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ASOCIACIÓN ECUMÉNICA DE TEÓLOGOS/AS DEL TERCER MUNDO**



**DOSSIER:**

## **TRANSGRESSIVE THEOLOGICAL VOICES VOCES TEOLÓGICAS TRANSGRESORAS**

**ALSO:**

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DIÁLOGO: BUDISMO COMPROMETIDO Y ESPIRITUALIDAD DE LA LIBERACIÓN**

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**TRANSGRESSIVE THEOLOGICAL VOICES**

**VOCES TEOLÓGICAS TRANSGRESORAS**

**VOICES**

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ECUMENICAL ASSOCIATION OF THIRD WORLD THEOLOGIANS  
ASOCIACION ECUMÉNICA DE TEÓLOGOS/AS DEL TERCER MUNDO  
ASSOCIATION OECUMÉNIQUE DES THEOLOGIENS DU TIERS MONDE



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# TRANSGRESSIVE THEOLOGY

## Introduction

The authors of this issue, part of the circle of US-EATWOT members and friends in solidarity, are grateful for the opportunity to have a theological conversation with the broader audience of the international organization, a conversation that has not happened for a while. It is our hope and desire that this modest start, as eclectic as it is, will be the beginning of a sustained and fruitful conversation. We are a diverse group of theologians from diverse locations, social and epistemic, who have been engaging each other in dialogue over the past few years and felt the need for starting a new conversation that we are calling--as a working definition--transgressive theology. Perhaps the best expression of the group's thinking is in the statement of life and energy reflected in the artwork on the cover.

The concerns that have been guiding our reflection as a group as we articulated them in a shared statement a couple of years ago when we started this conversation are the following: Where and how do we develop collaborations (projects, events, publications) with varied constituencies (academy, church, society) in order to maintain the necessary link between reflection and practice? How do we incorporate transgressive perspectives in our pedagogical praxis, in our scholarship, in the academy, in our churches, and in our social movements so that they become avenues for meaningful resistance and radical change?

This issue reflects the different experiences of doing theology as a transgressive tool to articulate voices of liberation from particular locations of social and intellectual struggle. Theology as we know it, is among the first constructs that have become irrelevant for addressing the emerging questions from our experiences in a changing world and collapsing empire. The epistemic revolution of decolonial thinking is all around us, and the Eurocentric theology that dominated the scene for the last centuries finds itself today irrelevant. That theology needs to be transgressed.

The authors in this volume offer snapshots of engaging theology in their locations as a form of theological reflection on their ongoing struggles in relation to politics, imperial religion, theological education, race, identity, and more. A central question this issue raises, which remains open, is whether one can do transgressive theology without transgressing theology? In almost all the instances discussed in the articles, traditional theology has been used by the imperial culture as a tool of domination. Gerald M. Boodoo offers a theoretical reflection in dialogue with the new thinking coming out of the writings on coloniality and decoloniality, with examples from theologizing in the Caribbean context.

Rufus Burnett examines the theological significance of the performance of teaching and pedagogy in the modern/colonial world relative to the emergence of the Black Atlantic. Using Carter G. Woodson's concept of the "mis-education of black Americans" as an interpretive lens, he explores colonial pedagogies—particularly those performed in the Christian Instruction of black Americans—and how they reduce the humanity of teachers and students into passive vessels for replicating the colonial imagination. He argues that decolonial pedagogical practice, reflected in bell hooks' engaged pedagogy, is a resistant act aimed at the recovery of learners and teachers as embodied subjects that are radically open to God. Burnett contends that this decolonial act is base for a constructive theological anthropology that evokes what James Noel, articulates as the "ineffable" character—the moans and shouts of black-religious consciousness.

By presenting a review of the Palestinian theology of reconciliation and liberation, Michel Elias Andraos responds to the dominant view in North American society that demonizes the peoples of the Middle East in order to justify an unjust foreign policy and the ongoing failing wars of imperial domination in that region in the name of "peace and democracy." In this process, the voice of Arab Christian theologians from the Middle East is supposed to be silenced.

Another pressing topic in our North American context is Islamophobia. In addition to Hispanophobia, Islamophobia is the most recent construct of an imaginary enemy that is gaining cultural momentum for scapegoating our Muslim communities. These communities could become the new sacrificial social victims necessary for prolonging the life of the collapsing empire, which is in constant need for new enemies to sustain its fragile and critical survival. Nami Kim offers us some insights on this growing and complex phenomenon by briefly looking through the experience of some Evangelical Korean communities in the U.S.

Can we let go of race? Phillip J. Linden, Jr., S.S.J., gives a reflection that broadens the parameters of the discourse on diversity and race using a historical-theological method. He claims that such an approach is better

able to uncover the victimization of peoples and the struggles accompanying the severity of poverty. What it demonstrates is how diversity and race in the contemporary situation of global conflict, imperceptibly marginalizes the poor, the exploited, those systematically and lawfully stripped of their status as human beings. His analysis is a critique of the use of race by those who are victims of market driven society, as a possible solution to the violence we face.

