysis of the Latin American reality (qtd. in Tamayo-Acosta, Para comprender 75).

Another problem observed by Gutiérrez is that Latin American social scientists did not pay enough attention to the key idea that “el primer enfrentamiento se da no entre naciones o continentes, ni entre un centro y una periferia (entendidos geográficamente), sino entre clases sociales. En ese cuadro es posible analizar, sin subestimar, otras confrontaciones que tienen dinamismo propio: nacionalismo, perspectiva racial” (La fuerza histórica 246). Dependency theory is therefore a decolonial current that is corrected and perfected by the first wave of liberation theology, a new decolonial theoretical discourse that clarifies that the decolonial dimension not only involves the conflict between countries or continents and the oppression of Latin America’s indigenous and African peoples but, first and foremost, a class struggle. The first wave of liberation theology, however, can be criticized for just mentioning all those other

American dependency are his articles “Consideraciones sobre el sub-desarrollo en América Latina” (1970) and “Pensamiento latinoamericano sobre subdesarrollo y dependencia externa” (1968). An expanded and revised version of the second article was published in French as “Le sous-développement et la dépendence externe au miroir de la littérature latinoaméricaine” (1969-70).
decolonial dimensions instead of analyzing and discussing them in detail in connection with the fundamental issue of the class struggle, a task whose goal will be the focus of its second wave.

What are the contributions of Marxism and dependency theory to Gutiérrez’s liberation theology? Mainly the key question of the historical praxis, the unmasking of international capitalist neoimperialism at a time when it was covered up by the “developmentist” ideology with the intellectuals of dependency theory as the only exception, and, very especially, the deepening of his decolonial insights when reinterpreting the Sacred Scriptures from the perspective of the poor. In other words, to enrich and complement the task of theological reflection making it more critical. Both Marxism and dependency theory have the potential to unmask the asymmetrical power and economic relations between the underdeveloping and underdeveloped countries of the world. In other words, they work as a lense that allows us to see how the international poverty and injustice is the result of a game in which a minority of privileged countries literally “suck the blood” of the majority. It must be remembered once again, however, that liberation theology’s point of departure is always the Latin American reality in confrontation with the Bible. Only then can that new decolonial interpretation of the Christian teachings enter into a dialogue with a deeply hybrid and complex Latin American decolonial Marxism and the contributions of dependency theory. That is why Marxism and dependency theory are secondary socio-analytical mediations of liberation theology.

The theoretical and epistemological problems of Gutiérrez’s Marxism since the origins of liberation theology in the early 1970s are still present in 1989 in Juan José
Tamayo-Acosta’s influential work *Para comprender la teología de la liberación*. Like Gutiérrez, Tamayo-Acosta also makes the mistake of globalizing and synthesizing the role of Marxism in liberation theology instead of theorizing it and historicizing it from a specifically Latin American perspective paying attention to the historical, socio-economic and political diversity of Latin American nations. Tamayo-Acosta is obsessed with justifying liberation theology’s use of Marxism as a secondary theoretical instrument that empowers its theological reflection. This, however, is of secondary importance from an intellectual and academic point of view although it may be essential for the discussions of liberation theologians with the Roman curia. Tamayo-Acosta provides a good analysis of their controversy. The main question for the Spanish theologian is whether there is an indissoluble link between the Marxist method of analysis and Marxist ideology or not (*Para comprender* 83). The 1984 Vatican Instruction emphatically affirms that Marxism constitutes an indivisible whole whose parts cannot possibly be isolated. Liberation theologians, however, contend that this is a very controversial point on which not even Marxists themselves agree. According to Gutiérrez, Engels and Soviet Leninism, for instance, consider Marxism to be an indissoluble unit while other intellectuals, like Gramsci and Mariátegui, contend that a Marxist analysis of reality is never linked to a “metaphysical materialism” (*La verdad* 88). Juan Luis Segundo, on the other hand, reminds us that the myth of an impenetrable Marxism is always inspired by “an anti-Marxist pathos” (*Theology and The Church* 104).

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37 Tamayo-Acosta’s work is the most important handbook on liberation theology published in Spanish-speaking countries. It has turned out to be very influential not only in departments of theology but also of philosophy and sociology both in Spain and Latin America.
Liberation theologians also call attention to the fact that the Instruction’s strict position disagrees with the more flexible and detailed approach of other ecclesiastical documents like John XXIII’s encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (1963), Paul VI’s encyclical *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), and a letter by Father Arrupe, former Jesuit General, on the meaning of Marxist analysis (1980). Tamayo-Acosta notes how liberation theologians agree with *Pacem in Terris* on the need to distinguish between philosophical theories and the socio-economic, cultural and political movements coming from them (*Para comprender* 84). *Octogesima Adveniens*, on the other hand, does not deny the distinction between Marxist analysis and ideology but rather stresses the danger of not doing this. This risk, however, does not mean that the theologian is bound to make a fatal mistake, as the document implies. Hence why liberation theologians prefer Father Arrupe’s tone and approach in his 1980 letter, which highlights the fact that Marxist analysis is not the only one mixed with those ideological elements. Neoliberal social analyses, in fact, also involve a materialist and individualist vision of the world that also goes against Christian values (Tamayo-Acosta, *Para comprender* 84-85). Tamayo-Acosta, however, forgets that, even if it is possible to separate the philosophical and ideological elements of Marxism, liberation theologians actually use and accept both.

Tamayo-Acosta’s main point to refute the Vatican is that some elements of Marxist thinking are used by philosophers (Max Weber and Karl Mannheim) and even theologians (Pope John Paul II in the *Laborem Exercens* encyclical and Karl Barth) without this meaning that they are Marxist. This argument, however, is not always valid. Liberation theologians not only incorporate the Marxist analysis into their reflection as a secondary socio-analytical mediation but also favours and sympathizes with Marxist
political projects. Gustavo Gutiérrez, for instance, openly admits that the result of the historical praxis must be the creation of a new and alternative socialist society (*A Theology of Liberation* 19-20). Liberation theologians are therefore Marxist thinkers. This, however, does not mean that their Marxism is orthodox and dogmatic like that of the Soviet Union. As will be discussed below, the novelty of liberation theology’s Marxism is precisely its creative, democratic and non-dogmatic nature. Instead of endorsing a naïve position that ends up distorting the intellectual and ideological identity of liberation theologians, Tamayo-Acosta’s point should be the legitimacy for a Catholic theologian to try and hybridize Marxism and Christianity in his thinking and practice as a Christian. After that, the Spanish theologian should theorize and historicize liberation theology’s Latin American Marxism paying attention to its intrinsic hybridity, something that is never present in his analysis.

Liberation theologians have always been very critical with an orthodox and dogmatic interpretation of Marxism. First of all, it is precisely the decolonial nature of liberation theology’s Marxism that accounts for the original and innovative interpretation of the Marxist notion of class struggle by liberation theologians. Tamayo-Acosta points out that the existence of social classes and their struggle was not something discovered by Marx. Marx’s contribution was to highlight the connection between class struggle and economic factors, which became deterministic in some forms of Marxist thinking (91). That deterministic perspective is considered by Gutiérrez “totalmente ajena a la teología de la liberación” (*La verdad* 100, n.16). The Peruvian theologian also clarifies that “el reconocimiento de la existencia de la lucha de clases no depende de nuestras opciones éticas o religiosas” (qtd. in Tamayo-Acosta, *Para comprender* 91). That is why Tamayo-
Acosta insists on the fact that class struggle is “antes que cualquier otra cosa, un dato analítico, un hecho social innegable. Y como tal ha sido descrito en no pocos documentos del magisterio eclesiástico” (*Para comprender* 91).

A decolonial Marxism, however, cannot possibly accept class struggle as the only form of historical clash but only as one of its various forms. If it only accepted class struggle, it would not be a decolonial but a European dogmatic Marxism. Liberation theologians are aware of the fact that there are other conflicts besides those between social classes such as race discrimination, the subjection and extermination of cultures, ecological degradation and the double marginalization of women from the point of view of gender and social class. The fact that they do not reduce historical conflicts just to an economic clash but also pay attention to racial, cultural, environmental and gender issues is what defines their decolonial Marxist approach. That is why Gutiérrez points out that it is necessary to take into account “aspectos no económicos en las situaciones de enfrentamiento entre grupos sociales. La persistencia de este señalamiento impide reducir el conflicto en la historia al hecho de la lucha de clases” (*La verdad* 99, n. 16) (emphasis added). A European dogmatic Marxist, however, is always essentialist and reductionist, which means that he would only consider class struggle as the driving force of history.

All this suggests that there are different dimensions of decoloniality in liberation theology’s use of Marxism. The economic dimension would be that of class struggle but there are also the racial, environmental and gender dimensions. The figure of the poor, which is so central in Marxist analysis, is therefore endowed with this multiple decolonial aura in Latin America. Liberation theologians, on the other hand, have explicitly warned
about the dangers of an orthodox and dogmatic interpretation of Marxism for liberation theology in the following terms:

Por lo demás, los teólogos de la liberación insisten en una serie de puntos en torno al uso del marxismo, cuales son: la necesidad de evitar su absolutización y su uso indiscriminado; cuidar que no se vacíen “la fe y la reflexión teológica en el encofrado marxista, por más que deban responder al desafío marxista en lo que tiene de interpretación y transformación del hombre y de la sociedad”; someter el marxismo a una crítica permanente que muestre sus limitaciones: “A la lectura crítica del hecho cristiano realizada desde el marxismo, debe acompañar la lectura crítica de la interpretación y acción marxista llevada a cabo desde la más auténtica fe cristiana” (Ellacuría, “Hacia una fundamentación” 634). Mostrar una gran libertad frente al marxismo, ya que éste sólo es útil a personas libres, “que han superado el marxismo como una religión” y lo utilizan como “un instrumento teórico y práctico para suplantar opresiones y crear caminos hacia la libertad” (L. Boff). (Tamayo-Acosta, Para comprender 88)

This explicit critique of an orthodox and dogmatic Marxism by liberation theologians clarifies how liberation theology is against fanatical and doctrinaire interpretations of Marxism that betrayed the cause of the poor and the oppressed —thus becoming a form of pseudo-Marxism— like the Maoism of the Shining Path terrorist group during the years of the political violence in Peru.³⁸ And this, not only from the point of view of theological reflection but also from that of the historical praxis. As has been mentioned before, it was Hugo Blanco himself that, some years before liberation theology was born, called attention to the danger of permanently basing the revolutionary praxis in Peru on armed struggle. According to Blanco, “we Trotskyists know that armed struggle is a necessary phase of the revolution, but it is only that—a phase” (Land or Death 62). Blanco also stresses the danger and opportunism of the Maoist guerrilla in the

1960s, thus foreseeing the trouble caused by the Shining Path many years later: “In the most recent stage, we have had to combat the ultra-leftists, for whom revolution is synonymous with guerrilla warfare carried on from one or more *focos*. In Peru, several Fidelista groups have sprung up, and the Maoists combine this position with Stalinist opportunism” (*Land or Death* 62). Though a Trotskyist, Blanco always sympathizes with the Cuban revolution and the Peruvian Fidelista sectors in his book but he radically condemns the Maoist groups of his country. The questioning of an orthodox and dogmatic Marxism is therefore another point of contact between Blanco and Gutiérrez that shows how Latin American decolonial Marxism is not afraid of being critical with itself.

**Part Two**

Liberation theology is considered by Latin American theologians as a new way of doing theology through a new Christian hermeneutics. Let us see the role and meaning of the hermeneutic mediation in liberation theology’s method. First of all, it is necessary to take into consideration the evolution of the hermeneutical problem in theology. Tamayo-Acosta observes how “uno de los desplazamientos más notables producidos en teología ha sido el paso de la apologética a la teología fundamental. Dicho paso ha supuesto abandonar el camino de la polémica agresiva y entrar en el terreno de la fundamentación de la fe, del análisis de sus presupuestos y de sus condiciones de posibilidad” (*Para comprender* 98). Unlike apologetics, which is only interested in the truth of revelation from an objective and intellectual perspective, fundamental theology is a practical theology that pays attention to the meaning of Christian faith today based on the life experience and understanding of modern man (Tamayo-Acosta, *Para comprender* 99).
The Spanish theologian also observes a second evolutionary process, from theology understood as constituted knowledge to theology as hermeneutics, which has taken place as a result of the influence of hermeneutic philosophy. This rejects the conception of objective knowledge by positivism and of historical knowledge by historicism and also questions the notion of speculative knowledge. The rejection of objective and historical knowledge means that it is not possible to recover the past without taking into account our present situation. The refutation of speculative knowledge, on the other hand, involves philosophy’s renunciation to its pretensions as absolute knowledge and theology’s to its pretensions to reflect on the Sacred Scriptures.

These were written thousands of years ago according to the metaphysical method, which is completely disconnected from the current socio-historical coordinates. This explains “la necesidad de la hermenéutica, que nos ayuda a vencer esa distancia, poniendo de relieve el carácter de revelación que tienen los textos para nosotros en nuestro contexto histórico” (Tamayo-Acosta, Para comprender 99).

Due to the hermeneutic turn, which, under the influence of hermeneutic philosophy, has taken place in the field of theological reflection in the last fifty years, liberation theology’s hermeneutics establishes a relationship of bidirectionality between Latin America’s historical reality of poverty, injustice and neocolonialism and the Bible. The foundational texts of the Sacred Scriptures and Latin America’s present socio-cultural context are therefore like two sides of a coin that need each other. The former is our point of arrival. The latter is our point of departure since, whether we like it or not, we are conditioned as Christians by our current historical experience.
Unfortunately, Gutiérrez hardly pays attention to liberation theology’s hermeneutic and epistemological methodology in *A Theology of Liberation*. That is probably why liberation theology has been criticized from its beginnings for lacking its own hermeneutics and epistemology. All Gutiérrez does in his book from an epistemological point of view is to discuss the fundamental category of liberation. An in-depth analysis of liberation theology’s hermeneutic mediation, however, must be founded from the start on a detailed discussion of the relationship established between the Latin American reality and the Sacred Scriptures in it, which is precisely what Gutiérrez’s book lacks. Only then can the fundamental category of liberation be theorized. Liberation theology has, in fact, a very complex hermeneutics and epistemology, which, due to Gutiérrez’s silence on this point, has been discussed in detail by other liberation theologians in the 1970s and 80s. Juan Luis Segundo, Clodovis Boff, Carlos Mesters and Juan Carlos Scannone are undoubtedly the liberation theologians who have studied liberation theology’s hermeneutical and epistemological methodology more in depth. It must be noted, however, that although their contributions to the subject are certainly valuable, these are ultimately problematic. That is why the best approach to liberation theology’s epistemology is to conceptualize it in bidirectional terms, as will be discussed below.

Juan Luis Segundo’s starting point is that academic theology, which is linked to a repeated reinterpretation of the Bible, does not see itself as autonomous regarding the past and the sciences needed to know that past like general history, the study of ancient languages and cultures, the history of biblical forms, and the history of biblical redaction. But academic theology does explicitly or implicitly assert its independence from the
sciences that deal with the present (*Liberation of Theology* 7).\(^{39}\) A liberation theologian, however, suspects anything and everything involving ideas, including theology, to be closely related, in at least an unconscious way, to the present social situation. This means that, unlike an academic theologian, a liberation theologian feels compelled to connect the disciplines that interpret the past with those that explain the present. Without this connection there is no theology of liberation in the long run or only a theology dealing with liberation from the point of view of content but not from the epistemological point of view of its method (Segundo, *Liberation of Theology* 8).\(^{40}\) This approach, which links past with present, demands a special methodology that is called the “hermeneutic circle” by the Uruguayan theologian and can be defined in the following terms:

> It is the continuing change in our interpretation of the Bible which is dictated by the continuing changes in our present-day reality, both individual and societal. “Hermeneutic” means “having to do with interpretation.” And the circular nature of this interpretation stems from the fact that each new reality obliges us to interpret the word of God afresh, to change reality accordingly, and then to go back and reinterpret the word of God again, and so on. (*Liberation of Theology* 8).

Segundo points out two preconditions that must be met if we are to have a hermeneutic circle in theology. The first one is that “the questions rising out of the present be rich enough, general enough, and basic enough to force us to change our customary conceptions of life, death, knowledge, society, politics, and the world in

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\(^{39}\) Segundo notes in connection with this point how a theologian as progressive as Schillebeeckx “can arrive at the conclusion that theology can never be ideological—in the Marxist sense of the term—because it is nothing but the application of the divine word to present-day reality. He seems to hold the naïve belief that the word of God is applied to human realities inside some antiseptic laboratory that is totally immune to the ideological tendencies and struggles of the present day” (*Liberation of Theology* 7).

\(^{40}\) According to Segundo, the fate of a liberation theology in which the past is disconnected from the present is to be “reabsorbed by the deeper mechanisms of oppression—one of these being the tendency to incorporate the idiom of liberation into the prevailing language of the status quo” (*Liberation of Theology* 8).
general” (Liberation of Theology 8). Only a change of this sort or, at least, a pervasive suspicion about our ideas and value judgements concerning those things will allow us to reach the theological level and force theology to come back down to reality and ask itself new and crucial questions. The second precondition, which is intimately bound up with the first one, is that the interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures must change according to the socio-historical context of the moment (Liberation of Theology 8-9).

The Uruguayan theologian underlines the fact that if theology somehow assumes that it can respond to the new questions without changing its customary interpretation of the Scriptures, “that immediately terminates the hermeneutic circle. Moreover, if our interpretation of Scripture does not change along with the problems, then the latter will go unanswered; or worse, they will receive old, conservative, unserviceable answers” (Liberation of Theology 9). The consequence of this is that, without a hermeneutic circle, theology is always a conservative way to think and act. And this, not so much because of its content, but because such a theology lacks here-and-now criteria for judging our real situation, the perfect pretext for approving the status quo or even for disapproving of it because it does not fit into ancient and outdated guidelines and canons (Segundo, Liberation of Theology 9). Hence why “the most progressive theology in Latin America is more interested in being liberative than in talking about liberation. In other words, liberation deals not so much with content as with the method used to theologize in the face of our real-life situation” (Liberation of Theology 9). All this allows Segundo to conclude that the only goal and purpose of the hermeneutical circle is to prove that “a theology is alive, that it is connected up with the vital fountainhead of historical reality. Without the latter source, the other font of divine revelation would remain dry, not
because of anything wrong with it but because of our own opaqueness” (Liberation of Theology 25).

The two conditions of the hermeneutic circle also presuppose four decisive points in it that are described by Segundo in the following terms:

Firstly there is our way of experiencing reality, which leads us to ideological suspicion. Secondly there is the application of our ideological suspicion to the whole ideological superstructure in general and to theology in particular. Thirdly there comes a new way of experiencing theological reality that leads us to exegetical suspicion, that is, to the suspicion that the prevailing interpretation of the Bible has not taken important pieces of data into account. Fourthly we have our new hermeneutic, that is, our new way of interpreting the fountainhead of our faith (i.e., Scripture) with the new elements at our disposal. (Liberation of Theology 9)

According to the Uruguayan theologian, the analysis of the hermeneutic circle in the thinking of American theologian Harvey Cox, Karl Marx, Max Weber and African American liberation theologian James Cone shows how its four points are only completed in Cone’s black theology of liberation. The hermeneutic circle, however, is interrupted either at its first, second or third point in the case of the other three intellectuals. The circle always begins “with a special or particular way of experiencing and evaluating reality in general. It is a critical way of experiencing, almost by its very definition—at least if it is to be the start of a hermeneutic circle” (Liberation of Theology 10). Following Karl Mannheim, Segundo believes that that initial assessment of reality, the first point of the circle, involves an “act of will.” This act of will is already problematic in Cox’s work The Secular City. Although Cox’s thesis is that secularization and urbanization provide an ideological basis to interpret theological reality in a new and hypothetically more just way, Segundo notes how Cox never really accepts pragmatic man or consuming society
as such. Therefore, “the ‘act of will’ cited by Mannheim as an essential feature of the starting point was never fully present. And this lack of an enthusiastic base, in my opinion, will prevent Harvey Cox from completing his hermeneutic circle and thus revolutionizing theology in some way. This is true, at least, in the case of his book entitled *The Secular City*” *(Liberation of Theology* 13).

Although Marx’s act of will through social compromise is certainly beyond the shadow of a doubt, his hermeneutic circle cannot possibly go beyond the third point. Segundo admits that, in Marx’s case, religion is a specific interpretation of the Bible imposed by the ruling classes to maintain their exploitation of the proletariat. Marx, however, was aware that religion could also become a powerful weapon for class struggle in the hands of proletarians through a new and more faithful interpretation of the Scriptures *(Liberation of Theology* 16). According to Segundo, the interruption of Marx’s circle at its third point is inevitable due to the fact that “instead of examining the specific concrete and historical possibilities of religion and theology, he [Marx] takes the easy way out of disqualifying religion in general insofar as he views it as an autonomous and ahistorical monolith” *(Liberation of Theology* 17).

The case of Weber’s hermeneutical circle is also problematic. Segundo observes how in his influential work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, the German sociologist studies the principal dogmas of Calvinism in relationship with the economic attitudes of Western capitalism using a methodology whose origins must be traced back to Marx’s historical materialism. Although Weber’s compromise with Western capitalism contrasts with Marx’s cause on behalf of the proletariat, the Uruguayan theologian believes that there is a point of connection between them. If we question the dogmatic
interpretation of Marx’s historical materialism as a sort of economic determinism and recall Engels’s disclaimer on this point, as well as many texts of Marx himself, one can no longer maintain any radical opposition between the methodology of Weber and that of Marx. It seems clear that Weber’s intention was not to correct but to complement Marx or at most to correct an excessive emphasis on the economic structure (Liberation of Theology 19). Although Weber mentions the soundness and solidity of Calvin’s interpretation of the Bible and how it was the fundamentally ascetic character of the Calvinist doctrine that made it choose and assimilate those passages from the Old Testament that were most convenient to its interests, Segundo notes how the German thinker is not interested in a new and enriched interpretation of the biblical sources from a liberating perspective. That is why Weber’s hermeneutic circle is interrupted between the third and fourth point: “Weber simply wants to make comparisons between different religious ideas insofar as they exert influence on different economic attitudes. There is no personal commitment involved” (Liberation of Theology 24).

It is only in James Cone’s black theology of liberation that, according to Segundo, the hermeneutic circle can be completed. The act of will of the first point can be appreciated in Cone’s consciously accepted partiality on behalf of the oppressed black community relating the forces of liberation to the essence of the gospel, which is Jesus Christ (Liberation of Theology 35). As far as the second point of the circle is concerned, the theoretical apparatus that allows the African American theologian to unmask the oppressive reality and theology is his belief that “the basis of exploitation is not an economic difference which forms different social classes but rather the racial difference
which is rooted far more deeply in human psychology” (Liberation of Theology 27). Cone criticizes the fact that American white theology has never been involved in the struggle for black liberation. White theology, in fact, has always been a theology of the white oppressor that has given religious sanction to the genocide of Native Americans and the enslavement of black people. According to Segundo, Cone’s most significant argument for the second point of the circle is his belief that the enemy’s most powerful weapon is a color-blind ideology since “the oppressor constructs an ideological edifice in which the cause of the oppressed people’s suffering is not even mentioned, much less studied. In this way, philosophy, and religion join with the mechanism of oppression and become its witting or unwitting accomplices” (Liberation of Theology 28).

Therefore, a new interpretation of the Scriptures, guided by the uncovering of the new mechanisms of ideology and the will to root them out of theology, will define the third and fourth stages of Cone’s circle (Segundo, Liberation of Theology 39). The Uruguayan theologian underlines the fact that this new interpretation will give rise to a new theology, which must be based on two aspects of a single reality: The liberation of

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41 Segundo clarifies that although the emphasis on racial rather than social class explicitly differentiates Cone from Marx, this opposition is not as alien to historical materialism after all since “rather it complements or corrects Marx, pointing up a factor which has been, and continues to be, important in the division of labor” (Liberation of Theology 27).

42 Cone also notes how “from the very beginning to the present day, American white theological thought has been ‘patriotic,’ either by defining the theological task independently of black suffering (the liberal northern approach) or by defining Christianity as compatible with white racism (the conservative southern approach). In both cases theology becomes a servant of the state, and that can only mean death to black people” (A Black Theology 22).

43 Cone himself highlights that “that is why American theology discusses sin in the abstract, debating it in relation to universal man. In white theology, sin is a theoretical idea and not a concrete reality” (A Black Theology 191). He also calls attention to the fact that “there is no place in Black Theology for a colorless God in a society where people suffer precisely because of their color” (A Black Theology 120).
black people and the revelation of Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{44} It is precisely the meaning of revelation here and now, while the black community is engaged in its liberation struggle, that Cone is interested in without forgetting its origins in the past (\textit{Liberation of Theology} 31). Hence why Segundo reminds us that “it must be stressed once again that the simultaneous presence of past and present in biblical interpretation is an essential hermeneutic principle” (\textit{Liberation of Theology} 31).

Segundo’s conclusion is that Cone’s hermeneutic circle can be applied to Latin American liberation theology, which, like black theology, departs from a partiality through its preferential option for the poor. Therefore, when Latin American liberation theology is accused of partiality, “it can calmly reply that it is partial because it is faithful to Christian tradition rather than to Greek thought” (\textit{Liberation of Theology} 33), and also say that “those who attack it are even more partisan, though they may not realize it, and tend to muzzle the word of God by trying to make one particular portion of Scripture the word of God not only for certain particular moments and situations but also for all situations and moments” (\textit{Liberation of Theology} 33-34).

Brazilian liberation theologian Clodovis Boff has interpreted the hermeneutic circle in dialectical terms. First of all, Boff admits that he borrows the term “hermeneutic circle” from Paul Ricoeur, who, in turn, takes it from Heidegger.\textsuperscript{45} Boff also observes that

\textsuperscript{44} Segundo observes how this hermeneutic orientation is expressed by Cone and also quotes Cone’s observation that “if I read the New Testament correctly, the resurrection of Christ means that he is also present today in the midst of all societies effecting his liberation of the oppressed. He is not confined to the first century, and thus our talk of him in the past is important only insofar as it leads us to an encounter with him now. As a black theologian, I want to know what God’s revelation means right now as the black community participates in the struggle for liberation” (\textit{A Black Theology} 64).

\textsuperscript{45} Boff notes that “I have this expression, with its meaning, from Paul Ricoeur, who has generalized it from a point of departure in Martin Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time} (1927), parag. 32, pp. 194-95” (n. 16, 294-95).
this circle subsists according to particular rules and that it is not a perfectly circular trajectory between homogeneous terms (255). This is due to the fact that “the constitutive relationship of the hermeneutic circle is of a dialectical nature” (134-35). Boff clarifies that “we are dealing with a tense, critical, indeed dramatic relationship, effeted under the governance of one of its terms, which rules the rhythm of the dialectical movement. After all, there is dialectic and there is dialectic—one must always identify the rules of its process” (135). The hermeneutic circle can take many forms between the following pairs of terms: Word of God—scripture, creation of meaning—acceptance of meaning, structure—meaning, present—past and technique—interpretation. As far as the relationship between the word of God and the Scriptures is concerned, Boff notes how God’s word cannot be found in the letters of scripture or in the spirit of the hearing or reading community but “it is precisely between these two, in their mutual, dynamic relationship, in a back-and-forth that is never perfectly objectifiable” (136).

The creation of meaning—acceptance of meaning relationship of the circle involves the idea that meaning can arise only from a sustained relationship between the reader and the text or else the dialectic of the terms in question will be interrupted, thus giving rise to two extreme positions: Hermeneutic improvisation and semantic positivism (Boff 136). Hermeneutic improvisation, a concept taken by Boff from Levi-Strauss’s structuralist anthropology,\(^{46}\) is the materialist and utilitarian manipulation of the

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\(^{46}\) Boff also mentions that the notion of “hermeneutic circle” is present in pages 121-38 of R. Lapointe’s book *Trois dimensions de l’herméneutique* (n. 16, 295).

Boff points out that “I take my inspiration from hermeneutic ‘improvisation’ or ‘tinkering’ (my neologism ‘biscateação’) from Claude Lévi-Strauss’s *La pensée sauvage* (Paris, Plon, 1962, pp. 26-47). Where Lévi-Strauss writes *bricolage*, or *bricoler*, the Portuguese translation retains the French term, because there is no precise equivalent in Portuguese” (n. 25, 295). According to the Brazilian theologian, Levi-Strauss uses the term *bricolage* to describe the “science of the concrete,” which is characteristic of the “savage mind” (better than “primitive”), as a sort of “intellectual *bricolage*” (n. 25, 295). Lévi-Strauss
Scriptures to make them fit into one’s interests as if the biblical texts were “‘proofs’ for a preestablished theoretical project or practice” (Boff 136). Semantic positivism, however, consists of gaining control of the meanings of the Scriptures to the point of cataloguing and storing them to be able to use them at will (Boff 136). It is not difficult to perceive “what interest these two extreme positions have in common: control of meaning and its utilization at whim” (Boff 136). The structure—meaning pair, on the other hand, pays attention to the connection between explanation and comprehension of the Scriptures. The contribution of the various linguistic theories may be useful here, especially in the order of a structural explanation of texts. 47 Boff calls attention to the fact that we need to grasp the autonomous structure of the text before attempting to gather its sense and meaning so that meaning can find its support in the structure (137). Hence why “in the

47 Boff mentions the violent critique of exegete André Paul, who calls the archaeological, exhumative reading of the Bible, which only engenders a dead and rigid exegesis, “hellish.” Paul believes that it is necessary to reeffectuate the biblical act that gave birth to the Sacred Scriptures, which “we must read-and-be-read, interpret-and-be-interpreted, act-and-suffer-activity, and thus produce meaning” (n. 26, 296). Boff also mentions François Refoulé’s defense of an antidogmatist and plural interpretation based on Nietzsche’s rejection of the “in se of a meaning ‘that was always there’” (n. 26, 296) and legitimation of “perspectivism,” which can be defined as “an undeniable relationship of any reading with the reading subject, together with the supreme value of ‘life,’ above and beyond any ‘truth’ or ‘sense’” (n. 26, 296).
case at hand, dialectic proceeds in such a way that explanation becomes a preliminary moment, whereupon the work of ‘comprehensive reading,’ a reading with understanding, supervenes” (Boff 137).

The present—past relationship of the circle shows how the text never ceases to be open to the world and history to be read and reread over and over again. That is why Boff insists on the idea that “at bottom, the ultimate reference of the Bible is to the present, to the reader’s current history. The biblical sense regards precisely this. It is the reader, then, who occupies the center of attention of the text” (137). Finally, the technique-interpretation pair demonstrates that it is impossible to construct an interpretative technique that fully grasps, once and for all, the only, original and integral meaning of the biblical texts disconnecting them from later historical contexts of readers, which, whether we like it or not, will produce new meanings (Boff 138, 140). Therefore, there is not one but many possible interpretations that will depend on the social and historical coordinates of the various Christian communities. The Brazilian theologian underlines that “in principle, hermeneutic technique has the capacity to fix the spatial limits of the appearance of meaning or sense” (138) but also reminds us that “hermeneutic alone, with its own tools, however perfected these may be, is incapable of deciding what the ‘right’ meaning is” (138). Therefore, only through an act of creation can this sense be grasped since “the ‘bestowal of meaning’ is not to be understood as capricious invention, but as a decision and determination of meaning in the space that ‘hermeneutic reason’ has opened and circumscribed” (138).

If the Bible has many possible interpretations, this means that scripture is to its interpretations as a language is to its various possible discourses. Therefore,
“hermeneutic competency” is similar to Chomsky’s “linguistic competency” (Boff 140). Boff concludes that the Scriptures appear as “a model of interpretation, and thus as an interpreting interpretation, a norma normans ut normata” (140). This means that “the hermeneutic circle works from the inside out, in the sense that this hermeneutic paradigm grows richer as such through the interpretations that it permits” (Boff 140).

The only obstacle observed by the Brazilian theologian is a sort of prejudicial presupposition, which dogmatically anticipates the sense that must be produced (141). In other words, “far from yielding to the tendency to control and dominate the pretended ‘essence’ of a text, we ought to conceptualize the text as a spring of meaning rather than a cistern, a focus of energy rather than a traffic light” (Boff 141).

According to the Brazilian theologian, the hermeneutic mediation has traditionally been founded on an interpretation model in which there is a correspondence of terms. Jesus Christ and his political context correspond to the Christian community and its current political context through a sort of “hermeneutical switch” (144). The problem with this model is that its exegetical and theological discussions were not of the order of historical cognition but rather of the order of political results they could have in terms of Christian social behavior (Boff 144-45). Therefore, an alternative model that pays attention not to exact correspondences but to the correspondence of relationships is needed. The starting point of this new model is how all Christian communities seek to

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48 Boff reminds us how the Scriptures are a code only in the form of a paradigmatic message. This paradigmatic message is connected by Boff with Fernando Belo’s idea that the gospel functions as a narrative open to new readings and is not a revelation made once and for all (n. 51, 298). The Brazilian theologian also highlights Belo’s idea that Jesus did not preach a message but struck up a “practice,” “the gospel being precisely ‘the story of Jesus’ practice’ (p. 52), and its function being to teach us to read our own practice (p. 62)” (n. 51, 298). Hence why Jesus never makes the reading himself and it is the hearers-witnesses that will make it by themselves (n. 51, 298).

49 Boff explains that “in the model of a ‘correspondence of terms,’ two ratios are set up and equilvalated. Then the sense of the first ratio is transferred to the second, by a sort of hermeneutical switch” (144).
apply the gospel to their particular situation taking into consideration the fact that “both the texts, and the situation to which they are to be ‘applied,’ are taken *in their respective autonomy*” (Boff 148). This means that “an identity of senses, then, is not to be sought on the level of context, nor, consequently, on the level of the message as such—but rather on the level of the *relationship* between context and message on each side respectively. It is this homological relationship that is the vehicle of sense” (Boff 149). The consequence of this homological relationship, which produces homosemy due to the fact that it serves as the vehicle of the same spiritual sense, is described by Boff in the following terms:

> We need not, then, look for formulas to “copy,” or techniques to “apply,” from scripture. What scripture will offer us are rather something like orientations, models, types, directives, principles, inspirations—elements permitting us to acquire, on our own initiative, a “hermeneutic competency,” and thus the capacity to judge—on our own initiative, in our own right—“according to the mind of Christ,” or “according to the Spirit,” the new, unpredictable situations with which we are continually confronted. The Christian writings offer us not a *what*, but a *how*—a manner, a style, a spirit. (149)

Dutch biblical scholar Carlos Mesters has approached the hermeneutic problem of liberation theology from an alternative perspective to that of Segundo and Boff. Mesters departs from the idea that, in order to use the Bible well, the study of the text is not enough since there are three forces that come into operation when we try to explain the Bible to the people: The particular problem burdening the people’s lives, the scientific investigation carried out by exegesis, which questions established truths, and the church’s

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50 Boff explains that in the correspondence of relationships model the key element is not a particular text of the Bible in correspondence with such and such precise situation or the number of texts to be produced with a view to this or that particular behavior, or this or that particular meaning but rather “the key element here is the global, and at the same time particular, ‘spirit.’ This spirit may, of course, lead to the selection of a particular passage from scripture—but without invoking a correspondence of terms, or a fortiori, a relationship of application” (149).
faith awakening in the “memory” of Christians. These historical forces are life, science and faith or, in other words, people, exegesis and church and are always in a constant tension.51 The people’s lives is the situation we are living in today in all its dimensions, which confronts us with religious, family-related, cultural, social, economic and political questions (Mesters, *Defenceless Flower* 107). Mesters underlines that the people’s lives is “the pre-text, that is, all that preexists in us, before we come into contact with the text, and which leads us to look in the text for a meaning for life” (*Defenceless Flower* 107). Scientific exegesis, on the other hand, is the critical approach of scientific analysis that permeates Christian thought today and has changed the way we look at the Bible and life (Mesters, *Defenceless Flower* 107). According to the Dutch biblical scholar, exegesis is “the text of the Bible when read and interpreted by the criteria of science, independently of any preconceived idea, in order to discover its literal meaning” (*Defenceless Flower* 107). Finally, the church’s faith is the particular vision with which Christians approach the Bible looking for a direct dialogue with God in it. Mesters calls attention to the fact that the historical force of faith “is the faith of the community which receives and reads the Bible as its book, which functions as the context in the reading of the text. It is the Spirit of God, the divine author of the Bible, who pulls away the veil from the reader’s eyes and so gives life to the written letters and, through them, a new meaning to God’s people” (*Defenceless Flower* 107-08).

Pre-text, text and con-text are the three angles of what Mesters calls the “hermeneutic triangle.” From each angle, however, there is a complete view of the whole

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51 Mesters underlines that they are “three forces in constant tension, each with its defenders, attempting in its own way to make its contribution to the correct use of the Bible in the church. I repeat: these are forces, not just ideas, historical forces, much stronger than we are” (*Defenceless Flower* 107).
inside field of the triangle. That is why the temptation for each of the three forces is to overestimate its function, to make its own point of view absolute and to forget that it is just one part of a larger whole, thus falling into the mistake of thinking that it is capable of explaining by itself all the phenomena inside the triangle (Mesters, *Defenceless Flower* 108). This is just what happened. Mesters reminds us how the force of exegesis has historically prevailed over the other two, which were subordinated to scientific exegesis.\(^{52}\) The predominance of exegesis broke the balance of the fruitful tension that should exist between the three forces.\(^{53}\) The consequence of this is that “if one of these three elements is missing, our interpretation is defective, or at least incomplete. In other words, the text has to be read and interpreted in the light of the pre-text of life and within the context of the community’s faith” (Mesters, *Defenceless Flower* 109). In this sense, Mesters insists that the heart of the problem is that the interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures does not depend on the exegete’s infallible academic competence, on faith or a better knowledge of the church’s tradition or even on more intense solidarity with the people but “depends on the integration of all these three forces” (*Defenceless Flower* 109).

The Dutch biblical scholar cannot help regretting the reductionist position of the average exegete of the Bible, who believes to have interpreted it correctly just because he was able to explain the literal meaning of the text. This, however, is a serious mistake

\(^{52}\) Mesters explains that “just look at some introductions to the Bible. They leave no room for life or faith. The only valid approach is the scientific analysis of the texts” (*Defenceless Flower* 108).

\(^{53}\) Mesters points out that this imbalance does violence to reality. Hence why “when the context is the use of the Bible in the church, it is impossible for any one force to isolate itself from the other two without the risk of fragmenting itself and losing its identity” (*Defenceless Flower* 109). Therefore, the three forces must necessarily be present in each angle of the triangle since “if we separate them, we destroy the correct use of the Bible and prevent the manifestation of the liberating power of the word of God” (*Defenceless Flower* 109).
since, according to Mesters, without the background of the Holy Spirit (con-text) and without the context of the people’s life-situation (pre-text), the text of the Bible is dead. The problem is not the knowledge of the text but “the ability to integrate the study of the Bible into the community’s faith-life and into the life-situation of the people; we are going to have to develop this skill if we are going to enable the text to recover a life and reveal a meaning to us” (Mesters, _Defenceless Flower_ 110). The text is always present due to the predominance of the exegetical dimension, which means that it is the pre-text and the con-text that tend to be absent. Mesters notes that, if the pre-text is eclipsed by the text, the conditions necessary to enable those living in the community to discover the real meaning of the text are also covered up. Mesters also explains that the real problem “is not that the contribution of real life is rejected. No one rejects it. But it is reduced to the scale of the life lived by the group, and no one looks beyond its boundaries to the larger human community” (_Defenceless Flower_ 114).

What Mesters underlines is the link between micro and macropolitics, which is essential for a liberation project to be successful. Sometimes, however, it is the con-text that is neglected. Not paying enough attention to the community and the church of the con-text is considered by the Dutch intellectual a serious mistake leading to the absence of the only critical instrument for the transformation of society and to the destruction of the historical project itself (_Defenceless Flower_ 152). Mesters concludes his analysis by stressing once more the interdependence, interconnection and balance of the tension between the three forces. Even though the text is never absent, we must be careful with it.

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54 According to the Dutch theologian, “the heart of the problem is to enable the faith community (context) and real life (pre-text) to occupy once more their rightful place within the overall process of interpreting the Bible” (_Defenceless Flower_ 110).
If the balanced tension is not kept, the text may be subsumed by the pre-text or the context. According to Mesters, “what is sometimes missing is the autonomy the text should enjoy in relation to the context and the pre-text. When the text is subordinated to the interests of the context, we get a dogmatic and apologetic exegesis. When it is subordinated to the interests of the pre-text, we may get an ideological exegesis” (Defenceless Flower 119). The consequence of this is that “the absence of the pre-text leads people to get trapped in a religious ghetto. The lack of the context leads people to lose their sensitivity to the presence of the living Christ among them” (Mesters, Defenceless Flower 120).

Liberation theology’s hermeneutic circle has been criticized from within liberation theology itself. Argentinian liberation theologian Juan Carlos Scannone, for instance, partially disagrees with the circle metaphor. Although the hermeneutic circle takes place between the reading of the situation and the historical praxis in the light of the Bible and the rereading of this from that very situation and praxis, Scannone believes that the circle metaphor is not correct. The Argentinian theologian underlines the fact that it is necessary to privilege the text over the historical situation since “la palabra de Dios leída en la Iglesia es normativa en última instancia; y también . . . el sentido teologal (que sólo la fe puede percibir e interpretar) es, en la ‘palabra’ interpelante del pobre, el momento desencadenante del círculo hermenéutico de la TL. No se trata de un círculo en el que todos los puntos tienen igual valor” (“La teología” 567).

55 Mesters reminds us that, although it is very difficult to avoid all these dangers, and, in fact, it will be impossible to avoid them completely “for we all read the text from a particular perspective” (Defenceless Flower 120), “the important thing is to remain aware of these dangers and to allow for the fact that one’s own starting-point is only one among others” (Defenceless Flower 120).
Scannone also notes how there is another element, besides the Latin American historical reality and the Sacred Scriptures, within the circle: Faith. Faith cannot be reduced to the other terms, guides their almost circular movement, and transcends both its own theological comprehension and the prophetic comprehension of the historical situation it encourages (‘La teología’ 567-68). Scannone calls attention to the fact that “la fe no se da ‘en el aire’, sino necesariamente encarnada en mediaciones culturales, tanto en el polo de la experiencia espiritual del pobre como en el de la interpretación reflexiva de la palabra” (“La teología” 568). Nevertheless, the fact that faith becomes incarnated in historical mediations and cannot do without them does not mean that it can be reduced or identified with them but that it transcends them, and that, when critically assuming them not as absolutes but just as cultural mediations, they will guide its judgement (Scannone, “La teología” 568). The most obvious cultural mediation for faith, of course, is that of the Christian community.

The theorization of liberation theology’s epistemological and hermeneutical methodology in terms of the concepts of “hermeneutic circle” and “hermeneutic triangle” also poses some problems from an outside scholarly perspective that must be taken into consideration. First of all, the notion of “hermeneutic circle,” as is acknowledged by Clodovis Boff himself, comes from the European philosophy of Martin Heidegger and Paul Ricoeur, and, following Segundo, is also influenced by Mannheim’s thinking. This means that the origin of the hermeneutic circle is not the Latin American historical and intellectual reality, which underlines its Eurocentric connotations. The European concept of the circle, on the other hand, is never resemanticized into the specific socio-historical
coordinates of the Latin American context by Segundo or Boff. The consequence of this is the emergence of a quite abstract theological discourse completely disconnected from Latin America’s concreteness and specificity from a social, historical and political point of view. The idea of hermeneutic circularity, on the other hand, has its origins in Nietzsche’s notion of the eternal return, which plays a key role in Heidegger’s and Ricoeur’s thinking. Even though, as is contended by Segundo, the Bible is interpreted and reinterpreted as time goes by, it is not that circularity that is really important but the bidirectionality, relationality and reciprocity that defines the dialectical relationship between the Latin American historical reality and the biblical texts. That is why it would be more appropriate to speak of liberation theology’s epistemology in terms of a “bidirectional hermeneutical dialectics.”

The specifically Latin American theoretical basis for a bidirectional hermeneutical dialectics can be found in the notion of “transculturation,” which was coined by Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz in his influential work Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar, first published in Spanish in 1940 and in English translation in 1948. According to Ortiz, the term “acculturation,” which was becoming fashionable among North American anthropologists in the 1940s, was only used to indicate the unidirectional imposition of the culture of the colonizer upon that of the colonized (102). Ortiz’s definition of the term “transculturation” from a specifically

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56 The specificity of the Latin American context is determined by the particular historical and socio-political conditions of each Latin American country.
57 The concept of “transculturation” has undergone a theoretical process of redefinition and revision from different angles and perspectives in the field of contemporary Latin American studies. This can be appreciated in the valuable studies on the subject by José María Arguedas, Ángel Rama, Néstor García Canclini, Roberto Fernández Retamar and Antonio Cornejo Polar —in Latin America—, by Friedhelm Schmidt and Martin Lienhard —in Europe— and by Mary Louise Pratt, Silvia Spitta and Nicolás Wey-Gómez —in the USA.
Cuban geopolitical context implies a bidirectional approach that insists on “understanding intercultural dynamics as a two-way toma y daca (give and take)” (Spitta 4). Therefore, Ortiz’s concept of “transculturation” shows that not only is the culture of the colonized radically altered by that of the colonizer in cultural contact situations but that the culture of the colonizer is also drastically transformed by that of the colonized.

Ortiz expressed this bidirectionality through the image of the counterpoint of tobacco and sugar, the two most important products in Cuban economy. Not only has sugar, a European import, seriously modified the economy of the island but tobacco, a genuinely Cuban plant, has also altered the habits, social behaviour and economy of the Western world from Columbus to the present (Ortiz 3-93, 183-253; Spitta 4-5). A transcultural approach involves “a give and take” (Spitta 4) in the sense that when two cultures come into contact, there is always a bidirectional negotiation process between the displaced and the imposed culture that gives rise to the intersection of practices coming from both (Ortiz 102-03; Spitta 4). Fernando Ortiz has described the three cultural operations that constitute a transculturation in the following terms:

I am of the opinion that the word transculturation better expresses the different phases of the process of transition from one culture to another because this does not consist merely in acquiring another culture, which is what the English word acculturation really implies, but the process also necessarily involves the loss or uprooting of a previous culture, which could be defined as a deculturation. In addition it carries the idea of the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena, which could be called neoculturation. In the end, as the school of Malinowski’s followers maintains, the result of every union of cultures is similar to that of the reproductive process between individuals: the offspring always has something of both parents but is always different from each of them. (102-03)
Although Ortiz’s theory of transculturation is a specifically Cuban theory, Ortiz carefully noted in his *Counterpoint* that “the concept of transculturation is fundamental and indispensable for an understanding of the history of Cuba, and, for analogous reasons, of that of America in general” (103) (emphasis added). Like the culture of the colonizer and the colonized in Ortiz’s notion of “transculturation,” the Latin American historical reality and the Sacred Scriptures engage in a bidirectional negotiation that can be defined as a hermeneutic “give and take.” The Latin American historical context needs to be led and guided by the teachings of the Bible. The Sacred Scriptures, in turn, also need to be adapted to the current Latin American socio-historical reality to avoid being anchored in the past without paying due attention to the burning issues of the present. The association between both terms is therefore one of bidirectionality, inter-relationality and reciprocity that has nothing to do with Clodovis Boff’s Eurocentric dialectics of the circle. This, however, does not mean that hermeneutical bidirectionality is non-dialectical. It is certainly dialectical but in specifically Latin American terms. European dialectical materialism is not needed when we have Ortiz’s decolonial Latin American dialectics, which is the fruit of the decolonial reformulation of Marxist thinking to Latin America’s cultural context from an anthropological perspective. The three cultural operations that characterize transculturation —acculturation, deculturation and neoculturation— are therefore a resemanticization into the Latin American context of the three stages of Marxist dialectics: Thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Ortiz’s theory, however, is not perfect and needs to be corrected since the product of transculturation is far from being homogeneous, as was envisioned by the Cuban anthropologist, but is
actually quite indefinite, hybrid and heterogeneous, as has been pointed out by Garcia Canclini, Cornejo Polar and other Latin American critics.

The product of the bidirectional hermeneutical dialectics established between the Latin American historical context and the biblical texts is liberation theology itself, which takes place on the practical level of the base ecclesial communities and on the theoretical one of professional theology. Liberation theology, however, is also quite a complex, indefinite and heterogeneous product, as can be appreciated in the different tendencies of its first wave within the Catholic church and the Protestant churches and of its second one (indigenous, African Latin American, feminist and ecological theologies among others). Like Marxism, whose mistakes have been corrected by liberation theologians, the totalizing and homogenizing connotations of Ortiz’s theory have to be fixed so that we can apply it to the field of Latin American liberation theology. All this shows how, contrary to Clodovis Boff’s hermeneutic approach, liberation theology’s epistemological and hermeneutical methodology does not need to resort to Heidegger’s and Ricoeur’s philosophy or to Levi-Strauss’s structuralist anthropology when we have Latin American decolonial theoretical tools like Ortiz’s anthropological theories at our disposal. Another problem with Boff’s hermeneutics is the fact that he understands the relationship between the context and the message in homological and homosemic terms. If the true sense cannot be found in the context or in the message but in the relation between them, this sense has to take place in heterological and polisemic terms since it may vary according to the specific historical reality and the particular situation of each Christian community.

The four points of Segundo’s hermeneutic circle, on the other hand, are only discussed in connection with Cone’s black theology of liberation but never in connection
with Latin American liberation theology. The Uruguayan theologian, however, identifies the hermeneutic circle in Latin American liberation theology with that of black theology in quite totalizing and assimilationist terms. Latin American liberation theology is therefore eclipsed by Segundo with Cone’s theological reflection, which causes historical and epistemological problems. First of all, there is a lack of historicization since the historical and socio-political context of the USA is not that of Latin America. Secondly, the epistemological evolution of Latin American liberation theology is different from that of the liberation theologies of the USA. As will be discussed in chapter three, Argentinian liberation theologian and philosopher Enrique Dussel has shown how the first wave of liberation theology (LT1), which took place in the 1970s and 80s in Latin America, is not the same from a hermeneutic perspective as its second wave (LT2), which was already taking place in the USA in the 1970s mainly through black theology. The consequence of this is that, from an epistemological point of view, Segundo ends up eclipsing LT1 with LT2 instead of paying attention to their differences, which is a serious theoretical mistake. Perhaps it would have been almost impossible for Segundo to theorize in depth liberation theology’s epistemological evolution in 1975, as was done by Dussel many years later. Nevertheless, the Uruguayan theologian should have studied how the hermeneutic circle specifically works in Latin American liberation theology paying attention to the epistemological similarities and differences with that of Cone’s black

58 Besides Cone’s black theology, the main tendencies of LT2 in the USA during the 1970s include Latino, Asian American and Native American liberation theologies. Womanist and mujerista theology, on the other hand, pay attention to gender issues from an African American and Latino feminist perspective respectively. For a discussion of the various tendencies of LT2 in the USA, see the articles collected in the volumes Liberation Theologies in the United States (2010), edited by Stancey M. Floyd-Thomas and Anthony B. Pinn, and Handbook of US Theologies of Liberation (2004), ed. Miguel de la Torre.
theology. In other words, a critical comparative approach on how the circle works in both theological reflections is what Segundo’s analysis lacks.

Mesters’ theory of the hermeneutic triangle, on the other hand, is not without its problems. The three forces of his triangle —pre-text, text and con-text— come from French structuralism, and, more specifically, from Gérard Genette’s narratological model in the field of literary theory. This is hardly surprising if we remember that Mesters is a biblical scholar. Trained as an exegete of the Sacred Scriptures, the Dutch intellectual must have used at some point Genette’s theory of narratology to approach the Bible as a literary text. French structuralist literary theory is therefore the instrument for his interpretation of liberation theology’s epistemological and hermeneutical method. This is already problematic since his hermeneutic approach is quite Eurocentric and is never resemanticized into the specificity and particularity of the Latin American historical reality. The consequence of forcing French structuralist theory upon the Latin American cultural context is a very abstract theological discourse in which the so-called “hermeneutic triangle” is, in fact, quite questionable. Bidirectional hermeneutical dialectics teaches us that the bidirectional relation between the historical context and the text involves an interpretation carried out by a Christian community. This means that the so-called “con-text” or referent, that is, the Christian community in question, is the acting historical subject of that negotiation, endowed with a Christian spiritual dimension, rather than one of its terms. It is not a question of a balance of forces, as is argued by Mesters, but of a bidirectional, reciprocious and interrelational dialectical process with the interpretation produced by a community of believers —understood as an external referential historical agent— as a result of the interaction between both terms.
Scannone’s insightful reflections on the problems of the circle implicitly question Mesters’ inclusion of the con-text on the same level as the pre-text and the text of his hermeneutic triangle and can be connected with my suggestion to view the referent of the Christian community as a sort of interpreting historical agent or subject located outside the two terms engaged in a bidirectional hermeneutical dialectics but certainly endowed with a spiritual dimension. On the other hand, Scannone’s point that the text must prevail over the historical context is quite problematic since only if the latter is our point of departure can we produce a new interpretation of the former adapted to the new historical situation. In other words, the critical analysis of the Latin American reality must precede its critical confrontation with the Sacred Scriptures or else a literal and fossilized interpretation of the Bible disconnected from the present historical context will emerge.

The fact that the epistemological and hermeneutical methodology proposed by Segundo, Clodovis Boff and Mesters falls into some Eurocentric reductionisms does not mean that the decolonial dimension is absent from their reflection. The three liberation theologians present their argument from the perspective of Latin America’s base ecclesial communities, whose members carry out a new decolonial interpretation of the Bible as a result of confronting the Latin American historical context with the Sacred Scriptures. This means that their method has a solid decolonial basis. This, however, is eclipsed by their non-resemanticized use of French and German philosophy (Heidegger, Mannheim, Nietzsche, Ricoeur, Levi-Strauss and Genette). Therefore, their decolonial basis needs to be developed much more in depth in specifically Latin American epistemological-hermeneutical concrete terms. The first wave of liberation theology (LT1) is liberation theology’s initial experience of decoloniality, which means that liberation theologians
still make some epistemological mistakes of a Eurocentric nature. Deeper layers and levels of decoloniality, which make it possible to overcome these Eurocentric reductionisms, will emerge in liberation theology’s second wave (LT2), especially when it is the victims themselves—the indigenous, African and female subaltern subject—that acquire theological agency, as will be discussed in chapter IV.

The third mediation of liberation theology is the practical mediation. Clodovis and Leonardo Boff remind us how if there is a feature that defines liberation theology, this is the fact that it starts from action and leads to action bound up with the atmosphere of faith. The analysis of the reality of the oppressed passes through the word of God to arrive finally at specific action (Introducing 39). Both theologians point out that liberation theology “leads to practical results because today, in the world of the ‘wretched of the earth,’ the true form of faith is ‘political love’ or ‘macro-charity.’ Among the poorest of the Third World, faith is not only ‘also’ political, but above all else political” (39). The concept of “political love,” however, is somewhat problematic since politics and manipulation usually go hand in hand. This means that politics is non-ethical by nature. Consequently, it would be more appropriate from a Christian perspective to speak of “ethical love” taking into account its significant political dimension. Reducing Christian love exclusively to politics is ultimately an essentialist position that is also very dangerous since it unconsciously involves the subjection of the gospel to political ideologies. Christian faith, on the other hand, cannot be reduced to action and must always be supervised by Christian ethics because faith is “‘always greater’ and must always include moments of contemplation and of profound thanksgiving” (Cl. and L. Boff, Introducing 39).
The Boff brothers also explain that the practical mediation has its own internal regimen due to the fact that the definition of action depends on the theological level on which one makes liberation theology: Professional, pastoral or popular. A professional theologian like Gustavo Gutiérrez can only suggest possible lines of action. A pastoral theologian like a bishop, priest or nun can be more specific, but only a popular theologian, who works with Christian base communities and Bible study groups made up by the victims of the system, can go deeply into the particular course of action to be followed. Therefore, the collective dimension, which is not present in the individual and lonely work of a professional theologian, plays a key role on the last two levels (Introducing 39-40).

The Boffs also underline the extreme complexity of the process of acting, which involves a number of steps. The first one is to determine what is historically viable or possible “through analyzing one’s own and the opposition’s forces, without underestimating the resistance and opposition of those who want to preserve the status quo in society and in the church, and without being utopian or satisfied with good intentions” (Introducing 40). The Brazilian theologians, however, fail to stress that the only way to achieve this is through a “critical reflection” on the circumstances of the surrounding reality. Only after that can we continue with the second step, which is to develop what Paulo Freire has called a “pedagogy of the oppressed” and Giulio Girardi a “revolutionary pedagogy.”59 This can only take place by defining “one’s strategy and tactics, favoring non-violent methods, such as dialogue, persuasion, moral pressure, passive resistance, evangelical resoluteness and other courses of action sanctioned by the

The third step is to coordinate microactions with the macrosystem “so as to give them—and ensure they retain—an effectively critical and transformative orientation” (Cl. and L. Boff, *Introducing* 40). It must be noted that the connection of the micropolitical and the macropolitical dimension has always been the great challenge of the praxical mediation and is still the main problem of the liberating praxis today. The fourth step contributes to this through the articulation of the action of the people of God with that of other of society’s historical forces (Cl. and L. Boff, *Introducing* 40), which is particularly important to make sure that the historical praxis is guided and oriented by Christian ethics. Finally, the fifth step is to draw up a program for action, “inspiring and encouraging the people to struggle, the program being, as it were, the bridge between decision-making and implementation” (Cl. and L. Boff, *Introducing* 40-41). The Boff brothers also warn us that, in the case of the practical mediation, more knowledge is gained from practice than from theory since it is easier to experience than to think out (*Introducing* 51). It must be emphasized, however, that, even so, a successful praxis must always be founded on a critical reflection on reality.

The practical mediation also involves, first and foremost, something that is not mentioned by the Boff brothers: The dimension of decoloniality. In this sense, the historical praxis is always a form of decolonial action carried out against the neocolonial oppressive structures of the capitalist system both on a micro and macropolitical level. And it is a decolonial reinterpretation of the Christian teachings that must always supervise and guide the critical reflection that must always precede a successful liberating
praxis. The Brazilian theologians, on the other hand, give a very good explanation of how the three mediations of liberation theology work out in practice by focusing on the theme of land. A liberation theology of the land, such as the one produced by Central American base communities like those of Nicaragua and El Salvador in the 1970s and 80s, would require, first of all, being involved in the specific land problem in a certain area by working in rural base communities, joining trade unions, taking part in harvests and other field tasks and participating in the struggles of rural workers (Introducing 41).

It is only then that liberation theology’s socio-analytical mediation (seeing) can help us to analyze the land situation, to encourage rural workers to stand up for their rights and to see how they organize their resistance to oppression. The hermeneutic mediation (judging) is what allows us to evaluate the land problem in the light of the Christian teachings, paying special attention to how the Bible views land (as a gift of God, a promised land, a symbol of the final kingdom to come, etc.) and to how the theological tradition of the church fathers sees the question of land (common ownership, nonmercantile character of land, etc.). On the other hand, the practical mediation (acting) stresses the organization of unions, cooperatives and other movements and publicizes the need for agrarian reform to be carried out by those who work the land. It also chooses particular banners under which to fight, joining forces with other groups, and foresees possible results and possible allocation of tasks (Cl. and L. Boff, Introducing 41-42). All this shows how liberation theology’s method involves the intertwining of the socio-analytical, hermeneutic and practical mediations as the best way to interpret the poverty and injustice of the Latin American reality in the light of the Sacred Scriptures taking into consideration the contributions of the social sciences and Marxist thinking and
underlining the crucial role of the decolonial historical praxis to transform society on behalf of a more just world.

Liberation theology interprets the Christian teachings from a liberating decolonial perspective. Let us see what its main biblical themes are. Liberation theology’s major biblical theme is undoubtedly that of Exodus. The crucial question of liberation in the book of Exodus is closely related to the notions of creation and salvation. Gutiérrez himself admits that “the Bible establishes a close link between creation and salvation. But the link is based on the historical and liberating experience of Exodus” (A Theology of Liberation 86). This means that biblical faith is faith in a God who gives self-revelation through historical facts, a God who saves in history (Gutiérrez, A Theology of Liberation 86-87). The Peruvian theologian insists on this idea and underlines the fact that “the creative act is linked, almost identified with, the act which freed Israel from slavery in Egypt” (A Theology of Liberation 87). The Exodus event is therefore synonymous with a political liberation that is also a re-creation and salvation. All liberation theologians agree on the significance of the Exodus episode for liberation theology to such an extent that, as has been mentioned above, it can be considered its major biblical theme. Clodovis and Leonardo Boff, for instance, observe how there are certain books of the Bible especially favoured and preferred by liberation theology. The first one of these is the book of Exodus since “it recounts the epic of the politico-religious liberation of a mass of slaves who, through the power of the covenant with God, became the people of God” (35).

Therefore, the political and religious meaning of Exodus is understood in decolonial terms by liberation theology taking into consideration the colonizer-colonized
dynamics that defines this biblical episode. The best example of this is Moses, who is sent by the Lord to liberate Israel from the yoke of slavery in Egypt:

The liberation of Israel is a political action. It is the breaking away from a situation of despoliation and misery and the beginning of the construction of a just and comradely society. It is the suppression of disorder and the creation of a new order. The initial chapters of Exodus describe the oppression in which the Jewish people lived in Egypt, in that “land of slavery” (13:3; 20:2; Deut. 5:6): repression (Exod. 1:10-11), alienated work (5:6-14), humiliations (1:13-14), enforced birth control policy (1:15-22). Yahweh then awakens the vocation of a liberator: Moses. (A Theology of Liberation 88)

The historical and liberating event of Exodus shows how the Lord made use of violence to liberate Israel, as can be appreciated in the drowning of the Egyptians in the Red Sea, the arrival of the plagues in Egypt and the death of the Pharaoh’s son. The Lord, however, only uses violence to liberate innocent human beings from exploitation and slavery, which underlines the decolonial dimension of the Exodus event. Moreover, the Lord always resorts to violence as counterviolence, that is, as a defensive violence against the colonizer, who causes pain and suffering to the colonized through the injustice of oppressive violence. It must be noted that oppressive and defensive violence are not the same. The former is always the fruit of subjection and domination while the latter is only a means of defense. Defensive violence is therefore a just and liberating form of violence, which can be connected with Gutiérrez’s observation that “the God of Exodus is the God of history and of political liberation more than the God of nature. Yahweh is the Liberator, the goel of Israel (Isa. 43:14; 47:4; Jer. 50:34)” (A Theology of Liberation 89). The Peruvian priest reminds us that Exodus is also the long march towards the promised land, the only place where a society free from misery and alienation can be
established thanks to Israel’s Covenant with the Lord, which shows that Exodus is not just a creative act but a re-creation (A Theology of Liberation 89). Therefore, Gutiérrez’s conclusion on the significance of Exodus is that “Yahweh will be remembered throughout the history of Israel by this act which inaugurates its history, a history which is a re-creation. The God who makes the cosmos from chaos is the same God who leads Israel from alienation to liberation” (A Theology of Liberation 89).

The Lord’s violence on behalf of the oppressed, which is just, ethical and inevitable, is mirrored by that of many Latin American Christians in the 1970s and 80s. In many cases, these had no choice but to resort to a form of just violence in order to defend the cause of the poor from the perspective of Christian ethics. That explains why Gutiérrez reminds us in 1971 that, as has been mentioned before, we cannot equate the unjust violence of the oppressors with the just violence of the oppressed, which is a form of defensive violence or counterviolence. Therefore, the paradigmatic experience of Exodus remains vital and contemporary today thanks to the similar experiences of many Christians from Latin America and other parts of the world. Like the Israelites in the book of Exodus, they also break with the yoke of slavery and oppression and assume their fate in history to become new women and men (Gutiérrez, A Theology of Liberation 90-91).

Besides Exodus, there are other biblical books and themes that are especially important for liberation theology. Clodovis and Leonardo Boff mention: The books of the Prophets, “for their uncompromising defense of the liberator God, their vigorous denunciation of injustices, their revindication of the rights of the poor, and their proclamation of the messianic world” (35); the Gospels, “obviously, for the centrality of
the divine person of Jesus, with his announcement of the kingdom, his liberating actions, and his death and resurrection—the final meaning of history” (35); the Acts of the Apostles, “because they portray the ideal of a free and liberating Christian community” (35); and the book of Revelation, “because in collective and symbolic terms it describes the immense struggles of the people of God against all the monsters of history” (35). The Boff brothers note that the Wisdom books are also favored in some places “because they embody the value of divine revelation contained in popular wisdom (proverbs, legends, etc.)” (35). They also underline the importance of the books of the Maccabees for some Central American base communities, which used them as a source of meditation and inspiration of their faith in the context of armed uprising, which was supported by their pastors (35). Once the war was over and the period of national reconstruction began, those Christian base communities engaged in the reading of the books of Ezra and Jeremiah, “which portray the efforts at restoring the people of God after the critical period in Babylonian captivity” (35).

Another important biblical theme for liberation theologians is that of the Kingdom of God. Clodovis and Leonardo Boff point out that “the kingdom is God’s project in history and eternity” (Introducing 52). The Brazilian theologians highlight the fact that the Kingdom of God is the divine plan revealed by Jesus Christ that takes place through the course of history and constitutes its definitive future in eternity (Introducing 52). The historical praxis is therefore a first realization or manifestation of the Kingdom on earth since its full plenitude culminates in the transcendent liberation of the afterlife. Hence why “the kingdom is not just in the future, for it is ‘in our midst’ (Luke 17:21); it is not a kingdom ‘of this world’ (John 18:36), but it nevertheless begins to come about in this
world” (Cl. and L. Boff, *Introducing* 52). The Boff brothers insist on the idea that the Kingdom, under different and profane signs, is always present “where persons bring about justice, seek comradeship, forgive each other and promote life” (*Introducing* 53). Therefore, the Kingdom of God represents the intertwining of the historical and the transcendent dimension in connection with the key issue of liberation. This means that liberation, like two sides of a coin, has a historical and eschatological aspect. This link is understood by Clodovis and Leonardo Boff as the connection between creation and redemption, time and eternity.

The balance between the material and spiritual plane must be taken into consideration since privileging the former would mean eclipsing the Christian teachings and privileging the latter distorting them through an idealized spiritualization of the gospel cut off from its historical insights and manifestations. It is this balance that it is difficult to achieve, as can be appreciated in some of the mistakes made by some Latin American revolutionary Christians in the 1970s and 80s as well as in the spiritualized version of poverty, liberation and justice carried out by Latin American conservative bishops in those decades and even today. In the words of the Boff brothers, “the kingdom of God is something more than historical liberations, which are always limited and open to further perfectioning, but it is anticipated and incarnated in them in time, in preparation for its full realization with the coming of the new heaven and the new earth” (*Introducing* 53). That is why the Brazilian theologians remind us that the Kingdom is not something that belongs to the future but becomes concrete through Jesus’s actions. His miracles and healings show how liberation becomes history among the oppressed (*Introducing* 54). Jesus Christ’s deeds and acts are therefore the first instance of the historical praxis of
liberation in the material world. The Kingdom is God’s gift but, as is noted by the Boff brothers, the way into it is through the process of conversion, and “the conversion demanded by Jesus does not mean just a change of convictions (theory) but above all a change of attitude (practice) toward all one’s previous personal, social and religious relationships” (Introducing 54). The intersection of the material and spiritual dimension is therefore the great challenge for a correct understanding of the Kingdom of God from a Christian perspective that contrasts with the Zealot conception of the Kingdom in purely material terms as the fruit of man’s revolutionary struggle.

Liberation theologians, on the other hand, stress the tie between the Kingdom and Jesus’s resurrection, another major biblical theme. According to Clodovis and Leonardo Boff, resurrection reveals the absolute meaning of the message of the kingdom and of the life and death of Jesus since “it is the definitive triumph of life and of hope for a reconciled kingdom in which universal peace is the fruit of divine justice and the integration of all things in God” (Introducing 55). The victory of the historical praxis and metaphysical reconciliation, resurrection is also “full liberation from all the obstacles standing in the way of the lordship of God and the full realization of all the dynamic forces for life and glory placed by God within human beings and the whole of creation” (Introducing 55). Resurrection, however, is also identified by the Boff brothers with “the death of the innocent, of those who are rejected for having proclaimed a greater justice—God’s justice—and of all those who, like Jesus, support a good cause and are anonymously liquidated” (Introducing 55). This is especially significant in the case of
many liberation theologians, who, like Óscar Arnulfo Romero\textsuperscript{60} and Ignacio Ellacuria, had to give their lives for defending the poor, thus becoming martyrs like Jesus himself.

The experience of martyrdom is therefore closely linked with liberation theology. In the words of Clodovis and Leonardo Boff, “following Jesus means taking up his cause, being ready to bear the persecution it brings and brave enough to share his fate in the hope of inheriting the full liberation that the resurrection offers us” (Introducing 55).

\textsuperscript{60} Óscar Arnulfo Romero y Ardales (1917-1980), known as Monsignor Romero, was a Catholic priest from El Salvador and the fourth metropolitan archbishop in the city of San Salvador. He was famous for his preaching on behalf of human rights and his solidarity towards the victims of his country’s political violence. He was murdered during mass celebration for denouncing many violations of human rights in his Sunday homilies. In 1997, Pope John Paul II bestowed upon Romero the title of Servant of God and opened a beatification and canonization process for him that still continues today. Romero was declared a martyr by Pope Francis on February 3, 2015.
CHAPTER TWO

The Formation and Reception of Liberation Theology

Part One

Although liberation theology is a contemporary theological reflection that is born in the late 1960s, its antecedents can be found in Latin America’s intellectual history from the colonial period to the first half of the twentieth century. First of all, it must be remembered that there was an energetic and prophetic missionary movement that defended the rights of Amerindian peoples in the sixteenth century and that especially took place in the Caribbean and Central America. Its main representatives were the Dominican friars Bartolomé de Las Casas, Pedro de Córdoba and Antonio de Montesinos (Hispaniola), Antonio de Valdivieso (Nicaragua), Cristóbal de Pedraza (Honduras) and Juan del Valle and Agustín de La Coruña (Colombia). As has been noted by Enrique Dussel, most of these early champions of the human rights of Latin America’s indigenous peoples were the first American bishops appointed by the Spanish Crown after Charles V’s New Laws (1542) were passed since “the Crown attempted to undergird the new law by naming bishops who supported the spirit of the new legislation” (A History of the Church 51).1

1 Dussel also mentions that “a study of the lives of these heroic bishops reveals that they risked everything, committing themselves without reservation, suffering expulsion from their dioceses, imprisonment, deportation, and even death in behalf of the Indians who were being violently oppressed and exploited by the Spanish colonists” (A History of the Church 51). Therefore, “the lives of these pastors should serve as an example for bishops of our era where the majority of violence is inflicted —as in the time of the conquistadores— by ‘men of arms’ ” (Dussel, A History of the Church 51). The bishops mentioned by the Argentinian philosopher are: Bartolomé de Las Casas as Bishop of Chiapas (1544-1547), Antonio de Valdivieso of Nicaragua (1544-1550), Cristóbal de Pedraza for Honduras (1545-1583), Pablo de Torres for Panama (1547-1554), Juan del Valle for Popayán (1548-1560), Fernando de Uranga for Cuba (1552-1556), Tomás Casillas for Chiapas (1552-1597), Bernardo de Alburquerque for Oaxaca (1559-1579),
Dussel also reminds us of the key role played by the Dominican order not only regarding the defense of the rights of indigenous peoples but also the early formation of an episcopate in the New World. Three Dominican missionaries, however, preceded the bishops, and, according to Dussel, “supieron oponerse a todos: al gobierno colonial, a los encomenderos, a los otros religiosos, a sus propios superiores, y en fin, al mismo Rey, y a los que le aconsejaban en la Corte sobre los problemas americanos. Se trata de tres dominicos: fray Pedro de Córdoba —jefe del grupo—, Antonio de Montesinos y Bernardo de Santo Tomás” (34). Córdoba, Montesinos and Santo Tomás came to Hispaniola in 1510 and immediately began to work on behalf of the Amerindians. Although they did not write any works, their example has left an indelible mark on the struggle for human rights in Latin America. This is especially true in the case of Montesinos, the first clergyman who radically questioned from the pulpit the abuses committed by the Spanish upon the indigenous population of Hispaniola:

Acción realmente profética, cuya actitud origina una tradición en la historia americana, fue la de Antonio de Montesinos, cuando en aquel 21 de diciembre de 1511, en el Domingo cuarto del “Adviento del Señor”, pronunció aquellas palabras que no dejarán de resonar en América mientras haya una conciencia cristiana que lleve realmente el nombre de tal: “Vox clamantis in deserto (20 . . . todos estás en pecado mortal, y en él vivís y morís, por la crueldad y tiranía que usáis con estas inocentes víctimas . . .)” (21). (Dussel, El episcopado latinoamericano 35-36)

Pedro de Angulo for Vera Paz (1560-1562), Pedro de Agreda for Coro (1560-1580), Juan de Simancas for Cartagena (1560-1570), Domingo de Santo Tomás for La Plata (1563-1570), Pedro de la Peña for Quito (1566-1583), and Agustín de La Coruña for Popayán (1565-1590). For a detailed study of the life and work of all these bishops, see Dussel’s book El episcopado latinoamericano y la liberación de los pobres, 1504-1620 (1979), especially pages 281-383.

2 Dussel underlines the significance of the members of the Dominican Order “en la gesta, no ya de la conquista, sino de la conquista moral de un continente. No puede menos que llamarnos la atención el hecho de que fueran 87 dominicos electos sobre los 292 del total de obispos (1504-1620) y que hubiera 57 obispos dominicos residentes sobre 159” (El episcopado latinoamericano 34).
Dussel believes that Montesinos’s radical and prophetic gesture represents the birth of the Indian protectorate in the New World in practice many years before it was instituted from a juridical point of view.\textsuperscript{3} That is why the Argentinian philosopher cannot help but come to the conclusion that “de hecho, fueron los religiosos —hombres de Iglesia— los primeros que levantaron la voz en defensa del indio a partir de principios evangélicos. Cabe al convento de Santiesteban —de donde saldrán tantos obispos— la gloria no sólo de haber comenzado el movimiento, sino como veremos, de continuarlo y llevarlo hasta sus últimas consecuencias” (El episcopado latinoamericano 36).

The thinking of Bartolomé de Las Casas, who supported the indigenous cause and stood up for the rights of Amerindians, is a clear antecedent of contemporary liberation theology. In many key works like The History of the Indies (1517), Memory of Remedies (1518), De unico modo (1537), A Brief Account of the Devastation of the Indies (1552) and even in his testament, Las Casas systematically questioned the oppression of the colonizer by identifying himself with the subaltern position of the colonized. Did Las Casas truly question the Spanish empire from a position of full exteriority or did he try to offer an alternative within that empire instead? Enrique Dussel has noted that “Bartolomé es el primer crítico frontal de la Modernidad, dos decenios posterior al tiempo mismo de su nacimiento” (“Meditaciones anti-cartesianas” 338). Gustavo Gutiérrez also points out that “his commitment to ‘those the world despises’ goes very far indeed. His life is an immense effort to make the outlook of the Indian his own. . . . They must not only be respected in their otherness, but listened to as well and understood in their way of seeing

\textsuperscript{3} Dussel notes how “así nacía la Protectoría del Indio no por derecho, sino de hecho. La institución en las costumbres tiene siempre antelación a la institución jurídica de derecho positivo” (El episcopado latinoamericano 36).
things” (*Las Casas* 19). Dussel concludes that Bartolomé’s thinking was the first anti-discourse of Modernity both from a philosophical and modern point of view (“Meditaciones anti-cartesianas” 349). His conclusion is based on the radicality of Las Casas’s thinking, which can be especially appreciated in the fact that, many years before Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, the Dominican friar asked the Spanish monarch to return the Kingdoms of Peru to Inca King Tito, the only legitimate ruler of the Andean lands. This fact can be connected with Gutiérrez’s observation that “his adoption of the native view of things distanced him from his fellows — from those he had close at hand. But it enabled him to draw near the remote nations of the Indies. And become their neighbor” (*Las Casas* 19).

In the spirit of the Dominican friar, liberation theologians criticize the exploitation and poverty of the wretched of the earth by present-day landowners and multinational corporations as well as the roots of the institutionalized oppressive violence: The neocolonial project of the West on Latin American soil. That is why Dussel insists on the idea that “Las Casas advocated ‘evangelism without arms,’ which signifies today liberation not as a struggle against subversion but in favor of the humanization of those unjustly treated: the Indian, the mestizo, the peasant, the laborer, the simple people, the poor and the uneducated” (*A History of the Church* 51). It must be noted, however, that, in spite of the points of connection, Latin America’s historical, theological and

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4 In his testament, *De Thesauris*, Las Casas observes that “es obligado pues el rey, nuestro señor, so pena de no salvarse, a restituir aquellos reinos al rey Tito, sucesor o heredero de Gayna Cápac y de los demás Incas, y poner en ello todas sus fuerzas y poder” (218). In his “Reply of Don Bartolomé de Las Casas to Problems Posed in 1584 Concerning the Moral Consequences of the Conquest of Peru,” Las Casas also mentions that “the Indians recognize one of the Inca’s descendants as king over the Andes—his name is Tito— and king over the rest of the country as well. Tito has his own court, has his own military guard. He keeps to the mountains along with the rest of Guainacápac’s descendants, so as not to be subject to the Spaniards, as are the rest of the Indians in Peru” (342).
intellectual context in the sixteenth century is not that of the twentieth century. As has been mentioned above, Las Casas was not the only Dominican missionary or bishop who fought for the rights of the Indians but certainly wrote many works, which has undoubtedly contributed to make him better known than any other. Dussel, however, believes that “even more important than Bartolomé de Las Casas was the Bishop of Nicaragua, Antonio de Valdivieso, who ultimately suffered martyrdom for his defense of the Indian” (A History of the Church 52). The fact that Valdivieso’s letters have never been published and can only be accessed in the Archivo de Indias in Seville shows why he has never been so well known as Las Casas. His martyrdom at the hands of a Spanish soldier for defending the poor and the oppressed inevitably reminds one of contemporary liberation theologians like Óscar Romero and Ignacio Ellacuría, who also became martyrs for the same reasons.

The antecedents of a theology of liberation in the colonial period can also be found in the Jesuit republic of the New World that took place in the eighteenth century in

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5 According to Dussel, Valdivieso’s letters show how the Indians “were brutally abused and killed . . . by Contreras, the governor, his brother, and the governor’s wife and sons, who according to Valdivieso had under their control more than a third of the principal villages in Nicaragua” (A History of the Church 52). Valdivieso informed the King of the injustices committed and of the danger he felt for his own life. He also noted that the situation was getting worse and worse and that, as had been the case with Las Casas, he recognized the possibility that his congregation would force him to leave. Because of his preaching on behalf of the indigenous peoples and against the abuses committed by the Spanish community, including the conquistadores and governors, Valdivieso was stabbed to death in his house by a Spanish soldier called Bermejo, who had been in Pizarro’s expedition and was one of the henchmen of the Contreras brothers (Dussel, A History of the Church 52-53). In Dussel’s words, “thus died Antonio de Valdivieso on February 26, 1550, in León, Nicaragua, martyred because of his love for and struggle in behalf of the liberation of the Indians in Spanish America” (A History of the Church 53).

6 The experience of martyrdom establishes a connection between past and present and demonstrates that the preferential option for the poor that defines liberation theology today is not something new but was already present in some socially compromised Latin American religious sectors in the sixteenth century. Valdivieso’s disappearance in 1550 is therefore “un símbolo de la eliminación del episcopado de la función política en defensa del indio americano” (Dussel, El episcopado latinoamericano 66), which clearly shows “el poder de la clase encomendera y la ambigua impotencia de la Corona —ambigua por cuanto en algún grado era solidaria con ella, al menos en el hecho de que esperaba siempre con ansia el fruto de sus explotaciones mineras—” (Dussel, El episcopado latinoamericano 66).
Paraguay. The Jesuit state represents the continuation and successful materialization of Las Casas’s dream of an Indian settlement, which could never become true due to the failure of his early experiments in Cumandá (Venezuela) and Vera Paz (Guatemala).7 Because of the frequent revolts of the Guarani against the Spanish settlers, the first Franciscan and Jesuit missionaries came to Paraguay in 1585 in order to help Governor Hernando Arias de Saavedra to subjugate the natives. This means that, as has been noted by Girolamo Imbruglia, “l’inspiration religieuse et le dessein ‘civilisateur’ des religieux s’inscrivirent dès les origins dans une perspective coloniale. Il fallait que les Indiens reconnaissent la légitimité des autorités espagnoles, représentées en l’occurrence par les

7 Lewis Hanke notes that the Cumandá project failed completely when put to the test. According to the American historian, Bartolomé’s plan “was to colonize in 1521 the northern coast of Venezuela, then called Tierra Firme, with Spanish farmers who would till the soil, treat the Indians kindly, and thus lay the basis for an ideal Christian community in the New World” (22). Hanke believes that the Cumandá experiment failed “partly because the conditions stipulated by Las Casas as necessary to launch the project did not exist. Spaniards willing to risk their lives and fortunes in the New World were interested, not in becoming farmers, even if they had been such in Spain, but in becoming men of wealth and position” (23). I believe, however, that it was the lack of ethics and morality along with the ambition and corruption of the Spanish that made it impossible for the Cumandá project to succeed. The fact that the Spanish wanted to be rich does not necessarily mean that many of them were not willing to till the land. Both goals were therefore complementary. On the other hand, Bartolomé’s theory that the Indians could be converted to Christianity by peaceful means alone was “successfully put into practice in the famous experiment which took place in Guatemala in the years following 1537” (Hanke 24). This was only possible due to the fact that Bartolomé’s two requests were granted by Governor Alonso Maldonado: The Indians would not be divided among the Spanish settlers but should depend directly upon the Crown with only moderate tribute to pay, and for five years no Spaniards except Las Casas and the Dominicans would be allowed in Vera Paz “in order that secular Spaniards might not disturb the Indians or provoke scandal” (Hanke 27). Nevertheless, the Vera Paz project also turned out to be a failure in the long run since, in Hanke’s words, “the conditions which alone would make such an effort ultimately successful—that is, Spanish colonists as selfless in their attitude as Las Casas—did not exist in the wilds of Guatemala any more than they had on the sands of Venezuela” (29). All this suggests that it was the greed, ambition and non-Christian behavior of the Spaniards that prevented the Cumandá and Vera Paz experiments from being successful. Lawrence A. Clayton also suggests this idea when wondering in connection with the Cumandá experiment “where were the hundreds, thousands, of good Spanish peasants to settle the new lands, motivated by Christian principles of fellowship and sharing rather than greed and avarice?” (189). Daniel Castro, on the other hand, points out that the failure of Las Casas’s Cumandá project could have been predicted from the start due to the fact that “at first there had been the opposition of influential figures at court who sabotaged the project from the very beginning” (83). Another significant factor mentioned by Castro was “the distraction of the Spanish government with the rebellion of the comuneros in Spain and the inability of the Casa de Contratación to produce the money necessary for the venture precisely because of the comunero conflict” (83).
deux ordres religieux” (10). The difference was that whereas the Franciscans made sure that the political and economic dependence of the Guarani was guaranteed through the continuity between Spanish political sovereignty and the encomienda and mita system, the Jesuits excluded the natives from this system in exchange for their recognition of Spanish sovereignty and political submission (Imbruglia 10-11). The fact that, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the encomienda became the object of violent critiques coming from both religious and civil authorities⁸ wishing to weaken the independence of the settlers helped the Jesuits to found their missions “sans mita en payant directement au roi un tribute proportionnel au nombre de d’Indiens mâles vivant dans la mission. Les Indiens n’étaient donc plus soumis au contrôle administrative et politique de l’Empire — même s’ils reconnaissaient la souveraineté du roi —, mais à celui de la Compagnie de Jésus” (Imbruglia 11). The novelty of the situation “fut constamment reprochée aux Jésuites par leur critiques: n’avaient-ils pas fondé un véritable ‘royaume jésuite’ dont l’indépendance politique était assurée, et comme dissimulée, par son indépendance économique?” (Imbruglia 11).

Therefore, the arrival of the Jesuits to Paraguay represented, a priori, a sort of religious colonialism that certainly involved cultural and spiritual violence through the extirpation of Guarani traditional spirituality and shamanic practices even if, in the spirit of Las Casas, the natives gave their consent to become vassals of the King of Spain.⁹ The Jesuits, on the other hand, were also obsessed with the idea of saving souls, which gave

⁸ Imbruglia mentions as examples of those authorities the synod held in Asunción in 1603 and the civil authorities from Madrid.
⁹ Native American scholar Jay Hansford C. Vest underlines the fact that “rather than practice an agape of selfless love or brother care, the Jesuits persecuted the Native shamans and those who continued to practice the traditional religion” (30).
rise to a sort of “soul lust” that was not without materialist and utilitarian purposes.¹⁰ The foundation and establishment of the Jesuit republic, however, gave rise to a series of Jesuit missions called “Reductions”¹¹ in which a communist economic system² where all things were shared in common without the use of money was successfully put into practice. Therefore, it is only a posteriori, once the Jesuits peacefully managed to convince the Guarani to come and live in the Reductions, that, pretty much like the first Christian communities of the New Testament, the Jesuit republic stands for a Christian communist project on behalf of the Guarani with the aim of liberating and protecting them from the abuses of the Spanish and Portuguese settlers. As has been pointed out by Philip Caraman, the government of the Jesuit republic of the New World was probably modelled on the communal utopia of Tommaso Campanella’s City of the Sun and certainly on the utopian thinking of other social theorists like Thomas More (108-09).¹³

¹⁰ According to Vest, “the Jesuits entertained grand designs dedicated to the ‘salvation of souls’ in a ‘spiritual conquest.’ In their Conquista Espiritual the Jesuits ‘wanted souls for Christ’ and were, thereby, motivated by a kind of ‘soul lust’” (30).
¹¹ According to Imbruglia, the definition in Latin for the word “Reduction” given by the Jesuits is “ad vitam civilem et ad Ecclesiam reducti sunt” (They are reduced to civil life and to the Church). Imbruglia, however, also notes that “mais ce mot ne possède pas seulement le sens de concentration urbaine; il possède aussi celui d’ordre imposé d’en haut, de subordination” (19). This shows the order, subordination and discipline imposed by the Jesuits in the Reductions, which, like the Inca empire, was a totalitarian state even though it was able to liberate and protect the Guarani from outside threats.
¹² The phrase “communist economic system” is used to designate an economic organization based on the distribution and sharing of all goods and products that has nothing to do with Marxist communism. Therefore, to identify the Christian communism of the Reductions with the Marxist communist ideology would be a dangerous epistemological mistake and anachronism. It would be possible, however, to consider the Guarani and the Jesuits of the Reductions precursors of a Marxist communist praxis avant la lettre. It is not a coincidence that, in Philip Caraman’s words, “at the end of the [nineteenth] century the pioneers of the Labour movement believed they had found there [in the Reductions] a pattern for British socialism” (11).
¹³ Caraman notes that “economically the Reductions were self-sufficient, while socially they were more advanced than any Indian community since the passing of the Inca empire. For the welfare of their citizens, they developed a system that European countries took another two centuries to attain” (108). The American historian believes that this explains why the Jesuit Reductions drew the attention of social theorists long before the French revolution and why many eighteenth-century writers “saw in their organization a planned attempt to put into practice the ideas of Thomas More and Tommaso Campanella” (108). Campanella was an Italian philosopher and poet whose most significant work was City of the Sun, a
Nevertheless, it was the more practical utopias of men like Bartolomé de Las Casas that, according to Caraman, became most influential:

His [Las Casas’s] treatise, published in 1518, three years after More’s, prefigures the spirit and methods that characterized the Reductions. Seventy-five years before the foundation of Loreto [one of the first Jesuit Reductions], Las Casas created and directed at Vera Paz in Guatemala an Indian settlement directly dependent on the Spanish Crown; and he excluded from it all Spaniards, both military and civil. Other less publicized but similar experiments were made in the same region. It was a time when many thinkers in the old religious orders were giving thought to missionary methods and to the psychology of the American Indian. In this atmosphere, the notion of a Christian republic continued to be mooted. (109)

Imbruglia, however, notes how, in spite of the fact that all eminent utopian thinkers from Plato to Campanella have been suggested to account for the origins of the Jesuit republic of Paraguay, “jamais n’a été avancé celui, moins glorieux peut-être mais plus adéquat, du grand théoricien et théologien jesuite F. Suárez” (25). According to the Italian critic, the connection of the idea of natural sociability with that of subordination plays a very important role in Francisco Suárez’s thinking (25). This is especially significant to understand the theocratic and totalitarian nature of the Jesuit state, which, philosophical and political treatise in which he described a universal theocratic state based on the community principles of equality. Campanella was in prison for twenty-seven years for leading an uprising attempt against the Spanish Crown in Calabria in 1599 promising to his followers a communist republic founded on harmony and love. Caraman reminds us that Campanella “was well known as a revolutionary thinker anxious to establish a new form of government in Naples on a theocratic communistic basis. . . . His book had been circulating in manuscript for many years before it was published” (108). Thomas More, on the other hand, was an English theologian, humanist and politician whose most famous work, *Utopia*, seeks to establish the ideal society of a nation on an island with the same name. Caraman underlines the fact that “certainly the ideas of Thomas More were very much in the air and it is probable that they were known to the Paraguayan priests” (109). He also mentions that several bishops in the Spanish possessions like Vasco de Quiroga in Michoacán had studied *Utopia* long before the arrival of the Jesuits (109).
despite its liberation and protection of the Guarani from the attacks of the mamelouks and other settlers, was guided by natural law, that is, the idea that the Guarani had to submit to the Jesuits, superior creatures who would guide them through Jesuit authority and laws. Following Imbruglia, there exists another idea of law in Suárez’s writings that develops on two levels: Family and the state. What founds the latter is the conception of popular sovereignty and will along with the idea of common good since, for Suárez, “la communauté des biens est une dimension du social qui peut devenir réalité, surtout si la piété vient l’exalter” (26). On the other hand, it must be noted that, because of their regulations and discipline, the Reductions were identified with monasteries by some chroniclers like Ludovico Antonio Muratori. Hence why, according to Imbruglia, the Jesuit state acquired its status as a utopia (23).

The Jesuit utopia of Paraguay was therefore the fruit of the intertwining of the utopias developed by Campanella, More and Las Casas with Suárez’s juridical and theological thinking along with certain elements of Guarani worldview, spirituality and culture—including the frequent use of their language and some form of private property.

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14 The Portuguese word Mameluco was used to refer to organized bands of slave-hunters, also known as bandeirantes, who hunted for Guarani Indians from the Atlantic to the foothills of the Andes and from Paraguay to the Orinoco river.

15 Muratori was an Italian philologist, historian and philosopher best known for his Riflessioni sopra il buon gusto (Reflections on Good Taste), where he presents his idea of a modernization and reorganization of Italian culture. He also wanted to increase knowledge through a new vision of history founded on a new and more solid philology as well as on erudition, as can be appreciated in his essential works Rerum italicarum scriptores (1723-38) (Of the things of Italian writers) and Antiquitates italicæ medii ævii (1738) (Antiquities of the Italian Middle Ages) (Imbruglia 35). Muratori always defended the work of the Jesuits in Paraguay and wrote a chronicle on the subject, Il Cristianesimo felice nelle missioni dei padri della compagnia di Gesù (The Happy Christianity in the Missions of the Fathers of the Company of Jesus). According to Imbruglia, the work became successful very quickly in spite of the fact that it included very little new information on the subject (36). A second volume was published by Muratori in which he refuted the accusations against the Jesuits, considerably increased the documentary part and made a reference to other Jesuit missions like those of California. A shortened French translation of the first volume of this work was carried out by Father F. E. de Lourmel in 1754. The title of the French text was changed to Relation des missions du Paraguay.
of the land—, which were preserved by the Jesuits. As has been pointed out by Frederick J. Reiter, “a group of Jesuit missions had, through circumstances as unique as extraordinary, grown into an entity, a state within the state, where more than a hundred thousand Guarani Indians, guided by a handful of the Fathers, led productive lives as free men, deeply religious Christians and proud subjects of the King of Spain” (i). Nevertheless, the splendor and prosperity of the Reductions soon required the creation of a Guarani army to protect them from the Portuguese slave hunters. The Guarani army was authorized by the Spanish Crown as a means of protection and was very successful in its mission, thus putting an end to the razzias carried out by the mamelouks or *bandeirantes*. The Crown, of course, had its own concealed interests since “en outre, on les utilisa au XVIIIe siècle pour mater les revoltes. Les objectifs coloniaux de l’Espagne se trouvaient donc en partie atteints” (Imbruglia 22).

The antecedents of a theology of liberation in the Jesuit utopia of Paraguay can be especially appreciated through the armed conflict known as the Guarani War, which took place in the 1750s and 60s. Due to the greed of the Spanish and Portuguese Crowns, which wanted the lands of the Reductions to be occupied by Spanish and Portuguese

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16 Imbruglia reminds us of the diffusionist theory of religion of the Jesuits, according to which religion was conceived as a universal mental structure in which the Christian religion embodied perfection. That is why the Jesuits came to identify the Guarani deity Tomé with the apostle Thomas (16). This complex process of inculturation shows how “les jésuites s’efforçaient de parvenir à un syncretisme religieux dont la base restait la religion chrétienne mais qui restait ouvert à un dialogue avec les autres cultures et, en permettant d’en pénétrer les règles, donnait le moyen de les ramener vers un unique ideal de civilisation” (Imbruglia 17). The Italian scholar also calls attention to the Jesuit concept of religion, which was based on “une vision très large de la divinité qui, ainsi qu’on la vu, permettait de dialoguer avec d’autres cultures que les Jésuites situaient sur une même echelle que la religion chrétienne, celle-ci n’en constituant que le plus haut degré” (25). It is not surprising that, as is observed by Imbruglia, the Vatican itself suspected this fluid transcultural process as a result of the cultural adaptation of the Jesuits. It must be remembered, on the other hand, that the inculturation of certain elements of Guarani spirituality with Christianity was preceded by a stage of spiritual conquest and violence when the Jesuits first arrived in Paraguay to help the Spanish Crown to subdue the Guarani.
settlers, the Jesuits and the Guarani were commanded to leave and be transferred. As has been pointed out by Caraman, “the transfer of the Indians went against their right to be considered free persons, against their natural right to property and even against their right to life: the treaty condemned them to perpetual exile, loss of fields and farms, and to a fresh start in life from virtually nothing” (241). Consequently, the Guarani and many Jesuits decided to defend their land and freedom and fight together against the oppressor in spite of the fact that the revolted Jesuits were threatened by the Vatican with excommunication. The Jesuit order, on the other hand, was unfairly expelled from the New World and all the other possessions of the Spanish Empire in 1767 in order to make things easier. Despite its tendency to idealize and romanticize the Jesuits by concealing their initial spiritual violence upon the Guarani, Roland Joffé’s film *The Mission* (1986) offers an excellent portrayal of the Guarani war. It is not a coincidence that Joffé himself made the connection between the Jesuits of Paraguay and the antecedents of the theology of liberation when mentioning in an interview that “absolutely. The film in that sense is intimately concerned with the struggle for liberation in liberation theology, and that’s why the historical perspective is very important, because what it’s actually saying is that these people [liberation theologians] haven’t come out of nowhere” (3).¹⁷

It must be noted, however, that there is a very important difference between the eighteenth-century Jesuits of Paraguay and present-day liberation theologians that has to do with the key issue of colonialism. Although the Jesuits were quite imperialist at first from a cultural and spiritual point of view through their extirpation campaigns of Guarani

¹⁷ Film critic John McInerney, on the other hand, observes in connection with this point that “the Jesuits, committed to the safety and independence of the Indian communes evoke the Marxist-leaning ‘liberation theologians’ who make our headlines, and the Vatican is just as leery of such movements today as it was then” (72).
religious practices but later liberated and protected the Guarani in the Reductions from an anti-imperialist Christian perspective to the point of fighting and/or giving their lives for their cause, they could not possibly get rid of a colonialist mindset working inside the Reductions. This can be appreciated in their belief that the Guarani had to be guided and instructed by them since the Indians were inferior creatures, which denies and eclipses the agency of the Guarani subaltern subject on behalf of the Jesuit paternalism of a sort of father-child relationship. Liberation theologians, by contrast, have always defended the dignity and equality of all human beings and certainly favor indigenous subaltern agency, thus overcoming the inner contradictions of the Paraguay Jesuits two centuries before. It is precisely for this reason that the Jesuit Reductions are just another instance of the antecedents of liberation theology. All this suggests that the Jesuit republic was an imperial project of a spiritual nature endowed with an anti-imperialist dimension as far as its dealings with the Spanish and Portuguese Crowns are concerned.

The antecedents of contemporary liberation theology are also present in the nineteenth century with Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical letter *Rerum Novarum: The Condition of Labor* (1891). This document contains the first explicit statement on the part of the magisterium on behalf of a preferential option for the poor, one of the main insights of the theology of liberation.¹⁸ The difference is that this commitment to the poor

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¹⁸ Irish theologian David Tombs observes that “an equally important contribution, though one that seems to have hardly been recognized, is that *Rerum Novarum* provided the first clear Catholic endorsement of an ‘option for the poor’—the principle on which liberation theology rests—even though it is not explicitly named as such” (45-46). Tombs also underlines the significance of the concepts of the “common good” and “distributive justice” in *Rerum Novarum*, which became central for the Catholic social tradition and have also influenced liberation theology (46). In spite of the fact that the option for the poor was just advocated by the Church and really taken by civil authorities, “nonetheless, it pointed to the principle of preferential treatment for the poor on which liberation theology successfully built a new political understanding in the late 1960s, and a new epistemological understanding in the late 1970s” (Tombs 46). Tombs also reminds us in connection with *Rerum Novarum* that “although the start of social tradition in
only works on the theoretical level of orthodoxy in the encyclical but not on that of orthopraxis, which is so important for liberation theologians. The preference for the poor is expressed by Pope Leo in the following terms:

But all agree, and there can be no question whatever, that some remedy must be found, and quickly found, for the misery and wretchedness which press so heavily at this moment on the large majority of the very poor. The ancient workmen’s guilds were destroyed in the last century, and no other organization took their place. Public institutions and the laws have repudiated the ancient religion. Hence by degrees it has come to pass that workingmen have been given over, isolated and defenseless, to the callousness of employers and the greed of unrestrained competition. The evil has been increased by rapacious usury, which, although more than once condemned by the Church, is nevertheless, under a different form but with the same guilt, still practiced by avaricious and grasping men. And to this must be added the custom of working by contract, and the concentration of so many branches of trade in the hands of a few individuals, so that a small number of very rich men have been able to lay upon the masses of the poor a yoke little better than slavery itself. 19 (15)

Neither must it be supposed that the solicitude of the Church is so occupied with the spiritual concerns of its children as to neglect their interests, temporal and earthly. Its desire is that the poor, for example, should rise above poverty and wretchedness, and should better their condition in life; and for this it strives. By the very fact that it calls men to virtue and forms them to its practice, it promotes this in no slight degree. Christian morality, when it is adequately and completely practiced, conduces of itself to temporal prosperity, for it merits the blessing of that God who is the source of all blessings. (25)

The fact that Rerum Novarum endorses a reformist liberal bourgeois perspective from a political and economic point of view also contrasts with liberation theology’s attempt to interweave Marxism and Christianity. Pope Leo’s attempt to reconcile

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19 Tombs calls attention to the fact that although Pope Leo was not aware of the exploitative conditions under which Latin American peasants labored, “his condemnation of industrial work patterns a little better than slavery was significant for Latin America. In many Latin American countries the near feudal agricultural patterns inherited from the time of the conquest resulted in labour practices as coercive and brutal as slavery” (44).
capitalism and the Gospel, on the other hand, is quite questionable as well since capitalism, a system founded on the exploitation of the poor masses of the world by a minority of rich individuals, goes against Jesus Christ’s teachings. The reformist procapitalist perspective of *Rerum Novarum* is therefore ultimately idealistic, utopian and even contradictory. This can be appreciated in Leo’s rejection of one of the main tenets of socialism, the community of goods, which also played a crucial role in Jesus Christ’s thinking and praxis as well as in the first Christian communities of the New Testament, as is later admitted by the Pope himself. Leo’s belief that it is possible for the rich and poor to live in harmony and unity in a capitalist society is a naïve utopia that also contradicts his previous observations on the cruel and merciless exploitation of the destitute by those who accumulate wealth. This innocent and romanticized stance culminates with Leo’s refusal to admit, as a result of an anti-Marxist *pathos*, the undeniable historical fact of “class struggle.” As has been mentioned in chapter one, the notion of “class struggle” predates Marxist thought although Marx is certainly to be admired for having called our attention to how it works within a capitalist framework.

Another serious problem with *Rerum Novarum* is Leo’s rejection of Marx’s valuable contribution to the defense of the rights of the poor, which is once again the consequence of his anti-Marxist prejudices, as well as the fact that he never admits that the encyclical itself is the fruit of the influence of Marx and Engels’s ideas on Catholic social thought. It is true that the interpretations of Marxism on the political arena are not without their problems. This, however does not justify overlooking the ethics of the Marxist revolutionary struggle on behalf of the poor and the oppressed of our world. The message of *Rerum Novarum* seems to be that the Church cannot bury its head in the sand
anymore by implicitly supporting the oppressors, which means that it must be critical and
question the abuses of capitalism not only in theory but also in practice. It is a pity that,
instead of strengthening ties and points of connection with the Marxist movement, *Rerum
Novarum* rejects the Marxist revolutionary praxis on behalf of the orthodoxy of a world
of wishful thinking dominated by quite a utopian, contradictory and naïve capitalist
project.20 In spite of its flaws, *Rerum Novarum* is the first document coming from the
Catholic Church that expresses a preferential option for the poor, a point that will become
one of the main tenets of the theology of liberation of the late 1960s and early 1970s after
being resemanticized or adapted from a Marxist praxiological perspective.

Published in 1931 to celebrate the publication of *Rerum Novarum* forty years
before, Pope Pius XI’s encyclical letter *Quadragesimo Anno: After Forty Years* is another
document from the magisterium that shows a preference for the poor and the oppressed
many years before liberation theology.21 Pius begins his encyclical by exaggerating the

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20 David J. O’Brien and Thomas A. Shannon remind us how “Leo attempted to persuade Catholics to
concentrate less on politics and more on the ‘social question’ ” (“Introduction to *Rerum Novarum*” 13).
The consequence of this was that “at times his appeal sounds quite radical, reviving the earlier emphasis
on the evangelical mission on behalf of the poor. But the goal was still the restoration of order and
authority, and that precluded enthusiasm, class preference, or labor militancy” (O’Brien and Shannon,
“Introduction to *Rerum Novarum*” 13). On the other hand, the discontent among the lower classes with
the devastating social effects of the industrial revolution “found fertile ground in radical social
movements, most of which regarded the church as allied with the enemy” (O’Brien and Shannon,
“Introduction to *Rerum Novarum*” 12). Therefore, it is not surprising that many poor Catholics claiming
their right to a living wage made up their mind to befriend and join those social movements. But, as is
noted by O’Brien and Shannon, “if that journey was to take place, Leo warned, it should be guided by the
church and its pastors. Catholics should dream of new things, but be cautious in bringing those dreams
to life” (“Introduction to *Rerum Novarum*” 13).

21 Tombs notes how Pope Pius “repeated Leo’s statement that it is the poor who are most in need of
public protection by the civil authorities and should be given special care” (56). This means that, forty
years after *Rerum Novarum*, the new Pope “thereby repeated and affirmed the foundational element for
liberation theology’s ‘preferential option for the poor’ that would be taken up as a political option by
liberation theologians in the late 1960s and an epistemological principle in the mid-1970s” (56). O’Brien
and Shannon, on the other hand, point out the differences as far as the historical contexts of *Rerum
Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno* are concerned. According to the American theologians, when Leo
wrote in 1891, “liberal capitalism was at the zenith of its power. Opting for reform rather than
social impact of *Rerum Novarum*. It is true that Leo’s text was influential but certainly not to such an extent. Therefore, most of the trade unions and workingman associations that had emerged since 1891 had more to do with the Marxist revolutionary struggle and the foundation of the first Marxist political parties. Some Catholic associations and unions had also been founded but experience shows that, in the long run, they have never been very influential. Truly influential trade unions have no religious affiliation and are usually sponsored by left-wing political parties. All this suggests that it was really Marx’s thinking and the revolutionary socialist movement that gave rise to new laws protecting the rights of the workers rather than Leo’s theoretical considerations, which worked only on the level of orthodoxy, and therefore, were ultimately disconnected from the real world.

Like *Rerum Novarum*, Pius’s document criticizes the exploitation of the poor in 1931 as well as international economic imperialism, as can be appreciated in the following passages:

> Nevertheless, the immense number of propertyless wage earners on the one hand, and the superabundant riches of the fortunate few on the other, is an unanswerable argument that the earthly goods so abundantly produced in this age of “industrialism” are far from rightly distributed and equitably shared among the various classes of men. (56)

> Moreover, there is the immense army of hired rural laborers whose condition is depressed in the extreme, and who have no hope of ever

counterrevolution, Leo tried to nudge European Catholics away from an apparently hopeless alliance with monarchy and preindustrial feudal economic ideals toward a more promising strategy of political participation and social reform” ("Introduction to *Quadragesimo Anno*" 40). Pius XI, however, faced a very different situation in 1931 since "World War I had shattered liberal confidence. Parliamentary democracy seemed almost helpless in the face of the mass movements of fascism and communism. And the economy of the Western world lay in the ruins of a worldwide depression" (O’Brien and Shannon, "Introduction to *Quadragesimo Anno*" 40). The consequence of this was that in 1931 “the church, better organized and more united than ever before, might be able to offer a credible alternative to a failed capitalism and a fearsome socialism” (O’Brien and Shannon, “Introduction to *Quadragesimo Anno*” 40).
“obtaining a share in the land.” These, too, unless efficacious remedies be applied, will remain permanently in a proletarian condition. (56)

But after the modern machinery and modern industry had progressed with astonishing speed and become common in many newly colonized countries as well as in the ancient civilizations of the Far East, the number of the dispossessed laboring masses, whose cries mount to heaven from these lands, increased exceedingly. (56)

The critique of imperialism and neocolonialism is also developed in connection with the corruption of the State and the relation of nations in the following terms:

Unbridled ambition for domination has succeeded the desire for gain; the whole economic life has become hard, cruel and relentless in a ghastly measure. Furthermore, the intermingling and scandalous confusing of the duties and offices of civil authority and of the economy has produced grave evils, not the least of which has been a downgrading of the majesty of the State. The State which should be the supreme arbiter, ruling in queenly fashion far above all party contention, intent only upon justice and the common good, has become instead a slave, bound over to the service of human passion and greed. As regards the relations of nations among themselves, a double stream has issued forth from this one fountainhead; on the one hand, economic “nationalism” or even economic “imperialism”; a no less noxious and detestable “internationalism” or “international imperialism” in financial affairs, which holds that where a man’s fortune is, there is his country. (65-66)

If there is something that defines Quadragesimo Anno, this is an anti-communist and anti-socialist *pathos*. Like his predecessor, Pius refuses to reconcile Marxism and Christianity as a result of his preconceptions on the communist and socialist revolutionary movement. This means that *Quadragesimo Anno* does not support a qualitative change in the system through a revolutionary liberating praxis that transforms society to put an end to capitalist oppression but rather a liberal bourgeois reformist
project that, like that of *Rerum Novarum*, is quite romantic, utopian and inefficacious.\(^{22}\) The consequence of this is that such a project supports in practice the injustice of the *status quo* instead of radically questioning this. Like *Rerum Novarum*, Pius’s document works only on the sphere of orthodoxy but not on that of orthopraxis. Its capitalist reformist approach prevents Pius from seeing the points in common between Marxism and Christianity as well as from putting into practice a joint orthopraxis that can give rise to a new and more just world led by a combination of Marxist distributive justice and Christian ethics. This is precisely what base ecclesial communities, the most immediate antecedent of liberation theology, will try to do in their Latin American local contexts by deploying a critical consciousness upon their surrounding reality.

Base ecclesial communities represent a sort of liberation theology in practice that is the fruit of confronting that praxis with a theological reflection still only articulated at a popular level. According to Tamayo-Acosta, these communities originated “entre los más pobres de los pobres y están formadas por aquellos sectores creyentes de la población que carecen de poder religioso, económico y social” (*Para comprender* 45). Moreover, “son comunidades martiriales que comparten la vida y las luchas del pueblo, sufren persecución por defender la justicia y llegan hasta a dar la vida por los hermanos”

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\(^{22}\) This idea can be connected with O’Brien and Shannon’s observation on *Quadragesimo Anno* that “on the whole, however, the project of Christianizing the modern social order had to be judged, at mid-century, a failure” (“Introduction to *Quadragesimo Anno*” 41). This was due to the fact that “the magnificent effort to construct a body of Catholic social teaching produced thinkers and documents that were insightful and powerful in perceiving and denouncing the evils of liberalism, capitalism, and democracy, but which could never transcend that critique to formulate a positive, attractive, and compelling alternative” (O’Brien and Shannon, “Introduction to *Quadragesimo Anno*” 41). As a consequence, the Church never succeeded in relating to the hopes and aspirations of the working class since it seemed “only to offer a return to a former age, which many knew instinctively had been neither secure nor happy for most people” (O’Brien and Shannon, “Introduction to *Quadragesimo Anno*” 41).
Leonardo Boff, on the other hand, notes how “the rise of the basic communities is also due to the crisis in the church institution. The scarcity of ordained ministers to attend to the needs of these communities has aroused the creative imagination of the pastors themselves, and they have come to entrust the laity with more and more responsibility” (Ecclesiogenesis 2). Therefore, the laity “carry forward the cause of the gospel here, and are the vessels, the vehicles of ecclesial reality even on the level of direction and decision-making” (Boff, Ecclesiogenesis 2). This shift of the ecclesial axis, which “contains, in seed, a new principle for ‘birthing the church,’ for ‘starting the church again,’ ” (Boff, Ecclesiogenesis 2) is highlighted by the Brazilian theologian in the following terms:

It is a transposition that bids fair to form the principle of a genuine “ecclesiogenesis”—to use a word that was employed on several occasions in the Vitória dialogue of January 1975. We are not dealing with the expansion of an existing ecclesiastical system, rotating on a sacramental, clerical axis, but with the emergence of another form of being church, rotating on the axis of the word and the laity. We may well anticipate that, from this movement, of which the universal church is becoming aware, a new type of institutional presence of Christianity in the world may now come into being. (Ecclesiogenesis 2).

Boff believes that it is necessary to establish a dialectical interaction between these two ecclesiological models, the universal church and the base communities, if the base ecclesial movement wants to keep the communitarian spirit alive. On the one hand,

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23 Father Dominique Barbé, a French priest who has been living in Brazil since 1968 among the most marginalized of industrial society and working with the small base communities and workers of São Paulo, does not hesitate to identify the contemporary base ecclesial movement in Brazil with the eighteenth-century Jesuit reductions when pointing out that “in these base communities of that age, even though somewhat patriarchal and paternalistic, the Indians learned how to escape from the steam roller of colonization and to achieve awareness of their human rights—namely, their rights to the land” (91). According to Barbé, the tension between the Jesuits and the Portuguese Crown in the 1750s resembles that between the Catholic Church and the military dictatorship of the 1970s in Brazil, a time when base ecclesial communities were becoming fully developed (91-92).
the basic church community will have to remain small “in order to avoid bureaucratization and to maintain a direct personal relationship among all its members” (Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis* 9). But, on the other, “the communities have come more and more to understand their need of the church as great institution, for the maintenance of their continuity, for their Catholic identity, and for their oneness with one another” (Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis* 9). Therefore, the great challenge for the basic church community is that “although it will have to open up to the communion of the church universal, with all the latter’s societal institutions and forms, yet it will have to maintain a dialectical tension with this global church in order not to be absorbed by it” (Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis* 9). Following Boff, this is the only way to avoid its deterioration into a fanatical group of futurists or a reactionary group in love with the past (*Ecclesiogenesis* 9).

As has been mentioned above, Latin American base ecclesial communities are the most immediate antecedent of the theology of liberation. In fact, a theology of liberation already took place in them in praxis — in a dialogical projection with a popular theological reflection— before it was first theorized by liberation theologians many years later. In this sense, it is not a coincidence that the first theoretical studies of the base ecclesial movement in Latin America were carried out by liberation theologians like Leonardo Boff and Carlos Mesters. All this suggests the need to emphasize the dialectical relationship between basic church communities and liberation theology itself. It is the praxis by the poor in the light of the Sacred Scriptures carried out in Latin American base communities that allows the theology of liberation to be theoretically articulated by

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24 The Brazilian theologian reminds us that “Christian life in the basic communities is characterized by the absence of alienating structures, by direct relationships, by reciprocity, by a deep communion, by mutual assistance, by communality of gospel ideals, by equality among members” (*Ecclesiogenesis* 4).
professional theologians like Gustavo Gutiérrez, Hugo Assman, Rubem Alves, Juan Luis Segundo and Leonardo Boff himself in the 1970s. It is the theological reflection of liberation theology, however, that attempts to account for the base ecclesial phenomenon in Latin America from a theoretical point of view by going beyond traditional theological-pastoral categories, which come from other contexts and ecclesial experiences disconnected from those of the basic church community.

This explains why English theologian Andrew Dawson insists on the idea that although liberation theology’s theological and socio-political critique was well in place before the mid-1970s, “it was only via its engagement with the nascent CEB movement that Latin American liberation theology was fully enabled to root itself within the lived experiences of the masses at the base” (121). This means that “without this praxiological grounding, liberation theology would neither have been able to articulate the sufferings of the poor, nor been allowed to claim the representative status upon which so much of its credibility continues to rest” (Dawson 121). This point is reinforced by the fact that the methodology of the theology of liberation is founded on that of the basic church community: The See-Judge-Act method, which, as is noted by Dawson, was previously used within Catholic University Youth and the Base Education Movement (117).

The first base ecclesial communities probably emerged in Brazil in the 1950s. As has been pointed out by Dawson, “given the sheer size of the Latin American continent, not to mention its attendant socio-political and cultural diversity, it would prove fruitless to try and sketch the origins and character of the CEB through such a wide and varied panorama” (110). Moreover, it should be noted that “the Brazilian experience is taken by many to be both the arena in which the earliest CEBs emerged and broadly representative
of the overall historical processes, forces and demands which combined to give rise to the base ecclesial community” (Dawson 110). The emergence of ecclesial communities in Brazil began in 1956 with a community evangelization movement initiated by Dom Agnelo Rossi25 in Barra do Piraí (Rio de Janeiro district). It was the complaint of the Catholic poor of Barra do Piraí about the lack of Catholic priests in the area, as opposed to the presence of many protestant pastors belonging to various denominations, that made Rossi begin training lay catechists as community coordinators “to do everything a person can do in God’s church in current ecclesiastical discipline” (qtd. in Boff, Ecclesiogenesis 3).26

The obligations of the so-called catequistas populares (popular catechists) included gathering the people from all over the district once a week for religious instruction, celebrating daily prayer with the people, and, on Sundays and Holy Days,

25 Dom Agnelo Rossi (4 May 1913-21 May 1995) was a Brazilian Cardinal and Dean of the Sacred College of Cardinals. After meeting duties as secretary to the Bishop of Campinas and faculty member of the Central Seminary of São Paulo and the faculty of economic science at the University of Campinas, he became Canon of the cathedral chapter of Campinas (1943-1956). Rossi was appointed Bishop of Barra do Piraí in 1956 and remained in this position until he was named Archbishop of Ribeirão Preto in 1962. It was during his first year as Bishop of Barra do Piraí that Rossi carried out his catechist experiment, which signals the start of the base ecclesial movement in Brazil. A source that gathers some information on Dom Agnelo Rossi’s biography is Salvador Miranda’s digital resource The Cardinals of the Roman Catholic Church.

26 Dawson observes in connection with this point that “the lay catechist of the Barra do Piraí experiment was by no means intended to have a free rein in following his own initiative. Rather, the lay catechist was called upon only to read material which had been especially prepared by the diocesan authorities” (112). According to the English theologian, since the popular catechist could never add to the material supplied by Rossi’s team or make commentaries on the readings, “it is apparent that Rossi’s concept of popular lay catechesis comprised no more than a strong lay subordination and strict clerical dependence, albeit once removed. As such, it is reasonable to surmise that Rossi would have favoured the rapid phasing out of lay catechists and their replacement by a traditional cleric-centricity should the priestly scarcity have ended” (112). Consequently, one cannot help to draw the conclusion that, at this early stage of the formation of the basic community, “Rossi regarded the laity as no more than a stop-gap measure in the face of priestly scarcity” (Dawson 112). It is only when base communities become more developed in the 1960s and 70s that their lay catechists will have full agency and freedom. Dawson also underlines Rossi’s strong reactionary character to the threat of non-Catholic religious movements in his area since “Rossi considered the main cause of the growing ‘propaganda of heresy’ to be the people’s ‘religious ignorance’ of Catholic moral teaching” (112).
gathering the people from all over the district for a “Massless Sunday,” or “priestly Mass,” or “Catholic worship,” and leading them “spiritually and collectively in the same Mass as is being celebrated by the pastor in the distant mother church. They will recite morning and evening prayers with the people, as well as novenas, litanies, May and June celebrations, and so on” (qtd. in Boff, Ecclesiogenesis 3). As has been pointed out by Boff, “thus catechesis became the center of a community, and someone was responsible for religious life. Instead of chapels, meeting halls were built and then used for school, religious instruction, sewing lessons, and meetings for solving community problems, even economic ones” (Ecclesiogenesis 3). On the other hand, “radio schools” were also created along with the MEB (Movement for Basic Education) for the archdiocese in Natal, which means that “reading and writing, along with other subjects, and, of course, religion were taught by radio. On Sundays, communities without a priest would gather around the radio and pray aloud the people’s parts of the Mass being celebrated by the bishop, and hear his homily” (Boff, Ecclesiogenesis 3-4). By 1963, 1,410 radio schools had been established in the country and the movement had spread to the northeast and center west.

According to the Brazilian Bishops’ Conference, another important factor in the emergence of ecclesial communities was the Better World Movement, which created an atmosphere of renewal throughout the country. A team of fifteen persons traveled around Brazil for five years “giving 1,800 courses and stimulating all areas of church life. Priests, bishops, religious, laity, and movements all experienced this renewal” (Plano pastoral de conjunto [1962-1965] 58). The result of this program was the Brazilian
Bishops’ Conference’s Emergency Plan, and the First Nationwide Pastoral Plan (1965-70), which courageously stated:

Our present parishes are or ought to be composed of various local communities and ‘basic communities,’ in view of their great extent, population density, and percentage of persons baptized and hence juridically belong to them. It will be of great importance, then, to launch a parish renewal in each place, for the creation and ongoing dynamics of these ‘basic communities.’ The mother church will itself gradually become one of these communities, and the pastor will preside in all of them, because all are to be found in the portion of the Lord’s flock with which he has been entrusted. (*Plano pastoral de conjunto [1962-1965] 58*)

This passage illustrates one of the main differences between Latin American base communities and those of other countries like France, Italy and the USA. As opposed to European and American ecclesial communities, which show “dissatisfaction and withdrawal, if not outright hostility and rupture, vis-à-vis the institutional Church” (Acevedo 24), base communities in Latin America show “a close link between BECs and the hierarchy. Almost always the hierarchy took the initiative in creating BECs, accompanying them with solid support” (Acevedo 25). As far as the establishment of the ecclesiological credentials of the base church movement in Latin America is concerned, the key role played by the Second Latin American Conference of Bishops (Medellín, 1968) must be underlined. As has been pointed out by Dawson, it was Medellín that did accord “ ‘the Christian base community’ formal and prominent ecclesial status” (115) since this represented “ ‘the first and fundamental ecclesiastical nucleus . . . the initial cell

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27 For a comparative study of the base ecclesial movement in Europe, the USA and Latin America, see the 1975 issue (104/4) of the international theological review *Concilium*, which is entirely devoted to “Basic Communities” considered as a topic of practical theology. Analyses of specific base community groups in France, Italy, the USA and Latin America are followed by the discussion of more theoretical and epistemological questions connected with the meaning of the term “basic.” The issue also debates the importance of those groups for the Church from the point of view of practical theology.
of the ecclesiastical structures and the focus of evangelization, and . . . [currently] . . . the most important source of human advancement and development’ (Joint Pastoral Planning, 10)” (115).

The consequence of the hierarchical support and the fruitful labor of those working at the base of the ecclesial movement was the presence of over 40,000 Brazilian base communities scattered throughout at least forty dioceses by the end of 1974. Another turning point was the celebration of the first national conference on base ecclesial communities, which took place in Vitória (Espírito Santo) from January 6 to January 8 1975. Several influential Latin American liberation theologians like Leonardo Boff, Carlos Mesters and Eduardo Hoornaert were present as professional advisers in this first encounter. Some of these theologians also produced the first theoretical studies on base church communities, which were presented at later conferences. Dawson, for instance, reminds us how the papers read by Mesters and Boff at the second national conference, which also took place in Vitória, became the seed for their books on the base ecclesial movement in Latin America (121).28

The richness and productivity of the post-Medellín years came to an end with Pope John Paul II’s conservative policy in the mid 1980s. According to Dawson, “emphases upon ecclesial engagement with land, housing, health, and education matters were now played down in favour of an individualized spirituality based upon a passive,

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28 Dawson observes how Carlos Mesters’ paper “Flor sem defesa: ler o evangelho na vida” would become a part of his highly influential book Defenceless Flower: A New Reading of the Bible (1989) and how Boff’s paper “Eclesiogênese: as ceb reinventam a igreja” would be the basis for his book Ecclesiogenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church (1986). Other important papers read at the second encounter were those by Eduardo Hoornaert and J. B. Libânio. Important Latin American theologians like Libânio himself, Pedro A. Ribeiro de Oliveira, Gustavo Gutiérrez and Thomas Bruneau were also invited to attend as guests later national conferences.
unquestioning deference to hierarchical authority and the privatized veneration of our
Lady and the saints. It is to this extent that the CEB movement has undergone some form
of spiritualisation” (123). This depoliticization and spiritualization process, which has
been taking place since the 1980s, does not mean that the base ecclesial movement has
completely lost its influence and relevance in Latin America today. It has certainly been
seriously weakened since it is much more difficult for it to keep on working in the same
manner as before due to lack of institutional support and funding. Therefore, only those
base ecclesial communities that are still faithful to the original insight of the cause of the
poor and the oppressed, even if this means going against official ecclesiastical policies,
can still succeed in their liberating praxis today within their limited structural and
economic possibilities. This idea agrees with Dawson’s observation that “it is upon this
continuing refusal of the faithful to countenance any religious undertaking which has no
relevance to the everyday experiences of poverty that much of the future hope of the base
ecclesial community lies” (124).

The origins of liberation theology are connected with the quest for a specifically
Latin American new theological reflection taking into consideration Latin America’s
situation of poverty and injustice. As has been noted by Tamayo-Acosta, the renewal of
the Second Vatican Council certainly played a crucial role not because of what its
documents may have contributed to the emergence of liberation theology but because of
the new expectations it opened up (Para comprender 53-54). Held in Rome from 1962 to

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29 The English theologian also explains that “Vatican orthodoxy soon gained hegemony, with the church
subsequently reverting to a pastoral concentration upon the middle classes and bourgeois elite as the
principal bulwarks of its influence in Brazil” (123). The consequence of this was that “previously available
personal and financial resources were gradually withdrawn and a growing number of prelates began to
impress an increasingly traditionalist agenda upon a pastoral terrain which until recently they had been
content to leave to the oversight of pastoral agents within their charge” (Dawson 123).
1965, Vatican II was undoubtedly “the most important event in the history of the Catholic Church for several centuries” (Gutiérrez, “The Church” 171). It was Pope John XXIII who called the Council paying special attention to the question of poverty, which was closely connected with the Pope’s fundamental insight of scrutinizing the “signs of the times.” As has been pointed out by Gutiérrez, John XXIII set down three major themes for the Council before the bishops began their work: Openness to the modern world, unity among Christians and the Church of the poor (“The Church” 175). The special attention paid by the Pope to the question of poverty, which is particularly related to the poor countries and churches of the world, shows the significance of John XXIII’s anti-imperialist insights before the opening of the Council.

Vatican II mainly focused on the first two themes and only assigned a secondary role to the third one. It is true that there were some memorable addresses, like that of Cardinal Lercaro, which highlighted the crucial role of poverty for the Church in the twentieth century. These, however, were isolated presentations that were out of tune with the major topics of the Council. Why were the Council Fathers not interested in the question of poverty? Probably due to obvious political and economic reasons that compromised the power position of the Church along with the fact that their theological tools, which came from European Modernity and the West, were more suited to answer the Pope’s first two insights. Consequently, if there is something that defines Vatican II, this is its Eurocentric point of view:

30 Giacomo Lercaro (October 28, 1891-October 18, 1976) was an Italian Cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church who served as Archbishop of Ravenna from 1947 to 1952 and as Archbishop of Bologna from 1952 to 1968. He sat on the Board of Presidency of the Second Vatican Council and was regarded as one of the main promoters of the Council’s liturgical reforms. He was also the first to popularize Pope John XXIII’s notion of a “Church of the Poor,” which was so influential in Latin America during the 1970s.
El Vaticano II se movió en una perspectiva europea o, para ser más exactos, en el horizonte sociocultural del Primer Mundo. Su teología fue un fiel reflejo de la reflexión teológica gestada en Europa a partir de la II Guerra Mundial. Su mensaje se dirigió de manera especial a las iglesias católicas de los países desarrollados. Su interlocutor fue el hombre moderno o ilustrado de las sociedades científico-técnicas avanzadas, hasta el punto de asumir con mesura buena parte de las señas de identidad de la modernidad. (Tamayo-Acosta, *Para comprender* 36)

Vatican II was therefore a council with a Western approach that mirrored the theological reflection of the countries of the center. Was it influential in Latin America in spite of its shortcomings? It was but, paradoxically, only as a result of the creative adaptation and resemanticization of John XXIII’s insight of the Church of the poor, which had only a secondary role in the Council, along with the key concept of “people of God”

31 to Latin America’s socio-historical, cultural and ecclesial context. This means that Latin America assumes the key issue of poverty and turns it into its basis for theological reflection, thus creatively enhancing and empowering this insight as a result of its adaptation to the specific coordinates of the Latin American reality. Therefore, Latin America not only enriches, empowers and transforms the Council from a decolonial perspective but is also able to capture John XXIII’s fundamental insight —expressed through Cardinal Lercaro’s address—, which was eclipsed by the Council’s Eurocentric

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31 Tamayo-Acosta observes that the notion of “people of God” was coined during the Council to define the Church as a community as opposed to the traditionally hierarchical conception of the Church that defines the ideology of Christianity. According to the Spanish theologian, the “people of God” category embodies a new paradigm that “subraya la igualdad radical de todos los creyentes y la idea de fraternidad eclesial. Y una vez sentadas estas bases, se habla de las diferentes funciones dentro del pueblo de Dios” (*Para comprender* 44). Tamayo-Acosta also underlines that “el hecho de haber privilegiado el Vaticano II la categoría de pueblo de Dios ha posibilitado el nacimiento y desarrollo de las comunidades eclesiales de base en América Latina” (*Para comprender* 47). The traditional opposition between the institutional and communitarian element is not present in the Latin American base ecclesial movement since both elements “no pugnan entre sí para destruirse el uno al otro, sino que se combinan dialécticamente, se fecundan y se mueven en el horizonte del reino de Dios, que intentan hacer realidad históricamente” (Tamayo-Acosta, *Para comprender* 46).
stance. Tamayo-Acosta is right to observe that “a pesar de que el Vaticano II no prestó la debida atención a la realidad de América Latina, la Iglesia de ese continente en su conjunto desarrolló el concilio con más decisión y coherencia que cualquier otra, caracterizándose por su fidelidad creadora” (Para comprender 37). Gutiérrez, on the other hand, insists on the idea that the Latin American church was reaching adulthood in the first years after the Council, which made it feel to be in communion with the universal Church (“The Church” 172). Therefore, “the essence of its reception of the Council is to be seen in this maturation, this movement toward adulthood” (Gutiérrez, “The Church” 172).

One of the consequences of resemanticizing the Council into the Latin American cultural context was the promotion and empowerment of a Latin American church of the poor through the base ecclesial communities, the cornerstone and genesis of a church of the destitute in Latin America, which have been discussed above. The most important consequence of the Council for Latin America, however, was the Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops, which took place in Medellín (Colombia) in 1968. Medellín was undoubtedly the best example of the adaptation of Vatican II to the cultural context of the periphery. As has been pointed out by Salvadoran liberation theologian Jon Sobrino, “como hecho empírico se ha reconocido que Medellín ha sido la aplicación más significativa y novedosa del concilio, aunque en otras partes del mundo el concilio también tuviese repercusiones importantes” (“El Vaticano II” 105). Therefore, Medellín meant the creative resemanticization and interpretation of the Council into Latin America’s cultural, historical and ecclesial context from a decolonial lense by the Latin American magisterium. Hence why Sobrino insists on the fact that Medellín received the
Council “transformándolo, es decir, no como mera aplicación de un universal a lo concreto, en lo cual lo universal se empobrecería al verse limitado por lo concreto, sino haciendo reales sus virtualidades, algunas de ellas previstas y otras imprevistas en el concilio, y de esa forma enriqueciéndolo” (“El Vaticano II” 105).

What are the origins and the main theological insights of Medellín? It was in 1964 that a group of Latin American theologians attending the Council realized that Latin American theology was an imitation of that of the West. An alternative theological reflection articulated from the point of view of the Latin American periphery had not been successful after five centuries of evangelization. Although a prophetic and energetic missionary movement, which supported the cause of the indigenous peoples, had emerged in the colonial period, Latin American theologians had not been able to produce a theological reflection founded on the Latin American historical reality. Some Latin American theologians present at the Council were therefore interested in adapting and translating its insights into Latin America’s cultural context in order to produce an original and innovative theological discourse articulated from the periphery without imitating the long theological tradition of the center. It was Bishop Manuel Larraín of Talca (Chile), president of CELAM (Latin American Episcopal Conference) in 1964, who began to organize Medellín in the following years first with the support of John

32 For an in-depth study of this missionary movement, see Enrique Dussel’s books El episcopado latinoamericano y la liberación de los pobres, 1504-1620 (1979) and A History of the Church in Latin America: Colonialism to Liberation (1981).
33 Manuel Larraín Errázuriz (Santiago, December 17, 1900-Rengo, June 22, 1966) was an important Chilean priest. He was Coadjutor Bishop of Talca from 1938 to 1939 and Bishop of Talca from 1939 to 1966. He played a key role in Chile’s Catholic Church. He was a reformist bishop, closely connected to the youth and Catholic Action. Along with Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez, he carried out Chile’s agrarian reform in Talca and Santiago. He played a significant role in Vatican II, where he became a part of the most progressist sector, from 1962 to 1965. He was also the founder of CELAM (Latin American Episcopal Conference) and Vicepresident of Chile’s episcopal conference.
XXIII, and, after the latter’s death, with that of Paul VI, who officially opened the Conference in 1968. It was the first time that a Pope had ever set foot in the New World. Unfortunately, Larraín could not see his dream come true due to his untimely death in a car accident in 1966.

Medellín’s main theological insight was a preferential option for the poor. One cannot help wondering if John XXIII’s support and promotion of the Conference could be connected with the crucial issue of poverty. Let us not forget that this was one of his most important insights for the Council. Perhaps John XXIII knew too well that the question of poverty, which had been almost forgotten at the conciliar sessions, would become the cornerstone of Medellín, thus empowering Vatican II and creatively transcending its Eurocentric and imperialist limitations. This idea can be connected with the fact that the Latin American bishops mention at the beginning of their conclusions to the Conference that “Latin America appears to live beneath the tragic sign of underdevelopment that not only separates our brothers and sisters from the enjoyment of material goods, but from their proper human fulfillment” (“Message to the Peoples” 90). Medellín is even more critical and prophetic about poverty in Latin America when denouncing that “that misery, as a collective fact, expresses itself as injustice which cries to the heavens” (“Document on Justice” 97). That is why the bishops remind us that poverty is in itself evil and that the prophets denounce it as contrary to the will of God and as the fruit of human injustice (“Document on the Poverty” 115). The best example of God’s preference for the poor in connection with the fundamental issue of liberation is Jesus Christ himself, who “not only loved the poor, but rather ‘being rich he became poor,’ he lived in poverty. His mission centered on advising the poor of their liberation
and he founded his church as the sign of that poverty among men and women” (“Document on the Poverty” 116).

The question of liberation in relation to the Latin American historical reality is also underlined by the bishops from the start. That is why they insist on the fact that “Latin America will undertake its liberation at the cost of whatever sacrifices” (“Introduction to the FinalDocuments” 94) and emphasize that, when choosing the Latin Americans “who are living in a decisive moment of their historical process” (“Introduction to the FinalDocuments” 95), the Latin American church has actually returned to humankind “aware that ‘in order to know God, it is necessary to know humanity’ ” (“Introduction to the FinalDocuments” 95). Once again, the insight of liberation comes from Jesus Christ himself, who was sent by the Father “to liberate all persons from the slavery to which sin has subjected them: hunger, misery, oppression, and ignorance — in a word, that injustice and hatred which have their origin in human selfishness” (“Document on Justice” 98). On the other hand, liberation theology’s crucial notion of the liberating praxis is already present in the Medellín documents without forgetting its critical articulation with theory: “It is certainly not enough to reflect, to be more discerning, and to speak. Action is required. The present has not ceased to be the hour of the word, but it has already become, and with dramatic urgency, the time for action” (“Introduction to the FinalDocuments” 95).

The Latin American bishops are so critical and insightful in their analysis of the Latin American historical reality that they even warn about the dangers of capitalism and Marxism for Latin America, something that will be discussed at length by liberation theologians a few years later but, though often neglected, is already present in Medellín:
The system of liberal capitalism and the temptation of the Marxist system would appear to exhaust the possibilities of transforming the economic structures of our continent. Both systems militate against the dignity of the human person. One takes for granted the primacy of capital, its power and its discriminatory utilization in the function of profit-making. The other, although it ideologically supports a kind of humanism, is more concerned with collective humanity, and in practice becomes a totalitarian concentration of state power. We must denounce the fact that Latin America sees itself caught between these two options and remains dependent on one or another of the centers of power which control its economy. (“Document on Justice” 101)

A qualitative change in the system is therefore necessary without repeating the mistakes of the capitalist and Marxist models. Although the Latin American bishops do not privilege a particular political option, their description of this new society and of the organization of workers, businesses, enterprises and the land seems to agree with a democratic socialist project working on a micro and macroeconomic level:

With the clarity which arises from human knowledge and human hopes, we must reiterate that neither the combined value of capital nor the establishment of the most modern techniques of production, nor economic plans will serve humankind efficiently if the workers, the “necessary unity of direction” having been safeguarded, are not incorporated with all of the thrust of their humanity, by means of the active participation of all in the running of the enterprise, according to ways which will have to be determined with care and on a macroeconomic level, decisive nationally and internationally. (“Document on Justice” 101)

A new form of socialization, “understood as a socio-cultural process of personalization and communal growth” (“Document on Justice” 102), is therefore necessary for all sectors of society to move beyond antagonisms and be united “in order to become agents of national and continental development” (“Document on Justice” 102). The Latin American bishops also touch on the fundamental issue of neoimperialism when they openly state that “without this unity, Latin America will not be able to succeed in
liberating itself from the neocolonialism to which it is bound, nor will Latin America be able to realize itself in freedom, with its own cultural, socio-political, and economic characteristics” (“Document on Justice” 102). Medellín deepens its decolonial insights by devoting a whole section of the document on peace to international tensions and external colonialism. The Latin American episcopate radically questions the international monopolies and the imperialism of money to the point of explicitly affirming that “the principal guilt for economic dependence of our countries rests with powers, inspired by uncontrolled desire for gain, which leads to economic dictatorship and the ‘international imperialism of money’ condemned by Pope Pius XI in Quadragesimo Anno and by Pope Paul VI in Populorum Progressio” (“Document on Peace” 108). On the other hand, the question of decoloniality is closely connected with that of the rights of peasants and the Amerindian peoples. This means that the indigenous question, which was implicit in LT1 under the still homogenizing category of the poor and became one of the most fruitful and productive tendencies of LT2, was already present in Medellín:

The Second Conference wishes to voice its pastoral concern for the extensive peasant class, which, although included in the above remarks, deserves urgent attention because of its special characteristics. If it is true that one ought to consider the diversity of circumstances and resources in the different countries, there is no doubt that there is a common denominator in all of them: the need for the human promotion of the peasants and the Amerindians. (“Document on Justice” 102).

Medellín also reminds us that the struggle for liberation must be founded on the essential value of Christian love since “love, ‘the fundamental law of human perfection, and therefore of the transformation of the world,’ is not only the greatest commandment of the Lord; it is also the dynamism which ought to motivate Christians to realize justice
in the world, having truth as a foundation and liberty as their sign” (“Document on Justice” 99). On the other hand, the Latin American bishops also note what would become one of the main insights of liberation theology a few years later: The beginning of the Kingdom of God here on earth even though its culmination can only take place in the afterlife. Liberation theologians have been often accused by the Vatican of confusing the Kingdom, which belongs to the eschatological dimension, with the material world. A careful reading of their works, however, shows that the Kingdom of God only has a first presence or manifestation on earth, which is just a preliminary step for its completion and fulfillment as a schatological promise. This idea, however, was already present in Medellín: “We do not confuse temporal progress and the kingdom of Christ; nevertheless, the former, ‘to the extent that it can contribute to the better ordering of human society,’ is of vital concern to the kingdom of God” (“Document on Justice” 99).

Medellín’s main insights were those of the poverty and injustice of the Latin American historical reality, the struggle for liberation from that oppressive reality through the liberating praxis, the significance of love for a Christian praxis founded on truth that can bring justice to the world, the unmasking of the neocolonialism coming from the rich countries of the center and the idea that the Kingdom of God begins here and now even though it is only fully realized in the transcendent dimension. Medellín is therefore an anticipation or previous step to the development of liberation theology from the point of view of the Latin American magisterium along with the experience of base ecclesial communities. In fact, we can say that Medellín was liberation theology’s theoretical precedent whereas base ecclesial communities were its praxiological anticipation. One cannot help but agree with Sobrino that Medellín was the most original
and innovative theological phenomenon worldwide as a result of Vatican II. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that, as has been noted by Gutiérrez, there were two important ecclesiastical documents that formed a bridge between Vatican II and Medellín: Paul VI’s encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (1967) and “A Letter to the Peoples of the Third World” (August 1967), a message signed by eighteen bishops from the poor countries, nine of them from Brazil (“The Church” 184).

Gutiérrez underlines how the encyclical discusses some matters that were not present at the Council and gives a description of the Third World of which Latin America is a part. Moreover, important issues from the point of view of the poor countries which were absent in *Gaudium et Spes* are powerfully stated in *Populorum Progressio* (“The Church” 184). Although the enormous influence of this document on Medellín and liberation theology is emphasized by Gutiérrez (“The Church” 184), it must be remembered that *Populorum Progressio* as a whole still moves in a developmentist direction even though it sometimes may endorse the perspective of the poor countries. It is true that the Peruvian theologian admits that what is said of “integral development” in the encyclical was the inspiration for his idea of “integral liberation” or “total liberation” (“The Church” 184, n. 30). It must be noted, however, that Gutiérrez’s notion of “integral liberation” is the fruit of his decolonial reinterpretation and resemanticization of Paul VI’s concept of “integral development,” which still works within a capitalist and developmentist framework. On the other hand, “A Letter to the Peoples of the Third World” also played a key role in the development of liberation theology through its statement that the gospel calls for the first and radical revolution of conversion, which is a transformation from sin to grace, from egotism to love, from haughtiness to humble
service (Gutiérrez, “The Church” 184). According to Gutiérrez, liberation theology got from this observation the insight that “sin is the ultimate root of social injustice and that only the gift of liberation in Christ can reach this root” (“The Church” 184, n. 31).

Medellín and the valuable contributions of Populorum Progressio, a document coming from the Church of the center that pays attention to the poor countries of the world sometimes incorporating their own perspective, and of “A Letter to the Peoples of the Third World,” a truly decolonial document coming from the poor churches of the periphery, may be said to constitute a proto-theology of liberation from the theoretical point of view of the magisterium of the Church. But when and how does a true liberation theology first emerge in Latin America? It is a few years after Medellín that liberation theology is fully developed as a specifically decolonial Latin American theological reflection through five crucial works: A Theology of Human Hope (1969), by Rubem Alves (Brazil), De la sociedad a la teología [From Society to Theology] (1970), by Juan Luis Segundo (Uruguay), A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation (originally published in 1971 in Spanish; English translation, 1973), by Gustavo Gutiérrez (Peru), Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology for Our Time (originally published in 1972 in Portuguese; English translation, 1978), by Leonardo Boff (Brazil), and Theology for a Nomad Church (originally published in 1973 in Spanish; English translation, 1975), by Hugo Assmann (Brazil). Some critics like Alfred T. Hennelly consider Gutiérrez to be the pioneer and leader of the field. This is not surprising if we take into account the fact that Gutiérrez had already delivered a paper entitled “Toward a Theology of Liberation” at a meeting of priests and laity held July 21-25 1968 at Chimbote, Peru. It is significant to note, however, something that is always forgotten:
Gutiérrez read this paper before the Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops took place. The consequence of this is that liberation theology was actually born a few weeks before Medellín.

Although it is a fact that Gutiérrez published *A Theology of Liberation* in 1971 in Spanish, things get even more complicated if we remember Hennelly’s often-neglected observation that “little attention, however, has been given to the fact that the theology of Gutiérrez had already come to the attention of theologians throughout the world the year before, when his article ‘Notes for a Theology of Liberation’ was published in the very scholarly and influential journal, *Theological Studies* (1970)” (*Liberation Theology* 122). It would be tempting to think that this article was a translation into English of “Toward a Theology of Liberation.” In the introduction to the English translation of this conference, which is included in Hennelly’s anthology *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History* (1990), Hennelly mentions that he is the one who translated the text into English for the first time from a mimeographed copy of the original.34 Gutiérrez had therefore deepened his first insights on liberation theology two years after reading his first paper on the subject. All this suggests that Gutiérrez was already an influential theologian on an international scale one year before the publication of *A Theology of Liberation* in Spanish, which can be said to represent his definitive consolidation as a new theological voice worldwide. As has been pointed out by Hennelly himself, “the lasting value of the volume was that it provided a panoramic survey or map of the field, which later

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34 Hennelly explains that “the English text was translated by me from a mimeographed copy of the talk, which is in the archives of the De Las Casas Institute in Lima, Peru. I am indebted to Friar Jeffrey Klaiber, S.J., a professor of Peruvian history, in Lima, for obtaining a copy for this volume. As far as I know, this is the first time it will be printed in English” (*Liberation Theology* 62). Hennelly’s translation into English of the Spanish original was reprinted for a second time in 2008 in Iván Márquez’s anthology *Contemporary Latin American Social and Political Thought*. 
collaborators could follow, develop, or even correct” (*Liberation Theology* 122). Another interesting fact that is often neglected is that both Rubem Alves and Juan Luis Segundo had already published their first books on liberation theology before Gutiérrez published his own.35

One cannot help but draw the conclusion that Medellín certainly motivated the deepening and development of liberation theology’s insights as a theological discourse in multiple and different directions represented by the works of various Latin American theologians. In this sense, it can be said that, as has been mentioned above, Medellín is liberation theology’s theoretical precedent from a Latin American magisterial perspective. This, however, does not mean that, as is usually believed by historians and theologians alike, the origins of liberation theology are in Medellín or in the first books on the subject published in its aftermath in the early 1970s. Liberation theology already existed as a theological reflection in embryo before Medellín, as can be appreciated in Gutiérrez’s 1968 paper.36 “Toward a Theology of Liberation” is therefore liberation theology’s foundational text although Gutiérrez is careful to observe from the start that “I will limit myself to a sketch, to recalling a few paths of inquiry, as is suggested by my title, ‘Toward a Theology of Liberation.’ It really is toward. I believe we will have to go much further, but we can only achieve that through collaboration as a number of concepts

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35 As has been mentioned before, Alves’s book *A Theology of Human Hope* was published in English in the USA in 1969. Segundo’s book *De la sociedad a la teología* [*From Society to Theology*] was published in Spanish in 1970 but, to my knowledge, has never been translated into English so far.

36 Although Gutiérrez’s paper signals the official birth of liberation theology, there is a *corpus* of texts coming from the Latin American magisterium and other religious and lay sectors that offer some theological and historical insights that will be present in liberation theology. Some of these texts, published between 1964 and 1968, are collected in the volume *Between Honesty and Hope: Documents From and About the Church in Latin America* (1970). For an in-depth study of all these documents, see Roberto Oliveros Maqueo’s excellent book *Liberación y teología: Génesis y crecimiento de una reflexión (1966-1976)* (1977), especially pages 9-50.
become more precise” (“Toward” 65). This is indeed what happened in the next few years when many theologians like Hugo Assmann, Juan Luis Segundo and Leonardo Boff began to explore the liberating dimension of a decolonial theological reflection articulated from a specifically Latin American stance. In his paper, Gutiérrez focuses on three main issues: The significance of the historical dimension of Christianity, the emergence of the key concept of liberation as a result of the decolonial reinterpretation of Paul VI’s insights in his encyclical letter *Populorum Progressio*, and the crucial role of the liberating praxis for a truly compromised and prophetic Christianity today.

Gutiérrez’s starting point is an original and innovative reconceptualization of the notion of theology. The Peruvian priest notes that “the classic meaning of theology is an intellectual understanding of the faith—that is, the effort of the human intelligence to comprehend revelation and the vision of faith” (“Toward” 63). Faith, however, “means not only truths to be affirmed, but also an existential stance, an attitude, a commitment to God and to human beings. Thus faith understands the whole of life theologically as faith, hope, and charity” (Gutiérrez, “Toward” 63). The consequence of this is that theology is not just the understanding of an abstract truth but also of an existential stance, which means that “it is progressive, it is the understanding of a commitment in history concerning the Christian’s location in the development of humanity and the living out of faith” (Gutiérrez, “Toward” 63). The historical dimension of theology suggests that “theology is a reflection—that is, it is a second act, a turning back, a re-flecting, that comes after action. Theology is not first; the commitment is first. Theology is the understanding of the commitment, and the commitment is action” (Gutiérrez, “Toward” 63). Gutiérrez illustrates this idea through the pastoral action of the church, which “must
be accompanied by a reflection to orient it, to order it, to make it coherent, so that it does not lapse into a sterile and superficial activism” (“Toward” 64).

The Peruvian theologian admits the present concern with a “theology of human liberation” since “using this or other expressions, the theme has become a major preoccupation of the magisterium of the church in recent years” (“Toward” 64). According to Gutiérrez’s reconceptualization of theology, it is necessary to stress the significance of action for Christians, something that has traditionally been forgotten by the Church. What Gutiérrez would later call “orthopraxis” in *A Theology of Liberation*, is already outlined in his precursive paper:

> If faith is a commitment to God and human beings, it is not possible to live in today’s world without a commitment to the process of liberation. That is what constitutes a commitment today. If participation in the process of human liberation is the way of being present in the world, it will be necessary for Christians to have an understanding of this commitment, of this process of liberation. (“Toward” 64)

Evoking the insights of the Second Vatican Council, Gutiérrez underlines the fact that “the process of liberation is a sign of the times. It is a call to action at the same time that it is a new theme for reflection, new because it is a global term for the problems contained within it” (“Toward” 64). He also complains that “thus there is a certain deficiency in the attempts that are being made with regard to a theology of liberation, which is clearly evident in the conclusions of the meetings at Mar del Plata and Itapoán, both of which leave me dissatisfied” (“Toward” 64). The analysis of the Mar del Plata and Itapoán documents shows how the lack of questioning of the neocolonial project of

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37 The X Meeting of CELAM took place in Mar del Plata (Argentina) in 1966. For the English translation of the Mar del Plata document, presented by Dom Hélder Câmara, see *Between Honesty and Hope*, pages
international capitalism by Mar del Plata can only produce a partial and deficient theological reflection, though articulated from the point of view of the periphery, that does not address the issue of liberation in all its complexity and depth. On the other hand, the fact that Itapoán still favours a reform of the capitalist system, instead of radically breaking with its oppressive structures on behalf of a new society, can only produce a “developmentist theology” that is, a capitalist and imperialist theology that cannot be truly critical when reflecting on the process of human liberation, thus becoming the ally of the injustice of the status quo. It is clear that Gutiérrez highlights the need to move in a new direction. His concern, on the other hand, is fully justified if one takes into account the serious problems of the working draft of Medellin observed by CELAM’s laity in June 1968. 38

It must be noted that Gutiérrez speaks at first of a “theology of human liberation” and admits that other theologians use this and other expressions to refer to a new theological reflection coming from Latin America. The term “theology of liberation,” in fact, was not only used by Gutiérrez in 1968 but also by Brazilian Presbyterian theologian Rubem Alves in his Phd. dissertation Towards a Theology of Liberation: An Exploration of the Encounter Between the Languages of Humanistic Messianism and Messianic Humanism, which he defended at Princeton Theological Seminary that year.


38 According to the Lay Apostolate Office of CELAM, Medellín’s working draft showed the lack of a truly critical consciousness of the Latin American historical reality and its state of economic and political dependency. If Medellin was able to develop important decolonial insights in its final documents a few months later, this was largely due to the report issued by the lay people, which made the bishops realize the flaws of their historical, socio-political and economic analysis carried out from a developmentist perspective. For the English translation of the working draft of the Medellín conference, see Between Honesty and Hope, pages 171-192. For the English translation of the lay critique of the Medellin draft, see Between Honesty and Hope, pages 193-200.

According to Gutiérrez, the crucial question for a theology of liberation is to ask about the meaning of the work that human beings perform in this world vis-à-vis the faith or, in other words, to explore the relationship between the construction of this world and salvation (“Toward” 65). The Church, however, has traditionally been disconnected from the material plane, “which constitutes a brake on the presence and action of human beings in this world” (Gutiérrez, “Toward” 65). This attitude, however, has come to an end thanks to the Second Vatican Council, which has valued the anthropocentrism of the modern age as well as the idea that “the human person has become the agent of his or her own destiny and the one responsible for his or her own development in history” (Gutiérrez, “Toward” 67). The Peruvian theologian believes that this realization begins with the growth of science and Descartes’ *cogito ergo sum*, continues through Kant and Hegel and culminates with Marx: “To liberate oneself, to emancipate oneself, is to create history” (“Toward” 67-68). Hegel’s, Kant’s and Descartes’ ideas, however, are never resemanticized into the Latin American context in Gutiérrez’s paper, but they will be in his first book on liberation theology. All this allows Gutiérrez to conclude that “it is a question, then, of human liberation, of human emancipation throughout history, which
will pass through radical social change, revolution, and even beyond these” (“Toward” 68).

Human liberation is for Gutiérrez the great sign of the times that must be scrutinized by theology. The key influence of *Populorum Progressio* can be appreciated in its defense of a global view of humanity for the Church. This Christian anthropocentrism suggests that “we are passing from a theology that concentrated excessively on a God located outside this world to a theology of a God who is present in this world” (Gutiérrez, “Toward” 68). The Peruvian priest also reminds us how *Populorum Progressio* insists on the idea that all human beings are called upon to develop and fulfill themselves, for every life is a vocation. It is this notion of development that is identified by Gutiérrez with the concept of liberation: “Human beings are called upon to develop themselves. In this perspective, we understand development as liberation, with all that implies, even in the economic sphere” (“Toward” 69). Although the influence of *Populorum Progressio* is undeniable, a difference must be established between Paul VI’s notion of “development” and Gutiérrez’s concept of “liberation” since the term “development” still belongs to a developmentist capitalist ideology whereas the term “liberation” belongs to a decolonial anticapitalist one. As has been mentioned before, Gutiérrez’s decolonial reinterpretation or resemanticization of Paul VI’s concept of development must be noted since it would be very tempting to believe that the former’s decolonial insights are already present in the latter when this is not the case. In other words, Gutiérrez’s theology of liberation is a step forward from the encyclical, as has been noted by Chilean liberation theologian Pablo Richard: “This conference [‘Toward a Theology of Liberation’] marked the explicit break, the qualitative leap, from
a world vision tied to a ‘developmentalist’ kind of practice to one tied to a practice of ‘liberation.’” (*Death of Christendoms* 5)

Paul VI, on the other hand, admits in *Populorum Progressio* that all human beings are called or convoked to this full development. For Gutiérrez, the consequence of this is the continuity between development and salvation:

> Development, therefore, is not a stage previous to evangelization, which we refer to with the incorrect word, “preevangelization.” Rather development (and this is the new theological contribution of *Populorum Progressio*) is situated within one’s vocation and thus of one’s communion with God. It is not a previous step, but forms a part of the process of salvation, because it is a vocation. Salvation, therefore, affects the whole human being. (“Toward” 70)

Gutiérrez’s analysis of the encyclical shows how Paul VI’s definition of “development” as passing from less human conditions to more human conditions of living involves a movement from misery toward the possession of necessities, the acquisition of culture, the cooperation for peace, and the acknowledgement of absolute values, God and faith. All this allows the Peruvian theologian to come to the following conclusion:

> More human is grace, more human is faith, more human is to be a child of God. Consequently, we can say that integral development, authentic emancipation, and human liberation are, for the pope, salvation. Actually, in this section Paul VI is sketching the whole process of development, which proceeds from material and moral misery toward the grace of God. This is development, which is also a task and a call to action.

> I emphasize that the work of building the earth is not a preceding stage, not a stepping stone, but already the work of salvation. The creation of a just and fraternal society is the salvation of human beings, if by salvation we mean the passage from the less human to the more human. Salvation, therefore, is not purely “religious.” (“Toward” 71)
The connection between the material world and the schatological dimension as part of an only process of salvation that begins on earth through what would be called in the 1970s the praxis of liberation is therefore the central idea in Gutiérrez’s paper. On the other hand, the connection between creation and salvation as a main biblical theme must also be underlined. According to the Peruvian theologian, “the construction of the temporal city is not simply a stage of humanization or preevangelization, as theology used to say until recent years. It is to place oneself completely in a salvific process, which includes the whole person” (“Toward” 72). Another important biblical theme is that of the messianic promises since “the sign of the coming of the messiah is the suppression of oppression: the messiah arrives when injustice is overcome. When we struggle for a just world in which there is not servitude, oppression, or slavery, we are signifying the coming of the messiah” (Gutiérrez, “Toward” 73). Therefore, one cannot possibly be a Christian without a commitment to liberation. That is why “to be a Christian in our epoch, it is necessary to commit oneself in one way or other in the process of human emancipation” (Gutiérrez, “Toward” 75).

In spite of its problems, Gutiérrez’s foundational text is a precious document that already anticipates some of the main concerns of liberation theology. Its greatest achievement is undoubtedly its articulation of a decolonial theological discourse from the subaltern locus of enunciation of the periphery that contrasts with the imperialist and capitalist theological reflection of the center and even of Itapoán, which are both influenced by the developmentist ideology. Gutiérrez’s reinterpretation of Paul VI’s concept of “integral development” from a decolonial perspective allows him to identify it with the notion of human liberation, authentic emancipation and salvation, which
involves a Christian liberating praxis to help the poor and the oppressed of this world to move from less to more human conditions by fighting against the oppressive structures of capitalism and its developmentist project. Although this is a great decolonial insight for which Gutiérrez must be admired, his theology of liberation at this point still depends too much on European philosophical ideas that have not been resemanticized into the concrete conditions of the Latin American socio-historical context. The notion that human beings are agents of their own destiny and the ones responsible for their development in history, for instance, comes from Descartes, Kant, Hegel and Teilhard de Chardin. Moreover, the fundamental category of liberation is just glimpsed by Gutiérrez and certainly needs to be developed and discussed much more in depth. All these issues would be dealt with by the Peruvian priest in *A Theology of Liberation*.  

Another key point is the fact that liberation theology was simultaneously born within Catholic and Protestant circles. As has been mentioned before, it was Rubem Alves, a Presbyterian minister from Brazil, that first published a book on liberation

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39 In fact, Gutiérrez’s article “Notes for a Theology of Liberation” (1970) already deepens into the theorization of the fundamental category of liberation vis-à-vis that of development one year before the publication of his book. In this new article, the decolonial nature of liberation becomes clearer through the use of dependency theory to unmask the phallacy of the developmentist discourse in connection with the idea that the oppressed peoples must seize the reins of their own destiny and shake free from the present servitude. What would be called “historical praxis” in Gutiérrez’s book is not only present in his 1970 article but also adapted to the concrete conditions of the Latin American historical reality. The fundamental category of liberation is also articulated in its three dimensions: Political liberation of oppressed peoples and social classes, man’s liberation in the course of history and liberation from sin. Moreover, man’s role as a subject of history and agent of his own destiny is already identified with the concept of the “new man.” Another novelty is Gutiérrez’s demystification of the idealization and spiritualization of poverty from a prophetic and denunciatory perspective founded on the Bible (Exodus). Liberation theology, on the other hand, is also contextualized in dialogue with Moltmann’s and Metz’s new political theology. This is Gutiérrez’s strategy to make sure that a new theological discourse articulated in the periphery from a decolonial perspective would be welcome by the international theological community from the start. Unlike Gutiérrez’s 1968 paper, all these issues, which will be discussed more in detail in *A Theology of Liberation*, are already present in his 1970 English-language article.
theology in 1969 and is widely regarded as one of its pioneers.\textsuperscript{40} Other influential Protestant liberation theologians from Latin America are José Míguez Bonino (Evangelical Church, Argentina), Julio de Santa Anna (Methodist Church, Uruguay) and Rafael Cepeda Reinerio Arce Valentín (Evangelical Church, Cuba). Liberation theology certainly has a Catholic and Protestant dimension from its beginnings although it must be admitted that most of its main representatives are Catholic theologians and that it is its Catholic wing that has proved to be most influential in the long run.

Part Two

Hennelly reminds us how, in the next few years after Medellín, there was a paradoxical dialectic between progress and opposition inside the Latin American church (\textit{Liberation Theology} 121). On the one hand, this was “a period of enormous activity to spread the liberating message of Medellín from the Rio Grande of México to Cape Horn” (Hennelly, \textit{Liberation Theology} 121) but, on the other, “the period witnessed the emergence from the very beginning of a powerful and well-organized opposition to key directions of Medellín and to liberation theology, which had followed those directions” (Hennelly, \textit{Liberation Theology} 121). Therefore, the conservative sectors of the Latin American church very soon began a continental campaign against liberation theology, which was coordinated by bishop Alfonso López Trujillo throughout Latin America and supported by the Vatican.\textsuperscript{41} López Trujillo was elected general secretary of CELAM in

\textsuperscript{40} For a study of the emergence of liberation theology in the USA at Princeton Theological Seminary through the work of Rubém Alves and American Presbyterian theologians John Alexander Mackay and Richard Shaull, see Bruno J. Linhares’s article “Princeton Theological Seminary and the Birth of Liberation Theology.”

\textsuperscript{41} In fact, López Trujillo was just a pawn in the hands of Cardinal Sebastiano Baggio, the true mastermind behind the anti-liberationist movement that took place in the next few years after Medellín. As has been noted by Enrique Dussel, “lentamente se dibujaba la personalidad de Sebastiano Baggio, que había estado
1972 and became president of CELAM in 1979. As is noted by Hennelly, “in 1983, when he retired as president, his followers were firmly in control of the conference, and continued to implement his policies, which have been consistently opposed to liberation theology and to the major advances of Medellín” (*Liberation Theology* 123).

The consequence of López-Trujillo’s election as new general secretary of CELAM was that “within the brief space of four years [1969-1972], an organization [CELAM] that was speeding along the road of implementation of Medellín was suddenly thrown into reverse gear, with a great shock to all involved” (Hennelly, *Liberation Theology* 123). It must be noted, however, that, as has been pointed out by Hennelly himself, in spite of all these anti-liberationist measures, “the activities and publications of the opponents of liberation theology did not loom so large in the public eye” (*Liberation Theology* 123). In other words, it was liberation theologians that became famous worldwide thanks to their works. Hennelly is certainly right to observe that the origins of this anti-liberationist campaign can be found in Medellín itself due to the fact that “a number of the 130 bishops at the conference disagreed with what had occurred there and that there were substantial divergences among most of the bishops with regard to the ‘real meaning of Medellín’ ” (*Liberation Theology* 121). López Trujillo, on the other hand, successfully recruited some other persons and institutions as allies in the struggle including the Jesuit Roger Vekemans,42 who hastily left Chile after Allende’s election in

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42 Dussel quotes from an important *Memorandum* signed by prestigious theologians like Karl Rahner, Moltmann, Metz and over one hundred German professors of theology: “Una fuerza propulsora de esta campaña (contra la teología de la liberación) es Roger Vekemans, actualmente director del Centro de

López Trujillo’s critique of liberation theology is not a radical reaction against it but rather consists of spiritualizing its main contents, thus emptying them of their true meaning. The secret aim of his skillful rhetoric is certainly to prevent any structural changes of the *status quo* from taking place. The main point of López Trujillo’s theology is that the poor must never be identified with the Marxist category of the “proletarians” since poverty is just “a state of life and also an attitude of approach and availability regarding the kingdom, the word” (“Liberation” 167). For the Colombian bishop, this means that “the poor in the gospel do not constitute a ‘class’ per se, but a quality of availability, who usually coexist in a situation of economic crisis. The *anawim*...
are measured according to the kingdom on how they live with a liberated heart in hopes of reaching it” ("Liberation" 167). What López Trujillo forgets is that the poor of the Bible are oppressed by the rich and powerful of their time, who only inflict pain and suffering on them. In other words, López Trujillo overlooks the historical dimension of the poor, which, due to their exploitation by the oppressive elites, inevitably turns them into a social class in confrontation with another. As has been mentioned before, the phenomenon of class struggle is as old as the history of humanity. This means that, contrary to López Trujillo’s belief, it was not discovered or invented by Marx. That is precisely why it is already present in the Old and New Testament, which were written thousands of years before Marx’s works. The historicity of the poor is certainly not incompatible with their eschatological dimension as the predilect sons of the Kingdom of Heaven. López Trujillo’s mistake, however, is to eclipse the former with the latter in order to deny any possibility of social change.

The relativization of the poor by López Trujillo is followed by that of the category of liberation. The Colombian bishop observes that “we are liberated in Christ because of his death and resurrection” ("Liberation” 171) and that Christ “liberates us in truth from sin, from death, from our own selfishness, and he makes us spiritual persons who live in the Spirit” (“Liberation” 169). Once again, we must be very careful not to spiritualize the category of liberation or else our interpretation of the gospel will be completely disconnected from the real world, which is the context to which the gospel is meant to be applied and to which it was actually applied by Jesus himself as a social reformer of Moses’ Law. On the other hand, the historicity, concreteness and revolutionary nature of liberation, which, in the case of Jesus, also has a schatological dimension that reaches
completion with the arrival of the Kingdom, is certainly a point of connection with Marx,
a social reformer of the capitalist system. Moreover, the fact that López Trujillo admits
the Christian liberation of body and soul shows his own contradictions. Liberation begins
with human effort because Christ’s liberation started with the liberating praxis of his own
humanity in the material world through his actions and sayings. Therefore, it is not true
that there are two kinds of liberation: A historical and a spiritual one. There is an only
liberation with a historical and a spiritual dimension that are like two sides of a coin. It is
not true that the historical one is Marxist and the spiritual one Christian. The Christian
liberation is both historical and eschatological and its points of connection with Marx’s
revolutionary praxis, which only takes place in historical and materialistic terms, are
undeniable.

López Trujillo’s most serious epistemological and theoretical mistake is therefore
his refusal to accept the intertwining of the historical and eschatological sphere as far as
the Christian category of liberation is concerned. Another mistake is his inability to
perceive the points in common with Marxism and how Christian and Marxist thinking
can enhance and empower each other. The fact that the Colombian bishop considers the
foundation of liberation theology to be politics is also quite problematic. The only
possible foundation for liberation theology is a critical analysis of the Latin American
historical reality in the light of the Sacred Scriptures. The Bible, however, is endowed
with a political dimension on behalf of the poor and the oppressed even though it does
not favor any particular political ideology. This means that Christians must choose
between the oppressors or the oppressed. If they side with the oppressed, thus being
faithful to the gospel, they must form bridges and establish a critical dialogue with all
other sectors of society that stand up for the rights of the poor. Their commitment to the
destitute of society, however, must always be guided by their critical consciousness as
Christians, which is previous to any political project or ideology.

Another problematic point in López Trujillo’s theology is his observation that “an
authentic theology of liberation has to be founded on immovable pillars of faith. Otherwise, one would become too suspicious if the theology seemed to be an emotional pretext for plotting a social revolution” (“Liberation” 172). The interpretation of the Scriptures must be adapted to the signs of the times since the various historical contexts of the Old and New Testament are not that of Latin America in the 1970s. If our interpretation of the Bible does not change over time, we will have an outmoded and old-fashioned version of Christianity disconnected from our present socio-historical context that will be anchored forever in the ancient world. On the other hand, the gospel is revolutionary by nature even though it is peaceful, as can be appreciated in its belief in the utopia of a more just and human world in which all things are shared, and there is no contradiction in this. If, according to López Trujillo, it is not a “theology of revolution” (“Liberation” 172) that Latin America needs but a “theology for times of revolution,” (“Liberation” 172) then we must pay attention to Latin America’s social and historical coordinates in the 1970s so that the Christian teachings can be resemanticized into them. This means that the Christian teachings and faith are not immovable, and therefore, that, once again, López Trujillo contradicts himself. Liberation is certainly a permanent value but only the truly Christian liberation, which is both historical and eschatological, and not the peudo-liberation conceived by López Trujillo in relativistic and spiritualized terms.
Bonaventure Kloppenburg’s critique of liberation theology starts with a preconception: The idea that its foundation is the Christians for Socialism movement, which emerged in Chile in the early 1970s and then spread to other Latin American countries. As has been mentioned before, the basis for the theology of liberation is the interpretation of the Latin American reality in confrontation with the Bible along with the praxiological experience of base ecclesial communities. It is only then that, after Medellín and the publication of the first books on liberation theology by Gutiérrez and other Latin American theologians, Christians for Socialism (Chile), the Movement of Priests for the Third World (Argentina) and other similar groups emerged all over the continent. According to Kloppenburg, “it is not difficult to see that the ‘Church of the People’ that is proper to these movements of priests in Latin America is closely related to the ‘Church of the People’ of which CfS speaks” (25). The concept of the Church of the People is also understood by the Brazilian theologian in quite prejudiced terms: “The ‘Church of the People,’ which will be the much desired ‘new Church,’ or even the ‘Church of the Future,’ will be an essentially politicized church to which only the proletariat will belong. No one else will have voice or vote in it” (25). Kloppenburg seems to forget that the People’s Church is not only a church for the poor but for all those who support their cause in the true spirit of the gospel. Therefore, it is a universal church but certainly one that demands strong commitment through social action on behalf of the oppressed.

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44 For a history of the movement, see the following works: John Eagleson’s Christians for Socialism: Documentation of the Christians for Socialism Movement in Latin America (1975), Alfredo Fierro Bardaji and Reyes Mate Rupérez’s Cristianos por el Socialismo: Documentación (1975), Pablo Richard’s Cristianos por el socialismo: Historia y documentos (1976) and Teresa Donoso Loera’s Historia de los Cristianos por el Socialismo (1976).

45 Some of these movements are: National Independent Organization of Priests (ONIS, Peru), Movement for Priestly Reflection (Ecuador), Priests for the People (México) and Priests for Latin America (Colombia).
Kloppenburg’s refutation of the class connotations of the terms “people” and “poor,” used with the meanings of “exploitation” and “oppression” by theologians like Gutiérrez and Richard as well as in the articles and statements of Christians for Socialism and other related movements, is also quite unconvincing. The abuses committed everyday in the capitalist world by the rich and powerful against the most exploited and weakest sectors of society demonstrate that the “classist” semantic burden of both terms is inherent and intrinsic. This means that the Marxist idea of “class” is never forced upon them but is a natural consequence and that those who are not oppressed inevitably become a part of the oppressive class. Kloppenburg’s questioning of the accusations of the People’s Church against the hierarchical branch of the Catholic Church is founded on a spiritualization of the latter’s doctrine and function in the world that is also quite problematic. The Church is not only holy and always in need of being purified as the faithful Spouse of the Lord by the power of the Holy Spirit but also acts and carries out its mission in the material world. It is precisely its praxis on earth that is criticized by the theology of liberation and the Church of the Poor since it is a fact that the institutional Church is allied with the national and international bourgeoisie, and linked, ideologically and structurally, with the ruling system. This, however, does not mean that, as is suggested by Kloppenburg, its spiritual elements are denied.

Kloppenburg’s deformation and distortion of one of the main tenets of liberation theology and the People’s Church can be appreciated in his refusal to admit the intertwining of the material and spiritual dimension that defines them. Paradoxically, this is identified by him with the hierarchical Church, which, in fact, is only guided by orthodoxy. This is even more shocking if we take into account that the connection
between the material and the spiritual plane was underlined by Gutiérrez from the first pages of *A Theology of Liberation*, and, a few years before, by Medellin. Kloppenburg’s accusation that the Church of the People is a new sect, which is supported by a declaration of the Chilean Bishops, perpetuates this deformed and distorted perspective. According to the Brazilian theologian and the Chilean episcopate, the People’s Church is a different institution with different roots, means and ends. One cannot help wondering how it can be a different institution if all its members are Catholic. Its roots are certainly different since it is based on the life and experience of the poor as are its means since it is articulated around an orthopraxis guided by Christian orthodoxy. Its aim, on the other hand, also agrees with that of Jesus, who, unlike the institutional Church, being rich, he became poor.

The Church of the Poor and the Church of the Rich are two different ways to understand and interpret the Christian teachings today. One is faithful to the example and the spirit of Jesus and the other is not. Therefore, if the notion of “sect” is to enter our discussion, it is actually the actions and behavior of the hierarchical Church that turn it into a new religious sect. This is guided by an empty and commodified spirituality that betrays the deeds of Jesus in this world on behalf of the destitute as a preliminary step for the eschatological promise of the Kingdom. Kloppenburg’s manipulation of the concept of “sect” is followed by that of the notion of “people of God,” which comes from Vatican II and is closely related to John XXIII’s insight of the “Church of the Poor.” According to the Brazilian theologian, “rich and poor alike, without distinction of social class, are a ‘people’ and constitute the people of God of the new covenant” (77-78). The connection

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46 This declaration, entitled “Christian Faith and Political Activity” (no 74), was issued on October 16, 1973.
between the concepts of “Church of the Poor” and “people of God,” however, suggests that only the poor and those who support their cause can belong to the latter. The fact that Kloppenburg himself admits that the real oppressors cannot become a part of the people of god shows his own contradictions. If the oppressors cannot belong to it, then the rich are out of it since they are the oppressors of the system.

Another critique of the theology of liberation and the Christians for Socialism movement comes from Chilean Jesuit priest Roger Vekemans. In his work *Teología de la liberación y cristianos por el socialismo* [Liberation Theology and Christians for Socialism], Vekemans comes to the conclusion that liberation theology is a Marxist theology of revolution like Christians for Socialism, that it supports a violent revolution founded on guerrilla warfare and that both liberation theology and Christians for Socialism justify guerrilla warfare (283-309; 528-48; 548-52). As has been noted by Enrique Dussel, Vekemans “unifica sin más teología de la liberación y ‘cristianos por el socialismo’ y a éstos con las tácticas foquistas o urbanas de la ultraizquierda” (*De Medellín a Puebla* 279). Like Kloppenburg, Vekemans is quite prejudiced in his conclusions. First of all, the theology of liberation only incorporates Marxist analysis into its reflection as an instrument or mediation but not as an end in itself. As has been mentioned above, Christians for Socialism is not the foundation of liberation theology but rather one of the consequences of its emergence. Liberation theology, on the other hand, always privileges a peaceful social revolution except in extreme situations, which, like the Exodus episode of the Bible, may demand the use of violence. This is also the case with the Christians for socialism movement. One of these extreme situations is that of the
Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua that will be discussed below in connection with John
Paul II’s opening address at the Puebla conference.

Like López Trujillo’s and Kloppenburg’s, Vekemans’ critique of the theology of
liberation aims to articulate an alternative “developmentist theology.” As has been
pointed out by Enrique Dussel, “como no puede negarse la teología de la liberación se la
pretende destruir en su momento primero, en su categoría central por excelencia: el
pobre, la pobreza. Relativizada . . . y universalizada . . . el punto de partida ha sido
aniquilado” (De Medellín a Puebla 288). In this sense, the various meetings and
encounters against liberation theology that took place in the 1970s all over the continent
show how “se trata de criticar categorías como ‘clase’, ‘dependencia’, y otras, que darían
a la pobreza un perfil real” (Dussel, De Medellín a Puebla 288). Things, however, are
not so easy from an intellectual, theological and theoretical point of view. The failed
attempt to forge an alternative “developmentist theology” in Latin America is observed
by Dussel in the following terms:

. . . En todas esas reuniones existe siempre la crítica de fondo sobre la
cuestión del pobre, la clase social, la dependencia, buscando en categorías
tales como “pueblo” o “nación” (que no deben descartarse), desarrollo,
etc., las maneras de poder articular un discurso que pueda “suplir” el de la
teología de la liberación. Sin embargo, el intento ha sido vano y nada se ha
hilvanado que tenga alguna importancia. Hay una radical impotencia para
lanzar una teología desarrollista. . . . Lo que sí se ha logrado es confusión
y un continuo anatemizar los compromisos con el pobre. La obra más
lograda en este sentido es la de Boaventura Kloppenburg, Iglesia popular.
. . .

Todo el intento de los grupos latinoamericanos . . . es de relativizar el
momento subjetivo (el sujeto) de la liberación; negar la profunda
negatividad de la pobreza. Y en el caso de aceptarla, tomarla inoperante al
quitarle toda posibilidad de detectabilidad (no es “clase”, entonces: ¿Qué
es?) y de operatividad histórica (“somos todos pobres, no es ninguno, nada
se puede hacer”). (De Medellín a Puebla 288-89)
The results of López Trujillo’s campaign against liberation theology made themselves felt in the Third General Conference of the Latin American Bishops, which took place in Puebla de los Ángeles (México) in 1979 with López Trujillo himself as president of CELAM and John Paul II as the new Pope. The neoconservative turn of the Latin American magisterium under López Trujillo’s presidency was supported by John Paul II, as can be appreciated in his opening address, in which he questioned and distorted the decolonial reinterpretations of the gospel carried out in Latin America without mentioning liberation theology explicitly. According to the Pope, “now today we find in many places a phenomenon that is not new. We find ‘rereadings’ of the gospel that are the product of theoretical speculations rather than of authentic meditation on the word of God and a genuine evangelical commitment” (“Opening Address” 227). The danger of these new interpretations is also underlined by John Paul II since “they cause confusion insofar as they depart from the central criteria of the church’s faith, and people have the temerity to pass them on as catechesis to Christian communities” (“Opening Address” 227). The experience of base ecclesial communities and liberation theology, however, demonstrates that the Latin American historical context of poverty and oppression is always interpreted in the light of the Christian teachings and Christian ethics from a decolonial lense that contrasts with the Vatican’s Eurocentric perspective. The Pope’s position on the subject therefore reveals his prejudices and close-mindedness towards other new interpretations of the gospel that are the fruit of inculcating or resemanticizing the Christian teachings into a specifically Latin American peripheral context.
John Paul II also criticizes those sectors of the Latin American church that “depict Jesus as a political activist, as a fighter against Roman domination and the authorities, and even as someone involved in the class struggle” (“Opening Address” 227) since “this conception of Christ as a political figure, a revolutionary, as the subversive from Nazareth, does not tally with the church’s catechesis” (“Opening Address” 227). First of all, neither liberation theologians nor base ecclesial communities conceive Jesus of Nazareth as a political militant and guerrilla fighter. What cannot be denied, however, is that Jesus Christ’s eminently spiritual project is endowed with a significant political dimension. Whether the Pope likes it or not, Jesus was certainly a peaceful and subversive revolutionary for the simple reason that his teachings questioned the modus comiendi and privileges of the religious and political elites of his time in spite of the ethics and justice of his cause. John Paul II’s denial of the subversive and revolutionary nature of Jesus is even more astonishing if we take into consideration that the first Christians were considered to be subversive and revolutionary citizens of the Roman Empire for many years to the point of being seen as the suspicious members of a new and mysterious religious sect.⁴⁷

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⁴⁷ As has been noted by James B. Rives, underlying the measures of the Roman empire’s religious policy “was a general concern with threats to public order, in particular the possibility that individuals from outside the socio-economic elite who set themselves up as religious authorities could undermine the status quo” (190). Consequently, “Roman leaders viewed all these people as potential threats to the established social and political hierarchy, and so were ready to take action against them whenever they considered it necessary” (190). The most famous example mentioned by Rives is the execution of Jesus of Nazareth, a charismatic individual “whom Roman authorities regarded as potentially subversive” (190). Rives also observes how early Christians rejected all the traditional markers of piety of Roman official religion, thus becoming social outcasts and acting “almost like political conspirators, meeting in secret and worshipping a man who had been executed by a Roman governor. It is not surprising that many people considered them impious, disloyal, and subversive, and were willing to believe the worst of them” (198). All this shows how Christianity was perceived by Rome as a threat to mainstream Roman religion and Roman public order. According to Rives, because the religious and the political sphere were so closely united, the Christian rejection of Roman religion was seen as a politically subversive act directed not only
The Pope’s diatribe is, no doubt, implicitly addressed at the Sandinista revolution of Nicaragua, which had just triumphed in 1979 and was supported by Nicaraguan base communities and liberation theologians like Ernesto and Fernando Cardenal. It must be remembered that the Nicaraguan church of the poor always interpreted their specific historical reality in the light of the Sacred Scriptures. As a result of their critical reflection, they realized that their quest for liberation involved fully supporting the poor and the oppressed of their country to the point of giving their life for them. Given the cruelty of the Somoza dictatorial regime at that time, those Nicaraguan Christians who were faithful to the gospel became aware of the fact that the cause of the victims was endowed with a political dimension that demanded an alternative political option to that of neoliberalism. It was only in order to liberate their country from a repressive regime of death, murder and terror that they supported the National Liberation Sandinista Front from a truly Christian perspective in order to fight for a more just and human society. It must also be remembered that there was no middle position in Nicaragua at that time: Either one was with the rich or with the poor. It is quite understandable from a Christian and even ethical-philosophical point of view that true Nicaraguan Christians supported those who were fighting for the rights of the destitute and the freedom of their country. If they had supported the oppressors, would they not have betrayed their Christian principles? This, however, does not mean that the Sandinistas did not make some mistakes when they came into power. They certainly did, but, as has been mentioned

at the gods but also at Roman citizens and officials (190). The fact that early Christians were seen as subversive citizens can also be appreciated in the persecution decrees issued by some Roman emperors like Decius (249 CE), Valerian (257 CE), and, especially, Diocletian (303 CE). See Rives’s work Religion in the Roman Empire (2007), especially chapter seven on Roman religious policy, and Robin Lane Fox’s Pagans and Christians (1986), especially pages 419-92 and 592-608.
many times by Ernesto Cardenal himself, at least they made those mistakes on behalf of the poor.

The Vatican would always criticize those Nicaraguan Christians for supporting the violence of the struggle against Somoza’s dictatorship. In fact, they only supported an inevitable defensive violence against the oppressor, which is quite a different matter. The pope forgets that this defensive violence on behalf of the weak is also present in the Exodus episode of the Bible when the Lord drowned the Egyptian armies in the waters of the Red Sea after the tribes of Israel had crossed it safely. Therefore, the social and historical coordinates of each reality require different measures. There are contexts in which peacefulness is possible and there are others in which, unfortunately, defensive violence is the only solution. The Bible itself offers very good examples of those different contexts: the historical reality of the Israelites enslaved by the Egyptian Pharaoh is not that of the Israelites at the time of Jesus Christ’s preaching. The former demanded the Lord’s violent action, the latter the peaceful practice of Jesus Christ’s sayings and deeds. The Vatican’s critique is still more astonishing if we remember the history of the Catholic Church, which had its own army in the Middle Ages, including the Templar knights and other similar warrior orders. The Catholic Church used its troops to carry out an oppressive violence that killed thousands of innocent women, men and children in the Middle East at the time of the Crusades for not believing in Jesus Christ. And, worst of all, these murders were committed in the name of Christ. Nicaraguan Christians, by contrast, were obliged to resort to a defensive violence they never wanted only in order to liberate their country from tyranny.
Some Nicaraguan liberation theologians like Ernesto Cardenal were also criticized by the Vatican for holding public offices in the Sandinista government. Ernesto Cardenal, for instance, was appointed Minister of Culture from 1979 to 1987 and publicly admonished for it by John Paul II himself in 1983 during his visit to Nicaragua. The Vatican’s point was that a true Christian cannot possibly be involved in politics. This critique is still more of a paradox if we take into account the fact that the Pope himself is the political leader, and therefore, the president of a capitalist state: The Vatican. If the Pope rules his own country, why can a mere priest like Ernesto Cardenal not work as a Minister of Culture for a government aiming to help the destitute by offering itself as an alternative to neoliberal injustice? It seems that this kind of critique is only valid for some and not for all. On the other hand, John Paul II’s appeal on behalf of a depoliticized Church in the Puebla documents is also quite contradictory: How can the Catholic Church be a depoliticized institution if the Pope himself is a politician? Moreover, is it

48 The fact that the Vatican is a capitalist country can be appreciated in its market economy, which contrasts with the nationalization of the means of production in socialist countries. Taking into consideration that the bank system is the cornerstone of capitalism, it must be remembered that the Vatican still owns its own bank today, which was founded in 1605 and was the first national bank in Europe. The Vatican’s procapitalist stance is also present in the anti-Marxist pathos of the Rerum Novarum and Quadragesimo Anno encyclicals of Catholic social teaching as well as in John Paul II’s struggle against communism in Poland and the Soviet Union, which even included his support of Lech Walesa’s Solidarity capitalist group in communist Poland through the transfer of funds from the Vatican bank. Another piece of evidence that shows how the Pope is a capitalist politician is the Holy Alliance signed by John Paul II and President Reagan on June 7, 1982. As has been noted by Carl Bernstein, “in that meeting, Reagan and the Pope agreed to undertake a clandestine campaign to hasten the dissolution of the communist empire” (“Cover story”). In the words of Richard Allen, Reagan’s first National Security Adviser, “this was one of the great secret alliances of all time” (Bernstein, “Cover Story”). The operation was focused on Poland since “both the Pope and the President were convinced that Poland could be broken out of the Soviet orbit if the Vatican and the U.S. committed their resources to destabilizing the Polish government and keeping the outlawed Solidarity movement alive after the declaration of martial law in 1981” (Bernstein, “Cover Story”). The consequence of this capitalist secret alliance was that the Polish Solidarity movement “flourished underground, supplied, nurtured and advised largely by the network established under the auspices of Reagan and John Paul II. . . . Money for the banned union came from CIA funds, the National Endowment for Democracy, secret accounts in the Vatican and Western trade unions” (Bernstein, “Cover Story”). The new crusade of the Holy Alliance only came to public light in 1992 thanks to Bernstein’s article, which was originally published in Time magazine on February 24, 1992.
not also contradictory that Puebla, like Medellin eleven years before, condemns both the capitalist and Marxist political models when the Pope is the ruler of a capitalist country? Should the Pope not inaugurate a new alternative society in the Vatican state, in which, following the example of Jesus and the first Christian communities, all things are shared in common among its citizens instead of favoring the capitalist system? All this shows the paradoxes and contradictions of John Paul II’s address, which represents a neoconservative ideological turn with regard to Medellin. It is not surprising that Hennelly himself mentions in his commentary on the Pope’s opening speech that “it aroused the most discussion, controversy, and press reports, accurate or not” (*Liberation Theology* 225).

These contradictions are also present in Puebla’s final document, in which the Latin American bishops state that “lay leaders of pastoral action should not use their authority in support of political parties or ideologies” (“Evangelization” 242). One cannot help observing how this idea only works in one direction in practice: Radical political action cannot be supported by a lay leader or a priest but politicization on behalf of conservative forces is allowed, as can be appreciated in the cases of Chile in the early 70s and El Salvador in the early 80s. Puebla implicitly condemns liberation theology by denying its critical analysis of the Latin American historical reality, which shows how violence is sometimes inevitable. On the other hand, the words of the final document against the kidnapping and torture carried out by Latin American dictatorial regimes contrasts with the actions of the Church, which was complicit with military dictatorships like those of Argentina and Chile either by actively supporting them or by burying its head in the sand.
Another problematic point is Puebla’s belief that the social teaching of the Church is free from any ideology. Puebla states that “neither the gospel nor the church’s social teaching deriving from it are ideologies. On the contrary, they represent a powerful source for challenging the limitations and ambiguities of all ideologies” (“Evangelization” 244). Although it is true that the gospel does not side with any particular ideology, one must not overlook its political echoes and connotations. As for the social teaching of the Church, this is certainly another ideology in itself. We can say that it represents a “Catholic ideology,” which, although the Vatican will never admit it, is certainly influenced by Marxist thinking, and, in fact, emerges because of it in spite of its critique of Marxism. In this sense, it is not a coincidence that the foundations of Catholic social teaching were laid by Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical letter *Rerum Novarum* in 1891, that is, a few decades after the publication of Marx’s *The Communist Manifesto* (1848). Catholic social teaching, however, is not only influenced by Marxism but also by the writings of Catholic thinkers like St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine of Hippo as well as by some concepts coming from the Bible and ancient Near Eastern cultures. Hennelly himself admits in his short commentary on Puebla’s final document that “there was some disagreement with the document’s social analysis as, for example, in the statement that the social doctrine of the church is completely free of ideologies” (*Liberation Theology* 232).

Puebla’s condemnation of Marxist thinking as a supplementary theoretical tool is another instance of its implicit rejection of liberation theology. The Latin American bishops call attention to the fact that “we must also note the risk of ideologization run by theological reflection when it is based on a praxis that has recourse to Marxist analysis.
The consequences are the total politicization of Christian existence, the disintegration of the language of faith into that of the social sciences, and the draining away of the transcendental dimension of Christian salvation” (“Evangelization” 245). As has been discussed before, the real problem with Marxism is not its theory but its praxis. The bishops are blinded by their political conservatism and cannot possibly see that Marxism is a valuable socio-analytical mediation. They always accuse Marxism of being ideologized but ideologization is also present in a capitalist church like the Vatican, which is not only a religious but also a capitalist political project. Does this not contrast with their belief in a non-politicized Christ? Marxism is a precious theoretical instrument that, if guided by the Christian teachings, can help us to critically interpret reality. Christianity cannot possibly be disintegrated into the social sciences since Marxism is just a mediation or secondary tool. If we want to be truly critical with Latin America’s neocolonialism, we cannot rely on a spiritualized theology disconnected from our world but on an interdisciplinary one, which, without renouncing to a theological foundation for reflection, can be enriched and empowered by the social sciences, including Marxist thinking.

Puebla’s option to maintain its freedom with regard to the capitalist and Marxist political model in order to opt solely for the human being is wishful thinking. Medellín was more critical and realistic by trying to find an alternative to both through a sort of democratic socialism. Puebla’s lack of an alternative is an implicit way to support Latin America’s status quo, that is, imperial capitalism. The Church must certainly follow Christ’s example but, having to choose between the oppressor and the oppressed, it must inevitably sympathize with certain ideologies without fully siding with any of them. In
the case of Latin America, the church of the rich supports the oppressor, thus betraying its faithfulness to Jesus Christ’s example, and sympathizes with the neoliberal model. The church of the poor, however, supports the cause of the oppressed, thus being faithful to the Christian teachings, and sympathizes with an alternative socialist project. One cannot help wondering how the Catholic Church can be free regarding both systems if the Vatican is a capitalist state and the Pope a capitalist politician. Things get even more complicated if we remember that the first national bank in the history of Europe, the Bank of the Holy Spirit, was founded and owned by the Vatican itself.\textsuperscript{49} On the other hand, Puebla’s appeal to a presumably depoliticized Christian anthropology to defend the dignity of the human being is also quite problematic. What exactly is a Christian anthropology since it is never defined? Can a Christian anthropology be neutral and objective? Can an anthropology be Christian? Is anthropology not already ideologized if it becomes Christian from Puebla’s conservative perspective? In other words, is not anthropology also subject to ideologization even from a Christian perspective?

In spite of its anti-liberationist turn, Puebla still approved the organization of base ecclesial communities and affirmed Medellín’s main insight of the preferential option for the poor. Hennelly reminds us that “there was some apprehension before the Puebla Conference that two key elements of the practice of liberation theology — the pastoral strategy of forming basic ecclesial communities and the preferential option for the poor—

\textsuperscript{49} The Bank of the Holy Spirit (\textit{Il Banco di Santo Spirito} in Italian) was founded by Pope Paul V on December 13, 1605. It was the first national bank in Europe as the bank of the Papal States (Euvino 106). The Bank of the Holy Spirit was also the first public deposit bank in Rome (Freiberg 833-43), and, according to Fodor’s Online Travel Guide, it was the oldest continuously-operating bank in Rome until its merger in 1992. For a detailed history of the Vatican bank from its origins to the present and of the corruption and financial machinations at the center of the Church that have led to Pope Francis’s reforms, see Gerald Posner’s book \textit{God’s Bankers: A History of Money and Power at the Vatican} (2015). The Bank of the Holy Spirit has nothing to do with \textit{Banco Espírito Santo}, which was founded in 1920 in Portugal.
might be condemned or completely ignored. However, Puebla gave a clear and enthusiastic approval” (*Liberation Theology* 248). It is obvious that Puebla did not dare to question two fundamental insights of the gospel that were reclaimed by Medellín. It would have been too much to go against poverty and the contemporary equivalent to the first Christians communities of the New Testament. It should be noticed, however, that Puebla’s language on behalf of the poor is not as bold, daring and forward-looking as that of Medellín. It is much more conservative, as can be appreciated in the bishops’ straightforward statement that “we affirm the need for conversion on the part of the whole church to a preferential option for the poor, an option aimed at their integral liberation” (“A Preferential Option” 254). The best example of Puebla’s affirmation of its preferential option for the poor is that, like Medellín, Puebla also defends the rights of Latin America’s indigenous peoples: “The indigenous cultures have undeniable values. They are the peoples’ treasure. We commit ourselves to looking on them with sympathy and respect and to promoting them” (“A Preferential Option” 257).

As has been noted by Hennelly, “in the immediate aftermath of the Puebla Conference, a fierce controversy erupted over who had ‘won’ at Puebla, the liberationists or their opponents” (*Liberation Theology* 263). Although there are different opinions on the subject, I believe that it is the neoconservative approach that ultimately predominated even though the two main insights of Medellín were still kept in theory. After all, Puebla represented liberation theology’s loss of CELAM’s public support with López Trujillo as its new president. It was precisely because of this that liberation theology’s advocates “could no longer rely on the network of the bishops’ conference to disseminate their views” (Hennelly, *Liberation Theology* 176). It was the works published by liberation
theologians along with the influential journal *Concilium* and some prestigious international conferences that made liberation theology famous worldwide in the 1980s. It was then that the Vatican began its official campaigns against liberation theology through Cardinal Ratzinger’s articles and instructions against it as well as through the investigations of two important liberation theologians: Gustavo Gutiérrez and Leonardo Boff.

It was the failed attempt to articulate a “developmentist theology” in the 1970s as a convincing alternative to liberation theology that precipitated Cardinal Ratzinger’s radical opposition to it in the early 1980s. López Trujillo’s theological method, which apparently accepted the basic tenets of the theology of liberation *a priori* only in order to spiritualize it and empty it of its praxiological contents *a posteriori*, never became popular, and Pope John Paul II decided that it was time for the Vatican to enter the field of theoretical discussion on its own. It was Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in the 1980s, that published a short article criticizing liberation theology in the Italian monthly *Trenta Giorni* in March 1984.50 As is noted by Hennelly, “there was considerable surprise that the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith should publish an article in the public press while an instruction on the subject was being prepared and awaited” (*Liberation Theology* 367). A previous article, “Ten Observations on the Theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez,” had been published by the Congregation a year before, but, according to Hennelly, in the 1984

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50 The English translation of this article was first published in the September 1984 issue of the journal *Catholicism in Crisis*. A different translation of the article may be found in *The Ratzinger Report: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church* (1985). The first English translation was also reprinted in Hennelly’s anthology *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History* (1990). All citations of this article in this chapter refer to Hennelly’s reprint of the first translation.
article, “in general, the critique is much more carefully done than the ‘Ten Observations’” (Liberation Theology 367). These completely distort and deform Gutiérrez’s theology of liberation when accusing the Peruvian priest of making the Marxist concept of class struggle “the determining principle from which he goes on to reinterpret the Christian message” (“‘Ten Observations’” 349). The falseness of this charge is underlined by Hennelly himself, who believes that “perhaps that is why very little publicity was given to this document by the congregation” (Liberation Theology 348).

In the new article, Cardinal Ratzinger, a theologian by training, stated that “with the analysis of the phenomenon of liberation theology, we are clearly facing a fundamental danger for the faith of the Church” (367). According to the Congregation Prefect, the danger lay in the use of certain erroneous instruments to carry out a new global interpretation of Christianity: Marxism and Bultmannian hermeneutics.51 Ratzinger’s anti-liberationist radical position in this text was the first step towards the Instruction on Certain Aspects of the “‘Theology of Liberation,’ ” the first Vatican official document against liberation theology published by the Holy Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on August 6, 1984. After discussing the fundamental lines of inquiry of some liberation theologies, the Instruction fully condemns the new Latin

51 Rudolf Bultmann was a German Lutheran theologian and professor at the University of Marburg. He was one of the major figures of early twentieth-century biblical studies. Bultmann believed that the historical analysis of the New Testament was unnecessary since early Christian texts were very little interested in specific locations. Therefore, all that mattered for Bultmann was that Jesus existed, preached and died. The historical events that took place throughout his life, however, were not important for him. It is quite a paradox that Ratzinger accuses liberation theology of being influenced by Bultmannian hermeneutics. If there is something that characterizes liberation theology, this is precisely its emphasis on the significance of the “historical Jesus” establishing the connection with the Christ of faith and the eschatological promise of the Kingdom. Unlike Bultmann’s existentialist and scientific exegetical analysis, which is influenced by Heidegger, the theology of liberation only makes use of Marxist thinking and the social sciences as mediations that empower theological reflection and biblical exegesis by allowing us to critically apprehend the Latin American historical reality of poverty and injustice. Therefore, Ratzinger completely misinterprets liberation theology’s methodology.
American theology without conceding any positive contributions. According to the *Instruction*, liberation theology reduces faith to an earthly humanism and uses the Marxist method of analysis, which cannot possibly be separated from Marxist atheist philosophy, non-critically offering a rationalist interpretation of the Bible that identifies the biblical category of the poor with the Marxist category of the proletarian and understands the Catholic Church as a class church in its Marxist meaning. In fact, the *Instruction* consists of a series of bold and close-minded statements and does not contribute a single piece of evidence that can prove that liberation theology is a deviation from Christian faith.\(^\text{52}\)

As has been mentioned above, the 1984 Vatican Instruction completely dismisses liberation theology. The ambiguity and contradictions of the Vatican’s position on the subject, however, can be appreciated in two later documents: *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation*, published by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on March 22, 1986, and Pope John Paul II’s letter to the bishops of Brazil, “Letter to Brazilian Episcopal Conference,” dated April 9, 1986. Both texts show a more receptive and positive attitude towards liberation theology that has nothing to do with the aggressive and condemnatory tone of the first instruction. A less fanatic and more objective approach seems to prevail although certain preconceptions still prevent the

\(^{52}\) For an in-depth critique and refutation of Ratzinger’s thinking against liberation theology in the *Instruction* coming from liberation theologians themselves, see Juan Luis Segundo’s excellent work *Theology and the Church: A Response to Cardinal Ratzinger and a Warning to the Whole Church* (1985). Segundo convincingly demonstrates that the *Instruction*’s theology goes against that of Vatican II, thus denying the change of orientation and legacy of the council. In the interview “Criticism Will Deepen, Clarify Liberation Theology,” which was published in the Peruvian newspaper *La República* on September 14, 1984, Gustavo Gutiérrez also criticized the contents of the *Instruction*, but, as is pointed out by Hennelly, “Gutiérrez’s comments on the *Instruction* are generally more positive and constructive than the judgments of many other liberation theologians” (*Liberation Theology* 419).
highest authorities of the Roman curia from discovering the wealth and density of liberation theology.

Pope John Paul II’s letter to the bishops of Brazil is undoubtedly the most explicit approval of liberation theology by the Catholic Church to date. The Pope not only admitted that liberation theology is useful and even necessary in this document but also stated that it must institute a new stage of theological reflection that began with the apostolic tradition. One cannot help wondering, however, what are the hidden reasons behind this sudden change of attitude, which is very suspicious. A possible explanation could be that the unforeseen consequence of the unfair investigations against liberation theologians Gustavo Gutiérrez and Leonardo Boff was to make liberation theology popular worldwide since many people were sympathetic to Gutiérrez’s and Boff’s ordeal. Therefore, it seemed better to publicly pretend to accept liberation theology

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Hennelly observes that “The pope [John Paul II] appears to have approved Cardinal Ratzinger’s investigation of two of the best-known liberation theologians: Gustavo Gutiérrez of Peru and Leonardo Boff of Brazil” (Liberation Theology 265). As has been mentioned before, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith made some very serious charges against Gutiérrez’ liberation theology in its article “Ten Observations on the Theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez” (March 1983). Hennelly reminds us that “although Gutiérrez has replied to these and other charges, constant pressure has been kept up against him” (Liberation Theology 348). In fact, some of the same accusations were made again next year in the first Vatican instruction against unspecified liberation theologies. On the other hand, Boff’s influential work Church: Charism and Power (1985) was not well received by the Congregation due to the fact that it called for “an emphasis on nurturing the charisms of service of all members of the church with a consequent deemphasis on the structures of power” (Hennelly, Liberation Theology 267). The letter sent by the Congregation to Boff is very critical of his book, especially “with regard to its critique of the exercise of power by the church’s hierarchy and institutions” (Hennelly, Liberation Theology 425). The letter was made public since, according to its conclusion, Boff’s positions “endanger the sound doctrine of the faith” (“Notification Sent” 430). Boff, however, was invited by Cardinal Ratzinger to travel to Rome to clarify some points of his book. On September 7, 1984, Boff was in Vatican City to speak with Cardinal Ratzinger. Hennelly mentions that “the conversation was carried on in a fraternal atmosphere and offered the author the opportunity to present his clarifications, which were also conveyed in writing” (Liberation Theology 425-26). In his clarification document, Boff refutes the Congregation’s line of thinking and defends the main points of his book. The Congregation examined Boff’s oral and written clarifications, and, “while it noted the good intentions and repeated testimonies of fidelity to the Church and the magisterium he expressed” (Hennelly, Liberation Theology 426), refused to consider its reservations on the book substantially overcome and considered it necessary to make the doctrinal content of the letter public.
once that it was no longer a threat after losing its continental voice in Latin America with the replacement of all the Latin American bishops who had supported it from the start. Moreover, liberation theology was becoming prestigious in many universities and theological schools all over the world in the mid 80s, which means that it could not possibly be wiped out. Finally, deep in their hearts the Pope and the members of the curia knew that liberation theologians were right and it was politically convenient to say so in 1986 after the Vatican had reassured its conservative political interests in Latin America.

CELAM’s neoconservative turn continued with greater force in the Fourth General Conference of Latin American Bishops, which took place in Santo Domingo in 1992 and was inaugurated by Pope John Paul II on October 12. In his opening address, the Pope identifies the arrival of Columbus in 1492, and, more specifically, of the first missionaries who accompanied the Spanish conquerors on Columbus’s second voyage, with the beginnings of evangelization in the New World (“Santo Domingo Documents” 42, no 3). According to John Paul II, “thus, began the sowing of the precious gift of faith. How can we fail to thank God for that, along with you, my dear brother bishops, you who today embody in Santo Domingo all the particular churches of Latin America! How can we fail to give thanks for the abundant fruits of the seed sown over the course of these five centuries by so many dauntless missionaries!” (“Santo Domingo Documents” 42, no 12). The Pope’s words show how the Conference begins with the legitimation of the theology of dominion or Christianity since it is a well-known fact that, with the exception of Bartolomé de Las Casas and some other missionaries and bishops who defended the rights of Amerindians, the evangelizing movement of the colonial period was generally founded on a violent and coercive notion of evangelization. The Pope, on the other hand,
idealizes and distorts the Church’s historical role in this process, as can be appreciated in his observation that, since the first steps of evangelization, “the Catholic Church, prompted by fidelity to the Spirit of Christ, has been a tireless defender of the Indians, a protector of the values present in their cultures and a promoter of humane treatment in the face of the abuses of sometimes unscrupulous colonizers” (“Santo Domingo Documents” 43, no 4).

Although Montesinos, Las Casas, Pedro de Córdoba and Juan del Valle, who are all mentioned by the Pope, were certainly champions of the rights of the indigenous peoples in the sixteenth century, they were the exception to the rule. The official policy of the Church was not only to support the physical conquest of Amerindians by the Spanish Crown but also to put into practice a violent cultural and spiritual conquest that aimed to extirpate all forms of native shamanism and spirituality. The cross and the sword were therefore allies and confederates from the start. The concept of “new evangelization,” on the other hand, is considered by the Pope the central idea to be addressed in Santo Domingo. The fact that “the starting point for the new evangelization is the certainty that in Christ are ‘inscrutable riches’ (Eph 3:8) that are not exhausted by any culture or any age and that we human beings can always approach in order to be enriched” (“Santo Domingo Documents” 45, no 6) reveals a spiritualization of the “new evangelization” category. Moreover, the Pope never observes its praxiological and historical basis, which must be founded on the idea of “proposing” the gospel and not on that of “imposing” it, or mention its first theoretical articulations, which had already been
produced in Latin America in 1988. This means that Santo Domingo’s central idea of a new evangelization only works in the sphere of orthodoxy but is deprived of a Latin American praxical historicity. As a consequence, it is the old imperialist concept of “evangelization” that is concealed behind Santo Domingo’s insight of a new evangelization, which is just a fancy dress or mask for an imperialist project undercover.

John Paul II also notes that “the newness of the evangelizing activity that we have called for is a matter of attitude, style, effort, and planning, or as I proposed in Haiti, of ardor, methods, and expression (cf. Address to Bishops of CELAM, March 9, 1983)” (“Santo Domingo Documents” 46-47, no 10). The lack of concreteness and the abstract nature of the notion of “new evangelization” can be appreciated in how the Pope never explains what the new changes in methodology are, the main change being the replacement of spiritual violence with evangelizing tolerance and democracy through the proposition of the gospel instead of its imposition. All this suggests that the ideology of Christianity of the first evangelization has not been overcome in Santo Domingo. In their message to the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean, the bishops greet and send their good wishes to the indigenous and African Latin American cultures but they never criticize the first evangelizers and the Spanish Crown for having committed a physical, cultural and spiritual genocide against their ancestors in the past. In other words, the bishops do not openly admit that if something was to be celebrated in 1992, this was certainly not Columbus’s arrival but that, after five hundred years of exploitation and

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54 For a theoretical articulation of the notion of “new evangelization,” see the essays collected by Paulo Suess in his book Queimada e semeadura: Da conquista espiritual ao descobrimento de uma nova evangeliçação (1988). Of special significance are the introduction and the essay by Suess himself, and the essays by Leonardo Boff, Enrique Dussel and Aiban Wagua.
oppression, the indigenous and African American peoples are still alive and the spirit of Las Casas and the few missionaries and bishops who defended the Indian cause is still present through the words and praxis of liberation theologians.

Another example of the presence of an imperialist concept of evangelization, which is related to the theology of dominion and the mentality of Christianity, in the Santo Domingo document can be appreciated in how the bishops never openly condemn the active participation of the Catholic Church in the slave trade for centuries and how the Church profited from it. They certainly state that “with John Paul II we want to ask God’s pardon for this ‘unknown holocaust’ in which ‘baptized people who did not live their faith were involved’ (Homily on the Island of Gorée, Senegal, February 21, 1992; Message to African Americans, Santo Domingo, October 12, 1992)” (“Santo Domingo Documents” 78, no 20). This, however, is not enough. It is true that the actions of the slave traders were not Christian but it is also a fact that many members of the Church were also slave traders or cooperated and traded with them for profit, something that is not mentioned by the bishops. The same lack of critical consciousness regarding the role of the Church is also present in their observation that “the enslaving of blacks and killing of Indians were the worst sins of the West’s colonial expansion. Unfortunately, some baptized people were involved in slavery, racism, and discrimination” (“Santo Domingo Documents” 139-40, no 246) (my emphasis).

These words, however, do not denounce explicitly the participation of the Church in these horrible crimes and also underscore the Church’s official support of the celebrations of the Fifth Centenary of the Discovery and Conquest of America and of the First Evangelization. Instead of joining the official celebrations organized by Spain and
other countries, the Church, in solidarity with liberation theology, should have supported the counter-celebration movement organized by indigenous and African American groups in solidarity with some subaltern sectors of the countries of the center. There is a great contradiction here between the Church’s words and actions. Truly supporting the indigenous and African American cause does not merely consist of saying words of consolation and encouragement to their representatives in Santo Domingo or asking them for forgiveness. It means acting like true disciples of Jesus Christ by refusing to be a part of a series of imperialist and Eurocentric events and by becoming actively involved in the counter-celebration movement, which presents the point of view of Amerindians and African Americans themselves. A truly Christian praxis is therefore what the Latin American and Caribbean Church of Santo Domingo lacks. Hence why it is a developmentist theology that ultimately prevails in Santo Domingo although some liberationist theological elements are scattered throughout the second and third parts of its document, as will be discussed below.

Pope John Paul II’s relativization and spiritualization of Medellin’s preferential option for the poor, which is deprived of its historical and sociological basis to the point of being distorted, can be appreciated in his observation that “it is ‘an option, moreover, that is based essentially on God’s word, and not on criteria provided by human sciences or opposed ideologies, which often reduce the poor to abstract sociopolitical and economic categories. But it is a firm and irrevocable option (Address to the Roman Curia [December 21, 1984], 9)” (“Santo Domingo Documents” 50, no 16). It is precisely the historical and praxiological foundation of the poor that gives a concrete dimension to them but only in the light of the Sacred Scriptures. Dependency theory and Marxist social
analysis are therefore just mediations that help us to critically apprehend the concrete historicity of the poor, which will always be guided by theological reflection. Paradoxically, the only possible abstraction of the poor category is the fruit of denying its historical and praxiological dimension, which is precisely what is done by the Pope. It is also significant to note that Medellin’s bold and courageous words on poverty are never quoted by John Paul II but only Puebla’s, which are much more conservative in the line of a developmentist theology. In fact, it is a developmentist theological reflection that prevails in Santo Domingo, as can be appreciated in the Pope’s denial of the achievements of the theology of liberation, which is eclipsed and spiritualized by the magisterium’s orthodoxy:

The genuine praxis of liberation must always be inspired by the doctrine of the Church as set forth in the two instructions by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (Libertatis Nuntius, 1984; Libertatis Conscientia, 1986), which must be kept in mind when the topic of liberation theologies comes up for discussion. However, the Church can in no way allow any ideology or political current to snatch away the banner of justice, for it is one of the primary demands of the gospel and, at the same time, a fruit of the coming of God’s kingdom. (“Santo Domingo Documents” 51, no 16)

The predominance of a developmentist theology in Santo Domingo can also be appreciated in how John Paul II and the bishops privilege the category of “integral human development,” which comes from Paul VI’s encyclical letter Populorum Progressio, over that of “integral human liberation,” which comes from Gutiérrez’s theology of liberation. Though not completely absent, the latter, however, is almost always subordinated to the former. The insights of liberation theology are also secondarily incorporated into Santo Domingo’s theological reflection by emphasizing the significance of concrete deeds. It must be noted, however, that no specific reference is made by the bishops to liberation
theology but only to Catholic social teaching, which agrees with the predominantly
developmentist perspective of the Santo Domingo document:

Since the Church is aware that the human being—not an abstract being, but the concrete human being in history—“is the route that it must traverse in carrying out its mission” (*Redemptor Hominis*, 14), stimulating *human development* must be the logical outcome of evangelization, which tends toward the *comprehensive liberation* of the person (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 29-39). (“Santo Domingo Documents” 48, no 13) (my emphasis)

The ultimate meaning of the Church’s commitment to *human development*, continually reiterated in its social teaching, lies in the firm conviction that “. . . genuine exterior social union has its origin in the union of minds and hearts . . . in faith and love” (GS 42). “Through the gospel message, the Church offers a force for *liberation* which promotes *development* precisely because it leads to conversion of heart and of ways of thinking, fosters the recognition of each person’s dignity, encourages solidarity, commitment, and service of one’s neighbor” (RM 59). “In carrying on these activities, however, she never loses sight of the priority of the transcendent and spiritual realities which are premises of eschatological salvation” (RM 20). By acting in this manner, the Church offers its specific participation to *human development*, which is the obligation of all. (“Santo Domingo Documents” 118, no 157) (my emphasis)

Our faith in the God of Jesus Christ and love for our brothers and sisters must be translated into *concrete deeds*. Following Christ means being committed to *live in his manner*. This concern for consistency between faith and *life* has always been present in Christian communities. (“Santo Domingo Documents” 117, no 160) (my emphasis)

One of the novelties of Santo Domingo with regard to previous conferences is the prominent role played by the ecological question. The bishops bravely defend the lands of Native Americans, denounce the ecocide of the Amazon and invoke the environmental teachings and spirit of St. Francis and the Bible in connection with the fundamental category of liberation:
In the countryside, indigenous and peasant populations are deprived of their lands, or they find themselves forced onto the least productive lands. They continue to slash and burn the forests in the Amazon and elsewhere on the continent. (“Santo Domingo Documents” 119, no 169).

In his love for the poor and for nature, Saint Francis of Assisi can be an inspiration for this path of reconciliation within creation and of human beings among themselves, which is a path of justice and peace. (“Santo Domingo Documents” 120, no 169)

Indeed, the biblical revelation teaches us that at creation the human being was placed in the garden of Eden to work it and care for it (cf. Gn 2:15) and use it (cf. Gn 2:16). Limits were pointed out (cf. Gn 2:17) to ever remind the human being that “God is the Lord and creator, that his is the earth and all it contains,” and that the human being may use it, not as absolute master but as administrator. (“Santo Domingo Documents” 120, no 171)

Jesus Christ’s resurrection once more sets humankind before the mission of liberating all of creation, which is to be transformed into a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness will dwell (cf. 2 Pt 3:13). (“Santo Domingo Documents” 121, no 173)

The inculturation of the gospel is another significant issue in the Santo Domingo document in spite of the imperialist and totalizing perspective in which it is perceived by the Latin American and Caribbean episcopate. The fact that “the encounter between Iberian Catholicism and the cultures of the Americas gave rise to a special process of amalgamation (mestizaje)” (“Santo Domingo Documents” 77, no 18) not only idealizes and eclipses the cultural and spiritual violence of the conquest of America through the use of the word “encounter” instead of “clash” or “conflict” but also shows how the bishops still view cultural hybridity in quite synthetic and assimilationist terms. This can be appreciated in the use of words like mestizaje or even “amalgamation,” which are full of acculturating and homogenizing connotations that deny the complex and fluid nature of the transcultural phenomenon even though the bishops may admit its conflictive aspects. These, however, are just mentioned but never discussed. The articulation of a
theory of inculturation in Santo Domingo shows an imperialist, synthetic and assimilationist conception of the inculturation phenomenon in which cultural hybridity, called “syncretism” by the bishops in spite of the homogeneous connotations of this term, is replaced by the old assimilationist notion of “acculturation:”

The inculturation of the gospel is a process that entails recognizing those gospel values that have been maintained more or less pure in present-day culture and recognizing those new values that are congruent with the message of Christ. The aim of inculturation is to bring society to discover the Christian nature of those values, to esteem them, and to maintain them as values. It also seeks to incorporate gospel values that are not present in the culture, either because they have been obscured or have even disappeared. . . . By becoming incarnate in these cultures, faith seeks to correct their errors and prevent syncretism. ("Santo Domingo Documents” 136, no 230)

The fact that the bishops perceive cultural hybridity as something negative and dangerous that must be changed demonstrates how they have not been able to leave behind the theology of dominion and the ideology of Christianity that defines Santo Domingo’s developmentist theology. Even so, the key issue of inculturation is insightfully connected by the bishops with Gutiérrez’s notion of “integral liberation:”

One goal of inculturated evangelization will always be the salvation and integral liberation of a particular people or human group, strengthening its identity and trusting in its specific future. At the same time, it will stand opposed to the powers of death by taking on the perspective of Jesus Christ incarnate, who out of weakness, poverty, and the redeeming cross, saved humankind. ("Santo Domingo Documents” 139, no 243)

Another problematic point is Santo Domingo’s perception of the Virgin of Guadalupe as “Star of the New Evangelization” ("Santo Domingo Documents” 70, no 47), which, as has been discussed before, is, in fact, the first evangelization undercover. It
must be remembered that Our Lady of Guadalupe was born as an indigenous religious icon to resist the assimilationist doctrine of the first evangelization by concealing native spiritual practices behind official Catholic practices. The idea was to preserve and perpetuate indigenous spirituality through the cultural hybridity of inculturation, which was initiated by natives themselves as a strategy of religious and cultural survival.

The analysis of the Santo Domingo document shows how a liberationist and anti-liberationist theological discourse coexist in it although it is the latter that finally prevails. Therefore, if there is something that characterizes the document, this is the predominance of a developmentist theology that eclipses liberation theology’s decoloniality. Alfred Hennelly, the editor of the English translation of the Santo Domingo materials, and the Amerindia movement, a group of theologians, social scientists, Native and African Americans who came as advisers to the Conference, believe that the “theology of Latin America” is present in chapter two on Human Development and in chapter three on Christian Culture whereas the “Roman Theology” can be found in chapter one on the New Evangelization. A close reading of the texts, however, shows that although a developmentist theological reflection certainly becomes dominant in chapter one, its trace is also quite present in chapter two, and, to a lesser extent, in chapter three (“A Report” 28-30). The theology of both chapters is certainly that of Latin America but it must be remembered that Latin American theology can be liberationist or developmentist and that both tendencies are present in them with the developmentist one imposing itself on the document as a whole. Hennelly observes how the voice of the bishops is not present in chapter one, which was written by Cardinal Sodano, Vatican secretary of state and chair
of the Conference, and the Commission on Latin America (CAL) (“A Report” 28-29). The fact that the voice of the bishops is in chapters two and three shows how the “CAL or Roman theology” mentioned by Hennelly was also a part of the Latin American theological reflection of both chapters, which also presents the developmentist theological approach of some bishops. Santo Domingo therefore represents a clash between a Latin American liberationist discourse and an anti-liberationist one that certainly comes from Europe but was also legitimated by some sectors of the Latin American and Caribbean episcopate.

In spite of Santo Domingo’s imperialist and neoconservative stance, liberation theology continued its development in the 1990s through LT2. Liberation theologians

55 The thorny circumstances surrounding the organization and celebration of the Santo Domingo Conference are observed by Hennelly. First of all, no journalists were allowed into the San Pablo auditorium except for the Pope’s inaugural speech, which they had already read (Hennelly, “A Report” 25). This means that “only the bishops and Vatican officials were eyewitnesses of what went on in the Santo Domingo conference, and . . . they did not publish detailed analyses of the meeting” (Hennelly, “A Report” 28). Secondly, instead of discussing the working document, which contained many valuable insights in the line of liberation theology coming from the Secunda Relatio or Second Draft, in plenary sessions, it was discarded “thus sabotaging years of work by the Latin American bishops” (Hennelly, “A Report” 28). The bishops “were subjected for several days to long, primarily conservative and useless lectures that were already familiar to the audience. Finally, they were allowed to break up into smaller working groups or committees, thirty in all, that discussed specific issues and problems” (Hennelly, “A Report” 27). The reports, however, were not open to plenary sessions but sent directly to the drafting committee, “which synthesized the results and presented them for discussion and voting in the plenary sessions” (Hennelly, “A Report” 27). Taking into consideration the thousands of petitions for changes and additions by the bishops and the episcopal conferences, it is hardly surprising that “up to the last few days of the conference, then, there were serious forebodings that the seventeen-day meeting would come to naught, no document at all” (Hennelly, “A Report” 27). According to Hennelly, that is the reason why the Final Document “shows signs of haste, poor organization, and few signs of prophetic fervor or ardor” (“A Report” 27). Another suspicious fact was that Rome added a second general secretary, in addition to Bishop Raymundo Damasceno Assis, a few months before the Conference. The new secretary, Bishop Jorge Medina Estévez of Chile, “was a lifelong friend and supporter of the former Chilean dictator, General Augusto Pinochet. Medina, a hardshell conservative, was not elected by the Chilean bishops’ conference, which strongly opposed his appointment to the conference and to such an influential position” (Hennelly, “A Report” 26). For an interpretation of the Santo Domingo Conference from the point of view of liberation theology, see Jon Sobrino’s article “The Winds in Santo Domingo and the Evangelization of Culture” (1993). For another interpretation from the perspective of a Dominican and a Spanish journalist who were in Santo Domingo, see Saturnino Rodríguez and Fausto Rosario Adames’s book Santo Domingo: Encrucijada de la Iglesia (1994).
like Giulio Girardi, Paulo Suess, Diego Irarrázaval, Clodomiro Siller, María Pilar Aquino, Ivone Gebara and Leonardo Boff himself became key figures of the second wave of liberation theology. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the second wave of liberation theology or LT2 can be said to begin with the first works written by indigenous and African Latin American liberation theologians like Eleazar López Hernández, Petul Cut Chab, Aiban Wagua and Marcos Rodrigues da Silva among others. The epistemological evolution from LT1 to LT2, which will be discussed in the next chapter, meant that the focus of liberation theology evolved from general socio-political issues into more specific racial, ecological and gender questions. It is precisely for this reason that liberation theology went more deeply into new levels or layers of decoloniality. This transformation, however, does not mean that liberation theology is no longer influential or dead, as is sometimes claimed. On the contrary, liberation theology is still commonly practiced in Latin America, Asia and Africa today. The best proof of this is that many books on liberation theology are still published every year in major languages like English and Spanish. The evolution of liberation theology’s epistemological tenets is also the reason why the Vatican is no longer so much worried about it since LT2 is not founded on the socio-political issues of LT1 but moves in a new direction. Another reason is that, as a result of CELAM’s anti-liberationist turn since 1972, the dominant line of thought has increasingly become a neoconservative one, as can be appreciated in the case of Santo Domingo.

The Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean took place in Aparecida (Brazil) in 2007 with Benedict XVI, former Cardinal Ratzinger, as the new Pope. Like Santo Domingo, Aparecida unfortunately privileges an imperialist
perception of the historical event of the conquest of America, which eclipses decoloniality from the start. This can be appreciated in the inaugural address in which the Pope surprisingly states that “in effect, the proclamation of Jesus and of his Gospel did not at any point involve an alienation of the pre-Columbian cultures, nor was it the imposition of a foreign culture” (Aparecida Document 4). According to Benedict XVI, authentic cultures are not closed in upon themselves but “are open, or better still, they are seeking an encounter with other cultures, hoping to reach universality through encounter and dialogue with other ways of life and with elements that can lead to a new synthesis, in which the diversity of expressions is always respected as well as the diversity of their particular cultural embodiment” (Aparecida Document 4-5) (my emphasis). The consequence of this idealization and distortion of the Conquest from a physical, cultural and spiritual point of view is the emergence of a sort of novela rosa that denies the physical, cultural and spiritual genocide committed against the indigenous peoples and cultures of the New World by Spain and the Catholic Church. Nevertheless, the fact that the Latin American and Caribbean bishops mention in the document that “the Gospel reached our lands as part of a dramatic and unequal encounter of peoples and cultures” (Aparecida Document 21, no 4) reveals a dissent with the Pope’s words. This is further supported by the Pope’s later admission of the drama of the Conquest in a General Audience (Aparecida Document 22, n. 4).56

56 On Wednesday May 23, 2007, Benedict XVI stated that “certainly the memory of a glorious past cannot ignore the shadows that accompanied the work of evangelization of the Latin American continent: the sufferings and injustices that the colonizers inflicted on the indigenous populations, often trampling their human rights, cannot be forgotten. But the obligatory mention of these unjustifiable crimes—which were indeed condemned by missionaries like Bartolomé de Las Casas and theologians like Francisco de Vitoria of the University of Salamanca—should not hinder grateful acknowledgement of the admirable work carried out by divine grace among these peoples over these centuries” (Aparecida Document 22, n. 4). The Pope, however, never admits the complicity of the Catholic Church in all these abominable crimes by
This dissenting position must be connected with the general theme of the Conference: Discipleship, missionary movement and evangelization. The general theme suggests that it is the interpretation of the Conquest in imperialist terms that ultimately prevails since, as has been mentioned in the case of Santo Domingo, the missionary and evangelizing movement in the New World was synonymous with a spiritual conquest and genocide. It is true that the concept of a “new evangelization” (Paulo Suess), founded on the idea of “proposing” rather than on that of “imposing,” has existed in the Latin American Church since Father Bartolomé de Las Casas and the first bishops who defended the rights of the indigenous peoples but that concept is never mentioned or explained in the document. Moreover, the use of the word “synthesis” by the Pope is also quite problematic since it is full of assimilationist connotations that eclipse the cultural and spiritual richness of the indigenous peoples. All this suggests that, like Santo Domingo, Aparecida unfortunately still supports the old imperialist concept of “evangelization,” which underlines its neoconservative theological orientation from the start.

Like John Paul II in Santo Domingo, Pope Benedict XVI also privileges a developmentist perspective founded on *Populorum Progressio’s* concept of “integral development” rather than on liberation theology’s notion of “liberation:” “This Papal document [*Populorum Progressio*] emphasizes that authentic development must be integral, that is, directed to the promotion of the whole person and of all people (cf. no 14), and it invites all to overcome grave social inequalities and the enormous differences supporting the physical conquest of Native Americans by the Spanish conquistadors (sometimes even to the point of becoming a part of it), let alone the Church’s own spiritual violence through the First Evangelization that is so enthusiastically praised by him.
in access to goods” (Aparecida Document 9). The consequence of this is the legitimation of a neoliberal reformist approach with all the problems and contradictions it involves. It is not “integral development” but Gutiérrez’s “integral liberation” that we need to transform society into a more just and equitable world. Therefore, decoloniality is also eclipsed by the developmentist ideology at the Conference. This means that, from a theological point of view, Aparecida represents a step backwards since it privileges a “developmentist theology” like that of López Trujillo, Vekemans and Kloppenburg in the 1970s instead of supporting liberation theology.

The fact that the Pope and the bishops relativize and spiritualize the praxiological and historical elements of Christianity can be appreciated in how Aparecida moves on the theoretical level of orthodoxy but not on that of orthopraxis. The preferential option for the poor, for instance, is still affirmed but not in such progressist and concrete terms as in Medellín. It is only affirmed in very conservative terms in which the Latin American historical and praxiological context is decentered even though the significance of the deeds and actions on behalf of the poor, to the point of martyrdom, is underlined:

Our faith proclaims that Jesus Christ is “the human face of God and the divine face of man.” Hence, “the preferential option for the poor is implicit in the Christological faith in the God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with this poverty.” This option arises out of our faith in Jesus Christ, God made man, who has become our brother (cf. Heb 2:11-12). Yet it is neither exclusive nor excluding. (Aparecida Document 124, no 392)

We commit ourselves to work so that our Latin American and Caribbean Church will continue to be, with even greater determination, a traveling companion of our poorest brothers and sisters, even as far as martyrdom. Today we want to ratify and energize the preferential option for the poor made in previous Conferences. That it is preferential means that it should permeate all our pastoral structures and priorities. The Latin American
Church is called to be the sacrament of love, solidarity, and justice within our peoples. (*Aparecida Document* 125, no 396)

The praxis on behalf of the poor is therefore not supported in practice despite general statements in the sphere of orthodoxy disconnected from the particularities of the Latin American reality. The bishops, on the other hand, never commit themselves to provide financial resources for base ecclesial communities but follow the line of action of John Paul II’s conservative measures. In other words, Aparecida does not reactivate the base ecclesial movement but rather supports the restriction of its field of action that has been taking place since the 1980s. And this in spite of the fact that the document admits that in the ecclesial experience of some churches of Latin America and the Caribbean, “basic (base) ecclesial communities have been schools that have helped form Christians committed to their faith, disciples and missionaries of the Lord, as is attested by the generous commitment of so many members, even to the point of shedding their blood” (*Aparecida Document* 69, no 178). Catechesis for Aparecida is no longer founded on basic church communities and the Church of the Poor but only on lectures and courses as well as on the use of the media as communication tools. The historicity of Jesus, on the other hand, is also neglected by the bishops although the human face of God is occasionally remembered.

Another problem with the Aparecida Conference in contrast with that of Medellín is its lack of critical consciousness regarding the specific and concrete socio-historical problems of the Latin American reality. The bishops just make general statements about the abuses committed by globalization and its worship of the profit mentality but lack a critical analysis of the particular socio-historical conditions of the Latin American
context. This is the fruit of their refusal to use the contributions of Marxist socio-economic analysis and dependency theory as mediations for theological reflection. This idea is closely connected with Aparecida’s non-critical perception of globalization, one of the main topics of the Conference, which perpetuates a developmentist approach that is never questioned by the bishops. According to these, “in his Inaugural Address, the pope views globalization as a phenomenon ‘of relationships extending over the whole planet,’ and considers it an ‘achievement of the human family’ because it favors access to new technologies, markets, and financing” (Aparecida Document 37, no 60).

The bishops non-critically internalize the capitalist myth of economic development, which, in fact, is only enjoyed by a minority of wealthy social sectors, when pointing out that “the high growth rates of our regional economy, and particularly its urban development would not be possible without opening to international trade, access to cutting-edge technologies, the participation of our scientists and technicians in the international development of knowledge, and the high investment in electronic media” (Aparecida Document 37, no 60). The bishops, however, remind us that “despite these advances, the pope also points out that globalization ‘brings with it the risk of vast monopolies and of treating profit as the supreme value’ ” (Aparecida Document 37, no 60). Pope Benedict XVI’s position on globalization is actually quite contradictory. If globalization is indeed based on monopoly and profit, it can only bring prosperity to a minority of rich and powerful sectors but never to the poor masses of the world. This means that it cannot possibly be a positive phenomenon, which highlights the Pope’s liberal bourgeois, developmentist and elitist stance. Benedict XVI’s position is even more
contradictory if we remember his belief in a depoliticized Latin American Church, which is emphatically stated in the inaugural address of the Conference.

The bishops, however, must be admired for standing up for the rights of the indigenous and African Latin American peoples: “As disciples and missionaries in the service of life, we accompany the indigenous and native peoples in strengthening their identities and their organizations, the defense of their territory, bilingual intercultural education, and the defense of their rights” (Aparecida Document 161, no 530). In spite of its imperialist and assimilationist perspective regarding indigenous and African Latin American spirituality, the Aparecida document sometimes mentions the religious phenomenon of “inculturation.” Its notion of inculturation, however, is one guided by the magisterium, which means that the hybridity of the intertwining of native spiritualities and Christianity is replaced by the assimilationist utopia of the former to the latter. This imperialist approach, which was also present in Santo Domingo, contrasts with the decolonial perspective of the indigenous liberation theologies of LT2. In fact, native spirituality is perceived by the bishops in quite Eurocentric theological terms as a part of a teleological process that culminates with Christianity as a superior form of spirituality:

As disciples of Jesus Christ incarnate in the life of all peoples, with faith we discover and recognize the “seeds of the Word” present in the traditions and cultures of the indigenous peoples of Latin America. We esteem their deep communal appreciation for life, present in all creation, in everyday existence, and in the age-old religious experience which energizes their cultures, and which reaches its fullness in the revelation of the true face of God by Jesus Christ. (Aparecida Document 160-61, no 528)
The fact that indigenous spirituality only carries the seeds of the Word shows how it is eclipsed by the concept of *Logos* coming from the Greek-Roman Christian tradition instead of being perceived in decolonial terms from its own cultural perspective in a more impartial and less paternalistic way. The document also overlooks any references to the various encounters and theoretical articulations of Indian and African Latin American Theologies as well as to the concept of a “new evangelization,” which shows its limitations due to its developmentist socio-economic, political and theological perspective. On the other hand, the critique of ecological degradation initiated in Santo Domingo is also present in Aparecida. Although it would be very tempting to see here the influence of Leonardo Boff’s “eco-theology of liberation,” one of the most productive tendencies of LT2, it must be remembered that Aparecida’s environmental critique always takes place within a politically correct neoliberal reformist framework that has nothing to do with LT2’s anticapitalist radical stance in works like Boff’s *Ecology and Liberation* (1995). Even so, the Latin American and Caribbean bishops do not hesitate to underline the urgent need to care more for Mother Earth in our globalized world:

> Although a greater valorization of nature has become more widespread today, we clearly see how many ways human beings threaten and are still destroying their habitat. “Our sister, mother earth” is our common home and the place of God’s covenant with human beings and with all creation. To disregard the mutual relationships and balance that God himself established among created realities is an offense against the Creator, an attack on biodiversity and ultimately against life. The missionary disciple to whom God has entrusted creation must contemplate it, care for it, and use it, while always respecting the order given it by the Creator. (*Aparecida Document* 55, no 125)

The study of the Aparecida document shows how certain key concepts like the preferential option for the poor, the base ecclesial movement or the notion of
Inculperation are affirmed at certain key moments of the text but only to be eclipsed by its neoconservative line of thinking, which skillfully imposes itself through the dehistoricization and spiritualization of the Latin American reality and the Sacred Scriptures. The unfortunate consequence of this is that, as has been mentioned before, Aparecida moves back toward a “developmentist theology.” This means that Aparecida is a reaction against liberation theology and the prophetic spirit of Medellín, which was not afraid to denounce the oppressive economic and socio-political structures of capitalism in reference to the specifically historical and cultural conditions of the Latin American context and privilege a truly Christian praxis, which, though always faithful to the spiritual teachings of the gospel, takes place in praxiological and historical terms.

On the other hand, the fact that the investigation of liberation theologian Jon Sobrino was concluded by Pope Benedict XVI two months before his first visit to Latin America to open the Aparecida Conference\(^57\) shows how the Pope wanted to weaken liberation theology before the beginning of the sessions and silence the only liberation theologian who still discusses the old socio-political issues of LT1, which so much used to annoy Cardinal Ratzinger in the 1980s. The Pope’s secret aim was therefore to make sure that a liberationist theological discourse would be absent from Aparecida from the

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\(^{57}\) Sobrino received worldwide attention in 2007 when the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a theological Notification, a critique statement and an admonishment in March 2007 because of the theological positions he took in some of his works. The Congregation declared that Sobrino placed too much emphasis on the human nature of Jesus Christ, thus downplaying his divine nature, and that his works “contain propositions which are either erroneous or dangerous and may cause harm to the faithful” (“Explanatory Note”). The Congregation, however, did not condemn or prohibit him from teaching or lecturing but hinted at the possibility that his superior in the Jesuit order of El Salvador might choose to take action. The two works censored by the Congregation in 2007 were *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth* (1993) and *Christ the Liberator: A View from the Victims* (2001). Sobrino’s defense, an eleven-page letter addressed to the Congregation, explains that the unanimous judgement of a great number of international theologians who have read his books is that there is nothing in them that is not compatible with the faith of the Church.
start, thus sanctifying a developmentist theology that would avoid the confrontation between the liberationist and anti-liberationist sectors of the episcopate that had taken place in Puebla and Santo Domingo. Pope Benedict XVI’s censoring action, however, not only discloses the political maneuver of the second Vatican instruction and the letter to the bishops of Brazil discussed above but also reveals his own visceral hatred and sickly fears towards liberation theology at the beginning of the new millennium.

The Roman Eurocentric model on which Pope Benedict XVI’s concept of the Church is founded went through a serious moral and spiritual crisis as a result of a series of sexual and financial scandals involving bishops, priests and even cardinals in addition to an internal power dispute within the Roman curia. The situation became so tense that Benedict XVI was driven to resign on February 28, 2013. As has been pointed out by Leonardo Boff, what was in deep crisis was “the idea of church as hierarchy, which Küng calls the ‘Roman system’ or the ‘institutional-hierarchical church’ or the ‘monarchical-absolutist structure of command,’ whose seat is in the Vatican and whose center is the figure of the Pope with the apparatus surrounding him: the Roman curia” (Francis of Rome 24). Therefore, a new Pope who was able to save and restore the Church from its current state of ruin, which had been going on for centuries and had seriously eroded the morality and credibility of the institution, was needed. It was Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio from Argentina that was elected as new Pope at the conclave of March 13, 2013, thus becoming Pope Francis I. Bergoglio chose the name Francis to evoke the life and mission of St. Francis of Assisi: To create a new model of Church, that is, a Church of the poor and for the poor. This new Church will be “a church that tries to be faithful to the legacy of Jesus. Its pastors must smell of ships, as he [Pope Francis] humorously
expressed it in a homily to priests in Rome. That means they should walk side by side with the people” (Boff, Francis of Rome 36). Bergoglio also knew very well from the start that, in his role as Pope, “he must guide the faithful, but he must also walk among them, sharing their journey, listening to the people, welcoming their wisdom, and feeling part of the people of God” (Boff, Francis of Rome 36).

Pope Francis therefore might come to a new and radical reformation of the Church that is closely related to the forward-looking orientation of John XXIII’s papacy. The difference, however, is that Pope Francis does not come from Europe but from the periphery, which means that his concept of the Church of the Poor does not just work on the sphere of orthodoxy, as was the case with Pope John’s, but also on that of orthopraxis. This means that decoloniality certainly plays a key role in his thought and actions, as can be appreciated in his endorsement of liberation theology’s preferential option for the poor, which has been consistently affirmed by the Latin American episcopate in Medellín (1968), Puebla (1979), Santo Domingo (1992) and Aparecida (2007) in varying degrees. It must be noted that the fact that Pope Francis reclaims Medellín’s preference for the poor does not turn him into a liberation theologian. Liberation theology, however, undoubtedly plays a key role in his thinking. Pope Francis himself has admitted that the most influential theologians in his intellectual formation have been two Argentinian liberation theologians: Lucio Gera and Juan Carlos Scannone.\(^{58}\) Both Gera and Scannone are the main representatives of the so-called

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\(^{58}\) Lucio Gera (Pasiano di Pordenone, 17 January, 1924-Buenos Aires, August 7, 2012) was an Argentinian Catholic priest, theologian and professor at Pontificia Universidad Católica Argentina. He is considered to be the most influential theologian in Argentina and one of the most important in the Hispanic world. He has also been very influential on Argentinian and Latin American theology. Gera was one of the founders of the Movement of Priests for the Third World in 1967 —for which he wrote its theological Reflection—
“theology of the people,” a branch or tendency of liberation theology that emerged in Argentina in the 1970s. Unlike mainstream liberation theology, which makes use of Marxist analysis as a socio-analytical mediation, the theology of the people is articulated around a non-Marxist historical-cultural analysis and is a product of the rich and popular culture that emerged with Juan Domingo Perón’s populist government.\footnote{Pope Francis has never concealed his Peronism, to such an extent that “and he [Pope Francis] said to President Kirchner: ‘It is the first time we have had a Peronist pope’ ” (Boff, Francis of Rome 89). According to Boff, “indeed, he [Pope Francis] never conceals his support for the Peronist ideal of social justice. The previous popes placed politics under suspicion for fear of a possible ideologization of the faith” (Francis of Rome 89). Boff also reminds us how “on June 17, 2013 at a Rome diocese convention, he [Pope Francis] said: ‘A Christian who is not a revolutionary today isn’t a Christian’; we must change hearts by sharing God’s love” (Francis of Rome 88-89). Pope Francis even told a group of students that “it is the duty of a Catholic to become involved in politics; ‘politics,’ he explained, ‘is one of the highest forms of charity because it seeks the common good’ ” (Boff, Francis of Rome 89).}

It doesn’t matter that Pope Francis does not use the expression “liberation theology.” The important thing is that he speaks and acts in a liberating way. In Argentina a tendency developed, not as an alternative to liberation theology but as a typical expression of the local culture: a theology of the people or \textit{theology of popular culture}. The people under Juan Domingo Perón developed a high level of political consciousness and created a rich and popular culture participating in the destiny of the nation. According to Jesuit Father Juan Carlos Scannone, the main exponent of this kind of theology, Jorge Mario Bergoglio (later to become Pope Francis) was a student of his in the Colegio Máximo de San Miguel in the suburbs of Buenos Aires. Father Bergoglio always supported this theology of the people. So, without having to use the more common expression “liberation theology,” he never departed from his basic insight and fundamental aim: to make the faith an instrument for the liberation of the oppressed. Instead of doing a class analysis showing the origins of impoverishment and social oppression, theology of the people prefers to analyze popular culture in its dynamism and its contradictions, stressing the elements of participation and liberation that are present in it. (Boff, \textit{Francis of Rome} 77-78)
Juan Carlos Scannone himself characterizes the theology of the people and explains its influence on Pope Francis in the following terms:

There are different currents in liberation theology, and one of them is the Argentinean current. (“Father Juan Carlos Scannone” 63)

There is an Argentinean current, which Gustavo Gutiérrez himself says is a current with its own characteristics of liberation theology, which never used Marxist categories or the Marxist analysis of society, but which, without disregarding the social analysis, prefers a more historical-cultural analysis.

In Argentinean liberation theology, Marxist social analysis is not used but, rather, a historical-cultural analysis not based on class warfare as a determining principle for the interpretation of society and history. I think Bergoglio’s pastoral work is understood in this context. My opinion is that the Argentinean line of liberation theology, which some call “theology of the people,” helps in understanding the pastoral work of Bergoglio as bishop, just as many of his affirmations and teachings do. (“Father Juan Carlos Scannone” 64)

The theology of the people is therefore a non-Marxist version of liberation theology whose neoliberal reformist approach still works within a capitalist framework in spite of its populist nature. The fact that it is the theology of the people, and not Marxist liberation theology, that has greatly influenced Pope Francis explains why he never speaks of the latter though his words and actions, as is noted by Boff, certainly show a liberating approach. Therefore, Pope Francis’s conception of the poor has a theoretical and practical dimension that must not be overlooked. The question is whether his concept of poverty is the same as that of liberation theologians or not. The rhetoric and
conceptualization of the category of the poor in Pope Francis’s words is certainly imbued
with the spirit of Medellín’s prophetic denunciation of poverty.\textsuperscript{60}

The socioeconomic system is unjust at its roots (\textit{Evangelii Gaudium}, no 59).

We also have to say ‘thou shalt not’ to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills . . . Human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded . . . The excluded are not the ‘exploited’ but the outcast, the ‘leftovers.’ (\textit{Evangelii Gaudium}, no 53)

To sustain a lifestyle which excludes others, or to sustain enthusiasm for that selfish ideal, a globalization of indifference has developed. Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people’s pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else’s responsibility and not our own. (\textit{Evangelii Gaudium}, no 54)

Pope Francis’s option for the poor, however, “is not just rhetoric but a life choice and spirituality” (Boff, \textit{Francis of Rome} 77) since “he has lived and continues to live in solidarity with them and has said very clearly that he would like ‘a poor church for the poor’ ” (Boff, \textit{Francis of Rome} 77). Boff believes that Pope Francis’s commitment to the poor not only in the sphere of orthodoxy but also in that of orthopraxis is due to the fact that “Pope Francis has lived liberation theology among us” (\textit{Francis of Rome} 77). One,

\textsuperscript{60} It is significant to note the difference between Bergoglio’s rhetoric on behalf of the poor in the Aparecida document, of which he was the main relator and director of the drafting commission, and in later texts, like the apostolic exhortation \textit{Evangelii Gaudium}, written after he became Pope. The Aparecida document is the product of Benedict XVI’s developmentist theology, which Bergoglio had no choice but follow. The humanity of Jesus Christ and the centrality of the poor are certainly there but not in the prophetic and concrete historical terms of Medellín or \textit{Evangelii Gaudium}. They are much more spiritualized, relativized and dehistoricized in Aparecida. It was surely Pope Benedict XVI’s pressure that prevented Bergoglio from developing the main insights of liberation theology in concrete terms in the Aparecida document. That is why its references to the oppressed and to the human face of Jesus are decontextualized and spiritualized, thus becoming very abstract and disconnected from the Latin American historical reality. This change in Bergoglio’s rhetoric, however, is never observed by Boff, who perceives a continuity between Aparecida and \textit{Evangelii Gaudium} that leads to a certain idealization of Bergoglio and the Aparecida document in his book on Pope Francis.
however, must be careful not to idealize the figure of the Pope. First of all, Francis does not come from Marxist liberation theology but from the theology of the people, in which Marxist analysis is replaced with a historical-cultural analysis. Secondly, although, no doubt, Pope Francis has always been supportive and solidarious with the cause of the poor through his own lifestyle, his praxis of poverty before and after becoming Pope is certainly not a prophetic one to the point of giving his life for the poor, as was the case with liberation theologians like Óscar Arnulfo Romero, Ignacio Ellacuría and Leónidas Proaño, for example. It is a well-known fact, admitted by Bergoglio himself in one of his biographies, that Bergoglio buried his head in the sand during the years of the Argentinian military dictatorship instead of openly confronting the military junta and fighting for the oppressed to the point of becoming a martyr.  

This was done by other more courageous Argentinian priests and liberation theologians who lived their faith to the full but not by Bergoglio. This means that there are different layers or levels of a

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61 Argentinean journalist Elisabetta Piqué has written *Pope Francis: Life and Revolution* (2013), one of the most important biographies on Pope Francis. Bergoglio admits in Piqué’s biography that “my government as a Jesuit had, at the beginning, many defects. I was thirty-six: it was a crazy state of affairs. I had to tackle difficult situations, and I made my decisions in a sharp, individualistic style. My brisk and authoritarian way of making decisions led to serious problems and accusations of being ultraconservative. I certainly wasn’t a saint, but I have never been right-wing. It was my authoritarian way of decision making that created problems” (qtd. in Piqué 62). Other important English-language biographies on Pope Francis from a more scholarly perspective are Mario I. Aguilar’s *Pope Francis: His Life and Thought* (2014) and Austen Ivereigh’s *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope* (2014).

62 As has been pointed out by Salvadoran liberation theologian Jon Sobrino, Bergoglio’s specific way of making an option for the poor did not consist of “actively going out and risking oneself in their defense in the time of repression of the criminal military dictatorships. . . . It doesn’t appear just to speak of complicity but it seems correct to say that in those circumstances Bergoglio distanced himself from the Popular Church, which was committed to the poor. He wasn’t a Romero — celebrated for his defense of human rights and assassinated while exercising his pastoral ministry” (“Jon Sobrino on Pope Francis”). In the case of Argentina, one of the best examples is that of Orlando Yorio and Francisco Jalics, two Jesuit priests who were persecuted for their social work in the shantytowns. They disappeared on May 23, 1976 and were tortured by the military. Bergoglio was accused of collaborating with the dictatorship by handing them over. Jalics himself admitted many years later that this is not true and that, in fact, Bergoglio did everything he could to help them (Piqué 79). Bergoglio, however, can be criticized for lack of a prophetic praxis. Instead of facing the military, he warned Yorio and Jalics that they must go away from the shantytowns since they were marked men by the regime (Piqué 76-77). How can a true disciple of
liberating praxis on behalf of the poor and that Bergoglio’s, though certainly in tune with liberation theology’s main insights, is not on the same level as that of liberation theologians, which is endowed with a prophetic dimension. This is precisely one of the reasons why Pope Francis cannot be considered a liberation theologian although the great influence of the theology of the people on his words and actions is unquestionable.\(^{63}\)

The fact that Pope Francis is in tune with liberation theology and shares its main insight of the prefential option for the poor from the perspective of the theology of the people can also be appreciated in his controversial interview with Gustavo Gutiérrez in Rome. Leonardo Boff reminds us how it was particularly intolerable for the conservative groups “that the pope received one of the initiators of the ‘condemned’ liberation theology, in a private audience” \((Francis of Rome 118)\). Another gesture on behalf of liberation theology is the fact that Monsignor Romero was declared a martyr by Pope Francis on February 3, 2015, which opens the possibility of completing his canonization process, initiated in 1997 by John Paul II, in a nearby future. During his recent visit to Paraguay in July 2015, Pope Francis not only issued a sweeping apology for the “sins and

\[^{63}\] Leonardo Boff thinks that other reasons are how dangerous it is for a Pope to affiliate himself with a single type of theology, as can be appreciated in John Paul II’s and Benedict XVI’s condemning and censoring actions, and how Pope Francis presents himself openly as a pastor and not as a doctor or theologian, which “makes him freer to speak from the standpoint of the gospel, with his emotional and spiritual intelligence, with an open and feeling heart, in tune with the globalized world of today” \((Francis of Rome 79)\).
crimes” committed by the Catholic Church upon the continent’s indigenous peoples during the colonial-era conquest of the Americas but also praised the eighteenth-century Jesuit missions, which were discussed at the beginning of this chapter as a clear antecedent of the theology of liberation, as an almost utopian social and economic experiment.\textsuperscript{64} According to Pope Francis, the Jesuit reductions “were one of the most important experiences of evangelization and social organization in history” (qtd. in Winfield and Servín). This is due to the fact that “there the Gospel was the soul and the life of communities which did not know hunger, unemployment, illiteracy or oppression” (qtd. in Winfield and Servín). Therefore, the great lesson to be learned for Pope Francis is that “this historical experience shows us that, today too, a more humane society is possible” (qtd. in Winfield and Servín).

An important question that needs to be asked is whether Pope Francis is just a radical reformer or a true revolutionary of the Church. The fact that he favors the non-Marxist theology of the people, which works within a liberal reformist framework, suggests that his is still a capitalist reformist project\textsuperscript{65} but one in which the poor are its cornerstone and have a voice. Nevertheless, the common insights and points of contact

\textsuperscript{64} It is significant to note that whereas Pope Francis’s apology of Native Americans received thunderous applause from a gathering of indigenous and civil groups in neighboring Bolivia, his comments on the Jesuit missions were met with silence by a similar gathering of indigenous and non-governmental groups in Paraguay. It seems that the descendants of the Guarani have not forgotten the spiritual violence and genocide committed against their ancestors by the first Jesuits who arrived in the colonial period. Their suspicious silence also brings to mind the words of Ricardo Pavetti, a member of the Academy of Paraguayan History, who has pointed out that the missions were hardly democratic and at times even despotic but that the Jesuit missionaries were highly capable men who taught the natives different trades and how to read and write. It must be remembered that the Jesuits also protected the Guarani in the reductions from the abuses of the Spanish and Portuguese settlers. That is why, as has been discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the Jesuit missions were endowed with both a liberating and imperialist dimension and are just an antecedent of contemporary liberation theology.

\textsuperscript{65} The best proof for this is Pope Francis’s statement that “the Marxist ideology is erroneous. However, in my life I have known many Marxists who are good people, and so for this reason I do not feel offended [at being called one]” (qtd. in Piqué 237).
with Marxist liberation theology show that some aspects of his thinking have strong anticapitalist connotations. This is the case of Pope Francis’s ecological awareness, which is another point of connection with the figure of St. Francis. Pope Francis’s environmental thought has been said to be similar to that of an antiglobalization NGO, which shows the connection with Leonardo Boff’s radically anticapitalist eco-theology of liberation. On the other hand, the great challenges ahead for the Pope as far as his radical reformation of the Church is concerned are many: “Pope Francis envisages reforming the papacy and the Roman curia. He wants to decentralize institutional offices, give women decision-making powers, and set the people of God at the center. He wants to include laymen and laywomen fully in determining the ways the church should go” (Boff, Francis of Rome 142). According to Boff, one of the the first tasks to be

66 Boff observes that another point in common between St. Francis of Assisi and Pope Francis is how we should relate to Mother Earth and to scarce goods and services (Francis of Rome 41). According to the Brazilian theologian, “in his inaugural speech at his enthronement, Francis of Rome used the word care more than eight times. The ethics of caring is what will save human lives and guarantee the health of ecosystems. Francis of Assisi, patron of ecology, will be the paradigm for a respectful kinship with all creatures, not from above but on the ground where every creature stands, especially those most threatened with extinction” (Francis of Rome 41).

67 Pope Francis’s latest encyclical letter, Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home (June 2015), is entirely devoted to the ecological question in our globalized world from an ecumenical and interreligious perspective. Chapter five of the encyclical, which deals with specific lines of approach and action to put an end to the present ecological degradation, is full of anticapitalist echoes. These can be appreciated in Pope Francis’s observation that “for new models of progress to arise, there is a need to change ‘models of global development’. . . . It is not enough to balance, in the medium term, the protection of nature with financial gain, or the preservation of the environment with progress. Halfway measures simply delay the inevitable disaster. Put simply, it is a matter of redefining our notion of progress. A technological and economic development which does not leave in its wake a better world and an integrally higher quality of life cannot be considered progress” (94, no 194). On the other hand, Pope Francis’s observation in reference to Mother Earth that “this sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will” (1, no 2) can be connected with Boff’s critique of the ecological degradation carried out by the modern man of capitalist societies, who, “especialmente a partir de la Revolución Industrial, se reveló como un verdadero ángel exterminador, un verdadero Satanás de la Tierra. Pero puede tornarse en un ángel de la guarda, puede ayudar a salvarya, pues es su patria y su madre terrenal” (La dignidad de la Tierra 29).
undertaken by Pope Francis and his eight cardinals is to turn the Synod of Bishops into a body through which the Pope can preside over the Church and whose representatives are not just members of the hierarchy but also of the people of God, including women, who are the majority in the Church (Francis of Rome 134).

This radical structural reform is considered by Boff to be a “refoundation” of the Church, “because the terms it uses go beyond reform, however far reaching” (Francis of Rome 135). This refoundation of the Church must not only be based on the historical Jesus and the apostles from a theological point of view, as is noted by Boff, but also on a decentering of the traditionally Eurocentric perspective of the Roman Church, which must be replaced by that of the poor churches of the periphery. Decoloniality therefore becomes the structuring axis around which Pope Francis’s refoundation of the Church will be articulated, something that is not observed by the Brazilian theologian. This idea, however, can be connected with Boff’s observation that “Pope Francis is aware that the Roman-centric and Eurocentric church model has no way out. It no longer has the conditions necessary to recover the freshness of the gospel and the joy that the Christian message produces. It has caused what he calls ‘a desert’ (EG, no 86)” (Francis of Rome 139).

All this suggests that Pope Francis’s Church will be no longer “Eurocentric, Vatican-centric, or papal-centric but Jesus centered, Spirit centered, people centered (centered on the notion of the people of God, as the pope has said a number of times), and

68 Boff notes that the Synod of the Bishops is “the collegial organ created by the Second Vatican Council to help the pope in the government of the universal church. But under pressure from the curia, which saw the synod as a way of breaking the centralism of Roman power, Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI transformed it into a consultative rather than a decision-making body” (Francis of Rome 133). The Synod still meets every two or three years but, as is regretted by Boff, “without any real consequence for the Church” (Francis of Rome 133).
world centered” (Boff, *Francis of Rome* 145). Theologically founded on the example of the historical Jesus and on the decoloniality of liberation theology’s main insights from the perspective of the theology of the people, Pope Francis’s new Church will probably lead to a new ecumenical council of all Christianity open to interreligious dialogue on the new challenges of our world, the main one being the survival of life on earth.\(^69\) After the neoconservative turn that began at Puebla and became more powerful in Santo Domingo and Aparecida, the figure of Pope Francis represents a return to the Medellín spirit and the fundamental tenets of the theology of liberation. It is the liberating dimension of Pope Francis that allows the Catholic Church to move forward in a liberationist direction once again. That is why Francis represents “a new dawn of hope, a sign that a new spring can burst upon the church, with all its vitality and splendor” (Boff, *Francis of Rome* 151).

The great challenge for liberation theology today, on the other hand, is to find a new, young and charismatic theological voice for the twenty-first century. This is especially important if we take into account that the great liberation theologians of LT1 are now very old men who are in their seventies or eighties. It is true that there is a younger generation of Latin American liberation theologians belonging to LT2 but, so far, none of them has been as influential as the founders of the first wave.

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\(^69\) Boff underlines how much the world has changed in the fifty years that have passed since the Second Vatican Council: “economic-financial globalization and consequent planetary awareness; the dissolution of the Soviet Union; new forms of social communication (the Internet and social networks, among others) that have unified the world; awareness of the limits of the earth; and the possibility that the human race will be exterminated, and with it, the planetary project of humanity” (*Francis of Rome* 147-48). As a consequence, “the categories of Vatican II are not now the ones we need to face this new threatening reality. Everything points to the need for a new ecumenical council” (Boff, *Francis of Rome* 148). Considering the present dangers, this new ecumenical council “must be a challenge for the whole of Christianity with all its churches” (Boff, *Francis of Rome* 148), which means that it must be founded on “the alliance . . . among the churches, religions, and techno-science” (Boff, *Francis of Rome* 148).
The experience of the base ecclesial movement in Latin America has shown how the origins of liberation theology are in the crisis of the Church in Brazil due to lack of vocations, which compels bishops to entrust religious instruction to the laity. The laymen and women from Brazil, on the other hand, come from a tradition of communal praxis to which they add the traditional thinking of the Church. It is the challenge posed by the protestant churches in Brazil that obliges ecclesiastical authorities to mobilize with the laity. This means that, as has been mentioned in chapter one, liberation theology is not a continuation or revision of a previous Eurocentric theological reflection but a new theological discourse articulated from the subaltern locus of enunciation of the Latin American periphery. Liberation theology’s foundation is therefore the popular movement within the Church in which the laity, drawing from their lived experience and praxis, begin to articulate a set of understandings of the relationship of religion to life which draws from the basic and early teachings of the Church.

The fact that Pope John Paul II had mobilized Polish Catholics against the communist state in Poland since the early years of his pontificate shows that he knew too well the political possibilities of a popular movement like that of base ecclesial communities and liberation theology in Latin America. It was his fear of not being able to control it due to its lay and Marxist nature, against which he had been fighting for many years, that explains his neoconservative policy against liberation theology and the base ecclesial movement in the 1980s. One can understand John Paul II’s fears given his

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70 For a detailed account of John Paul II’s struggle against communism in his native Poland and the Soviet Union, see George Weigel’s Witness to Hope: The Biography of John Paul II (1999), pages 396-434; David Willey’s God’s Politician: John Paul at the Vatican (1992), pages 26-47; and Carl Bernstein’s article “John Paul II and the Fall of Communism” (2006). The much neglected fact that, however paradoxical it may seem, it was the Polish communist government that helped Karol Wojtyla to become Archbishop of Krakow, the key step on his road to the papacy, is recounted by New York Times journalist Tad Szulc in his book Pope John Paul II: The Biography (2007), pages 225-38.
previous traumatic experience with Polish communism in Europe. This, however, does not justify his struggle against liberation theology in Latin America. First of all, neither liberation theologians nor the members of basic church communities were Marxist Leninists like the Polish governmental elites. Secondly, Latin America’s socio-historical, economic and political coordinates were not those of Poland, which shows how the specific conditions of the Latin American historical, cultural and religious context were eclipsed by John Paul II’s biased Eurocentric perspective, which he was never able to overcome. This means that, although the Pope may have acted in good faith, his lack of vision was precisely his interpretation of liberation theology and the base ecclesial movement in Latin America from Europe’s imperialist and socio-political lense. This contrasts with Pope Francis’s approach to liberation theology and Latin America, which seems to signal a rupture with the Vatican’s traditionally Eurocentric stance.
CHAPTER THREE

Liberation Theology’s Decoloniality and Epistemological Evolution

The previous chapters have shown the decolonial insights of the first wave of liberation theology in connection with dependency theory, Marxism and Medellín, and how, in spite of the continental neoconservative campaign against liberation theology for four decades, the Medellín spirit was kept alive by liberation theologians, the church of the poor and the base ecclesial movement and was recently reactivated from a magisterial perspective by Pope Francis. It is necessary, however, to discuss the decoloniality of liberation theology’s first wave more in depth in order to see how its decolonial potential increases through its epistemological evolution, which will result in a second wave. The novelty of understanding liberation theology as a decolonial theoretical current demands comparing this new interpretation with the traditional one. It is German Evangelist theologian Jürgen Moltmann\(^1\) that has interpreted liberation theology as a Eurocentric theological reflection derived from the Second Vatican Council, European political and progressist theologies and Western Marxism. Moltmann’s Eurocentrist thesis must be questioned by paying attention to the fact that liberation theology is articulated from the subaltern and peripheral *locus of enunciation* represented by Latin America. Since it denounces the exploitation of the poor by the capitalist machine from the periphery,

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\(^1\) Jürgen Moltmann (born in Hamburg on 8 April, 1926) is a German Evangelist theologian who is Professor Emeritus of Theology at the University of Tübingen. Moltmann is a major figure in twentieth-century theology and is most noted as a proponent of his “theology of hope,” a theological reflection with an eschatological foundation that focuses on the hope that the resurrection brings. The theology of hope is founded on the idea that God suffers with humanity but also promises humanity a better future through the hope of Resurrection. Together with J. B. Metz, Moltmann is one of the main exponents of the European political theology of the 1960s, 70s and 80s.
liberation theology is an anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist or, even better, decolonial school of theological thought. That is why it has been strongly repressed by capitalist sectors of the center like the Vatican itself. It is possible that it may have found its inspiration in some of the tenets of the Second Vatican Council and European political theology but to conceive it as a Eurocentric theology derived from them is a serious theoretical and epistemological mistake.

The origin of Moltmann’s critique against liberation theology is his harsh reaction to the questioning of his theological method by Latin American liberation theologians, especially by Argentinian Evangelist theologian José Míguez Bonino. In chapter seven of his work *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation* (1975), Míguez Bonino reflects on one of the key elements of Christianity: The connection between the material and the spiritual plane. According to Míguez Bonino, there are two “worlds” or “histories”: “This present, temporal, earthly one, which had a preparatory, contingent, and even at points negligible value, and the eternal one which is the true realm of life, fulfillment and happiness, the goal for the Christian” (133). The question of the two histories therefore involves the connection between historical action and eschatological expectation (Míguez Bonino 133-34). The tension between these two dimensions is present in the Bible. The Argentinian theologian notes that, in the case of the Old Testament, “God’s action takes place in history and as history” (134). This history is eminently political and represents the link between the political and the religious (Míguez Bonino 134). In the New Testament, however, “the history of salvation acquires a certain ‘density’ of its own, a certain ‘distance’ in relation to the totality of human history” (Míguez Bonino 135). This new history, which is the history of Jesus Christ, is never a separate history but is
connected with that of Israel. Therefore, there is a continuity in the Old and New Testament between the history of Israel and that of Jesus Christ or, in other words, between human action and the eschatological dimension (Míguez Bonino 135-36).

Traditional Christian thinking, however, has always solved the problem in dualistic terms. Míguez Bonino points out how this dualistic line of solution, which separates both histories, comes from Augustine’s *City of God* and consists of identifying the Kingdom with the history of faith and of reducing the history of Israel “to a general episodic framework devoid of eschatological significance: a mere stage” (136). This idea can be connected with Míguez Bonino’s earlier observation that “any separation between the brute facts of history and their prophetic interpretation is alien to the Bible and originates in the Greek epistemological split between brute facts and *logos*” (134). Míguez Bonino notes how liberation theologians have always rejected the dualistic position to maintain the integrity of one single God-fulfilled history. Although this idea was already present in different ways in the Greek thinking of Origen and Irenaeus, the systematic attempt to overcome dualistic thinking is relatively recent in the field of theology (Míguez Bonino 137-38). European and American theology, for instance, still reinforce the dualistic relativizing of historical action (Míguez Bonino 140). Following Juan Luis Segundo, Míguez Bonino explains how European theologians like Moltmann and Metz understand the relationship between human historical action and the Kingdom

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2 Origen (Alexandria, Egypt, 184-85-Tyre, Phoenice, 253-54) was a Christian theologian who was born and spent the first half of his career in Alexandria. He was a prolific writer and scholar in various branches of theology such as textual criticism, biblical exegesis, hermeneutics and philosophical theology among others. His most famous work, the treatise *On First Principles*, is considered to be the seminal work of Christian Neoplatonism. Irenaeus (Smyrna, Asia Minor c. 125-c. AD 202) was an early Church Father, apologist and Bishop of Lugdunum in Gaul whose writings were very influential on the early development of Christian theology. His best-known work, *Against Heresies* (c. 180), is a poignant critique of Gnosticism, which posed a serious threat to the Church of his time, especially of the system of the gnostic Valentinus.
of God in terms of “anticipation” or “analogy” instead of in terms of “causality.” The consequence of this is their reticence to relate action on socio-political structures and the building of the Kingdom (Míguez Bonino 139-40). Míguez Bonino reminds us how this problem is already present in Moltmann’s first book, *Theology of Hope* (1967).³ In this work, the Tübingen theologian argues that Christian hope does not accept the *status quo* but is a constant disturbance of reality as it is and a call to move ahead to the future. Some liberation theologians found “Moltmann’s description of the ‘promise’ of the hope towards which we move too vague, a tantalizing mirage unable to inspire concrete historical action” (Míguez Bonino 145). Others criticized the optimism of Moltmann’s vision conceived as a victorious march into the future without recognizing the close relation between resurrection and the cross (Míguez Bonino 145).

Míguez Bonino also analyzes the problems of *The Crucified God* (1974)⁴, another major book by Moltmann. The German theologian explores in this work the tension between what Míguez Bonino calls “the double historical reference of our faith” (145). According to Míguez Bonino, Moltmann perceives a lack of equilibrium between the historical and eschatological dimension, which he calls identity and relevance, and presents the Christian cross as a symbol for the balance between them (145). Since God in Christ identified himself on the cross with the poor, the destitute and the oppressed, Moltmann realizes that not only must Christians identify themselves with the crucified Christ but also with those with whom Christ himself was identified. Moltmann tries to be very concrete in his description of the historical dimension of this identification and

³ This is Moltmann’s first major work on political theology and the one that turned him into a reputed and respected theologian worldwide.
⁴ This is another crucial work in which Moltmann develops more in depth his articulation of a political theology.
speaks of “five demonic circles of death:” Poverty, violence, racial culture and deprivation, industrial destruction of nature and meaninglessness or Godforsakenness (Míguez Bonino 146). Míguez Bonino calls attention to the fact that, at this point, Moltmann sees “‘a political theology of the cross’ in opposition to the classical political theologies which glorified and sacralized power” (146). He also reminds us how Moltmann himself defines its function as “to liberate the state from political idolatry and men from political alienation and powerlessness” (Moltmann, *The Crucified God* 304). The Argentinian theologian concludes that the critical function of Moltmann’s theology of the cross through de-sacralization and de-ideologization is “the ‘political task’ of the Church which finds her identity in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus” (146).

Míguez Bonino begins his insightful critique of Moltmann’s thesis by pointing out that Moltmann himself explains in his chapter on the political theology of man that he writes in dialogue with Latin American liberation theology. For Míguez Bonino, this is quite paradoxical since “his coherent and brilliant argument seems, nevertheless, to fail to grasp the basic challenge of Latin American theological thought and to remain, therefore, within the circle of European political theology. This does not, certainly, minimize the value of his most significant work” (146). Let us see how the Argentinian theologian sharpens his criticism in order to establish a critical dialogue with Moltmann. Míguez Bonino’s critique of Moltmann’s thesis is articulated around three main issues: The lack of a sociopolitical analysis in his theological method, the lack of a concrete dimension for the identification with the poor and the presence of a liberal social-democratic theological discourse, which is presented as presumedly de-politicized.
Míguez Bonino points out how Moltmann rightly criticizes the theologies that separate the political and theological realms and those that only pay attention to the analogical and formal relations between the two. The German theologian also rejects an abstract and general theology with secondary concrete realizations of the abstract (146-47). According to Moltmann, “history is the sacrament of Christian ethics, not only its material” (The Crucified God 298). This means that God’s action can be found in the concrete and the historical. Míguez Bonino, however, questions a theology of the cross that does not resort to a concrete and historical way of understanding that sacrament. That is why he cannot help wondering “can we remain satisfied with a general description of ‘the demonic circles of death,’ without trying to understand them in their unity, their roots, their dynamics, i.e., without giving a coherent socio-analytical account of this manifold oppression?” (147). What Míguez Bonino highlights is the need for theology to take into consideration the socio-analytical mediation in order to be in tune with the current historical and political reality. Hence why he concludes that “if theology means to take history seriously, it must incorporate—with all necessary caveats—a coherent and all-embracing method of sociopolitical analysis. Moltmann does not seem to be conscious of this need” (147).

Míguez Bonino believes that this, in turn, leads to another problem: The failure to give a concrete content to the identification with the oppressed (148). The key here is Moltmann’s observation that “the crucified God is really a God without country and without class. But he is not an a-political God; he is the God of the poor, of the oppressed, of the humiliated” (The Crucified God 305). Míguez Bonino, however, notes
that “but the poor, the oppressed, the humiliated are a class and live in countries” (148). The Argentinian theologian cannot help wondering if one can truly support the poor and the oppressed if one does not see them as a class, and therefore, as members of oppressed societies (148). In Míguez Bonino’s words, “if we fail to say how; are we ‘for them’ in their concrete historical situation? Can we claim a solidarity which has nothing to say about the actual historical forms in which their struggle to overcome oppression is carried forward? (148). On the other hand, Moltmann’s observation that “a modern political theology does not intend to dissolve the Church into a politics of right or left” (148) is also quite problematic. Once again, Míguez Bonino cannot help wondering “is it possible to claim a solidarity with the poor and to hover above right and left as if that choice did not have anything to do with the matter?” (148).

Míguez Bonino thinks that Moltmann’s problem —and that of most European theology— is that they draw back from the materializations of God’s presence in history and take refuge in a presumed “critical function” which is supposedly ideologically neutral and independent of a structural analysis of reality (149). Moltmann’s explanation that this is necessary to avoid sacralizing a particular ideology or power structure is not convincing for Míguez Bonino. Although any sacralization of ideology and system must be avoided, “it is important to stress that such a secularization of politics is to be attained not through a new idealism of Christian theology, but through a clear and coherent recognition of historical, analytical, and ideological mediations” (Míguez Bonino 149). What Míguez Bonino means is that even though there is no divine politics or economics, we must use the best human politics at our disposal. Therefore, European theologians

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5 Moltmann’s relativization and idealization of the poor category agrees with that of the developmentist theology of López Trujillo, Kloppenburg and Vekemans discussed in chapter two.
need to de-sacralize their conception of critical freedom in order to recognize its human
and ideological contents (149). The consequence of this is that “when they [European
theologians like Moltmann and Metz] conceive critical freedom as the form in which
God’s eschatological Kingdom impinges on the political realm, they are simply opting
for one particular ideology, that of liberalism” (Míguez Bonino 149). What emerges is
therefore “one form of the liberal social-democratic project which progressive European
theologians seem to cherish particularly” (Míguez Bonino 150). The Argentinian
theologian admits that they may be justified in this choice but clarifies that “it should not
be camouflaged as ‘the critical freedom of the gospel’ but analytically and ideologically
presented and justified in human political terms in the same way as our option for
socialism and Marxist analysis” (150).

In an open letter to Míguez Bonino written in 1975, Moltmann harshly reacted to
the critique of his own theological method by Latin American liberation theologians
questioning their use of Marxism. According to the German theologian, liberation
theology has more to do with the sociological theories of Western socialists than with the
life and history of the Latin American people. Moltmann offers a Eurocentrist argument
without giving convincing reasons. His 1975 letter was very influential, and, no doubt,
must have played a key role in the popularity of the Eurocentrist thesis among certain
scholarly circles of Europe, Latin America and the USA. Moltmann eclipses the alterity
of Latin American theology by forcing and imposing the Eurocentrism of Western
Marxism upon it. This epistemological deformation and distortion of Latin American

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6 The English translation of this letter was first published in the journal Christianity and Crisis (March 29, 1976), pages 57-63, and reprinted in Alfred T. Hennelly’s anthology Liberation Theology: A Documentary History (1990), pages 195-204. All quotations from Moltmann’s letter in the text come from Hennelly’s anthology.
liberation theology completely overlooks its decolonial dimension by approaching it from the typically Westernized imperialist and colonialist mentality. Let us see the contents of his critique more in detail.

Moltmann begins his discussion by defining liberation theology as “an indigenous theology that frees itself from the European tradition and North Atlantic theology in order to give its full attention to the unmistakable experiences and tasks of Latin America” (“An Open Letter” 196). Liberation theology, however, was not an indigenous theology in 1975 but an alternative theological reflection to that of Europe and the USA articulated from the decolonial point of view of Latin America. It was not until the second wave of liberation theology (LT2) that deeper layers or levels of decoloniality emerged within the initial insights of liberation theology, thus giving rise to the emergence of specifically indigenous, African Latin American, feminist and environmental liberation theologies among others.

On the other hand, the fact that liberation theology offers an alternative theological discourse founded on the interconnection between the historical process of human liberation and the eschatological dimension of the Kingdom of God does not mean that it is hostile to European or North American theology. In other words, liberation theology does not want to “free” itself from European theology but to produce an alternative theological reflection from the point of view of the periphery. This, however, does not mean that it does not value the contributions of European and North American theology. A fundamental work like Gustavo Gutiérrez’s *A Theology of Liberation* (1973) presents an original and innovative theological discourse from a decolonial Latin American vantage point that often incorporates the best achievements of European
theology without this meaning that liberation theology derives from it or adopts its imperialistic theological point of view. Moltmann also notes that “but the destruction of theological imperialism should not lead to the provincialization of theology. If that were to happen, we in Europe would be able to abandon the rest of the world and Christianity as a whole and occupy ourselves with our own concerns and traditions” (“An Open Letter” 196). The German theologian is blinded by his own prejudices and cannot possibly see that liberation theology does not provincialize theology but provides an alternative decolonial point of view to that of Europe, which is defined by its imperialist and universal pretensions. In this sense, all theologies, even those coming from Europe, are provincial since all of them endorse a standpoint or perspective from which to approach reality, which is that of the socio-cultural and historical context in which they were born.

This is precisely the problem with Moltmann’s argument since the German theologian fails to apprehend the Eurocentric and imperialist partiality of European theology and how it eclipses the theological reflections coming from other parts of the world including Latin American liberation theology. This is the best example to illustrate how European theology, contrary to Moltmann’s assertion, has actually abandoned the rest of the world instead of “dis-covering” it. It may be true that European theology is not only concerned with Europe but only from an imperialist perspective that is considered universal and imposed upon the rest of the world. Moltmann is full of good intentions but is also quite contradictory. Paradoxically, his belief in a world theology built through dialogue and communication demands accepting the various points of view, or, in his own words, “provincialisms” of the various theologies of the world instead of eclipsing
them with that of Europe. Therefore, Moltmann’s assertion of the presumed provincialism of Latin American liberation theology denies the decolonial point of view of the periphery from which to make theology.

Moltmann continues his critique by accusing liberation theology of lack of originality because of its use of Marxist thinking, which comes from Europe and has nothing to do with Latin America. The Evangelist theologian observes that “in North American black theology we have encountered new forms of communication through the language and music of an oppressed community . . . But up to now scarcely anything comparable has come out of Latin America” (“An Open Letter” 196) and also underlines that “we hear severe criticism of Western theology and of theology in general—and then we are told something about Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, as if they were Latin American discoveries” (“An Open Letter” 196). First of all, it must be noted that, as has been admitted by James Cone himself, it is black theology that was deeply influenced by Latin American liberation theology, especially by Gutiérrez’s book _A Theology of Liberation_, which was published several years before Cone’s book _God of the Oppressed_ (1975). Moltmann, on the other hand, forgets that, even though Marx and Engels are not Latin American thinkers, their ideas are resemanticized into the Latin American cultural context in order to produce a “decolonial Marxism,” which is different from classical

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7 Latin American liberation theology taught Cone the importance of paying attention to class analysis and not just to racial analysis. Unlike Cone’s first three books, which only focus on the racial question, _God of the Oppressed_ signals a radical change in a new direction. As has been noted by Rufus Burrow Jr., “it is in this book that the idea of an on-going interplay between ideas and social context was systematically developed” (129). Moreover, the fact that in his remarks at the Geneva symposium Cone was already talking the language of a sociologist of knowledge shows that “he was in the process of researching and thinking through his fourth book, _God of the Oppressed_” (Burrow Jr. 129).

8 For an explanation and definition of the notion of “decolonial Marxism,” see chapter one, page 49.
European Marxism. Once again, Moltmann eclipses the originality of liberation theology’s use of Marxism with his own Western Marxism.

The German theologian also accuses liberation theology of first criticizing European theology only in order to confirm what European theologians like he himself and J. B. Metz9 have previously argued. His critique goes against four key liberation theologians: Rubem Alves, Juan Luis Segundo, José Míguez Bonino and Gustavo Gutiérrez. In fact, the refutation of Moltmann’s and Metz’s theological method carried out by these liberation theologians does not reconfirm their argument but rather opens up a new decolonial theological avenue that is absent in the methodology of both German theologians. In other words, liberation theology may agree with some aspects of their theological method but what it criticizes in it certainly contributes something new, original and innovative — the decolonial theological dimension — that is overlooked by European theology. Moltmann notes how Alves criticizes the theology of hope for being too transcendental in the definition of the eschatological promise and too negative in the judgement of the present.10 The German theologian believes that Alves’s attempt to explain the connection between the material and the spiritual plane in terms of causality

9 Johann Baptist Metz (born in Auerbach, Germany, on August 5, 1928) is a Catholic theologian who is Ordinary Professor of Fundamental Theology, Emeritus, at Westphalian Wilhem University in Münster, Germany. Metz is one of the most influential theologians of the twentieth century on the subject of political theology. He and Moltmann are the two main theoreticians of the so-called “new political theology” that emerged in Europe in the 1960s, 70s and 80s. One of Metz’s most important works, The Emergent Church: The Future of Christianity in a Postbourgeois World (1981), was the fruit of the profound influence of liberation theology’s critique of his theological method. In this work, Metz offers a paradigm of prophetic Christianity beyond bourgeois religion that pays attention to the perspective of the victims of the system. In the 1960s and 70s, however, Metz, like Moltmann, still followed an idealist and transcendental theological paradigm under the influence of his mentor, Karl Rahner, which was strongly criticized by Míguez Bonino and other Latin American liberation theologians. Some of the most important works of this early stage of Metz’s thinking are Faith and the World of Politics: Fundamental Theology (1968), Theology of the World (1969) and Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology (1980).

10 Alves develops this critique in his influential work A Theology of Human Hope (1969).
is something taken from Leibniz and Bloch\textsuperscript{11} ("An Open Letter" 197). Moltmann also calls attention to the fact that Alves cannot explain the causality of this relationship, which is why he reverses it and "must ask about the father who has begotten the child and has engendered the present with hope. Therefore, he speaks of the divine promise and of the language of freedom and ends at the point where the "theology of hope" already was" ("An Open Letter" 197).

Alves certainly criticizes the transcendental nature of Moltmann’s theology of hope for being disconnected from the historical present. He also emphasizes the idea that the future comes from the pregnancy of the present but it must be remembered that he does this from a specifically Latin American socio-historical and cultural context that has nothing to do with that of Leibniz and Bloch. Even if Alves were influenced by these two thinkers, he would be resemanticizing their ideas into the Latin American decolonial context, which gives rise to an entirely new and original theological reflection. Moreover, the novelty of a causal relationship between historical action and the eschatological dimension from the periphery’s decolonial theological perspective differentiates Alves’s reflection from that of Moltmann and Metz, who understand this dynamic in terms of

\textsuperscript{11} Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (Leipzig, July 1, 1646-Hanover, November 14, 1716) was a German polymath and philosopher of Sorbian origin who, to this day, occupies a prominent role in the history of mathematics and philosophy. Along with René Descartes and Baruch Spinoza, he was one of the main exponents of seventeenth-century rationalism. Ernst Bloch (Ludwigschafen, July 8, 1885-Tübingen, August 4, 1977) was a German Marxist theologian and philosopher whose thought was influenced by Hegel and Marx as well as by apocalyptic and religious thinkers like Thomas Müntzer, Paracelsus and Jacob Boehme. Bloch’s philosophical reflection is articulated around the idea that a truly revolutionary force will always be present in a humanistic world in which exploitation and oppression may have been eliminated. Bloch’s major work is The Principle of Hope (originally published in German in three volumes, 1938-47; English translation, 1986), a work that tries to explain humankind’s and nature’s orientation towards a socially and technologically improved future. The Principle of Hope is cited by Moltmann as a key influence in his Theology of Hope (1967). Other thinkers like German theologian Dorothée Sölle, Italian priest and peace activist Ernesto Balducci and psychoanalyst Joel Kovel have also praised Bloch and consider him one of the most important modern utopian thinkers.
“anticipation” and “analogy.” Moltmann persists in not wanting to admit the alternative decolonial *locus* of enunciation of Latin American liberation theology. The German theologian also distorts and misinterprets Alves’s use of the figures of the father and the son in his reflection. The father has certainly begotten the son so that the son can put into motion the transformation of reality through the historical praxis of his actions, deeds and sayings, a first realization or manifestation of the eschatological promise of the Kingdom of God, which culminates in the afterlife. Alves therefore keeps the causality of his argument at all times instead of falling into the spiritualized perspective of European political theology.

Moltmann’s critique of Juan Luis Segundo is also quite questionable, unconvincing and problematic. The Evangelist theologian points out how Segundo “lodges against ‘political theology’ the criticism that by means of its eschatological hope it would simply relativize all absolute experiences and ideologies and would validate only nonbinding anticipations, analogies, and designs directed at the wholly other schatological future” (“An Open Letter” 197).12 Moltmann, however, argues that European theologians like Bonhoeffer, Barth, Metz and himself13 have constantly spoken

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12 Segundo questions Moltmann’s theological method in his article “The Choice between Capitalism and Socialism as the Theological Crux” (1974).

13 Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Breslau, 4 February, 1906-Flossenbürg concentration camp, Natzi Germany, 9 April 1945) was a German Lutheran pastor, theologian and anti-Natzi dissident. His writings on the role of Christianity in the secular world have become very influential and his work *The Cost of Discipleship* (originally published in German in 1937; English translation, 1966) is a modern classic of Christian thought. The book offers an exposition of the Sermon on the Mount in which Bonhoeffer explains what it means to follow Christ. It is significant to note that Bonhoeffer’s theology of costly discipleship takes place against the background of the rise of the Natzi regime in Germany. Karl Barth (Basel, May 10, 1886-Basel, December 10, 1968) was a Swiss Reformed theologian who is often considered to be the greatest Protestant theologian in the twentieth century. Barth rejected nineteenth-century Protestant liberal theology as well as more conservative forms of Christianity. This led him to develop an alternative theological method called “dialectical theology,” which stresses the paradoxical nature of divine truth due to the fact that God’s relationship to humanity embodies both grace and judgement. Barth’s major works
of the intensification of historical hopes through the eschatological hope ("An Open Letter" 197). This means that the individual event of liberation or salvation “does not gain in this way a ‘causal character’ for the Kingdom of God — even Pelagius\(^{14}\) never would have said that— but rather the Kingdom attains a causal character for the experienced event of liberation, for all messianic activity realizes the possibilities that have been made possible through the inbreaking of the messianic time (Luke 4:18ff.)” ("An Open Letter" 197). Segundo’s insightful critique certainly underlines how European political theology spiritualizes the eschatological hope, thus relativizing all historical experiences in terms of anticipation and analogy. The principle of causality is therefore what defines the relationship between historical action and the eschatological promise. Moltmann’s reversal of this causality, however, is also problematic. It must be remembered that the example of Jesus Christ’s actions and sayings is not primarily messianic but historical. This means that they belong to the dimension of the historical Jesus even though they have a messianic and eschatological projection and meaning. Pelagius, on the other hand, was a Christian thinker who refuted the Greek dualistic thinking legitimated by Moltmann. The fact that Pelagius supported the doctrine of free will suggests that he did not believe in the presence of divine aid in the acts of human

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\(^{14}\) Pelagius (c.390-418) was a British-born ascetic moralist and monk who opposed the idea of predestination and asserted the doctrine of free will. According to this, original sin did not taint human nature, which means that human will can choose good or evil without special divine aid. He was accused by Augustine of Hippo and others of denying the need for God’s help to perform good works. Pelagius, on the other hand, radically questioned Augustine’s theory of original sin, and his followers cited Deuteronomy 24:16 to support his position. Pelagius was declared a heretic by the Council of Carthage. His interpretation of the doctrine of the free will became known as Pelagianism.
beings. Pelagius, however, would never deny that human beings orient themselves towards God when choosing of their own free will to perform good actions.

The key point here is that the first realizations or manifestations of the Kingdom begin in the material world through the historical praxis of the historical Jesus, which must be perpetuated by his followers under the guidance of Christian ethics and culminates in the eschatological sphere of the Kingdom. The example of Jesus Christ’s life, which was followed by his death and resurrection, teaches us that. First, comes Jesus the man. Then he is declared as the Christ of faith. Therefore, contrary to Moltmann’s thesis, it is the historical Jesus that precedes the Messiah Christ and must be our point of departure. Messianic time and activity, however, will be our point of arrival understood as the full realization of all the possibilities that have been made possible through and after the inbreaking of historical time. Moltmann, on the other hand, also criticizes Segundo for using the concept of the fragmentary with the sense of “anticipation” and “analogy,” which is how it is used by the most progressist European political theologies of the time (“An Open Letter” 197). The fact that Segundo speaks of a “fragile, partial causality that not infrequently errs and must be initiated anew” (qtd. in Moltmann, “An Open Letter” 197) and refers to history as the sphere in which “the eschatological kingdom [is] at stake, even if perhaps merely in a fragmentary way” (qtd. in Moltmann, “An Open Letter” 197) shows how his notion of the partial and fragmentary has nothing to do with Moltmann’s and Metz’s notion of anticipation and analogy but with that of causality.

Moltmann’s critique of Míguez Bonino’s ideas distorts and deforms the Argentinian theologian’s thinking as a result of projecting his own imperialist and
Eurocentric mind upon it, as is also the case with his criticism of Alves and Segundo. The German theologian points out that “your Barthianism always lets you distinguish between what God does and what human beings do. But at the same time, you reproach Barth, the Europeans, and thus, in the same breath, also yourself for not overcoming this dualism through a new, historical-dialectical way of thinking” (“An Open Letter” 197). Moltmann accuses Míguez Bonino of not being able to go beyond a Barthian dualistic theology when, in fact, Míguez Bonino departs from this dualistic position only in order to question it and propose a “monist theology” as an alternative founded on the Bible itself, which is the one favored by liberation theology. Moltmann’s accusation is therefore pointless. The German theologian, on the other hand, finally admits Míguez Bonino’s critique of the lack of materialization of the Kingdom of God, and therefore, of the excessive spiritualization of the critical function of his theological method (“An Open Letter” 197-98). Moltmann’s observation that “but then one reads your summary of your own thoughts and, behold, everything you have criticized in the ‘political theology’ of Metz and Moltmann is again in place” (“An Open Letter” 198) shows how he is not able to admit the lack of a socio-analytical mediation or a socio-political analysis of reality in his method. This is precisely Míguez Bonino’s greatest contribution to his critique of Moltmann’s thesis. That is why Moltmann reacts in quite fanatic and Eurocentric terms.

15 I use this term in order to refer to a theological discourse that establishes a continuity between the material world and the eschatological promise, which means that there is an only history that has both a praxical-historical and eschatological dimension.

16 Moltmann specifically accuses Míguez Bonino of repeating some ideas coming from European political theology: Our concrete historical options should correspond to the Kingdom (Barth), the critical connection of the judgement of God to the whole of our human efforts (Luther) and Christian faith as a stimulus and challenge for the revolutionary action (Moltmann) (198). Moltmann, however, fails to see that what Míguez Bonino criticizes through the use of those ideas is precisely the relativization and spiritualization of historical mediations that defines European political theology since it lacks a socio-political analysis of reality. The consequence of this is the unconscious legitimation of the bourgeois liberal ideology, along with the neocolonial project and the injustice that comes with it, in the name of political neutrality.
and deforms the whole picture by accusing Míguez Bonino of imitating his own theological method and that of Metz, Barth, Bonhoeffer, Gollwitzer\textsuperscript{17} and other European theologians.

This is a complete distortion of the facts since the excessive spiritualization and lack of emphasis on historical action due to the absence of the socio-analytical mediation is a problem of all European political theology but not of Latin American liberation theology. It is possible that Míguez Bonino uses some concepts or ideas from Moltmann, Metz and other European theologians but he takes them to a new dimension through his critique, which is the fruit of making theology from the decolonial point of view of the periphery. This is defined by the historical reality of the poor and the oppressed, a concrete dimension that Moltmann only takes into consideration in order to spiritualize it. Therefore, the use of some of Moltmann’s and Metz’s ideas is a necessary preliminary step for Míguez Bonino to articulate his critique and show the originality of his thinking. If the Argentinian theologian returns to Moltmann’s theological method, it is only to incorporate in it what it lacks in order to be convincing: The socio-analytical mediation. It is only thanks to the decolonial theological perspective of the periphery that the epistemological and methodological mistakes made by European political theology can be corrected. Míguez Bonino’s theological reflection is therefore an original theological discourse that critically apprehends, but does not imitate, European theology without denying its contributions. All theologians, on the other hand, are influenced by key ideas

\textsuperscript{17} Helmut Gollwitzer (Pappenheim, 29 December, 1908-17 October, 1993) was a German Lutheran theologian and writer. During the period of the Nazi regime, he was involved in the Confessing Church movement which resisted the regime’s attempt to control the churches. He was a professor of systematic theology at the University of Bonn (1950-1957) and a professor of Protestant theology at the Free University of Berlin, where he retired in 1975. Gollwitzer was actively involved in the political debates of the 1960s and 70s. He was a pacifist and was against nuclear weapons. He was also very critical with US engagement in Vietnam as well as with the injustice of capitalism.
and concepts from other theologians. Moltmann’s theology of hope, for instance, is highly influenced by Ernst Bloch’s notion of the principle of hope. This, however, does not mean that Moltmann’s reflection is a copy and imitation of Bloch’s. On the contrary, Moltmann’s theology of hope is an entirely new valuable and original reflection from a European vantage point.

Moltmann’s critique of Gustavo Gutiérrez also overlooks the fact that A Theology of Liberation is written from Latin America’s decolonial perspective. According to Moltmann, the reader is disappointed at the impossibility to find Latin America in this book (“An Open Letter” 198). The German theologian complains that “Gutiérrez presents the process of liberation in Latin America as the continuation and culmination of the European history of freedom. One gets a glimpse into this history of freedom by being enlightened about Kant and Hegel, Rousseau and Feuerbach, Marx and Freud” (“An Open Letter” 198). Moltmann’s reading, however, is quite partial and limited since it does not take into consideration Gutiérrez’s discussion of the Latin American historical liberation from a theological perspective using the contributions of the social sciences and Marxism as secondary socio-analytical mediations that can help us to critically capture the oppressive structures of the Latin American reality of poverty and injustice. Paradoxically, Moltmann eclipses the hermeneutical and epistemological methodology of liberation theology, which is precisely what his own theological method lacks and one of the main original contributions of Gutiérrez’s book from a specifically Latin American historical perspective. Moreover, Moltmann neglects the rich and valuable experience of Latin America’s base ecclesial communities, in which a practical liberation theology
avant la lettre took place at a popular level some years before it became a theoretical theological discourse, thus becoming one of its foundations.

Gutiérrez certainly uses Marxist thinking and other theological and philosophical ideas from Europe to complement and empower the originality of his own decolonial theological reflection from the periphery. In this sense, Gutiérrez’s use of Marxism, the social sciences and other European sources certainly enhances his thinking because he adapts and resemanticizes them into the Latin American decolonial context. But to suggest that Gutiérrez’s incorporation of European sources into his own theological reflection eclipses its decoloniality is to take things too far. Some ideas from the European history of freedom can certainly empower Latin America’s own history of freedom but never replace it. Therefore, Moltmann’s weak argument is always the same: To accuse liberation theology of copying European thought and lacking originality. This can be especially appreciated in the following observation:

The “secularization process” is portrayed in detail through the work of Gogarten, Bonhoeffer, Cox, and Metz. This is all worked through independently and offers many insights—but precisely only in the framework of Europe’s history, scarcely in the history of Latin America. Gutiérrez has written an invaluable contribution to European theology. But where is Latin America in it at all?” (“An Open Letter” 198).

Moltmann’s Eurocentrism eclipses the specifically Latin American decoloniality of Gutiérrez’s work. Paradoxically, the reason why the secularization process is presented

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18 Friedrich Gogarten (Dortmund, January 13, 1887-October 16, 1967) was a German Lutheran theologian and one of the main theoreticians, along with Karl Barth, of "dialectical theology." Harvey Cox (born in Malvern, Pennsylvania, on May 19, 1929) is one of the most important theologians in the USA. He was Hollis Professor of Divinity at Harvard until he retired in October 2009. His research focuses on world Christianity, including liberation theology, and on the role of Christianity in Latin America. Cox’s most influential work is The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective (1965).
by the Peruvian theologian in the light of European theology is because, until the publication of his book, Latin American theology has been a copy and imitation of that of the center for centuries. It is precisely because of the intellectual, theological and philosophical colonization of Latin America by Europe that the Latin American secularization process took place in European terms. Moltmann also fails to see how Marxism is resemanticized into Latin America’s social and historical coordinates in order to become a “decolonial Marxism” differentiated from that of Europe. This can be appreciated in his observation that “today we see the initial phases of the social and political liberation of the people from Western economic imperialism and from subjection to class rule by military dictatorship. That is, the proletarian revolution has begun, but again in the train of socialistic movements and their theories in Europe” (“An Open Letter” 199). Contrary to what Moltmann contends, the social and political liberation of the Latin American people is not a proletarian revolution, like that of classical European Marxism, but a decolonial one.

Moltmann also criticizes the use of Marxism by liberation theologians since, according to Moltmann, “they do not carry through this class analysis with respect to the history of their own people; they only quote a few basic concepts from Marx . . . In them one reads more about the sociological theories of others, namely Western socialists, than about the history or the life and suffering of the Latin American people” (“An Open Letter” 199). The German theologian does not realize that liberation theology departs from the critical analysis of the Latin American reality, which is illuminated by the Christian teachings with the help of the secondary socio-analytical mediations of Marxist thinking and the social sciences. As has been mentioned above, the liberation struggle of
the Latin American people is discussed by Gutiérrez in specifically Latin American historical terms in a key section of his book and is certainly founded on the experience of base ecclesial communities, which are ignored by Moltmann. Therefore, the starting point of liberation theology is the Latin American historical reality of poverty and injustice and not European history or philosophy. Some elements from European thinking can certainly contribute to illuminate the Latin American historical reality, once adapted to Latin America’s decolonial context, but only as secondary mediations, as is the case with Marxism. Moltmann, however, wants us to believe that Marxist thinking eclipses Latin American history as if it were the primary element of liberation theology’s method, which is a full distortion of the facts.

Liberation theology introduces a radical theological change thanks to the fact that it takes on the perspective of the poor and the oppressed, which is that of the periphery’s decoloniality. European theology, on the other hand, still assumes an imperialist and Eurocentric approach that prevents it from supporting the decolonial liberation of the oppressed despite its pretensions of goodness, innocence and universality. Moltmann also complains that Míguez Bonino criticizes in connection with European political theology how it internalizes the developmentist, technological and liberal ideology, which is the source of exploitation and oppression of the poor countries of the world (‘An Open Letter’ 200). He also accuses the Argentinian theologian of not giving “the slightest shade of evidence” (‘An Open Letter’ 200). In fact, the evidence is Moltmann’s and Metz’s lack of attention to the historical praxis and the political options it involves as a first insight or manifestation of the eschatological hope of the Kingdom of God. It is the

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19 Part three of A Theology of Liberation, “The Option Before the Latin American Church,” focuses on the historical process of liberation in Latin America and on the Church’s role in it.
lack of a socio-political analysis of reality as a socio-analytical mediation in their theological method that makes Moltmann and Metz unable to question the imperialist ideology of developmentism and liberalism, which means that they are ultimately complicit with the system without even realizing it.

Moltmann also criticizes Míguez Bonino’s lack of originality when concluding that orthopraxis must be privileged over orthodoxy, something previously noted by Metz, and that theology has to transform the world instead of just observing it, something previously mentioned by Moltmann (“An Open Letter” 200). It is precisely for the reasons mentioned above that, contrary to Moltmann’s observation, liberation theology’s notion of orthopraxis has nothing to do with Metz’s. This is due to the fact that orthopraxis has a decolonial dimension for liberation theology that is not present in Moltmann’s and Metz’s political theology in which orthopraxis has imperialist and Eurocentric connotations. As has been mentioned before, Míguez Bonino may borrow some theological concepts from European theology but he takes them to a new and original dimension by readapting them to the Latin American decolonial experience. Orthopraxis in European political theology works within a developmentist and liberal bourgeois ideological and conceptual framework —which is never admitted and is even eclipsed as “de-politicization”— that never unmask the cause of the dependency of the poor countries and of the situation of international poverty and injustice. Orthopraxis in Latin American liberation theology, however, works within a decolonial ideological and conceptual framework that, using the contributions of Marxist thinking and the social sciences, questions and reveals the neo-colonial oppressive structures of capitalism and the developmentist ideology on an international scale, thus illuminating the root of the
problem. As has been mentioned before, Míguez Bonino’s originality, and that of liberation theology in general, is to call our attention to the crucial issue of decoloniality by incorporating a precious socio-analytical mediation that is not present in European theology, thus weakening its critical potential. Moltmann ends up negating once again liberation theology’s innovation and originality, which is still conceived by him as an imitation of European political theology, as a result of his Eurocentric prejudices and imperialist mind.

In the last section of his letter, Moltmann discusses his preference for a democratic socialism as a political option. Like his theological method, Moltmann’s democratic socialist project takes place exclusively in European terms and works within bourgeois liberal ideology. His democratic socialism is therefore defined by its Eurocentrism, liberalism and lack of decoloniality. This is not surprising if we remember Moltmann’s observation at the beginning of his letter in connection with the proletarian revolution as the fruit of Western socialist movements. As has been mentioned before, the German theologian is blinded by his Eurocentrism and cannot see the decolonial nature of Latin American Marxism. That is why the social and political liberation of the Latin American people is conceived by him as a proletarian revolution and not as a decolonial one. Moreover, Moltmann almost denies the existence of Latin American socialist projects (“An Open Letter” 199). A close reading of *A Theology of Liberation*, however, shows that there were different socialist political alternatives in Latin America in the early 1970s like those of Che Guevara, the Cuban revolution, Camilo Torres and the Sandinista Front and the possibility of a decolonial democratic socialism, which is the
option favored by Gutiérrez himself four years before the publication of Moltmann’s letter.

Moltmann’s democratic socialism does not function outside the bourgeois liberal model but inside it. This means that it is ultimately a capitalist and liberal project that is politically correct and complicit with international neo-colonialism. The problem with Moltmann’s political option is therefore the same as that of his political theology: The legitimation of the poverty and injustice caused by the capitalist system on an international level. Gutiérrez, on the other hand, sympathizes with a decolonial democratic socialism outside a capitalist framework. His political option, a true social utopia, agrees with his decolonial political theology founded on a truly critical historical praxis that transforms the oppressive structures of capitalism, thus giving rise to a more just society and to the emergence of a new man. On the other hand, Moltmann’s observation in connection with liberation theology towards the end of his letter that “orthopraxis is a dangerous word if by it is meant that the practice of life should be dogmatized and made uniform” (“An Open Letter” 202) shows how his prejudices about dogmatic Marxism are unfairly projected on liberation theology. Orthopraxis in liberation theology is never dogmatic at all for the simple reason that, as has been discussed in chapter one, liberation theology is very critical with dogmatic Marxism and always corrects its mistakes.

It was Moltmann himself, however, that admitted his epistemological flaws ten years later by confirming the theological legitimacy and stability of liberation theology. The German thinker finally realized that Latin American liberation theology was rooted in the experience of base ecclesial communities. It is precisely this decolonial foundation
that makes it possible for liberation theology to move beyond Eurocentrism and Marxism itself, which is just a secondary instrument or mediation always resemanticized into Latin America’s decolonial context. What Moltmann finally realized was precisely the decolonial dimension of liberation theology that he had eclipsed with his own Eurocentrism, Western Marxism and liberal theology ten years before:

Los teólogos de la liberación se han enraizado en las comunidades de base, que son un signo prometedor de reforma de la Iglesia y de la sociedad, y que inyectan vida de un modo que tiene algo de milagroso en una Iglesia un poco apática de centralismo. Y ahí, y ahora, la teología de la liberación tiene su relación organizativa. ¡Distinta del marxismo! Por esto puedo hoy decir que la teología de la liberación es una teología sólida y sana y dejo caer por completo las complejidades que yo formulaba en aquella carta mía. Sé que existen muchas objeciones contra la teología de la liberación, sobre todo a propósito de la Iglesia popular. Creo, sin embargo, que la experiencia que hay bajo el nombre de Iglesia popular es una nueva experiencia del Espíritu Santo, una nueva experiencia pentecostal. Es la comunidad de fieles que quiere ser sujeto de su propia historia. (qtd. in Tamayo-Acosta, Para comprender 173).

The case of German Catholic theologian Johann Baptist Metz, the main theoretician of the highly influential European political theology of the 1960s, 70s and 80s, also reinforces my interpretation of liberation theology as a decolonial school of thought. Metz is the only European theologian that not only admits but ends up incorporating the decolonial dimension of liberation theology in the last stage of his theological reflection with great intellectual honesty. That is why Tamayo-Acosta points out that “creo, por ello, que no se pueden seguir dirigiendo a su teología hoy [en 1989] las críticas que en los primeros años de la década de los setenta le hicieron de forma generalizada algunos teólogos latinoamericanos” (Para comprender 174). Metz’s thinking in the 1970s, which, as has been discussed before, was highly criticized by
Míguez Bonino, has nothing to do with his thinking from the mid 1980s on. Liberation theology makes him realize that his prophetic critique is set within the national sphere, thus overlooking the international injustice coming from the rich countries, and that his deprivatizing critique\(^{20}\) only concerns the internal elements of the system, not the system as such or its origins. In other words, liberation theology teaches Metz to be self-critical with the partiality of his own Eurocentric and imperialist theological perspective. That is why, in his latest works, he develops a prophetic Christian paradigm, which he considers to be beyond bourgeois religion,\(^{21}\) and places emphasis on the victims of the system and on the justice for the dead.

It is precisely the incorporation of the decolonial dimension that allows Metz to criticize modern reason and the limits of Enlightenment. According to the German Catholic theologian, the processes of the Enlightenment—which were called by Max Weber “occidental rationality”—define the modern era and are centered on Europe and North America (“Theology” 13). One can see in these processes the disintegration of the religious and metaphysical images of the world, which brought to an end the stage of theology’s cognitive innocence. What Metz calls “the logos of theology” is affected by this crisis and must deal with new and challenging historical and social questions—like Marxism—instead of just withdrawing to its former secure metaphysical foundation.

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\(^{20}\) Metz questions in the early 1980s the private dimension of religion that began with the Enlightenment. It is precisely this privatistic reduction of modern Christianity that produces a rupture with the cause of Jesus Christ, which was based on social compromise, community life and charity. That is why the German theologian believes that it is necessary “to deprivatize” religion. His deprivatizing critique, however, is only limited to the inner working of the system but never pays attention to the roots of its injustice or to its neocolonial project, which takes place at an international level. As a consequence, the victims of the system are eclipsed in Metz’s theological method of this early stage of his thinking.

\(^{21}\) This new theological paradigm certainly turns the victims into its basis for theological reflection but does not manage to go beyond bourgeois religion. This is due to the fact that, in spite of incorporating liberation theology’s insights, decoloniality is still only a mediation or secondary tool in the final stage of Metz’s theological method, which never renounces to endorse a Eurocentric point of view.
The processes of Enlightenment mean that theology is threatened by a twofold reduction. First of all, there is a privatistic reduction of theology “in which the *logos* of theology is entirely concentrated on religion as a private affair and thus is in danger of losing continuity with the Messianic cause of Christianity” (Metz, “Theology” 14). There is also a rationalistic reduction of theology, which involves “a withering of the imagination, a radical renunciation of symbolism and mythology under the excessive cognitive pressure of the abstract modern world of the sciences” (Metz, “Theology” 14). This, however, does not mean that society has been completely secularized and religion and theology completely privatized. Metz carefully notes that one of theology’s main tasks is to refute the idea of a completely secularized and rationalized society, the specific myth “which a non-dialectical setting up of Enlightenment as an absolute always produces” (“Theology” 14).

The various forms of the critique of ideology coming from the processes of Enlightenment have also rephrased in a new way the question of who does theology, where it is done and what are the interests of those involved (Metz, “Theology” 14). Metz argues that theology can no longer see itself within the framework of the existing ecclesiastical and social division of labor embodied by professional theologians. Another form of theology is emerging, which “is labelled grassroots theology, and an initial report on it was given in volume 5 of 1978 of this journal [Concilium]. Productive examples can above all be found in the theologies of liberation, as well as in the form of the Black theologies and in the initiatives of feminist theology” (Metz, “Theology” 15). The catastrophic crises as a result of the Enlightenment give rise to an additional crisis of theology: The Auschwitz genocide. Metz calls attention to the fact that “if theology wants
to remain itself by not turning its back on such catastrophes and does not wish to betray its historical responsibility, then it must regard as finished that form of theological idealism not centred on a particular agent with which German theology has supplied the Christian world” (“Theology” 15). Hence why the German Catholic theologian insists on the idea that a theology aware of such catastrophes must “become one locked into a concept of the active agent, and one with a practical foundation” (“Theology” 15).

This new Catholic theology founded on agency and praxis demands an open mind, especially if we pay attention to the fact that the Catholic Church and its mainstream theology have always had a more or less defensive attitude towards the European history of the modern age. This can be seen in how, instead of playing a creative role in Modernity’s history of freedom, and, particularly, in the processes of bourgeois and post-bourgeois Enlightenment, the Catholic Church always opposed these emancipative movements (Metz, “Theology” 15). The foundation of this new Catholic theology is described by Metz in the following terms:

Today, for example, we must start from the fact that the Church no longer simply ‘has’ a third world Church outside Europe but that it ‘is’ a third world Church with its origins and its history in the West and Europe. To put it another way, the Church today is in transition from what culturally is a more or less monocentric Church of Europe and North America to a culturally polycentric universal Church. In this sense it stands at the end and watershed of a modern age that is characterized in exclusively Eurocentric terms. And this is of great importance not just for the life of the Church but for the fate of theology, since the Church’s social history affects the intellectual history of theology. (“Theology” 16)

This new theology and Church mark a new stage in the history of theology and the Catholic Church following the previous stages of Jewish Christianity and Hellenism and European culture and civilization. Metz also underlines that the present dissolution of
a culturally monocentric Church into a polycentric one does not give rise to an arbitrary contextual pluralism of non-European cultures and churches against which Western and European theology must remain pure and untouched (“Theology” 16). This is not possible due to the fact that “embedded in this cultural polycentrism is the history of the Church’s Western origins, which in practice was also a history of guilt (with regard to the non-European cultures). But now it is a question of mutual inspiration and mutual creative assimilation” (Metz, “Theology” 16). According to the German Catholic theologian, this new polycentric Church has a great potential to deal with the problems of Modernity and with the Catholic Church’s defensive attitude towards it. Therefore, the “poor churches” of the world —grassroot churches, theologies of liberation, etc.— are seen by Metz as a starting point to overcome the privatistic and rationalistic reductions of theology through their praxis of liberation (“Theology” 17). In Metz’s words, “what is involved is a new unity of the experience of redemption and of liberation, a Church community which, united with its bishops and thus incorporated in the apostolic succession, is struggling for a new relationship (and one which admittedly is not free from conflict) between religion and society, between mysticism and politics” (“Theology” 17).

22 Metz insists on the idea that cultural polycentrism still exists in the contemporary world, which means that “it has not already been replaced in embryo by that secular Europeanisation of the world that we call technology or technological civilisation and thus by the universal domination of occidental rationality” (“Theology” 14). Therefore, the German theologian comes to the conclusion that “then we must presuppose the view strongly represented in modern theories of culture, that there is something like a mutually inspiring creative assimilation of different cultures” (“Theology” 16). The use of the term “assimilation,” however, is quite problematic due to its totalizing and homogenizing connotations both in a Eurocentric or non-Eurocentric direction. In this sense, it would be more appropriate to speak of the “interweaving” or “intertwining” of cultures in order to emphasize the complex hybridity and heterogeneity of the transcultural phenomenon and avoid the eclipse of some cultures by others conveyed by the term “assimilation.”
Although the incorporation of liberation theology’s decolonial dimension has certainly empowered and enriched Metz’s thinking, this does not mean that the German Catholic theologian has overcome the Eurocentric point of view of his theological reflection. Metz is still a European theologian who does theology in Europe from a European perspective, which, it is true, does not renounce to incorporate the decolonial contribution of liberation theology. It is also true that, as has been pointed out by Tamayo-Acosta, one can no longer criticize Metz’s theological method for the reasons given by Míguez Bonino and other Latin American liberation theologians in the 1970s. There are other aspects of his theological reflection, however, that must still be criticized from a decolonial perspective since they show Metz’s theological contradictions and how he is ultimately unable to transcend his Eurocentrism due to the fact that, unlike liberation theology, decoloniality is never the foundation of his method.

First of all, it must be noted that Metz distinguishes three theological approaches or paradigms within the Catholic Church: The neoscholastic, the transcendental-idealistic and the postidealist paradigms. The neoscholastic paradigm is defined by the German Catholic theologian as “a defensive-traditionalist, nonproductive confrontation with the challenges of so-called modernity” (“On the Way” 31). The transcendental-idealistic

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23 This means that it is not possible for Metz to do liberation theology from the center. One cannot help wondering: Is it really possible to do liberation theology from Europe and the USA? Although there is no final answer to this question, I believe it is but only if the point of view or perspective from which our theological reflection takes place is consistently that of the periphery’s decoloniality, which must never be just a mediation but always the foundation for our theological reflection from beginning to end. For a detailed discussion of this complex issue, see Giulio Girardi’s articles “Posibilidad de una teología europea de la liberación” (1984), “Possibilitá di una teologia europea della liberazione” (1983) and “De la ‘Iglesia en el mundo’ a la ‘Iglesia de los pobres’. El Vaticano II y la teología de liberación” (1985). See also the excellent article by German theologian N. Greinacher “Liberation Theology in the ’First World’?” (1986) and Tamayo-Acosta’s reflections (Para comprender 179-82). For a more recent approach to the subject, see the chapter “An Option for the Poor?: Liberation Theology in the First World” in Hennelly’s book Liberation Theologies: The Global Pursuit for Justice (1995).
paradigm, on the other hand, is that developed by Metz’s mentor, Karl Rahner, and the one that Metz could not possibly help questioning in the second stage of his theological reflection during the 1970s. This paradigm appropriates the heritage of the classical patristic and scholastic traditions by means of “a productive and aggressive dialogue with the challenges of the modern European world” (Metz, “On the Way” 32). These challenges are the critical-productive confrontation with Kant, German Idealism and Existentialism on the one hand, and the social processes of secularization and scientific civilization on the other (Metz, “On the Way” 32).

The new crises and challenges that theology has been confronted with demand a new paradigm if they are to be dealt with and grasped in a critical and productive way. Therefore, it is necessary to go beyond a transcendental-idealistic approach and move towards the postidealist paradigm, which is the one theorized by Metz. The German theologian presents three crises that enkindle this new approach: the Marxist challenge, the challenge of the catastrophe of Auschwitz and the challenge of the Third World (“On the Way” 33). Metz confesses that his own experience and confrontation with these crises “meant a certain shift in philosophical-theological background. I shifted from the transcendental Kant and from Heidegger to the Kant of the primacy of practical reason (turning once again to the theme of Enlightenment)” (“On the Way” 33). Therefore, the epistemological and hermeneutical basis of Metz’s theological method is not decolonial.

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Karl Rahner (Freiburg im Breisgau, March 5, 1904-Innsbruck, March 30, 1984) was a German Jesuit priest and theologian who is unanimously considered to be one of the most influential Catholic theologians of the 20th century. His theological reflection greatly influenced the Second Vatican Council and was essential for the articulation of a modern understanding of Catholicism. Rahner’s theology has as its foundation the idea that there is a latent understanding of God in all human beings in any perception of meaning or transcendental experience. This sort of “proto-revelation” is what makes possible the recognition of a distinctively special revelation such as the gospel. One of Rahner’s most important works is Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity (1978).
thinking but a Eurocentric philosophical discourse: Kant’s practical reason. Liberation theology, however, has Latin American decoloniality as its foundation even though, as has been discussed in chapter one, liberation theologians may sometimes fall into some Eurocentric reductionisms.

The starting point of Metz’s methodology is clearly Eurocentric. It is true that the German intellectual speaks of a praxis but this praxis is exclusively conceived in Kantian European terms. Metz’s Westernized perspective also involves two other Eurocentric points of departure besides Kant’s philosophy: European Marxism and the Auschwitz genocide, that is, the first two crises that lead him to move to a postidealist paradigm. Decoloniality is just a secondary element or mediation in his theological method that is only present from a Eurocentric perspective through the third crisis, “the challenge of a socially antagonistic and culturally polycentric world” (“On the Way” 33). The fact that this culturally polycentric world is identified by Metz with a theology and a Church at the end of Eurocentrism is quite contradictory since the theoretical and epistemological basis of his postidealist approach cannot possibly go beyond a Eurocentric conceptual framework. His new paradigm may be postidealist but certainly not post-Eurocentric.

Therefore, Metz incorporates the decolonial dimension into his thinking but only from a Eurocentric lense that cannot possibly be transcended. The German Catholic theologian may have learned some valuable lessons from liberation theology. His thinking, however, still moves in the sphere of Being unlike liberation theology itself or Enrique Dussel’s philosophy of liberation, which move in that of non-Being, the Other.²⁵

²⁵ For a detailed analysis of the articulation of a specifically Latin American philosophical reflection from the perspective of non-Being and the Other, see Dussel’s classical work Philosophy of Liberation (1985).
In this sense, the case of Metz is very similar to that of philosophers like Emmanuel Levinas or Jacques Derrida, who produced a philosophical discourse on the Other from the Eurocentric stance of Being, that is, from the perspective of the European Self. All this shows how Metz’s critique of European theology and Modernity takes place from the inside of Enlightenment whereas liberation theology’s decolonial critique takes place from the outside, from the dimension of non-Being, which empowers its decolonial critical potential. Metz’s observation that “consequently, theology, from its own logos, becomes political” (“On the Way” 43)\(^{26}\) is also quite contradictory. This is due to the fact that Metz’s new political theology is in principle a reaction against that theological *logos* precisely because of its culturally polycentric nature, which challenges the Eurocentrism of the *logos* notion. There is also a similar contradiction between Metz’s critique of Greek dualistic thinking —which resembles that of Míguez Bonino and other Latin American liberation theologians— and his later use of the phrase “the *logos* of theology,” which embodies that Hellenistic dualism that has been previously questioned by him (“On the way” 43). Therefore, Metz’s Westernized approach ends up eclipsing his decolonial *bona fide*.

Another example of Metz’s Eurocentrism is the lack of an analysis of Marxism in connection with the key issue of decoloniality, which should be of primary importance for a new Church and theology founded on polycentrism. This is quite surprising since, according to Metz, the Marxist challenge is the first of the three crises that justifies the

\(^{26}\) Metz previously observes that the fact that the Church no longer has a third-world church but is one with its historical origins in Europe means for Catholic theology that the social conflicts of the world play a central role in ecclesial and theological awareness. The consequence of this is that “conditions that are directly contradictory to the Gospel—like oppression, exploitation and racism—become challenges for theology. They demand the formulation of the faith in categories of transformation and of a resistance that is prepared to suffer” (“On the Way” 43).
use of a postidealist paradigm. Metz’s description of the Marxist challenge, however, always takes place in the terms of classical European Marxism. Only at the end of his discussion, does the German intellectual mention the interaction between liberation theology and base ecclesial communities (“On the Way” 39). On the other hand, his analysis of the second crisis, the challenge of Auschwitz, is also full of Eurocentric connotations. What about previous genocides in world history that involve the decolonial dimension like that committed by Europe against Native Americans, which, in quantitative terms, was probably the worst in human history? All this shows how decoloniality is not the core of Metz’s reflection but just a mediation or secondary instrument that complements his thinking.

Metz’s observation that “the church finds itself moving from a more or less monocentric European and North American church toward a culturally polycentric global church” (“On the Way” 43) is also quite problematic. Is it good that the Church becomes “globalized”? Is not “globalized” synonymous with “totalized” and “homogenized” from a capitalistcentrist perspective? Metz’s Westernized and liberal bourgeois approach is at work here not only from a conceptual but also from a linguistic point of view and shows the contradictions of his postidealist theological paradigm, which is only partially “post-bourgeois.” The German Catholic theologian may have opened up a post-bourgeois perspective as a result of incorporating liberation theology’s decolonial critique but this is

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27 Metz notes that theology cannot work on a purely theoretical level but must return to the subjects of faith and their praxis, which are its practical and subjectwise foundation. Therefore, it is the community that must be the locus for historical responsibility and for the interest in universal justice and liberation (“On the Way” 38-39). The consequence of this is that “such a theological approach will inevitably refer more strongly back to its ecclesial basis, and it will become much more energetically involved with it than the usual division of labor in the wider church would presume or than the magisterium would wish” (“On the Way” 39). According to Metz, “the clearest instance of this today is the mutual interaction between liberation theology and the base community initiatives in the ecclesial life of Latin America” (“On the Way” 39).
ultimately eclipsed by his conception of the church of the poor countries of the world in
globalizing and homogenizing terms. On the other hand, the fact that “the Western,
European history of its origins continues to be inalienably immanent to this cultural
polycentrism” (“On the Way” 43-44) is also very questionable. The origins of the new
church of the poor are, in fact, Jewish even though these were abandoned on behalf of a
Western European religious monocentrism that began in Greece and culminated in Rome.
The fact that Metz identifies its origins exclusively with Greece and Rome after having
previously highlighted the significance of the Jewish Christian tradition is another
instance of his Eurocentrism.

Metz also believes that “liberation theology belongs to a postidealist approach to
theology” (“On the Way” 45). How can liberation theology belong to the postidealist
paradigm if the theoretical basis for this paradigm is Kant? Liberation theology is a
decolonial theological reflection articulated from a decolonial perspective of exteriority
outside and against Enlightenment but not inside it. Moreover, can Metz’s approach go
beyond idealism having a Kantian theoretical foundation? On the other hand, Metz’s
concept of a “polycentric church” is not without its problems. This notion lacks the
concreteness of historical mediations, which are never discussed or explored in depth,
thus becoming an abstract construct that is ultimately idealized and spiritualized.
Moreover, the term itself is questionable from a linguistic point of view. What does
“polycentric” mean: A new church with multiple centers? This is quite problematic since

28 Liberation theology presents a challenge to the whole Church called by Metz “Catholicism’s European
dilemma:” “The Catholic Church has only gone along with the European history of modernity in a more or
lesss defensive attitude” (“On the Way” 46). According to Metz, in order to overcome this Catholic
dilemma in the late-modern European situation “we must get beyond the monocultural realm of the
Western and European church, and so arrive at a world church that is learning how to depict and call
upon the grace of God as the integral liberation of human beings” (“On the Way” 46).
the new churches of the poor countries do not belong to the center but to the various peripheries of the world (Latin America, Asia and Africa). They also carry out a new decolonial reading of the Bible that contrasts with the Western interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. Therefore, is it not more appropriate to speak of “poly-peripheral decolonial churches” in order to avoid the assimilationist and Eurocentric connotations of Metz’s term, which ultimately conceals the decoloniality of the new churches of the world? One cannot help but draw the conclusion that the theoretical basis of a non-contradictory postidealist paradigm must be founded on decolonial theory and not on the European philosophy of the Enlightenment.

Metz also calls attention to the fact that base ecclesial communities offer a theological renewal not under the authority of the Catholic Church but under that of the Holy Spirit. For Metz, a previous historical example of this process is that of religious orders and their dramatic tensions with Rome (“Un nuevo modo” 52). According to the German Catholic theologian, “la iglesia de las órdenes coincidía con el desafío sin conciliación del Evangelio y el discipulado frente a compromisos arriesgados y cuestionables; con la pobreza de Jesús frente a una iglesia rica; con una memoria passionis frente a una iglesia triunfalista” (“Un nuevo modo” 52). A new daring and creative theology emerged as a result of this common life of discipleship and the theology produced by the mendicant orders especially insisted on theological poverty. This theological poverty was skeptical about official Catholic theology, which was not able to overcome the contradictions of ecclesial life. Like the mendicant orders, base ecclesial communities embody for Metz an experience of the Spirit from below with a similar criterion to that of the orders: the Church as a collective discipleship (“Un nuevo modo”
52-53). Base ecclesial communities are the present proof that “el surgimiento de agencia del discipulado aquí es al mismo tiempo la liberación de la pobreza destructiva y de la opresión inhumana” (Metz, “Un nuevo modo” 53). Therefore, a new theology is born since “la teología participa de esta autoridad en la medida en que participa en la praxis y construcción de esta comunidad eclesial de base” (Metz, “Un nuevo modo” 53).

Metz’s identification of the situation of the European religious orders of the past with that of current Latin American basic church communities is too straightforward. First of all, the European socio-historical coordinates of the religious orders in the past are not those of Latin America’s base ecclesial movement at present, which means that Metz is assimilating the latter to the former, and therefore, eclipsing Latin American historical and theological decoloniality with European history and theology. Secondly, Metz forgets that, in many cases, religious orders made the mistake of turning theological poverty into a sort of spiritual ideal. This means that the liberating praxis of base ecclesial communities, which seeks to put an end to poverty and suffering, is not present in all the members of religious orders since these often embody a spiritualized and idealized view of poverty. Even in those cases in which there was a truly liberating praxis on behalf of the oppressed carried out by some members of the orders, as was the case with some Jesuit missionaries in eighteenth-century Brazil and Paraguay, there is a history of cultural and spiritual genocide, soul lust and religious imperialism that has been discussed before. The crucial difference between religious orders and base ecclesial

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29 Metz mentions in connection with the base ecclesial movement that “me refiero al surgimiento de las comunidades eclesiales de base y la teología comprometida con ellas en los países pobres de este mundo. Aquí, en mi opinión, hay una ‘experiencia del Espíritu desde abajo’ que puede apelar al ruego de San Pablo: ‘¡No extingáis el Espíritu!’ ” (“Un nuevo modo” 53).

30 See pages 125-33 and notes 9 and 10 of chapter two.
communities is that the revolution of the former took place within Modernity while that of the latter takes place outside and against it. Therefore, the Eurocentrism of religious orders contrasts with the decoloniality of base ecclesial communities.

Another instance of Metz’s inability to go beyond a bourgeois paradigm can be appreciated in his observation that “así como la iglesia en su totalidad no podría convertirse en una iglesia de órdenes religiosas, tampoco puede transformarse simplemente en una iglesia de comunidades de base” (“Un nuevo modo” 55). First of all, a church exclusively based on religious orders would be a Eurocentric church, which is something unthinkable due to the fact that the phenomenon of inculturation teaches us how the Gospel becomes intertwined with the different cultures of the world and not just with that of Europe. Besides that, many disciples of Christ want to follow their religious vocation freely outside the rules and constrictions imposed by all religious orders, which is perfectly valid and legitimate. However, a true post-bourgeois and post-Eurocentric revolutionary praxis faithful to the tenets of the postidealistic paradigm must be founded on a church made up by base ecclesial communities both in the center and the periphery. This religious utopia would not be impossible if the Vatican and religious orders were willing to leave their political and economic bourgeois privileges behind and become a part of the base ecclesial structure, thus being faithful to the spirit of the first Christian communities. They would also have to renounce their Eurocentrism on behalf of decoloniality by officially supporting the base ecclesial model, and, in the case of the Vatican, by becoming a basic church community with a decolonial basis in spite of its European origins. The fact that Metz denies the possibility of a church structured upon base ecclesial communities shows how, like the Vatican itself, he has not been able to
transcend a Eurocentric and bourgeois perspective as a result of conceiving decoloniality just as a mediation or supplementary element of his thinking but never as its point of departure or arrival.

The decolonial dimension therefore plays a key role in the often complex and thorny relationship between Latin American liberation theology and European political theology. As has been noted by Tamayo-Acosta, “la TL pertenece a la familia de las teologías políticas, mas no vía Carl Schmitt, cuya teología política venía a legitimar las formas sociales y políticas autoritarias, sino vía Metz, Moltmann y Sölle” (*Para comprender* 57). Political theology, on the other hand, does not just deduce certain socio-political consequences or applications from the Christian teachings but “lo que hace es mostrar la dimensión crítica, pública, liberadora y, en definitiva, política de las promesas escatológicas y de la misma salvación cristiana” (Tamayo-Acosta, *Para comprender* 58). Although the political hermeneutics of European theology is shared by liberation theologians, it must be remembered that, as has been pointed out by Brazilian liberation theologian Hugo Assman, liberation theology is “una forma latinoamericana de teología política” (*Teología desde la praxis* 24, n. 7). This means that, in Tamayo-Acosta’s words, “[su] punto de partida no es la realidad política en general o en abstracto, sino la situación de la América Latina dependiente y dominada” (*Para comprender* 58). It is its methodology, founded on the questioning of the capitalist neocolonial project from

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31 Carl Schmitt (Plettenberg, 11 July, 1888-Plettenberg, 7 April 1985) was a conservative German legal, constitutional and political theorist. Schmitt is considered one of the most important critics of liberalism, parliamentary democracy and liberal cosmopolitanism. The value and significance of his work, however, is subject to controversy due to his intellectual support and active involvement with National Socialism. Dorothee Sölle (Nipperdey, 30 September 1929-27 April 2003) was one of the most creative and prophetic German theologians of the post-war generation whose work was shaped by the memory of war, the Holocaust, and totalitarianism. Her theological reflection combines political theology, endowed with a profound mystical dimension and a concern for the challenges of history, with feminism, ecology, a witness for peace and global solidarity.
a specifically Latin American decolonial perspective by confronting the Latin American reality with the gospel, that differentiates liberation theology from that of Europe:

European theologians like Claude Geffré have often complained about liberation theology’s radical rejection of Western progressist theologies.\(^{32}\) The lack of interest of liberation theologians in European political theology is due to its Eurocentric locus of enunciation, which is quite imperialist and prevents it from unmasking the structural injustice and poverty inflicted by the liberal model upon the poor countries of the world.

As has been noted by Jon Sobrino, this lack of interest is not due to a lack of knowledge of European theology, to a feeling of superiority or to a scorning attitude towards its achievements but rather to “la falta de sintonía de interés del conocimiento teológico” (“El conocimiento” 188). According to Sobrino, “mientras la teología europea se

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\(^{32}\) Claude Geffré (born in Niort, France, in 1926) is a French Dominican theologian who studied theology and philosophy at the Dominican Faculties of Saulchoir and received a Phd. in philosophy at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas in Rome. Geffré is one of the most reputed French contemporary theologians. A spiritual son of Marie-Dominique Chenu and Yves Congar, he is especially interested in fundamental theology and in the dialogue with non-Christian religious and atheist modernity. Geffré notes in 1974 that “Latin American theologians clearly distance themselves from what has been termed a ‘neo-integrism’ which is developing at present in the USA and some European countries . . . But, more surprisingly, they criticize even more radically the various progressive theologies of the western world—whether ‘secularization theologies’ or ‘political theology’ “ (9).
comprenda, aun inconscientemente y lo cual agrava el problema, como una teología desde el centro geopolítico del mundo, no puede captar la miseria de la realidad y por ello ‘tiene[n] el defecto común de hacer el juego inconscientemente a la sociedad capitalista occidental’” (“El conocimiento” 188).

The decolonial dimension also accounts for Sobrino’s observation that, unlike European political theology, which is inevitably tied to the first Enlightenment, liberation theology seeks to give an answer to the questions of the second Enlightenment (“El conocimiento” 181, 185). As has been noted by Sobrino, “la liberación que propone por lo tanto el primer momento de la Ilustración, aun cuando Kant pretendía la liberación política, es la liberación de la razón de todo autoritarismo, el anhelo de la racionalidad” (“El conocimiento” 180-81). The second stage of Enlightenment, however, does not understand liberation as the autonomy of reason but “pretende en directo la liberación de la miseria de la realidad, lo cual exige no sólo una nueva manera de pensar, ahora autónomamente, sino una nueva manera de actuar” (“El conocimiento” 181). According to Sobrino, modern European theology tries to answer the questions of the first Enlightenment due to the fact that “ha comprendido la función liberadora del conocimiento teológico como liberación en primer lugar de cualquier arbitrariedad dogmática, de cualquier autoritarismo” (“El conocimiento” 181). Latin American theology, however, spontaneously orients itself towards the challenge of the second Enlightenment since “la función liberadora del conocimiento no consiste en último término en explicar o dar significado a una realidad existente ni a la fe amenazada por la situación, sino transformar una realidad para que llegue a tener significado y recuperar de ese modo el sentido perdido o amenazado de la fe” (Sobrino, “El conocimiento” 185).
Therefore, liberation theology provides an answer to the questions of the second Enlightenment but only from a decolonial lense that reveals Europe’s partial Westernized perspective as well as the theoretical and epistemological contradictions of Western Modernity, something that is not observed by Sobrino.

The Salvadoran liberation theologian also calls attention to the fact that theological knowledge is for liberation theology praxical and ethical and cannot be reduced to the hermeneutical dimension, “aspecto este último algo descuidado por reacción a la concepción europea sobre la autonomía del conocimiento” (“El conocimiento” 185). The difference between European and Latin American theology is that the former has tried a contact with reality from the mediations of thinking (theology, philosophy and culture). In other words, “el acceso a la realidad ha acaecido en diálogo (de rechazo o de aceptación crítica) con un tipo de pensamiento” (Sobrino, “El conocimiento” 185). The latter, however, “pretende acercarse a la realidad tal cual es, aun cuando no se pueda hacer una clara distinción entre la realidad como es y la realidad interpretada teológica, filosófica o culturalmente” (Sobrino, “El conocimiento” 186).

Although Latin American theologians value the intellectual merits of European political theology, often quote and make use of European and US theological scholarship into their own reflection and even admit the influence of Western progressist theologies as a source of inspiration, this does not mean that liberation theology has dependency on or derives from European theology. Due to the key factor of the locus of enunciation of the center and the periphery, there is an inevitable political and epistemological rupture between them. Gustavo Gutiérrez, for instance, observes how “the interlocuter of progressivist theology is the modern spirit and liberal ideology, whose agent—historical
subject—is the bourgeois class” (*The Power of the Poor* 212)\(^{33}\) whereas the theology of liberation “begins from the questions asked by the poor and plundered of the world, by ‘those without a history,’ by those who are oppressed and marginalized precisely by the interlocuter of progressivist theology” (*The Power of the Poor* 212).\(^ {34}\) The Peruvian priest also underlines the fact that “the modern forms of this oppression must not deceive us, but rather show us the exact point of historical, political, and social breach between the two perspectives” (*The Power of the Poor* 212).\(^ {35}\) It must be noted, on the other hand, that liberation theology’s decolonial *locus* of enunciation is inexorably linked to the praxis of liberation, which is considered the key moment of rupture by Giulio Girardi.

Other reasons for this political and epistemological rupture are given by Juan Luis Segundo. According to the Uruguayan liberation theologian, European political theology makes a distinction between the relative and the absolute sphere. This means that “the concrete political option is considered to be relative” (Segundo, “Capitalism-Socialism” 111) and that the absolute is “the eschatological Kingdom of God, the ultimate future, which comes down from God himself to mankind” (Segundo, “Capitalism-Socialism” 111). Segundo reminds us how German political theology chooses the terms which indicate this relationship between a relative political order and the absolute eschatological order: Anticipation, analogy or outline. All these terms, however, reject every idea of

\(^{33}\) Gutiérrez explains that “this point of departure distinguishes it from traditional theology, with its mark of the feudal world and its prolongation in the ancien régime” (*The Power of the Poor* 212).

\(^{34}\) Gutiérrez clarifies that “the principal partner in the dialogue of modern Western theology has been unbelievers or else believers affected by unbelief and the criticisms of the Enlightenment. In the theology of liberation, on the other hand, our principal interlocutor has been nonpersons insofar as they are considered as nonpersons” (*The Truth* 23-24).

\(^{35}\) Gutiérrez also points out in connection with this point that “the oppression of human beings certainly did not begin with the modern period, but in that period it has taken on a new modality” (*The Truth* 24). This is due to the fact that “the moderns who pose questions to the faith —questions that a sizeable part of contemporary theology is trying to answer— belong to social groups, cultures, and countries that have been creating new forms of domination” (*The Truth* 24).
causality from the material to the spiritual dimension (“Capitalism-Socialism” 111). It is precisely due to this lack of causality that, as has been discussed before, every historical project becomes absolute and universal in Moltmann’s theological method, which is quite problematic (Segundo, “Capitalism-Socialism” 111).

The consequence of this is that political theology tends to absolutize the eschatological reserve in quite abstract and spiritualized terms in which there are no concrete historical mediations. Political theology can certainly make use of analogy to deal with certain historical facts. These, however, will lack a praxical dimension, which means that they are also absolutized. Liberation theology, on the other hand, tends to concreticize and relativize the eschatological promises by giving a concrete, historical and praxical dimension to them within a causal process toward the definitive Kingdom of God in the afterlife. Segundo’s conclusion is that European political theology absolutizes historical mediations without taking into account their ethical value, that is, their more or less proximity to the Kingdom depending on whether more or less justice is achieved. Liberation theology, however, concreticizes all those historical mediations within a causal process leading to the Kingdom and classifies them according to their more or less proximity to it taking into consideration that not all of them contribute the same ethical value (“Capitalism-Socialism” 110-14). Segundo’s insightful reflections, on the other hand, can be connected with Leonardo Boff’s critique of the intrasystemic captivity of European theology in the 1970s, which also accounts for its abstraction and prevents it from “dis-covering” the mechanisms of domination of the empire as well as the omnipotence of enlightened reason (Teología del cautiverio 94).
This rupture, however, does not mean that a fruitful dialogue between European political theology and liberation theology is not possible. In fact, this intercultural theological dialogue has taken place largely through Enrique Dussel, Metz and the different encounters of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT). This call to interreligious dialogue has revealed the differences between the center and the periphery as well as those between the various peripheries (Africa, Asia and Latin America). It has also provided some possible solutions to understand the point of view of the Other and move towards what Dussel has called a “future world theology” (“Theologies of the ‘Periphery’ ” 94) that takes into consideration all the theological particularities of the center and the periphery from a position of tolerance, respect and equality. One cannot help to conclude with Tamayo-Acosta that nowadays European political theology and liberation theology are not split anymore or move in opposite directions. In fact, without overlooking their differences, there are more similarities between them than what one might see at first sight.

As has been noted by Tamayo-Acosta, the success of this interreligious dialogue will certainly depend on the willingness of European theology to overcome its arrogance and superiority complex as well as on the overcoming of liberation theology’s anti-European chauvinist attitude into which some of its theologians may sometimes have fallen in the past (Para comprender 169). Both theological reflections provide particular answers to particular situations (Tamayo-Acosta, Para comprender 169) and it is only from the specific particularity of their locus of enunciation as well as from a respectful and tolerant intercultural dialogue that Dussel’s “world theology” may become real in the twenty-first century. One cannot help sadly noticing the lack of dialogue today between
the European new political theologies by Žižek, Badiou, Taubes and Agamben\textsuperscript{36} and the latest theological reflections of LT2, particularly Eleazar López Hernández’s indigenous theology, Ivone Gebara’s eco-feminist theology and Marcos Rodrigues da Silva’s African Latin American theology.\textsuperscript{37} Therefore, Europe’s new political theologies and the latest currents of Latin American liberation theology still have a great interreligious task and challenge ahead of them.

As has been discussed in chapter two, liberation theology emerged in the late 1960s in Peru. What is often forgotten is that its epistemological tenets have evolved with time in connection with the crucial question of decoloniality, which became more prominent. It is therefore necessary to theorize two different moments in the epistemological evolution of liberation theology. The first two stages have been called by Enrique Dussel LT1 and LT2. LT1, the first wave of liberation theology that begins in the 1970s but has its origins in the base ecclesial communities of the 1950s and 60s, presents the original insights of liberation theology. According to the Argentinian philosopher, “se

\textsuperscript{36} All these new political theologies coming from Europe are founded on new interpretations of St. Paul’s writings. The fundamental works are: Žižek’s \textit{The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity} (2003), Badiou’s \textit{Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism} (2003), Taubes’ \textit{The Political Theology of Paul} (2004) and Agamben’s \textit{The Time that Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans} (2005). New political theologies based on decolonial readings of St. Paul’s letters are also coming from the periphery. See Enrique Dussel’s article “The Liberatory Event in Paul of Tarsus” (2009), and the books \textit{Fuerza ética y espiritual de la teología de la liberación en el contexto actual de la globalización} (2004), by Pablo Richard, \textit{Struggles for Power in Early Christianity: A Study of the First Letter to Timothy} (2007), by Elsa Támez, \textit{La maldición que pesa sobre la ley: Las raíces del pensamiento crítico en Pablo de Tarso} (2010), by Franz Hinkelammert, and \textit{Pablo de Tarso en la filosofía política actual y otros ensayos} (2012), by Enrique Dussel.

trata de una teología que parte de una opción ética por los pobres, para la construcción práctica ahora y aquí del reino de Dios” (“Transformaciones” 291). LT1 is articulated around the economic-political discourse on behalf of the poor. This means that it pays attention to key socio-political issues from a decolonial and subaltern locus of enunciation that still totalizes the various victims of globalization under the homogenizing category of the poor. This is a problematic term from the beginnings of liberation theology that tends to assimilate and delete the difference of those exploited and oppressed by the world-system.

Dussel, however, admits that, in the last three decades, there has been an evolution of the epistemological tenets of LT1. This is due to the fact that “esta identidad profunda [de la teología de la liberación] no se opone a una transformación, como desarrollo homogéneo, de sus supuestos epistemológicos, ya que ha aprendido de las críticas, ha crecido, se ha transformado, se ha complificado” (Dussel, “Transformaciones” 291). The Argentinian intellectual believes that not to admit these transformations would be terrible for liberation theology since, first of all, liberation theology must learn from its own mistakes and, secondly, if it did not experience an evolution, it would be dead as a theological current (“Transformaciones” 291). That is why Dussel reminds us that “sólo lo viviente se transforma, y dicha transformación es un signo de su vitalidad” (“Transformaciones” 291). It is therefore inevitable for LT1 to become LT2, which is defined by Dussel as “la teología de la liberación que se practicará a partir del año 2000” (“Transformaciones” 291). LT2 is therefore today’s liberation theology. The series of transformations in the epistemological foundations of liberation theology that explain the change of LT1 into LT2 have a point of departure and a point of
arrival. Dussel, however, makes clear that the former is never “subsumed” by the latter but remains as if it were “transformed” and “affirmed” from a new horizon (“Transformaciones” 291).

The first transformation is that of the paradigm of consciousness into that of language. Dussel reminds us that Gutiérrez’s LT1, following Gramsci, always believed that praxis preceded theory (“Transformaciones” 292). Things, however, are more complicated since there are certain practical principles that frame the liberating praxis like life understood as the Kingdom of God and the consensus of the community as a specific formal mediation for its correct constitution (“Transformaciones” 292). Dussel contends that it was neither theory nor praxis but ethics as a result of combining both (“Transformaciones” 292). This means that “epistemológicamente . . . , sin embargo, el ‘paradigma de la conciencia’ que se conoce como teoría era reductivo. Se ha transformado en un ‘paradigma lingüístico’, ya que en realidad no se pensaba la praxis sino que se la veía, se la juzgaba y se decía obrar desde un diálogo lingüísticamente articulado” (292). This poses hermeneutical problems to theology on a narrative about praxis that is more complex than a mere cognitive reflection upon it. Therefore, Dussel concludes that “una teología del lenguaje es esencial para una TL2. Supone una formación específica del teólogo en la línea de Wittgenstein, Austin, Searle, etc.” (“Transformaciones” 292).

It is true that LT2 needs a theology of language. It is difficult to believe, however, that this can be found in European philosophy, which comes from the imperial center and is completely disconnected from Latin America’s historical and socio-cultural context. Therefore, one of the great challenges of LT2 will be to develop its own anti-Eurocentric
theological language from the decolonial and subaltern locus of enunciation of the periphery represented by the Latin American historical reality. The work of Gilberto Giménez could be a first step in this direction. The need of a specifically Latin American theology of language can be connected with the second transformation, that of the “light-text” into the “text-text.” Dussel explains that LT1 considered the Bible as the light from which the right course of action was illuminated. The light-text was interpreted from a given reality but was never seen as a difficult text. It was necessary to pay attention to its complexity as a text for a critical hermeneutics to emerge, which means that it was necessary to develop a Latin American critico-Biblical hermeneutics (“Transformaciones” 292). Consciousness must be subsumed in language, which, in turn, must be subsumed in the text so that this can be interpreted. Following Derrida and Ricoeur, Dussel insists on the fact that the text must be deconstructed and reconstructed from the community’s discursiveness to conclude that “la TL2 debe dominar especialmente el Texto (como texto revelado) en una hermenéutica crítica propia” (“Transformaciones” 292).

A hermeneutics of the text, in fact, was always present in LT1 but only from a socio-political dimension that paid no attention to gender, ethnic, ecological and intercultural issues and tended to globalize all the victims as the poor. This socio-political dimension was tied to the ideology of the white man in many cases and failed to get actively involved in the cause of the indigenous and African Latin American peoples like

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38 Gilberto Giménez is a Mexican sociologist whose work focuses on the symbolic dimension of social practices from the perspective of cultural analysis. His interests include the sociology of social representations, ideologies and religion in connection with semiotics and discourse analysis. Giménez has been the pioneer in articulating a theology of language in specifically Latin American terms in his work Cultura popular y religion en el Anáhuac (1978) and in his article “El golpe militar y la condenación del CPS en Chile” (1975).
This hermeneutics of the text was therefore non-critical. A Latin American critical hermeneutics of the Bible, however, is only possible from the concreteness and specificity of the community of believers. In this sense, the interpretation of the text will not be the same for an indigenous tribe, an African Latin American congregation or a group of environmentalists. It is not so much a question of making use of deconstruction and French postmodern philosophy but rather of articulating various proposals of a Latin American critical hermeneutics adapted to the various conditions and specificities of the various victims.

This can be connected with the third transformation, from a monological paradigm to a communitarian subjectivity. Dussel points out that the monologism of LT1 becomes a sort of dialogism in LT2 through the key role of the community (“Transformaciones” 293). For the Argentinian thinker, this means that, like Peirce’s or Apel’s pragmatism, LT2 will be epistemically communitarian (“Transformaciones” 293). The consequence of this is that “se trata de una articulación sui generis entre el teólogo profesional con la narrativa teológica explícita y crítica, de la comunidad de las víctimas creyentes, que opera como la ‘subjetividad’ intersubjetiva y comunitaria”

39 The case of the Miskito people shows how the goals of the Sandinista revolution were not those of other subaltern groups in Nicaragua. For an interpretation of the events leading to the confrontation between Miskito leaders and the Sandinistas from the perspective of a Miskito Indian, see the testimonial work Ráfaga: The Life Story of a Nicaraguan Miskito Comandante (1992). For an interpretation of the facts from the perspective of one of the key figures in the Sandinista revolution, see Ernesto Cardenal’s autobiographical work La revolución perdida: Memorias 3 (2004).

40 Karl-Otto Apel (born on March 15, 1922) is a German philosopher and Professor Emeritus at the University of Frankfurt am Main. His great contribution to the history of philosophy is the articulation of an original philosophical discourse known as “transcendental pragmatics.” Charles Sanders Peirce (Cambridge, September 10, 1839-Milford, April 19, 1914) was an American philosopher, logician, mathematician and scientist who is considered to be the founder of the philosophical tradition known as pragmatism.

41 According to Dussel, the monologism of LT1 was due to the fact that the community was taken for granted without being consciously engaged in the analysis of the text, which means that LT1 was not epistemically communitarian (“Transformaciones” 293).
(“Transformaciones” 293). Although the community was present in LT1, it was conceived in quite abstract, assimilationist and homogenizing terms as one community (the poor) instead of the different communities of victims of LT2. The movement from the monological to the dialogical certainly emphasizes the dialogue and communication between the professional theologian and the different members of a community when interpreting the text, which, according to the specific conditions of each community, will give rise to a new communitarian hermeneutics of the Bible adapted to its particular situation. It is quite problematic, on the other hand, to identify the multiplicity of communities of LT2 with European philosophy, which has always eclipsed the Latin American Other. LT2 has nothing to do with Apel or Peirce, which means that it can only be communitarian from a Latin American epistemic point of view due to the alterity and plurality of the victims. Moreover, it should be remembered that LT2’s dialogism takes place between the professional theologian and not one but many different communities, which shows that it stands for both an intersubjective and intercommunitarian subjectivity and not just for an intersubjective and communitarian one. Therefore, the third transformation must refer to the evolution from a monological paradigm to a dialogical one founded on the emergence of an intercommunitarian subjectivity.

The fourth transformation, from knowledge to consensus, shows how the objectivity of the Text in LT1 becomes a consensual community that precedes us as a tradition of re-reading of the Text (“Transformaciones” 293). Dussel explains that “lo conocido es ‘consensual’, y el acceso a la verdad de la revelación del Texto es válido intersubjetivamente desde la aceptación concordante de la comunidad. Para la TL2 la verdad de la revelación no se opone a la tolerancia de la validez de los otros como
aceptación de lo revelado” (“Transformaciones” 293). If, following Dussel, it is true that faith is not relativized before the tolerant love that accepts the other from a rational and emotional point of view, then there is no risk of fundamentalism. This means that the new critical hermeneutics of the text carried out by the various communities from the perspective of the otherness of their victims will be accepted. The Argentinian philosopher certainly has in mind the tolerance of liberation theologians towards the phenomenon of “inculturation,” that is, the incarnation of the gospel in the different non-European peoples of the world respecting their cultures and ancient spirituality, which becomes intertwined with Christianity. That is why it is quite striking that Dussel identifies this tolerance with Habermas’s philosophy instead of linking it with Levinas’s discourse on the Other, which was adapted to the Latin American cultural context by Dussel himself in his first works, or, even better, with Diego Irarrázaval’s theory of inculturation. After all, Irarrázaval belongs to the periphery, is one of the most influential liberation theologians of LT2, the theological current theorized by Dussel, and has lived and suffered for many years with the poor Aymara ayllus or communities from Peru and Bolivia, an experience that a bourgeois philosopher like Habermas, always operating on a theoretical and abstract level fully disconnected from praxis, will never have.

The fifth transformation, from a critical self-consciousness to the respect of the self-regulated processes without denying a critical consensus, focuses on how LT1 considered the process of conscientização very important. And this to such an extent

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42 For an in-depth study of the phenomenon of “inculturation” in Latin America within an Aymara cultural context, see Diego Irarrázaval’s work *Inculturation: New Dawn for the Church in Latin America* (2000).
43 See his *Philosophy of Liberation*, especially pages 16-66.
44 The Portuguese term conscientização (which could be translated into English as “conscientization”) was introduced by Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire in his influential work *Pedagogy of the*
that the individual deployed her/his critico-prophetic self-consciousness to correct the perverse flaws of the system (“Transformaciones” 294). Dussel observes that “esta posición producía un cierto voluntarismo conciencialista que impedía apreciar positivamente los procesos autoregulados sociales (o que aparecían como tal), sumamente complejos y que no hacían fácil la intervención correctiva” (“Transformaciones” 294). LT2, however, pays more attention to the self-organized processes of life, to the self-regulated movement of the market (often in appearance) and to the quasi-cybernetic logic of the functional systems (Dussel, “Transformaciones” 294). Dussel also reminds us that LT2 “al mismo tiempo, sabe que dichos procesos en apariencia autorregulados producen efectos no-intencionales perversos, y cuando éstos se tornan intolerables (para las víctimas) la intervención autoconsciente (la profecía) se torna inevitable” (“Transformaciones” 294). Following Hugo Assman, Dussel concludes that not everything is consciousness or self-regulation for LT2 (“Transformaciones” 294).

It is true that LT2 is much more critical with the negative effects of self-regulated social processes than LT1. LT2, however, must be very careful not to forget the spirit of conscientização, which feeds the social utopias that we need to keep fighting for a more just world.45 In other words, LT2 needs to be more critical than LT1 with the mechanisms

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Oppressed (1970). According to Freire, there must be an interdependence between the articulation of critical reflection and praxis so that people can not only critically reflect but also critically act upon their situational reality (108-09). Therefore, only critical thinking can make people “emerge from their submersion and acquire the ability to intervene in reality as it is unveiled” (109). Freire clarifies that “intervention in reality—historical awareness itself—thus represents a step forward from emergence, and results from the conscientização of the situation. Conscientização is the deepening of the attitude of awareness characteristic of all emergence” (109).

45 The articulation of a critical dialogue between reflection and praxis founded on the deepening of the attitude of awareness characteristic of all emergence that defines conscientização is still the key for the
of oppression in order to be more efficient not only in theory but also in praxis. It is good to deploy a more alert and critical consciousness upon the Latin American reality if this can help us to empower the liberating praxis. In this sense, the example of conscientiçaõ, which has become more analytical and productive now, must be remembered along with Hugo Assman’s consideration about the need to go beyond consciousness or self-regulation.

The sixth transformation, from the social sciences to ethics, explains how “la TL1, en alguna de sus vertientes, reemplazó las filosofías por las ciencias sociales. Las ciencias sociales eran garantía de científicidad, y cuando eran críticas . . . de criticidad . . .” (Dussel, “Transformaciones” 294). Dussel also underlines the fact that “sin embargo, las ciencias sociales se establecían en un ámbito de objetividad neutral . . . no sabiendo sin embargo enmarcar su objeto desde criterios y principios prácticos, que son éticos” (“Transformaciones” 294). The Argentinian philosopher believes that only an ethics of liberation could clarify the criticality of the critical social sciences (“Transformaciones” 294).46 One of the main tasks of LT2 is therefore to become aware of the ethical principles of immediate human life. The symmetrical consensuality of those involved is the framework in which the objects of science can explain or understand the material negativity of the victims (which is what criticality as such consists of) (Dussel, “Transformaciones” 294).

46 For the articulation of an ethics of liberation, see Dussel’s work Ethics of Liberation: In the Age of Globalization and Exclusion (2013).
First of all, the social sciences were just a secondary mediation for most tendencies of LT1, whose starting point was the Latin American historical reality of poverty and injustice and its interpretation from the perspective of the Christian ethics of the Bible. As is noted by Dussel, some tendencies of LT1 made the mistake of eclipsing their own reflection with the social sciences. This, however, does not mean that the social sciences were objective and disconnected from ethical principles and criteria for most tendencies of LT1. On the contrary, the social sciences made it possible for LT1 to apprehend some mechanisms of oppression deployed by international capitalism, which is what allowed LT1 to frame its own critical discourse within a Christian ethics and praxis. An ethics of liberation can certainly contribute to go into the criticalness of the social sciences and is undoubtedly a very precious tool that must be incorporated by LT2 into its own reflection. This, however, does not mean that the social sciences were not critical enough in LT1. On the contrary, they were very critical in most cases but they have become even more critical in LT2.

The seventh transformation, from politics to economics, has as a starting point the fact that “la TL1 tomó conciencia de la crisis de muchos cristianos en la antinomia: fe o compromiso político” (“Transformaciones” 294). According to Dussel, “los que se comprometían en el proceso político revolucionario perdían su fe. Era necesaria una reinterpretación de la fe cristiana para abarcar, fundamentar y revitalizar el compromiso militante de los cristianos en política” (“Transformaciones” 294-95). The Argentinian thinker insists on the fact that politics alone was not enough in LT1 and that a more critical analysis of the economic mechanisms of capitalism was necessary since dependency theory was not merely sociological but economic as well
Dependency theory, on the other hand, could never be successfully refuted and was reformulated into the world-systems theory within a globalization process of capitalism that excludes the majority of humanity (Dussel, “Transformaciones” 295). The consequence of this is that LT2 pays much more attention to the economic relations of the world-system since “la TL2 toma mucho más en cuenta la economía, como ciencia social privilegiada, en cuanto toca la materialidad de la existencia humana” (Dussel, “Transformaciones” 295). Franz Hinkelammert, as is observed by Dussel, is the initiator of all this process (“Transformaciones” 295).

As far as LT1 is concerned, it is also a fact that political compromise empowered the faith of many Latin American revolutionary Christians. A good example is that of Camilo Torres in Cuba, Ernesto and Fernando Cardenal in Nicaragua and Néstor Paz Zamora in Bolivia. This means that many Christians actually reinterpreted their

48 Hinkelammert is a German-born liberation theologian and economist who, along with Hugo Assman and Pablo Richard, is one of the co-founders of the influential Departamento Ecuménico de Investigaciones (DEI) in San José, Costa Rica, where he currently works. His books and articles strongly criticize the neoliberal model from a theological and economic perspective. Along with Enrique Dussel and Pablo Richard, Hinkelammert is one of the few liberation theologians who has truly incorporated in depth the mediation of Marxist thinking into his theological reflection.
49 See the communiqués and short messages issued by Camilo in Revolutionary Priest: The Complete Writings & Messages of Camilo Torres (1971). See also Ernesto Cardenal’s observations on the subject in the second volume of his memoirs, Las insulas extrañas (2002), and in the third one, La revolución perdida (2004), and Fernando Cardenal’s in his autobiography Junto a mi pueblo, con su revolución (2009). Of special interest is Néstor Paz Zamora’s diary. Paz Zamora was a Bolivian professor of theology and guerrilla fighter whose Christian faith and mysticism was empowered by the revolutionary struggle on
Christian faith within the context of LT1 to support and revitalize their militant compromise in politics. The question is therefore quite subjective and ambiguous. Liberation theologians, on the other hand, were quite aware of the fact that dependency theory was not just concerned with sociological factors but first and foremost with economic ones. One need only have a look at *A Theology of Liberation* to see that most of the works quoted by Gutiérrez in the section dealing with dependency theory belong to the field of economics. It is true, however, that sociology has played a key role in dependency theory since its inception and that economic relations have become much more complex and entangled since the 1960s and 70s, as can be appreciated in the evolution of dependency theory into the world-systems theory observed by Dussel. All this suggests that although economic factors were important for LT1, they have become even more important for LT2. In other words, LT2 has become more critical from an economic point of view. Franz Hinkelammert is certainly the pioneer in the study of the connections between liberation theology and economics.⁵⁰ The future of this line of thinking within LT2, however, is also represented from a different perspective by Korean-Brazilian liberation theologian Jung Mo Sung, whose work *Desire, Market and Religion* (2007) has become a classic study on the subject.⁵¹

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⁵¹ Jung Mo Sung is a South Korean-born liberation theologian (Seoul, 1957) who lives and works in Brazil. He is a lay Roman Catholic theologian who moves within the paradigm of liberation theology and is considered to be one of the members of the next generation (what Dussel calls LT2). He has served as an informal associate of the Departamento Ecuménico de Investigación (DEI), the prestigious research institute in Costa Rica where important theologians like Elsa Támez, Pablo Richard and Franz Hinkelammert are currently working. The main difference between Sung’s approach to the interaction between liberation theology and economics and Hinkelammert’s is Sung’s rejection of Marxist social
The eighth transformation, from economy to immediate life, reminds us of how the most radical tendencies of LT1 absolutized a critique of a political economy, thus forgetting human life as such. In contrast, “la TL2 trata a la realidad no como el objeto de una economía sino de una ética de la vida, del reino de dios como vida comunitaria y consensual y por ello el sujeto teológico no es alguien que sólo piensa, sino que goza, que consume (‘¡Comed!’), que recupera la materialidad de la corporalidad plena” (‘Transformaciones’ 295). Perhaps the best example of this is the Sandinista revolution from Nicaragua, which turned its project of a Marxist political economy into its ultimate goal, thus invading the bare life of Miskito Native Americans, who could not possibly fit into that project.\(^{52}\) Dussel, however, overlooks the fact that some political economies of LT1, like that of the Sandinistas themselves, ended up making the effort to overcome the limits of their Marxist tenets by assuming the point of view of the Other. Unfortunately, analysis, especially of the historical and liberating praxis that is the basis of LT1. Therefore, Sung does not believe that the victims of the system can carry out a successful revolutionary struggle that will bring into history the utopia of a just, peaceful and harmonious society. This, however, does not mean that Sung is passive before social injustice, as can be appreciated in his work with the base ecclesial movement in Brazil. It can be said that his theological work moves within a neoliberal framework that does not prevent him from being very critical with it. Other important works by Sung are *Teologia e economia: Repensando a teologia da libertação e utopias* (1994), *Cristianismo de libertação* (2008), *Beyond the Spirit of Empire: Theology and Politics in a New Key* (2009), with Joerg Rieger and Nestor Miguez, and *The Subject, Capitalism and Religion: Horizons of Hope in Complex Society* (2011).

\(^{52}\) I use the term “bare life” with the meaning it has in Giorgio Agamben’s influential work *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998) and also resemanticize it into the Latin American cultural context defined by the concrete and specific socio-historical coordinates of the Miskito people vis-à-vis the Sandinista revolution. According to the Italian philosopher, in classical Greece there were two different terms to refer to the concept of “life.” One of them —zoē— expressed the simple fact of living whereas the other one —bios— indicated the specific form or way of living of a particular individual or community. This means that simple natural life was excluded from the sphere of the polis, which was represented by a political life (1-2). Agamben underlines the fact that it is at the threshold of the modern era that “natural life begins to be included in the mechanisms and calculations of State power, and politics turns into biopolitics” (3). The consequence of this is that “placing biological life at the center of its calculations, the modern State therefore does nothing other than bring to light the secret tie uniting power and bare life” (Agamben 6). It was precisely the invasion of Miskito bare life, which was seized and apprehended by the sphere of sovereign power represented by the Sandinista government in the early 1980s, that gave rise to a zone of irreducible indistinction of exclusion and inclusion, right and fact, *bios* and *zoē*, life and death (Agamben 9, 122, 170) in which the politicization of Miskito bare life took place.
American imperialism was on the watch and had already used and manipulated the Miskito communities to its own advantage to prevent an immediate approach and understanding with the Sandinista government. This means that the Sandinista Front of the 1980s was self-critical after all, and therefore, that LT1 realized in some cases, even though it was too late, that immediate life was its primary goal. The best proof for this is that a statute of autonomy for the Miskito was negotiated with Miskito leaders and approved by the Sandinista government in 1987. LT2, of course, has learned out of the mistakes of LT1 and, as is very well noted by Dussel, has turned the bare life of human beings and Mother Earth into an ethics of life that is its basis for theological reflection.

The ninth transformation, from the poor to the victim, is one of Dussel’s most insightful theses on the evolution from LT1 to LT2. The Argentinian philosopher mentions that “el pobre es una realidad: es el explotado, el negado, el humillado, el que no puede reproducir su vida, el excluido . . . Pero es también la ‘metáfora’ de todos los oprimidos” (“Transformaciones” 296). As a metaphor, however, the term “poor” could not possibly be accepted by other humiliated or oppressed subjects who began to develop their own liberation theologies within LT2: Feminist theology, eco-theology, indigenous theologies, etc. (Dussel, “Transformaciones” 296). Dussel admits that “son teologías ‘transversales.’ El ‘pobre’, que Jesús mismo usa como metáfora universal, pareciera que

53 The best proof for all these facts are the oral accounts given by Miskito Indians themselves. Reynaldo Reyes Davis, a Nicaraguan Miskito Indian whose nom de guerre was “Ráfaga,” tells us about the atrocities committed against the Miskitos and other Nicaraguan indigenous groups first by the Sandinistas and then by the American Contra movement organized by the CIA. Disillusioned with both, of which he was a militant, Ráfaga decided to begin to work on his own for peace and Miskito autonomy. Ráfaga’s life story was edited by J. K. Wilson and Tod Stratton Sloan and published in English as a testimonio under the title Ráfaga: The Life Story of a Miskito Comandante (1992). Testimonies such as Ráfaga’s show how Miskito bare life in the early 80s was not only politicized by the Sandinistas but also by the contras and suggest that the best solution for the Miskitos at the time was to become subjects of history and agents of their own destiny through their own socio-political activism. They succeeded in the end and managed to have their statute of autonomy recognized by the Sandinista government in 1987.
la TL2 debe ampliarla, y ha comenzado a usarse, con mucho sentido, la palabra ‘víctima.’” (“Transformaciones” 296). But who are the victims?: “Son todas las víctimas de los sistemas funcionales, de la razón estratégico-instrumental, que se fetichizan (los ídolos de los profetas de Israel)” (Dussel, “Transformaciones” 296). Dussel jumps to the conclusion that “el ‘pobre’ es la última instancia de todas las ‘víctimas’, pero no es la única. La ‘diferencia’ de las víctimas nos habla de la universalidad del pecado” (“Transformaciones” 296). The Argentinian thinker also highlights the fact that it is precisely the alterity of the empirical communities of the victims (indigenous and African Latin American cultures, women, the environment, etc.) that gives a sense and meaning to the “truth” of the different denominations and churches. That is why “sin comunidad de víctimas las Iglesias están vacías de contenido” (Dussel, “Transformaciones” 296). The Christian churches, on the other hand, will not have a prophetic role unless there are base ecclesial communities,54 which, independently of their denomination, carry out an intersubjective and consensual reading of the Sacred Scriptures (Dussel, “Transformaciones” 296).

The tenth transformation, from utopia to democratic-strategic reason and from revolution to transformation, is another key thesis that focuses on the parallel evolution of liberation theology and alternative political movements from the 1960s on. It is a fact that LT1 understood the significance of Christian social compromise when various liberation movements, influenced by the Cuban revolution of 1959, showed that radical

54 For Dussel, the prophetic dimension of any church is inexorably linked to the cause of the poor, and therefore, to the base ecclesial movement, which is made up by the poor and carries out a sort of liberation theology avant la lettre in praxis, which is also articulated with some theological reflection at a popular level. It is the intersubjective and consensual reading of the Bible taking place in basic church communities that is confronted with the concrete and specific conditions of the community’s historical reality in order to choose the best course of action for its members.
transformation was possible. Dussel points out how “los cristianos formularon la posibilidad de articular el reino de Dios (la utopía escatológica) con el proyecto de liberación (la utopía posible histórica), en una única historia de la salvación como el lugar donde acontecen el reino y las liberaciones humanas” (“Transformaciones” 296). This, however, does not mean that there were not mistakes. Dussel reminds us that “se estaba muy lejos de dominar el espectro teórico de las ciencias políticas funcionales o críticas y de asumir toda la complejidad estratégica y táctica de lo que la política involucra” (“Transformaciones” 296). Also, it must be noted that “por otra parte, se vio la importancia de la praxis de liberación, pero no se concedió igual importancia a la consensualidad de los afectados participantes en un movimiento donde la democracia fuera la práctica propuesta como ideal procedimental” (Dussel, “Transformaciones” 296-97). The consequence of this was that although democracy was not denied, it was never privileged either as a political option. At the same time, Rosa Luxembourg’s opposition (Revolution or Reform) was accepted by some groups (Dussel, “Transformaciones” 297).

Although LT1’s political praxis of liberation was problematic in some cases, I believe that the theoretical spectrum of its political and social sciences, especially that of Marxism understood as a mediation, was handled very efficiently in connection with their strategic and tactical complexity. That is why liberation theologians could always brilliantly and convincingly defend their use of Marxism as a mediation against the attacks coming from the Vatican. It must be remembered, on the other hand, that it was the use of Marxism in connection with the social sciences by liberation theologians that allowed them to critically capture the hidden mechanisms of oppression and neocolonization of the victims of the system on an international scale. This means that
their understanding of political maneuvers and strategies was actually quite good. All this
suggests that the actual problem of LT1 was the liberating praxis, which, as is noted by
Dussel, was never truly democratic and ended up being imposed upon certain groups that
did not feel identified with it. As has been mentioned before, perhaps the best example of
this are the tense relationships between Miskito Indians and the Sandinista
revolutionaries from Nicaragua in the late 1970s and early 80s. Revolution was certainly
necessary but only a democratic concept of revolution coming from the social and
historical coordinates of the periphery, which have nothing to do with Rosa
Luxembourgh’s dictatorial concept of revolution from the perspective of European
Marxism.

Dussel’s conclusion on the interaction between LT1 and politics is that “la
transformación práctica a partir del criterio del reconocimiento y la responsabilidad por
las víctimas, aun en acciones cotidianas, no tenía igual densidad ética”
(“Transformaciones” 297). It must be noticed, however, that this was not always true
with LT1. It may be accurate in some cases like the Miskito confrontations with the
Sandinistas or the assassinations committed by some members of the Guatemalan
guerrilla groups in the 1980s but quite misleading in others like Father Gustavo
Gutiérrez’s own compromise and praxis of liberation as a Christian and liberation
theologian or Camilo Torres’s and Néstor Paz’s revolutionary mystical praxis. Another
problem with Dussel’s argument is his rejection of the notion of “revolution” in LT2. The

55 Although this was not always the case and Dussel generalizes too much, one cannot help thinking of a
testimonial work like Mario Roberto Morales’s Face of the Earth, Heart of the Sky (2000), which collects
the testimonies of the victims of the massacres committed by the military and some left-wing guerrilla
groups from Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG) in Guatemala during the 1980s. It is
true that the revolutionary praxis of LT1 is defined by a strong ethical crisis in some cases.
Argentinian philosopher insists on the fact that “la TL2 se instala en la vida cotidiana de un mundo donde las posibilidades revolucionarias son escasas cuando no inexistentes” (“Transformaciones” 297). This is due to the fact that “los movimientos sociales más diversos (feminismo, ecologismo, antirracismo, organización de la marginalidad, rechazo a la globalización pretendidamente modernizante, etc.) actúan como posibles sujetos de prácticas que no son revolucionarias pero sí liberadoras” (“Transformaciones” 297). A critical analysis of present-day socio-cultural movements, however, shows that they are not only liberating but truly revolutionary as well from a different perspective to the revolutionary spirit of LT1. Revolutionary praxis for LT1 was eminently political. Revolutionary praxis for LT2 is eminently socio-cultural. This, however, does not mean that the notion of “revolution” is dead or that it does not have a political dimension. It is a different revolution. It is not one that aims to dethrone capitalism in order to institute another Cuban revolution or Sandinista Front but certainly one that seeks liberation from the neoliberal tornado by resisting against it in new consensual, democratic and peaceful ways.

Dussel also observes that “el fracaso de la primera etapa de las revoluciones que sólo llegaron a organizar socialismos realmente existentes de corte estaliniano y la

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56 This is Giulio Girardi’s conclusion after his analysis of the indigenous, African Latin American and popular movement in his work Los excluidos ¿construirán la nueva historia? El movimiento indígena, negro y popular (1994). Contemporary antiglobalization Latin American movements like that of Amerindians, African Latin Americans and the popular sectors, which are also supported by some subaltern sectors of the center, have to be independent from traditional political parties, which will never renounce their own selfish interests, if they want to be successful. Therefore, they must be revolutionary socio-cultural movements moving within an eminently ethical-political horizon. Girardi’s message seems to be that revolutionary ethics cannot be reconciled with traditional politics but can be reconciled with a new understanding of the ethical-political dimension. Consequently, the revolution carried out by all these movements must not be eminently political, in the traditional sense of the term, but eminently ethical-political in the socio-cultural and macroecumenical sense that defines the indigenous, African Latin American and popular movement.
dominación norteamericana militarmente hegemónica exige una profunda transformación de la comprensión de la política como expresión de la razón estratégica (y hasta instrumental)” (“Transformaciones” 297). This political transformation must take place “dentro de los marcos de la reproducción material de la vida humana y de la participación simétrica y democrática de los afectados en las tomas de decisiones. Se trata de una nueva comprensión de lo político” (Dussel, “Transformaciones” 297). It is true that the revolutions of the 1960s and 70s were not as successful as they should have been. This, however, was largely due to the unbearable pressure of American imperialism in the form of economic blockades, which destroyed the popular achievements of the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolution and prevented them from further developing in a truly socialist direction. On the other hand, Dussel also forgets that the product of all revolutions was not always Stalinism. Ernesto Cardenal, one of the key figures of the Sandinista National Liberation Front of the 1970s and 80s, has always considered the Sandinista revolution to be Marxist but never Leninist. Another important consideration is the fact that American military hegemony was one of the main causes for the demise of the revolutionary movements, without forgetting their own mistakes, rather than just a consequence of this, as seems to be suggested by Dussel.

A new political understanding is therefore necessary for LT2 but one that is truly critical paying attention not only to the political mistakes of the revolutionary movements of the previous decades but also to their achievements and how these were obstructed by lack of economic resources due to the political-economic caciquismo of the USA and its court of lackeys. This new political transformation is eminently democratic and must walk hand in hand with the new socio-cultural movements, which have an anticapitalist
political dimension without aligning themselves with a particular ideology. This lack of identification with the specific agenda of a left-wing political party is the consequence of the disappointment and frustration with all leftist political factions, which end up privileging their selfish interests over the social causes they want their voters to believe they are fighting for. The different tendencies of LT2 mentioned by Dussel—indigenous, feminist and ecological liberation theologies among others—are certainly some of the best exponents of these new socio-cultural movements that pose an alternative to the neoliberal model.

These and many other liberation movements of a non-theological nature converge in the World Social Forum, an annual meeting of civil society organizations, first held in Brazil in 2001, which seeks to develop an alternative future through the championing of counter-hegemonic globalization. The World Social Forum defines itself as “an opened space—plural, diverse, non-governmental and non-partisan—that stimulates the decentralized debate, reflection, proposal building, experience exchange and alliances among movements and organizations engaged in concrete actions towards a more solidarious, democratic and fair world” (qtd. in Wikipedia). The World Social Forum is “a permanent space and process to build alternatives to neoliberalism,” (qtd. in Wikipedia) and therefore, the best and most successful example of what has come to be known as the alter-globalization movement.57 The WSF is undoubtedly the emblem of

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Dussel’s new political understanding mentioned above although, paradoxically, it is never mentioned in his discussion.

The eleventh transformation, from the critique of ideology to that of fetishism, focuses on how LT1 carried out a critique of ideology in the sphere of the production of the self-comprehension of groups, classes and societies since ideology showed the level of concealment and the justification of oppression (Dussel, “Transformaciones” 297). Dussel explains that LT2, however, “dará un paso hacia la fundamentación de la crítica ideológica desmantelando la lógica de los sistemas formales instrumentales o funcionales (Luhmann), que se autonomizan y del servicio a la vida pasan no-intencionalmente a producir la muerte de sus víctimas institucionales” (“Transformaciones” 297). Dussel also calls attention to the fact that “el fetichismo o auto-totalización de los sistemas formales (económicos, políticos, educativos, según los meros criterios de la razón instrumental, al decir de Horkheimer o Adorno) pone en riesgo la sobrevivencia” (“Transformaciones” 297). LT2, no doubt, must consolidate the foundations of an ideological critique by questioning the autonomous entity of those concrete instances into which the instrumental and functional formal systems become materialized, thus becoming instruments of death. The Argentinian thinker, however, overlooks the fact that some of these and their institutional victims belong to the cultural and geopolitical Latin American context. This means that a critical reflection on the deconstruction and demolition of those instrumental or formal functional systems as executioners of the innocent victims must have as a starting point what I have called before the decolonial and subaltern locus of enunciation of the periphery represented by Latin America instead
of Luhmann’s Eurocentric abstract philosophy, which is completely disconnected from the Latin American historical reality.

Fetishism, which is understood as the self-totalization of the economic, political and educational formal systems, is identified by Dussel with Adorno and Horkheimer’s criteria of instrumental reason. It would be more appropriate, however, to interpret it in the light of the insightful discussions on fetishism carried out from a specifically Latin American cultural perspective by liberation theologians like Jon Sobrino, who offers a brilliant discussion of the idols of death within a Latin American setting in one of the key chapters of his influential work *Jesus the Liberator* (1994). Pablo Richard is another important liberation theologian who has discussed in detail the phenomenon of fetishism in Latin American terms in his works *The Idols of Death and the God of Life* (1983) and *Apocalypse: A People’s Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (1995). As far as the justification of fetishism is concerned, this is questioned by Dussel by appealing to certain European philosophical concepts such as Levinas’s Totality, Marx’s capital and Freud’s consciousness under the influence of a dominating super-ego. Fetishism, however, must be refuted and deconstructed paying attention to the Latin American historical reality as well as to the different schools of Latin American decolonial theological thought that illuminate that reality by unveiling the fetishism of the idols of death. This is even more urgent if we take into account the fact that Latin America is never present in Levinas’s, Marx’s or Freud’s philosophical reflection.

Only the new theological discourses of LT2 can help us to struggle against the eclipse of neoliberal fetishism. Therefore, it is not Levinas, Marx and Freud that we need but Boff’s articulation of an eco-theology of liberation that does not renounce to explore
its ties with the Eastern notion of “Tao,” Eleazar López Hernández’s theorization of an indigenous liberation theology founded on the key concept of “inculturation,” Ivone Gebara’s exploration of the connections between ecology and feminism or Jung Mo Sung’s insightful reflections on the institutions of the international capitalist system, the modern altars of the “global market god.” All this suggests that the fetishistic idols of death in Latin America would be better represented by concepts such as ecocide/geocide, acculturation/assimilation/cultural genocide, eco-sexism and Capital god/Enterprise goddess. Only then can Dussel’s biblical connection between these idols and the Antichrist vis-à-vis the Lamb be established.

The twelfth transformation, from liberation theology to a meta-theology of the various liberation theologies, shows that the main difference between LT1 and LT2 is the intrinsic heterogeneity of the latter, which individualizes the victims of globalization according to ethnic, gender and environmental criteria. This means that LT2 is articulated around race, gender and ecological issues. Although Dussel illustrates how the poor of LT1 become women, the indigenous and African Latin American peoples, the Earth, etc., he never emphasizes enough the heterogeneity of LT2 or the movement from an economic-political discourse centered on the homogeneous category of the poor to a racial, gender and ecological one founded on the alterity and heterogeneity of the victims. The Argentinian intellectual observes that “el discurso preponderantemente económico-político y en torno al ‘pobre’ de la TL1 deviene ahora un discurso crítico-abstracto donde caben, en un meta-discurso, los fundamentos de las ‘diversas’ teologías de la liberación” (“Transformaciones” 298). For Dussel, this means that “la TL2 tiene entonces como una
It would be more accurate, however, to say that LT1 becomes the various new liberation theologies of LT2, all of which include its original insights. This means that LT1 cannot possibly become a critico-abstract homogenizing meta-discourse but a series of concrete, specific and heterogeneous discourses containing its main ideas. One must be very careful not to assimilate and totalize a theological current like LT2, which, as has been mentioned above, is defined by its inherent heterogeneity and diversity. Dussel is right, however, when he mentions the danger of absolutizing each of the theological discourses of LT2 since it is necessary to understand that each of them not only contains the main principles of LT1 but also somehow the other discourses of LT2, which are all interconnected in a sort of heterogenous web. Another danger, however, is also the temptation of absolutizing LT2 as a theological discourse.

The thirteenth transformation, from an intra-Christian ecumenism to an ecumenism among universal religions, explores the movement from LT1’s Christian ecumenism between Protestant and Catholic theologians to LT2’s macroecumenism among Christian and non-Christian theologians. This will give rise to the emergence of an interreligious dialogue of liberation theology with other major religions like Islam, Bhuddism and Hinduism. Dussel begins his analysis by pointing out that LT1 was “un discurso critico nacido entre protestantes (Rubem Alves, Richard Shaull, José Míguez Bonino, etc.) y católicos (Gustavo Gutiérrez, Juan Luis Segundo, José Comblin, Hugo Assman, el que escribe estas líneas, etc.)” (“Transformaciones” 298). Dussel also reminds us that these Protestant and Catholic theologians “habían sido interpelados por
los pobres, por las víctimas, que exigían superar los estrechos horizontes de los credos respectivos y abrirse a un panorama práctico más allá de las iglesias ‘separadas’ desde antes, pero muy especialmente desde el origen de la Modernidad” (“Transformaciones” 298).

As a result of the contact with Africa and Asia, LT2 goes one step forward and establishes an interreligious dialogue with other religions of the world. Dussel brilliantly identifies LT2’s new theological challenges with the disputes on the doctrines of revelation and Christology during the first centuries of the Roman empire. Recent progressist theological venues like the Ecumenical Association for Third World Theologians, supported by many liberation theologians since 1975, show the need for new Christological interpretations that allow us to revise certain dogmas that have remained unchanged for centuries when formulated within the categories of Mediterranean, Eastern or Western European culture whose limits must be overcome in order to face the evangelizing process worldwide in the twenty-first century (Dussel, “Transformaciones” 299). Dussel also admits that there is a new macroecumenical evangelizing process under way from the victims that cannot possibly be equated with Christianity or with the quantitative increase in church believers (“Transformaciones” 299). The Argentinian intellectual, however, forgets to mention that it is necessary to endorse a truly inclusive and heterodox perspective, which is tolerant, democratic and egalitarian, to achieve this. In fact, his observation that “el Mesías se revelará a las

58 According to the Argentinean philosopher, the new theological challenges of ecumenism are especially present in the case of those theologians who must face the pressure of the other universal religions (Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism) or even of Catholic orthodoxy in their countries. This is especially important in the case of Asian liberation theologians, “que se enfrentan en su vida cotidiana a dichas religiones universales (como acontece en la Sri Lanka de Tissa Balasuria, al que se le excomulga de la iglesia católica por sus posiciones teológicas sobre una cristología ya tradicional entre los teólogos asiáticos recientes)” (“Transformaciones” 299).
religiones universales una vez que el ‘lugar hermeneútico’ de su posible epifanía haya sido previamente descubierto y aceptado’ (299) is not without Christiancentrist connotations.

Dussel also highlights the fact that “la TL2 deviene así un discurso teológico que pueda ser esperanza de los oprimidos, de los pobres, de las víctimas de todas las culturas periféricas, de todos los excluidos de los sistemas impuestos por la modernidad europea en proceso de globalización capitalista” (“Transformaciones” 299). This means that the excluded, subjects of history and agents of their own destiny, “deben ser invitados a sumarse a un proceso donde devienen parte de un sujeto intersubjetivo, que lucha por el reconocimiento, con auto-responsabilidad solidaria por la construcción de una sociedad donde quepan todos” (“Transformaciones” 299). One cannot help wondering, however, if this intersubjective subject embodied by LT2’s universal ecumenism has a specific face in the case of Latin America. In other words, does LT2 have a specific form of Latin American macroecumenism as a previous step to the worldly macroecumenical movement analyzed by Dussel? In fact, it does. Giulio Girardi has theorized the emergence of an Indo-Afro-Latin American popular macroecumenism in Latin America. This alter and antiglobalization movement brings together the different native spiritualities, which become inculturated with Christianity, of the victims: The indigenous and African Latin American peoples supported by the subaltern popular sectors of the subcontinent and even by the solidarious subaltern sectors of the countries of the center. The ultimate aim of this interreligious and intercultural platform is to engage in a fruitful interreligious and intercultural dialogue that paves the way for a more just and human world as a result of the peaceful demolition of the invisible wall of neoliberalism.
A more detailed analysis of Indo-Afro-Latin American popular macroecumenism as one of the most productive Latin American theological discourses and epistemologies of LT2 will be discussed later. For the moment, it must be noted that it was born in the early 1990s as one of the many reactions against the Quicentennial celebrations of the miscalled “discovery” of America.\textsuperscript{59} This means that it predates by over a decade the universal macroecumenical movement discussed by Dussel, which became prominent on an international scale around 2004 and 2005. It was around this time that a monograph on the subject was published by Spanish liberation theologian Juan José Tamayo-Acosta along with an essay collection edited by Tamayo-Acosta himself and Cuban philosopher Raúl-Fornet Betancourt.\textsuperscript{60} Indo-Afro-Latin American popular macroeumenism, however, is never mentioned by Dussel, which means that the Argentinean philosopher overlooks the Latin American dimension of an interreligious and intercultural phenomenon that only becomes transnational in its second stage.

Things get even more complicated if we remember the emergence of the World Social Forum in 2001, an international organization in which different epistemologies of LT2 like indigenous and feminist liberation theologies began to engage in a highly productive antiglobalization dialogue with many other solidarious sectors coming from very different backgrounds including key Latin American philosophers like Dussel

\textsuperscript{59}In his influential work \textit{The Invention of the Americas} (1995), Dussel observes that Modernity embodies a rational, emancipative concept but also an irrational myth that justified violence and came to birth in 1492 “in Europe’s confrontation with the Other. By controlling, conquering, and violating the Other, Europe defined itself as discoverer, conquistador, and colonizer of an alterity likewise constitutive of modernity” (12). The Argentinean philosopher also underlines the fact that “Europe never discovered (des-cubierto) this Other as Other but covered over (encubierto) the Other as part of the Same: i.e., Europe” (12). Dussel’s conclusion is that “modernity dawned in 1492 and with it the myth of a special kind of sacrificial violence which eventually eclipsed whatever was non-European” (12).

\textsuperscript{60}The two books in question are Tamayo’s \textit{Fundamentalismos y diálogo entre religiones} (2004) and Tamayo and Betancourt’s \textit{Interculturalidad, diálogo interreligioso y liberación} (2005).
himself, Nelson Maldonado-Torres and Boaventura de Sousa Santos among others. The WSF experience therefore becomes a sort of intermediate stage between the beginnings of popular Indo-Afro-Latin American macroecumenism and the full development of a universal macroecumenism. Dussel, however, never analyzes the interconnection of the WSF with both forms of macroecumenism as three different stages of a common process. His reductive and limited perspective on this point is also present in the lack of a historical analysis of the evolution of LT2, which is never present in his article. The Argentinean intellectual concludes that the consequence of a universal macroecumenism is the emergence of an Islamic, a Bhuddist and a Hindu liberation theology (“Transformaciones” 299). These new theological reflections of LT2 become “teologías críticas ante las teologías funcionales de los sistemas dominantes, de los diversos sistemas civilizatorios o sistemas dominantes” (Dussel, “Transformaciones” 299). That is why “las teologías críticas son teologías mesiánicas aunque no sean cristianas” (Dussel, “Transformaciones” 299). As far as Christian messianic theology is concerned, Dussel also insists on the fact that it must seek its prophetic place to build the kingdom of God, which must not be confused with a church or denomination in particular, through the establishment of an egalitarian society in which everyone is accepted (Dussel, “Transformaciones” 299).

A critical reading of the thirteen transformations in the epistemological tenets of LT1 observed by Dussel shows that he never pays attention to the key issue of decoloniality. The decolonial dimension, however, is essential to understand the

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movement from LT1 to LT2. LT1 was a theological discourse produced from a subaltern and peripheral locus of enunciation understood from a geographical, intellectual and metaphysical horizon. Its decoloniality was exclusively socio-political since it always assimilated the different victims under the category of the poor. LT2, on the other hand, consists of a multiplicity of theological discourses articulated from many different subaltern and peripheral loci of enunciation (indigenous and African Latin American cultures, women and the Earth among others) also understood from the triple dimension of the geographical, the intellectual and the metaphysical. This means that its decoloniality is founded on ethnic, gender, environmental, economic, intercultural and interreligious criteria since it always individualizes and respects the alterity of the victims. All these various decolonial criteria, however, somehow transform and affirm the original socio-political decolonial value of LT1 from a new perspective. In other words, there are different levels or layers of decoloniality in liberation theology as a critical discourse. Decoloniality was always present in it from its beginnings but only from a homogenizing socio-political dimension that became extremely more prominent, complex, heterogeneous and diverse in LT2, which emerged without forgetting the initial epistemological tenets of LT1.

The historical development of LT2 shows how its first theological reflections emerged in the USA in the 1970s in the form of Black, womanist, Native American,

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62 Latin America’s subaltern locus of enunciation has a geographical, intellectual and metaphysical dimension. It is geographically located in the periphery of the world and is defined by its critique of the neoliberal model and its neocolonial project from an intellectual and ideological point of view. Its basis for philosophical reflection, on the other hand, is the metaphysical sphere of non-Being or the Other, which contrasts with the ontological sphere of Being that characterizes European philosophy.
Latino and *mujerista* theologies among others.\(^{63}\) It was in the 1980s that the influence of liberation theology reached the African continent and India, thus giving rise to the emergence of an African liberation theology, which was particularly prominent in the sub-Saharan region and in South Africa, and of a Dalit theology.\(^{64}\) As far as Latin America is concerned, the 1970s and 1980s were dominated by LT1 and it was not until the late 80s and early 90s that the first Latin American manifestations of LT2 began to emerge in the form of María Pilar Aquino’s and Elsa Támez’s feminist liberation theology and of Antonio Aparecido da Silva’s and Marcos Rodrigues da Silva’s African Latin American theology.\(^{65}\) It is in the 1990s, however, that LT2 finally spreads


throughout Latin America according to ethnic, ecological, economic and gender criteria—which are a part of its epistemological and historical evolution—whose product is the emergence of an eco-theology of liberation and of indigenous, African Latin American, economic and eco-feminist liberation theologies.

It must be noted, however, that some of the Latin American liberation theologians that played a crucial role in LT1 very soon became a part of LT2. This is the case of Gustavo Gutiérrez and Giulio Girardi, who became interested in indigenous issues, and of Leonardo Boff, who turned his attention to the ecological question and its connections with liberation theology. Unlike the liberation theologies of the United States, which were articulated from the start by the African American, Native American and Latino/a subaltern subject herself/himself, the Latin American face of LT2 in the late 1980s and in the early 1990s was usually articulated by Latin American theologians of European American descent, some exceptions being those of Gustavo Gutiérrez, a mestizo theologian, Antonio Aparecido da Silva and Marcos Rodrigues da Silva, two African Brazilian theologians, and Aiban Wagua, a Kuna Catholic priest and theologian from Panama. It is not until the late 90s and the early years of the twenty-first century that more indigenous and African Latin American theologians begin to emerge and publish their works. This is therefore a very recent phenomenon. The reason for this may be connected with the extreme poverty and lack of education among the indigenous and African Latin American peoples, which exceed those of many African Americans and

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67 An often neglected fact, Gutiérrez’s biological heritage is actually of mixed Quechua and Spanish descent.
Native Americans in the USA. This is probably also related to Latin America’s state of underdevelopment as a result of its neocolonial exploitation by the underdeveloping countries of the West. In other words: It is much worse to experience poverty in a poor country like Brazil than in a rich one like the USA even if poverty will always be a hard, terrible and traumatic experience anywhere. Another important factor that has also played a key role in the development of a Latin American LT2 is the opposition to and questioning of the Quicentennial celebrations by indigenous and African Latin American groups, a process whose culmination was Rigoberta Menchú’s award of the Nobel Prize for peace in 1992.

All this suggests that there are two categories within LT2: Those theological reflections coming from the subaltern sectors of the USA, a rich country, and those coming from the poor and underdeveloped countries of the world in Latin America, Africa and Asia. One cannot help wondering if the LT2 discourses produced in the US are as critical, radical and transgressive as those coming from the Third World. In other words, does the key issue of the center/periphery *locus* of enunciation influence the critical and radical awareness of the various theological reflections of LT2? In the particular case of US liberation theologies vis-à-vis Latin American liberation theology, it can be said that it does. Latin American LT2 has always had an anticapitalist perspective that is never present in the various forms of LT2 in the US with a few exceptions. This antiglobalization lense undoubtedly comes from LT1’s use of Marxism and the social sciences as mediations to disclose the oppression and injustice of the capitalist system on an international scale to such an extent that, following Cuban intellectual Roberto Fernández Retamar, we can speak about “underdeveloping” and “underdeveloped”
Latin American LT2 therefore inherits the critical, radical and transgressive socio-political consciousness of LT1 but only as a basis of reflection for the new ecological, ethnic, economic and gender issues that become its focus of analysis.

The case of the US theologies of liberation, however, is quite different. Articulated in the epicenter of capitalism, they were never able to get rid of a liberal, bourgeois perspective inherited from American liberal theology, which was especially influential on Black, womanist, Latino and mujerista theology. These certainly stand up for the rights of African American men and women, Latinos and Latinas but they always do so within a neoliberal framework, which, unlike Latin American liberation theology, is never truly questioned due to the ever-present influence of liberal theology. This lack of a truly critical consciousness extremely weakens their power as liberationist discourses, thus making them fall into an ultimately non-critical position. This non-critical assumption of a neoliberal framework is also undoubtedly connected with the lack of a truly radical American left-wing political movement. Most of these theological currents do not question the US as the international emblem of capitalism. Therefore, their socio-cultural struggles articulated from a theological perspective will always be conceived within a neoliberal reformist political project, thus overlooking the root of the injustice that, paradoxically, they are fighting against. In this sense, US liberation theologies are not revolutionary but “reformist” theologies since, whether we like it or

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68 See the revised version of Fernández Retamar’s influential essay “Calibán: Apuntes sobre la cultura de nuestra América” in his essay collection Todo Calibán (2003).
not, they are ultimately capitalist theologies. Perhaps we should say that they are the latest development of nineteenth-century American liberal theology.

A possible exception is that of Native American liberation theology, which, due to its main concern with environmental issues, cannot help frontally colliding with neoliberal ecocide and geocide, thus giving rise to a very critical and radical alter and antiglobalization theological reflection. Begun by Vine Deloria Jr. in the 1970s and 80s,70 a truly transgressive Native American liberation theology is alive and kicking today with the contributions by great theologians like Roy I. Wilson, Achiel Peelman, George E. Tinker and Clara Sue Kidwell among others.71 Another exception is that of the latest lines of theological thought of Latino and Asian American liberation theology, which begin to pay attention to the critique of the dictatorship of global capital.72 A lot of work and reflection, however, is still needed in this direction. Therefore, the big problem of US theologies of liberation today is that they just focus on the sphere of microeconomics, which regulates infrastructural processes, instead of critically connecting this with the significant dimension of macroeconomics, which regulates superstructural processes, as is the case with Latin American liberation theology. Dussel certainly mentions US black

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70 Vine Deloria Jr. (Martin, SD, March 26, 1933-Golden, CO, November 13, 2005) was a renowned Oglala Lakota theologian, historian and activist. As a Native American scholar, Deloria set the foundations for the development of a Native American liberation theology in the US in his influential works *Custer Died for Your Sins* (1969) and *God is Red* (1973).


72 For a discussion of this point, see the chapters on Latino and Asian American liberation theology in *Liberation Theologies in the United States* (2010), edited by Stancey M. Floyd-Thomas and Anthony B. Pinn.
and feminist theologies as well as African and Dalit theology as important schools of LT2 besides those coming from Latin America but never makes a classification or distinction between them, thus forgetting that they are not equally critical even though all of them belong to LT2.

Another interesting case of LT2 is that of India’s Dalit theology. Here we have a theological reflection that, although coming from the periphery, has the same problems as most US theologies of liberation. Arvind P. Nirmal, its first theoretician, always rejected to use Marxism as a secondary tool for his theological reflection. The consequence of this prejudiced, bourgeois and elitist position, which contradicts the social compromise of Dalit theology itself, is that Nirmal’s reflection only focuses on the microeconomic dimension, thus failing to deploy a truly critical consciousness that addresses the root of the problems he criticizes, which belongs to the macroeconomic sphere. This non-critical starting point weakens Dalit theology’s critical potential to such an extent that it overlooks one of the key factors for the oppression of Dalits in India: The alliance of the neofascist ruling castes with the multinational corporations, which underlines the key role of the macroeconomic sphere. Like James Cone’s or Martin

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73 The Hindu term “Dalit,” which literally means “oppressed,” is used to refer to the category of people who fall outside the caste system in India, which assigns individuals a certain hierarchical status according to Hindu beliefs. Since Dalits are the members of the lowest social rank, they are subjected to all forms of discrimination: From access to education and medical facilities to restrictions on where they can live and what jobs they can take. Dalits are divided into several groups: Leather workers, street sweepers, cobblers, agricultural workers, and manual “scavengers.” These jobs do not provide enough income for Dalit families to buy food or send their children to school. The consequence of this is that most Dalits are poor, uneducated and illiterate. Dalits have been oppressed, culturally subjugated and politically marginalized even from a religious point of view since Christianity still maintains some form of caste in India even if this contradicts its principles. Dalit Christians, for instance, have separate burial areas from non-Dalit Christians. Arvind P. Nirmal (1936-1995) was a Dalit Christian theologian and a member of the Church of North India. He questioned the Christianity of the upper castes, especially the Brahmin. Nirmal was the first and main theoretician of Dalit theology and argued that Christian theology should be devoted to the poor and reflect Dalit concerns since Jesus Christ himself was a Dalit.
Luther King’s Black theology, the problem in this case is Nirmal’s non-critical assumption of a capitalist, bourgeois and liberal perspective that is never questioned from the start.

This contrasts with Latin American liberation theologians, whose compromise with the victims is not only present in their praxis as priests but also in their theoretical reflection by questioning the exploitation and injustice of the neoliberal model through their critical use of Marxist social analysis as a mediation. All this shows that Latin American liberation theology is the most critical and radical liberationist theological current to have emerged in the world in the last four decades. One cannot help to agree with Craig L. Nessan’s observations on the backcover of his recent work *The Vitality of Liberation Theology* (2012) that “Latin American liberation theology bursts forth as the most original and compelling theological movement from the developing world in the modern period” and that “the story of the emergence and proliferation of liberation theology, as well as the opposition to this movement both within and without Latin America, is one of the most significant and lasting developments in Christianity since the last third of the twentieth century.”
CHAPTER FOUR

Liberation Theology’s Latin American Epistemologies in the Twenty-First Century

As far as the main Latin American epistemologies of LT2 are concerned, indigenous and African Latin American theologies of liberation certainly pave the way for the future. It must be noted that, as has been mentioned in the previous chapter, the first articulations of an indigenous liberation theology were not usually carried out by native theologians but by European American theologians.¹ Therefore, the first stage in the articulation of an Amerindian theology of liberation in Latin America is defined by the lack of indigenous intellectual and theological agency. Giulio Girardi, Paulo Suess, Diego Irarrázaval and Clodomiro Siller are the most significant exponents of the beginnings of a nativist liberation theology in Latin America.² They are all European

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¹ The exception to the rule would be Towards an Aymara Church (1979), a Master’s thesis defended by Domingo Llanque Chana, a Catholic Aymara priest, at St. John’s Seminary (USA).
² Giulio Girardi (Cairo, Egypt, February 23, 1926-Rocca di Papa, Italy, February 26, 2012) was an Italian liberation theologian who became interested in the development of the indigenous, African Latin American and popular movement in Latin America from a macroecumenical perspective. Girardi was the first theoretician of the origins and development of this movement, and therefore, plays a prominent role in the articulation of a nativist theology of liberation. He was also the first one to articulate a systematic approach to an indigenous liberation theology. See Girardi’s works Los excluidos ¿construirán la nueva historia? El movimiento indígena, negro y popular (1994), El derecho indígena a la autodeterminación política y religiosa (1997) and Desde su propia palabra: Los indígenas, sujetos de un pensamiento emergente (1998), and his article “El macroecumenismo popular indo-afro-latinocentrico: perspectivas ético-políticas, culturales y teológicas” (2003); Paulo Suess (born in 1938) is a German liberation theologian who has spent most of his life working in Brazil and the Amazon as a missionary. His contribution to the articulation of a nativist liberation theology takes place from a historiographic and missiological point of view through his studies on the cultural and spiritual genocide committed upon the indigenous peoples by the Catholic Church at the time of the conquest of America and the need to develop an alternative paradigm for a New Evangelization that proposes the gospel instead of imposing it. The New Evangelization involves for Suess adopting the point of view of the Other, and therefore, assuming the historical projects of the Other as our point of departure. See Suess’s works A causa indígena na caminhada e a proposta do CIMI: 1972-1989 (1989), La nueva evangelización: Desafíos
American but approach liberation theology from an Amerindian lense that privileges the intertwining of traditional indigenous spirituality with Christianity but also respects all native spiritual experiences independently of whether they enter into an interreligious dialogue with Catholicism or not.³

It is only after this first generation of a nativist liberation theology that the Amerindian subaltern subject truly becomes the subject of history and the agent of his own destiny, thus giving rise to the emergence of a new stage: An indigenous liberation theology developed by Amerindian theologians themselves. Although native theological agency already existed since the early 1990s,⁴ it is from the late 1990s and the year 2000 on that indigenous liberation theologians write most of their works. This is especially the case with Eleazar López Hernández, a Zapotec Catholic priest who is unanimously...

³ A pioneering work published many years before those by Girardi, Suess, Irarrázaval and Siller is Religiones nativas y religion cristiana (1972), by Xabier Albó, a Spanish Jesuit priest, anthropologist and linguist specialized on Aymara and Quechua culture who still carries out his ministry in Bolivia, studied in the USA and wrote his dissertation on the Quechua language in 1974. Another important work is The Indian Face of God in Latin America (1996), edited by Spanish-born Peruvian anthropologist Manuel Marzal, which includes a contribution by Albó on Aymara religion. See also the essays on Aymara spirituality and Christianity in Religión aymara (2012), edited by Albó himself.

⁴ See Aiban Wagua’s articles “Antigua y nueva evangelización de los indígenas” (1990), “Present Consequences of the European Invasion of America” (1990), “Las teologías indias ante la globalidad de la teología cristiana” (1991), and “Jesus is scourged and Crowned with Thorns” (1992).
considered to be the father of indigenous liberation theology in Latin America.\(^5\) Other important Amerindian liberation theologians are Petul Cut Chab, Aiban Wagua, Pedro Uc Be, Humberto Ramos Salazar, Domingo Llanque Chana, Armando Marileo and Ramón Federico Curivil.\(^6\) Like their European American predecessors, they all believe in the inculturation of the Gospel with indigenous spirituality. It must be noted, however, that, as has been pointed out by priest Alcides Catota, indigenous theology is mainly the fruit of a communitarian, collective and ecumenical reflection.\(^7\) This means that most of the

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\(^6\) Petul Cut Chab is a pastoral agent and an indigenous theologian of the Tzeltal people in the diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, México. See Chab’s articles “Conceptos básicos de la teología india” (1993) and “Experiencia de Dios en los proyectos de vida de los pueblos” (1994) and the interview conducted by Giulio Girardi “‘Dios nos habla en los sueños’. Testimonio de la iglesia india en Chiapas: Entrevista con Petul Cut Cha” (1997); Aiban Wagua is a Catholic priest and a theologian of the Kuna people in Panama. See Wagua’s articles “Antigua y nueva evangelización de los indígenas” (1990), “Present Consequences of the European Invasion of America” (1990), “Las teologías indias ante la globalidad de la teología cristiana” (1991), “Jesus is scourged and Crowned with Thorns” (1992) and his oral account “Testimonio kuna” (2003); Pedro Uc Be is a Maya Presbyterian pastor and professor of philosophy who teaches at the Centro Educativo Rodríguez Tamayo of Ticul, Yucatan, México. See Uc Be’s articles “Elementos vigentes de la teología maya: Rescate y sistematización” (1994) and “Del K’ooj” (2013); Humberto Ramos Salazar is an Aymara Lutheran priest and theologian from Bolivia who is unanimously considered to be the main theoretician of an Aymara theology. See Ramos Salazar’s work Hacia una teología aymara (1997); Domingo Llanque Chana is an Aymara Catholic priest from Peru and, along with Ramos Salazar, is also considered one of the key proponents of an Aymara theology. In his capacity as president of the Peruvian Academy of the Aymara Language, he has also promoted the study of Aymara and Quechua within a bilingual context in Peru. See Llanque Chana’s works La cultura aymara: Desestructuración o afirmación de identidad (1990), Ritos y espiritualidad aymara (1995) and Vida y teología andina (2004); Armando Marileo is a pastoral agent and a Mapuche religious leader or Lonko from Chiloé, Chile who also teaches ancient Mapuche wisdom, spirituality and philosophy at Universidad Católica de Temuco (Chile). See Marileo’s article “El teólogo indio y la teología indígena ante las iglesias” (1991) and, co-authored with Ricardo Salas Astrain, “Filosofía Occidental y Filosofía Mapuche: Iniciando un Diálogo” (2011). See also ¿Modernización o sabiduría en tierra mapuche? (1995), edited by Marileo; Ramón Federico Curivil is a Mapuche professor of philosophy in Carahue and Puerto Saavedra (Chile). See Curivil’s work La fuerza de la religión de la tierra: Una herencia de nuestros antepasados (2007) and his articles “Una aproximación a la religión mapuche desde la fenomenología” (1994) and “Religión mapuche y cristianismo” (1995).

\(^7\) In his inaugural address to the participants of the VII Continental Encounter of Indigenous Theology (Latacunga, Ecuador, 2013), Father Catota, Vicar of Indigenous Pastoral for the Latacunga Diocese, reviewed the main points and contributions of each of the previous encounters to the articulation of an indigenous theology. According to Catota, “las memorias de los encuentros latinoamericanos no son
books that have been published on the subject so far are a compilation of the various papers dealing with indigenous theology from different angles and perspectives read at the continental Encounters on Indigenous Theology that have been taking place since the early 90s in México (México, D.F., 1990), Panama (Colón, 1993), Bolivia (Cochabamba, 1997), Paraguay (Asunción, 2002), Brazil (Manaus, 2006), El Salvador (Berlin, 2009) and Ecuador (Latacunga, 2013). The consequence of this is that few books on indigenous liberation theology have been written by individual Amerindian theologians so far. This accounts for the lack of a systematization of this theological reflection coming from native theologians themselves, which is still one of its main challenges for the future.

If there is something that defines this second stage of indigenous liberation theology, this is the intersection of race and agency. The great novelty from an epistemological point of view is therefore the presence of indigenous intellectual and theological agency. This was already present in the US epistemologies of LT2 (Black, Latino and Native American liberation theologies among others) but, due to the reasons mentioned in chapter three, is a very recent phenomenon in the case of Latin America. Only a nativist liberation theology, articulated by European American liberation theologians as a main tendency of LT2, did exist in Latin America until very recently with the exception of the proceedings of the continental Encounters on Indigenous Theology. Indigenous liberation theologians like Eleazar López Hernández, however, show how it is now the subaltern subject himself, the victim of the system, that can speak
from a decolonial theological locus of enunciation and write his own books, thus signaling a continuity with indigenous intellectuals of the past like Waman Puma.8

López Hernández begins his theological reflection by defining indigenous theology as “la rica sabiduría de los pueblos originarios del continente llamado ahora América. Esta sabiduría es fruto de milenios de búsqueda de las realidades divinas y espirituales, que los primeros pobladores llevaron a cabo en el pasado, y que actualmente sus descendientes mantenemos activa de manera autónoma o en vinculación con el Cristianismo” (Teología india 7). According to the Zapotec priest, “no existe una única Teología India, sino múltiples teologías indias, cada una caminando por senderos propios según el Espíritu le inspira y según las circunstancias históricas le permiten desarrollarse” (Teología india 7). One of the main problems of indigenous theology observed by López Hernández is the legitimacy of the use of the term “theology” in connection with Amerindian spiritual thought. The Church, on the one hand, does not take seriously

popular epistemological tools, which are not considered to be true theological knowledge. Indigenous intellectuals, on the other, have serious reservations about using categories of Western thought like theology itself to approach Amerindian intellectual production. López Hernández cannot help wondering whether some epistemological elements to initiate an intercultural and interreligious dialogue with the Christian world truly exist in indigenous spirituality and whether this dialogue is possible taking into account that, whereas Christianity has been making theology for a long time, this seems to be something rather new in the case of the indigenous peoples (Teología india 96).

López Hernández, in fact, underlines the phallacy of the idea that ancient Amerindian cultures lacked any conceptualizations of God. This is just a preconception, for a serious approach to the ancient sources and the present-day forms of indigenous spiritualities shows “el enorme sentido teológico de nuestros pueblos, que se desborda en una cantidad impresionante de producción teológica digna de las mejores bibliotecas. Lo que pasa es que, para los ojos miopes y la mente cerrada de un colonizador, los símbolos religiosos y el lenguaje ritual del pueblo resultan totalmente incomprensibles” (Teología india 97). The Zapotec missionary insists on the fact that, in the case of the Mesoamerican area, “en el pasado existían —y en la actualidad perviven de alguna manera— una teología [indígena] refinada y una teología [indígena] popular, que no estaban totalmente desvinculadas” (Teología india 98). A learned theology was produced by the priestly castes of the Maya and the Mexica, as can be appreciated, for instance, in the cryptical theological reading of history present in the books of Chilam Balam. The refined language of the priests, however, was unintelligible for the people. Therefore, a popular theology was also developed by the interpreters, who were in charge of
translating the undecipherable language of the priests for the common people (*Teología india* 97). It was learned indigenous theology —represented by the priests, wisemen, sacred texts and places— that was destroyed by the violence of the First Evangelization at the time of the conquest of Abya-Yala at the dawn of Modernity. Popular theology, however, could not possibly be wiped out due to the fact that the people “mantuvo sus esquemas teológicos en la intimidad personal o familiar, o en la clandestinidad de los cerros y de la noche, o los formuló poniéndolos a dialogar interculturalmente con los contenidos del cristianismo. Es lo que dio por resultado el fenómeno que ahora denominamos ‘religiosidad popular o religión del pueblo’” (*Teología india* 99).

One of the most important currents of indigenous theology today is therefore what López Hernández calls “Christian-Indigenous theology,” which is the fruit of the interweaving of Amerindian spiritualities with Christianity, and which, in López Hernández’s words, “se hace en el contexto de diálogo entre lo indígena y lo cristiano” (*Teología india* 50). Another current, however, is “Indigenous-Indigenous theology,” which is defined by López Hernández as “la que se hace sin intervención del elemento cristiano —algunos la llaman Teologías Originarias o puramente indígenas—” (*Teología india* 50). The conflict between the proponents of both currents are highlighted by the Zapotec priest, who openly admits that “a veces los representantes de estas dos vertientes tenemos dificultad en sentarnos a la misma mesa; pues los radicales nos tildan a los

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9 The Zapotec priest later explains that some Evangelical ministers not only are promoting the rescue of Amerindian religious texts but also the restoration of purely indigenous spiritualities without any outside influences (*Teología india* 107). This certainly involves “un proceso de descristianización de la religiosidad y expresión teológica de nuestros pueblos. Por eso ellos no hablan de Teología India, sino de Teologías Originarias” (*Teología india* 107). López Hernández, however, is not sure about the real possibilities of this theological discourse since “la idea entusiasma a varios, pero habría que ver si corresponde a procesos de las iglesias y de las comunidades o sólo es inquietud de algunas élites indígenas o cristianas” (*Teología india* 107).
cristianos como traidores a nuestras raíces o como colaboracionistas con el enemigo” (Teología india 50). The fact that López Hernández understands Christian-Indigenous theology in terms of a religious juxtaposition and superimposition and a theological synthesis is not without its problems. Actually, there is no juxtaposition but an intersection of Christian and indigenous religious symbols and practices. The indigenous subaltern subject may certainly choose to go to church or worship the ancient gods of the mountains as a result of her/his bireligious identity. It must be noted, however, that this bireligious subjectivity that allows her/him to select certain Christian or Amerindian religious practices is the fruit of a previous process of cultural hybridity, which, from a spiritual point of view, involves the inculturation of native and Christian spiritual elements. Only then can the indigenous subaltern subject choose freely which god to worship.

The concept of religious superimposition, on the other hand, is also quite problematic. According to López Hernández, “los mismos misioneros de antaño la promovieron mucho: más que arrasar y derribar los templos y las manifestaciones indígenas religiosas, lo que hicieron fue bautizarlos poniendo encima o en primer lugar alguna expresión marcadamente cristiana (un nuevo templo, una cruz o algún santo)” (Teología india 53). The religious fanaticism of most of the Catholic missionaries of the First Evangelization, however, shows how, in fact, what they had in mind was a substitution or replacement of indigenous spirituality with Christianity, which gave rise to a cultural and spiritual genocide. The strategy of resistance of the indigenous peoples, on the other hand, was not just “to cover” their ancient sacred places and symbols with Christian elements but to creatively carry out the complex process of interweaving of
native and Christian religious practices. The consequence of this inculturation phenomenon is understood by López Hernández in quite essentialist, reductionist and assimilationist terms as “síntesis novedosas de ambos aportes” (Teología india 55). The fact that “esta técnica de sustitución inauguró un tipo de inculturación indígena de la fe cristiana y de cristianización de la religión indígena, que no implicaba más cambios que poner en vez del símbolo indígena, un símbolo cristiano equivalente o parecido” (Teología india 55) shows how the Zapotec priest not only confuses the concepts of “inculturation” and “acculturation” but also simplifies too much the inherent fluidity, heterogeneity and complexity of transcultural processes.

López Hernández’s approach to a Christian-Indigenous theology is therefore full of serious theoretical and epistemological problems. The fact that utopian concepts like “juxtaposition” and “superimposition” are privileged in his reflection and that the inculturation of indigenous spirituality and Christianity is still understood in the assimilationist terms of synthesis and syncretism reveals an old-fashioned anthropological perspective that is quite weak from a theoretical point of view. In fact, juxtaposition and superimposition are not ends or results in themselves but just means or stages that result in the interweaving of religious beliefs. Cultural hybridity, however, is quite a complex and indefinite phenomenon. That is why a religious icon such as the Virgin of Guadalupe in Nican Mopohua cannot possibly stand for an idyllic

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10 Nican Mopohua is a seventeenth-century Mexica religious text written in Náhuatl that recounts the apparitions of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Tepeyac to Juan Diego, a humble indigenous peasant. “Nican Mopohua” (which can be translated as “here is told or narrated”) are the first two words in this account, whose author, according to printer Luis Lasso de la Vega, was Antonio Valeriano, a colonial Mexica scholar and politician who had also collaborated with Friar Bernardino de Sahagún in the twelve-volume work General History of the Things of New Spain. Nican Mopohua is thirty-six pages long and was first published in 1649. For an English-language translation and critical commentary on Nican Mopohua, see Guadalupe: Mother of the New Creation (1997), ed. Virgil Elizondo.
reconciliation and harmony, as is contended by López Hernández, but is the fruit of a fluid interweaving process of religious and socio-cultural phenomena, founded on asymmetrical power relations, that is full of traumatic connotations from an indigenous perspective.\footnote{This is the thesis on the emergence of the Virgin of Guadalupe as a religious icon offered by Mexican filmmaker Gabriel Retes in his excellent film Nuevo Mundo (1976).}

Although López Hernández points out that Christian-Indigenous theology certainly involves “una reformulación del pasado indígena en el ámbito del Cristianismo” \cite{Teologia_India_107}, the whole process of inculturation is still conceived by him in quite essentialist and idealized terms of reconciliation and synthesis. This can be especially appreciated in his observation in connection with Christian-Indigenous theology that “esto está concebido como parte de la lucha por reconciliar los dos amores mediante una nueva síntesis vital de formas distintas de Dios y de expresiones religiosas” \cite{Teologia_India_107}. The fact that “pero su principal riesgo [el de la Teología India Cristiana] es que, en el diálogo, pierda fuerza la parte indígena al quedar nuevamente atrapada en la lógica del mundo cristiano” \cite{Teologia_India_107} is quite paradoxical, for it is precisely the indigenous element in López Hernández’s theological reflection that is assimilated and eclipsed by Christianity when the inculturation phenomenon is understood by him as a theological synthesis.

The historical stages of indigenous theology and the theological plurality that the “indigenous theology” category stands for are also highlighted by López Hernández. As for the historical development of indigenous theology, the Zapotec missionary distinguishes three stages: pre-Conquest, Conquest and contemporary. The pre-Conquest
stage is defined by López Hernández as the period when the indigenous peoples “podían elaborar por sí mismos, sin interferencias transcontinentales, los contenidos y formas de expresión de su fe. Es lo que se podría llamar Teología Originaria u original” (Teología india 104). The Conquest stage, however, refers to the five hundred years “en que la teología originaria fue agredida y se convirtió en resistencia o diálogo obligado. Es propiamente la Teología India que se refugió en las montañas, se enmascaró de cristianismo, se reformuló en los espacios disponibles o se hizo clandestina” (Teología india 104). The contemporary phase, on the other hand, shows how nowadays “la Teología de nuestros pueblos sale de las cuevas y se convierte en propuesta de vida para los demás. Es el momento en que hay condiciones nuevas para el diálogo enriquecedor, porque el mundo vuelve la mirada a los indígenas como reserva de humanidad, donde pueden refotanarse las sociedades y las iglesias” (Teología india 104).

The Zapotec priest also reminds us that “la pluralidad teológica es producto de la multiplicidad de pueblos indígenas históricamente diversos” (Teología india 104). This means that, according to López Hernández, there are as many differentiated theologies as indigenous peoples but “sólo en apariencia, ya que se dan también ejes comunes de pensamiento y de elaboración teológica, que conducen a formar grandes bloques de cultura afines” (Teología india 104). The concept of “cultural block,” however, is not without its problems. This is due to the fact that different kinds of indigenous theologies exist within each block (Mesoamerican, Caribbean, Andean, Amazonian, Southern cone, etc.), something that is eclipsed by López Hernández’s conception of “cultural block” in quite globalizing, synthetic and homogeneous terms. Within the Mesoamerican block, for instance, Maya theology is not the same as Zapotec or Mexica theology although they
may have many points in common. This is also the case with Aymara and Quechua theology within the Andean cultural block. Some indigenous peoples, on the other hand, have developed various theological reflections according to their geographical area. This is especially the case with the Maya. There is not just one but various Maya theologies today such as those articulated in Yucatec, Tzeltal, Tzotzil and Quiché Maya communities, for instance.\(^{12}\)

López Hernández also pays attention to the subject of indigenous theological reflection. If this has no specific subject and is the product of the people, then we have a popular indigenous theology identified with “popular religious culture” (Teología india 106). The situation is different, however, “cuando las comunidades están organizadas y hacen reflexión de fe, entonces producen una teología más determinada. Es la Teología India comunitaria” (Teología india 106). This is the most common indigenous theological discourse today since indigenous theology is first and foremost a collective and ecumenical reflection.\(^{13}\) López Hernández, however, also underlines the theological agency of indigenous religious leaders. Those who are illiterate produce an indigenous theology intended to guide and orient their communities, which is called by López Hernández “teología india de consumo interno” (Teología india 106). Only literate indigenous leaders, however, can produce a theological reflection that will be received by

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\(^{12}\) For a characterization, articulation and theorization of the various Maya theologies, see the collective volume Teología India Mayense: Memorias, Experiencias y Reflexiones de Encuentros Teológicos Regionales (1993).

\(^{13}\) It is significant to note that, in spite of his key role in the reemergence of indigenous theology in the Church through the regional and Latin American encounters organized by CENAMI (National Missionary Center), López Hernández does not see himself as the father of indigenous theology. According to the Zapotec priest, “este involucramiento amplio ha llevado a que algunos me identifiquen como padre de la teología india. Lo cual no corresponde a la realidad, pues la Teología India es patrimonio de nuestros pueblos, y quienes recientemente la hemos llevado al interior de la Iglesia y en las ágoras actuales no somos más que portadores o voceros de esta teología” (Teología india 24).
theological and scholarly circles outside the community, that is, “producen Teología India de exportación para el mercado externo” (Teología india 106). As will be mentioned below in connection with Giulio Girardi’s thinking, it is this form of indigenous theological reflection, which moves in the sphere of professional and systematic theology, that must be promoted and empowered in the next few years if indigenous theology wants to be taken seriously by theologians and scholars worldwide.

This is closely connected with López Hernández’s observation that “también hay una tendencia a elaborar Teología India a partir del impulso o estímulo de la Teología de la Liberación. Esto es reciente y apenas está encontrando mecanismos adecuados de diálogo, apoyo e intercambio metodológico” (Teología india 106).¹⁴ It is precisely the scholarly dimension of indigenous theology as a result of the theological reflection of individual indigenous theologians in connection with liberation theology that urgently needs to develop a consistent methodology in order to be systematized. The methodology of liberation theology, on the other hand, is also the foundation for the communitarian, collective and ecumenical reflection of indigenous theology that is being articulated in most basic church communities and pastoral agencies at a continental level. Therefore, according to López Hernández, “en ese sentido se puede hablar de Teologías Indias de Liberación” (Teología india 106).

The Zapotec missionary also calls our attention to the risks and challenges of indigenous theologies. Some of its main risks are: To evade reality and to believe that this

¹⁴ López Hernández also clarifies that “con los esquemas anteriores era difícil reconocer el valor de la cultura para la liberación. Ahora hay otras condiciones y la Asociación Ecuménica de Teólogos del Tercer Mundo está incorporando en su seno a interlocutores indios y está animando algunos procesos teológicos de las comunidades andinas” (Teología india 106).
cannot possibly be transformed; to sacralize the subject of reflection in a ghetto or island disconnected from the other peoples or sectors of the poor people; to propitiate a certain messianism that makes the subject of reflection believe that she/he is the chosen one to save all the other peoples; to carry out a fundamentalist and fossilized reading of indigenous sacred texts that forgets that we are no longer in the past; to disintegrate when being expressed in a non-symbolic language and entering into a dialogue with Western theologies; and to become ideologized, either from an indigenous or Christian point of view, when their sources are used for purposes other than the original (Teología india 109-10). On the other hand, some of the main challenges of indigenous theologies for López Hernández are: To enter into a productive dialogue with Modernity that not only allows the indigenous peoples to avoid being absorbed by it but also to take advantage of its advances; to learn how to handle non-symbolic and scientific language in order to establish an intercultural and interreligious dialogue with the Western world; and to reconcile them with the church in the case of all those who, like López Hernández, practice and support indigenous theologies but also belong to the Catholic or protestant churches, the church being not so much a limit but the foundation of their actions (Teología india 110-12).

López Hernández’s theological reflection is therefore a valuable contribution to the articulation of an indigenous theology in Latin America today from the perspective of the subaltern subject himself, who does not renounce to be self-critical. Its greatest problem, however, is the lack of a solid theoretical and epistemological basis. This must be founded on the theories of transculturation, cultural hybridity and heterogeneity, which, without forgetting their respective correctives, must be in dialogical projection
with those of interculturality and interreligious dialogue. Only in this way can López Hernández’s theological discourse overcome an old-fashioned anthropological approach based on problematic notions such as “synthesis,” “juxtaposition” or “superimposition,” which are full of assimilationist connotations that eclipse the precious contributions of indigenous spiritualities. Another problem with López Hernández’s theological discourse is that, instead of just providing a classification and historical development of indigenous theology and becoming the “spokesman” of the popular indigenous community understood as a theological subject, it must also be articulated from a scholarly and systematic perspective represented by the professional theologian or pastoral agent as an alternative theological subject. The greatest challenge for indigenous theology in the future is therefore to reach a balance and coexistence between its communitarian and academic dimension.

Giulio Girardi is the most important exponent of the nativist stage in the articulation of an indigenous theology of liberation in Latin America. He is also the only theologian who has developed a truly systematic approach to indigenous theology. The starting point of his reflection is the “500 years of Indigenous and Popular Resistance” Campaign, which was first organized by several indigenous and peasant associations of the Andean and Amazonian regions in 1987 and 1988, and formally launched at a continental level in 1989. The aim of the Campaign was to question, from the point of

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15 Girardi underlines the crucial role played by the regional encounter that took place in Quito (Ecuador), 7-12 October 1987, “donde organizaciones indígenas y campesinas de la región andina (Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Colombia) realizaron un Intercambio de experiencias en Educación y Comunicación popular, a partir del cual siguieron reuniéndose periódicamente” (Los excluidos 35). The indigenous communities of the countries of the Amazon Basin, which were also present in this first encounter, “abrieron espacios de reflexión común sobre la problemática ecológica, socioeconómica y política de la región, y creaban la COICA (Coordinación Indígena de la Cuenca Amazónica)” (Girardi, Los excluidos 35). The problem of the celebration of the V Centenary of the European conquest of Abya-Yala made the indigenous and peasant
view of the Amerindian peoples, the official celebrations of the V Centennary of the conquest of America organized by Spain, the USA, Italy and the Vatican among other countries. It was at the II Continental Encounter of the Campaign, which was held in the city of Xelajú (Quetzaltenango, Guatemala), that the Campaign became “500 years of indigenous, black and popular resistance.”

The main contribution of the III Continental Encounter, which took place in Managua (Nicaragua), 6-12 October 1992, was the decision to transform the campaign into the “continental indigenous, black and popular movement” with its motto “united in difference.”

According to Girardi, the indigenous, black and popular movement has an eminently social, political and economic basis but is also endowed with a significant religious dimension represented by the Asamblea del Pueblo de Dios. This is a Christian movement identified with indigenous, black and popular resistance that emerged in the midst of the debate surrounding the V Centennary. The Asamblea is therefore a base movement that not only involves base Christians but also followers of other religions. Its organizations present at the Andean encounter call a new Latin American Encounter in 1989. The Brazilian organization MST (Movement Without Land) also joined them in January 1989. The event, called “Encuentro Latinoamericano de Organizaciones Campesinas Indígenas,” took place in Bogotá, 7-12 October 1989, with the participation of about thirty organizations from seventeen countries. The “500 years of Indigenous and Popular Resistance” Campaign was officially launched and organized there (Los excluidos 35-36).

16 Girardi calls attention to the fact that “a partir de este encuentro, la campaña se enriquece con una referencia específica a la participación de los negros o afroamericanos” (Los excluidos 37). It was also at this encounter that “se presenta como candidata al Premio Nobel de la Paz en 1992 a Rigoberta Menchú” (Girardi, Los excluidos 37).

17 Girardi notes that the reason why Managua was chosen as the host was “un cierto reconocimiento a la revolución popular sandinista y a sus conquistas. En Nicaragua, los pueblos indígenas de la Costa Atlántica han conseguido un estatuto de autonomía, reconocido por la Constitución, y actualmente amenazado por la política neoliberal del gobierno. Esta lucha es una referencia importante para todos los pueblos indígenas y negros del continente” (Los excluidos 37).

18 Girardi points out that “nació así, por iniciativa de grupos cristianos de Ecuador, el movimiento continental ‘Asamblea del Pueblo de Dios’, que se difundió rápidamente en 20 países de América Latina y el Caribe, celebrando en muchos de ellos encuentros ecuménicos nacionales” (Los excluidos 220). The first national encounter of the Asamblea was held in Nicaragua, 30-31 July 1992, and its First Continental Encounter took place in Quito (Ecuador), 14-18 September 1992.
members “se inspiran en la teología de la liberación, ponen en el centro de su compromiso la opción por el pueblo oprimido como sujeto y están dispuestos a sacar todas sus consecuencias, prácticas y teóricas” (Girardi, Los excluidos 221). Girardi also clarifies that “en el centro de su primer encuentro continental (Quito, 14-18 de septiembre de 1993), de sus debates, búsquedas y tensiones, estuvo el ‘macroecumenismo’: una palabra nueva, se dijo, para expresar una realidad y una conciencia nueva” (Los excluidos 219).

“Macroeucumenism” is defined by Girardi as a development of “popular ecumenism,” which is practiced in Christian base communities and is the expression of the People of God as opposed to the “institutional ecumenism” of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The emergence of macroecumenism, which is closely connected with the problem of the V Centennary, is the fruit of the option of the popular ecumenical movement on behalf of indigenous, black and popular resistance (Girardi, Los excluidos 221-23). It is significant to note, however, that macroecumenism is not “una opción coyuntural, vinculada a las contracelebraciones, sino histórica, de compromiso en una movilización continental que pretende invertir el rumbo impuesto a la historia, a lo largo de 500 años, por las conquistas y colonizaciones” (Girardi, Los excluidos 223-24).

Macroeucumenism is also an eminently lay movement. Hence why “los encuentros del movimiento, inclusive el continental, son ‘autoconvocados’ por el mismo pueblo. De aquí el nombre ‘Asamblea del Pueblo de Dios,’ que en un principio fue pensado como alternativa a la cumbre episcopal de Santo Domingo” (Los excluidos 224). One of the

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19 Girardi clarifies that “los obispos tuvieron que aceptar [en Santo Domingo] una rigurosa dependencia del papa y de las autoridades romanas delegadas a representarlos (quienes actuaron como un ejército de ocupación), sacrificando la autonomía que les correspondía como referencia episcopal latinoamericana; la
key principles of the *Asamblea* is to promote an “inculturated evangelization” as an alternative to the violence of the First Evangelization at the time of the Conquest. It is precisely the reformulation of the Christian teachings, whose message must be extracted from the Greek and Roman categories and cultural forms in which it was historically conveyed, into the cultural coordinates of the various indigenous and black cultures that “inspira justamente los intentos recientes de teología india o negra; de lectura india o negra de la Biblia” (Girardi, *Los excluidos* 226). The theological aim of the *Asamblea* is therefore the articulation of various indigenous and black theologies of liberation in Latin America.

Using Eleazar López Hernández’s distinction between an “Indigenous-Indigenous theology” and a “Christian-Indigenous theology,” which has been discussed above, the second stage of Girardi’s reflection theorizes indigenous theological agency, that is, the role of Amerindians as theological subjects who produce their own theological discourses as a result of the promotion of indigenous theological reflection in Latin America by the *Asamblea del Pueblo de Dios*. The key question for Girardi is whether the indigenous peoples as a community can be theological subjects or not taking into account that indigenous theological reflection can take the forms of “Indigenous-Indigenous theology” or “Christian-Indigenous theology.” Both theological discourses can certainly be

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*APD pudo actuar en larga medida como expresión autónoma de los pueblos oprimidos del continente* (*Los excluidos* 228). This means that, whereas the bishops had to celebrate and legitimate the First Evangelization disguised as a “new evangelization,” the APD radically questioned that concept of evangelization on behalf of a new evangelization founded on the agency of the indigenous and African Latin American peoples. Moreover, the APD even admitted, though still shily, the right of Amerindians and African Latin Americans to be disevangelized (Girardi, *Los excluidos* 228). The consequence of this was that in Santo Domingo, “los obispos tuvieron que distanciarse de la campaña 500 años de resistencia, por cuanto ella denuncia el papel de la evangelización coercitiva en el sometimiento del continente y considera la teología de la cristiandad como parte de la ideología colonialista y violenta del occidente cristiano” (Girardi, *Los excluidos* 228).
produced by Amerindian or non-Amerindian priests, pastoral agents and intellectuals, that is, without the participation of the community. But can they be the common work of the community and of its organic intellectuals? According to Girardi, “el surgimiento de los pueblos indios como sujetos de la teología se produce cuando ellos toman conciencia de su derecho y de su capacidad de autodeterminación y se rebelan a las imposiciones culturales y religiosas” (Desde su propia palabra 15). Indigenous socio-political activism is therefore an essential element of indigenous theology. It is only then that the community can become an active part of the articulation of an Indigenous-Indigenous theology or a Christian-Indigenous theology. For Girardi, this collective and ecumenical theological reflection is much more precious and valuable than “la reflexión sobre la experiencia o más específicamente [a] la obra de sistematización de la experiencia y por tanto [a] la producción teológica científica” (Desde su propia palabra 15). Hence why “es en este segundo caso donde los pueblos indios se afirman plenamente como sujetos de teología” (Girardi, Desde su propia palabra 15).

Another interesting point is the connection between Christian-Indigenous theology, which favors the inculturation of all forms of native spirituality with Christianity, and liberation theology, which is discussed by Girardi in the following terms:

Parece importante, para caracterizar la teología india-cristiana su relación con la teología de la liberación. Teóricamente, la teología india-cristiana podría mantenerse en una óptica espiritualista, prescindiendo de la liberación política y económica y desarrollando una ideología del sometimiento y la resignación. Pero de hecho, la exigencia de rescatar las culturas y religiones originarias se está desarrollando en una profunda interacción con la lucha por la autodeterminación política, económica y ecológica. La teología india-cristiana así entendida es la que aborda el
Christian-Indigenous theology, which is still the most common native theological discourse in Latin America today, is therefore “una teología india de la liberación: donde el creyente comprometido con la lucha de liberación india reflexiona sobre el conjunto de los problemas” (Desde su propia palabra 76). For Girardi, this means that it cannot be limited to the indigenous sector since it also has a global dimension. That is why Girardi concludes that it is necessary to value it “no sólo como aporte a la liberación de los pueblos indios sino a la liberación de la humanidad” (Desde su propia palabra 76).

Brilliant and original, Girardi’s discussion of indigenous theology still poses some problems and crucial challenges for the future. The first one, admitted by Girardi himself, is the contradiction between the theory of the notion of “macroecumenism” and the practice of the Asamblea. There is still a lack of indigenous agency in the organization of its encounters. This results in a Christiancentric and Westernized perspective, which is certainly quite problematic. Ecumenism, on the other hand, only takes place between the Christian churches and although the concept of “macroecumenism” is privileged by the Asamblea, the Asamblea still wants to evangelize Native Americans in practice. Another problem is how to coordinate on a continental and international scale the indigenous, black and popular movement that is the foundation of indigenous theology, especially from the point of view of its eminently ethical-political dimension as a new world liberation front that even incorporates the subaltern sectors of the countries of the center. This is still more important if we take into consideration Girardi’s characterization of the movement in terms of the North-South dialectics as a popular block of the South vis-à-vis
the imperial block of the North. The international ethical-political basis, organization and projection of the movement is therefore one of its most important challenges.

From a strictly theological point of view, the main challenge is that the various forms of indigenous and black theologies truly respect one another in practice. The inculturation of indigenous spirituality and Christianity certainly plays a key role but originary indigenous and black spiritualities must be respected as well. Only in this way, can we have a truly macroecumenical indigenous and black theological reflection, which, following Girardi, must be founded on the method of liberation theology. The idea is that there is not one but many indigenous and black theologies and that they must all respect one another on an equal basis. In this sense, one of the greatest challenges is to avoid the eclipse of indigenous and black religions by Christianity within the frame of articulation and reflection of indigenous and black theology. A serious danger is the fact that inculturation may become assimilation in practice, and therefore, that an inculturated indigenous theology may end up eclipsing its non-Christian spiritual elements or even a non-Christian indigenous theology. This was precisely one of the problems criticized by some Amerindian sectors of the Asamblea del Pueblo de Dios.

One of the main flaws of Girardi’s theorization of indigenous theology is that, as is the case with López Hernández, its most common reflection, Christian-Indigenous theology, is always perceived in terms of a synthesis. This is deeply problematic due to the assimilationist, totalizing and homogenizing connotations involved, which contribute to empower the eclipse of indigenous spirituality with Christianity that has been mentioned above. This is also closely connected with the idea of reaching unity through difference, which is so important in macroecumenism. If the concept of macroecumenism
is not to become a mere theoretical construct full of assimilationist echoes and devoid of a praxical dimension based on intercultural and interreligious dialogue, we must pay attention to the option for the oppressed people as a historical subject, which is highlighted by Girardi himself. The consistent use of this option is the key for the notion of macroecumenism to be successful in practice.

On the other hand, Girardi’s too straightforward dismissal of a systematic approach to indigenous and black theologies as a result of their inherently communitarian and collective nature is also quite questionable, especially if we take into consideration the systematic nature of Girardi’s own theological reflection. A systematization is necessary for indigenous and black theologies to have a solid theoretical and epistemological foundation that allows them to continue to develop as theological discourses in the future, especially from a theological and scholarly perspective, which can coexist with its eminently communitarian, ecumenical and praxical dimension. The intrinsic heterogeneity of indigenous theology also suggests the need to theorize in depth specific indigenous theological discourses like, for instance, a Maya, Zapotec, Mapuche, Guaraní, Aymara or Kuna indigenous theology or else indigenous theology will run the risk of becoming a fossilized, homogeneous and abstract category devoid of concreteness and specificity, which is what sometimes happens in Girardi’s reflection. The plurality and diversity of indigenous theology is therefore another reason why not one but many systematizations are needed besides its various collective and ecumenical articulations at a popular level. Girardi’s theological reflection is therefore a possible systematic approach to indigenous theology but certainly one that does not explore its heterogeneity as a theological discourse through the critical analysis of its various epistemologies.
The case of the African Latin American theologies of liberation is different from that of the indigenous theologies. Unlike the latter, black intellectual and theological agency played a crucial role from the beginnings of an African Latin American theological reflection, as can be appreciated in the early works of African Brazilian theologians Antonio Aparecido da Silva and Marcos Rodrigues da Silva. African Latin American theological agency was therefore always present from the start. On the other hand, other Brazilian theologians of European American origin like José Óscar Beozzo and João Evangelista Martins Terra also made significant contributions to the consolidation of an African Latin American theological discourse in the 1980s. A

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20 Antonio Aparecido da Silva (1948-2009) was an African Brazilian theologian, a professor of theology in São Paulo and an assistant to the African Brazilian and African Latin American pastoral. He was also president of the “Atabaque: Black Culture and Theology” association. Known as Padre Toninho, Aparecido da Silva is unanimously considered to be one of the main theoreticians of an African Latin American liberation theology. Another of his great contributions to the Catholic Church was the foundation of a Black Pastoral. His main legacy, however, is not only the articulation of a black theology of liberation for Latin America but also his social compromise with the cause of the poor and his fight against racial discrimination and all forms of religious and social exclusion. Some of Aparecido da Silva’s early works are his book *Comunidade negra. Interpelações à vida religiosa* (1988) and his article “Vida religiosa. Nova evangelização e povo negro” (1988); Marcos Rodrigues da Silva is an African Brazilian theologian and professor of theology who teaches at the Educational Association of the Itajaí-Mirim Valley (UNIASSELVI/ASSEVIM), Brusque, Santa Catarina, Brazil. He is also the coordinator of the Black Theology and Culture for Latin America Work Group. Rodrigues da Silva is one of the main proponents of a Latin American black theology of liberation. His pioneering work *Teología Afro-Latinoamericana (Primer Ensayo Ecuménico para una Teología Negra de la Liberación)* (1990) is the first systematic approach to an African Latin American liberation theology.

21 José Óscar Beozzo is a Brazilian priest and theologian who is well known for his studies on the history of the Church in Latin America in connection with black slavery and on African Brazilian culture from an ecumenical perspective; João Evangelista Martins Terra (born on March 7, 1925) is a Jesuit priest, Catholic bishop and emeritus auxiliary bishop in Brasília who is interested in exploring the relationship between black culture in Latin America and the Catholic Church. According to *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African & African American Experience* (2005), Chilean liberation theologian Pablo Richard showed in a 1988 essay how a black theology of liberation was getting consolidated in Latin America in the late 80s. Richard identified five Latin American black theologians during those years: Laennec Hurbon (Dominican Republic), Quince Duncan (Costa Rica), Antonio Aparecido da Silva (Brazil), René Castellanos (Cuba) and Agustín Sambola (Nicaragua) (534). *Africana* also mentions that Richard’s essay notes the importance of the Ecumenical Center for Services to Evangelization and Popular Education, “an institution in São Paulo, Brazil, where the young black theologian Marcos Rodrigues da Silva was working at the time” (534). *Africana* also underlines that “also during the 1980s, Brazilian theologian José Óscar Beozzo was conducting the most thorough theoretical and historical research done on the subject until that time. Thus, by the end of the period of consolidation, the groundwork was in place for a full-fledged black
turning point in the emergence of an African Latin American theological reflection was undoubtedly Marcos Rodrigues da Silva’s M.A. thesis *Teología Afro-Latinoamericana* (*Primer Ensayo Ecuménico para una Teología Negra de la Liberación*), published as a book in Spanish by Ediciones Afro-América (Centro Cultural Afro-Ecuatoriano) in Quito. This work presents the first consistent, coherent and systematized articulation of an African Latin American theology of liberation from a theoretical and epistemological point of view as early as 1990. It is from the late 90s and the early years of the twenty-first century, however, that the most important works on African Latin American liberation theology will be published in Brazil.  

Rodrigues da Silva’s black theology of liberation is founded on the liberating experience of the *Unión y Conciencia Negra* (Black Union and Consciousness) and *Agentes de Pastoral Negros* (Black Pastoral Agents) groups, which emerged in São Paulo in 1980 and 1983 respectively. Both groups were born as a result of a critical reflection

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23 Rodrigues da Silva observes that the origin of *Unión y Conciencia Negra* “está vinculado directamente con la preparación a la Conferencia de Puebla. De hecho, es por una necesidad exigida a la Iglesia de Brasil de presentar un análisis sobre la situación vivida por los afro-brasileños que un grupo de estudiosos (sociólogos, antropólogos, teólogos, pastoralistas y agentes de pastoral) se reunieron en São Paulo” (48). The event, which was called *Encuentro de Agentes de Pastoral Negros* (Encounter for Black Pastoral
on the social, political and economic situation of the black population in Brazil. According to Rodrigues da Silva, “el negro es el más empobrecido. . . . En el campo eclesial, su situación se presenta entre dos realidades: ser la mayoría y estar ausentes de poder” (73). The situation is pretty much the same in the sphere of theological reflection. “Official theology” does not recognize the otherness of the African Brazilian subaltern subject since “a la luz de una lectura dogmática y a partir de Europa, se resalta una vision universal del cristianismo que justifica una única acción, preestablecida por la jerarquía de la Iglesia” (Rodrigues da Silva 73). These valuable insights were developed in the first encounters of the Agentes de Pastoral Negros and Unión y Conciencia Negra groups.24

It was in the mid 80s, however, that the theological thought of the African Brazilian movement was radically changed as a result of the influence of Latin American liberation theology. This recognized African Brazilian culture “dentro de un análisis

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24 Rodrigues da Silva points out that “el nacimiento del Grupo Unión y Conciencia Negra, en 1981, proporcionó a la vida pastoral de la Iglesia del Brasil elementos importantes para un nuevo punto de partida eclesial desde el pueblo afro-brasileño” (59). Among the issues debated were the new sense given to eucharistic celebrations, the memory of African Latin American martyrs and saints, the recovery of African music and gestures and the discussion on the meaning and identity of the black priest in pastoral work (Rodrigues da Silva 59). As for the Agentes de Pastoral Negros group, Rodrigues da Silva notes that “exactamente reflexionando sobre la negritud en la Iglesia surge un nuevo proceso que acompaña al vivido por el Grupo Unión y Conciencia Negra. Aquí el negro cristiano asume en su trabajo eclesial la llamada, asumiéndose e identificándose con su negritud y vivencia de fe. Se inicia una nueva etapa de asumirse como negro y cristiano” (61-62). The African Brazilian theologian also explains in connection with the evolution of this second group that “con la necesidad de reflexionar a partir de las experiencias de las comunidades eclesiales de base, donde está presente el negro, el debate toma proporciones que traen a la Iglesia nuevos tiempos y nuevas acciones de liberación a la luz de temas reflexionados y asumidos en Medellín y en Puebla” (62).
estructural y político. Es una cultura explotada, sin embargo, elemento fundamental para el proceso de liberación en la sociedad latinoamericana” (Rodrigues da Silva 73). It was liberation theologians that understood the so-called *Ser Negro* (Being Black)\(^\text{25}\) as the capacity to transform society. Therefore, the great novelty was the emergence of the agency of the African Brazilian subaltern subject, which not only took place from a socio-political but also from a theological point of view. This means that a black theology of liberation had been born at last: “Esto nos desafía a pensar una nueva eclesiología y una nueva reflexión teológica que contemplen al hombre y a la mujer negra, respetando lo específico del Ser Negro” (Rodrigues da Silva 74).

According to Rodrigues da Silva, an African Latin American liberation theology must be based on the identification of the theologian with the black poor people whose faith “nace en la periferia, porque su forma de invocar al Dios de la creación y de sus antepasados tuvieron que ser camuflados ante el lenguaje oficial de la Iglesia” (98). The liberating praxis is the point of connection between the theologian and the black people. This means that the black Christian’s commitment must be based on his actions in the church community, “donde deberá dar testimonio del Ser Negro junto a una sociedad estructuralmente pobre y racista. Por lo tanto, el testimonio se da en el contexto histórico y real en el que vive la comunidad negra y cristiana” (Rodrigues da Silva 98). The theologian, on the other hand, must carry out “una lectura de la práctica teologal de las manifestaciones de fe cristiana del pueblo negro y del Ser Negro” (Rodrigues da Silva 98). An epistemological rupture also takes place from a social and ideological point of view due to the fact that the black people have their own way of acting and thinking.

\(^{25}\) As will be discussed later, this term is used by Rodrigues da Silva and other African Brazilian theologians in order to refer to black socio-political and theological agency.
within their personal and collective categories. It is the theologian that plays a key role to
detect those elements, which will be applied to the socio-economic and cultural context in
the light of faith:

Será también su tarea [la del teólogo] contribuir con un nuevo tipo de
comprensión de la fe, que enseñe la unidad, el conocimiento y la
transformación, a partir de la práctica y de la teoría reflexionada por los
afroamericanos. Sin duda, el Evangelio será la clave tradicional auténtica
del lenguaje y la actitud de fe del Ser Negro.

La Teología de la Liberación afroamericana es una reflexión teológica que
busca una aproximación con la práctica histórica salvífica de la comunidad
negra cristiana y no-cristiana. Consecuentemente, la acción, el
compromiso, comprensión de fe, vida de fraternidad del Ser Negro deberá
crear un nuevo tipo de actitud en la sociedad y en la Iglesia. (Rodrigues da
Silva 99)

A Latin American black theology of liberation is therefore the fruit of the
interweaving of the oral traditions of African American spirituality with the Christian
Bible. This means that the construction of Being Black, whose goal is the integral
liberation of the African Latin American subaltern subject, must be founded on the
inculturation phenomenon:

Aplicar el evangelio como luz y diálogo de las culturas. Se trata de
ennegrecer la vida eclesial: en sus pronunciamientos, gestos,
celebraciones, actitudes, representatividad del cuerpo eclesiástico, etc. Es
necesario que la Iglesia, el teólogo, el agente de pastoral, dé fe en su
estado de aculturación o comodidad y se encarne en el espíritu del desafío
evangelico. Lo que implica asumir completamente la realidad socio-
cultural y el proyecto socio-económico-político de los empobrecidos. El
punto de referencia de nuestra opción es la vida del Ser Negro en las
comunidades afro-brasileñas. Particularmente, a la luz de los Grupos
Unión y Conciencia Negra, y Agentes de Pastoral Negros. Según
especificamos en el Capítulo I, la prioridad es el afro-brasileño.
(Rodrigues da Silva 105)
A black theology of liberation must therefore deny *Ser Moreno* (Being Dark) so that *Ser Negro* (Being Black) can be born. As is noted by Rodrigues da Silva, this certainly involves a rejection of the evangelizing method of the First Evangelization of Abya-Yala, which always supported the history of antiblack racism (105). The African Brazilian theologian also calls attention to the epistemological rupture between the concepts of *Ser Moreno* and *Ser Negro* as far as the key issue of socio-political and theological agency is concerned. According to Rodrigues da Silva, common language understands *Moreno* as “características que dan énfasis al color de la piel y a la pasividad de la persona de color ante el dominio de la sociedad blanca” (106, n. 10). The term *Ser Negro*, however, “quiere caracterizar la lucha contra toda actitud de discriminación y violencia a la dignidad humana, es la forma de llamar a la comunidad afro para que se organice en un proyecto de liberación” (Rodrigues da Silva 106, n. 10). It is only through the socio-political and theological activism of *Ser Negro* that the African Latin American subaltern subject can overcome what Rodrigues da Silva calls *ideología del blanqueamiento* (ideology of whitening), that is, the domination and imposition of European American culture upon Latin America’s black populations. *Ser Negro* therefore represents the active vindication and revaluing of all African Latin American cultures.

One cannot help but agree with Rodrigues da Silva’s observation that “el término ‘moreno’ deja ver claro el sentimiento racista presente en las relaciones sociales, donde no se reconoce al negro como persona con dignidad humana: es puramente color. Por tanto, es aislarlo, descaracterizarlo, destruir el Ser Negro” (107).

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26 Rodrigues da Silva further clarifies that “el adjetivo ‘moreno’ se antepone al Ser Negro; hace parte del ‘juego’ racista que focaliza al afro-brasileño en su individualidad. De esta manera, lo separa del contexto.
The great challenge for the articulation of an African Latin American theology of liberation is that the Being Black ideology can overcome traditionally antiblack negative elements in Latin American societies such as not being, not having, not being able to and not knowing how. Only in this way can a social and structural change take place and not just a change of discourse. Black being, having, power and knowledge must also be present in the field of theological reflection carried out by black theologians and base ecclesial communities (Rodrigues da Silva 108). The consequence of this process is that the socio-political agency of Black Being brings with it black theological and liturgical agency. As is the case with indigenous theology, African Latin American theological agency has a fundamentally communitarian, collective and ecumenical basis, which is represented by the base ecclesial movement. Individual theological agency from a more professional and scholarly perspective, however, is also present through the first attempts at systematization carried out by black theologians like Rodrigues da Silva himself. This individual theological reflection involves the cultural phenomenon known as

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Se acomoda socio-culturalmente. El ‘moreno’ no puede actuar a no ser que acepte las condiciones establecidas por sus interlocutores, la sociedad blanca racista” (107).

Rodrigues da Silva reminds us that “las CEBs para el pueblo afro-americano son el vehículo de comunicación y vivencia de sus historias, tradiciones y espiritualidad. El encuentro del grupo para reflexionar sus momentos fuertes será ocasión de profunda oración, conversación y proyectos. Es el lugar donde el negro comienza a conocerse como negro y pueblo” (109). This means that “la conscientización de estado en el que vivieron sus antepasados y su situación actual es el paso de liberación. Como perspectiva para el futuro, se señalarán proyectos de transformación, que respetan el caminar de la comunidad negra” (109). New themes are also discussed as a result of the study of the Bible in basic church communities: The African Latin American family in the light of the Old and New Testament; the articulation of a Christology from the African Latin American family; the presence and action of black women; and how to keep a traditional relationship with the ancestors in the light of the people of God in the Bible (Rodrigues da Silva 109). The key issue is therefore that “en el cambio de lugar eclesial (de oyente a participante) nacen nuevos elementos para ser expresados y vividos. Tal vez el más significativo sea la respuesta de fe transmitida en el medio popular, como lo afirmaba Puebla. Otro elemento importante es el descubrimiento, por parte del pueblo, en su carácter y fuerza de renovarse en la historia” (Rodrigues da Silva 109).
Ennegrecimiento (blackening), which is characterized by Rodrigues da Silva in the following terms:

El ennegrecimiento es una actitud de escucha, respeto y sistematización de la vida de la comunidad. El teólogo ennegrecido asume, en esta nueva elaboración eclesiológica-teológica, el testimonio de la comunidad negra; se compromete en las luchas de los movimientos populares y de resistencia por el rescate de su propia historia afro. Otra actitud importante es la presencia y el uso de la Biblia como herramienta capaz de alentar la fuerza motivadora de la comunidad negra.

El negro, al hacer una lectura desde la perspectiva liberadora bíblica se siente animado para seguir su camino de liberación, hoy, en la comunidad eclesial. Y, en ese compromiso es más claro asumir la lucha por una Iglesia con rostro negro y pobre. (113)

As has been noted by African Brazilian theologian Antonio Aparecido da Silva, a new encounter between Being Black and God has been born in Latin America, and therefore, a new spirituality with different tendencies. It is not an encounter with the white God of the theology of Christianity and slavery but with a God that became black.

The African Latin American people is today God’s concrete mediation of social and historical-salvific transformation so that the construction of the Kingdom can begin here and now (Aparecido da Silva, “Espiritualidade” 28). The black people is therefore “expresión de todos los marginados” (Aparecido da Silva, “Espiritualidade” 28) and its spirituality is “ternura, danza con expresión corporal, símbolos, pero todo un fuerte grito negro que se despierta con vigor para transformar los cimientos del mundo” (Aparecido da Silva, “Espiritualidade” 28). Hence why Rodrigues da Silva insists on the key idea of the African Brazilian black face of Jesus Christ, which has a significant theological dimension: “La Teología ... debe salir de la centralidad, evidenciando prácticas falsas en complicidad con el sistema marcado por el racismo y la discriminación. Se trata de una
Teología que busca la identidad de Cristo con el más oprimido, el negro. Se trata de asumir el conflicto existente entre el sistema opresor y los oprimidos (Mc, 3,6)” (119). An African Latin American theology of liberation can therefore be defined as a theological practice in Christ with a black face. Only then can we understand that “el negro (oprimido, discriminado, marginado, despojado) es hoy el escogido para confundir/reducir a todo el sistema opresor racista. De esta manera, podemos hablar de un tiempo (Kairós) de liberación y respeto al pueblo negro” (Rodrigues da Silva 119-20).

A first systematic approach to an African Latin American theology of liberation, Rodrigues da Silva’s theological reflection still poses some problems and challenges that must be discussed. First of all, his is a specifically African Brazilian reflection based on the experience of the first African Brazilian cultural and theological groups that emerged in the early 80s. It is therefore necessary for this kind of theological discourse to spread to other parts of Latin America so that we can speak of a truly African Latin American theology of liberation as far as its theoretical, systematic and individual dimension is concerned. As for its eminently praxical, communitarian and collective horizon, a black theology of liberation is widely spread throughout Latin American base communities. Being theorized almost exclusively by African Brazilian theologians, it runs the risk of becoming a globalizing, totalizing and homogenizing discourse that eclipses theoretical plurality and diversity. In other words, the African Brazilian school must be only one

28 Rodrigues da Silva also reminds us that “la reflexión identifica el rostro del afro-brasileño con el de Cristo vivo, pasando por una actitud de reconciliación, según la Teología Paulina desde la práctica del pueblo” (119). The consequence of this is that “nuestra misión la debemos encontrar en la práctica teológica en Cristo con rostro negro: éste es nuestro llamado según el espíritu paulino” (Rodrígues da Silva 119).
current or tendency though certainly one with a founding theoretical role that must not be forgotten.

Another problem is that, although it is a fact that a rich *corpus* of theological African Brazilian production has existed since the late 80s, the attempts to systematize an African Brazilian liberation theology carried out so far are not very convincing. They are certainly important liberating theological experiences but do not deepen their insight of a concrete and specific epistemology for an African Brazilian theological reflection. Consequently, their epistemological dimension is still weak and little developed from a theoretical point of view. There are three reasons that account for this. First of all, an eminently historical perspective has traditionally predominated when dealing with the ecclesial-theological phenomenon from a Latin American black angle. Although the history of the African Brazilian movement is certainly important and must certainly be a part of an African Brazilian theological reflection, its theoretical component must be articulated much more in depth, especially from an epistemological point of view. Let us not forget that only an eminently theoretical and epistemological approach can produce a truly systematized African Brazilian theological reflection, which, of course, must also incorporate a solid historical basis. It is therefore necessary for the theoretical and historical components of an African Brazilian theological reflection to reach a balance.

The second reason is that African Brazilian theology still places too much emphasis on the concept of race understood as a biological category. It is true that, from a methodological point of view, African Brazilian theology not only pays attention to the biological question of race but also to socio-economic, political and cultural factors, which are frequently underlined by Rodrigues da Silva throughout his book. This is due
to the fact that its methodology is based on that of the theology of liberation, which uses Marxist class analysis as a mediation to empower theological reflection. It must be noted, however, that the articulation of an African Brazilian theological reflection from a theoretical and epistemological point of view still shows how African Brazilian theology cannot help falling into biologizing and static categories like Ennegrecimiento (blackening), Blanqueamiento (whitening) and Ser Negro (Being Black) in spite of being aware of the significance of Brazil’s social, economic and political context. These categories are actually fluid and dynamic cultural phenomena that must, first and foremost, be understood in socio-cultural terms within a cultural contact situation without forgetting their biological connotations. Hence why certain terms like Ennegrecimiento, Ser Negro or Ideología del Blanqueamiento, which have an important critical function of the “white fetish,” must be reformulated and replaced by concepts like “transcultural negotiation of African Brazilian cultures” and “assimilationist utopia to European Brazilian culture,” which work within a socio-cultural frame and context. This is especially significant since the oppression of the black people by the white man is fundamentally a socio-cultural, economic and political phenomenon although it may have a significant biological dimension. Once again, a balance must be reached to avoid the danger of biological reductionism, which is sometimes present in Rodrigues da Silva’s reflection.

James Cone, the influential theoretician of a Black Theology in the United States, articulated his reflection in purely biological terms in the first stage of his thinking.29 In this sense, Rodrigues da Silva’s articulation of an African Latin American theology of

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29 This is represented by Cone’s works *Black Theology and Black Power* (1969), *A Black Theology of Liberation* (1970) and *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation* (1972).
liberation also runs the risk of falling into Cone’s racial biological obsession in practice in spite of theoretically taking into consideration the socio-political, economic and cultural dimension that defines liberation theology’s hermeneutic methodology, which is non-critically used by the African Brazilian theologian. Cone himself, however, ended up admitting the significance of incorporating class analysis into his theological reflection, something he learned from Latin American liberation theology. Therefore, Rodrigues da Silva must also learn to critically incorporate social, economic and political factors besides race when articulating his theological reflection in order to avoid serious theoretical and epistemological problems coming from his use of biologizing concepts.

The third reason that explains the epistemological weakness of Rodrigues da Silva’s theological discourse is his tendency to understand complex, fluid and dynamic cultural contact situations in assimilationist, totalizing and homogeneous terms, as can be appreciated in his use of essentialist and reductionist anthropological concepts like “religious syncretism” instead of “interweaving,” “hybridity” or “non-dialectical heterogeneity,” terms which emphasize the fluidity, in-process and indefinite nature of transcultural phenomena. The use of a reductionist and old-fashioned anthropological theoretical apparatus is therefore a problem of both indigenous and African Latin American liberation theology. In spite of its theoretical and epistemological flaws, Rodrigues da Silva’s theological reflection is still a precious and valuable first systematic approach to a Latin American black theology of liberation. Its two main challenges for

30 That is why there is an evolution in Cone’s thinking that begins with God of the Oppressed (1974).
the future are the development of multiple African Latin American theologies—and not just of an African Brazilian theological discourse—from a professional, scholarly and systematic point of view as well as delving into the theoretical-epistemological basis of those theological discourses in order to consistently and convincingly articulate their epistemological dimension. The recent articles by African Brazilian theologian Silvia Regina de Lima Silva seem to point in this direction in connection with the emergence of African Latin American female theological agency.\(^{32}\) In this sense, another challenge of a Latin American black theology of liberation for the future is to empower the female theological agency initiated by de Lima Silva in Brazil, which will be discussed below, and explore the link between race and gender issues.

The starting point of de Lima Silva’s theological reflection is Latin American feminist liberation theology, another major Latin American current of LT2 whose main theoreticians are María Pilar Aquino, Elsa Támez and Ivone Gebara.\(^{33}\) It is therefore

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\(^{32}\) Silvia Regina de Lima Silva is considered to be the leading African Brazilian liberation theologian today by important Latin American theologians like Iván Petrella. She is dean of the Universidad Bíblica Latinoamericana in San José, Costa Rica, and coordinator of the women’s commission of the Association of Theologians of the Third World. See de Lima Silva’s book *En Territorio de Fronteras: una lectura de Marcos 7. 24-30* (2001), and, especially, her articles “Latin American Feminist Theology and Gender Theories” (2003), “From Within Ourselves: Afrodescendant Women on Paths of Theological Reflection in Latin America and the Caribbean” (2005) and “Dialogue of Memories: Ways Towards a Black Feminist Christology from Latin America” (2007).

\(^{33}\) María Pilar Aquino (born in 1956 in Ixtlán del Río) is a Mexican Catholic theologian who holds a Phd. in theology granted by Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca (Spain). She is currently a professor of theology and religious studies at the University of San Diego (USA). Aquino is also a member of the editorial board of the international journal *Concilium*. She has also been the president of the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States (ACHTUS); Elsa Támez (born in 1951 in México, D. F.) is a Mexican theologian and biblical scholar who has lived and worked in Costa Rica for over forty years. She is both a Methodist theologian and also a pioneer of liberation theology in the field of biblical studies. Támez holds a Phd. in theology granted by the University of Lausanne (Switzerland). In addition to her work as a faculty member of the Latin American Biblical University in Costa Rica, she is a member of the team of researchers of the Ecumenical Department of Investigation (DEI) in Costa Rica; Ivone Gebara (born in 1944 in São Paulo) is a Brazilian Catholic nun (a Sister of Our Lady) and one of Latin America’s leading theologians, writing from the perspective of ecofeminism and liberation theology. She holds a Phd. in philosophy granted by Pontificia Universidade Católica de São Paulo and in religious studies
necessary to pay attention to Latin American feminist theology’s main insights and epistemological evolution before discussing de Lima Silva’s contribution to the subject from a specifically African Brazilian female perspective. According to María Pilar Aquino, Latin American feminist theology can be understood as “una reflexión crítica sobre la vivencia que las mujeres tenemos de Dios dentro de nuestras prácticas que buscan transformar las causas que producen empobrecimiento y violencia contra las mujeres como grupo social con el fin de avanzar hacia nuevas relaciones sociales basadas en la justicia y la integridad de vida para las mujeres y para todo organismo de la tierra” (“Teología feminista” 16). In order to reach this goal, Latin American feminist theology must radically question “los modelos teóricos jerárquicos con los que operan las teologías androcéntricas y las relaciones patriarcales de poder en las iglesias cristianas” (Aquino, “Teología feminista” 21). Its critique, however, also refutes “las nociones antropológicas dualistas que han acompañado al discurso cristiano, las construcciones tradicionales de los símbolos cristianos, las fuentes clásicas de la fe, y las prácticas religiosas que conceden primacía a los hombres como grupo social” (Aquino, “Teología feminista” 21). Consequently, an essential task of Latin American feminist theology will be to offer “una reconstrucción de los símbolos cristianos, de las fuentes y de las tradiciones religiosas que fundan la autoridad de las mujeres” (Aquino, “Teología feminista” 21).34

Latin American feminist theology has also been influenced by various currents of thought. Latin American liberation theology has certainly played a crucial role in its
generated by the Catholic University of Louvain (Belgium). She worked as a professor of philosophy and theology at the Theological Institute of Recife from 1973 to 1989. She currently works as an advisor for different groups of women within an ecumenical, feminist and ecological perspective.
34 Aquino clarifies that “en este sentido, se busca repensar críticamente el contenido de la revelación de Dios en correlación con las prácticas transformadoras de las mujeres y en diálogo fecundo con nuestras propias tradiciones culturales emancipatorias” (“Teología feminista” 21).
emergence but “los nuevos espacios críticos ofrecidos por los movimientos de mujeres y los movimientos feministas latinoamericanos, los diálogos teológicos auspiciados por la Asociación Ecuménica de Teólogos del Tercer Mundo, y finalmente la notable presencia de las Teologías Feministas hechas en Norte América y Europa” (Aquino, “Teología feminista” 51) have also been very influential upon it. Aquino, on the other hand, also reminds us that, whereas the term “feminist” was used in connection with theology in the United States since the early 70s by Rosemary Radford Ruether and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza35, it only began to be incorporated into the discourse of a Latin American theological reflection in the late 80s (“Teología feminista” 50). Even so, it can be said confidently that before this period, which was strongly influenced by liberation theology’s androcentric theoretical framework, “muchas mujeres latinoamericanas se auto-reconocerían en los elementos que componen la descripción de la teología feminista crítica de la liberación formulada por Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza” (Aquino, “Teología feminista” 50). From a hermeneutical point of view, the locus of enunciation of Latin American feminist theology, from which the Bible, the Christian teachings, the religious traditions of the Latin American peoples and theological work itself are interpreted, is that of the oppressed and poor women, whose life experience takes place in “el campo de

35 Rosemary Radford Ruether (born November 2, 1936) is an American feminist critic and Catholic theologian specialized in the area of women and religion. Ruether is a major voice in raising a feminist critique of the traditional male field of Christian theology. She is also an advocate of women’s ordination in the Catholic Church. Since 1985, Ruether has been serving as a board member for the pro-choice group “Catholics for Choice.” Among Ruether’s major works are Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology (1983), Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing (1994), and Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions (2005); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (born 17 April 1938, Cenad) is a Romanian-born German Roman Catholic feminist theologian who is currently the Krister Stendhal Professor of Divinity at Harvard Divinity School. Schüssler-Fiorenza has provided models, methods and metaphors for biblical interpretation and a reconstruction of early Christianity in which women shared the center and were restored to human subjectivity. Some of her most important works are In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins (1983), But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation (1992), and Transforming Vision: Explorations in Feminist Theology (2011).
las relaciones sociales marcadas por el entrecruce de las coordenadas sexuales, raciales, culturales, y de clase social” (Aquino, “Teología feminista” 61). According to Aquino, it is the analysis of these relationships that reveals “tanto la opresión y violencia contra las mujeres, como sus resistencias y victorias. En esta línea, la vivencia actual de estas mujeres constituye la clave para la interpretación de la fe y es la fuente para la creación de contenidos teológicos” (Aquino, “Teología feminista” 61).

If there is something that defines Latin American feminist theology, this is its eminently ecumenical horizon: “La experiencia ecuménica es una característica clave de la Teología Feminista Latinoamericana. El ecumenismo es tanto más importante cuanto que las divisiones sociales, raciales, sexuales, religiosas y culturales tienden a profundizarse debido a la lógica predadora de la civilización actual” (Aquino, “Teología feminista” 65). This, however, does not seem to worry the ecclesiastical elites of the Catholic Church and the protestant churches, who “sobre todo en sus capas más elevadas, no parecen manifestar inconformidad con esta lógica que está hundiendo al Pueblo de Dios, y que continúa alienando a las mujeres” (Aquino, “Teología feminista” 66). It is precisely the ecumenical dimension that accounts for the wide range of theological topics discussed by Latin American feminist theology today:

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36 Aquino also explains that, when affirming the connection with this socio-ecclesial sector, Latin American feminist theology “supera el concepto abstracto de ‘la experiencia de las mujeres’ como principio interpretativo genérico y, a la vez, quita normatividad y universalidad a los principios interpretativos de las teologías androcéntricas” (“Teología feminista” 62).

37 According to Aquino, the Catholic Church still keeps the division of the men and women of the People of God into separate social groups. This means that the Church is still structurally founded on the split between men and women. The persistence of this division is due to the Catholic Church’s inability to accept two of the most important achievements of our contemporary world: The autonomy of the person and democracy (“Teología feminista” 66). Aquino also reminds us that “en los últimos años los líderes de las instituciones religiosas han acrecentado el centralismo del poder y el control sobre todo tipo de trabajo pastoral e intelectual alternativo. La censura hacia la teología feminista hecha por mujeres latinoamericanas se está llevando a cabo privada y públicamente” (“Teología feminista” 66).
Es notable el esfuerzo de muchas mujeres por exponer críticamente el carácter sexista y androcéntrico de las teologías cristianas dominantes en la región latinoamericana. Pero también es notable el esfuerzo realizado con el fin de ofrecer una interpretación alternativa en clave feminista e incluyente de temas clásicos como Antropología teológica, Hermenéutica, Dios, Jesucristo, Iglesia, Espiritualidad, Biblia, María de Nazareth, Religiosidad popular y Ética cristiana. Más recientemente, se está ampliando la producción sobre el campo metodológico en la articulación de las teorías de género, la vida cotidiana, la condición racial y social, la ecología y la ética feminista. Igualmente, el quehacer teológico feminista latinoamericano está desarrollando nuevas perspectivas sobre sexualidad, salud y derechos reproductivos, violencia contra las mujeres, placer y descanso, nuevo proyecto de sociedad y utopía. Estos campos de reflexión buscan mayor adecuación a la experiencia de las mujeres. (Aquino, “Teología feminista” 68)

Elsa Támez has studied the hermeneutic and epistemological dimension of a Latin American feminist liberation theology, which is the fruit of the interweaving of liberation theology’s discourse with that of feminist thought articulated from the decolonial and subaltern locus of enunciation of the Latin American periphery. Támez departs from the fact that a Latin American feminist theology and hermeneutics of liberation has been very productive “para la Iglesia, la teología y la formación ministerial en general. Recientemente forma parte de una de las voces que desafía radicalmente la teología, la hermenéutica bíblica y la Iglesia” (“Hermenéutica feminista” 75). Támez, however, insists on the idea that a feminist hermeneutics must be understood as a “process” due to the fact that “de acuerdo a nuestra experiencia, el acercamiento hermenéutico no es algo fijo, acabado, sino una vivencia. Dicha vivencia es constantemente desafiada por una realidad socio-económica y cultural” (“Hermenéutica feminista” 75). According to the Mexican theologian, there are three different stages in the hermeneutics and construction of a feminist theological consciousness in Latin America. The first one, which takes place during the 1970s, is defined by the fact that “las mujeres biblistas y teólogas siguen la
línea de la teología de la liberación. Pero se da aquí el inicio del descubrimiento de la mujer como sujeto histórico oprimido y discriminado. Y también como sujeto histórico de liberación y de producción teológica” (Támez, “Hermenéutica feminista” 80).  

The political, theological and church militancy of women also characterizes this first stage in which the reading of the Bible carried out by women is also popular and militant and founded on the principle of “Dios como liberador y solidario de los oprimidos y oprimidas” (Támez, “Hermenéutica feminista” 81). Hence why “se escogen solamente aquellos textos que hablan sobre la liberación y se aplican a la situación de las mujeres doblemente oprimidas” (Támez, “Hermenéutica feminista” 81). The hermeneutic approach is therefore that of the theology of liberation: Exodus, the historical Jesus and the idea that woman is implicit in the category of the poor. On the other hand, the main exegetical topics are: The analysis of women leaders like Deborah and Mary and of those women who help to attain liberation like Egypt’s midwives; the rescue of certain poor women of the Bible that have traditionally been forgotten in the studies on the main figures of the history of salvation like Hagar, a woman oppressed from the point of view of class, race and sex; and the sacrifice of the innocent women of the biblical texts like Jephthah’s daughter and the Levite’s concubine, who are connected with the torture, repression and violation of human rights carried out by the Latin American fascist military regimes in the 70s. The evocation of the divine always takes place in masculine terms in this stage, something criticized by those Christian women involved in the

38 Támez also observes that in this stage “para el quehacer teológico de las mujeres, se asume como punto de partida la mujer doblemente oprimida, por su clase y susexo. Y se afirma que la mujer ha de estar comprometida, por lo tanto, con una doble lucha: una lucha específica como mujer, y otra lucha por la liberación económica y política de la sociedad” (“Hermenéutica feminista” 81).

39 Támez also reminds us how “todas las lecturas de la Biblia están marcadas por un tono fuerte de esperanza en una nueva sociedad de igualdad económica y de nuevas relaciones entre hombres y mujeres” (“Hermenéutica feminista” 82).
feminist movement. The word feminist, on the other hand, is not used and is stigmatized as foreign (Támez, “Hermenéutica feminista” 82-83).

The second stage, which takes place in the second half of the 1980s, especially emphasizes woman’s theological agency by criticizing the partiality of the option for the poor, which only pays attention to economic factors: “Se enfatiza que, si en el hacer teología se parte de la experiencia de la mujer, el discurso debe ser diferente; pues la experiencia de las mujeres y su cosmovisión son diferentes a la de los varones, por distintos factores: culturales, biológicos e históricos” (Támez, “Hermenéutica feminista” 88). That is why, from a hermeneutic point of view, the female theological reflection of this second phase is called “woman’s theology” and “theology from a woman’s or a female perspective:”

Se busca rescatar lo femenino del discurso sobre Dios. Se cuestiona el discurso teológico clásico, analítico, rígido y demasiado racional, logocéntrico, y se proponen nuevas formas de discursos teológicos. A la praxis política, se dice, debe acompañar la praxis del cariño para hacerla más humana. (Támez, “Hermenéutica feminista” 88)

Se trabajan imágenes femeninas de Dios. Dios como madre y padre. Se busca leer la pasión y resurrección de Jesús desde los sufrimientos y deseos de liberación de las mujeres. También el Espíritu Santo es visto como femenino. En síntesis, se busca femenizar la teología y a Dios Trino, reivindicando roles que la sociedad ha prescrito para mujeres y que a la vez ha menospreciado. (Támez, “Hermenéutica feminista” 89)

The confrontation with the patriarchal biblical texts that discriminate women is another hermeneutic contribution of this stage. On the one hand, Latin American women theologians question those readings that are usually more patriarchal than the texts

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40 Támez insists on the fact that in this second stage “se necesitaba no sólo una práctica por la justicia, sino la ternura para consolar a los torturados, a las madres de los desaparecidos” (“Hermenéutica feminista” 89).
themselves. On the other, the text is not considered to be normative if it cannot possibly be reinterpreted from a feminist perspective (Támez, “Hermenéutica feminista” 90). In other words, the idea that God is willing to marginalize women is not accepted: “El acercamiento hermenéutico aquí consiste en privilegiar el Espíritu a la letra. Por el discernimiento del Espíritu se va contra la letra; y eso para ser más fiel al Evangelio de Jesucristo” (Támez, “Hermenéutica feminista” 90). The hermeneutic contributions of American and European feminist theologians are also incorporated in order to reconstruct and transcend the text and reinterpret it from the critique of the patriarchal vision and the use of extrabiblical materials that illuminate another reality concealed by it (Támez, “Hermenéutica feminista” 90-91). On the other hand, the theological language of this second stage becomes inclusive, which means that God shily begins to be considered both father and mother, he and she. In this sense, the word “feminist” is also introduced as a synonym of “theology from a woman’s or a female perspective:” “Se alterna teología feminista, teología femenina, teología desde la óptica de la mujer. Se habla de leer la Biblia con ojos de mujer. Aunque el término feminista no es aceptado en todos los círculos, hay más tolerancia” (Támez, “Hermenéutica feminista” 91).

The third stage, which takes place from the 1990s to the present, articulates “un nuevo discurso bíblico-teológico con la ayuda de las teorías de género; se trata de destruir para construir” (Támez, “Hermenéutica feminista” 106). According to Támez, if there is something that defines this final stage, this is “una actitud hermenéutica radical anti-patriarcal, que busca proponer una teología nueva inclusiva y no patriarcal”

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41 Támez also points out that “por esta manera de trabajar la Biblia se lanza la pregunta del significado de la autoridad bíblica, o la palabra de Dios inspirada escrita” (“Hermenéutica feminista” 91).
Hence why “la teóloga Ivone Gebara, propone la reconstrucción total de la teología y llama a esta fase Ecofeminismo Holístico” (Támez, “Hermenéutica feminista” 93). The female face of God and Trinity that characterizes the previous stage is no longer enough as a result of the development of a new insight:

Se reconoce por un lado que se están tomando valores muchas veces impuestos como femeninos, pero que corresponden a una identidad falseada; y por otro lado también se reconoce que se está dentro de los parámetros de un discurso teológico patriarcal aunque se le feminice. Ivone Gebara, que va al frente en esta fase, con nuevas proposiciones y discursos teológicos, señala que lo que se ha estado haciendo ha sido teología feminista patriarcal. Y en efecto, el discurso teológico cristiano es androcéntrico, patriarcal. La tarea es de reconstruir toda la teología. (Támez, “Hermenéutica feminista” 96)

The first step for this reconstruction of a Latin American feminist theological reflection is the use of gender theories, which, due to the fact that African Latin American and indigenous female theological agency is present in this stage, must be combined with anthropological and symbological theories:

En estos últimos años teólogas y biblistas latinoamericanas señalan la importancia de trabajar las teorías de género para desarrollar con más seriedad el discurso teológico y la hermenéutica bíblica feminista. Si la teología de la liberación utilizó la economía y la sociología para analizar la situación de opresión, y posteriormente construir un discurso teológico, las mujeres, tendrán que utilizar teorías de género para analizar con más seriedad la situación de opresión de las mujeres. Por otro lado, mujeres negras e indígenas haciendo teología, están pidiendo también que se asuman teorías antropológicas y de la simbología. En fin, estas inquietudes epistemológicas y metodológicas no son fáciles de responder, y apenas se están levantando las preguntas a partir de las necesidades. Lo más interesante e importante de esta fase son las preguntas. (Támez, “Hermenéutica feminista” 96-97)

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42 Támez notes that “el encuentro celebrado en Río de Janeiro en diciembre del 93 deja ver esta nueva inquietud de la hermenéutica feminista latinoamericana” (“Hermenéutica feminista” 93).
According to Támez, in this stage the female body and everyday life become new hermeneutic categories that will be important from the point of view of biblical exegesis in those texts, which, like *The Song of Songs*, focus on feasts and happiness as well as on the joy of flesh and sexuality. On the other hand, the relationship of Paul’s texts with women as an epistemological criterion is another avenue of hermeneutical inquiry. A feminist hermeneutics of liberation, however, must pay attention to the use of gender theories to interpret a biblical text like Hosea’s, for instance. Sociological exegesis will also play a key role in the reconstruction of the text by giving a face to nameless women like those in the Acts of the Apostles (Támez, “Hermenéutica feminista” 97-98). As far as the theological language is concerned, this is eminently inclusive like that of the previous stage. The difference, however, is that now “se asume el término feminista y se trata de desestigmatizarlo. Se propone referirse a la divinidad con nombres asexuados, como gracia infinita o misericordia infinita, o energía, etc.” (“Hermenéutica feminista” 98). Although there is a critical dialogue between Latin American women theologians and leading feminist critics from Europe and the USA, there is always concern that the gender theories from the North “pasen por un proceso crítico de latinoamericanización” (Támez, “Hermenéutica feminista” 98). The fundamental question is therefore “cómo articular la hermenéutica y teología feminista con las preocupaciones básicas de nuestros pueblos pobres y el sistema económico de mercado y sus políticas neoliberales” (Támez, “Hermenéutica feminista” 99).

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43 Támez calls attention to the fact that “este momento es muy nuevo y se ha avanzado más a nivel de preguntas que de trabajo concreto con la Biblia. Se está consciente de que el desafío es muy radical pues implica retrabajar o mejor dicho reinventar toda la tradición cristiana” (“Hermenéutica feminista” 98). That is why Latin American women theologians feel uncomfortable when working with great theological topics like Christology, Trinity and ecclesiology since “se reconoce que las implicaciones de la reconstrucción van más allá de la ortodoxia” (“Hermenéutica feminista” 98).
After explaining the hermeneutic evolution of a feminist theology in Latin America, Támez calls attention to the fact that there is not a radical separation but a coexistence of the three stages. This is due to the different degrees of development in the construction of a feminist consciousness by different Latin American women theologians as well as to the base and pastoral work in which they are involved. The Mexican theologian especially highlights the valuable and precious contribution of Latin American black and indigenous women to a feminist hermeneutics of liberation “por la articulación que han de hacer con la cultura además de lo económico” (“Hermenéutica feminista” 101). Nevertheless, as has been noted by Aquino, many indigenous women still tend to reject “la perspectiva teológica que vincula las categorías críticas de género con otras relaciones de poder en la sociedad . . . entre otros factores, debido al control intelectual que ejercen los líderes y asesores del movimiento indígena, en su mayoría sacerdotes y clérigos” (“Teología feminista” 52-53). This also explains why the theological current that just feminizes patriarchal symbols and theological concepts without actually questioning their patriarchal nature “opera con gran intensidad en el ámbito de la teología indígena” (Aquino, “Teología feminista” 52). In this sense, many indigenous women have internalized the sexism and male chauvinism of their religious leaders and still find it contradictory “afirmar el carácter igualitario de las culturas indígenas frente al gran silencio y marginación que el propio machismo indígena les ha impuesto” (Aquino, “Teologia feminista” 53). Consequently, whereas some indigenous women oppose

44 Aquino clarifies that “para estos asesores, la crítica feminista no corresponde al universo religioso-cultural de las mujeres indígenas. Estos grupos operan con la idea errónea de que el marco feminista en nuestro contexto propone formas de convivencia social o formas de pensar la fe sólo para mujeres como si fuésemos entidades aisladas” (“Teología feminista” 53). Due to the fact that they only accept the social class and race categories, indigenous male leaders “aceptan bien las lecturas teológicas que trasponen a los símbolos indígenas las categorías androcéntricas de género que no cuestionan las instituciones patriarcales” (“Teología feminista” 53).
feminist theology, others, like Mexican indigenous theologian Chilo Villareal, “buscan su incorporación con el fin de ampliar la visión sobre las múltiples relaciones de poder en la Iglesia, la sociedad y las propias culturas indígenas” (Aquino, “Teología feminista” 53).

The danger of indigenous theology’s tendency to feminize patriarchal religious symbols and theological concepts without critically reformulating them from a truly feminist perspective is also underlined by Támez in connection with female popular spirituality in the following terms:

En nuestros encuentros de mujeres teólogas y biblistas, hemos manifestado una preocupación profunda, y es la del peligro que vemos de avanzar desde una conciencia feminista hacia la reconceptualización total del pensamiento cristiano, pero sin ir acompañadas con las mujeres del pueblo. La espiritualidad de la mujer popular ha avanzado hacia una concepción despatiarcializada de Dios, pero la evocación de Dios es totalmente masculina. Hay un gran trabajo de base que hacer para ayudar a desmasculinizar al Dios cristiano. (“Hermenéutica feminista” 106).

One of the most influential tendencies today within the third stage of the hermeneutic and epistemological evolution of Latin American feminist theology is Ivone Gebara’s ecofeminist theology of liberation. An ecofeminist epistemology must be articulated from the start in order to define the basic hermeneutic principles of an ecofeminist theological discourse. Nevertheless, a theological reflection from an ecofeminist perspective demands, first of all, to discuss the origins and meaning of the

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45 Aquino notes how a feminist indigenous theology aims to bring justice not only to women but also to the whole indigenous community. Therefore, a feminist indigenous theological reflection must be founded on “una espiritualidad de compasión por quienes sufren la pobreza, de acción por empujar la historia participando en los movimientos sociales y populares, y de esperanza que anticipa lo que las mujeres indígenas esperan mientras garantizan la propia sobrevivencia y la de quienes de ellas dependen” (“Teología feminista” 54).
word “eco-feminism.” Gebara points out that “el término ecofeminismo comenzó a ser
usado en Francia al final de los años setenta y de allí se extendió a otros países de
Europa, América y África. Fue introducido por la socióloga Franҫoise D’Eaubonne, con
la finalidad de mostrar la alianza de la lucha hacia el cambio de relaciones entre hombres
y mujeres con la transformación de nuestras relaciones con el ecosistema” (Intuiciones
17). The term “eco-feminism” was used by D’Eaubonne with political-ideological
connotations connected with ecological degradation and social struggle. As is noted by
Gebara, “el ecofeminismo como pensamiento y movimiento social se refiere básicamente
a la conexión ideológica entre la explotación de la naturaleza y la explotación de las
mujeres dentro del sistema jerárquico-patriarcal” (Intuiciones 18). Ecofeminism,
however, also has a philosophical and theological dimension, which is described by the
Brazilian theologian in the following terms:

Desde el punto de vista filosófico y teológico, el ecofeminismo puede ser
considerado como una sabiduría que intenta recuperar el ecosistema y las
mujeres. Éstas fueron relegadas por el sistema patriarcal, y
particularmente por la modernidad, a ser fuerza de reproducción de mano
de obra —‘vientres benditos’— en tanto la naturaleza se tornó objeto de
dominación para el crecimiento del capital. (Intuiciones 18).

Gebara also calls attention to the fact that “theological attention to ecofeminist
issues in Latin America is still quite limited. The ways in which theological formulations

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46 Franҫoise d’Eaubonne (12 March 1920, Paris-3 August 2005, Paris) was a French feminist who
introduced the term “eco-feminism” (écologie-féminisme, éco-féminisme or écofeminisme in French) in
1974 in her work Le feminisme ou la mort (Feminism or Death).

47 Following Carolyn Merchant, Gebara reminds us how Modernity begins with the torture of witches and
the establishment of a new scientific method. According to the Brazilian theologian, the witch not only
became a symbol for evil but also for nature’s violence, which could bring storms and illnesses or even kill
children (Intuiciones 18). The connection between women and the natural world was quite obvious and
explains why “las mujeres revoltosas y la naturaleza en desorden precisaban ser controladas. Esto justificó
socialmente la caza de brujas y consecuentemente la ejecución de millares y millares de mujeres en toda
Europa como obra de cultura” (Gebara, Intuiciones 18).
support the ongoing domination of women and the unlimited exploitation of natural 
resources have still not been clearly and critically understood” (*Longing* 14). Even so, 
some small, organized ecofeminist groups exist in Latin American countries like 
Argentina, Chile, Peru, Venezuela, Bolivia, Uruguay and Brazil. They still have little 
fluence on a Latin American ecofeminist theological reflection, especially from an 
ademic point of view, but, despite their limited institutional presence, “there is already 
an effort to create a Latin American ecofeminist network” (*Longing* 14). The Latin 
American ecofeminist movement seeks “a broad base, and does not intend to limit itself 
to theological issues; rather, it hopes to take up a variety of topics that are relevant to our 
lives” (*Longing* 14). The work of the different Latin American ecofeminist groups reveals 
that “an awareness of the need to develop a feminism that is within the Latin American 
liberation tradition and to relate it to the ecological perspective in the hope of building 
interdependent, noncompetitive relationships seems to be slowly growing” (*Longing* 14). 
According to Gebara, the liveliest ecofeminist group in Latin America today is the Con-
spirando Collective in Santiago, Chile, which has been publishing the ecofeminist journal 
*Con-spirando* since 1992 (*Longing* 14).

The central assumption of an ecofeminist epistemology is “the interdependence 
among all the elements that are related to the human world” (Gebara, *Longing* 51). 
Interdependence, however, must be understood as “accepting the basic fact that any life 
situation, behavior, or even belief is always the fruit of all the interactions that make up our lives, our histories, and our wider earthly and cosmic realities” (Gebara, *Longing* 52).

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48 Gebara also notes in connection with this point that “we have not yet become aware of the magnitude of the complicity of Christian religious discourse in the momentous crisis faced by the planet and the human community that inhabits it” (*Longing* 14).
Therefore, “our interdependence and relatedness do not stop with other human beings: They encompass nature, the powers of the earth and of the cosmos itself” (Gebara, *Longing* 52). On the other hand, if there is something that defines an ecofeminist epistemology, this is that knowing is conceived as a process. Unlike patriarchal theology, in which the act of knowing is founded on causal linearity, an ecofeminist theological discourse speaks of knowing as a process, which means that “the process by which new elements are constantly being added to overall human knowledge does not necessarily follow a predictable causal path” (Gebara, *Longing* 55). This suggests that, from an ecofeminist point of view, knowing is “an ongoing process, one that is in constant flux, like the bits of colored glass in a kaleidoscope, in which the bits continually form new patterns and all the pieces are in constant motion” (Gebara, *Longing* 55). Another major feature of an ecofeminist epistemology is the necessary bond between spirit and matter, mind and body: “Within an ecofeminist perspective, these separations or divisions disappear, and so we are invited to live the oneness of the matter and energy that are our very makeup without knowing what that oneness really is. No longer can we have the spirit struggle against the body, angels against devils, and God against humanity” (Gebara, *Longing* 57).

Gebara underlines the fact that ecofeminist epistemology considers gender and ecology to be mediations or ways of understanding both the world and human beings. These mediations, however, are not just tools or instruments to be used and cast aside but

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49 Gebara clarifies that “patriarchal epistemology emphasizes a particular quality of knowing: its linearity, or the idea that progress always moves in a straight line. Linear thinking evokes a path of rectitude, a path that clearly manifests positive moral connotations” (*Longing* 54-55). The purpose of theological knowing for patriarchal epistemology is therefore to find “‘true knowledge of God’ or ‘true knowledge of Jesus Christ.’ But if we speak of knowing in linear terms, then we also need to speak of linear causality. This means that we always have to go back to the beginning of the chain to look for causes, and in the end we will find the first cause” (*Longing* 55).
“a reality that is a means of knowing, but at the same time a part of and a constitutive purpose of the knowing subject” (Gebara, *Longing* 58). The idea is that both the feminine and ecological dimension are an integral part of human reality “despite the fact that both these emerged only recently into the light of historical consciousness” (Gebara, *Longing* 58). On the other hand, the contextual, holistic, affective and inclusive nature of ecofeminist epistemology is also discussed by Gebara. The contextuality of an ecofeminist epistemology means that “we cannot absolutize our present way of knowing; rather, we need to admit its historical and provisional character and the importance of always being open to the new referents that history—and life in general—will propose” (Gebara, *Longing* 61). Unlike Cartesian epistemologies, which understand human knowing in rational and scientific terms as limited to certain mechanical processes that take place in our inner or subjective realm and expand outward into the objective world, holistic epistemology “opens up to the possibility of multiple ways of knowing what is to be known, of appealing to the diversity of cognitive capacities we have within us. These different capacities cannot be reduced to a single, rationalistic mode of discourse” (Gebara, *Longing* 62-63). The idea is that we are not just parts of a greater whole but the greater whole is also part of ourselves.

The fact that ecofeminist epistemology is affective reveals how nature and culture are interconnected components that allow us to be what we are and allow the earth to be what it is. This is due to the fact that an epistemology defined by affectivity will

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50 Gebara also points out that, as a contextual epistemology, ecofeminist epistemology is “a demand of the historical moment in which we live, and develops out of local contexts long before it opens up to a global perspective” (*Longing* 61).

51 Gebara reminds us that “it is on the basis of this subjectivity that they [Cartesian epistemologies] affirm the rationality and the scientific character—the objectivity—of their knowing” (*Longing* 62).
recognize that “the immense spectrum of emotions and feelings is manifested in all men and women according to their individual characters, their life situations, and their cultures” (Gebara, *Longing* 64). The inclusive nature of ecofeminist epistemology, on the other hand, means that “it does not impose rigid limits on knowing. It is inclusive, first of all, in recognizing the diversity of our experiences” (Gebara, *Longing* 64). The fact that this inclusiveness has not only a cognitive but an ethical dimension means that we are not guided by a single paradigm in culture, in our way of living Christianity or in our sexual orientation. In other words, no model or criterion can represent authentic knowing (Gebara, *Longing* 65). This is even true in the sphere of theological knowing, where the experience of God or the divine is always an inclusive experience: “Our perceptions, our insights and our ecstasy are aptitudes that express themselves in a thousand and one ways without any of them exhausting any other” (Gebara, *Longing* 65).

Latin American feminist theology, one of the main epistemological discourses of LT2, is certainly a key theological reflection that opens up new avenues of theological inquiry from the point of view of gender. Feminist theology, however, is not perfect and still poses some theoretical and epistemological problems that must be dealt with in the future. The first of these is the need to develop a truly Latin American feminist hermeneutic and epistemological method from which to articulate its theological discourse. Unfortunately, Latin American feminist theology’s method is not consistently organized and systematized at present and ends up becoming a “theoretical melthing pot” in which, following Elsa Támez, gender theories, structuralist elements, liberation theology’s hermeneutic circle and sociological exegesis intersect with one another
without any sense of order and coherence. Lack of accuracy and precision is also a problem since no specific gender theory or structuralist component, for instance, is ever mentioned by Aquino, Támez or Gebara. Its tendency to globalize and synthesize is therefore one of its dangers at the moment. As far as gender theories are concerned, another challenge is to articulate those theories from a specifically Latin American decolonial and feminist perspective so that they can be applied to the field of theology from a decolonial feminist lense, thus giving rise to a true Latin American feminist liberation theology. Those theoretical contributions coming from American or European feminism, on the other hand, must first be adapted and resemanticized into the Latin American cultural context.

Due to the fact that the poor category is full of assimilationist and homogeneous connotations and only pays attention to economic factors, Latin American feminist theology must be articulated in dialogical projection with the category of “interculturality.” The emergence of a Latin American feminist theology of interculturality is therefore one of the main challenges for the future. It is true that María Pilar Aquino has recently moved in this direction but her articulation of a feminist intercultural theology from an epistemological point of view is still too general, straightforward and superficial. It is necessary to explore in depth the epistemological

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52 See Támez, “Hermenéutica feminista” 103-04. Támez herself, on the other hand, admits that “asimismo, por la situación grave a nivel económico y político del continente, y por el desafío de la exclusión de una gran parte de la población por las políticas neoliberales, se experimenta una incomodidad en trabajar la radicalidad feminista en el discurso teológico, sin un método claro y práctico que articule la preocupación económica, política, racial y feminista” (“Hermenéutica feminista” 105-06).

principles of a feminist intercultural theology so that it can truly develop as one of the new theoretical discourses of twenty-first century Latin American feminist liberation theology. Feminist intercultural theology must also analyze in detail the concrete and specific faces of the victims that become the *locus* of enunciation of its discourse. In order to achieve this, it is the victims themselves (especially African Latin American and indigenous women) that must become theological subjects and articulate their own theoretical discourses within a feminist intercultural horizon. This is precisely the case of Silvia Regina de Lima Silva, which will be discussed below.

As far as biblical exegesis is concerned, Latin American feminist theology must interpret the biblical texts much more in depth and incorporate the contributions of the latest gender theories from Latin America and the West paying special attention to the feminist intercultural perspective. A text cannot be interpreted the same by a European American feminist theologian like Aquino, Támez or Gebara as by a black or indigenous theologian whose theological reflection involves a dialogue between Amerindian or African spirituality and the Christian teachings. The great challenge for the future from an intercultural feminist perspective is therefore that more indigenous and black women become theological subjects and publish their own books. In this sense, another important challenge is that Amerindian women theologians, who have traditionally internalized the patriarchal discourse of their cultures and religious leaders, are able to question the androcentric organization and structure of their societies and develop a truly feminist consciousness in their theological reflection.

Ecofeminist theology, on the other hand, is another theoretical discourse that must enter into a deeply critical dialogue, which has hardly begun, with intercultural feminist
theology. Ecofeminist liberation theology is certainly one of the most important theological currents of LT2 for the future of Latin American liberation theology at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Although its epistemological basis is very well founded, ecofeminist theology is still in the process of being developed as a theological discourse, which means that, from a theoretical point of view, it is not without its problems. One of these is that its epistemology is carried out in quite abstract terms. Ecofeminist epistemology must certainly take place in more concrete and historical terms, especially as far as the dialogical interaction between women and the natural world with liberation theology is concerned. One of the dangers of this lack of concreteness and historicity is that ecofeminism ends up falling into an essentialist position that favours a sort of idealistic common essence between women and Mother Earth, which would become predefined categories.

Another challenge is the adaptation and resemanticization of the ecological discourse, which has traditionally been an elitist and masculine discipline coming from the West, into the socio-historical, economic and political coordinates of the Latin American cultural context so that a specifically Latin American decolonial ecology truly concerned with the plight of women, the poor and the natural world can emerge. This means that only a resemanticized and demasculinized decolonial ecological discourse can truly empower the feminist struggle instead of weakening and leading it away from its goals. The feminist discourse, on the other hand, must also be reformulated from the decolonial lense of the Latin American periphery in order to give rise to the emergence of a decolonial feminism. This means that an ecofeminist theology of liberation must be the product of the interweaving of liberation theology’s main insights and the reformulation
of the ecofeminist discourse in specifically Latin American decolonial terms. One of the greatest challenges for the future is therefore the development of a decolonial ecofeminist discourse in multiple directions, which will vary according to the various Latin American socio-historical conditions. In Gebara’s case, this is a discourse articulated around her urban experience working with the poor of the Brazilian favelas but other reconceptualizations of a decolonial ecofeminist reflection in Latin America are possible and must be articulated in the future.

As has been mentioned above, one of the flaws of ecofeminist theology is its lack of concreteness and historicity. A historical basis is therefore essential for it to explore the connection between the oppression of women, which dates back to the origins of patriarchy five or six thousand years ago, with that of Mother Earth, which began in the sixteenth century in the West with the conquest of America. Although the specific historical coordinates of the former are not those of the latter, there is a resemblance and similarity between these two historical facts as far as the key issue of oppression, exploitation and plunder is concerned. Looking for their common insights and points of connection is therefore not a historical mistake but a way to establish the link between the different stages of the history of human beings and the cosmos in order to develop an ethical consciousness from which to articulate a critico-theoretical discourse of a theological or philosophical nature that can help us to build a better world. This suggests that a comparative historical approach must be an integral part of ecofeminist theology that will empower the articulation of its own theoretical and epistemological discourse paying special attention to the struggle on behalf of the rights of women and Mother Earth as a step towards the cosmic balance.
It is only after a solid Latin American (eco)feminist epistemology has been incorporated into liberation theology’s discourse that the intersection of race and gender issues from an African Latin American perspective becomes a new form of reflection with African Brazilian theologian Silvia Regina de Lima Silva. Her starting point is the idea that black feminist theology emerges from a double challenge. The first one is that, like the third stage of feminist theology, “it has the challenge of questioning and deconstructing the patriarchal theology that in Latin America and the Caribbean has assumed a male, white and elitist face, fostering an ethnocentric, class-based, macho theology” (de Lima Silva, “From Within” 68). The second one, however, reflects on “the experience of faith lived by black women. We ponder theology as a new theological locus where black women may come together in order to share, to think, and to proclaim their liberating experiences and presences of God” (de Lima Silva, “From Within” 69). This theological locus emerges from the identity of African Latin American women as Afrodescendant women in the African diaspora, which means that “we carry an Africa in our heart. More than a real Africa, we bear a mythic, symbolic Africa, a utopian construction that nourishes our dreams and desires of liberation, of a decent life” (de Lima Silva, “From Within” 69). The consequence of being a black woman in a racist society and in an androcentric and sexist world is the emergence of a “non-place” from which African Latin American female identity must be rebuilt by recovering a theological discourse that not only seeks to delegitimize the theology of dominion of the past but also to contribute to the process of affirmation of identity and retrieval of black citizenship (de Lima Silva, “From Within” 69).
The collective, communal and macroecumenical nature of a Latin American black feminist theology of liberation is underlined by de Lima Silva, who insists on the fact that “the struggle against discrimination and racism roots this theology in movements and organizations of impoverished women and men, and it is united to other groups who are similarly excluded” (“From Within” 69). On the other hand, the reformulation of the affirmation of the body as a theological locus in Latin American feminist theology is considered by de Lima Silva as one of the main epistemological principles of black feminist theology through the concept of the “black body:”

The experience of racial discrimination is the negation of the black body. The association of black with what is evil, dirty, with the negative dimensions of life, makes many black women and men deny their blackness by wishing to be whitened. Wishing to be whitened is ultimately wishing one’s own extinction as person and as a people. Unwillingness to assume one’s blackness means aspiring not to be, not to have been. The black woman is challenged to rediscover her own bodiliness, to be reconciled to her black body, to reencounter it as the beautiful work that came from the hands of the Creator. (“From Within” 70)

Another important element of black theology observed by de Lima Silva is the process of retrieving the historical memory of the black people. This allows the African Latin American female subject to discover herself as part of a people with roots and a past: “Integrating ourselves into this history of the past means discovering ourselves as subjects who make history today. We also discover our history as a place of encounter, of manifestation of God. The history of black women and men is also a place of revelation”

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54 The African Brazilian theologian also clarifies that, as a result of the growing exclusion fostered by neoliberal globalization, “we offer blackness and feminist commitment from the world of the poor, and together we seek the other world that is possible, the society that respects life, protects those who are weakest, allows everyone, female and male, to exist with dignity amid differences. Believing in and anticipating the other possible world is another important theological locus from which black feminist theology emerges” (“From Within” 69-70).
The discovery of history also gives rise to the recovery and affirmation of memory, which is not just a lifeless recalling of the past but “the living power of the past that is manifested in the present, filling it with meaning and transcendence” (de Lima Silva, “From Within” 71). Black memory, on the other hand, is preserved through the secrets of grandmothers and the wisdom of elders, which are deposited in the foundations of religions from Africa. It is precisely this encounter with black history and memory that has allowed many African Latin American women to discover the link between ancient African spirituality and Christianity:

That has meant approaching something that we thought we knew, the God of our ancestors. We have called this experience intra-religious dialogue, because it takes place within us. We feel loved and embraced by the God of our grandfathers, by the Goddess of our grandmothers, by our ancestors. It is the encounter with a particular experience of God/Goddess, “of a God who is not a single gate, not a single path, but who makes many paths possible.” This has been something liberating for the life of women. We do not renounce the experience of Christian faith, but we enrich it on the basis of the encounter with this different countenance of God/Goddess. A God/Goddess who also has a female countenance, who is closer to nature and sometimes merged with it. Land, ancestors, rivers, food, the axé (Yoruba tradition: energy, vital power) are part of historic religious memory, part of our experience of God, and foundations of a theology with a black countenance. This is an ecumenical and macro-ecumenical theological experience incarnate in the challenges of society. (De Lima Silva, “From Within” 71)

De Lima Silva’s conclusion is that doing theology is an act of transgression for Afrodescendant women that involves going beyond the patriarchal and racist codes of Latin American societies even from an ecofeminist point of view.55 This hazardous

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55 Following de Lima Silva, the starting point for black feminist theology is the broader context of Latin American feminist theology, which arose in the 1990s within liberation theology. According to de Lima Silva, an important element in Latin American feminist liberation theology is “the mediation of the categories of gender as instruments of analysis, as a broader conceptual framework for analyzing issues of
journey not only entails traveling “one portion of the route of Latin American feminist theology” (de Lima Silva, “From Within” 72) but also entering “through other paths, by our own paths” (de Lima Silva, “From Within” 72). According to the African Brazilian theologian, there are two different ways to do an African Latin American feminist theology of liberation that are reflected in her own theological journey. One is to understand the experience of the faith of Latin American black women and to reinterpret it using concepts and categories of Western Christian theology. The problem with this approach, however, is that “to begin with, it was an effort to reconcile the irreconcilable. Moreover, the effort to understand black theology with concepts from Western Christian theology set up Western patriarchal theology as the main, and in some instances only, interlocutor of our theological endeavor” (de Lima Silva, “From Within” 72). In other words, this kind of theological reflection only answers the questions and challenges coming from Western patriarchal theology. It is therefore necessary to become aware that “black feminist theology and other liberation theologies in Latin America operate within a different rationality. They seek to respond to questions coming from other places” (de Lima Silva, “From Within” 72). Decoloniality as opposed to Eurocentrism is therefore the crucial issue when articulating a theological discourse like black feminist theology from the subaltern and decolonial locus of enunciation of the periphery vis-à-vis the imperialist one of the center.

The consequence of this epistemological rupture is that the second orientation of African Latin American feminist theology is articulated from the perspective of the black female subaltern subject, which means that “theology is invited and challenged to extend
its borders so as to make room for other actors who until that moment have been excluded from its process and method of theological reflection” (de Lima Silva, “From Within” 72). This explains why de Lima Silva highlights the need of a change in our understanding of what theology means to black women from Latin America. According to the African Brazilian theologian, “looking at the initial inspiration that led me to theological study, I discover that I think of God not only with my head. I am a living-thinking-loving-enjoying body. The experience of God passes through my entire body and through the bodies of other women and men. Theology takes on another meaning” (“From Within” 72). This new dimension of theological reflection is founded on the idea that no people or human gender possesses the whole truth since what theologies can do is just open up a space to reveal the various faces of God/Goddess. This is considered by de Lima Silva a major theological and political task committed to changes in human and social relations that also involves “unmasking all those who seek to hijack God and reduce God to themselves, to their interests. At the same time it returns to each person and human group the right to be in difference, a creature, a people created in God’s image and likeness” (“From Within” 73).

Brilliant and original, de Lima Silva’s articulation of an African Latin American feminist theology of liberation is not without its difficulties and challenges for the future. First of all, like Rodrigues da Silva’s theological reflection, a black feminist theology still lacks a balance between its historical and epistemological elements. In other words, its solid historical foundation, based on the historical memory and experience of Latin American black peoples, contrasts with its epistemological weakness as a theoretical discourse, which is never developed in depth, especially as far as the dialogical
interaction between the race and gender categories is concerned. This is just dealt with superficially and certainly demands a more detailed analysis. Another problem is that the “black body” category, which plays a prominent role in de Lima Silva’s theological reflection, is always understood in quite essentialist and reductionist biological terms. Race is not so much a biological question as a socio-cultural one, especially if we take into consideration the significance of the cultural experience of African Latin American women that is so often underlined by de Lima Silva. Therefore, concepts like “black body” or “living-thinking-loving-enjoying body” are not so much biological constructions but rather socio-cultural ones based on de Lima Silva’s own experience and identity as both an African Latin American whose cultural difference is specifically shaped by African Brazilian culture and a woman whose gender difference is also socio-culturally constructed.

De Lima Silva’s biologizing category of the “black body,” which is so significant as a theological locus, also eclipses the fluid and in-transit nature of cultural contact situations, which are in a permanent process of redefinition and revision. This underlines the dynamic nature of transcultural socio-cultural phenomena, which contrasts with the ethnocentric and static connotations of biologizing notions like “black body.” This is especially worrying from a theological point of view since the conception of “black body” in purely biological terms prevents it from capturing the intercultural and interreligious dialogue between ancient African spirituality and the Christian teachings, which is the fruit of the interweaving or inculturation of both religious experiences as an example of a cultural contact phenomenon from a spiritual point of view. Another challenge for black feminist theology is therefore to deepen the dialogue of African
traditions and Christianity from an inculturating horizon, something that is just mentioned by de Lima Silva but never explored in depth. All this suggests that it would be more accurate and realistic to speak of “black culture within a transcultural setting” rather than of “black body,” a notion that seems to be influenced by the biologizing connotations of the theoretical production of some of the poststructuralist French feminists of the 1970s (Heléne Cixous and Luce Irigaray).\(^{56}\) It would be more appropriate for de Lima Silva, however, to follow the steps of the school of American feminism, in which gender is conceived in more socio-cultural terms, represented by African American feminists like Alice Walker, bell hooks, Barbara Christian and Patricia Hill Collins among others.\(^{57}\)

Another problem related to that of inculturation and intercultural and interreligious dialogue is the partiality of de Lima Silva’s historical approach in her theological reflection. Attention not only must be paid to the historicity of the black people and women but also to that of Jesus Christ himself, which must enter into dialogue with that of the black community. It is therefore necessary to rescue the memory of the historical Jesus and to look for the points of connection with African Latin American historical memory from an intercultural, interreligious and inculturating horizon that involves a macroecumenical perspective.\(^{58}\) In spite of its theoretical and epistemological

\(^{56}\) See Cixous’ essay “The Laugh of the Medusa” (English translation, 1976) and Irigaray’s “This Sex Which is Not One” (English translation, 1985).


\(^{58}\) De Lima Silva has pointed out in connection with the historical Jesus that “I share the opinion of those scholars of biblical theology who hold that such studies [on the historical Jesus] manifest persistent tendencies of the kyriarchal currents that attempt to secure Christian identity in terms of the Western ‘logic of identity’ ” (“Dialogue” 176). The African Brazilian theologian cannot help to draw the conclusion that “these studies contain valuable elements that can contribute to a feminist or black feminist
flaws, de Lima Silva’s theological reflection is a valuable first attempt to conceptualize an African Latin American feminist theology of liberation. It is necessary, however, to articulate its epistemological, socio-cultural and inter-historical dimension more in depth so that a true systematic approach can emerge in the form of a book as a result of a more individual, theoretical and scholarly reflection than that carried out by the collective agency of the various Latin American black communities from an eminently praxical and macroecumenical horizon. The greatest challenge, of course, is that more African Latin American women develop their own theological discourses from a black feminist perspective that must not be exclusively restricted to Brazil but also spread to other parts of Latin America and the Caribbean. One cannot help to draw the conclusion that black feminist liberation theology is certainly one of the most promising tendencies of LT2 that is bound to provide decisive and revolutionary contributions to the Latin American liberation theology of the future.

Unlike indigenous liberation theology, African Latin American liberation theology was systematized from the start in spite of its theoretical and epistemological problems. That is why nowadays we have a large corpus of works, the result of a fruitful theological reflection that has been going on for twenty-five years. It must be noted, however, that its most influential theoretical works were produced by African Brazilian theologians like Aparecido da Silva, Rodrigues da Silva and de Lima Silva, its three main

Christology, but, still more important than searching for the historical Jesus is recovering the many easily available stories of Jesus and dialoguing with them” (“Dialogue” 176). De Lima Silva’s critique is actually quite questionable since the stories of Jesus, along with his deeds, are the fruit of Jesus Christ’s own historicity, and therefore, a manifestation of the historical Jesus. Moreover, although some studies on the historical Jesus coming from Europe can certainly show a Westernized approach, those carried out in Latin America by important liberation theologians like Jon Sobrino and Leonardo Boff are articulated from the periphery’s subaltern and decolonial locus of enunciation, which contrasts with the Eurocentric lense of Western theology.
exponents. As has been mentioned before, this means that African Latin American
liberation theology is essentially an African Brazilian theological current whereas
indigenous liberation theology is more widespread throughout México, the Andes,
Central America and the Mapuche areas of the southern cone. African Latin American
liberation theology, however, is also present in the Caribbean, as can be appreciated in
the works by Laennec Hurbon (Dominican Republic), Quince Duncan (Costa Rica) and
René Castellanos (Cuba). Another important fact that has considerably contributed to the
systematization, theoretical production and publication of its main works was the
foundation of the Atabaque group of black culture and theology by Aparecido da Silva
himself.\footnote{The goal of the Atabaque group is to gather researchers belonging to various fields of knowledge in
order to reflect on black culture and African Latin American and Caribbean theology. Therefore, some of
its main objectives are to discuss the main concerns of black communities, to publish works on black
theology, and to offer courses, advising and subsidies to the communities and groups committed to the
cause of the black peoples in Latin America.}

It must be noted, on the other hand, that some European American theologians
like Giulio Girardi and Paulo Suess not only have studied African Latin American
theologies and cultures in some of their works but have also explored the points of
connection with indigenous liberation theologies and cultures.\footnote{This is the case with Girardi’s work Los excluidos ¿construirán la nueva historia? El movimiento indígena, negro y popular (1994) and with Suess’s works A conquista espiritual da América española (1992), Evangelizar a partir dos projetos históricos dos Outros (1995) and Los confines del mundo en medio de nosotros. Simposio Misiológico Internacional (1999). See also Girardi’s article “El macroecumenismo popular indo-afro-latinoamericano: perspectivas ético-políticas, culturales y teológicas” (2003).}

Another major Latin American theological reflection of LT2 is Leonardo Boff’s
eco-theology of liberation, which is the fruit of the identification of LT1’s fundamental
insight of the preferential option for the poor with the exploitation and oppression of
Mother Earth that is criticized by contemporary ecological discourses. Eco-theology’s
goal is therefore to develop an ecologico-social awareness. This is especially based on the
ecological teachings of St. Francis of Assisi as well as on the reinterpretation of the Genesis episode from a decolonial lense but also presents a macro-ecumenical perspective through the incorporation of some spiritual elements coming from Amerindian and Buddhist religious thinking. Boff’s point of departure is the recovery of the significance of creation theology for Christianity. Due to the fact that “se le ha dado [al ser humano] el mundo como jardín que debe cultivar y cuidar” (Boff, *La dignidad* 54), the relationship of humanity with creation is “fundamentalmente de responsabilidad, una relación ética” (Boff, *La dignidad* 54). This ethical relationship is instituted in the book of Genesis. The Brazilian theologian convincingly argues that both versions of the creation and mission of human beings show how “el ser humano, en cuanto hombre y mujer, es el representante de Dios en la creación, su hijo y su hija, su lugarteniente y el que prolonga la obra creadora de Dios” (*La dignidad* 51). Due to the cultural context of its author more than three thousand years ago, the terms “subyugad la tierra y dominad,” which appear in the first version, must not be understood despotically in a literal sense but rather with the sense of “administrar y cuidar una herencia recibida del Padre” (Boff, *La dignidad* 52).

Unfortunately, these words were literally interpreted in the context of Modernity and humanity’s mission was understood by important intellectuals like Descartes and Bacon as to dominate and enslave Mother Earth and the natural world for individual and social profit: “Esa interpretación legitimaba, con la fuerza de la palabra de Dios, el saqueo que la Tierra sufrió y viene sufriendo. Necesitamos revisar esa interpretación y rescatar el sentido original, profundamente ecológico del mensaje bíblico” (Boff, *La dignidad* 52). Boff’s point is supported by the second version, which explicitly mentions
that man “fue colocado en el jardín del Edén ‘para cultivarlo y guardarlo’ (Gn 2, 15)” (Boff, *La dignidad* 52). As is observed by the Brazilian theologian, “aquí el sentido es manifiesto. El ser humano es amigo de la naturaleza, trabaja con la tierra (cultivar es eso) y es el ángel bueno que la preserva. Este sentido pudo haber limitado al otro, pero, en verdad, quedó sólo en el papel o fue espiritualizado” (*La dignidad* 52). The serious consequence of this is that the originary sense of Genesis was misinterpreted by Western Christianity. But, as is noted by Boff, “en la caja de resonancia de nuestra cultura occidental, de por sí ya orientada por el poder y por el faraonismo, tal mensaje tenía pocas posibilidades de ser escuchado y de ser vivido” (*La dignidad* 52).

Eco-theology’s ecologico-social awareness is best represented by the figure of Francis of Assisi, who, according to Boff, “se transformó en arquetipo de una confraternización ejemplar con la naturaleza . . . En razón de eso, fue proclamado patrono de la ecología” (*La dignidad* 58). The Brazilian theologian calls attention to the fact that “la originalidad de San Francisco reside en el hecho de haber conseguido una síntesis feliz entre la ecología interior y la ecología exterior, esto es, dio origen a una fascinante mística cósmica” (*La dignidad* 58). St. Francis’s cosmic balance as a result of the integration, union and harmony of his inner world with the world of creation can be especially appreciated in the reconciliation of his option for the poor with that for the natural world: “San Francisco nos muestra, por fin, que la opción por los pobres y por los

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61 Boff also notes how St. Francis’s biographers —Thomas of Celan, St. Bonaventure and the texts of his close comrades— unanimously affirm “la profunda empatía que mantenía con todos los seres de la creación. Francisco era un poeta genial, capaz de sentir el corazón de las cosas, descifrar su mensaje ontológico y sentir, por conaturalidad, los lazos que nos prenden unos a los otros y al corazón del Padre” (*La dignidad* 59). St. Francis, however, also developed “toda una ecología interior (ecología de la mente). En sus escritos, oraciones e himnos se nota el entusiasmo y el brillo que el universo producía en su experiencia del mundo y de Dios. Al final de su vida compuso el *Himno al hermano sol*, pieza del más alto éxtasis cósmico” (Boff, *La dignidad* 59).
más pobres (los leprosos y los enfermos de sida de hoy), opción que lo hizo el *Poverello* (el pobrecito), puede compaginarse con la ternura hacia la creación” (Boff, *La dignidad* 60). Consequently, the life and work of St. Francis demonstrates that “nuestro lugar es la Tierra, madre y amiga, hecha jardín del Edén para cultivarla con cariño y guardarla con el corazón en las manos” (Boff, *La dignidad* 60).

Another major element for the emergence of eco-theology’s ecologico-social awareness is the Holy Spirit, which inhabits the world and the human heart:

La tradición cristiana posee una categoría para entender la realidad como energía y como vida. Es la figura del Espíritu Santo. Él es, por excelencia, el Espíritu creador. Actúa en todo lo que se mueve, hace expandir la vida, suscita los profetas, inspira a los poetas, inflama a los líderes carismáticos y llena el corazón de todos de entusiasmo.

El Espíritu, según el testimonio de las Escrituras, llena el universo y renueva constantemente la estructura del cosmos. Él habita en su creación semejantemente al Hijo que se encarnó en la humanidad de Jesús. (Boff, *La dignidad* 56)

According to Boff, Christians have no problems to accept the mystery of incarnation or the cosmic presence of the resurrected Christ but are little sensitive to the inhabitation of the Spirit of Creation, which produces “una espiritualidad espontánea, cósmica y ligada a los procesos de la naturaleza y de la historia” (Boff, *La dignidad* 56-57) and also contributes to the integration of woman and the feminine dimension of humanity (Boff, *La dignidad* 57). Therefore, it is necessary to incorporate the insight of

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62 Boff clarifies that “el mismo amor que le lleva a los leprosos y al lobo de Gubbio le hace abrazar al pobre de los caminos y hablar con los pajaritos. Él sabe que este mundo es el reino de las desigualdades (*regio dessimilitudinis*), pero ni por esto deja que la amargura se asiente en su vida” (*La dignidad* 60).

63 Boff observes in connection with this idea that, from the point of view of a spontaneous, cosmic and ecological spirituality, woman is much closer to the mystery of life than man (*La dignidad* 57). The best proof for this is that “no sin razón, la mujer María, madre de Jesús, guarda una relación única con el
the cosmic location of the Spirit that defines the religious thought of the indigenous peoples of the USA and Latin America and of Zen buddhism:

Bien decía un poeta antiguo que vivía esa mística de la omnipresencia del Espíritu: “El Espíritu duerme en la piedra, sueña en la flor, despierta en los animales, sabe que está despierto en los hombres y siente que está despierto en las mujeres.” Hay aquí una intuición correcta de la ubicación cósmica del Espíritu, como la testifican tanto los místicos de las culturas originarias, como los indígenas sioux de los Estados Unidos, los bororos del Brasil y otros maestros de la tradición zen de Oriente. (Boff, *La dignidad* 57)

This insight, in fact, is not foreign to Christianity, as can be appreciated in the early fathers of the fourth and fifth-century Latin and Greek church like Gregorius Naciancen, Gregorius Nisa, Basilius and Peter Damianus, who often spoke of “spiritus ubique diffusus” (the Spirit spread everywhere) (Boff, *La dignidad* 57). Ancient Amerindian and Eastern wisdom can therefore help us to recover the dimension of the Spirit of Creation, which was also present in early Christianity and is essential to develop an ecological mysticism: “Estamos sumergidos en un océano de vida, de espíritu, de vibración y de comunión. Formamos un todo en el Espíritu que, como un hilo de collar de perlas, une todo y atrae todo hacia lo alto, en dirección de una comunión plena en el reino de la Trinidad” (Boff, *La dignidad* 57). Ecological mysticism, on the other hand, is closely related to the significance of the “Tao of Liberation” concept for eco-theology. The notion of the Tao of Liberation has been jointly articulated by Boff and Mark Hathaway, a popular educator, pastoral agent and freelance ecologian from Canada, in their work *The Tao of Liberation* (2009). Boff and Hathaway’s source of inspiration is the *Tao Te Ching*, an ancient text from China written approximately twenty-five hundred

Espíritu, pues él levantó su tienda sobre ella (Lc 1, 35), divinizando para siempre lo femenino” (Boff, *La dignidad* 57).
years ago that has been traditionally attributed to Lao-Tzu, a sage who is believed to have lived from 551 to 479 BC, although most scholars think it is just a collection of traditional sayings coming from various sources (“About”). Following sinologist Jonathan Star, Boff and Hathaway show how “Tao” is the Supreme Reality, the whole universe and the way the universe operates, whereas “Te” is the shape and power of Tao, that is, the way Tao manifests. “Ching,” on the other hand, means a book or a classic work (“About”). Hence, Tao Te Ching literally means “The Classic Book of the Supreme Reality (Tao) and its Perfect Manifestation (Te), “The Book of the Way and its Power” or “The Classic of Tao and its Virtue” (Star 2).

The origins of the concept of Tao are therefore in Tao Te Ching, which, according to Boff and Hathaway, “after the Bible . . . is the most widely published text in the world” (“About”). The Tao of ancient Chinese philosophy and spirituality is therefore the basis for the notion of “Tao of Liberation,” which is defined by Boff and Hathaway in the following terms:

The Tao of Liberation is a search for wisdom, the wisdom needed to effect profound transformation in our world. We have chosen to describe this wisdom using the ancient Chinese word Tao, meaning a way or path leading to harmony, peace, and right relationship. The Tao can be understood as a principle of order that constitutes the common ground of the cosmos; it is both the way that the universe works and the flowing cosmic structure that cannot be described, only tasted. The Tao is the wisdom that lies at the very heart of the universe, encapsulating the essence of its purpose and direction. (“Prologue”)

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64 Boff and Hathaway also mention that the text was probably written between the seventh and second century B.C.E. (“About”).
65 Boff and Hathaway also clarify that “innumerable translations of it exist, some more scholarly and literal, others more poetic. Ancient Chinese is a conceptual language, so in truth each word of the text evokes a host of images that can be translated in a variety of ways” (“About”). The consequence of this is that “no one translation, then, captures the whole breadth or depth of the text. In some sense, any translation of such a text is a form of interpretation, and none provides us with a complete picture of what is being said” (“About”).
The interphilosophical and interreligious nature of Tao is underlined by Boff and Hathaway, especially in connection with other concepts of Eastern spirituality like Dharma in Buddhism\textsuperscript{66} and Malkuta, an Aramaic word used by Jesus that is usually translated as “the kingdom” or “reign.”\textsuperscript{67} On the other hand, the fact that the Chinese ideogram for Tao combines the concepts of “wisdom” and “walking” conjures “the image of a process that puts wisdom into practice—or in other words, a kind of \textit{praxis}. In \textit{The Tao of Liberation}, we seek this kind of ‘walking wisdom’ inherent in the very fabric of the cosmos” (Boff and Hathaway, “Prologue”). Boff and Hathaway’s observation that “in the quest for this wisdom, we draw upon insights from such diverse fields as economics, psychology, cosmology, ecology, and spirituality” (“Prologue”) also reveals how eco-theology’s interdisciplinarity is empowered as a result of incorporating the notion of the Tao of Liberation into its reflection. Tao, however, is an art and not a science, which means that “in a very real sense, the Tao is a mystery: We can provide signposts pointing to the path, but we cannot draw a detailed map” (Boff and Hathaway, “Prologue”). But what is then the aim and purpose of the Tao of Liberation in dialogue with eco-theology? According to its theoreticians, this mainly consists of “finding insights that will enable humanity to move away from perceptions, ideas, habits, and systems that perpetuate injustice and destroy our planet’s capacity to sustain life” (“Prologue”). Only then “can we find new ways of living that will allow the needs of all people to be equitably met in

\textsuperscript{66} Boff and Hathaway point out that “the Dharma in Buddhism signifies ‘the way things work’ or ‘orderly process itself’ (Macy 1991a, xi)” (“Prologue”).

\textsuperscript{67} Boff and Hathaway also note that the term \textit{Malkuta} “refers to ‘the ruling principles that guide our lives toward unity’ and conjures ‘the image of a ‘fruitful arm’ poised to create, or a coiled spring that is ready to unwind with all the verdant potential of the Earth’ (Douglas-Klotz 1990, 2)” (“Prologue”). Their conclusion is that both the \textit{Dharma} and the \textit{Malkuta} point in some way to the same reality as the Tao, “a reality that ultimately evades a hard and fast description but can only be intuited on a deeper level” (“Prologue”).
harmony with the needs and well-being of the greater Earth community, and indeed the cosmos itself (Boff and Hathaway, “Prologue”).

The word “liberation” is used by Boff and Hathaway to refer to this process of transformation. It must be noted, however, that although “liberation” has traditionally been used “either in the personal sense of spiritual realization or in the collective sense of a people seeking to free itself from oppressive political, economic, and social structures” (Boff and Hathaway, “Prologue”), Boff and Hathaway not only include both of these uses but also frame them “in a wider, ecological—and even cosmological—context. For us, liberation is the process of moving toward a world where all human beings can live with dignity in harmony with the great community of beings who make up Gaia, the living Earth” (“Prologue”). Moreover, liberation is also understood by both theologians in a cosmic perspective as the process through which “the universe seeks to realize its own potential as it drives toward greater differentiation, interiority (or self-organization) and communion” (“Prologue”). The fact that Boff and Hathaway have drawn inspiration from a wide variety of perspectives and spiritual traditions shows how eco-theology enters a new interdisciplinary and macro-ecumenical stage articulated around the hybrid discourse on the quest for the Tao of Liberation, which combines the reflections of a thinker from the North with those of one from the South.

Another epistemological element that defines Boff’s eco-theology of liberation is the concept of “ecologico-social democracy.” The Brazilian theologian explains how various forms of democracy have existed throughout history like direct, representative,
participating or social democracy or even a democracy understood as a universal value.  

A new way of living democracy, however, is beginning to emerge “sea como valor universal, sea como forma más integradora en la organización de una sociedad: la democracia ecológico-social” (Boff, La dignidad 87-88). The birth of an ecologico-social democracy has to do with the fact that the ecological dimension is present in all contemporary socio-cultural manifestations:

A partir de los años sesenta, las ciencias sociales y humanas constituyeron la mediación necesaria para comprender y conferir eficacia a las actividades políticas. Hoy la ecología constituye una mediación imprescindible, para que las ciencias y las prácticas puedan dar la contribución que se espera, en el sentido de garantizar la integridad de lo creado, principalmente la salvaguarda de la vida, comenzando por la más amenazada. (Boff, La dignidad 88).

An ecologico-social democracy therefore demands the fulfilment of a series of eminently ecological factors: Overcoming anthropocentrism, according to which man is the lord of creation and the king of the universe who can dominate and exploit all

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68 Direct democracy is defined by Boff as that in which “todos los ciudadanos participan de modo directo en la elaboración de las decisiones” (La dignidad 86). Representative democracy, however, is that in which “los ciudadanos eligen representantes, a través del voto, para que éstos los representen en las diversas situaciones en que ejercen el poder” (Boff, La dignidad 86). In a participating or social democracy, on the other hand, “la sociedad se organiza de tal forma que otros grupos sociales participan en las decisiones, como los sindicatos, las asociaciones de carácter nacional, el colegio de abogados, las iglesias, los organismos de derechos humanos, las universidades, etc. Se socializa el ejercicio del poder, y la democracia pasa a tener un carácter más cotidiano y dinámico” (Boff, La dignidad 87). Democracy as a universal value is the result of the correct implementation of a participating democracy. Democracy is here a value not only to be lived in political situations as power relations but also in other spheres of human life: The family, the egalitarian relationship between husband, wife and children, school and social groups like neighbor associations, trade unions and political parties (Boff, La dignidad 87). According to the Brazilian theologian, the most common types of democracy are the first two, which are also the most imperfect. A direct democracy is a utopia that was only experienced in classical Athens by a third of its free population. Representative democracy, on the other hand, is full of imperfections in a classist society in which the elites have economic, political and ideological privileges to choose their representatives (La dignidad 86).
Creatures; recognizing the alterity of each creature of creation, which means that all beings, animate or inanimate, have a value in themselves and must be respected in their otherness; emphasizing the reciprocity and complementarity that exists among creatures since all beings need one another, and therefore, are reciprocal to and complement one another in everything; paying attention to the demands of a “social ecology,” which, by studying human historical-social systems in interaction with environmental systems, reveals the link between social and ecological injustice, how the poor person is the most harmed human being, and how the future generations have the right to inherit a healthy Earth and biosphere; and widening the meaning of the option for the poor, which must also include an option for the most threatened beings and species like all the cultures and animals in danger of extinction: The Yanomami, the Kaipó, the Panda bear or the almost fifty thousand species of insects, plants and other animate beings that disappeared on the Amazon basin before the end of the year 2000 (Boff, La dignidad 87-92). All this allows Boff to conclude that an ecologico-social democracy is “una democracia que acepta en su

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69 Boff reminds us that the understanding of reality that is present in the technical-scientific project of Modernity, “confirma la misma voluntad de dominación. Descartes, Galileo Galilei, Newton y Bacon nos enseñaron que ‘saber es poder’ y que ‘poder es dominar’, vale decir, desarrollar la capacidad de colocar a todos los seres y sus potencias como ‘esclavos a nuestro servicio’, como escribió Descartes” (La dignidad 89). The consequence of this understanding was the consecration and reinforcement of “la violencia y la agresión que, ya en los primeros años de la modernidad (véase la invasión de América Latina, en 1492), se practicaron contra la naturaleza. Está presente en el modelo de desarrollo que entonces se elaboró y que persiste hasta nuestros días. Es el mayor y el más poderoso mito colectivo de la humanidad: el desarrollo económico ilimitado” (Boff, La dignidad 89). This model of development, as is noted by Boff, does not take into consideration “los costes ecológicos, tales como la destrucción de los ecosistemas, la contaminación de la biosfera, el pillaje de los recursos naturales no-renovables (combustibles, fósiles, etc.)” (La dignidad 89).

70 Boff also mentions in connection with the poor that “su relación social que abarca los bienes necesarios para su subsistencia es distorsionada por la explotación de su fuerza de trabajo. La pobreza aparece en la falta de infraestructura para su subsistencia y para la vida digna: aguas contaminadas, aire envenenado, viviendas insalubres, transporte contaminante y relaciones sociales violentas” (La dignidad 91). Consequently, “como el ser humano es parte del medio ambiente, la injusticia social camina paralela a la injusticia ecológica” (Boff, La dignidad 91).
Boff’s eco-theology of liberation is certainly one of the main Latin American theological currents of LT2, and, no doubt, a valuable theological reflection that seeks to find the link between the oppression of the poor and that of Mother Earth and the natural world today. Eco-theology, however, still has some problems as a theological discourse, which means that it also has some challenges ahead for the future. First of all, eco-theology must empower and enhance the dialogue of the Christian teachings with Amerindian and Eastern spirituality. Only if this dialogue is dealt with more in depth can it become a truly epistemological foundation or principle, instead of just working as a thematic-ideological element, that will allow eco-theology to acquire an eminently macro-ecumenical dimension. Although the macro-ecumenical perspective has always been present in it from the start, it must be discussed more in detail so that eco-theology can have a solid epistemological method. Eco-theology, on the other hand, must also approach and enter into a dialogue with another Latin American theological reflection of LT2 with which it shares many common insights: Ivone Gebara’s ecofeminist liberation theology. A book co-authored by Gebara and Boff in which they debate and discuss the points of connection between eco-theology and ecofeminism as well as their differences is urgently needed. Perhaps the contents of the book could be organized as a series of conversations on the subject.

Another problem is that eco-theology’s discourse has turned out to be too redundant and repetitive over the years. Eco-theology certainly needs to renew and rejuvenate, something it can only achieve by entering into a much more critical dialogue.
with the Tao of Liberation and other philosophical and religious concepts coming from Eastern thought. This is eco-theology’s chance to be revitalized as a theological current. One co-authored book on the subject, however, is not enough. Eco-theology must pay more attention to the perspective of the countries of the South, especially to that of the Latin American periphery. Therefore, it is Boff himself that must continue articulating eco-theology’s macro-ecumenical horizon in dialogical projection with Eastern, and especially, Amerindian spirituality. It must be noted that no book exploring the interaction between eco-theology and the indigenous spiritualities of the USA, Latin America and Canada has been written by the Brazilian theologian so far. Therefore, the indigenous spiritual elements working within eco-theology’s macro-ecumenical framework must also be analyzed and discussed more in depth in order to correct a serious epistemological flaw of its methodology. On the other hand, the fact that no other book on the subject of eco-theology and its dialogical relationship with Tao has been published since 2009 is also very worrying. Not only Tao but other Eastern and Amerindian philosophical and spiritual elements must seek some common insights and points of connection with eco-theology’s Christian tradition. If Boff or another Latin American theologian do not break new ground in this direction, eco-theology will lose a precious opportunity to be renewed and evolve as one of the most influential, innovative and original macro-ecumenical theological discourses of LT2 in the future.

A special case within the Latin American theological currents of LT2 is represented by the theological reflection of South-Korean-born Brazilian liberation theologian Jung Mo Sung. The main tenet of Sung’s theological discourse is the interaction between theology and economy that takes place through a rupture with
Marxist social analysis and LT1’s key notion of the historical praxis. In this sense, Sung does not believe in the success of the liberating praxis carried out by the proletariat or any other victims of the system, which signals a rupture with one of the basic epistemological principles of LT1. Theology and economy, however, interact with each other in order to produce a theological reflection that is very critical with neoliberal globalization but only from the inside, which means that it does not offer any alternatives to it. The critical potential of Sung’s theological reflection is therefore much weaker than that of LT1 or the Marxist-based discourses of some tendencies of Latin American LT2 like Boff’s eco-theology of liberation and Gebara’s ecofeminist liberation theology.

Sung’s reflection, in fact, is closer to the US theologies of liberation of LT2, which also move within a liberal horizon, although, unlike Sung’s theological discourse, they are not critical with it. Sung’s liberation theology, on the other hand, also reminds one of the theology of the people, articulated in Argentina in the 1970s by important theologians like Lucio Gera and Juan Carlos Scannone. The main difference, however, is that the theology of the people is founded on an analysis of the Latin American reality that takes place in historical-cultural terms whereas Sung’s analysis is eminently economic in spite of its non-Marxist nature. It is precisely the dialogical interaction between theology and economics, which is still quite critical with capitalist globalization, without resorting to the Marxist socio-analytical mediation or the historical praxis that defines the originality of Sung’s reflection as a sort of economic theology.

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71 As has been mentioned before, some of the new discourses of Latina and Asian American liberation theologies are critical with neoliberal neocolonialism and injustice but they are the exception to the rule. Another exception mentioned before is that of Cornel West’s theological reflection within the horizon of Black theology, which is always defined by its link with nineteenth-century American liberal theology.

72 See chapter two, note 58 and pages 215-17.
Sung’s theological discourse based on the dialogical projection between theology and economics is a part of what Juan José Tamayo has called “the changes within Latin America’s new theological paradigm” (“Cambio” 29-30). According to Tamayo, a “new theological paradigm” has been developing in Latin America since the 1960s through the articulation of the various theologies of liberation, which presuppose a new theological method and hermeneutics (“Cambio” 11-29). It is at the dawn of the twenty-first century, however, that Latin American theology is beginning to move in a new direction “a partir de los nuevos rostros, sujetos emergentes, nuevos niveles de conciencia y nuevos desafíos que la propia realidad plantea: la naturaleza, la tierra, las mujeres, los afrolatinoamericanos, los indígenas, el campesinado, los excluidos —cada vez más numerosos— por el neoliberalismo, etc.” (Tamayo-Acosta, “Cambio” 29-30). Therefore, this new theological horizon involves deep changes in the new paradigm that started to be developed four decades ago (Tamayo-Acosta, “Cambio” 30). These changes are identified by Tamayo with the interaction of theology with gender, economics, ecology and the indigenous and African Latin American peoples, which gives rise to feminist, economic, ecological and indigenous and African Latin American liberation theologies.

One of the changes in the new theological paradigm is the emphasis on the interaction between theology and economics, which produces a series of theological discourses that can be called “economic theologies of liberation.” Sung’s reflection is certainly one of these discourses but Tamayo also mentions those of Hinkelammert, Gustavo Gutiérrez and Santa Ana (“Cambio” 38-41). According to Tamayo, the main features of an economic theology of liberation like Sung’s are: The study of the relationship between religious practices and discourses and between economic practices
and discourses; the idea that economics is a belief system that works as an economic religion and has theological tenets; and the theological significance of economics, which is privileged in all the dimensions of Christian reflection, in the alteration of the new paradigm (‘Cambio’ 37-38). It must be noted, on the other hand, that Tamayo’s concept of the ‘new theological paradigm’ can be identified with Dussel’s LT1 whereas ‘the new changes within the new theological paradigm’ observed by the Spanish theologian are the equivalent to Dussel’s LT2. The difference, however is that, in contrast with Dussel’s brilliant theorization of the epistemological evolution of LT1 into LT2, Tamayo uses a merely descriptive approach that just summarizes the ideas of the main tendencies of LT2 but never contributes his own original theory on the evolution of the new theological paradigm.73

The problem with Sung’s reflection, however, is not only that, as has been mentioned above, it always takes place within a neoliberal context that is never transcended from the perspective of an antiglobalization alternative but also its rejection of the historic praxis, which is considered an impossible utopia for him. This would be similar to renouncing Christian ethics just because Jesus Christ’s goal of a more just and human world here on earth leading to the eschatological promise of the Kingdom is a social utopia. In fact, it is not a question of being or not being utopian. It is a question of being ethical and following the right course in life. Now that Sung’s theological discourse has been characterized and defined, we must pay attention to some features of the other Latin American theological currents of LT2 and how these compare with Sung’s economic theology of liberation. As has been mentioned above, some tendencies like

Boff’s eco-theology and Gebara’s ecofeminism still rely on the mediation of Marxist social analysis. Others, however, are not based on a Marxist analysis of reality but rather on a historical-cultural one. Unlike the theology of the people, however, these Latin American discourses of LT2 are very critical with neoliberalism and, unlike Sung’s reflection, they openly endorse an antiglobalization perspective. This is especially the case with indigenous and African Latin American liberation theologies. These currents certainly do not deny the influence of Marxist analysis on liberation theology but, as has just been mentioned, their analysis goes in a non-Marxist socio-cultural and historical direction full of common insights. This, however, does not mean that their theological reflection does not incorporate some elements of Marxist thinking like the historical praxis, which shows that they certainly go beyond a capitalist conceptual framework.

Another interesting point is that, unlike all the other theological discourses of Latin American LT2, which focus on socio-cultural issues, Sung’s liberation theology only pays attention to the economic-political question from a capitalist reformist perspective that contrasts with LT1. Although Sung’s theological reflection may not be so radical and transgressive due to its lack of an anticapitalist stance, its decolonial potential is certainly more powerful than that of LT1. This is due to the fact that, as is noted by Dussel himself, the complexity of the economic and political dimension is captured more critically and efficiently by the theoretical instruments of LT2. Although Dussel especially mentions Hinkelammert’s economic theology in connection with this point, Sung’s discourse breaks new ground in the articulation of an economic theology of liberation from an alternative non-Marxist perspective that is also very critical with globalization. The decoloniality of Sung’s theology, however, is not so powerful as that
of other discourses of Latin American LT2 due to its neoliberal reformist approach and to its rupture with the historical praxis, which seriously weaken its decolonial potential.  

It is probably due to its reformist and conservative orientation that Sung’s economic theology of liberation has been more appealing to American publishers than the various indigenous and African Latin American theologies. Hence why some of Sung’s works have been recently translated into English.  

This, however, is not the case with indigenous and African Latin American theologians, whose books have never been translated into English so far. This makes it very difficult to spread their line of thought at an international level. This is also the case with the books written by the European American theologians working on indigenous and black theologies, which have never been translated into English with the exception of one book by Diego Irarrázaval.

Another problem is that few books have been published by indigenous and African Latin American theologians since the late 90s and the year 2000. There are many recent articles scattered across a wide range of conference proceedings and journals but no serious systematic approach in the form of a book written by an indigenous theologian has

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74 Sung’s liberation theology certainly uses the economic and political theoretical tools more effectively than LT1 in spite of its neoliberal perspective. Hence why its decolonial potential is stronger. In this sense, Dussel is right when pointing out that LT2 becomes more critical from an economic and political point of view. It must be noted, however, that, though quite critical with globalization from the inside, Sung’s reflection is never so radical and transgressive as that of the LT1 founders due to its lack of a Marxist social analysis and to its rupture with the Marxist-based historical praxis. Therefore, Sung’s theological discourse is ultimately rather moderate and conservative, which is probably why, as will be discussed next, it has been more successful than indigenous and African Latin American liberation theology in spite of its much weaker decolonial potential.

75 Three of Sung’s works have been translated into English so far: Desire, Market and Religion (2007), The Subject, Capitalism and Religion: Horizons of Hope in Complex Societies (2011) and, co-edited with Néstor Oscar Míguez and Joerg Rieger, Beyond the Spirit of Empire: Theology and Politics in a New Key (2009).

76 To my knowledge, only Teologia india: Antologia (2000), which collects the various essays written over the years by Zapotec Catholic priest Eleazar López Hernández, has been translated into the French and Italian languages so far. The translations are Sagesse Indigène: La théologie indienne latino-américaine (2002) and Teologia india (2004).

emerged so far.\textsuperscript{78} Even so, I believe that indigenous and African Latin American liberation theologies are the future of Latin American liberation theology both from a praxical and theoretical point of view. The praxis of their theological method certainly plays a key role today in pastoral agencies and base ecclesial communities all over the continent. Although it is true that, from a theoretical point of view, few books on Latin American indigenous and black theologies of liberation have been published in the last fifteen years,\textsuperscript{79} and that, in the case of indigenous theologies, a consistent systematic approach theorized by an indigenous theologian is still missing, I believe that these are precisely the great challenges ahead for the future.\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{78} As has been mentioned before, the only serious systematic approach to an indigenous theology of liberation today are the three volumes by Giulio Girardi \textit{Los excluidos ¿construirán la nueva historia? El movimiento, indígena, negro y popular} (1994), \textit{El derecho indígena a la autodeterminación política y religiosa} (1997) and \textit{Desde su propia palabra: Los indígenas, sujetos de un pensamiento emergente} (1998). The closest to a systematic approach to an indigenous liberation theology by an Amerindian theologian is Eleazar López Hernández’s \textit{Teología india: Antología} (2000). This work gathers various crucial essays on the subject but does not have the structural consistency and coherence of a specialized monograph devoted to the subject. The essays are still too loose and disconnected from each other and all the author has done is to bring them together in a single volume. That accounts for the weakness of the anthology from a theoretical and epistemological point of view.


\textsuperscript{80} As has been mentioned on pages 311-12 and further explained in note 7 of chapter three, this lack of systematization is due to the inherently collective and ecumenical nature of indigenous liberation theology as a reflection. A more systematic approach theorized by particular indigenous theologians, however, is not incompatible with this eminently communitarian approach and must be undertaken in the next few years if indigenous liberation theology wants to be taken seriously at an international level from a theological and scholarly point of view.
Argentinian theologian Iván Petrella has noted that liberation theology “is now being reinvented for the twenty-first century. A new generation of Latin American theologians has taken the reins of liberation theology, developing its themes and hopes in new directions” (“Introduction” xi). In fact, Petrella’s concept of “the next generation” is quite problematic due to its chronological meaning and homogenizing connotations. It must be noted that a generation covers a time span of five to ten years. If we take into account that LT2 emerges in the early 1990s, then we should not speak of just one next generation but at least of three. Petrella’s use of the term “generation” therefore tends to globalize and synthesize. This can be especially appreciated in how Petrella includes Jung Mo Sung, one of the key figures of mainstream LT2, in the same generation as much younger liberation theologians like Marcella Althaus-Reid, Silvia Regina de Lima Silva or Nelson Maldonado-Torres, who would all belong to a later generation according to Petrella’s classification. Petrella, however, is right to observe some common features of all these new theologians: They are lay scholars and expand the theoretical tools available to liberation theology to include comparative political economy, legal theory, queer theory, border thinking, psychoanalysis and poststructuralism (“Introduction” xv). They also tackle new issues like “liberation theology’s heterosexual matrix, the theological import of Latin Americans globalized as migrants, and the relationship between liberation theology and U.S. Hispanic theology, and they rethink issues such as the ethics of neoliberalism, the partnership between theology and the social sciences, and the role of historical projects in pursuing liberation, to name just a few” (“Introduction” xv).
The new liberation theologians of Petrella’s “next generation” are, in fact, the youngest members of what Dussel calls LT2, a much better theoretical and epistemological concept to approach the latest tendencies and developments of twenty-first century liberation theology. The list of theologians included under the label “the next generation” by Petrella is also very questionable. While some intellectuals like feminist and queer theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid and African Brazilian theologian Silvia Regina de Lima Silva qualify for inclusion, Jung Mo Sung belongs to a previous generation and Nelson Maldonado-Torres is not a theologian but a philosopher whose intellectual work moves in the field of decolonial ethics. On the other hand, the absence of important indigenous liberation theologians like Eleazar López Hernández or Aiban Wagua shows how Petrella’s list is incomplete and too partial and subjective. Therefore, it is more consistent and coherent from a theoretical and epistemological point of view to keep Dussel’s category of LT2 and distinguish between its mainstream and new theological voices. Besides Jung Mo Sung (see chapter three, note 51) and Silvia Regina de Lima Silva (see note 32), Petrella’s list of the next generation of Latin American liberation theology includes the following names: Marcella Althaus-Reid, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Germán Gutiérrez, Nancy E. Bedford, Manuel J. Mejido and Petrella himself.81 None of them, however, has become the new prophetic theological voice that is so much needed in Latin America today.

81 Marcella Althaus-Reid (Rosario, Argentina, 1952-Edinburgh, Scotland, 2009) was a senior lecturer in Christian ethics, practical theology, and systematic theology at the University of Edinburgh and also a Freirean educator among the working poor. According to Petrella in 2005, “her work ranks among the most innovative and controversial in contemporary theology. Her ‘indecent theology’ emerges from a rereading and revision of liberation theology from the perspective of queer theory and is the first attempt to link these two currents of thought” (“Introduction” ix). See Althaus-Reid’s works Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex (2000), The Queer God (2003) and From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology: Readings on Poverty, Sexual Identity and God (2004); Nelson Maldonado-Torres is an Associate...
The fact that the indigenous liberation theologians are not present in Petrella’s “next generation” and that its members are all lay scholars, who, in some cases, even work and live in Europe and the USA, results in a new Latin American liberation theology, which, in most cases, moves within an elitist neoliberal horizon that betrays the prophetic denunciation that was the basis for reflection of LT1. Due to its more efficient and critical use of economic and political instruments, Petrella’s next generation is certainly more decolonial than LT1 but not quite as prophetic, which greatly weakens the role of the next generation as LT1’s successor. One cannot help wondering, on the other hand, why other mainstream exponents of LT2 like Ivone Gebara, María Pilar Aquino, Elsa Támez, Franz Hinkelammert or the indigenous theologians themselves are not

Professor in the Dpt. of Latino & Hispanic Caribbean Studies at Rutgers University. He is unanimously considered to be Enrique Dussel’s intellectual heir. Petrella points out that “his work combines reflections on religion, philosophical anthropology, social and cultural formations in the Americas, and the role of critical intellectual activity in the context of global coloniality” (x). See Maldonado-Torres’s works Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity (2008) and Latin@s in the World-System: Decolonization Struggles in the Twenty-First Century U.S. Empire (2005), edited with Ramón Grosfoguel and José David Saldívar; see also his article “La descolonización y el giro des-colonial” (2008); Germán Gutiérrez is a researcher at the Departamento Ecuéménico de Investigaciones (DEI) in San José (Costa Rica). His work studies the interaction between ethics, economics and liberation theology from a global perspective. See Gutiérrez’s books Ética y economía en Adam Smith y Friedrich Hayek (1998) and Globalización, caos y sujeto en América Latina: El impacto del neoliberalismo y las alternativas (2001); Nancy E. Bedford is the Georgia Harkness Chair at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, and also a deacon in her local church, where she founded several outreach programs for women. Her theological reflection explores the connections between liberation theology, feminist theory and theology within a Baptist framework. See Bedford’s books Jesus Christus und das gekreuzigte Volk (1995), Nuestra fe (2008), co-authored with Guillermo Hansen, El mundo palpita: Economía, género y teología (2005), edited with Marisa Strizzi, and Mujeres haciendo teologías. Huellas y cruces del camino (2013), edited with Virginia Azcuy and Marta Palacios; Manuel J. Mejido is an associate researcher at the Center for Advanced Studies at the University of Santiago (Chile). According to Petrella, “his work is one of the few attempts to reread Latin American liberation theology and U.S. Hispanic theology in unison” (x). See Mejido’s articles “The Fundamental Problematic of U.S. Hispanic Theology” (2003) and “Beyond the Postmodern Condition, or the Turn Toward Psychoanalysis” (2005); Iván Petrella is an Argentinean professor of religious studies at the University of Miami, Coral Gables. See Petrella’s works The Future of Liberation Theology: An Argument and Manifesto (2004), Latin American Liberation Theology: The Next Generation (2005), an essay collection which includes contributions by all the members of the next generation, and Beyond Liberation Theology: A Polemic (2008). See especially the articles by the next generation theologians collected by Petrella in Latin American Liberation Theology.

included by Petrella along with Jung Mo Sung. With the exceptions of Silvia Regina, Nelson Maldonado-Torres and Germán Gutiérrez, Petrella’s list of the next generation seems to silence those representatives of LT2 whose reflection works within an anticapitalist horizon and to privilege those whose reflection takes place within an elitist scholarly neoliberal framework, as is the case with Sung, Althaus-Reid, Bedford, Mejido and Petrella himself.

As has been pointed out at the end of chapter two, a young, prophetic and charismatic new theological voice is urgently needed by Latin American liberation theology at the dawn of the twenty-first century. The founders of LT1 are too old and the key figures of LT2 (Boff, Gebara, Aquino, Támez, Hinkelammert and Sung) have been saying the same things for too many years. The fact that indigenous and African Latin American liberation theologies are still in the process of developing as theological reflections explains why indigenous theologians have not systematically organized their theological reflection in the form of books yet, and why, although there is a rich scholarly production of journal articles, few books have been published by indigenous and African Latin American theologians for the last fifteen years. Sung’s economic theology, on the other hand, is certainly critical with globalization but only from the inside and moves in a direction that is very similar to that of the US theologies of liberation and the theology of the people though from a much more original, innovative and critical perspective. Other next-generation tendencies like Malthaus-Reid’s queer theology of liberation or Mejido’s postmodern and psychoanalytical theological discourse also offer this neoliberal critique from the inside and end up becoming highly sophisticated theoretical discourses lacking a praxical foundation. Germán Gutiérrez’s combination of ethics, economics and liberation
theology, on the other hand, sounds pretty much like a repetition of the main arguments of Hinkelammert’s economic theology despite being quite critical from a valuable antiglobalization perspective that recovers the prophetic dimension of the option for the poor.

Therefore, the prophetic and liberating new theological voice that is so much needed in Latin America today cannot possibly come from LT2’s ethical-economic, sexual or poststructuralist and psychoanalytical discourses but from its indigenous and African Latin American theological reflections, which have a significant communitarian, ecumenical and praxical dimension. After all, these are truly critical with the neoliberal tornado from the outside through their anticapitalist perspective in an original and innovative way that interweaves traditional indigenous and black spirituality with Christianity. For the moment, however, Jung Mo Sung, one of the leading theoreticians of LT2’s economic theology of liberation, is the youngest mainstream liberation theologian alive. He is not so young after all if we take into account that he is fifty-nine years old but is certainly much younger than the founders of LT1. A younger indigenous or African Latin American theologian, however, must become this prophetic and energetic theological voice that will recover the radicality of LT1’s historical praxis in LT2 and lead the indigenous and African Latin American peoples into becoming the new subjects of history and agents of their own destiny in the twenty-first-century. This young theologian, however, must not be a scholar working in an elitist institution but a poor and humble person who works and lives with the poor as a pastoral agent in the best prophetic spirit of the Bible inherited by LT1. One cannot help to conclude that a truly critical and charismatic younger theological voice still has to emerge in Latin America and that, in
spite of their challenges for the future, LT2’s indigenous and African Latin American liberation theologies are bound to play a crucial role in this process.\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{83} Tamayo notes that indigenous theology “está llamada a hacer aportaciones ‘revolucionarias’ en el conjunto de la teología, ya que abre horizontes nuevos, preteridos, cuando no negados explícitamente, por la teología cristiana. La teología indígena, reprimida desde la época de la conquista, es la que mejor responde a la experiencia religiosa de las comunidades amerindias. Hoy se encuentra en pleno proceso creativo” (“Cambio” 44-45). African Latin American liberation theology, on the other hand, “es otra de las corrientes teológicas más vivas hoy en América Latina, que se desarrolla en torno a numerosas experiencias comunitarias y se elabora metodológicamente en centros de estudio e investigación y en publicaciones interdisciplinares” (Tamayo-Acosta, “Cambio” 48-49).
CHAPTER FIVE

Liberation Theology and Latin America’s *Testimonio* and New Historical Novel: Decolonial Indigeneity vs. Imperialist Indianness

Part One

Liberation theology has had a great influence on Latin American narrative, and, more specifically, on the *testimonio* genre and the new historical novel. This influence takes place both from a liberationist and anti-liberationist approach that is closely connected with the key notions of “indigeneity” and “Indianness.” This means that the dialogical interaction between indigenous cultures and the theology of liberation plays a crucial role in contemporary Latin American narrative. The analysis in this chapter of two testimonial works, Ernesto Cardenal’s *The Gospel in Solentiname* and Elisabeth Burgos’s *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, and of a new historical novel, Mario Vargas Llosa’s *The War of the End of the World*, from the perspective of liberation theology will show the contrast between Cardenal’s and Burgos’s articulation of new decolonial reconceptualizations of indigeneity and Vargas Llosa’s legitimation of the traditionally imperialist discourse of Indianness. First of all, however, it is necessary to find a definition for the concept of indigeneity, which is not an easy task. “Indigeneity” is a very complex and fluid category that is always in process, in transition, on the move, which means that there is no final definition or revision for it but only different ways to construct it from the perspective of
anthropology, cultural studies, history, philosophy and spirituality among other disciplines.

One of the most brilliant articulations of indigeneity today, and the one that I will use as a starting point for my discussion, is that proposed by Tracy Devine Guzmán from the perspective of cultural studies. Devine Guzmán’s point of departure is the opposition between “Indianness-Indian” and “indigeneity-indigenous” when analyzing the political and cultural dynamics of the colonizer-colonized relationship in modern and contemporary Brazil. Devine Guzmán points out that “. . . I use indigenous and Native interchangeably to refer to the realm of self-identification, and indigeneity to refer to the lived experience of that identification” (“Introduction”) and that “I use ‘Indian’ and ‘Indianness’ to designate essentializing and Orientalist constructions in a wide range of discourses, from fiction, popular culture, and advertising, to state policy, education, and various forms of social science” (“Introduction”). The term “indigeneity” therefore conveys the idea of indigenous agency and self-representation whereas “Indianness” refers to the essentialist, prejudiced and false image and construction of Indians in

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1 Some of the most important theories of indigeneity today coming from non-indigenous scholars are those by anthropologists Adam Kuper (2003), Alan Barnard (2006), Marisol de la Cadena and Orin Starn (2007) and Francesca Merlan (2009). All these theorists, however, are too imperialist and Eurocentric in their approach to indigeneity, which always takes place from the point of view of the colonizer either from a socio-cultural or a political-juridical approach. Native scholars like Manulani Aluli Meyer (Hawaii) and Waziyataywin Angela Wilson (USA) offer a more convincing spiritual and philosophical approach that has indigenous cosmologies and epistemologies as its point of departure. As will be discussed next, Tracy Devine Guzmán’s theory of indigeneity from the lense of cultural studies (2013) is one of the most insightful contributions to the subject carried out by a non-Native scholar. See Kuper’s article “The Return of the Native” (2003) and Barnard’s reply “Kalahari Revisionism, Vienna and the ‘Indigenous Peoples’ Debate” (2006), which gave rise to a heated controversy on the question of indigeneity among anthropologists from Europe and other parts of the world. One of the best responses to Kuper’s influential essay was that of Brazilian anthropologist Alcida Rita Ramos (2003), which offers the subaltern perspective of the poor countries of the world that is always eclipsed by Kuper and Barnard. See also de la Cadena and Starn’s introduction to their essay collection Indigenous Experience Today (2007), Merlan’s article “Indigeneity: Global and Local” (2009) and, especially, Devine Guzmán’s work Native and National in Brazil: Indigeneity after Independence (2013).
Brazilian dominant national discourse. Although this distinction is certainly important, its use by Devine Guzmán is not without its problems since she sometimes uses the word “indigeneity” with the meaning of Indianness or even to refer to indigenous issues or to an indigenist discourse (“Introduction”). A more careful and critical use of both terms is therefore needed, especially if we remember her observation that “the Indian ‘question’ or ‘problem’ still has as much to do with imagined representations of difference (Indianness) as it does with lived experience (indigeneity) and thus serves not only as an important reminder of the popular tendency to conflate the two concepts but also of their ultimate commensurability” (“Introduction”).

The focus of Devine Guzmán’s reconceptualization of indigeneity in the particular case of Brazil is to explore the connections between indigeneity, Indianness and national identity. The American critic questions the stereotypical image of assimilating “Indianness” to “Brazilianess” in order to eclipse the key question of

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2 Brilliant and original, Devine Guzmán’s reconceptualization of indigeneity still poses some other problems. First of all, Devine Guzmán’s point of departure is never that of indigenous cosmologies, epistemologies and knowledges, which are only considered one more possibility to understand indigeneity today. This means that she never goes into the rich web of Native Brazilian knowledges, epistemologies and ontologies or uses these as the lense through which to analyze the indigenous question in present-day Brazil. Another problem is that the various Native cosmologies, epistemologies and ontologies are never articulated in a critical dialogue with liberationist discourses like those of liberation theology and philosophy, which have been so influential in Native Brazilian thinking in the last few decades. The ultimately Eurocentric approach of Devine Guzmán’s book can also be appreciated in her predilection for Western philosophers and thinkers like Deleuze and Guattari or Agamben among others as well as in her use of Indian postcolonial theory, which was greatly influenced by French philosophy, belongs to a different socio-historical and cultural context from that of Brazil and Latin America and is never resemanticized into this but used in connection with Native Brazilian cultures in a straightforward and direct way. This is also the case with Devine Guzmán’s use of Agamben’s homo sacer figure. Not only is this not resemanticized into a specifically Native Brazilian cultural context but is also identified with the dimension of sacrificeability, which is precisely what the homo sacer figure questions from an epistemological point of view. My preference for the use of Devine Guzmán’s theory of indigeneity as a point of departure for this chapter is due to her indigeneity/indianness distinction, which I find quite illuminating. I believe, however, that, as will be seen in my analysis of Rigoberta Menchú’s testimonio, her notion of “indigeneity” must incorporate the dimension of Native cosmologies, epistemologies and knowledges as a starting point.
indigenous agency. “De-indianization,” that is, the absorption of Indianness into Brazilian mainstream national identity, is therefore a phallacy since “hundreds of thousands of Brazilians refuse to see indigeneity and national belonging as mutually exclusive” ("Introduction"). This means that “their belief in the ultimate coherence and complementarity of indigeneity and Brazilian nationhood is, indeed, the condition of possibility for contemporary indigenous political activism, intellectual practice, and cultural production” ("Introduction").

Devine Guzmán’s theorization of indigeneity is certainly one of the best and most original approaches to the subject today. Its most important contribution is undoubtedly the differentiation between “Indianness” and “indigeneity,” which is so important to question the racist and imperialist representations of indigenous peoples in mainstream dominant discourses and to illuminate the crucial issue of agency through their lived experience to self-represent themselves and become subjects of history and agents of their own destiny. This is especially significant to understand the complex and entangled web of relations between Indianness, indigeneity and national identity in modern and contemporary Brazil. It also plays a key role to question the de-Indianization represented by the imperialist assimilation of Indianness into Brazilianness on behalf of the complementarity between indigeneity and Brazilian national identity that the lived experience of self-representing indigenous peoples stands for. Devine Guzmán’s reconceptualization of indigeneity is therefore an invaluable contribution to the subject that breaks new ground and opens new avenues to explore the crucial issues of indigenous agency and interculturality today vis-à-vis past and present colonial
representations of Indianness in connection with the always controversial questions of national identity, sovereignty and Native polities.

Devine Guzmán’s theory of indigeneity can be adapted and resemanticized into the Central American indigenous socio-historical and cultural contexts of Nicaragua and Guatemala. It is the study of *The Gospel in Solentiname* and *I, Rigoberta Menchú* from the lense of liberation theology using Devine Guzmán’s notion of indigeneity as a theoretical tool in which to frame my discussion that will allow me to theorize two different decolonial formulations of indigeneity in these works. *The Gospel in Solentiname* (first published in Spanish in 1975-77 in two volumes and in English in 1976-82 in four volumes) was written by Ernesto Cardenal, a young Marxist Catholic priest from Nicaragua committed to the cause of the poor in his country, which took him to embrace the Sandinista revolution of the late 1970s and become a member of the National Liberation Sandinista Front (FSLN). It was in Solentiname, “a remote archipelago in Lake Nicaragua inhabited by campesinos (peasants)” (Cardenal, “Introduction” xi) that Cardenal founded a base eclesial community in 1966 made up by indigenous peasants. In contrast with the traditional Catholic mass on Sundays, Cardenal

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3 Cardenal has noted the key role played by American contemplative writer and Trappist monk Thomas Merton in his decision to found the community of Solentiname. According to Cardenal, “yo llegué a Solentiname a principios de 1966, poco después de mi ordenación sacerdotal. Había estado en un monasterio trapense en Estados Unidos, y no pude continuar allí por motivos de salud. Mi maestro de novicios, Thomas Merton, me aconsejó que fundara una pequeña comunidad donde se tuviera la vida contemplativa en una forma natural y sencilla, y sin reglamentos. Para esa fundación escogí una isla en el remoto archipiélagso de Solentiname en el lago de Nicaragua” (“Aquellos años de Solentiname”). Before coming to Solentiname, Cardenal had joined the Trappist community of Gethsemane in Kentucky, USA. It was there that he met Merton and developed a close friendship with him. Merton himself was also deeply influenced by Cardenal’s experience in Solentiname. This can be appreciated in Merton’s decision to join Cardenal’s community. It was only because he was not allowed to do so by his superior that Merton remained in the US. Cardenal and Merton also kept a fascinating correspondence throughout the years. All of Merton’s letters to Cardenal are included in *The Courage for Truth: Letters for Writers* (1983), the third volume of Merton’s correspondence edited by Christine M. Boschen. Cardenal’s letters to Merton
explains that “instead of a sermon we held a dialogue on the gospel reading. The campesinos’ discussions were often more profound than those of many theologians, but they reflected the simplicity of the gospel readings themselves” (“Introduction” xi). This is not surprising since, according to Cardenal, “the gospel, or good news (good news to the poor), was written for them, by people like them” (“Introduction” xi).

The Gospel in Solentiname is therefore the result of Cardenal’s gathering of all these comments since “some of my friends urged me not to let those comments be lost, but to collect and publish them in a book” (Cardenal, “Introduction” xi). Although it is not mentioned explicitly by Cardenal himself, The Gospel in Solentiname is a literary work that belongs to the testimonial genre. Officially born in 1966 with the publication of Cuban anthropologist Miguel Barnet’s Biografía de un cimarrón, testimonio became one of the most popular genres of the post-Boom Latin American narrative of the 1970s and 80s. The term testimonio is used to refer to those works in which there is a testimonial subject or informant who gives an oral testimony to an editor, compiler or mediator. This, in turn, will use the testimonial subject’s oral account as the basis for his book, which is always written in the first person and will also include some fictional elements.

have been published in Spanish along with the translation of Merton’s epistles to Cardenal in the volume Thomas Merton, Ernesto Cardenal: Correspondencia (1959-1968) (2003), which was edited and translated by Santiago Daydí-Tolson.

4 In her essay on post-Boom and postmodernity, Elzbieta Sklodowska notes that “la novela testimonial — que sigue el modelo establecido por el cubano Miguel Barnet con su Biografía de un cimarrón (1966)— llega a convertirse en una de las formas más cultivadas y criticamente reconocidas” (“Novísima narrativa” 640).

5 The terms “informant” (Barnet, Beverley, Sklodowska), “testimonial subject” (García), “interlocutor” (Sklodowska), “narrator” (Beverley), “witness” (Garcia and Sklodowska), “subaltern or marginal subject” (García) and “testimonialized” (Sklodowska) are used in order to refer to a poor person who has witnessed key historical events in the evolution of a people or a nation and is willing to share them with an “editor”, “compiler” or “mediator,” the socially compromised intellectual who will write a book. The oral account coming from the informant is the basis of the book that will be written by the editor in the first person. For a detailed discussion of the role of the informant or testimonial subject in testimonial narrative, see Barnet 27-29; Beverley, “The Margin at the Center” 26-34; García 50-61; Sklodowska, Testimonio hispanoamericano 121-50; and Sklodowska, “Spanish American Testimonial Novel” 93-97.
which, at least in theory, should be incorporated in accordance with the informant’s perception and interpretation of the world. The tape-recorder, on the other hand, is often used by the editor in order to facilitate the preservation of the informant’s oral account. Hence why Cardenal mentions that “I began by collecting them [the comments] in my memory, for as long as I could. Later, out of a growing sense of practicality, we used three tape recorders so that none of the comments would be lost” (“Introduction” xi).

It is significant to note that although testimonio as a genre is close to biography and autobiography, it is certainly not the same. Due to the fact that the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction become easily blurred, biographical and autobiographical texts can actually include fictional elements though, in principle, they should be non-fictional works. The use of fictional elements is something that depends on the professional ethics of the writer but that, in fact, is also textually inevitable given the very nature of representation in (auto)biographical texts. The key point here is that testimonio cannot possibly be assimilated to them. A biography is written in the third person, which means that there is a single narrative voice, but first-person accounts may be inserted in some parts. These, however, do not turn a biography into a testimonio since either they belong to the authorial narrative voice —which changes from the third to the first person— or to a witness whose testimony is literally transcribed without the mediator’s

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6 For a discussion of the methodology of the testimonial novel in Latin America, see Barnet 21-31; Beverley, “The Margin at the Center” 26-31, 33-35; García 50-71; Sklodowska, Testimonio hispanoamericano 7-22; and Sklodowska, “Spanish American Testimonial Novel” 86-97. The term “novela-testimonio,” which was originally coined by Miguel Barnet in an influential essay, has been freely translated into English as “documentary novel” by Paul Bundy and Enrico Mario Santí. Other critics prefer to use the terms testimonio (“testimony”), novela testimonial (“testimonial novel”) or even the more general terms literatura testimonial (“testimonial literature”) and narrativa testimonial (“testimonial narrative”), one of whose categories would be the documentary novel. For a discussion of the terminology and classification of testimonial literature, see Barnet 20-21; Beverley, “The Margin at the Center” 24-26; García 33-50; Sklodowska, Testimonio hispanoamericano 9, 68-91, 97-102; and Sklodowska, “Spanish American Testimonial Novel” 84-86.
manipulation of the informant’s oral narrative that defines the testimonial genre. *Testimonio*, on the other hand, is not the same as autobiography since no editor writes the text in the first person in an autobiographical work although an autobiography may sometimes be corrected or revised by an editor before publication. This means that the main feature that distinguishes *testimonio* from biography and autobiography is the presence of a socially compromised intellectual who acts as a mediator and writes a first-person account defined by its hybrid narrative voice, which is the fruit of the interweaving of the testimonial subject’s voice with the editor’s.

Unlike most testimonial works, in which the testimonial subject or informant tells some key historical events she/he has witnessed, *The Gospel in Solentiname* does not have one but many indigenous informants who do not speak of the history of Nicaragua directly but rather interpret the Bible from a Marxist perspective in the light of the recent history of their country during the repressive regime of dictator Anastasio Somoza. *The Gospel in Solentiname* is therefore an unusual case of Latin American testimonial narrative. Cardenal, on the other hand, openly admits his role as an editor of the oral commentaries of the peasants:

Naturally I have elaborated on the dialogues from time to time. These are not transcriptions from an anthropological text, but a work of literature. I omitted some of the less interesting or repetitious comments, polished some phrasings, and added things that would enrich the gospel texts; but most of it is just what the *campesinos* said, in their own words, and that is the value of the book. I consider it the best of my books precisely because I am not its author. (“Introduction” xi-xii)

The Solentiname archipelago is made up by thirty-eight islands but only the biggest ones are inhabited. According to Cardenal, “the population is around 1,000
people, in about 90 families. Most of the houses are made of straw, scattered widely along the shore of each island” (“Introduction” xii). Cardenal’s small basic church community or commune, Our Lady of Solentiname, was at one end of the largest island and its members were a few peasants:

The Colombian poet William Agudelo and his wife Teresita were members, along with their two small children, Irene and Juan; also some young men born on the island: Alejandro, Elvis and Laureano. There was very little communication beyond the island, so our contemplation was seldom disturbed in this secluded spot, away from the tourist and trade routes.

Not everyone who came participated equally in the discussion. Some spoke up more often than others. Marcelino was a mystic. Olivia was more theological. Rebeca, Marcelino’s wife, always talked about love. Laureano saw everything in terms of the revolution. Elvis was always thinking about the perfect society of the future. Felipe, another youth, was constantly aware of the proletarian struggle. His father, old Tomás Peña, couldn’t read but spoke out of a deep wisdom. Alejandro, Olivia’s son, was a youth leader; he had guidance to offer everyone, especially other young people. Pancho was a conservative, but later took a different position. Julio Mairena was a staunch defender of equality. His brother Óscar always talked about unity. They, and all the others who often spoke up and had important things to say, and those who spoke little but also said important things, along with William and Teresita and our other companions who took part in the dialogues, are the authors of this book. (Cardenal, “Introduction” xii-xiii)

The fact that the Bible used at mass by Cardenal and his congregation was not a Catholic Bible but a Protestant translation, Dios llega al hombre by the American Bible Society, suggests that the methodology of the meetings and the biblical hermeneutics and exegesis that took place in them from a Marxist perspective was closer to that of Protestant churches. This challenges the infallibility of the official Catholic

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7 A look at the Spanish original of The Gospel in Solentiname shows that the New Testament used by Cardenal was actually published by United Bible Societies (UBS) in 1966. It is true, however, that it was published by American Bible Society, one of the 146 member societies of UBS, that same year in the USA.
interpretation of the Bible known as Vulgate, which underlines the subversive nature of Cardenal’s popular theological experiment. The reason why this particular translation was chosen is that, in Cardenal’s words, “it is the best translation of the gospels that I know. The translator is anonymous, but it must have been done by a poet. It is written in the simple language of the Latin American campesinos, but with great faithfulness to scripture” (“Introduction” xi). The innovative and progressist method of Cardenal’s masses in Solentiname, which would be unacceptable for an orthodox Catholic, partly explains why so few people came to church on Sundays. Cardenal himself observes how “not everyone who lived on these islands came to mass. Some didn’t come for lack of a boat. Others, because we didn’t have devotions to the saints as they were accustomed to doing. Others were influenced by anti-communist propaganda, and perhaps also by fear” (“Introduction” xii).

Cardenal’s method is therefore founded on a popular interpretation of the gospels from a decolonial and Marxist lense, which, as has been mentioned above, always takes place in the light of the current historical context of the Somoza regime: “These discussions took place during the Somoza dictatorship; the dictatorship was always a part of them, along with the hope that liberation would soon come. I have called them Marxist commentaries on the gospel, interpreting the gospel in light of the revolution” (“Introduction” xiii). The Gospel in Solentiname thus became a very dangerous and subversive work that was banned and censored in Nicaragua since its publication due to

Several versions of Dios llega al hombre do exist. It is the so-called “popular version,” which is written in a fresh and spontaneous language that is very easy to understand, that was published in 1966 and was used by Cardenal in Solentiname. It is quite a coincidence that the publication of the popular version of Dios llega al hombre and Cardenal’s foundation of the community of Our Lady of Solentiname took place in 1966.
the fact that it was considered to be “a pernicious book that ‘uses the gospel to promote communism among the people’ ” (Cardenal, “Introduction” xiii). Cardenal himself admits that, as a result of their Marxist interpretation of the Bible, he and his congregation became radicalized to such an extent that “little by little we came to identify with the revolutionary movement in Nicaragua, until at some point we became a part of it. Some of the young people wanted to leave the community and become guerrilla fighters” (“Introduction” xiii). Some of the youth ended up joining the guerrilla movement and took part in the attack of the army barracks in nearby San Carlos as part of a general insurrection. Although this action was successful, the young men and women of Solentiname who were part of it “had to withdraw because the insurrection didn’t take place as planned in other places. . . . The Somoza army razed our community in retaliation, and I had to go into exile with the other people of Solentiname, although I had not taken part in the armed action” (Cardenal, “Introduction” xiv).

Although the current socio-historical and political context of Nicaragua is not that of the late 1970s, Cardenal still believes that the message of The Gospel in Solentiname has not gone out of date and is as valid today as the gospel itself. This is due to the fact that “the utopia of that time is the same as it is now, and has been ever since the time of the prophets. More people than ever have faith and hope for a better world, and I believe that those who don’t should have them too” (Cardenal, “Introduction” xv). Some of those who interpreted the gospel in Solentiname were martyrs of the revolution. This was the case of Felipe, Elbis and Donald before its triumph and of Laureano and Alejandro after it. All of them are buried next to the church where the discussions of the gospel took place with the exception of Felipe, who is symbolically buried since his body was never
found. The homage paid by the community of Solentiname to their martyrs is described by Cardenal in the following terms:

For each of them there is a stone, engraved with words spoken in these commentaries about the resurrection. Beside them is a steel sculpture several meters high which I made, a stylized image of the red and black flag of Sandino. At its base are Sandino’s words: “Our flag is red upon black. The black is death; the red, resurrection.” (“Introduction” xv)⁸

The analysis of some key passages from The Gospel in Solentiname from the perspective of Gustavo Gutiérrez’s ideas on institutionalized violence and the arrival of the Kingdom of God and of Jon Sobrino’s on the dialectical interaction between the Kingdom, the anti-Kingdom and the idols of death shows the emergence of a decolonial notion of indigeneity in the text. This is founded on the struggle of the indigenous peasants of Solentiname against neoimperialism, tyranny and oppression through their involvement in the socialist and communist revolution of the National Liberation Sandinista Front. The fact that the gospel is interpreted from a revolutionary Marxist lense shows how indigenous agency and self-representation are present in the text not only from a theological and hermeneutic point of view but also from a political one. This theological-political praxis carried out by the indigenous subaltern subject in Cardenal’s commune of Solentiname is similar to that of the base ecclesial communities of the 1950s

⁸ It must be noted that the memory and legacy of the indigenous peasants of Solentiname is not only political but also artistic and literary. Besides giving their life for the revolution, the peasants produced a series of beautiful paintings that visually represent their comments on the gospel in connection with their own reality of oppression by the Somoza dictatorship. These works are regarded today as one of the best exponents of twentieth-century popular art. Venezuelan poetess Mayra Jiménez, who came to visit the community, collected a series of popular poems that were also written by the peasants. These poems were the fruit of a series of writing workshops taught by Cardenal himself. Both the paintings and the poems were published in book form in the 1980s in the volumes The Gospel in Art by the Peasants of Solentiname (1984), edited by Phillip and Sally Scharper, and Nicaraguan Peasant Poetry from Solentiname (1988), edited by Mayra Jiménez. The testimonies of some of the peasants that participated in the attack of the San Carlos barracks have also been collected in the volume El asalto a San Carlos: Testimonios de Solentiname (1982), edited by Colombian poet William Agudelo.
and 60s, which, as has been discussed in chapter two, was the praxical foundation of
liberation theology. Nevertheless, indigeneity in *The Gospel in Solentiname*, which takes
place in the late 1970s, is also deeply influenced by liberation theology, Cardenal himself
being one of the most important liberation theologians. The study of *The Gospel in
Solentiname* from the perspective of liberation theology will also help us to understand
how the theological-political insights of the indigenous peasants of Solentiname are the
result of adapting Marxist thinking to a decolonial interpretation of the gospels, thus
giving rise to a sort of popular decolonial Marxism.

One of the most important passages in *The Gospel in Solentiname* is that dealing
with the notion of the “good shepherd.” Before beginning the comment on John 10: 7-16,
Cardenal clarifies that political and not religious leaders were called “shepherds” or
“pastors” in ancient times. Cardenal notes how the prophet Ezekiel says of the political
leaders of Israel that “they are shepherds who drink the milk, dress in the wool, and eat
the fattest sheep. That’s why the sheep have been scattered and lost in the hills. Yahweh
will take the sheep from their mouths, and he himself will be their shepherd; he will
gather them together. ‘Flock’ at that time meant ‘people’ ” (390). The first verses to be
interpreted are “I tell you truly: I am the door through which the sheep enter. All those
who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep paid them no heed” (390). Gigi, a Peruvian friend who was visiting the community, observes that all kings before
Jesus have been criminals due to the fact that “everybody had a power that they’d taken
by force; and they ruled by means of a social class that had imposed itself on the others.

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9 All quotations from the gospels come from the *Dios llega al hombre* popular version of the New Testament, first published by American Bible Society in 1966. The page numbers in brackets always correspond to the pages from *The Gospel in Solentiname* in which the verses from the gospels are quoted before being discussed by the peasants.
through a private appropriation of the means of production and through the system of slavery of that time” (390). The idea that all kings and governments are criminals and oppressors is certainly quite radical and subversive, as can be appreciated in Gigi’s later comment “and what a revolutionary that Jesus is, condemning all the previous political systems, saying they were thieves and bandits! According to the ideas of that time those political systems were legal and even of divine origin” (390).

One can deduce from Gigi’s interpretation that it is the exploitation of some human beings by others that divides men into social classes, something that could be symbolically present in John’s gospel a few lines later through the sheep-wolf opposition: “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for his sheep; but the one that works only for pay, when he sees the wolf coming, he leaves the sheep and flees, because he is not the shepherd and because the sheep are not his. Then the wolf seizes the sheep and scatters them” (391). Sure enough. William immediately identifies the metaphor of the wolf with exploitation and Gigi quickly makes the connection with class struggle, which was already present in the gospels a thousand years ago. The comments of other members of the congregation like Manuel also suggest that Jesus comes to gather a scattered humanity, that is, to put an end to the classist system in his corral, his church: “The corral is to gather the cattle. And he has come to gather humanity, which was scattered, each one going in a different direction. It seems to me that the corral is his church” (391). The main idea of these discussions of the gospel is therefore to identify the exploitation that engenders class struggle as one of the worst sins, which can be called a “structural sin.”
Gustavo Gutiérrez has defined the Latin American reality of oppression of the 1960s and 70s as “a situation of injustice that can be called institutionalized violence”; it is responsible for the death of thousands of innocent victims” (A Theology of Liberation 63). According to Gutiérrez, “institutionalized violence violates fundamental rights so patently that the Latin American bishops warn that ‘one should not abuse the patience of a people that for years has borne a situation that would not be acceptable to anyone with any degree of awareness of human rights’” (A Theology of Liberation 64). From a theological point of view, the consequence of the situation of institutionalized violence in Latin America is that “this situation of injustice and oppression is characterized as a ‘sinful situation’ because ‘where this social peace does not exist, there we will find social, political, economic, and cultural inequalities, there we will find the rejection of the peace of the Lord, and a rejection of the Lord Himself’” (A Theology of Liberation 64). The interpretation of Gigi’s commentary in the light of Gutiérrez’s ideas shows how Gigi’s critique of the exploitation and class struggle carried out by kings and governments in ancient times is a questioning of another form of “institutionalized violence” resembling that of Latin America today. Hence why Gigi cannot possibly help making the connection with the private appropriation of the means of production. The exploitation of some human beings by others, and, as a consequence, the division of men into social classes is therefore the origin of the situation of “structural sin,” which is not only present in Latin America in the 1970s but also in the Bible.

The exploitation and class struggle that is so insightfully discovered by the indigenous peasants of Solentiname in the gospel can also be interpreted in the light of Jon Sobrino’s reflections on the presence of the “anti-Kingdom” and the “idols of death”
in the real world. The Salvadorean theologian notes the significance of the actual realities of the Kingdom of God and the God of life, which is precisely why we must pay attention to their opposites: The anti-Kingdom and the divinities of death, which are especially present in the Latin American reality (Jesus the Liberator 183). According to Sobrino, “if God is the God of the just life, the analogatum princeps of idols is determined by their capacity to generate death through impoverishment. The idols and their victims in history become correlates” (Jesus the Liberator 183). The oppression and enslavement carried out by all rulers and monarchs, even by King David and King Solomon, so brilliantly observed by Gigi in the words of Jesus are therefore the two main “idols of death” that define the anti-Kingdom not only in the gospel but also in Latin America in the late 70s. The fact that Gigi connects the exploitation and social inequalities of the Bible with those of the contemporary Latin American historical reality agrees with Sobrino’s point on the key role played by the subject of idolatry in Latin America today not only from a historical but also from a theological point of view.

Sobrino’s conclusion, on the other hand, is that “the analogatum princeps of idolatry is the absolutization of inbuilt wealth/private property, which becomes, in Medellín’s famous phrase, ‘institutionalized violence’ (Peace, 16). This idol is the worst and gravest of all because of what it produces, but also because it begets other idols: the doctrine of national security in the interests of the idol of wealth” (Jesus the Liberator

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10 One of the peasants cannot help wondering if King David and King Solomon are also included in Jesus’ critique of all rulers. William replies that “if not, he would have made the qualification” (390), and Felipe notes that “he says all governments were thieves, and still are, because their laws are to protect private property: robbery” (390). Cardenal himself points out that “what Jesus thinks about the kings is the same as the Bible thought” (391). When Israel wants to have a king, Yahweh always speaks to them through the prophet Samuel to warn them about the exploitation and oppression of the people carried out by all monarchs. Hence why Cardenal concludes that “and with the kings it happened just as Samuel had prophesied, even with David, who took Uriah’s wife away and ordered him slain, and with Solomon, who had a thousand wives, and it’s because every king is a thief and bandit” (391).
Once again, Gigi and his comrades must be admired for interpreting the accumulation of wealth by kings through oppression and slavery in terms of their appropriation of the means of production both in the past and present. In this sense, the worst idol for Gigi and his friends of Solentiname from the point of view of their historical experience would be a dictator like Anastasio Somoza himself, who, following Salvadorean liberation theologian Óscar Romero, could be identified with the mythical god Moloch, thus becoming a historical mediation of the anti-Kingdom: “The omnipotence of these national security regimes, the total disrespect they display towards individuals and their rights, the total lack of ethical consideration shown in the means that are used to achieve their ends, turn national security into an idol, which, like the god Molech, demands the daily sacrifice of many victims in its name” (Romero 135). It must be noted, on the other hand, that the indigenous peasants of Solentiname discuss the gospel from the popular practical perspective of their base ecclesial community. This, however, contrasts with Gutiérrez’s and Sobrino’s approach, which is that of professional theologians, as well as with Medellin’s, which is that of the magisterium of the Church.

Other key passages in The Gospel in Solentiname are those dealing with the crucial issue of the Kingdom of God. In their commentary on Matthew 11:12-19 and Luke 16:16-17, the peasants of Solentiname discuss the thorny issue of the relationship of

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11 Sobrino also observes that “and, indirectly, it also begets the response, good and just in itself, of the popular front, which nevertheless can itself become an idol” (Jesus the Liberator 185). As will be discussed later, although the Sandinista cause was just, ethical and guided by noble principles of social justice, it also had its own contradictions. The most important of these was the violation of human rights committed by the Sandinista government against the Miskito people from Nicaragua in the 1980s. This is a very good example of how a popular front like FSLN can also become an idol of death in certain situations, and therefore, an anticipation of the anti-Kingdom on Earth.

12 Moloch was an ancient deity worshiped by the Phoenicians and the Caananites that was associated with a particular kind of propitiatory child sacrifice by parents. Moloch appears in the Book of Deuteronomy and in the Book of Leviticus, where he represents a forbidden form of idolatry.
the Kingdom of Heaven and violence with two friends who came to visit their community: Venezuelan poet Antidio Cabal and his wife, poetess Mayra Jiménez. The first verses read aloud are “from the time of the coming of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and those who use force try to seize the kingdom” (403). Antidio suggests that “it seems that it is a question of two violences, the violence brought by John, who understands the kingdom of heaven in a way different from how it was formerly understood; and the violence of people who have power, the power of arms and money, that is, authority, and who are opposed to the renewal that John the Baptist brings” (405). But what is the novelty of John the Baptist’s conception of the Kingdom? According to Mayra, “perhaps John brings a new concept of the kingdom of heaven (a kingdom of heaven that is the bringing about of perfect equality and justice on earth) and that necessarily creates violence” (406). This violence, however, is double-fold for Mayra: “A violence in the first place within ourselves, and an external violence that wants to take possession of heaven and snatch heaven from us like a prize of war” (406).

The idea is that the Kingdom belongs to this world and not to the eschatological dimension, as has traditionally been believed. Cardenal notes in connection with this point that the Old Testament announces the kingdom as a future kingdom. It is with John, however, that “the kingdom has been a reality” (406), something that is also present in Jesus: “For the prophets and Jesus the kingdom is the same one: a just, perfect society: communism on earth. The difference is that the prophets were announcing the future kingdom, and Jesus says that it has already arrived; that is his new tidings. And the new tidings of John, the precursor, who said that the kingdom was ‘near’ ” (406). Julio
Castilla, a worker from Juigalpa, brilliantly observes with simplicity that “John told them something really screwy: now is the hour for change” (406). Cardenal shares his own interpretation of the passage with the community in the following terms:

He [John] told them: ‘Now is the revolution.’ And that’s why since John came violence came. Earlier, when they talked about the kingdom, there was no conflict. They talked about a future society. Now we must expropriate private property and all that, and now comes violence. The violence that we ourselves must make, and the external violence, as Mayra says. (406).

Other peasants join the discussion and share their own thoughts on the subject with Cardenal, who supports their views, and their friends:

ESPERANZA: “Ernesto, I see that what Christ says began to exist with John the Baptist is the same thing that has begun to exist with us with the Gospel. We had religion, a lot of religion throughout the country, but it didn’t mean a thing. Only now, when we’re beginning to know the Gospel in all its passages, does it have to bring violence because of course it goes against the rich. So it’s something violent because the rich are not about to let their things be taken from them. So each part of the Gospel brings violence, which we have to create, then, even if we don’t want it.”

I: “What Esperanza says is as clear as a bell. At first the Gospel didn’t bring any danger; they even thought that the kingdom of heaven was the sky. But with John and Christ, of course, violence already begins, revolutionary violence, and counterrevolutionary violence.”

OLIVIA: “And you could also say: the violence of love and the violence of injustice, those are the two violences. Because there is a just violence, a violence of love that wants to put an end to injustice with the Gospel, with love among people.”

I: “So what Christ is saying is that the prophets talked about the kingdom, but that’s all they did, just talked. Now is the time for action. Now there is revolution and repression.”

OLIVIA: “But revolutionary violence exists to put an end once and for all to all violence and to bring love into being.”

JULIO: “The kingdom of heaven is perfect communism.”
The interpretation of these passages in the light of Gutiérrez’s and Sobrino’s reflections on the Kingdom of God allows us to appreciate the innovative nature of the peasants’ conception of the Kingdom as well as its faithfulness to the true spirit of the gospel but also its limitations. According to Gutiérrez, “we can say that the historical, political liberating event is the growth of the Kingdom and is a salvific event; but it is not the coming of the Kingdom, not all of salvation. It is the historical realization of the Kingdom and, therefore, it also proclaims its fullness. This is where the difference lies” (A Theology of Liberation 104). Gutiérrez further clarifies this point when noting that the Kingdom “is already present in history, but it does not reach its complete fulfillment therein” (A Theology of Liberation 227, n. 103).13 The consequence of this is that “its presence already produces effects, but these are ‘not the coming of the Kingdom, not all of salvation’; they are anticipations of a completion that will be realized only beyond history” (A Theology of Liberation 227, n. 103). Sobrino, on the other hand, also insists on this idea in the following terms:

Liberation theology takes the essentially historical dimension of the Kingdom of God most seriously. This means that it does not leave its appearance to the end of history (though its fullness will appear only at the end) but insists on its actual realization in the present of history. The Kingdom of God cannot ever be fully realized in history, since it is utopia; this does not remove it from history, however, but obliges us to make it present through historical mediations and to bring it about at all levels of historical reality; utopia becomes a source of ideologies functioning to configure history. (Jesus the Liberator 129)
The peasants of Solentiname insightfully capture in their discussion the revolutionary nature of the idea that the Kingdom takes place and becomes a reality on Earth, something that is explicitly mentioned in the gospels on several occasions. The problem with their interpretation, however, is that, as a consequence of its Marxist perspective, they reduce the Kingdom to some of its historical mediations in the past and the present like the revolutions brought by John and Jesus in ancient times or the Sandinista revolution and all the other Latin American revolutionary movements of the 1960s and 70s. In other words, some of the historical mediations of the Kingdom mentioned by Sobrino become an absolute in their discussion, which makes them fall into the danger of mistaking the Kingdom for one or more of its historical achievements, realizations or anticipations observed by Gutiérrez. In this sense, the Sandinista revolution is just a historical mediation of the Kingdom of God, which can only reach its fullness and plenitude in the transcendent dimension. This means that the historical mediation of the Kingdom embodied by the Sandinista struggle not only involves the political dimension of the Kingdom but also its religious or spiritual horizon, which takes place in the afterlife. Let us not forget that Jesus Christ himself speaks of the eternal life and the resurrection of all bodies, which can only take place with the arrival of the Kingdom in the eschatological dimension. The discussion of the question of the Kingdom by the peasants of Solentiname is therefore quite illuminating and reductionist at the same time. On the one hand, they brilliantly grasp the historical dimension of the Kingdom in their simplicity. On the other, they fail to see that the historical dimension of the Kingdom is just a mediation and fall into the temptation of turning it into an absolute, thus forgetting that the Kingdom can only reach its final realization in the eternal life.
Sobrino also underlines the dialectical relationship established between the Kingdom and the anti-Kingdom. The idea is that the benefits of the Kingdom are in direct contradiction with the anti-Kingdom. According to the Salvadorean theologian, the Kingdom not only has to bring benefits but also to liberate from ills, which means that it has a liberating dimension (Jesus the Liberator 126). Sobrino’s conclusion is that there is a confrontation between the Kingdom and the anti-Kingdom, which takes place in the following terms:

The coming of the Kingdom stands in *combative relation* to the anti-Kingdom. They are not merely mutually exclusive, but fight against one another, and this is massively evidenced in Latin America: the Kingdom is not being built from a *tabula rasa*, but in opposition to the anti-Kingdom, and the present persecution of those who are mediating the coming of the Kingdom is effective proof of this. This persecution, in its turn, becomes the criterion of whether the Kingdom is actually being built. Those who carry out purely beneficial activities are not persecuted, which means that they have not struggled against the anti-Kingdom, and this, in turn, means that their activities are not, strictly speaking, signs of the Kingdom, since they are not activities like those of Jesus. (Jesus the Liberator 126)

The indigenous peasants of Solentiname support and become a part of the Sandinista revolution, which is one of the historical mediations of the Kingdom that can only exist in opposition to the Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua, a historical mediation of the anti-Kingdom. They commit to the Sandinista cause from the point of view of the historical praxis, which not only takes place in the text through their discussions of the gospel but also outside it through their commitment to the revolutionary praxis as guerrilla fighters. In this sense, the combative relation between the Kingdom and the anti-Kingdom in *The Gospel in Solentiname* not only takes place from a popular theological and hermeneutic praxical perspective but also from an ethical-political one that will result
in the peasants’ decision to be a part of the Sandinista revolutionary praxis, which is understood by them as a “praxis of love.”

The indigenous peasants thus become subjects of history and agents of their own destiny who join the revolution of the white man in order to fight for a more just society in their country. The best proof of the clash between the Kingdom and the anti-Kingdom in the text is the peasants’ realization of the contrast between the rich and the poor in the gospels and the class division it engenders with prophetic denunciation as an ethical imperative that rebels against the anti-Kingdom, thus keeping the combative relation alive through God’s preferential option for the poor. The best example of this struggle from an extra-literary point of view is undoubtedly the razing and plundering of Solentiname by Somoza, which truly represents the arrival of the anti-Kingdom through one of its possible historical mediations.

The analysis of *The Gospel in Solentiname* from the perspective of liberation theology shows how the interpretation of the gospel by the indigenous peasants of Solentiname from a Marxist lense gives rise to a decolonial notion of indigeneity based on the Sandinista revolutionary struggle against the historical mediations of the anti-Kingdom—the institutionalized violence, the structural sin and the idols of death embodied by Somoza and American neoimperialism—through the historical praxis of revolutionary love in order to establish the Kingdom of God here on Earth. Indigenous agency and self-representation are present in the text both from a popular theological-hermeneutic and an ethical-political point of view. The indigenous peasants certainly have a very personal and particular way to conceive and understand their indigeneity since they feel identified with the socialist and communist political project of the white

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14 This key idea that defines the revolutionary struggle of the peasants of Solentiname is also present in Che Guevara and Camilo Torres, as has been discussed in chapter one.
man in Nicaragua. In this sense, their indigenous agency always moves in the direction of the Sandinista struggle against Somoza and the USA in the late 1970s. One of the most important reasons for the peasants’ decision to join the Sandinista revolution as Christians is their awareness of the points of connection between socialism and the Bible. This can be appreciated in their discussions of the gospel. These always take place from an anti-imperialist Marxist stance that gives rise to the emergence of a sort of popular decolonial Marxism, which agrees with the goals of the Sandinista revolution. This means that their indigeneity is closely connected to the Sandinista political agenda. Was this conception of indigeneity also present in other indigenous groups of Nicaragua or were there other alternative notions of indigeneity?

Other ways to understand the concept of indigeneity did, in fact, exist in Nicaragua after the triumph of the Sandinista revolution. The most important of these is represented by the Miskito people, who live on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua. Due to their geographical isolation, the Miskito were ignored by Somoza and, as a people, knew nothing about the revolution or communism. It is true, however, that some Miskitos

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15 The Miskito are an indigenous people from Central America. Their territory extends from Cape Camarón, Honduras, to Río Grande, Nicaragua, along the Atlantic Coast and the Mosquito Coast in the West Caribbean. Many Miskitos are of African-Native American descent or of African-Native American and British descent. Consequently, they not only speak the Miskito indigenous language but also Miskito creole English and Spanish, which is the official language in Nicaragua and Honduras. According to Reynaldo Reyes, a Miskito indigenous leader, the true name for his people is not Miskito, Mosquito or Mosco, “which all refer to insects, flies” (Ráfaga 169) but Miskuyo. Some linguists, however, think that the name Miskito comes from the Miskito-language word Mískitu, their name for their people, which has nothing to do with the Spanish word mosquito, which derives from the Spanish word mosca (fly).

16 The Miskito were encountered by Columbus on his fourth voyage (1502). After this initial experience of European contact, they were isolated until the mid-seventeenth century, when steady European contact began. Their isolation was due to the fact that the Spanish were unable to conquer the Miskito territory during the sixteenth century. This is why the region became a paradise for Dutch and English privateers. It was in the mid-seventeenth century that a number of Africans —either survivors from shipwrecked slave ships or runaway slaves from the Providence Island colony— settled around Cape Gracias a Dios and intermarried with the Miskito. It was then that several informal alliances of English privateers working for the Providence Island Company and the Miskito began. With the exception of Moravian and Catholic
living in Managua in the late 70s joined the Sandinista cause and became guerrilla fighters. This was the case of Reynaldo Reyes, a Miskito peasant who fought with the Sandinistas, and, many years later, gave an oral account of his life as a Miskito guerrilla fighter before and after the triumph of the revolution. In Ráfaga: The Life Story of a Nicaraguan Miskito Comandante (1992), edited by J. K. Wilson and Tod Sloan, Reyes shows how a new concept of indigeneity, tied to a different political ideology, emerged a year after the triumph of the Sandinistas.

Although the goals of the revolution were quickly brought to the Atlantic Coast and the relationship between the Miskito and the Sandinista government was very good and cordial at first, things changed very soon. According to Reyes, this was due to the fatal policies of a Miskito leader called Steadman Fagoth, who, out of personal interest, began to collaborate with counterrevolutionary groups such as the somocista and the CIA contras. Fagoth washed the brain of many Miskitos by making them believe that missionaries, who came to evangelize the Miskito, interest in the region began to wane from the middle of the nineteenth century. This is the reason why the Miskito were relatively isolated until the late 1970s.

It must be noted, however, that during the conflict between Augusto César Sandino and the USA, which took place from 1927 to 1933, many Miskito in the Jicotega region joined Sandino’s troops, thus putting an end to their isolation.

Reyes observes how Commander Daniel Ortega came to Puerto Cabezas on two occasions “to speak about the necessity for us to work together with the new government so that programs to enhance the quality of our lives could be carried out” (35). It was after Ortega’s second visit that a Miskito organization called MISURATA, whose goal was to safeguard the rights and freedom of the Miskito that had been won with the triumph of the revolution, was formed “and began to function in a way that was pleasing to the Miskito and to the Sandinista government” (35). According to Reyes, “the good relations between my people and the Sandinista government for several months following the Triumph were due in large part to the effectiveness of MISURATA, which was led by Steadman Fagoth, who was part Miskito and part German (through Moravian missionaries)” (35).

Reyes notes that, in a series of secret meetings held in Puerto Cabezas between Fagoth and other Miskito leaders, “Fagoth never mentioned the CIA, which had already begun to seek ways to reverse the Sandinista triumphs; but since that time evidence has been made public that Fagoth’s strong ties to the CIA and to the Oficina de la Seguridad Nacional (OSN), Somoza’s secret police, dated back to his college days in Managua during the 1970s.
communism was not compatible with their identity as an indigenous people. He also crossed into Honduras and formed several Miskito guerrilla groups that secretly received supplies and weapons from Somoza’s supporters and the USA. Very soon, these Miskito guerrilla units began to cross the frontier to attack and destroy some Sandinista military posts in Nicaragua. As a result of the crimes committed by the Miskito guerrilla fighters sent by Fagoth, which culminated in the terrible events of the so-called “Red Christmas,” violent retaliation from the Sandinista military ensued. Reyes explains how the serious mistake made by the Sandinistas was to believe that all Miskitos, even those living in Nicaragua, supported Fagoth and his henchmen. The Sandinista soldiers kidnapped, tortured and murdered many Miskitos living in Nicaragua and also relocated some Miskito groups. Reyes painfully remembers that, although the official purpose of the relocation policy was to protect his people, the Sandinista army committed all sorts of

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19 Reyes mentions that “it was in the secret meetings with MISURATA members during 1980 that Fagoth introduced the idea of fighting against the Sandinista government. He insisted that the government was bringing a bad law to Nicaragua—the law of communism—and that this law would eventually incapacitate us as an Indian nation” (38). The phallacy of Fagoth’s words can be appreciated in the social welfare brought by the Sandinista government to the Miskito through the literacy campaign, which, paradoxically, was organized by Fagoth himself, and the medical care service provided by Cuban doctors. Reyes himself points out that “from that time until now I have believed that Steadman Fagoth has been an opportunist when given the chance. He only works for personal gain” (39). The best proof for this, according to Reyes, is that “his motive in trying to persuade the boys to fight was to get money from the government of the United States. When he initially presented these ideas, in 1980, he had not received any money from the U.S. government—only the promise of money contingent on his ability to recruit Miskito boys to fight the counterrevolution” (40). It is also a fact that, in 1984 and 1985, Fagoth received $10 million of the $110 million appropriated by the U.S. Congress for the counterrevolution. The money, however, was never invested in the clothes, food and weapons that Miskito revolutionaries were supposed to get but spent on helping Fagoth’s family to settle down and live in Miami Beach and California.

20 In 1981, Fagoth brought a shedding of blood to Nicaragua known as “Red Christmas.” After attacking the Sandinista military base at San Carlos and killing every government soldier, the Miskito fighters forced their only prisoner, the radio operator, to call the government military base at Tronquer asking for reinforcements. When a helicopter of the Sandinista army arrived, the Miskito fighters were all dressed in Sandinista uniforms and motioned to the helicopter to land. Reyes tells that when the Sandinista military leaders Lucho Chevarria and Reynaldo Mendoza stepped out of the helicopter, the Miskito revolutionaries “opened fire on them using the weapons they had taken from the dead Sandinista soldiers” (43). The pilot and two soldiers, who were wounded but still inside the helicopter, escaped flying on to Waspam. According to Reyes, “the copter crashed at Waspam, but those inside survived. Both Sandinista leaders perished. Lucho was found tied to a tree, disemboweled. His heart had been removed” (44).
crimes and abuses upon Miskito men, women and children on the way to the new settlements:

The soldiers mistreated the Indian people as they were forced to move from their river villages to faraway asientamientos (resettlement communities). The Indians sacrificed much, and they themselves were sacrificed. It was not “protection” but persecution that the Sandinistas forced upon my people. As the Indians were forced out of their homes, leaving all their possessions, the Sandinistas burned all the buildings in the little villages and destroyed all the crops and livestock. (57)

Usually Miskito people travel in little canoes called pitban batu, but the Sandinista troops forced the people to walk. Some of the very old or very sick people could not keep up with the pace set by the soldiers. The Sandinistas shot the old and sick ones and just left them by the roadside to die. Some of my Indian sisters who gave birth during the journey were forced by the soldiers to abandon their little babies on the road. If the mother protested or tried to remain behind to care for the new born, then both the mother and baby were executed by the government soldiers. Probably between one thousand and fifteen hundred Miskito were killed.

This is a macabre story that I am sharing with you. It makes my heart cry. I do not want to go any deeper into those events. That is all I can say. This is the truth of what happened to our people during that time. Since the ancient days, this sort of tragedy had never before happened to the Miskito nation. Not since the Spaniards came into this region four or five hundred years ago have we seen this kind of tragedy. Neither have other governments to which we have been subjected ever treated us in this barbaric way. (57-58)

The Miskito living in Nicaragua were terrorized, and, consequently, hundreds of them crossed the frontier and joined Fagoth and his guerrilla units in Honduras. From then on, the Miskito people of Nicaragua did not believe in the Sandinista cause anymore and took up arms against the Sandinista government. Reyes himself, who had been trained in Cuba as a guerrilla fighter by the Sandinistas in the past, became a great Miskito comandante of the anti-Sandinista struggle known as Ráfaga, his war name. The origin of Reyes’ nom de guerre, which is the fruit of his courage as a Miskito fighter in a
military action against the Sandinista army, is told by Reyes himself in the following terms:

I began firing that .22-caliber long hunting rifle like it was a machine gun. I had to do that to save my boys because the Sandinistas were going to kill us. I was firing fast—shooting so fast—Rapido! Rapido! Rapido! When it was over, there were eleven soldiers dead right in front of us and I had not used the last of the eighteen bullets in my rifle.

Then my boys, instead of calling me “hero,” called me “Ráfaga,” which is a Spanish word that means a burst of volley of fire, or a gust of strong wind. You see, I was shooting so fast with that .22 that it looked like I had an automatic weapon. That is how my boys gave me my nombre de guerra, Ráfaga. (67-68)

Ráfaga’s testimonio shows how the Miskito people represents the emergence of an alternative decolonial notion of indigeneity in Nicaragua a few years after the triumph of the Sandinista revolution. The decoloniality of this new formulation of indigeneity can be appreciated in its struggle against the imperialist and genocidal policy of the Sandinista government towards the Miskito, which shows the contradictions of the Sandinista revolution. The worst of these is how the crimes committed upon the Miskito by the Sandinista military are also, however paradoxical it may seem, historical mediations of the anti-Kingdom. One cannot help to conclude from this shameful historical episode that all revolutions, even those fought on behalf of the poor and the oppressed, are far from being perfect. Ráfaga’s testimonio, on the other hand, shows how this new decolonial notion of indigeneity was also highly politicized from the neoliberal capitalist perspective represented by the USA and Somoza’s supporters, who were living in Miami. Its most important feature, however, was how, in spite of its initial procapitalist nature, it ended up questioning Fagoth and the CIA contra movement, which also committed many terrible crimes including the kidnapping of forty-two Miskito children,
the assassination and rape of Miskito men and women and the mistreatment of the Miskito refugees in Honduras.\textsuperscript{21}

It was true that many Miskito comandantes had behaved like savages toward their own race. I can think of many Indians who were captured and killed by commanders and fighters. Some were taken on the pretext that they were Sandinista collaborators; others were assassinated for pure pleasure. These Miskitos were killed not by the Sandinistas but by their own Indian brothers. This behavior was like that of animals. Miskitos killing Miskitos is unacceptable in my way of thinking. I was living many years in the mountains but that kind of thing I never did. If I captured a Sandinista, I sent him to Honduras to be put in jail. Always I would try to explain to my captives why we Miskito were fighting to reclaim our rights. (164)

Not only the government was to blame for all the atrocities. Miskitos had murdered Miskitos, spilling the blood of our own race. Lies had been told by Miskitos against our own people. Miskito fighters had beaten, raped, and killed their Indian brothers and sisters. If you look at both sides, neither is without fault. Most of the crimes committed against Miskitos by Miskitos were done by lower-ranking fighters making decisions on their own without direct order. But other grossly wicked deeds were done at a comandante’s direct order. One example is the kidnapping and rape of a Miskito medical doctor. A wicked commander ordered the kidnapping of the doctor and then permitted sixty-four of his Indian fighters to rape her successively. For a crime such as that, there is no redemption. (165-66)\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{21} In 1983, Ráfaga had agreed to carry out a very important mission, called Alpha Uno, for Fagoth, other Miskito comandantes and the CIA. The aim of this mission was that Ráfaga took 160 Miskito warriors to Francia Sirpe, Nicaragua, in order to convince all the village people living there to walk to Honduras as a sign of protest against the Sandinista government. The long march took place, and, after resisting the attacks by the Sandinistas, Ráfaga and the Miskito peasants from Francia Sirpe finally made it to Honduras. Fagoth had promised the peasants that they would live better and have all their needs met there. Ráfaga tells us, however, that, when he visited the refugee camps to see how the peasants were doing, “what I saw caused me to be very sad. Not even one pound of salt had been given to them” (138). Ráfaga observes with a broken heart that “Fagoth knew that those people had been abandoned and had given them nothing. I remembered their pretty little village of Francia Sirpe, where they had everything nice, and how I had promised, ‘you will be having it better in Honduras than you are having it in Nicaragua.’ I felt sad and discouraged because my words had been of no value. I cried in my heart for my Indian people” (138). After that, Ráfaga rebelled against Fagoth and, little by little, Fagoth lost the support of all the military leaders. He still went to Miami Beach to raise some big money. When he returned to Honduras, Fagoth and a group of paid fighters launched an attack on the Miskito base at Rus Rus. Fagoth was about to burn the hospital building where many Miskito fighters were hospitalized with injuries sustained during the revolution. It was Ráfaga and his warriors that made Fagoth prisoner at the Miskut Miskito base, thus putting an end to his reign of terror.

\textsuperscript{22} The juxtaposition of these two passages reveals Ráfaga’s contradiction as far as responsibility for the crimes committed by Miskito warriors against their Miskito brothers and sisters is concerned. The first
The greatest contradiction of Ráfaga’s Miskito decolonial indigeneity is therefore the collaboration with an imperialist project like that of Somoza and the US, which was also supported by Fagoth and the other Miskito comandantes. Hence why Ráfaga’s indigeneity evolves with time and ends up becoming peaceful indigenous socio-political activism on behalf of the human rights and the political autonomy of his people through dialogue with the Sandinista government. Ráfaga quits fighting and breaks ties with Miskito military leaders, thus becoming the main promoter and representative for the Miskito nation in the peace negotiations with the Sandinistas. This means that Ráfaga ends up questioning the Miskito guerrilla movement sponsored by the CIA and Somoza’s supporters after realizing that his people is being used by the contras:

All these realizations about the corruption of our leaders moved us toward dialogue with the Sandinistas. We knew that we would not get 100 percent of what we wanted from them, but at least we could gain some of our lost rights through a process of dialogue. There was no hope of getting anything through further fighting under the conditions that the United States and our Miskito leaders had arranged. (148)

In this sense, Ráfaga’s illumination is his realization that the CIA, the somocistas and the Miskito comandantes do not care about the innocent Miskito men and women murdered and abused by Miskito fighters and the Sandinistas or the rights of the Miskito and other Central American peoples, which is precisely what Ráfaga has always believed in and fought for. They just care about the imperialist political interests of the USA, 

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passage openly admits that many of these crimes were ordered by many Miskito comandantes. The second, however, tries to soften this idea by suggesting that most of the crimes were committed by lower-ranking Miskito soldiers. One cannot help but draw the conclusion that many crimes were committed both by Miskito soldiers and Miskito military leaders. Ráfaga, however, never gives us his opinion on who is to blame for the crimes committed by the Sandinista army: The soldiers or their superiors? As is the case with the Miskito, both Sandinista fighters and their leaders are probably guilty for all those crimes.
which turns the Miskito into pawns or puppets led and manipulated by them through Miskito traitors like Fagoth who organize guerrilla violence. What is the point of fighting if the Miskito have no money or weapons, are getting themselves killed not only by the enemy but by Miskito guerrilla fighters themselves and if the young boys are so young that they do not even know what they are fighting for? What Ráfaga seems to be questioning here is the terrible reality of the Miskito “child soldiers,” another instance of the dark side of the contra war.

After reading Ráfaga’s testimonio, one cannot help coming to the conclusion that the Miskito guerrillas never got the money from the CIA and the somocistas through the mediation of their Miskito military leaders because, however contradictory it may seem, nobody wanted the Miskito to succeed. If the Miskito had won the war against the Sandinistas, an independent Indian state within Nicaragua would have been born. This not only went against the expansionist political interests of the United States and Somoza’s supporters but also against the selfish ends of their Miskito allies, who would no longer be able to profit from getting the money. All this demonstrates that the contras and the Miskito traitors just wanted to use Miskito guerrilla fighters as instruments for a campaign of international political propaganda against the Sandinista government. Fortunately, the peace conversations were fruitful and a statute of autonomy for the Miskito people was agreed and approved in 1987. The Sandinista government must be praised not only for publicly apologizing to the Miskito and the international community for its mistakes of the past but also for being truly democratic, thus being faithful to the commitment of its Christian militants to build the Kingdom of God on Earth. One cannot help but draw the conclusion that, disenchanted both with the Sandinistas and the
contras, Ráfaga’s indigeneity is politically independent in the end even if his political views are still quite conservative, as can be appreciated in his sympathies towards Violeta Chamorro’s new government, which was the ally and confederate of American neoimperialism.23

Part Two

I, Rigoberta Menchú (Spanish original, 1983; English translation, 1984) is a classical testimonial work that offers another decolonial formulation of indigeneity when interpreted from the perspective of liberation theology. Although the official author of the text is Elizabeth Burgos, a Venezuelan anthropologist, the book is the fruit of a complex process of collaboration between Rigoberta Menchú, the informant, Elizabeth Burgos and Arturo Taracena, the editors,24 and Paquita Rivas, the transcriber. Guatemalan historian Arturo Taracena has confessed after sixteen years of silence that “it’s interesting how the Guatemalan press has insisted that Elisabeth Burgos was the one who wrote the book, although they also had political motives for their involvement in the book: “In this vein we must dissociate ourselves from Ráfaga’s elation, reported in the Epilogue, in response to Violeta Barrio de Chamorro’s 1990 victory over the Sandinistas. That we have nevertheless proceeded with publication serves as evidence that this is indeed Ráfaga’s own story, and not an account generated to serve alien political interests” (x). Tod Sloan, one of the editors of the text, observes how he and J. K. Wilson completely disagree with Ráfaga on this point. Even so, they decided to include Ráfaga’s political views to demonstrate that theirs is not a politicized work although they also had political motives for their involvement in the book: “In this vein we must dissociate ourselves from Ráfaga’s elation, reported in the Epilogue, in response to Violeta Barrio de Chamorro’s 1990 victory over the Sandinistas. That we have nevertheless proceeded with publication serves as evidence that this is indeed Ráfaga’s own story, and not an account generated to serve alien political interests” (x). History shows that, in fact, Ráfaga was too naive and optimistic, for Violeta Chamorro’s government failed to respect the statute approved by the Sandinistas, as can be appreciated in the events of 1992 and 1993. Two towns were seized by Miskito protesters on February 16, 1992. These attacks were in response to Miskito claims that President Chamorro was ignoring issues of Indian rights and had not implemented autonomy measures for the region. In January 3, 1993, growing organization and mobilization of Miskito protesters in coordination with Moravian priests took place due to growing discontent with Chamorro’s economic policies and lack of development regarding the autonomy plans.24

23 Ráfaga enthusiastically notes that “the recent election, in February 1990, of Doña Violeta Barros de Chamorro and the National Opposition Union (UNO), displacing the ‘comrades’ in Nicaragua, is definitely the triumph of liberty, peace, justice, development, and national reconciliation. . . . With Doña Violeta, justice and freedom of expression will reign” (184). Ráfaga also believes that “the desires and dreams of the indigenous nation will be realized as well. Tawaswalpa [the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua in the Miskito language] will again be Tawaswalpa. With Doña Violeta, our autonomy will be real and effective, not just a piece of paper” (185). Tod Sloan, one of the editors of the text, observes how he and J. K. Wilson completely disagree with Ráfaga on this point. Even so, they decided to include Ráfaga’s political views to demonstrate that theirs is not a politicized work although they also had political motives for their involvement in the book: “In this vein we must dissociate ourselves from Ráfaga’s elation, reported in the Epilogue, in response to Violeta Barrio de Chamorro’s 1990 victory over the Sandinistas. That we have nevertheless proceeded with publication serves as evidence that this is indeed Ráfaga’s own story, and not an account generated to serve alien political interests” (x). History shows that, in fact, Ráfaga was too naive and optimistic, for Violeta Chamorro’s government failed to respect the statute approved by the Sandinistas, as can be appreciated in the events of 1992 and 1993. Two towns were seized by Miskito protesters on February 16, 1992. These attacks were in response to Miskito claims that President Chamorro was ignoring issues of Indian rights and had not implemented autonomy measures for the region. In January 3, 1993, growing organization and mobilization of Miskito protesters in coordination with Moravian priests took place due to growing discontent with Chamorro’s economic policies and lack of development regarding the autonomy plans.

24 For a detailed study of the role of editing in I, Rigoberta Menchú in comparison with Miguel Barnet’s Autobiography of a Runaway Slave, see Sklodowska, Testimonio hispanoamericano 109-50.
because Elisabeth Burgos never wrote the book; she edited and she edited with my help” (85). Taracena also clarifies that “the complete transcription is Paquita’s work. Once the material was transcribed, Elisabeth and I sat down to do the editing, but I did most of the dirty work, the work of hard editing” (85). Rigoberta herself, however, is the true author of the text since, according to Taracena, “the book is a narration only by Rigoberta, with her own rhythm, with her own inventions, if there are any, with her own emotions, with her own truths. What we did afterward was the work of editing” (85). All this shows how the collaborative nature of *I, Rigoberta Menchú* is the fruit of the “testimonial contract”25 between a Maya-Quiché indigenous woman, a Venezuelan anthropologist, a Guatemalan revolutionary and historian and a secretary of Cuban origin. Therefore, the controversy surrounding the collaboration, authorship and veracity of the text, which has already been debated extensively over the years, must also be approached from a new revisionist perspective, as will be discussed later.

*I, Rigoberta Menchú* tells the struggle for the land carried out by Rigoberta, a twenty-three-year-old Maya-Quiché indigenous woman peasant, her family and her community against the landowners and the military of Guatemala. The Maya-Quiché defend their freedom, land and dignity as human beings to the point of organizing the peasant movement at a local, regional and national level and of forming an alliance with the labor and student movement and trade unions to fight repression. The interpretation of

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25 Elzbieta Sklodowska has coined the term “testimonial contract” to refer to the truth-believing pact made in good faith by the testimonial subject and the editor as well as to the problems that its good intentions pose to the critical reader (*Testimonio hispanoamericano* 4, 48, 118, 121-50; “Spanish American Testimonial Novel” 87, 95). For a theorization of the “testimonial contract” in connection with Holocaust testimonial literature, see Lyotard 3-14. For a discussion of Lyotard’s definition of the “differend” as a phrase universe of “testimonial contract” in connection with Latin American *testimonio*, see Sklodowska, “Spanish American Testimonial Novel” 86-87, 89, 96-99.
the text from the lense of liberation theology shows the emergence of a decolonial notion of indigeneity based on a revolutionary pedagogy working at a micropolitical level whose foundation is a decolonial reading and interpretation of the Bible from an indigenous cultural perspective carried out by the Maya-Quiché from their own historical experience of poverty and oppression. First of all, it is significant to note that the first experience of Christianity among the Maya-Quiché is that of Catholic Action.26 Rigoberta remembers that, when she was ten years old, “there was already the mixture of our culture with the Catholic religion, let’s say Catholic customs” (49). According to Rigoberta, “by accepting the Catholic religion, we didn’t accept a condition, or abandon our culture. It was more like another way of expressing ourselves. . . . Catholic Action is like another element which can merge with the elements which already exist within Indian culture” (80). The best example of this is how Rigoberta and her community accept the Biblical forefathers as if they were their own ancestors while still keeping within their own culture and customs:

For instance, the Bible tells us that there were kings who beat Christ. We drew a parallel with our king, Tecún Umán, who was defeated and persecuted by the Spaniards, and we take that as our own reality. In this way we adjusted to the Catholic religion and our duties as Christians, and made it part of our culture. As I said, it’s just another way of expressing ourselves. It’s not the only, immutable way of keeping our ancestors’ intermediaries alive. (80-81)

Rigoberta’s theological and transcultural insights can be interpreted in the light of Eleazar López Hernández’s ideas on the intertwining of Mesoamerican spirituality and Christianity as the basis for an indigenous theology of liberation. According to the

26 Catholic Action is defined by Elisabeth Burgos in the glossary of the Spanish edition as an association founded by Monsignor Rafael González in 1945 in the altiplano of Guatemala with the aim of controlling the indigenous brotherhoods (Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú 323).
Zapotec priest, “tampoco la propuesta cristiana es contradictoria a la propuesta india: todo lo contrario, ambas son compatibles y complementarias” (“Los indios” 236). This means that “por eso el diálogo que la iglesia propone con la inculturación será para mutuo enriquecimiento, y los pueblos indios, por la evangelización inculturada, se encontrarán consigo mismos y con el futuro que Dios ha sembrado en sus culturas desde antiguo” (López Hernández, “Los indios” 236). Hence why López Hernández proposes to combine the Christian Bible with the Popol Vuh, the sacred book of the Maya-Quiché, or with other Mesoamerican religious experiences like those of the Zapotecs or the Mexica (“Los indios” 226-36). It is precisely the interweaving of Catholicism and Maya spirituality carried out by Rigoberta and her people in practice that gives rise to the emergence of the complex phenomenon of “inculturation” in the text.

It must be noted, however, that this process of inculturation does not mean that the Maya-Quiché have become theological subjects who have acquired theological agency in connection with the fundamental question of liberation through the work of Catholic Action. Although the Maya-Quiché must certainly be admired for developing an inculturated spiritual experience on their own, this was never encouraged by Catholic Action, an imperialist Christian organization that aimed to replace traditional Maya spirituality with Catholicism and that, instead of promoting a critical reflection on the reality of poverty and oppression lived by the Maya-Quiché, always taught them to be passive and a dormant people. Therefore, it is not surprising that Rigoberta mentions that “I remember that at first the prayers weren’t even in Spanish but in Latin or something like that. . . . Since the priests don’t know our language and they say the prayers in Spanish, our job is to memorize the prayers, and the chants. But we didn’t understand
exactly what it meant, it was just a channel for our expression. It’s very important for us, but we don’t understand it” (81). It is only much later that the Maya-Quiché will become subjects of history and agents of their own destiny, thus developing a theological agency that will allow them to understand and interpret the Bible on their own from an inculturated perspective, which, it is true, they began to develop at the time of Catholic Action as a strategy of cultural resistance and survival.

It is when Rigoberta becomes a catechist at the age of twelve and starts working with children both in the community and down in the finca that the Maya-Quiché begin to interpret the Bible by themselves. According to Rigoberta, “the Catholic religion chooses, or at least the priests choose, people to become catechists. . . . The priest used to come to our area every three months. He’d bring texts for us to teach the doctrine to our community. We did it on our own initiative as well, because my father was a dedicated Christian” (80). Rigoberta also explains that “the priest used to come and celebrate Mass, form groups of catechists and leave texts for them to study. But as we couldn’t read or write, we usually had to learn them by heart. That’s how we started learning a few things” (81). Since Rigoberta and most of her fellow catechists were illiterate and could not speak Spanish, one cannot help but draw the conclusion that one of the few people who knew how to read and write had to summarize the contents of the texts in a loud voice or just read and translate them directly into the Maya-Quiché language so that they could be learned and memorized by all the catechists. The fact that Rigoberta mentions that her people also did this on their own initiative shows how, like the peasants of Solentiname, the Maya-Quiché catechists began to choose and interpret some texts of the Bible on their own from their own reality of exploitation and oppression. It is not a
coincidence that the Maya-Quiché start to do this when the landowners first send their bodyguards and the military to expel them from their lands.

It must be noted, on the other hand, that the summary or translation of the texts chosen by the priests also presuppose an interpretation carried out by a literate catechist which was followed by that of his fellow illiterate catechists when memorizing the texts. In other words, the Maya-Quiché begin to develop theological agency on their own even when they are supervised by the priests, who, due to the long distances and to the fact that they only showed up every three months, could not possibly control their Christian education in practice. Therefore, the teachings and the example of true and devoted Christians like Rigoberta’s father, Vicente Menchú, Rigoberta’s mother, and Rigoberta herself shows how the first Maya-Quiché base ecclesial communities were created and organized in Guatemala. As is the case with the peasants of Solentiname, the methodology used by the Maya-Quiché to interpret the Sacred Scriptures is more similar to that of a Protestant congregation than to that of a Catholic mass. Unfortunately, unlike *The Gospel in Solentiname*, there is no way to know which Bible was actually used by Rigoberta’s community. It makes sense to think, however, that it must have been the standard Catholic Bible due to the fact that all the priests who visited Rigoberta’s village belonged to Catholic Action.27

Another important fact is the crucial role played by Maya-Quiché women in the organization of the Maya-Quiché base ecclesial movement in Rigoberta’s village.

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27 David Damrosch observes that “in Menchú’s region, there were presumably some residents who had little use for Christianity, others who were blending ‘pagan’ and Catholic traditions in a variety of ways, and still others (not mentioned by Menchú) who were converting to the newly spreading teachings of evangelical Protestantism, whose missionaries were much more hostile to traditional culture than many Catholic priests were at this period” (246).
Rigoberta’s mother, for instance, played a prominent role in her congregation: “There was a group of women who began organising themselves along Christian principles. My mother was the president of the group. . . . The women used to go mostly to learn the Gospel, to sing a bit and chat and then go home” (88). There were also boys and men among the catechists. The catechists also used to gather the people to study and interpret the Bible, as can be appreciated in Rigoberta’s observation that “sometimes we arranged to study texts with my brothers who could read. We’d read a text and analyse the role of a Christian. This brought us together more and made us more concerned about each other’s problems” (88). In his influential work Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Paulo Freire theorizes the concept of conscientiçazão to refer to the learning process that allows the poor to perceive social, economic and political contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality (35). It is the critical reading of the Sacred Scriptures that teaches the Maya-Quiché how to develop a critical consciousness on their reality, which is the first step that defines their process of conscientiçazão:

We began to study the Bible as our main text. Many relationships in the Bible are like those we have with our ancestors, our ancestors whose lives were very much like our own. The important thing for us is that we started to identify that reality with our own. That’s how we began studying the Bible. It’s not something you memorize, it’s not just to be talked about and prayed about, and nothing more. It also helped to change the image we had, as Catholics and Christians: that God is up there and that God has a great kingdom for we the poor, yet never thinking of our own reality as a reality that we were actually living. But by studying the Scriptures, we did. Take ‘Exodus’ for example, that’s one we studied and analysed. It talks a lot about the life of Moses who tried to lead his people from oppression, and did all he could to free his people. We compare the Moses of those days with ourselves, the ‘Moses’ of today. ‘Exodus’ is about the life of a man, the life of Moses. (131)
The Maya-Quiché begin to read and interpret the Bible from their own historical and existential experience as colonized subaltern subjects subjected to oppression and repression. Their interpretation of the Bible from a decolonial lens shows how they try to find the points of connection between their own historical reality and that of Moses and the tribes of Israel in the Exodus episode as well as the points in common between their forebears and those of the Sacred Scriptures. The Maya-Quiché therefore become theological and hermeneutic subjects who constitute a base ecclesial movement that interprets and acts according to its own hermeneutic exegesis, thus overcoming the previous stage of control, manipulation and theological dependency embodied by Catholic Action. The fact that Rigoberta and her community start to make the connections between the Bible and their own historical situation of poverty and oppression shows how they realize that the Bible does not consist of learning by heart or repeating some prayers without understanding them. The Bible means acting here and now on behalf of the poor and the weak, thus following the example of its teachings.

This shows how Rigoberta and her people have finally become aware of the significance of “orthopraxis,” that is, action upon the material world in Christian life. The best example of this is Rigoberta’s observation that “I´m a catechist who walks upon this earth, not one who thinks only of the kingdom of God” (79). What Rigoberta and her

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28 Thomas Ward points out how Bartolomé de Las Casas and Menchú “escriben para fomentar una praxis así como lo describe Yúdice, el esfuerzo de cambiar el mundo a raíz de desarrollar la conciencia” (291). The American critic also highlights the fact that the Maya appropriate the Bible and incorporate it into their culture (299). According to Ward, “evidentemente aquí hablamos de la teología de la liberación, la cual va en contra de las normas oligárquicas de organizar la vida. Con un futuro posible, con una redistribución de riqueza, se impulsará un sentimiento de nación basado en la tolerancia y en la justicia” (299). Greg Grandin also notes in reference to the Maya and all the other poor sectors of Guatemalan society that “Marxism and liberation theology gave inhabitants of one of the most subjugated regions in the Americas a way to link their local aspirations to larger national and international movements and to make sense of the kind of everyday, routine forms of violence, as well as stunning displays of terror, that are documented in Menchú’s book” (30).
community end up questioning is Catholic Action’s belief that the Kingdom of God is in the sky. Their decolonial critical reading of the Sacred Scriptures teaches them that the Kingdom begins on Earth and that the historical reality of the Maya-Quiché is invaded by the historical mediations of the anti-Kingdom, which are represented by the landowners, their henchmen and the military sent by the Guatemalan government. Catholic Action’s great phallacy is therefore to make the Maya-Quiché believe that the Kingdom exclusively belongs to the heavenly dimension. That is precisely the manipulation and deception that is questioned by Rigoberta and her people.

As a consequence of their decolonial interpretation of the Bible, Rigoberta and her community realize that their orthopraxis must consist of putting into practice a revolutionary pedagogy, which is a historical mediation of the Kingdom that allows them to defend their lives and freedom. It is only then that they become aware of the fact that their main problem is the ownership of the land and that conscientização must be founded on the just violence of the oppressed that is present in the Bible. Hence why they feel identified with Moses and the Exodus episode. Like Moses, the Maya-Quiché also fight for their liberation from exploitation and slavery, which shows the similarity of the socio-historical coordinates of the present with those of the past. The example of Judith is also an important source of inspiration for Maya-Quiché women like Rigoberta herself and that of David’s victory over Goliath also plays an influential role:

We began looking for texts which represented each one of us. We tried to relate them to our Indian culture. We took the example of Moses for the men, and we have the example of Judith, who was a very famous woman in her time and appears in the Bible. She fought very hard for her people and made many attacks against the king they had then, until she finally had his head. She held her victory in her hand, the head of the King. This gave us a vision, a stronger idea of how we Christians must defend
ourselves. It made us think that a people could not be victorious without a just war. We Indians do not dream of great riches, we want only enough to live on. There is also the story of David, a little shepherd boy who appears in the Bible, who was able to defeat the king of those days, King Goliath. This story is the example for the children. This is how we look for stories and psalms which teach us how to defend ourselves from our enemies. I remember taking examples from all the texts which helped the community to understand their situation better. (131-32)

Rigoberta’s illumination after reading all these texts is that to be a Christian is to fight so that every human being may have his basic needs satisfied and lead a worthy life. The just violence of the Bible is therefore the foundation for a revolutionary pedagogy in the text to such an extent that, as is noted by Rigoberta, “we even got the idea [from the Bible] of using our own everyday weapons, as the only solution left to us” (132). On the other hand, the fact that Rigoberta mentions that “we don’t need very much advice, or theories, or documents: life has been our teacher” (133) shows how her decolonial perception and interpretation of the Bible from a Maya cultural perspective emerges out of her experience of poverty and hunger. This popular reading of the Bible in dialogue with Popol Vuh and traditional Maya spirituality and culture is a form of what Eleazar López Hernández has called “Indigenous-Christian theology.”29 This indigenous-Christian theological discourse articulated by Rigoberta and her community is eminently praxical since it is based on the historical reality of the Maya-Quiché but also has a theoretical dimension at a popular level. Theory and praxis go hand in hand but, given the historical experience of Rigoberta and her people, praxis precedes theory, a typical

29 As has been mentioned in chapter four, Indigenous-Christian theology is defined by López Hernández as a theological reflection “que se hace en el contexto de diálogo entre lo indígena y lo cristiano” (Teología indígena 50) in order to produce “una reformulación del pasado indígena en el ámbito del Cristianismo . . . Por eso no se renuncia, sino que se rescata y se potencia tanto la identidad indígena como la identidad cristiana” (Teología indígena 107).
feature of the Latin American base ecclesial movement that was also present in Ernesto Cardenal’s community of Our Lady of Solentiname.

The Bible is therefore the main weapon for the Maya-Quiché but only when interpreted from the perspective of the poor and the oppressed, which is supported by the Bible and is faithful to its message. According to Rigoberta, “perhaps those who call themselves Christians but who are really only Christians in theory, won’t understand why we give the Bible the meaning we do. But that’s because they haven’t lived as we have. And also perhaps because they can’t analyse it” (134). It is therefore necessary to make a distinction between those who are only Christians in theory and true Christians. The former distort and commodify the Christian teachings as a result of adapting them to their interests. The latter are faithful to the example of the historical Jesus through their experience of poverty, discrimination and suffering. Hence why a Maya-Quiché will have no problems to interpret any passage from the gospel, which he will easily connect with his life of misery and exclusion. A bourgeois, however, will definitely have problems to interpret the Bible because of his class prejudices, which will make him try to adapt the Christian teachings to his class interests. One cannot help but agree with Rigoberta’s observation that “we do this because we feel it is the duty of Christians to create the kingdom of God on Earth among our brothers. This kingdom will exist only when we all have enough to eat, when our children, brothers, parents don’t have to die from hunger and malnutrition. That will be the ‘Glory’, a Kingdom for we who have never known it” (134).

All this shows how the interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures carried out by Rigoberta and her people contrasts with that of a Catholic priest or bishop. It is true that
some priests have changed their perception of reality after living with the Maya-Quiché. They were anti-communists when they first came but “nevertheless understood that the people weren’t communists but hungry; not communists, but exploited by the system. And they joined our people’s struggle too, they opted for the life we Indians live” (134). Others, however, “call themselves Christians when they’re only defending their own petty interests and they keep themselves apart from the people so as not to endanger these interests” (134). After the experience of exploitation, hunger and discrimination of her people, Rigoberta cannot help radically questioning the church of the rich embodied by the Pope and the bishops in the following terms:

All the better for us, because we know very well that we do not need a king in a palace but a brother who lives with us. We don’t need a leader to show us where God is, to say whether he exists or not, because, through our own conception of God, we know there is a God and that, as the father of us all, he does not wish even one of his children to die, or be unhappy, or have no joy in life” (134-35).

Although the Bible is a weapon and document that orients Rigoberta and her community when they interpret it according to their historical reality, the change itself is the fruit of a critical reflection and praxis on their reality and of their compromise on behalf of the cause of the poor, which they defend through the just war.\(^\text{30}\) The Bible is therefore just a means but not an end:

\(^\text{30}\) Gustavo V. García points out in connection with “just war” that this concept, which comes from the Christian Bible, a text used against indigenous peoples by the Spanish colonizer, “es otra estrategia contrahegemónica que habilita la acción defensiva frente a los abusos perpetrados por el ejército por un lado, y, por otro, proyecta las reivindicaciones indígenas sin tener en cuenta consideraciones condenatorias, de la religión oficial, a la relevancia y/o efectividad de las mismas” (235). That is why “se trata, en definitiva, de aplicar los postulados de la teología de la liberación aceptada por sectores progresistas de la Iglesia” (García 235).
We believe that, when we started using the Bible, when we began studying it in terms of our reality, it was because we found in it a document to guide us. It’s not that the document itself brings about the change, it’s more that each one of us learns to understand his reality and wants to devote himself to others. More than anything else, it was a form of learning for us. Perhaps if we’d had other means to learn, things would have been different. But we understood that any element in nature can change man when he is ready for change. We believe the Bible is a necessary weapon for our people. Today I can say that it is a struggle which cannot be stopped. Neither the governments nor imperialism can stop it because it is a struggle of hunger and poverty. Neither the government nor imperialism can say: ‘Don’t be hungry,’ when we are all dying of hunger. (135)

Besides the Biblical figures of Moses, Judith and David, whose liberating actions make Rigoberta and her people realize what Christians must do to defend themselves through a Christian praxis, the example of Jesus Christ is always remembered by them in the following terms:

For me, as a Christian, there is one important thing. That is the life of Christ. Throughout his life Christ was humble. History tells us he was born in a little hut. He was persecuted and had to form a band of men so that his seed would not disappear. They were his disciples, his apostles. In those days, there was no other way of defending himself or Christ would have used it against his oppressors, against his enemies. He even gave his life. But Christ did not die, because generations and generations have followed him. And that’s exactly what we understood when our first catechists fell [they were kidnapped and tortured by the army]. They’re dead but our people keep their memory alive through our struggle against the government, against an enemy who oppresses us. (133)

Rigoberta’s conception of Jesus Christ can be explained in the light of Jon Sobrino’s reflections on the historical Jesus. According to Sobrino, “by ‘historical Jesus’ we mean the life of Jesus of Nazareth, his words and actions, his activity and his praxis, his attitudes and his spirit, his fate on the cross (and the resurrection). In other words, and expressed systematically, the history of Jesus” (Jesus the Liberator 50). The Salvadorean
liberation theologian also points out that “my thesis is that the most historical aspect of the historical Jesus is his practice and the spirit with which he carried it out. By ‘practice’ I mean the whole range of activities Jesus used to act on social reality and transform it in the specific direction of the Kingdom of God” (Jesus the Liberator 51). The practice with the spirit therefore represents the indissoluble bond between the material and the spiritual, orthopraxis and orthodoxy, which are like two sides of a coin.

It is the practice with the spirit of the historical Jesus, which will take us to the Christ of faith, that guides Rigoberta’s critical awareness upon the oppressive reality that threatens her people. Following the example of the historical Jesus in her struggle for the land, freedom and human rights of her community, Rigoberta also questions the terrible fact that “even religions are manipulated by the system, by those same governments you find everywhere. They use them through their ideas or through their methods. . . . But our reality teaches us that, as Christians, we must create a Church of the poor, that we don’t need a Church imposed from outside which knows nothing of hunger” (133). It is precisely the manipulation of religion by dictatorial regimes as a strategy to control and turn the masses into a dormant people that gives rise to a church of the rich, which is best represented in the text by the religious colonialism of Catholic Action. Rigoberta, however, thinks that only a church of the poor can be faithful to the practice with the spirit of the historical Jesus and his disciples since the only religion that can challenge the oppression of the powerful is that born out of the experience of the people: “Catholic Action and other religions and the system itself have all tried to keep us where we were. But I think that unless a religion springs from within the people themselves, it is a weapon of the system” (134). As a result of her theological insights, Rigoberta also
refutes the ideas that the Kingdom of the poor is in heaven and that the poor must put up with pain and suffering on Earth:

As far as sins go, it seems to me that the concept of the Catholic religion, or any other more conservative religion than Catholicism, is that God loves the poor and has a wonderful paradise in Heaven for the poor, so the poor must accept the life they have on earth. But as Christians, we have understood that being a Christian means refusing to accept all the injustices which are committed against our people, refusing to accept the discrimination committed against a humble people who barely know what eating meat is but who are treated worse than horses. (134)

Although it is true that the Kingdom of God for the poor is already present on Earth through a Christian orthopraxis like that of the Maya-Quiché people in the text, Rigoberta’s concept of the Kingdom is somewhat reductionist and restricted. Like the indigenous peasants of Solentiname, Rigoberta completely overlooks the eschatological dimension of the Kingdom, which is where it reaches its fullness and fulfilment even if it is already anticipated here on Earth. Besides revealing the limitations of Rigoberta’s theological insight, her conception of the Kingdom in exclusively earthly terms also contradicts one of the basic principles of the practice with the spirit of the historical Jesus: The intersection of the material and the spiritual dimension, and therefore, of orthopraxis and orthodoxy. This, however, does not mean that a balance between orthopraxis and orthodoxy has not been reached in the text. As will be discussed below, the revolutionary pedagogy carried out by Rigoberta’s community is always guided by a Christian ethics. It is her essentialist and reductionist notion of the Kingdom, which is always conceived in purely material terms, that disconnects the physical world from the transcendent dimension, thus breaking the balance between orthopraxis and orthodoxy in certain passages of the text. As has been mentioned in the case of the Gospel in
Jesus himself speaks of the eternal life and the eschatological promise as another dimension where peace, justice and brotherly love reign, which means that it can only be identified with the Kingdom of God in its final stage of completion. Unfortunately, this fundamental insight, which is even shared by important liberation theologians like Gutiérrez and Sobrino, is never present in Rigoberta’s narrative.

As has been mentioned before, the Christian praxis of the Maya-Quiché takes place through a revolutionary pedagogy founded on their decolonial reading of the Bible from an indigenous cultural perspective. This revolutionary pedagogy, however, has a local, regional and national dimension in the text, which means that it takes place in the sphere of micropolitics. It is the self-defence method put into practice by Rigoberta’s community to resist the first attacks of the Guatemalan army that shows the triumph of a revolutionary pedagogy at a local level. Rigoberta and her people carry out a successful strategy of socio-political resistance against the bloodthirsty soldiers based on the use of popular weapons, the unification of all the lands and houses, the construction of traditional Maya war traps and the division of a wide range of tasks—including emergency exits and security measures—among the different people of the community:

The following day everyone came with ideas of how to defend themselves. Some brought stones, others machetes, others sticks, others their work tools. The women brought salt, hot water, etc. We put all our ideas together. How would we use them? One compañero would say: ‘I think that this is useful for defence. How can we use it?’ Another would say: ‘This is what I have in mind . . .’. And he explains what he would do if they came. Each person contributed something. Then we organised very carefully who would plan the best ways to use the community’s ideas and who would teach them. How would we teach the children? Which duties would the children have? Who would be in charge of seeing that the women played their special part? When would we hold a general assembly to evaluate all this? We began to get a much better idea of how to organise our community. (125-26)
... So when the repression started coming closer, we realized we had to put our houses together to confront the soldiers when they came to repress our village. (126)

I was helping with the security measures, by setting traps and all the other things for our defence. But at the same time I was involved in organising and educating the compañeros. We had to do whatever work the community wanted, what was most needed at the time. And that was teaching many of the compañeros to do the same job we did. We tried to avoid all working at the same thing and changed round all the time so that everyone got experience of the different duties. We began organising the children, the women, the men. We started using our safety measures, the emergency exits for example. (127)

Rigoberta’s community not only critically perceives its own reality but also develops an efficient popular educational program to survive as a people. In fact, the defense of a liberating education vis-à-vis an oppressive education is also observed by Rigoberta herself: “This taught me that even though a person may learn to read and write, he should not accept the false education they give our people. Our people must not think as the authorities think. They must not let others think for them” (170). A liberating education as a result of a critical reading of the Bible from the point of view of the oppressed is therefore the basis for a revolutionary pedagogy in the text. Paulo Freire himself has pointed out that “it is to the reality which mediates men, and to the perception of that reality held by educators and people, that we must go to find the program content of education” (96). It is precisely the critical analysis of reality carried out by the Maya-Quiché in the text using the Bible as a weapon that allows them to develop a successful educational program to resist against the enemy. Rigoberta and her people have indeed investigated what Freire calls the people’s “thematic universe” (96), which is the complex of their “generative themes” (96).
Freire notes that an epoch is “a complex of ideas, concepts, hopes, doubts, values, and challenges in dialectical interaction with their opposites, striving towards plenitude” (101) and that the themes of an epoch are “the concrete representation of many of these ideas, values, concepts, and hopes, as well as the obstacles which impede the people’s full humanization” (101). This means that “the complex of interacting themes of an epoch constitutes its ‘thematic universe’ ” (Freire 101). Freire explains that human beings are aware of themselves and of the world because they are conscious beings. When human beings separate themselves from the world and from their own activity, they overcome the situations which limit them: The limit-situations (99). According to Freire, “men and women respond to the challenge with actions which Vieira Pinto calls ‘limit-acts’: those directed at negating and overcoming, rather than passively accepting, the ‘given’ ” (99). The careful organization of Rigoberta and her people as an essential part of their fight against the landowners and the military is an example of a series of limit-acts that try to transform oppressive reality, that is, to overcome the limit-situations that limit the freedom of the Maya-Quiché. According to Freire, the different limit-situations and limit-acts give rise to the generative themes of an epoch, and these, in turn, give rise to a thematic universe. Freire’s conclusion is that unless the themes are clearly perceived, humans will not transcend the limit-situations:

In the last analysis, the themes both contain and are contained in limit-situations; the tasks they imply require limit-acts. When the themes are concealed by the limit-situations and thus are not clearly perceived, the corresponding tasks—people’s responses in the form of historical action—can be neither authentically nor critically fulfilled. In this situation, humans are unable to transcend the limit-situations to discover that beyond these situations—and in contradiction to them—lies an untested feasibility. (102)
The lack of an untested feasibility can be appreciated in the text when Rigoberta’s village is invaded by the military for the first time and her people are expelled from their land and houses after their animals have been killed and their cooking utensils destroyed. It is only when Rigoberta and her community critically analyze the thematic universe corresponding to their reality that not only are they able to perceive the main generative theme of their epoch, that of domination and liberation, but also become aware of the need to move from the general nature of that theme to its particularities, which are determined by their historical context. This means that Rigoberta and her people not only succeed in seeing the need for liberation but also in apprehending this generative theme in connection with all the other generative themes that define their reality, that is, their thematic universe. Therefore, it is thanks to their critical reflection on their reality, which leads to a successful educational program, that they are able to capture the connection between the parts and the whole. In this sense, it is when Rigoberta begins to educate and organize her community after her previous experience as a catechist in the base ecclesial movement of her village that the process of conscientização becomes more critical and complex, thus giving rise to the emergence of a critical awareness that moves from the abstract to the concrete and from the parts to the whole. This is what makes it possible for the Maya-Quiché to critically apprehend their particular reality instead of falling into noncritical solutions such as social activism with no planning or organization.

The consequence of a successful revolutionary pedagogy in Rigoberta’s community is the development of a liberating education and organization at a regional and national micropolitical level. Giulio Girardi, the main theoretician of a revolutionary pedagogy besides Freire, has underlined the fact that “el concepto de revolución está
afectado de una manera decisiva por la importancia que atribuya a la educación; y el concepto de educación se transforma por el hecho de estar inscrito en un proyecto revolucionario” (Por una pedagogía 78). Girardi also highlights the fact that only through revolutionary struggle can human beings become true subjects of history (Por una pedagogía 81). According to the Italian liberation theologian, revolutionary praxis is a global transformation process concerning the oppressive structures of the capitalist system and culture, which are perceived in their dialectical relationship through their mutual influence and autonomy (Por una pedagogía 84). It is only then that the right conditions exist to articulate a liberating education, which is precisely “el movimiento de creación de una cultura alternativa, como expresión de un hombre nuevo” (Girardi, Por una pedagogía 86). Girardi, however, contends that the revolutionary struggle of the oppressed, which is the fruit of an alternative liberating education, not only involves a critical perception of reality but also an organization of the masses especially based on the foundation and alliance of trade unions and political parties:

El combate revolucionario conducido por las clases explotadas exige no solamente una toma de conciencia por su parte, sino también una organización fundada especialmente bajo la forma de sindicatos y partidos. Conciencia de clase y organizaciones se llaman y se engendran mutuamente.

Permanece, sin embargo, como esencial, que la revolución no es la obra de las minorías, sino de las masas. En la medida en que el cambio sea un quehacer de las masas, será revolucionario. La libertad no puede ser concedida. Nadie puede liberarse sino por sí mismo. Siempre que, por el contrario, los cambios sociales sean la conquista de minorías desligadas de las masas, el régimen que sobreviniese se vería obligado a establecer nuevas relaciones de dominación. El cambio no podría conseguir su objetivo esencial, el de instaurar el reino de la libertad. (Por una pedagogía 87-88)
It is the liberating education and organization of other Maya-Quiché communities of the area carried out by Rigoberta and her people that signals the beginning of the cooperation and union of the Maya-Quiché masses in the text. It is thanks to Rigoberta’s involvement in this project that the revolutionary pedagogy of her village spreads at a local level. The Maya-Quiché become new women and men who have developed a critical awareness, thus becoming subjects of history and agents of their own destiny through a revolutionary action based on a liberating education that teaches them how to defend and organize their communities efficiently. It is only then that the movement can acquire a regional dimension through contact with some trade unions and, especially, through the United Peasant Committee (CUC), which is founded by Rigoberta’s father and other peasants. Denied legal status by the President of Guatemala as a union which defends peasants’ rights, the CUC works clandestinely. Rigoberta’s work with the CUC not only involves helping to organize other communities but also to learn Spanish and to read and write so that she can teach the language of the enemy to her people. Knowing how to speak the language of the colonizer is therefore an essential element of a liberating program of education.\footnote{Laura Charlotte Kempen points out that “a primary technique Menchú (author and protagonist) employs to reclaim and invent an active female voice, is to appropriate the language of power, the colonial language of Spanish” (139). Although she may experience a feeling of guilt at having to learn the language of the oppressor, “Rigoberta realizes that one must have access to the language of power in order to transform one’s misery. In addition, in order to become a political leader, one must be able to communicate directly with those in power” (Kempen 139). Rigoberta’s appropriation of the language of the colonizer is therefore a way to talk back and transform the repressive conditions she and her people have known (Kempen 141).} It must be noted, on the other hand, that Rigoberta’s observation on the CUC that “it organised the peasants both in the Altiplano and on the coast. It wasn’t a formal organisation with a name and all that: more like groups of communities, at the grass roots, that sort of thing” (159) shows how its fundamental
component is the base ecclesial movement, which is the immediate precedent of the theology of liberation. Girardi’s idea that the revolution must not be carried out by the minorities but by the masses, who must unite in their struggle, is best represented in the text by the union of the Maya-Quiché and the poor *ladinos* through the CUC:

The CUC condemned this act [the massacre of 106 Kekchi Indians in Panzós], and that’s when it was recognized under the name of Comité de Unidad Campesina, as an organisation defending peasants’ rights. Our objectives were: a fair wage from the landowners; respect for our communities; the decent treatment we deserve as a people, not animals; respect for our religion, our customs, and our culture. Many villages in El Quiché were unable to perform their ceremonies because they were persecuted or because they were called subversives and communists. The CUC championed these rights. It came into the open. Then the repression against it began. We held a huge demonstration to herald the CUC with the participation of Indian men, women and children, although the CUC also recognizes that it is not only Indians who are exploited in Guatemala but our poor *ladino compañeros* as well. The CUC defends all peasants, Indians and *ladinos*. And within the framework of the organisation, we began having contacts between *ladinos* and Indians. (160)

One of CUC’s main insights is therefore the awareness that ethnic barriers must be overcome if the poor of Guatemala want to be successful in their revolutionary pedagogy. This idea can be connected with Rigoberta’s illumination that “I can say that in my organisation most of the leaders are Indians. There are also some *ladinos* and some women in the leadership. But we have to erase the barriers which exist between ethnic groups, between Indians and *ladinos*, between men and women, between intellectuals and non-intellectuals, and between all the linguistic areas” (223). The idea that a true revolutionary pedagogy must be free from all forms of racism and discrimination can be connected with Giulio Girardi’s observation that a true liberating education must be Christian (*Por una pedagogía* 175). Girardi’s project of a Christian revolutionary
pedagogy is based on the figure of Jesus Christ whose message is not explicitly political but is also a global transformation project involving political and economic demands (*Por una pedagogía* 180). Hence why the Italian liberation theologian notes that “en nuestra época, aparece cada vez mayor evidencia a muchos cristianos, que las exigencias de la liberación cristiana contradicen la adhesión al sistema capitalista; que en el interior del sistema capitalista, el cristianismo, como mensaje colectivo de liberación, no es realizable” (*Por una pedagogía* 180). Girardi’s conclusion is that Christ is the only Liberator and Educator whose life and teachings reveal a mobilized and creative presence in history (182).

Rigoberta and her father are the representatives of an anticapitalist revolutionary project in the text that favors the link between political and Christian liberation, thus uniting all Maya and *ladino* peasants, laborers and students against the abuses committed by the landowners, the military and the legal system. Rigoberta and Vicente Menchú therefore rebel against the lack of ethics of the system. The best example of this ethical crisis is the torture and execution of Rigoberta’s brother, the torture, rape and assassination of her mother and the burning of her father and many other peasants in the demonstration that peacefully took the Spanish Embassy. Father and daughter embody Girardi’s insurgent Christian project that questions the oppressive structures of capitalism. Hence why, after the events of the Spanish Embassy, many revolutionary Christians in Guatemala founded an organization called “‘Vicente Menchú’ Revolutionary Christians.” Rigoberta explains that “the Christians took my father’s name because he is a national hero for them: a man who despite his terrible experiences never lost his faith. He never confused what Heaven is with what Earth is. He chose to fight
with his people, a people which through its faith came to denounce terror and exploitation” (234).

It is precisely the union between the Maya-Quiché and the poor ladino masses of the CUC with the labor and student movement, revolutionary Christians and some unions that gives rise to the national micropolitical dimension of a revolutionary pedagogy in the text. This is especially present in the episodes of the taking over of the Spanish Embassy and the Guatemalan Congress buildings and also in that of the calling of a strike in the southern coast and Bocacosta, which was supported by eighty thousand workers. According to Rigoberta, it was at the time of the taking over of the Spanish embassy that the first approach between the CUC, other popular organizations and the students took place. It was only then that the 31st of January Popular Front, whose name honors the compañeros dead in the Spanish embassy, emerged as a result of the union and alliance of the CUC, the Revolutionary Workers Groups, the Coordinating Committee in the shanty towns, the “Vicente Menchú” Revolutionary Christians, the “Robin García” Secondary Students Revolutionary Front and the “Robin García” University Students Front.

The revolutionary pedagogy of the Front, which is defined by its interethnic and intersocial nature, certainly empowers the process of conscientização among the Maya-Quiché peasantry at a national level but is followed by bloody repression all over the country to exterminate the peasants through tank and bomb attacks as well as through the burning of the crops. The situation becomes so difficult and desperate that Rigoberta, one of the main leaders of the CUC, has to leave for México to avoid being seized, tortured and murdered. It is significant to note, however, that although the articulation of a
revolutionary pedagogy in the text takes place from an eminently micropolitical perspective, the macropolitical dimension, which goes beyond local, regional and national boundaries, is somehow present when the Maya peasants take over the Swiss and Spanish Embassies as well as some radio stations in Guatemala City. Rigoberta herself admits in reference to these revolutionary actions that “they took over several radio stations to tell people about our plight. At the same time, they thought they should make it known internationally by occupying an embassy where the ambassadors would be spokesmen. Unfortunately, most of us were too poor to think of going on a tour of other countries” (184). Although the international macropolitical dimension of a revolutionary pedagogy is dealt with in detail in Rigoberta’s second testimonio, Crossing Borders (1999), this already begins to take shape at the end of I, Rigoberta Menchú when Rigoberta makes the cause of her people known in México: “I remember that they asked for my testimony about the situation in Guatemala and I was very moved. I was invited to take part in a conference of church people from Latin America, Central America and Europe, where I was asked to describe the lives of our women, and with such great pleasure” (242).

Unlike her sisters, who make the decision to join the guerrilla movement in the mountains, Rigoberta, following the example of Christ the Liberator and the Educator, becomes a peaceful social activist upon her return to Guatemala. Like her father, she will defend the rights of her people by using the Spanish language, the Christian Bible and Popol Vuh against the colonizer. Rigoberta, however, does not return to the CUC but, compromised with the organization of her people from a Christian perspective, prefers to join the “Vicente Menchú” Revolutionary Christians Organization and work as a
catechist again. Her role as a catechist shows her commitment to build the Kingdom of God on Earth and her illumination about the true mission of a Christian in this world, an insight she gets by reinterpreting the Bible from a decolonial lense and from the point of view of Maya culture. It is this interpretation that allows a revolutionary Christian to condemn the injustice committed against her people. Rigoberta’s work as a catechist is therefore to educate the compañeros and compañeras from the base ecclesial movement in the Christian teachings through a revolutionary praxis founded on a popular reading of the Bible, which is the fruit of their experience of exploitation, hunger and discrimination. Because of her peaceful campaign on a national and international level, which involves telling her life story to Elizabeth Burgos and denouncing the atrocities committed by the Guatemalan army before the United Nations in 1982, Rigoberta was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1992.

An approach to the text from the lense of the theology of liberation reveals a notion of indigeneity based on the success of a Maya-Quiché revolutionary pedagogy that mainly takes place in the sphere of micropolitics but also begins to have a macropolitical dimension. It must be noted, however, that the active agency and self-representation of Maya-Quiché women in the revolution is an essential part of such a concept of indigeneity. In this sense, Rigoberta’s praxis and awareness in her narrative can be considered to be feminist. Hers, however, is a feminism whose goal is the welfare of her community through dialogue and discussion with the men in it. Hence why, according to Rigoberta, “for the time being, though, we think that it would be feeding machismo to set up an organisation for women only, since it would mean separating women’s work from men’s work. Also we’ve found that when we discuss women’s problems, we need the
men to be present, so that they can contribute by giving their opinions of what to do about the problem” (222). The idea is that men must learn through dialogue as well because “if they don’t learn, they don’t progress” (222). This shows how Rigoberta’s feminism is not exclusivist, isolationist and hostile but inclusive, communitarian and holistic through constructive dialogue.

It is therefore possible to speak of the emergence of a “decolonial feminism” in the text, which contrasts with Western feminist thought.\(^{32}\) Unlike Western feminism, which favors the violence and confrontation of dualistic thinking, decolonial feminism privileges holistic thinking through peaceful dialogue between women and men. Decolonial feminism believes it is necessary to carry out a joint analysis of women’s problems so that men can contribute to the discussion and learn from it. This will not put an end to *machismo* but will certainly help to reduce it. Even Western feminism, despite its more hostile and belligerent nature, has not succeeded in eliminating *machismo*. Quite the opposite. It is Rigoberta’s belief that it has actually empowered it due to the violence of dualistic thinking. Rigoberta’s decolonial feminism certainly vindicates the right of Maya-Quiché women to be an important part of the revolution and play an active role in it. It is not, however, a feminist discourse that violently confronts *machismo* in order to radically question the foundations of the patriarchal order that defines traditional Maya-Quiché culture. Even if Rigoberta renounces marriage and motherhood, the traditional roles of a Maya-Quiché woman, she only does this to help her people through her work.

\(^{32}\) Laura Charlotte Kempen observes that “Menchú appropriates patriarchal power and then situates herself as feminine subject, along with both her compañeras and compañeros, within the paradigm of active agents” (125). Kempen underlines the fact that although “I do not intend to argue that her [Rigoberta’s] primary intent was the struggle for women’s liberation, especially as it is construed within the bourgeois Euro-American context. However, her political activism and her people’s struggle for a life free of oppression, were necessarily informed by her gender” (125).
as a social activist but never to rebel against Maya-Quiché patriarchy and phallocentrism. This shows that, once again, it is the welfare of her community that she is most interested in.

It must be noted, on the other hand, that this conception of a feminist discourse within an indigenous cultural context is already present in Rigoberta’s mother. Like Rigoberta, she also values and defends the active presence and participation of Maya-Quiché women in the revolution but never challenges the patriarchal roots of the Maya-Quiché social structure. For Rigoberta and her mother, dialogue is therefore the only way to achieve a true social change and transformation through the revolution as far as the self-agency and rights of Maya-Quiché women are concerned. If this crucial issue is not discussed, then revolutionary change will not be authentic. It is necessary for Maya-Quiché women themselves to articulate a decolonial feminist agency since, in Rigoberta’s words, “we must solve our problems ourselves and not ask someone else to come and solve them, otherwise it’s dishonest. No-one will solve our problems for us” (221). On the other hand, the fact that the critical dialogue and discussion on the role of women in the revolution favored by Rigoberta’s decolonial feminism never questions the patriarchal foundations of Maya-Quiché society also reveals the limitations and reductionism of its ultimately reformist nature.

Besides the episode of the taking over of the Spanish Embassy, in which all the demonstrators, including Rigoberta’s father, are burned alive, some of the most shocking scenes of repressive violence in the text are those of the torture and murder of Rigoberta’s brother and mother by the military, which are described by Rigoberta in the following terms:
In my brother’s case, he was cut in various places. His head was shaved and slashed. He had no nails. He had no soles to his feet. The earlier wounds were suppurating from infection. And the woman compañera, of course I recognized her; she was from a village near ours. They had shaved her private parts. The nipple of one of her breasts was missing and her other breast was cut off. She had the marks of bites on different parts of her body. She was bitten all over, that compañera. She had no ears. All of them were missing part of the tongue or had had their tongues split apart. I found it impossible to concentrate, seeing that this could be. You could only think that these were human beings and what pain those bodies had felt to arrive at that unrecognizable state. All the people were crying, even the children. (178)

Anyway, they lined up the tortured and poured petrol on them; and then the soldiers set fire to each one of them. Many of them begged for mercy. They looked half dead when they were lined up, but when the bodies began to burn they began to plead for mercy. Some of them screamed, many of them leapt but uttered no sound — of course, that was because their breathing was cut off. (179)

My mother was kidnapped. And from the very beginning she was raped by the town’s high-ranking army officers. . . . They cut her whole body bit by bit. They began with small tortures, small beatings and worked up to terrible tortures. The first tortures she’d received became infected. It was her turn to suffer the terrible pain her son had suffered too. They tortured her the whole time and didn’t give her any food for many days. From the pain, from the torture all over her body, disfigured and starving, my mother began to lose consciousness and was in her death throes. (198)

They left her there dying for four or five days, enduring the sun, the rain and the night. . . . Since all my mother’s wounds were open, there were worms in all of them. She was still alive. My mother died in terrible agony. When my mother died, the soldiers stood over her and urinated in her mouth; even after she was dead!” (199)

These terrible torture, rape and murder scenes, which literally take the reader’s breath away, gave rise to the famous controversy surrounding the veracity of Rigoberta’s narrative.33 It was David Stoll, an American anthropologist working at Middlebury

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33 For a full discussion of the controversy, see the essays collected in the volumes The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy (2001), edited by Arturo Arias, and Stoll-Menchú: La invención de la memoria (2001), edited by Mario Roberto Morales. Other collections of essays on the controversy include the October-December 1999 issue of Human Rights Review (with essays by Daphne Patai, Joan Bamberger, Brian Haley, Daniel
College, that published a book, *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* (1998), in which he questioned the veracity and reality of some parts of Rigoberta’s testimony. According to Stoll, the *Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres* (EGP) and other peasant and Christian organizations from Guatemala were not the product of a historical experience of racism and economic exploitation. Instead, Stoll’s thesis supports the idea that conditions in the Western Highlands were improving for most indigenous peasants in the 1970s and that political repression was carried out by the Guatemalan government only against the EGP, which was led by middle-class intellectuals with little connection to the peasant communities they were trying to liberate. Therefore, it was the guerrillas that prevented peaceful reform and were to blame for military violence. This means that Maya indigenous peasants did not join the insurgents to fight social injustice and make a revolution but rather to escape from brutal state repression. To make his argument, Stoll presents Rigoberta’s father, Vicente Menchú, as a Maya peasant who was not involved in a decades-long struggle against rich *ladino* planters but with his wife’s family. Stoll insists on the fact that although it is true that Vicente was expelled from his land, sent to jail and even beaten, it was his Maya in-laws, the Tums, that were responsible for this. Stoll deducts that the Menchús joined the rebels not because they wanted to fight for the rights and freedom of the Maya-Quiché but because they wanted

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to defeat their peasant rivals. In so doing, the Menchús and their neighbors were caught in the wave of violent military repression.

As has been noted by American historian Greg Grandin, “subsequent research over the last decade [after the publication of Stoll’s book] has proven Stoll’s provocative thesis about Guatemala’s civil war to be largely wrong, while confirming Menchú’s interpretation of events” (16). According to Grandin, the definitive refutation has come from the historical section of the United Nations-administered truth commission, the Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico (CEH), or, in English, the Historical Clarification Commission. Grandin, who, along with three hundred other historians and social scientists, was a member of the commission, shows how the CEH, “based on extensive and diverse sources, unambiguously concluded that the war was ‘historically and structurally determined,’ tracing how colonial racism, exploitation, and authoritarianism evolved to the point where genocide and counterinsurgency became indistinguishable social projects” (x). Grandin clarifies that the CEH did not say, as the

34 Grandin observes how this commission did what no other commission had done before and has not done ever since: “It gave a team of Guatemalan historians and social scientists . . . access to its research—including an enormous database of over eight thousand testimonies, about a dozen ‘context reports,’ or local histories, composed by the CEH’s regional offices, interviews with key actors, including former presidents, military strategists, death squad members, and guerrilla leaders, thousands of declassified US government documents, and an extensive library of secondary sources—and asked them to write an analysis of the ‘causes’ and ‘origins’ of the human rights abuses” (ix-x). The result was “a sweeping interpretation of Guatemalan history that went well beyond the often vacuous ‘reconciliation talk’ of past truth commissions” (Grandin x). A second Guatemalan truth commission was administered by the Catholic Church through Bishop Juan Gerardi, who was murdered shortly after the publication of the commission’s report Guatemala: Never Again! (1999).

35 The CEH’s final report also offers an insightful analysis of Guatemalan history from the nineteenth century to the present:

From independence in 1821, an event led by the country’s elite, an authoritarian state was created that excluded the majority of Guatemalans; it was racist in theory and practice and served to protect the interests of a small, privileged elite . . . State violence has been fundamentally aimed against the excluded, the poor, and the Maya, as well as those who struggled in favor of a just and more equitable society . . . Thus a vicious circle was created in
South African truth commission did, that armed struggle was morally justified but “did unequivocally understand the guerrillas as emerging from a society that allowed no possibility for peaceful reform” (x). The American historian also demonstrates how the truth commission’s findings reveal the partial and simplistic nature of Stoll’s thesis:

... the CEH, like Stoll, understands the escalating civil war as emerging from the fault line of local conflicts, including petty family grievances and parochial land conflicts, often among peasants and between indigenous communities. But it places its examination of any given clash within the broader context of a militarized plantation economy where non-indigenous elites fought to hold on to their monopoly, control over land, labor, markets, credits, and transportation. As to Chimel [Rigoberta’s village], commission investigators recognized local feuds between peasants but also found evidence that ladino planters did play a crucial role in instigating violence and dispossession in the 1960s and 70s. On the key point of chronology, which is ultimately the hook on which Stoll’s case dangles, the CEH documents a clear pattern of repression enacted by planters, ladinos, and security forces in the indigenous highlands well before the arrival of the guerrillas in the 1970s. In the case of Chimel, Stoll says the army showed up only after the EGP guerrillas executed two ladinos in the spring of 1979, thus laying blame for the ensuing spiral of events that claimed the life of Menchú’s brother and mother and the destruction of Chimel at the feet of her father’s allies. But CEH researchers dated the beginning of the military’s harassment of Chimel to earlier than this first EGP action. (16-17)

Another problem with Stoll’s argument is his belief that Maya peasants were manipulated by the guerrillas and other left-wing groups to such an extent that they became puppets in their hands deprived of their indigenous agency. Other scholars like Victor Montejo and Mario Roberto Morales, whose work is sympathetic to Stoll, also endorse this idea. Montejo, himself a Maya anthropologist, contends that it has always been a strategy of the Left to have a unified voice or spokesperson, which was the role of Rigoberta Menchú in the popular movement now called the Maya movement (378).
According to Montejo, “if you have one voice and if that voice is not free to say things unless approved by partisan interests, then it becomes ineffective. This is what happened to Rigoberta Menchú. The popular movement and the guerrilla movement wanted international solidarity support and created one voice, which became the only voice for all the Maya” (378). Morales, on the other hand, notes how Rigoberta’s account reflects the needs of a guerrilla organization, which means that subaltern discourses are not enunciated from a *locus* of absolute otherness but are “often solicited and elicited by dominators who wish to instrumentalize the subaltern’s political potential and also to identify with its discourse to solve their own internal conflicts” (361). In other words, subalterns like Menchú “must adjust their discourse to the interest of their interlocutors in order to meet their own material and ideological needs” (Morales 361).

Stoll, Montejo and Morales seem to forget that the main purpose of Rigoberta’s narrative is to defend the rights of the Maya and let the world know about the torture, repression and violation of human rights that was taking place in Guatemala during the 1970s and 80s.\(^\text{36}\) Hence why an important section of the text explains how her people learned to develop a successful revolutionary pedagogy to resist the attacks of the enemy. Therefore, Maya agency was always a fact both from a literary and historical point of view.\(^\text{37}\) This, however, does not mean that the Maya did not join forces with the Left. They certainly did in order to give a regional and national dimension to their struggle but

\(^{36}\) John Beverley observes that “her interest in creating the text is not in the first place to have it become part of the canon of Western Civilization . . . It is rather to act tactically in a way she hopes and expects will advance the interests of the community and social groups and classes her testimonio represents: ‘Poor’ Guatemalans” (“The Real Thing” 75).

\(^{37}\) Beverley has noted in connection with Rigoberta’s narrative agency that “it would be yet another version of the ‘native informant’ to grant a narrator such as Rigoberta Menchú only the possibility of being a witness, but not the power to create his or her own narrative authority and negotiate its conditions of truth and representativity” (“What Happens” 233).
they did of their own free will. This means that Rigoberta has an independent agency from the guerrilla movement even though she may sympathize with it. The best proof for this is that Rigoberta tells how she works for the CUC and for the Vicente Menchú Revolutionary Christians Organization, but, unlike her sisters, never makes the decision of taking up arms and joining the guerrilla in the mountains. Stoll is obsessed with Maya support of the EGP, which is a fact, but the main point of the text is to show how the Maya develop their indigenous agency and self-representation by organizing themselves at a local, regional and national level to defend their land and freedom. In Rigoberta’s case, it is the CUC and 31st January Front that play a crucial role for this and not so much the EGP even though she may be sympathetic to it and two of her sisters decide to become guerrilla fighters.

Rigoberta’s voice is therefore a free voice that tells her own life story, which is also that of her people but not that of the guerrillas. The fact that she joins and supports some left-wing organizations does not mean that her voice is controlled and dominated by the Left. On the contrary, hers is an independent voice that stands for the rights of the Maya and knows very well when it is necessary to make political alliances in order to advance the struggle for the cause of her people. These political alliances are therefore the fruit of her indigenous agency, which is also reinforced.38 As far as Rigoberta’s subaltern discourse is concerned, this cannot possibly come from a position of full otherness due to the key issue of mediation that defines the testimonial genre and gives

38 Grandin observes that “what makes Menchú’s testimony so extraordinary is how far her engagement with ideas clearly outstripped whatever orientation she might have received from organizers. What she learned from her travails, she learned by her own impressive will and intelligence” (31). According to the American historian, “her interpretation of events broadly reflects the concerns of liberation theology, and at times it can sound mechanical. But it is clearly rooted in her personal grappling with the dilemmas of history and her own particular experience of power and powerlessness” (31).
rise to a hybrid narrative voice in testimonial texts. This, however, does not mean that Rigoberta’s account is ideologically controlled and instrumentalized by the Left. As has been mentioned above, her narrative presents her own story and that of her people, which is the fruit of her own agency as a testimonial subject or witness who gives an oral account. It is a fact that there are many points of connection between the historical experience of exploitation and oppression of the Maya and that of the ladino labor and peasant movement. Hence why political alliances do emerge and Guatemala’s Left has always felt sympathetic and identified with Rigoberta’s text to such an extent that Arturo Taracena, a Guatemalan representative for EGR in Paris, was one of its editors. But Taracena himself has admitted that “the book is a narration only by Rigoberta” (85).

Stoll also questions Rigoberta’s just war, which was not just for those Maya indigenous peasants who were murdered by some guerrilla units that betrayed the cause of the poor. First of all, Rigoberta’s narrative is based on her own experience, that is, on what she lived and saw. It is very likely that the crimes committed by the guerrillas did not take place in her village but in other areas. Secondly, she may have been forced to conceal this information in order to protect the lives of good and innocent people both inside and outside the guerrillas due to the dangerous situation of repressive violence.

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39 Beverley points out how Spivak’s negative answer to the question “Can the Subaltern Speak?” shows how “behind the good faith of the ‘committed’ ethnographer or solidarity activist who ‘allows’ or enables the subaltern to speak [is concealed] the trace of the colonial construction of an Other who is available to speak to us—with whom we can speak (that is, feel comfortable speaking with)—neutralizing thus the force of the reality of difference and antagonism” (“The Real Thing” 66). According to Beverley, “Elzbieta Sklodowska has in mind something similar when she claims that, despite its appeal to the authority of an actual subaltern voice, testimonio does not in fact represent ‘a genuine and spontaneous reaction of a ‘multiform-popular subject’ in conditions of postcoloniality but rather continues to be a discourse of the elites committed to the cause of democratization’ ” (“The Real Thing” 67). The American critic believes that Sklodowska seems to imply that the appeal to authenticity and victimization in the critical validation of testimonio stops the semiotic play of the text and fixes the subject in a unidirectional gaze that deprives it of its reality (“The Real Thing” 67).
When asked in an interview why the atrocities committed by the guerrillas were covered up in her book, something criticized by Elisabeth Burgos herself many years after its publication, Rigoberta answered that “first, you have to imagine yourself in the Guatemala of the mid-1980s. Anyone who even seemed to be part of the opposition, not even of the guerrilla movement, would certainly be persecuted immediately” (113). Victor Montejo observes that “it is important that solidarity organizations, scholars and activists also recognize the contributions of other Maya. We tend to focus on only one voice and that is why people fear that the Maya revitalization movement will be destroyed” (387). It may be true that not all Mayas see Guatemala’s civil war from Rigoberta’s perspective. A victim of the guerrillas, for instance, will probably see things differently. That is why it is so important to read Rigoberta’s narrative in dialogue with other testimonial texts offering a different perception of the events like Montejo’s *Testimony: Death of a Guatemalan Village* (1987) and Mario Roberto Morales’s *Face of the Earth, Heart of the Sky* (2000).

Nevertheless, the tendency to focus on only one Maya voice is not only present in left-wing scholars. Stoll himself is quite partial when including only those testimonies

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40 Grandin observes that “it is public knowledge that Burgos and Menchú, since the early 1990s, have been on bad terms and that in September 1993 Burgos asked Gallimard to stop sending Menchú her share of the royalties” (vii). Burgos told David Stoll that the reason why she did this was because the two women “began to diverge politically over her criticism of Cuba, an account Burgos repeats in her preface to a second edition of Stoll’s *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of all Poor Guatemalans*, the book that led to Menchú’s discrediting” (Grandin vii). According to Grandin, a second reason noted by Stoll is Rigoberta’s questioning of the fact that she was not considered the book’s legal author: “Then in February 1993, Menchú asked Burgos to sign over the author’s rights, ‘so that she could make her own contracts.’ This request was denied, and Stoll, whose book Burgos strongly endorses in her preface, suggests that Burgos ‘stopped the remittances’ because of Menchú’s complaints” (vii). Stoll mentions that Burgos “had always sent Rigoberta the full royalties” (321) and even “reproduces in his book receipts showing that Menchú received 295,802 francs, about $59,000, between 1983 and 1993” (Grandin vii, n. 1). Grandin also points out that “a Gallimard representative, however, told me that according to company records, until 1993, the company ‘paid [Menchú], upon request of Elisabeth Burgos, every year part of Burgos’s royalties’” (vii, n. 1).
that support his thesis instead of giving us a larger picture by comparing testimonial accounts by right-wing and left-wing Maya. It is here precisely that politicization emerges as well. Moreover, what is the reliability of Stoll’s witnesses? What if they were coerced or intimidated by the army to say what they said or just afraid of not saying what the Guatemalan Right wanted them to say? Another problem concerning the reliability of the documentary sources used by Stoll is that he is said to have had access to an archive containing land records and human rights reports. The problem is that he is the only person who has been granted access to those materials so far, which is quite suspicious. Guatemalan writer Dante Liano cannot help wondering “which archives, it is hard to know. Are there actual files on the war in Guatemala? If there are and they were opened for an American, it might be useful to ask why the army has denied access to them to the Commission for Historical Clarification, as well as to Guatemalan congressman Héctor Barrios Klée, who, by the way, was recently killed by a shot to the head” (122-23).

Uruguayan essayist Eduardo Galeano, on the other hand, also notes that “not too long ago, Congressman Barrios Klée tried to consult those same archives, and he was later found with a bullet hole in his head. Bishop Juan Gerardi, who had tried the same thing, ended up with his own head smashed to smithereens” (99-100). If Stoll was not denied access, this was because the ideological orientation of his work agrees with the political views of the Guatemalan conservative sectors and the army. Independently of whether Stoll was working for the CIA or not, politicization emerges here again either directly or indirectly.

But Stoll’s most serious mistake is his inability to perceive what Elzbieta Sklodowska has called the artifactuality of testimonio by assimilating this to legal
testimony and journalistic writing. This shows his blindness to realize that testimonial works are literary texts. A careful study of Latin American testimonial literature shows how fictional elements are always present in connection with the memories of the witness. There is nothing wrong with this as long as the testimonial subject’s fictional elements empower the social compromise of her/his work and the truth of the main facts instead of distorting them. In Sklodowska’s words:

I have always seen testimonial texts as a peculiar mixture of experience, creation, manipulation, and invention, more akin, perhaps, to a novel, than to a scientific document, I have never relinquished my interest in the “literary.” On the outset of my work I armed myself with an awareness of the text’s artifactual nature, including the inevitable embroidering of the facts for dramatic, political or aesthetic effect. Throughout this process, I must have developed antibodies that make me immune to the kind of revelations we have heard recently about Menchú’s book. So, where Stoll spots lies and fabrications, I see allegories and metaphors. In short, I see a text. (“The Poetics of Remembering” 256)

To reinforce the point about the enduring power of Menchú’s testimony from a disciplinary perspective other than my own and to avoid an

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41 As has been noted by Arturo Arias, testimonio should not be subsumed under the category of legal discourse but should be recognized as a genre, which “was never meant to be autobiography or a sworn testimony in the juridical sense, but rather a collective, communal account of a person’s life” (“Authorizing” 76). According to Arias, “for Mayas there is no clear separation between an individual subject and a community, between being and belonging” (“Authorizing” 76). Hence why the Guatemalan critic cannot help wondering “if her text, which did not make any historical truth claims, achieved the goals of ending massacre and creating respect for Mayan culture, does it matter if it did not conform to how Western science contextualizes documentary facts?” (“Authorizing” 87).

42 Gustavo V. García believes that I, Rigoberta Menchú offers a shared organization and mediation where it is difficult to separate the role of the witness and the intellectual. According to García, “la naturaleza participativa en la construcción textual es responsable de la aproximación multidisciplinaria y transculturada que otorga al testimonio, en cuanto a forma y contenido, una coherencia conflictiva que en no pocos casos genera diversas contradicciones, oscilaciones e imprecisiones textuales” (223). Hence why, following Hayden White’s idea that historical and literary discursive conventions are the same, García concludes that “acusar a Rigoberta Menchú de ‘falsear’ su historia es una ingenuidad que ignora la estructura y función literaria del testimonio, puesto que a pesar de la vocación antiliteraria del género testimonial, (por su carácter de veridicción), es posible que no exista otro texto más ‘literaturizado’ que éste” (223).

43 This idea is also supported by David Damrosch when pointing out that “for its part, Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú is a highly literary work. The genre of testimonio to which it belongs gives a personal shape to broader social events, and the most successful testimonios (like the best autobiographies in general) are rhetorically charged and artistically shaped narratives that often read like nonfiction novels” (232).
increasingly unproductive debate about the borderlines between fact and fiction, I suggest we learn from fellow researchers in the field of oral history who have long recognized both the artificiality and the artifactuality of life stories without diminishing the value of human experience (see Portelli). (“The Poetics of Remembering” 266)

Two of Stoll’s charges concerning Rigoberta’s life are true: The fact that she received some education and that she falsely placed herself at the scene of her brother Petrocinio’s murder. Rigoberta herself explains in an interview why she did not mention that she had studied at the Belgian school with the nuns: “I recognize, because I do not say so in the book, that I was a servant in the Belgian school. I did not say so then in order to protect my relationship with the sisters in those years” (110). It is Sklodowska’s theory of the artifactuality of the testimonial genre that can help us to interpret the second charge correctly. The fact that Rigoberta presents herself as an eyewitness can be seen as a fictional element used for dramatic and political effect that demonstrates that Rigoberta’s narrative, like any other testimonial text, is a literary artifact with an ideological and political agenda that aims to persuade and manipulate the reader both from an emotional and political point of view. This is still more obvious if we take into consideration the fact that, according to Stoll, Petrocinio was not burned but shot dead. By placing herself at the scene of Petrocinio’s assassination, Rigoberta not only manages to appear as a reliable witness before her readers but also aims to increase the dramatic effect of the situation upon her audience in order to persuade it to sympathize with the cause of her people. As has been mentioned above, there is nothing wrong with the use of some fictional elements by Rigoberta since they contribute to reinforce the social

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44 Gustavo V. García notes in connection with Rigoberta’s (re)presentation in her narrative that “la construcción del ‘otro’ indígena, en su versión lascasiana, es fundamental para asegurar la receptividad y el éxito del libro en calidad de artefacto literario e instrumento de concientización” (216).
compromise of her text as well as to safeguard the veracity of one of its main historical facts: The genocide committed by the Guatemalan army.

Either burned or shot dead, the key question here is that Petrocinio, a sixteen-year-old innocent boy, was murdered by the military like thousands of other innocent Maya indigenous peasants.\textsuperscript{45} The fact that Rigoberta herself has justified the need to place herself at the scene of this brutal crime due to the fact that her mother, the only witness, was already dead when she was being interviewed by Elisabeth Burgos in Paris demonstrates how she was always trying to preserve the historical truth of the events she tells: “My mother saw it [Petrocinio’s execution]. And she can no longer speak about it. And how could I possibly have presented my mother as the number one witness, when they have killed so many witnesses so they can’t speak?” (111). Other reasons that may account for Rigoberta’s decision to present herself as an eyewitness have been suggested by Greg Grandin in the following terms:

\textsuperscript{45} Gustavo V. García has interpreted the scene of Petrocinio’s death in the light of the concept of human sacrifice in Maya mythology (236-39). Brilliant and original, García’s interpretation is actually quite problematic. This is due to the fact that sacrifice in the text is the fruit of the torture and violence carried out by the Guatemalan army. This has nothing to do with the inevitability of human sacrifice among the ancient Maya, which was considered an integral part of Maya life and death to prevent the destruction of their world. This means that sacrifice has negative connotations in the text connected with oppressive violence but not the positive connotations of Maya sacrifice as a means to preserve and perpetuate the world. Moreover, the description of the episode does not present mythological overtones or clues that refer to the Maya concept of human sacrifice. As will be discussed next, the only mythological element in the passage is Rigoberta’s use of the collective voice, which is typical of Maya mythology and oral storytelling but has nothing to do with sacrifice. Maya culture certainly plays a key role in other episodes but one cannot help feeling that, in the particular case of Petrocinio’s death, García forces Maya sacrifice and mythology upon it. Therefore, it is the pain, sadness and anger at seeing what has happened to Petrocinio and all the other prisoners murdered by the military that makes Rigoberta’s family commit to the Maya revolutionary struggle and not the Maya ritual of human sacrifice. García also believes that the subversion per excellence in the text is that of the circularity of Maya-Quiché time vis-à-vis the linearity of the Western notion of time (230-36). Although it is true that both concepts of the temporal dimension are transculturated into the text, a careful reading shows that its main conflict is not temporal but decolonial through the oppression-liberation dialectics. This takes the form of the confrontation between the theology of dominion of the elites and the theology of liberation, which is reinterpreted from the perspective of Maya culture and is the basis for the emergence of Maya agency and self-representation through revolutionary praxis in the text.
The need to draw attention to Guatemala, which compared to neighboring Nicaragua and El Salvador was being ignored by the international press, must have tempted her to place herself at the scene of the many crimes she describes. Menchú did not know her interviews with Burgos would produce a book, much less an international bestseller. She had no experience with the publishing industry. And she certainly could not have imagined that everyone of her statements would be subject to fine-tooth scrutiny. And yet her narrative hews closely to a truthful chronology, and even her most serious embellishment—that she witnessed her brother being burned to death—“can be considered factual,” according to her principal fact-checker [Stoll].

Grandin is also to be admired for being the only researcher who has listened to and transcribed Rigoberta’s audiotaped account of Petrocinio’s assassination, drawn from a session she did with Arturo Taracena, and not with Elisabeth Burgos, in Paris. According to Grandin, the comparison between the original oral account and that of the book shows that Rigoberta tends to use plural verbs and the pronoun “nosotros” in the former whereas a mix of singular and plural tenses is used in the latter. Taking into consideration Christopher Lutz and George Lovell’s observation that, like sixteenth-century Maya accounts of the Spanish conquest, Rigoberta’s text is written in a collective voice, Grandin suggests that “the collective voice is perhaps Menchú’s acknowledgement that she did not witness her brother’s death but was repeating her

46 Sklodowska’s reflections on the artefactuality of the testimonial text can also be connected with Greg Grandin and Francisco Goldman’s observation that “her story was a call to conscience, a piece of wartime propaganda designed not to mislead but rather to capture our attention. It relied upon a classic Dickensian technique of pulling together different individual experiences into one character’s heart-rending story. Such distortions were probably necessary to break through the wall of media indifference.”

47 The recordings of the interviews that led to the book are available at the Hoover Institution Archives, in Stanford, California. The interview on Petrocinio’s execution conducted by Taracena can be found in the Elisabeth Burgos-Debray Papers, Box 1, Hoover Archives.

48 Lutz and Lovell argue that, due to the fact that sixteenth-century indigenous chronicles were often written in a collective voice, when Menchú says on the first page of her memoir that the story she is about to tell is not only her life but also the testimony of her people, she means it literally. Grandin believes that Rigoberta’s use of plural verbs and the pronoun “nosotros” in her oral account of Petrocinio’s murder illustrates “what the historians Lutz and Lovell say is the resonance between Menchú’s oral testimony and historic Mayan accounts of atrocities associated with the Spanish conquest” (27).
family’s account of what happened” (27). It is also possible that Rigoberta “was synthesizing accounts of other, similar executions; or she was repeating what her family had told her about how her brother had died” (Grandin 27). Taracena himself has also underlined the significance of the collective voice in Rigoberta’s narrative in the following terms:

You don’t see anyone else attacking autobiographies like this: there’s a hidden racism. If Stoll is an anthropologist and doesn’t know that Indian people speak collectively, that she expressed the voice of the collective conscience, then I don’t know what he knows . . . . The magic of the book is the first-person narrative. There are things that she heard from other militantes, things that she didn’t see, things that she put in her own voice. What she was narrating was the life of the Maya. (Qtd. in Canby 33)

It is also significant to note that, as far as the death of Rigoberta’s mother is concerned, even Stoll admits that “Rigoberta’s account is basically true” (127). Stoll’s lack of empirical basis, however, becomes quite problematic in his interpretation of the firebombing of the Spanish Embassy episode. All the American anthropologist can do is to speculate that “the protesters might have intentionally killed themselves to reinforce ‘the left’s cult of martyrdom’ ” (Grandin 15). Grandin, however, observes that “investigations by the Spanish government, the Catholic Church and the United Nations all confirmed Menchú’s description of events and in 2005 a Spanish judge issued an arrest warrant for a former Guatemalan interior minister accused of ordering the bombing” (15). Moreover, the American historian also finds quite shocking the fact that Stoll’s speculations come from “a researcher who bases his legitimacy on opposing fact-based, empirical argumentation against the deductions of a politicized Left” (15).
Stoll’s fact-based argumentation is, in fact, full of contradictions. According to Mary Louise Pratt, Stoll’s book “questions point for point the veracity of Menchú’s account, but raises many doubts as to its own reliability. It proposes to vindicate empirical research (247), but deploys an intensely partisan rhetoric and hermeneutics. It proposes interpretations and arguments, and then sets them aside without explaining why” (43-44). Pratt observes how what appears at first as one possibility among others later reappears as an empirical claim: “In chapter 8, for instance, two eyewitnesses affirm that Menchú’s father, Vicente, was not present when the guerrilla first entered his town of Chimel. Two other informants say the opposite, one of whom appears to be speaking at second hand (110-11). In chapters 12 and 17, however, it has become a fact that Vicente Menchú personally received the guerrilla in Chimel (172, 240)” (44). Other facts turn themselves into fictions in reverse fashion:

Early on, the author affirms that Menchú’s account of the capture, rape, torture, and death of her mother is ‘basically true,’ and gives reasons for this conclusion (125). Nevertheless, in chapter 14 we read that Menchú ‘imagined’ the death of her mother (194), and chapter 17 offers a perverse metaphor, speaking of ‘the calvaries through which Menchú [textually, we suppose] puts her mother and brother (308).’ (Pratt 44)

Pratt also calls attention to the frequent incongruencies between the author’s conclusions and the facts cited to support them:

One of Stoll’s main points is that the guerrilla movement never had massive support among indigenous peasants, from which he deduces that anyone who did support the guerrilla cannot speak reliably about the experience of the peasants during the war. At the same time, we read of the ‘inundation of recruits from religious, peasant and labor organizations’ in 1981 (174); of an expansion in Santa Cruz del Quiché so massive that it overwhelmed the guerrilla’s capacity for growth; that the Guatemalan guerrilla was the first in Latin America to attract significant numbers of indigenous adherents (208). (44-45)
Grandin, on the other hand, proves how Stoll’s contradictory statements to explain the point of his research show how the controversy was quickly escaping his control:

His book dedicated a chapter to proving that Menchú could not have witnessed her brother’s execution, yet he now said that ‘how one member or another of her family died’ was a minor issue. Stoll confirmed the “essential factuality of Menchú’s account of how her brother and mother died,” yet complained to a reporter that she was “still displaying a lack of candor” in answering his charges. He distanced himself from the Right, defending Menchú’s status as a Nobel Laureate, and flailed at the Left, complaining that the members of the ‘Menchú cult’ had called him ‘everything but an infidel Jew.’ (10)

The analysis of the Menchú-Stoll controversy shows that although some inaccuracies and inconsistencies do exist in Rigoberta’s narrative, these never distort the main historical facts and actually reinforce the veracity of the events as well as the social compromise of the text. Rigoberta’s use of fictional elements, however, does not mean that she lacks indigenous agency as a Maya subaltern subject as a result of being used and manipulated by the Guatemalan guerillas. Rigoberta develops her own indigeneity by becoming, first and foremost, a peaceful social activist as well as by telling her life story to Elisabeth Burgos. It is precisely her indigenous agency as a social activist and a storyteller that reveals her goal: To help her people, the Maya-Quiché. This, however, does not mean that she may not sympathize with the guerrilla movement or be politicized from a left-wing perspective. It is precisely because of this that Rigoberta allows the final text to be edited by some friends from EGP like Taracena himself. Therefore, it is a terrible mistake to believe that Rigoberta’s indigeneity has been taken away from her and that she has been manipulated by guerrilla leaders. All Rigoberta has done has been done
of her own free will in order to help her people because it is the ethics of the cause of the Maya that comes first for her. Only then comes the alliance with political factions of the Left as a strategy to regionalize and nationalize the Maya movement.

It is possible that other Maya activists have different political views and see things differently. It is also possible that their testimonios have not become so widespread as Rigoberta’s. This, however, has nothing to do with the fact that the Left has sanctified or used Menchú, as is contended by Stoll, Montejo and Morales, but rather with fate. It was Rigoberta that became a revolutionary leader with the CUC and had to leave Guatemala due to military repression. Consequently, she had the chance to make the plight of her people known internationally, especially after meeting Burgos and Taracena in Paris. But this was chance and fate. As has been mentioned above, the main concern of Rigoberta’s testimonio is the well-being and survival of her people even though she may be politicized from a left-wing ideological orientation. Who is not politicized after all? Are Stoll, Montejo and Morales not politicized as well? All this suggests that Rigoberta’s sin is her defense of the rights of the Maya against the injustices of capitalism. If she were on behalf of the neoliberal model and criticized the abuses committed by a communist regime, she would be considered a hero and none of her statements would have been subjected to fine-tooth scrutiny by a researcher like Stoll. Indeed, this is what happened with The Gulag Archipelago, a famous testimonial work that criticizes the abuses committed by the Soviet communist dictatorship and was written by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971.

As has been noted by Grandin, in spite of the fact that The Gulag Archipelago was described upon its publication as “non-fiction” (Washington Post), and as only
presenting “true facts” as a “factual documentary” (*The New York Times*), and by Solzhenitsyn himself as containing “no fictional persons, no fictional events . . . all took place just as it is here described” (qtd. in Grandin x), “the respected Russian historian Roy Medvedev, as part of a broader study of Stalinism, writes that Solzhenitsyn ‘distorted many details’ in that book and that he did so for political reasons” (xi).49 One cannot help but agree with Grandin’s brilliant observation that “no one, rightly, would use such distortions either to diminish the horrors of the gulag or to present a sweeping reinterpretation of Stalinism, as Menchú’s critics do for Cold War terror in Latin America” (xii).50 Yet, one cannot possibly help wondering: Why has not an anthropologist from a capitalist country questioned the veracity of Solzhenitsyn’s story to the point of subjecting each and every of its author’s statements to deep scrutiny and of writing a book about it? For a simple reason: *The Gulag Archipelago* is a politically correct work but *I, Rigoberta Menchú* is not.51 Politics and ideology are therefore what is behind a book like Stoll’s but only from a right-wing perpective.

The American and Guatemalan scholars who have been critical in their response to David Stoll just want to vindicate the social ethics and compromise of Rigoberta’s cause: To defend the rights of her people. This does not mean that Rigoberta is

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49 See Medvedev’s book *Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism* (1989), especially page 273. Other autobiographical and testimonial works mentioned by Grandin that also show distortions, inaccuracies or rearranges in the life of their protagonists as a result of the incorporation of fictional elements are those by Benjamin Fanklin, Mark Twain, Henry Kissinger, who was also a Noble Peace Laureate, and Betty Friedan.

50 Grandin also underlines the fact that human rights intellectuals such as French philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy “insisted that what separated Solzhenitsyn’s ‘experiment in literary investigation’ (as the author described his method) from dry statistical or fact-based accounts of Soviet terror was its ability to invoke ‘that aspect of myth, of fiction, of the symbolic that makes it possible that Evil, which cannot be thought, can be represented.’ Menchú of course was pilloried for just doing that” (xii).

51 This explains why “then, in the late 1990s, when accusations called Menchú’s testimony into question, those most likely to demonize Menchú, or dismiss her as a dupe, were also likely to celebrate Solzhenitsyn as a moral beacon” (Grandin xi).
untouchable, sacred or that she cannot be criticized or questioned. It is her compromise with the Maya that is sacred and that is precisely what Stoll has forgotten and what has made American and Guatemalan intellectuals feel hurt. The social ethics and compromise of Rigoberta’s book and work remain intact in spite of the inconsistencies and inaccuracies of her text, which may be inevitable in some cases due to the role of memory and may be present for dramatic, political or aesthetic effect in others due to the fact that, following Sklodowska, a testimonial work is a literary text, and therefore, an artifact.

The interpretation of *I, Rigoberta Menchú* from the perspective of liberation theology shows the emergence of a notion of indigeneity founded on a revolutionary pedagogy that is articulated at a local and regional level *a priori* and also at a national level *a posteriori*. It is the micropolitical horizon that defines this notion of indigeneity at different levels although the presence of the macropolitical sphere is also present towards the end of the text when the revolutionary pedagogy carried out by the Maya-Quiché begins to acquire an international dimension. This revolutionary pedagogy, which is the basis for the articulation of a decolonial concept of indigeneity in the text, is founded on the indigenous-Christian orthopraxis of the Maya-Quiché base ecclesial movement. This is the fruit of a popular and decolonial interpretation of the Bible from the lense of Maya culture in a dialogical projection with the historical experience of poverty and oppression of the Maya-Quiché people, the originary and primeval praxis, and the traditional Maya spirituality of *Popol Vuh*. On the other hand, the fact that this decolonial notion of indigeneity has a national dimension within the micropolitical sphere underlines its interethnic and intersocial nature, which can be appreciated in the alliance of the CUC
with some other socio-political organizations like the labor and the student movement and trade unions.

It is significant to note that this decolonial notion of indigeneity not only involves Native agency and self-representation for Maya-Quiché men but also for women, who play a key role in the revolution, especially through their work as Christian educators and catechists in basic church communities as well as social activists compromised with the cause of organizations like the CUC. The decolonial formulation of indigeneity articulated in the text is therefore defined by a decolonial feminist consciousness understood from the point of view of Maya-Quiché culture, which, as has been discussed before, is different from that of Western feminist thought. On the other hand, the Maya-Quiché women involved in the Maya-Quiché base ecclesial movement feel identified with the socio-historical coordinates and the actions of some women from the Bible like Judit, whom they try to imitate through their Christian revolutionary orthopraxis. This, in turn, can take the form of the just violence of guerrilla fighters in the mountains or of the peaceful social activism embodied by Rigoberta. Both are legitimate strategies of resistance and rebellion against the injustice of the system, the worst of which is the problem of the ownership of the land, which is still in the hands of the ladino landowners.

The Christian revolutionary orthopraxis in which Rigoberta and other Maya-Quiché women try to educate the compañeras and compañeros and on which the decolonial notion of indigeneity theorized in the text is based is therefore one of the historical mediations of the Kingdom, which must be built on Earth. This is Rigoberta’s main insight as a Christian, catechist and social activist although, as has been mentioned before, her notion of the Kingdom is somewhat reductionist since it does not clarify the
fact that the Kingdom can only reach its plenitude with the eschatological promise. On
the other hand, the Maya-Quiché base ecclesial movement, which is secret but not
clandestine since it takes place among the people, represents the emergence of the church
of the poor in Guatemala, which contrasts with the church as a hierarchy. The Church
hierarchy is strongly denounced by Rigoberta for supporting the injustice of the
oppressors. Hence why her main task is “organising the people, at the same time
practising with them in the light of the Gospel” (246). In this sense, Rigoberta knows
very well that what she needs to teach to her people is that “together we can build the
people’s Church, a true Church. Not just a hierarchy, or a building but a real change
inside people” (246). Rigoberta’s belief that the masses are the only ones capable of
transforming society through a Christian revolutionary praxis is therefore the tenet on
which the articulation of a decolonial concept of indigeneity in her narrative is based.

The War of the End of the World (originally published in Spanish in 1981 and
translated into English in 1984) is one of the best examples of the anti-liberationist
tendency in contemporary Latin American narrative and one of the most important new
historical novels written in Latin America between 1949 and 1992. The interpretation of

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52 Ángel Rama observes in 1982 that The War of the End of the World “es artísticamente una obra maestra
y con ella ha quedado consolidada la novela popular-culta en América Latina. No son necesarios los dones
de Casandra para anunciar que tendrá millones de lectores y que en la renovada apuesta a cien años vista
se la mencionará como una de las novelas clave de esta segunda mitad del siglo XX que vio la triunfal
expansión del género en el continente” (III). Antonio Cornejo Polar also praises the novel when
mentioning that “en efecto, con La guerra del fin del mundo, Vargas Llosa vuelve a mostrar su aptitud
para encarar proyectos narrativos muy vastos, complejos y difíciles y para llevarlos a cabo con eficiencia e
ingenio nada comunes” (“La guerra” 2). Sara Castro-Klarén, on the other hand, calls attention to the fact
that “the novel was awarded the first annual Ritz Paris Hemingway Prize in 1985” (166). The significance
of The War of the End of the World as a historical novel is highlighted both by Rama and Castro-Klarén.
According to Rama, “A la intensidad, amplitud y coherencia del proyecto y a la soberana sapiencia
narrativa, debe atribuirse que América Latina alcance su Guerra y Paz, aunque con cien años de retraso,
haciendo de su autor nuestro mayor clásico vivo” (III). Castro-Klarén underlines the fact that “in spite of
the puzzles in the novel’s discourse, The War of the End of the World not only retells a powerful and tragic
this work from the perspective of liberation theology reveals an anti-liberationist approach that gives rise to the articulation of the traditionally imperialist and prejudiced notion of Indianness, according to which the indigenous subaltern subject is viewed as a savage, beast and animal that must be dominated and tamed by the white man, the representative of the forces of civilization. As a consequence, we cannot possibly speak of indigeneity but of Indianness since the indigenous subaltern subject is deprived of true agency and self-representation when being constructed and misrepresented as a barbarian and cannibal as a result of Vargas Llosa’s social prejudices. Though certainly imperialist, essentialist and reductionist, Indianness is a complex category in the novel that involves a mixture of indigenous and African subaltern subjects along with those mestizo and white people who join their cause to the point of giving their lives for it. That cause is that of the poor and the oppressed and their right to live in peace in their own community, which is outside the sphere of influence of the sovereign power of the state, in which private ownership has been abolished and all things are shared among its members. It is this social utopia that the community of Canudos, located in the Brazilian backlands, stands for vis-à-vis the Republic of Brazil.

Antônio Conselheiro is the mystic and visionary preacher who gathers a legion of followers and founds the settlement of Canudos, which was very small at first but came

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story but also opens the vast expanses of the historical novel for Mario Vargas Llosa’s work” (187). Castro-Klarén also points out that “the author’s interest in history, in narrative history to be exact, dates back to his university days when he studied with the Peruvian historian Raúl Porras Barrenechea” (187) and insists on the idea that “Vargas Llosa’s interest in history also dwells on the gestation of great social movements, revolutions, mutinies, and civil war, some of which have appeared already in Conversation in the Cathedral (the Arequipa revolt) and Captain Pantoja (the cult of the Brothers of the Arch)” (187).
to shelter thousands of *yagunços* or insurgent poor peasants\(^{53}\) in a few years. What brings so many poor people together in Canudos is their belief in the Counselor’s Christian teachings, who, like Jesus Christ, welcomes everybody and never discriminates people even though they may have committed terrible sins in the past. This is the case of characters like former slave Big João and ex-*cangaceiros*\(^{54}\) Abbot João and Pajeú, who committed many bloody crimes in their lives before being converted by the Counselor. All those who have never been loved due to their monstrous deformity are also welcome and accepted in the Canudos community, as is the case with the Lion of Natuba. Even those who, like Maria Quadrado, have committed the unforgiveable sin of philicide can also be redeemed. But what are the Counselor’s teachings and why are they so appealing? They are a sort of primitive Christianity\(^{55}\) that gives rise to a new millenarian spiritual movement that is quite unique but not so different after all from previous

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\(^{53}\) The term *yagunço* was first used to refer to armed hands or bodyguards usually hired by big farmers and colonels in the backlands of Brazil, especially in the northern regions. They were hired to protect the landowners against invaders and feudal enemies and also to control their slaves and indentured servants. The term was later used to name any kind of rural bandit or outlaw such as the *cangaceiros* (see note 54 below). The inhabitants of Canudos, who were rebel poor peasants who did not accept the authority of the Republican government, were also pejoratively called *yagunzos*, which shows how the word also had derogatory connotations. For a discussion of the term, see Robert M. Levine’s *Vale of Tears: Revisiting the Canudos Massacre in Northeastern Brazil, 1893-1897* (1992), pages 62-70.

\(^{54}\) The term *cangaceiro* is used to refer to the bands of poor peasants who inhabited the northeastern deserts of Brazil in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century and who were bandits. They used to wear leather clothing and hats and to carry carbines, revolvers, shotguns and long narrow knives known as *peixeiras*.

\(^{55}\) As has been noted by Castro-Klarén, “his beliefs, his very early Christian version of the message of Galilee, appears in the novel as part of the Beatito’s search for the Conselheiro’s word, Maria Quadrado’s quest for repentance and the León de Natuba’s quest for humanity in the Conselheiro’s loving acceptance of his deformed and repugnant body” (176). Antonio Cornejo Polar, on the other hand, defines the Counselor as “un predicador asceta de ideología sincretista (mezcla múltiple en la que priman el cristianismo y el Sebastianismo)” (“*La guerra*” 4). It is precisely the primitive nature of the Counselor’s teachings that accounts for Cornejo Polar’s observation that “los fragmentos dedicados al Consejero evocan un mundo misterioso y primitivo, regido por la magia, el misticismo y otras oscuras pero poderosas instancias de la conciencia humana” (“*La guerra*” 5).
European millenarian movements like that of Thomas Müntzer in Germany. Sara Castro-Klarén observes how “the Conselheiro’s preaching holds, as the final reward for repentance, repose and peace. Union with sweet Jesus seems to be their idea of final bliss and eternal reward” (177-78).

The peculiar nature of the Counselor’s primitive Christianity is, first of all, its allegiance to King Sebastian, who ruled Portugal and its colonies in the sixteenth century, that is, three hundred years before Canudos was founded. The Brazilian Republic, however, is identified with the Devil, called the Can in the novel, as a result of its atheism, secularism and hostile attitude towards the Catholic Church, which is the fruit of its obsession with rationalism and the idea of scientific progress and development. The Counselor’s primitive Christianity is therefore faithful to the expansionist project of the Portuguese empire, which, according to the saint, counts with God’s blessing, thus favoring a sort of religious imperialism that reminds one of the eighteenth-century Jesuit Republic of the New World and the sixteenth-century evangelizing experiments of

56 Thomas Müntzer (ca. 1489-27 May 1525) was a German preacher and theologian of the early Reformation whose opposition to both Luther and the Catholic Church made him become a leader of the German peasant and plebeian uprising of 1525. He was captured after the battle of Frankenhausen, tortured and executed. Müntzer was a very controversial figure in his time and is nowadays regarded as a highly significant player in the early years of the German Reformation as well as in the history of European revolutionaries. Almost all modern studies on Müntzer emphasize the need to understand his revolutionary actions as a consequence of his theology. See Thomas Müntzer: Theology and Revolution in the German Reformation (1989), by Tom Scott; Thomas Müntzer, a Destroyer of the Godless (1990), by Abraham Friesen; and Thomas Müntzer: Apocalyptic, Mystic and Revolution (1993), by Hans-Jürgen Goertz.

57 Dom Sebastian I (20 January 1554-4 August 1578) was King of Portugal and the Algarves from 11 June 1557 to 4 August 1578 and the penultimate Portuguese monarch of the House of Aviz. He was the son of John Manuel, Prince of Portugal, and the grandson of King John III of Portugal and of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. King Sebastian disappeared (was presumably killed in action) in the battle of Alcácer Quibir and is usually referred to as “The Desired” since the Portuguese people anxiously expected his return to end the decline of Portugal that had taken place after his death. The Counselor and his followers in the novel are among those who long for King Sebastian’s return so that the supremacy of the Catholic faith can be guaranteed in Republican Brazil.
Bartolomé de Las Casas, which may have inspired the Counselor.\textsuperscript{58} It is Galileo Gall, an anarchist and Marxist revolutionary from Scotland who has spent his life fighting for the socialist utopia of a classless society where private ownership is suppressed and the means of production are nationalized, that captures the originality and innovative nature of Canudos in one of his letters to the readers of the French anarchist newspaper *l’Étincelle de la révolte*:

\ldots In Canudos humble and inexperienced people, by the sheer powers of instinct and imagination, are carrying out in practice many of the things that we European revolutionaries know are necessary in order to institute a reign of justice on this earth. (46)

The dwellings, the crop lands, the domestic animals belong to the community: they are everyone’s and no one’s. The Counselor has persuaded them that the more possessions a person has, the fewer possibilities he has of being among those who will find favor on Judgment Day. It is as though he were putting our ideas into practice, hiding them behind the façade of religion for a tactical reason, namely the need to take into account the cultural level of his humble followers. Is it not remarkable that in the remote reaches a group of insurgents is forming a society in which marriage and money have been done away with, in which collective ownership has replaced private ownership? (48)

Canudos is not only a revolutionary movement in theory but also in practice. This means that a true revolutionary praxis is taking place in Canudos although, paradoxically and contrary to Gall’s belief, the Counselor and his followers know nothing about Marx, Engels and the school of thought known as Marxist thinking. The interpretation of the novel from the lense of liberation theology shows how the Counselor’s primitive Christianity is deeply revolutionary even if it is not influenced by Marx’s ideas. It is precisely for this reason that the Counselor and his congregation cannot possibly be

\textsuperscript{58} For an analysis of the significance of the Jesuit Republic and the settlements founded by Las Casas for the emergence of liberation theology in the second half of the twentieth century, see the first part of chapter two.
considered Marxists but, like the eighteenth-century Jesuits who fought against the Portuguese and Spanish troops during the Guarani War,\textsuperscript{59} can certainly be considered precursors of a Marxism \textit{avant la lettre} as far as their revolutionary praxis through their armed struggle against the Brazilian Republic is concerned.

It is precisely a classless society where all things are shared and private ownership no longer exists that has already been achieved in Canudos\textsuperscript{60} without a single drop of Marxism but with the same aim: To defend the rights of the poor and create a more just world where their needs may be satisfied. This is what makes Galileo Gall feel so irremediably attracted to Canudos to the point of risking and giving his life when trying to get there. It is the fascination of exploring the points of connection between Marxism and Canudos, that is, between Marxism and Christianity in praxis, a true revolutionary experiment, that a restless spirit like Gall cannot possibly resist.\textsuperscript{61} An altruistic, socially compromised and idealistic character full of positive energy, Galileo Gall is portrayed by Vargas Llosa in very negative and even ridiculous terms as a rapist, a crazy man who is a fanatic Marxist revolutionary, and even as a person obsessed with the socialist revolution to such an extent that he has not had sex for ten years in order to fully devote himself to the cause. Given his negative characterization, it is hardly surprising that the author gets

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{59} For an analysis of the involvement of the Jesuits in the Guarani War and of its importance for the antecedents of liberation theology in the colonial period, see chapter two pages 131-33.

\textsuperscript{60} Castro-Klarén mentions that “midwives, itinerant peddlers, ex-bandits, murderers, carpenters, storytellers, and all the dispossessed and the scum of the earth meet in Canudos. They organize a solidarian society where enough food and dignity is the bread of daily life” (182). Cornejo Polar also observes that “Desde 1893 hasta su destrucción en 1897, en Canudos se estableció sobre las bases religiosas una sociedad extraordinariamente parecida (propiedad colectiva, ausencia de dinero, etc.) a la que se diseñaba en las utopías libertarias de la época” ("La guerra" 4).

\textsuperscript{61} Gall’s exploration of the links between Marxist and Christian praxis from the practical point of view of a socialist revolutionary is similar to Michael Löwy’s establishment of the points of contact between Marxism and Christianity from the theoretical perspective of a Marxist intellectual in the first chapter of his book \textit{The War of Gods: Religion and Politics in Latin America} (1996).
\end{footnotesize}
rid of him before the first half of the novel. The use of liberation theology as a theoretical framework to interpret the text should show how a notion of indigeneity founded on the praxical revolutionary potential of the Counselor’s primitive Christianity is articulated in it. Instead, it shows how Vargas Llosa favors the articulation of the biased notion of imperialist Indianness mentioned before. This is not only founded on his legitimation of a monarchical and authoritarian conservative ideology, represented by the Baron de Canhabrava, but also on his sympathies towards the conservative bourgeois liberal ideology represented by Epaminondas Gonçalves and the Republic.

Although the author supports a conservative ideology in both cases, it is significant to note that monarchy and empire, which favor the feudal privileges of the Ancient Regime, are even more conservative than the Republic, which supports the capitalist system. In this sense, the fact that Vargas Llosa seems to feel most identified with a monarchical project through the Baron de Canhabrava in most of the novel underlines his ultraconservative approach. It is also a paradox that the Counselor and his followers are sebastianistas but it must be remembered that this exclusively has to do with religious reasons connected with the idea that the Portuguese Empire is the guardian and protector of the Catholic Church rather than with truly political or ideological convictions. The romantic idea that King Sebastian will return to save the yagunços from

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62 It is only towards the end of the novel that the reader can see how the Baron adapts to the bourgeois order through his pact with Epaminondas Gonçalves, President of the Republican Party of Bahia. Since the Baron is the author’s ideological alter-ego, we can see how Vargas Llosa legitimates both monarchical and bourgeois ideology although most of the novel shows his preference for the former.
the claws of the godless Republic also plays a key role. Nevertheless, it is true that, as will be discussed below, there is a contradiction here that must not pass unnoticed.

The interpretation of the novel from the perspective of Pablo Richard’s observations on idolatry and of Franz Hinkelammert’s reflections on entrepreneurial metaphysics underlines the significance of the conflict between the God of life and the idols of death in it in connection with the concept of the Kingdom of God. It is a fact that the Republic stands for atheism and secularism vis-à-vis the Counselor’s primitive Christianity. The central issue, however, is not so much atheism, though this is certainly important, but idolatry, which, according to Richard, is “a worship of the false gods of the system of oppression. Even more tragic than atheism is the faith and hope that is put in false gods. All systems of oppression are characterized by the creation of gods and idols that sanction oppression and anti-life forces” (“Introduction” 1). What we find in Canudos is therefore “the battle of the gods—that is, Yahweh’s struggle against false gods” (Richard, “Introduction” 1). This means that “the search for the true God in this battle of the gods brings us to an anti-idolatrous discernment of false gods, of those fetishes that kill with their religious weapons of death” (Richard, “Introduction” 1). It is precisely such anti-idolatrous discernment that makes the yagunços from Canudos identify the Republic of Brazil, a symbol for the bourgeois order, with the Can or Devil,

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63 The fact that, after the defeat at the battle of Alcácer Quibir, several soldiers returned to Portugal and that Sebastian’s fate was uncertain made many Portuguese believe that Sebastian was alive and would return to claim his throne. That is how “Sebastianism,” that is, the belief that Sebastian could return at any moment, was born. Consequently, several myths and legends concerning Sebastian emerged with time. The main one regarded Sebastian as a great Portuguese patriot, a “sleeping king” who would return to help Portugal in its darkest hour, thus turning him into a mythical figure like King Arthur in Britain, Frederick Barbarossa in Germany and Constantine XI Palaeologus in Byzantium. That is also the reason why Sebastian came to be known from then on as “The Hidden One” (O Encoberto in Portuguese) and the “The Desired One” (O Desejado in Portuguese). The legend of Sebastian became very well known through the massive circulation of popular rhymes or trovas composed by Portuguese writer António Gonçalves de Bandarra in the sixteenth century.
and therefore with the fetishistic forces of the anti-Kingdom. The confrontation between the *yagunços* and the Republican army is therefore a clash between the God of life of anti-capitalism, which is represented by a big wooden cross and the flag with the image of the Divine One, and the idols of death of what Hinkelammert has called an “entrepreneurial metaphysics:”

Entrepreneurial metaphysics is a metaphysics of commodities, money, marketing, and capital. Since the beginning of the bourgeois world, the thinking of the bourgeoisie has had a metaphysical perception of these matters, and has not given it up even today. It is present in all the ethics and morality of the capitalist undertaking, and constitutes the essence of the legitimacy of the power of capital. It is expressed in all the outlets of bourgeois society: in the newspapers, the magazines, the speeches of politicians, and, most especially, in everything said and done by entrepreneurs. And, concurrently, there is a vast advertising effort aimed at transforming this entrepreneurial metaphysics into the common thinking of the common populace. (“The Economic Roots” 165-66).

It is Epaminondas Gonçalves, leader of the Republican Party in Bahia, that best represents an entrepreneurial metaphysics in the novel in his role as a shrewd politician and entrepreneur whose newspaper plays a crucial role in the dissemination of a propaganda campaign against Canudos, which shows how Epaminondas controls and manipulates the thinking of the masses from a liberal perspective. In fact, the conflict between the Counselor and the Republic gives rise to a dual metaphysics in the text: That of the capitalist system embodied by the Republic and that of the alternative to the bourgeois order represented by Canudos, which is considered disastrous and chaotic by Vargas Llosa. Dual metaphysics is described by Hinkelammert in the following terms:

This dual metaphysics (that of the bourgeois order and that of the chaos of any alternative to the bourgeois order) lies at the root of the extremely violent nature of bourgeois thinking. Whether overt or covert, bourgeois thinking entails an unlimited justification of violence, and of the violation
of human rights. Bourgeois thinking leads to the most unrestricted legitimizing of the violation of human rights when confronted with any group capable of replacing the bourgeois society. There is no atrocity that cannot be committed in the name of this entrepreneurial metaphysics. One need only remember the type of treatment that Locke recommends for the opponents of the bourgeois society. There are three in particular: torture, slavery, and death. This explains why there has not been in human history such a brazen legitimizing of slavery as that in the liberal thought of John Locke, or such a crude affirmation of the violation of human rights in all respects as is found precisely in this author. He considers opponents to be “brutes,” “beasts,” and “wild animals,” and repeatedly recommends treating them as such. (“The Economic Roots” 168)

The extreme violence of bourgeois thinking can be appreciated in how it is the Brazilian army that comes to destroy Canudos and to exterminate its inhabitants, thus compelling the yagunços, who want to replace the capitalism of the Republic with a more just society where all things are shared, to defend themselves through just war. Being opponents of the bourgeois order, the yagunços can be killed with impunity by the Republican troops in the novel because, pretty much like Locke, Vargas Llosa depicts the Canudos revolutionaries who oppose the capitalist system as savages and cannibals who must be treated as beasts or animals. This shows how the Peruvian novelist legitimates the violence and violation of human rights of bourgeois thinking and society instead of radically questioning them. As has been mentioned above, the key issue of idolatry in the novel gives rise to a battle of the gods: The Counselor’s true god against the false gods or idols of death of the Republic, Jesus Christ against the Can and the anti-Kingdom led by the Beast or Antichrist. All this shows how the battle of the gods has an apocalyptic dimension for the Counselor and his followers, as can be appreciated in one of the

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64 Seymour Menton observes how the phrase “the Can against Canudos” (177), “where ‘Can’ means ‘Dog’, a symbol for Hell, and represents the epithet bestowed on the government by the rebels” (42), identifies the two opposing fanatical forces of the novel.
Counselor’s visions: “An eclipse would plunge the world into such total darkness that everything would have to be done by touch, as blind people do, while in the distance the battle resounded. Thousands would die of panic” (50). That is why the battle is called the war of the end of the world. As has been noted by Sara Castro-Klarén, the Counselor’s indirect message seems to be “a strange mixture of love and wrath, compassion and vengeance, hope in the Good Jesus and the expectation of the cleansing, final scorching of a corrupt and mean world” (176). Hence why “his hope is messianic, for the social and material hold only the despair of the same ancient hunger and suffering” (Castro-Klarén 177).

The Counselor’s visions also suggest that, like in The Gospel in Solentiname and I, Rigoberta Menchú, the concept of the Kingdom of God plays a crucial role in the orthopraxis of the Christian revolutionaries of Canudos. The fact that the Counselor tells his congregation how in the second part of his vision “when the mists dispersed, one bright clear dawn, the men and women would see the army of Dom Sebastião all around them on the hills and slopes of Canudos” (50) shows how the popular legend and myth of

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Sara Castro-Klarén notes that “even though Vargas Llosa has added only a few characters to Euclides da Cunha’s rendition of the war, and remains faithful to the main historical events of the last decade of the nineteenth century, one of the chief differences between Os sertões and The War of the End of the World is the uncompromising apocalyptic tenor of the novel” (169-70).

Cornejo Polar underlines the double apocalyptic meaning of the title of the novel: “es el ‘fin del mundo’ para los yagunzos, pues son físicamente exterminados por una represión que ellos mismos interpretan bajo el modelo de la escatología bíblica, pero también es el ‘fin del mundo’ para los otros, para los representantes de la razón y el progreso, porque también para ellos Canudos significa el hundimiento de los principios esenciales de su cosmovisión” (“La guerra” 9). This is connected with the issue of fanaticism in the novel: “. . . el fanatismo corre a los yagunzos como a los republicanos; o lo que es más significativo, unos y otros equivocan sus interpretaciones de la realidad, generan una intensa actividad enloquecida y absurda y se encaminan —cigos— hacia su destrucción” (Cornejo Polar, “La guerra” 10). Fanaticism is undoubtedly present in the extermination of the yagunços carried out by the Republic. But are the Counselor and the yagunços truly fanatic or do they just defend the Canudos alternative as a result of their superstitious, primitive and even magical interpretation of Christianity? Is it not the author who misrepresents the yagunços and turns them into fanatics by projecting his conservative political ideology upon them, thus distorting their representation when he depicts them as beasts and animals?
King Sebastian’s return defines the Counselor’s notion of the Kingdom. This begins here on earth with the arrival of the desired Portuguese monarch, who, according to the Counselor’s vision, becomes God’s scourger and liberator of his chosen people, and therefore, the representative of the Lord, Jesus Christ and the heavenly legions commanded by him to defeat the Evil One:

The great King would have defeated the Can’s bands, would have cleansed the world for the Lord. They would see Dom Sebastião, with his shining armor and his sword; they would see his kindly, adolescent face, he would smile at them from astride his mount with diamond-studded gold trappings, and they would see him ride off, his mission of redemption fulfilled, to return with his army to the bottom of the sea. (50)

This magic realist passage not only underlines the superstitious and primitive nature of the Counselor’s Christianity but also its theoretical contradictions. King Sebastian represents the imperial project of the Portuguese Crown in the sixteenth century in the New World, and therefore, the conquest and domination of the indigenous populations of Brazil (African, Native American or poor mestizo), which, paradoxically, the Counselor seeks to liberate through his teachings. In other words, an empire is always a project of subjection and oppression and not one of liberation. This is one of the main differences between the Counselor’s Christianity and liberation theology, which, both in theory and practice, is an anti-imperialist theological discourse belonging to the school of Latin American decolonial thinking. Another difference is the key role played by Marxism, which is never present in the Counselor’s teachings, as an important mediation for liberation theology. Some points of connection, however, do exist. Sara Castro-Klarén, for instance, notes that “any observer of some recent trends in Latin American societies and politics can discern the analogies between the Conselheiro’s Christian
messianism, his communitarian preaching, and his silent criticism of the established church, and many of the precepts and questions raised by liberation theology” (187). Another point of connection is the potential of the Counselor’s religious teachings to make the *yagunços* think and act critically instead of turning them into a dormant people, as is usually the case with official Catholic orthodoxy. Once again, it is Galileo Gall that best captures this idea:

Didn’t Canudos represent an interesting exception to the historical law according to which religion had always served to lull the masses and keep them from rebelling against their masters? The Counselor had used religious superstition to incite the peasants to rise up against bourgeois order and conservative morality and to stir them up against those who traditionally had taken advantage of religious beliefs to keep them enslaved and exploited. In the very best of cases, as David Hume had written, religion was a dream of sick men; that was doubtless true, yet in certain cases, such as that of Canudos, it could serve to rouse the victims of society from their passivity and incite them to revolutionary action, in the course of which rational, scientific truths would gradually take the place of irrational myths and fetishes. (263-64)

What Gall cannot possibly see is that those irrational myths and fetishes are an integral part of the Counselor’s primitive Christianity. This means that the *yagunços* would never have become revolutionaries and actors of an alternative to the bourgeois order without them, and that, contrary to Gall’s opinion, they will never be willing to leave them behind or else their faith and cause would make no sense to them. Theirs is an

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67 Ángel Rama notes how Galileo Gall represents a radical or revolutionary intellectual like the late nineteenth-century anarchist (XIII). Rama, however, highlights the fact that Gall’s “desenfoque respecto a la realidad de lo que está ocurriendo delata sus orígenes foráneos, sus doctrinas igualmente foráneas nacidas de otras circunstancias históricas y a las cuales debe su errático comportamiento con los nativos (Jurema-Rufino) que lo torna inaceptable para cualquiera de las fuerzas en pugna” (XIII). The Uruguayan critic insists on Gall’s inability to understand what could be called “American specificity”: “No puede comprender y considera irrisorio el código del honor dentro del cual se mueven [Rufino y Jurema], porque él mismo no es capaz de percibir que está respondiendo a otro código del honor que es simplemente diferente pero que, con visión eurocéntrica, considera el único válido y el superior, pues combina a Bakunin, Franz Joseph Gall, la sociedad industrial y el desarrollo del proletariado” (XIV).
revolutionary Christianity whose primitive nature must be respected and that, despite its myths and distortions, is full of illuminations. Another vision of the Counselor, for instance, shows how the Kingdom of God brought by King Sebastian to the material world in Canudos is only its partial realization on earth, and therefore, a symbol of the victory over the idols of death and the anti-Kingdom represented by the Republic:

Once the Devil was overthrown, the Kingdom of the Holy Spirit would be established, the last era of the world before Judgment Day. Would Canudos be the capital of this Kingdom? If the Blessed Jesus so willed it. Then the wicked laws of the Republic would be repealed and the priests would return, as in the very earliest days, to be selfless shepherds of their flocks. The backlands would grow verdant from the rain, there would be an abundance of maize and cattle, everyone would have enough to eat, and each family would be able to bury its dead in coffins padded with velvet. But, before that, the Antichrist had to be overthrown. (68-69)

The fact that the Kingdom of the Holy Spirit still belongs to the material world suggests that this is a first insight or manifestation of the Kingdom of God that will be brought by King Sebastian to Canudos. But if the Kingdom of the Holy Spirit is the last era of the physical world before Judgment Day, this means that it is only in the eschatological dimension of Judgment Day that the Kingdom of God can reach its plenitude and fulfilment. Unlike the indigenous peasants of Solentiname and the Maya-Quiché people from Guatemala, the Counselor clearly perceives that the completion of the Kingdom can only take place in the eschatological sphere after the anti-Kingdom and its idols and fetishes of death, one of which would be the Republic, are destroyed on earth. Contrary to The Gopel in Solentiname and I, Rigoberta Menchú, which are testimonial works in which their protagonists have narrative agency to represent themselves to a certain extent, The War of the End of the World is a novel in which the
representation of the Counselor is fully controlled by Vargas Llosa. Given that the author supports the monarchical and bourgeois order and questions revolutionary movements and theoretical currents like liberation theology, it is not surprising that one of the theological mistakes committed by the revolutionary Christians from Nicaragua and Guatemala is not present in his novel.

The analysis of the text from the point of view of the theology of liberation also shows how the theoretical basis of the imperialist Indianness it privileges is not only a political theology in the Eurocentric and authoritarian line of Carl Schmidtt’s concept of sovereignty, which is represented by the Baron de Canhabrava in the text, but also a developmentist theology, which defines the bourgeois liberal ideology of progress of Epaminondas Gonçalves, the armed forces and the Republic. Both theological projects become intertwined in the novel in order to produce a theology of dominion. The best example of Vargas Llosa’s legitimation of this in its fascist and liberal version is how Father Joaquim, the main symbol for liberation theology at the end of the novel, is depicted by the nearsighted journalist as a guerrilla priest who joins the Canudos fight against the Republic in very negative terms as if he were a thug or terrorist who has betrayed the cause of the Church:

The curé of Cumbe was holding a rifle between his legs and was wearing a bandoleer of bullets around his neck. As well as he could make out, Father Joaquim had the look of a man who had been fighting: his spare locks were disheveled and matted with dirt, his cassock in tatters, one sandal was tied round his foot with a length of twine rather than a leather thong,

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68 See Schmitt’s work Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty (1985).
69 This developmentist theology is very similar to that favored by López Trujillo, Kloppenburg and Vekemans (see chapter two), the main difference being the bourgeois liberal framework of nineteenth-century Brazil vis-à-vis the neoliberal model of the 1970s and 80s in Latin America. A developmentist theology is therefore a capitalist theology of dominion and oppression in both cases.
and he was obviously completely exhausted. He was speaking of someone named Joaquinzinho. (482-83)

So there were other priests in Canudos with them. He imagined them loading their guns, aiming, shooting. But wasn’t the Church on the side of the Republic? Hadn’t the Counselor been excommunicated by the archbishop? Hadn’t edicts condemning the mad, fanatical heretic of Canudos been read aloud in all the parishes? How, then, could there be curés killing for the Counselor?

“Do you hear them? Listen, listen: ‘Fanatics, Sebastianists! Cannibals! Englishmen! Murderers!’ Who was it who came here to kill women and children, to slit people’s throats? Who was it who forced youngsters of thirteen and fourteen to become combatants? You’re here and you’re still alive, isn’t that true?” (484)

This is also the case with Big João, Abbot João and Pajeú. Instead of presenting them as poor men who, after having been able to redeem themselves of their sins and begin a new life in Canudos, are forced to defend their life, land and freedom through the just war against the oppressive violence of the Brazilian army, they are characterized by Vargas Llosa as crazy men, fanatics and even cannibals who cut their enemies’ testicles to put them in their mouths. But why does the Republican army want to destroy Canudos if its inhabitants are poor people who only want to live in peace? Besides the fact that they do not admit the authority of the Republic and want to restore the Portuguese monarchy and the false propaganda that they are being helped by the English, the true reason behind the Republican army’s campaign is the new model of society that Canudos stands for: One in which private ownership no longer exists since all things are shared in common so that there are neither rich nor poor people and everybody’s needs can be met. Such a society, whose example would soon spread to other parts of Brazil and possibly of Latin America, is certainly a very dangerous social and political experiment for the
selfish interests of the monarchical and Republican elites of late nineteenth-century Brazil.

It is significant to note that Vargas Llosa’s distortion and deformation of the characterization of the revolutionary Christians of Canudos and of the ethics and justice of their cause has echoes in the present of the publication of the novel.\(^{70}\) Liberation theology was alive and kicking in Latin America in the early 80s after the triumph of the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua in 1979. Vargas Llosa’s censorship and poignant critique of the *yagunços* from Canudos can also be symbolically interpreted as his questioning of the theology of liberation and the Sandinista government. The fact that, as has been mentioned above, the *yagunços* and Father Joaquim are sometimes described as being so primitive, wild and barbarian that they almost seem to be terrorists is not a coincidence either. The Canudos revolutionaries are also identified by the author in quite prejudiced and unfair terms that completely distort the whole picture with the terrorists of the Shining Path, a terrorist group that had been founded by Abimael Guzmán in Peru one year before the publication of the novel.\(^{71}\) There are two problems with Vargas Llosa’s identification of the historical facts told in the text with Latin America’s history in the early 80s. First of all, the Peruvian novelist lumps everybody together, which is quite problematic. A revolutionary who has to defend himself and his people and fight for his land and freedom as well as for the cause of the poor is not the same as a Shining Path

\(^{70}\) Seymour Menton points out that “on a more personal level, Vargas Llosa’s condemnation of fanaticism in late nineteenth-century is also aimed at the left-wing extremists who have excoriated him, particularly since 1971, for his criticism of the Cuban government’s curtailment of freedom of artistic expression” (40).

\(^{71}\) Sabine Köllman notes that “In *A Writer’s Reality* (p. 133) he [Vargas Llosa] points out that ‘in contemporary Latin America you still have Canudos in many countries. In Peru, for instance, you still have Canudos in the Andes’, referring to the conflict between state and Maoist guerrilla forces in the 1980s” (153). For a detailed study of the emergence of the Shining Path in the early 80s and of its extermination campaigns of indigenous peasants in the 80s and 90s, see the works mentioned in note 38, chapter one.
terrorist. This is especially important if we remember how the Shining Path betrayed the cause of the poor whom it theoretically sought to defend by torturing and exterminating thousands of innocent indigenous peasants.

Secondly, the Peruvian novelist seems to forget that in a repressive state like Somoza’s Nicaragua there were only two choices for a priest like Father Joaquim: Either to support the poor or to bury his head in the sand and become the ally and confederate of the rich. Given the situation of extreme violence in Nicaragua at that time, taking the side of the poor inevitably meant taking up arms to fight for a more just world. This is something that has nothing to do with the indiscriminate oppressive and fanatic violence of a Shining Path terrorist, which even violates and betrays the cause of the poor, which is always safeguarded by a revolutionary priest like Father Joaquim in the novel. The social ethics and justice of the revolutionary Christians of Canudos certainly resembles that of contemporary Latin American revolutionary Christians and liberation theologians, something that Vargas Llosa fails to understand in the text. Instead of supporting and legitimating a theology of liberation, the Peruvian writer endorses a Eurocentric political theology of sovereignty in the authoritarian vein of Carl Schmidtt as well as a bourgeois

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72 Cornejo Polar calls attention to Vargas Llosa’s presumably anti-ideological position, which is assumed “en nombre de un realismo pragmático (como si eso no fuera también una ideología) y con ciertas interpretaciones de la violencia que sacude a América Latina como enfrentamiento de dos bandos igualmente enloquecidos –los subversivos y el ejército- que se destrozan y destrozan a los países en razón del exacerbamiento fanático de sus respectivas (e igualmente falsas) ideologías” (“La guerra” 12). According to the Peruvian critic, “es posible que una perspectiva de este tipo pueda representar la visión propia del liberalismo ilustrado que condena globalmente la violencia, sin ninguna discriminación acerca de su origen y dirección histórica, porque carece de los valores e instrumentos conceptuales para jerarquizar e interpretar las convulsiones de una sociedad hirviente” (“La guerra” 12). Cornejo Polar himself admits the imposition of Vargas Llosa’s conservative ideology even if we accept the idea that both sides of the Canudos conflict are fanatic and commit wild deeds. It is precisely the favoring of the author’s ideological position that ultimately identifies the yagunços with barbarism and legitimates their murder, as can be appreciated in the reflections of the Baron de Canhabrava, the representative of the author’s ideology, at the end of the novel. The Republican army’s actions are therefore justified, and their wild nature ultimately eclipsed, in the name of progress, which is precisely that of enlightened liberalism.
liberal developmentist theology in the line of López Trujillo’s, Vekemans’ and the other conservative sectors of Latin America and Europe including the Vatican. As has been mentioned above, this authoritarian and developmentist political theology is the basis for the articulation of an imperialist Indianness in the novel.

One of the best examples of the representation of Indianness is the episode in which Abbot João remembers how the Kariri Indians from Mirandela came to Canudos. It is a fact that both the Indians and the whites have committed some cruel and brutal deeds in Mirandela but the image of primitivism and savagery is only imposed upon the Indians in quite racist and imperialist terms. The Indians and their language are also scorned and despised by the author for being poor and miserable:

The few hundreds Indians of Mirandela went around half naked, speaking a local dialect seasoned with little spurts of spit, and hunting with bows and poisoned arrows. They were surly, wretched specimens of humanity, who kept entirely to themselves within their circle of huts thatched with ícó leaves, with their maize fields between, and so poor that neither the bandits nor the flying brigades of Rural Police entered Mirandela to sack it” (362).

The fact that the Kariri are also called herejes (“heretics”) shows Vargas Llosa’s lack of tolerance and respect towards Kariri spirituality and how he favors the religious imperialism of the Capuchin and Lazarist missionaries, who want to extirpate Kariri shamanic practices and religious beliefs to impose the Catholic faith. This perception of the Kariri contrasts with that of the Counselor himself, which the author of the novel is honest enough to include. The Counselor’s visit to the Kariri represents a tolerant interpretation of the Christian teachings that does not consist of imposing them through spiritual conquest and genocide but of peacefully proposing them to the Indians. That is
why, many years after his visit, the Kariri decide to come to live to Canudos. Tired of the problems with white settlers and missionaries, the Kariri move to Canudos because they know that they can live in peace there and that their spirituality will be respected independently of whether they decide to incorporate some Christian elements into it or not. Vargas Llosa’s imperialist and racist prejudices are also projected on Abbot João, who also discriminates and marginalizes the Kariri until he sees how bravely they defend Canudos against the attacks of the Republican troops.

*The War of the End of the World* is not only one of the best novels written by Vargas Llosa but also one of the best new historical novels written in Latin America. Seymour Menton observes how the genre of Latin America’s new historical novel somehow represents the continuity with the experimental sophistication of the Boom in the following terms:

> While some critics have prematurely hailed the demise of the ‘Boom’ novelists and have touted the emergence of a new generation of ‘post-Boom’ novelists, the empirical evidence suggests that since 1979 the dominant trend has been the proliferation of New Historical Novels, the most canonical of which share with the Boom novels of the 1960s muralistic scope, exuberant eroticism, and complex, neo-baroque (albeit less hermetic) structural and linguistic experimentation. (14)

According to Menton, the first real new historical novel is *The Kingdom of this World* (Spanish original, 1949; English translation, 1957), by Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier, who also wrote three other important new historical novels between 1949 and 1979: *Explosion in a Cathedral* (Spanish original, 1962; English translation, 1963), *Baroque Concert* (Spanish original, 1974; no English translation) and, especially, *The Harp and the Shadow* (Spanish original, 1979; English translation, 1990). Some of the
first new historical novels produced in Latin America are also Augusto Roa Bastos’s *I, the Supreme* (Spanish original, 1974; English translation, 1986), Carlos Fuentes’s *Terra Nostra* (Spanish original 1975; English translation, 1976), César Aira’s *Moreira* (Spanish original, 1975; no English translation), Abel Posse’s *Daimón* (Spanish original, 1978; English translation, 1992) and Antonio Benítez Rojo’s *The Sea of Lentils* (Spanish original, 1979; English translation, 1990). Although Carpentier undoubtedly plays a key role in the creation and establishment of the genre, Menton overlooks the long-neglected fact that the first new historical novel, *Cubagua*, was actually written in Venezuela by Enrique Bernardo Núñez in 1931, eighteen years before the publication of *The Kingdom of this World*. But how can we define the new historical novel? Menton himself engages in a discussion about how to define historical fiction in general but does not provide a definition for the new historical novel in particular. The study of the large corpus of new historical novels produced in Latin America from 1931 to 1992 and even beyond suggests that new historical novels are those works that rewrite Latin American history from a postmodern revisionist perspective, which is often decolonial as well, in order to question the official story by offering a more impartial and objective alternative version of the facts. In order to attain this aim, new historical novels often distort and deform history.

According to Menton, although the actual year of birth of the new historical novel is debatable (1949, 1974, 1975 or 1979?), “there is no question that it was primarily engendered by Carpentier, with strong support from Jorge Luis Borges, Fuentes, and Roa Bastos, and that it is clearly distinguishable from the previous historical novel by . . . six traits that are evident in a large number of novels from Argentina to Puerto Rico
(although all six are not necessarily found in each novel)” (22). The six characteristics of Latin America’s new historical novel observed by Menton are: The subordination of the mimetic recreation of a historical period to the predominance of Borgesian philosophical ideas related to the impossibility to discern the true nature of reality and history as well as the latter’s cyclical and unpredictable character; the conscious distortion of history through omissions, exaggerations, and anachronisms; the use of famous historical characters as protagonists; the utilization of metafiction; the presence of intertextuality; and the use of the Bakhtinian concepts of the “dialogic,” the “carnivalesque,” parody, and “heteroglossia” (23-25). Surprisingly, one of the most important characteristics of the new historical novel that is also essential for its definition, the deconstruction of official historiography, is not mentioned by Menton. It was Uruguayan critic Fernando Aínsa that first noted this crucial feature of the new historical novel. In his article, “La reescritura de la historia en la nueva narrativa latinoamericana,” Aínsa observes that the new historical novel proposes “una lectura demitificadora del pasado a través de su reescritura” (31) with the aim of “buscar entre las ruinas de una historia desmantelada por la retórica y la mentira al individuo auténtico perdido detrás de los acontecimientos, descubrir y ensalzar al ser humano en su dimensión más auténtica, aunque parezca inventado, aunque en definitiva lo sea” (31). Aínsa also underlines the polyphonic nature of the new historical novel given its variety of discursive styles.

In his article “La nueva novela histórica latinoamericana,” Aínsa deepens his initial study and gives ten characteristics of the new historical novel in Latin America: The critical re-reading of history; the questioning of the official story; the multiplicity of points of view that express different versions of history; the suppression of the historical
distance that defines the nineteenth-century mimetic historical novel; The use of parody to keep a distance from the official story; the superimposition of different times; the utilization of various historical materials—from textual quotations to the imitation of chronicles and accounts—; the use of pseudo-chronicles or apocryphal chronicles that pretend to be historical chronicles; the rewriting of history through the use of “carnivalization,” which contributes to imagine it; and the concern with language through the use of pastiche, parody and humor (83-85). Elzbieta Sklodowska, on the other hand, points out in her work *La parodia en la novela hispanoamericana* (1991) that the defamiliarizing potential of parody is particularly appropriate for the purposes of the new historical novel since it allows to deautomatize the perception of the usual, thus giving a subversive character to it that questions the official story (33).

Most of the characteristics of the new historical novel noted by Menton and Aínsa are present in *The War of the End of the World*. Nevertheless, it is significant to note that, as will be discussed below, *The War of the End of the World* is not a typical new historical novel but rather a special case within the genre. The idea that it is not possible to perceive the true nature of history can be appreciated in how the story of Canudos is told from multiple points of view: That of the Counselor and the *yagunços*, the officers of the army, Galileo Gall, the Baron de Canhabrava, Epaminondas Gonçalves and the nearsighted journalist, who is an alter-ego for Euclides da Cunha, the author of *Rebellion in the Backlands* (originally published in Portuguese in 1902; English translations, 1944 and 2010), the most famous novel on the Canudos campaign that is based on da Cunha’s experience as a journalist and eyewitness of the events. Although Canhabrava’s perspective represents the author’s ideology, it is significant to note how the nameless
journalist’s version of the historical facts, which he relates to the Baron, is a mixture of reverence and terror towards the yagunços, which underlines its ambiguity. This is the fruit of the fluctuation between a pro-Canudos and anti-Canudos historical interpretation that also reveals the nearsighted journalist’s doubts on the subject. The cyclical nature of history, on the other hand, can also be appreciated in how at the end of the novel Canudos is once again uninhabited and destroyed, as it was at the beginning.

History is also consciously distorted by Vargas Llosa through his representation of the yagunços as wild beasts and cannibals. The distortion of history usually takes place in new historical novels in order to question the lies of the official story and provide a more objective and impartial account of the events. Given that The War of the End of the World is a postmodern revisionist rewriting of Rebellion in the Backlands, Vargas Llosa questions the official story of the Canudos campaign present in da Cunha’s novel, which always supports the struggle of the yagunços against the Republic and depicts the genocide committed by the army in a negative light. What is quite unique about The

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73 Although Rama admits that The War of the End of the World is a remaking of Rebellion in the Backlands, he believes that Vargas Llosa’s novel “no intenta reescribir Os sertões, sino que, como Da Cunha, se apropia de la historia original, salvo que una de sus fuentes principales está dada por la tarea intelectual de Da Cunha, tanto en su novela como en sus artículos sobre la guerra de Canudos, y aun en su famosa Caderneta de campo que hace poco fue editada” (XIX). Aníbal González, on the other hand, observes that Rebellion in the Backlands is “the great hybrid, multigenre book about the Canudos revolt that Vargas Llosa rereads and rewrites in La guerra del fin del mundo” (84). A careful reading of The War of the End of the World shows how Vargas Llosa not only appropriates but also rewrites da Cunha’s novel, as can be appreciated in the questioning and deconstruction of da Cunha’s sympathies toward the yagunço struggle and in the legitimation of the extermination campaigns carried out by the Republican troops. If Vargas Llosa’s novel were not a rewriting of Rebellion in the Backlands, there would be no questioning of da Cunha’s official story and The War of the End of the World would not be a new historical novel. Menton, however, has convincingly demonstrated that it is. Nevertheless, the fact that da Cunha’s progressivist stance is founded on “la comprobación realista que opuso al discurso político manejado en la época y que hacía de los rebeldes simples soldados de la Monarquía derrotada, la Iglesia y el Imperio Británico” (Rama XXII) does not mean that his perception of the sertanejos is not somewhat racist and imperialist from an ethnographic and anthropological point of view. Rama himself has shown how, in spite of his highly progressivist idealism, da Cunha speaks of Canudos in terms of “primitive animality” (XXIV) and fails to see that, instead of being a pathological phenomenon of social chaos based on the degeneration of the three
War of the End of the World as a new historical novel is that Vargas Llosa’s deconstruction of the official story legitimates and reinforces a conservative ideology instead of a progressist one, which is the one usually favored by the questioning of official historiography present in most new historical novels. That is why The War of the End of the World is not a typical work of the genre. This means that instead of coming closer to what really happened in Canudos, Vargas Llosa’s historical distortions of da Cunha’s version eclipse historical objectivity through the imposition of his own conservative ideology upon it. Hence why one cannot possibly agree with Sabine Köllmann’s observation that “whereas the ‘true’ history of Canudos [that told by da Cunha] turns out to be close to the lies of the imagination, fiction [in The War of the End of the World] is able to shed light on history” (167). The fact that Vargas Llosa’s novel is a rewriting of Rebellion in the Backlands also underlines the significance of intertextuality in it. The use of real historical characters in the text, on the other hand, can be appreciated in the cases of the Counselor, Big João, Abbot João, Pajeú, Lieutenant Pires Ferreira, Major Febrônio de Brito, Colonel Antônio Moreira César and General Arthur Óscar de Andrade Guimarães as well as in the nameless nearsighted journalist, who is the fictionalized Euclides da Cunha.  

races, Canudos also means the emergence of a new social organization whose group cohesion was threatened by the presence of urban culture (XXIII).

74 Menton cannot help wondering why the nearsighted journalist remains anonymous throughout the novel when all the other historical characters are named. The American critic concludes that “in addition to the constant emphasis on his nearsightedness, which reinforces the ‘seeing’ leitmotif and the novel’s Weltanschauung, the character’s anonymity may suggest that he is a fictitious version of Euclides da Cunha, the Brazilian newspaperman who wrote the 1902 classic Os sertões about the Canudos War” (58). Sara Castro-Klarén, however, notes that if the historical referent of Vargas Llosa’s myopic journalist is indeed Euclides da Cunha, “then La guerra del fin del mundo parodies not only utopian and idealistic figures such as Gall but also the best and most committed Latin American intellectuals” (171-72). Castro-Klarén’s conclusion is that “because of the great distance in intellectual prowess and quality between da Cunha and the journalist in this novel, I am inclined to think that the latter has no specific historical
The War of the End of the World is more mimetic than other new historical novels, which are metafictional and distort history much more. This means that metafiction is never present in it. This is probably due to the intertextuality with Rebellion in the Backlands, which makes Vargas Llosa respect to a certain extent the conventions of the nineteenth-century realist historical novel. The dialogical element, however, plays a crucial role in the text through the conflicting presentation of the characters, events and worldviews. In this sense, the Counselor’s social alternative to capitalism embodied by Canudos contrasts with the Republic’s legitimation of the bourgeois liberal ideology and order as well as with the Baron de Canhabrava’s support of the monarchical institution and the feudal privileges of the colonial period. Similarly, the primitive Christianity of the Counselor and the yagunços is also at odds with orthodox Catholic doctrine to such an extent that the Counselor’s teachings have been officially condemned by the magisterium of the Catholic Church in Brazil and the Counselor himself has been excommunicated. Even within Canudos, Kariri Indians represent a different worldview from that of the other yagunços.

referent” (172). Castro-Klarén also suggests that the army engineer who reconnoiters and maps the route for the Brazilian troops advancing upon Canudos “is more likely to stand as the fictional version of Euclides da Cunha who before taking up journalism had been a military engineer” (173). Since The War of the End of the World questions the Canudos version given by Euclides da Cunha in his novel, another possible interpretation could be that the anonymous nearsighted journalist is a parody of Euclides da Cunha himself. If this is so, parody would be used by Vargas Llosa as an efficient literary device to ridicule da Cunha in order to criticize his view of the Canudos conflict. According to Castro-Klarén, other characters like the Baron de Canhabrava and Epaminondas Gonçalves are based on historical characters. The Baron is probably based on the Baron de Gerembão (Castro-Klarén 171) and Epaminondas Gonçalves, “although a historical participant in the events of Bahia, appears to be a composite of the various self-serving and vain Bahian politicians who saw in the Conselheiro’s following the excuse to attack their enemies and consolidate the new republican power” (Castro-Klarén 171).

Castro-Klarén points out how, at the beginning of the Counselor’s mission, “many of the local priests, who have in turn been forgotten and abandoned by their dioceses, allow him to do his preaching in church atriums” (179). According to Castro-Klarén, things begin to change when the Counselor mentions that he wants to preach inside the church and from the pulpit. Few priests then are willing to lend the Counselor “the trappings and symbols of their authority and monopoly over the sacred” (Castro-Klarén
The Bakhtinian element of the carnivalesque, on the other hand, is present in the novel through humorous exaggerations and their emphasis on bodily functions from sex to elimination. The fact that Galileo Gall has not had sexual contact for ten years as a consequence of his deep commitment to the Marxist revolutionary cause is one of these comic exaggerations and the scenes in which Jurema is raped by Gall and Sebastiana by the Baron de Canhabrava in front of his wife show Vargas Llosa’s obsession with exuberant eroticism. Sex is also present in the scene in which a soldier is publicly whipped for having tried to abuse another very young soldier as well as in the love scenes between Jurema and the nearlysighted journalist and in the secret lesbian relationship between Estela, the Baron de Canhabrava’s wife, and Sebastiana, her loyal African servant, which is only suggested. Bodily functions are also present at the end of the novel when, shortly before dying, the Counselor cannot help defecating out of dysentery and, due to the fact that he is regarded as a saint in Canudos, the Little Blessed One cannot help identifying the fluids of his defecation with mana from heaven.

Parody is another Bakhtinian concept that is used by Vargas Llosa in the novel. The best example is again the revelation of Galileo Gall’s ten-year sexual abstinence as a result of his dedication to the revolutionary struggle in body and soul. It is clear that Vargas Llosa wants to ridicule the figure of the Marxist revolutionary, which is the antithesis to his conservative ideology, in order to criticize it. Hence why he chooses to use parody, whose defamiliarizing potential allows the Peruvian novelist to deautomatize

179). Consequently, “hostility between the church’s hierarchy and the Conselheiro grows” (Castro-Klarén 179) and the Counselor “becomes despondent and loses no time in showing his contempt for the church and its sins” (Castro-Klarén 179). It is also significant to note that, as is mentioned by Castro-Klarén, “this parting of the ways between some local priests and the Conselheiro more or less coincides with the aggressive promulgation of the new laws of the republic” (179).
his readers’ perception of the social archetype of the revolutionary with the aim of
subverting its positive depiction in the official story of Euclides da Cunha’s novel, which
underlines the subversive nature of parody observed by Sklodowska. On the other hand,
the multiplicity of discourses or conscious use of different types of speech that defines
the Bakhtinian notion of heteroglossia, which often appears in new historical novels, is
also present in *The War of the End of the World* through the juxtaposition of the various
discourses of the Counselor, the *yagunços*, Galileo Gall, the nameless journalist, the
Baron de Canhabrava, Epaminondas Gonçalves and the military officers among others.
Other characteristics of the new historical novel, which are typical of those works dealing
with the Conquest of America, like the use of quotations from chronicles and other
historical materials and the presence of apocryphal chronicles and of a superimposition of
times, are not used by Vargas Llosa in the novel.

The study of *The War of the End of the World* from the point of view of the
theology of liberation shows how the old notion of imperialist Indianness is articulated in
the text instead of reconceptualizing that of decolonial indigeneity. The emergence of the
category of imperialist Indianness is the fruit of the misrepresentation of the indigenous
subalterner subject in the novel as a brute and animal that must be subdued, which
completely eclipses his agency and self-representation. Liberation theology helps us to
appreciate the subversive revolutionary potential of the Counselor’s primitive
Christianity, which is never influenced by Marxism and is full of myths and superstitions
of an imperialist nature. In spite of the connections with the Latin American
revolutionary Christians and liberation theologians of the 1970s and 80s, it would be
anachronistic to identify the primitive Christianity of late nineteenth-century Canudos.
with the theology of liberation, a contemporary theological reflection born in 1968 in Peru. It would also be quite contradictory since Marxist thinking is a significant socio-analytical mediation for liberation theology, which is also an anti-imperialist theological discourse. This demonstrates that the Counselor and the yagunços are not liberation theologians or Marxist revolutionaries but can certainly be considered precursors of a theology of liberation and a Marxism avant la lettre. This is precisely the reason why Vargas Llosa cannot help making the connection between Canudos in the past and liberation theology and Latin American revolutionary movements in the present from an anti-liberationist conservative perspective that is quite prejudiced to the point of identifying the yagunços with Shining Path terrorists. It is true that one of the main characteristics of the new historical novel is the distortion of history. This, however, must always take place in order to attain a higher degree of historical objectivity and impartiality. The misrepresentation of the yagunços in the novel, however, produces the opposite effect.

Liberation theology also helps us to understand how the main conflict in the novel is not atheism but idolatry, as can be appreciated in the battle between the God of life represented by the Counselor’s rejection of the capitalist system through the Blessed Jesus and the idols of death embodied by the Republic’s bourgeois liberal order. It is the interpretation of this battle in the light of the concept of “entrepreneurial metaphysics” that shows the violence and violation of human rights of bourgeois thinking, which, unable to repudiate and remove its false gods of capital, will always regard those who reject subjugation to the higher forces of the market as arrogant and proud, those who try to build a new society without using the law of market value as utopians, and those who
fight for a real life as violent, terrorists and subversives. This entrepreneurial metaphysics is supported and legitimated by Vargas Llosa, whose political project becomes even more conservative in the novel through the Baron de Canhabrava, his alter-ego, whose monarchical, imperialist and authoritarian feudal ideology is fully justified by the Peruvian novelist. Imperialist Indianness is therefore the fruit of Vargas Llosa’s legitimation of a feudal and entrepreneurial metaphysics mentality, which gives rise to an ultraconservative ideological project that has a significant theological dimension. This, of course, does not move in a liberationist direction like that of liberation theology itself or Moltmann’s and Metz’s new political theology but, unfortunately, follows the example of Schmidtt’s authoritarian political theology. In spite of its literary merits, one cannot help but draw the conclusion that The War of the End of the World fully misinterprets the Canudos episode and its connections with contemporary Latin American history as a result of its author’s political ideology whose imposition upon the historical facts narrated in the novel, even from a theological point of view, eclipses the social ethics and justice of the yagunço cause and of liberation theology and the Latin American revolutionary movements of the 1970s and 80s.
Conclusion

The study of liberation theology from the revisionist approach of cultural studies throughout the five chapters of this dissertation has shown how liberation theology is a decolonial theoretical discourse that signals the beginnings of Latin American decoloniality. The problematic issue of the role played by Marxism in it since its inception has been originally and innovatively reinterpreted by looking at the points in common between Gutiérrez’s and Mariátegui’s thinking from a decolonial perspective. On the other hand, the revisionism of the classical question of liberation theology’s lack of a hermeneutic and epistemological methodology in terms of the notion of “bidirectional hermeneutic dialectics” not only has proved the reality of liberation theology’s hermeneutics and epistemology but has also demonstrated the problems posed by the most important theoretical contributions on the subject coming from liberation theologians themselves.

The discussion of the antecedents of liberation theology in connection with the Dominican and Jesuit missionary movements of the colonial period, the first encyclicals coming from the magisterium in the late nineteenth century, and, especially, the Latin American base ecclesial movement beginning in the 50s in Brazil has shown some decolonial insights that culminate with Gutiérrez’s first articulation of a theology of liberation and the publication of the Medellín documents in 1968. A significant part of this revisionist approach is therefore to conceptualize Medellín as a resemanticization of Vatican II from a decolonial perspective represented by Medellín’s preferential option for the poor, which was its basis for the theological reflection and the socio-political analysis of the Latin American historical reality. The fact that Medellín was highly influenced by
Gutiérrez’s paper “Toward a Theology of Liberation,” which was read in Chimbote, Peru, in 1968, must be noted as well as Gutiérrez’s subsequent in-depth discussion of liberation theology in his influential work *A Theology of Liberation*, which signals the emergence of a truly Latin American decolonial thinking. This, however, was already prefigured in his 1968 paper as well as in Medellín. A revisionist approach to the history of the evolution of liberation theology from the first few years after Medellín until the present has also shown how the conservative sectors of the Catholic Church both in Latin America and Europe organized an anti-liberationist campaign with the aim of eclipsing liberation theology’s decoloniality with a developmentist theology that tried to spiritualize and empty the meaning of liberation theology’s fundamental decolonial insights, as can be appreciated in the works of anti-liberationist theologians like López Trujillo, Vekemans and Kloppenburg.

The fact that liberation theology’s decoloniality evolves with time means that an epistemological evolution is experienced by it. The readaptation and reinterpretation of Enrique Dussel’s categories of LT1 and LT2 from the point of view of liberation theology’s decoloniality and its evolution, which is completely neglected by the Argentinian philosopher, has shown how decoloniality is already an integral part of LT1. The best way to justify this is to revise the famous polemic between Moltmann and Míguez Bonino in which the Argentinian liberation theologian convincingly refutes the German theologian’s interpretation of liberation theology in the 1970s in quite prejudiced Eurocentric terms. This suggests that the Protestant school of Latin American liberation theology plays a pioneering role in its conception of this as an alternative theological reflection articulated from the point of view of the periphery vis-à-vis the progressist
political theologies of the center. On the other hand, the fact that the homogeneous category of the poor in LT1 becomes the heterogeneity and plurality of the victims of the system in LT2 shows an epistemological movement from LT1’s concern with socio-political issues to LT2’s focus on questions of ethnicity, race, gender, globalization, economy and ecology among others. The critical analysis of liberation theology’s intellectual evolution from LT1 to LT2 therefore shows how its decolonial insights become more prominent, deep and complex as they evolve with time. This can be seen in the multiple theological reflections belonging to LT2, which not only come from Latin America but also from other peripheral areas like Africa and Asia as well as from the subaltern ethnic sectors of the US.

As far as the Latin American epistemological discourses of LT2 are concerned, the most important ones at the dawn of the twenty-first century are certainly indigenous and African Latin American liberation theologies, feminist, eco-feminist and African Latin American feminist liberation theologies and an eco-theology and economic theology of liberation. The discussion of all these theological discourses has shown that, though full of valuable insights, they still need to grow and mature one way or another from an epistemological point of view so that they can overcome their different problems and limitations. In spite of the fact that they all make significant contributions to the articulation of a liberation theology for the twenty-first century, indigenous and African Latin American theologies are undoubtedly the future of liberation theology in Latin America. This is due to the fact that, following the example of the theoreticians of LT1, indigenous and African Latin American theologies of liberation still show LT1’s anticapitalist perspective, and therefore, its radical critical consciousness, which is
empowered by their decolonial growth and maturity. Another reason is that, unlike other highly sophisticated Latin American theoretical discourses of LT2, indigenous and African Latin American liberation theologies still keep LT1’s fundamental insight of the praxical dimension in focus. It is precisely the socio-political and environmental activism of the indigenous and African Latin American peoples against neoliberal injustice that can produce a young, prophetic and charismatic new theological voice for Latin America in the twenty-first century.

The study of the dialogical interaction established between liberation theology and Latin American literature has shown the need to overcome the reductionism of the thematic, structural and contextualizing approaches of the past and to use liberation theology’s potential as a decolonial theoretical current as our point of departure. The novelty of exploring the relationship between liberation theology and Latin America’s testimonio and new historical novel, which has never been studied before, in connection with the indigenous question also demands to frame our discussion within the theoretical concepts of “indigeneity” and Indianness in order to go beyond another thematic perspective that is ultimately essentialist, reductionist and even imperialist, as can be appreciated in its misrepresentation of the indigenous subaltern subject as a result of a lack of dialogue between the text and liberation theology and/or other subaltern and decolonial theories.

The analysis of The Gospel in Solentiname and I, Rigoberta Menchú from the lense of liberation theology has allowed for the discussion of a decolonial reformulation of indigeneity, understood as Native agency and self-representation, in both works. Decolonial indigeneity in The Gospel in Solentiname is defined by socio-political and
theological-hermeneutic agency, which can be appreciated in how the indigenous peasants of Solentiname discuss the gospel from a Marxist perspective, which makes them become revolutionary Christians who support the communist goals of the Sandinista revolution. The decolonial notion of indigeneity articulated in *I, Rigoberta Menchú* has its foundation in the Christian orthopraxis of the Maya base ecclesial movement in which Maya women play a very active role. It is also based on a popular and decolonial interpretation of the Bible from the perspective of Maya culture in a dialogical projection with the Maya traditional spirituality of *Popol Vuh* whose liberating dimension gives rise to the emergence of a revolutionary pedagogy of the oppressed that teaches the Maya how to defend themselves at a local, regional and national level.

The main difference between both decolonial reconceptualizations of indigeneity is that the former is highly influenced by Marxist thinking and Sandinista communism from the start whereas the latter is not. This, however, does not mean that, according to Rigoberta’s narrative, the Maya do not join forces with some left-wing socio-political organizations in order to give a national dimension to their struggle. They certainly do but only after they have fought at a local and regional level on their own, and therefore, after they have interpreted the Bible by themselves. Their interpretation agrees with that of the theology of liberation, of which they might have heard before the first extermination campaigns carried out by the Guatemalan army. The Maya, however, just fight for their rights as a people but not for a communist political ideology, as is the case with the peasants of Solentiname.

The analysis of Mario Vargas Llosa’s *The War of the End of the World* from the perspective of liberation theology has shown how a decolonial reconceptualization of
indigeneity is questioned by the Peruvian novelist, who favors the imperialist notion of Indianness instead. This is present in the text through the deformed image and representation of the poor peasants of Canudos, who are depicted as if they were beasts or animals who must be dominated by the bourgeois project of the Republic of Brazil. The fact that the author also sympathizes with a monarchical and feudal ideology underlines his ultraconservatism, which can also be appreciated in how the poor peasants are identified with the Christian militants of the Sandinista revolution in very negative terms or even with Shining Path terrorists. It is precisely the fact that Vargas Llosa is in control of the (mis)representation of the Christian revolutionaries of Canudos that takes their agency and self-representation away from them. In contrast with *The Gospel in Solentiname* and *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, their indigeneity is eclipsed with the traditionally imperialist concept of “Indianness” whose imposition upon the poor characters of the novel is the fruit of the projection of the author’s discriminatory, prejudiced and ultraconservative ideology upon his fictionalized reconstruction of the historical events of the Canudos campaign.

All this suggests the need to approach liberation theology from the lense of cultural studies as a decolonial theoretical current born in Latin America in 1968 that was subsequently developed in depth in the 1970s. After discussing liberation theology’s success and problems from a socioanalytical, hermeneutic and praxical point of view that especially takes into account the key role played in it by Marxism, we must also pay attention to its historical and epistemological evolution, which is also that of its decoloniality, until the twenty-first century. It is only after this hermeneutic, historical and epistemological diagnosis of liberation theology from a decolonial revisionist
perspective that we can begin to explore its dialogical projection with Latin American literature, and, more specifically, with Latin America’s *testimonio* and new historical novel in connection with the indigenous question. Liberation theology’s decoloniality along with the theoretical notions of “indigeneity” and “Indianness” must always be our starting points if we want this dialogical interaction to be truly fruitful and productive both from a critico-theoretical and literary hermeneutic point of view.
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