In the final article, Joseph Drexler-Dreis argues for reciprocity to exist between theological discourses on God and the irruptions beyond the borders of the western concepts that theology has traditionally drawn upon to describe God. He does this by first engaging the transgressive character of the “irruption of the poor,” which catalyzed liberation theology’s use of the “preferential option for the poor” as a discourse about God. He then considers Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* in order to reveal the dynamism and creativity of this irruption, which he grounds theologically by drawing on Marcella Althaus-Reid’s *Queer Theology*. From this intersection he develops criteria by which theological discourses on God will make a preferential option for those queer experiences that have been excluded.

Again, we hope these articles help to begin a sustained and fruitful discussion among the international EATWOT community and its friends in solidarity as we respond to the significant challenges facing theologies in our changing worlds.

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# Transgressive Theology or Transgressing Theology?

**Gerald M. BOODOO**

## **Introduction**

This short essay is an attempt to offer some reflections on what a theology that transgresses may mean and what sort of epistemological and methodological issues might arise in taking on this activity. Since I cut my theological teeth in the contexts of the Anglophone Caribbean, I will frequently refer to these contexts in order to help describe, explain and clarify my thoughts on this topic.

The title of this short reflection already offers some questions for consideration. Can one speak of transgressive theology, one that implies and encourages transgression, or is it theology itself that needs to be transgressed? The former holds out hope that theology is capable of transgressing boundaries and can engage and generate transgression as a constitutive part of its endeavor. The latter recognizes the imperial and oppressive activities of theologizing and perhaps suggests that we might be better off leaving what we call “theology” behind and involve ourselves in analyses and activities that better express and address the injustices rampant in our world. I will admit that setting up the issue like this is a binary polarization that may not be helpful (though familiar to theologians) in looking at the issue for it is clearly apparent in our social and individual relationships that categories of interaction are not neatly compartmentalized and discrete. In fact, the “impurity” of our thoughts and activities, as the condition of our lived realities, forces us to recognize that perhaps theology should be understood as both in need of transgression as well as able to transgress. I will therefore read, or understand, transgressive theology as occasioning the need for theology to be transgressed as well as to transgress. It is reflexive as well as active.

## I. Limit

The term transgression itself means and implies a crossing over of some limit or boundary. As going beyond the limits of what has been accepted as the norm and thereby transgressing boundaries that are either regulative or perceptually imposed upon our thinking and living. I understand limit here not primarily nor necessarily in the negative manner of a boundary that limits thought or movement but more along the lines of a participatory activity. I initially follow Paul Ricoeur in this regard by understanding limit as “an act and not a fact”. To quote him:

*The concept of “limit” implies not only and even not primarily that our knowledge is limited, has boundaries, but that the quest for the unconditioned puts limits on the claim of objective knowledge to become absolute. “Limit” is not a fact, but an act.*<sup>1</sup>

Limit understood as such is a descriptive act and a mediative tool used in the search for the unconditioned within the conditioned. So it is not primarily a defining concept of understanding. We place limits on our thinking as we try to express in conceptually clear language that which goes beyond such conception and thereby try to find alternative ways to conceptualize and express (sometimes in figurative and metaphorical ways) that which we seek.

This looking for alternative ways to conceptually express what we seek is important for a transgressive and transgressing theology if one also understands transgression as an activity that engages that which lies beyond the limits of adequate conceptual expression. I hasten to add that this does not necessarily indicate engagement with divinity but a willingness to engage that which we do not normally encounter within our normal boundaries. So limit acts as a *limiting* force and not as an end or *telos*. In this sense limit is a shifting boundary that, much like a territorial border, changes over time as various civilizations and groups of people lay claim (in convincing conceptual fashion they believe) to its space. Of significance here is that no limit is absolute and therefore no transgression is the/a final act of transgressing. Going beyond limit therefore is not, nor primarily, a search for “ultimate reality” but an act of engagement, conceptually and practically. Reading limit as a boundary beyond which we ultimately find answers, tends to absolutize this other space/place and more often than not leads to what Edward Said<sup>2</sup> terms *orientalism*, our exoticizing of the other to serve the ends we have imagined/created for ourselves. I sometimes wonder, in the vein of Ludwig Feuerbach,<sup>3</sup> whether institutional theology and religion overly subscribes to this.

## II. Decoloniality

An example of transgressive thinking that could be helpful to transgressive theologizing is decolonial thinking. There are three main points I want to make with regard to decolonial thinking. The first is that we need to understand that modernity has created a world system that for the first time in the history of the world has linked all (or virtually all) parts of the world and subsumed them into a connected system. Along with this comes the realization that not everyone and everywhere have benefited from these connections. There is a dark side to this modern system of coloniality so that you have those who benefit from the modern project, those who are “inside” modernity and wield the power of modernity and who can be too easily blinded to the millions who are negatively affected by modernity, who are “outside”. This “outside” of modernity is termed the “colonial difference”. By colonial difference is meant “the place and experiences of those who have been the object of inferiorization on the part of others who, in the midst of the colonial endeavor, have come to consider themselves to be superior. It is a place and experience constituted as an exteriority to modernity according to a negative logic (a logic of inferiorization)”.<sup>4</sup>

Second, there is a “coloniality of power”<sup>5</sup> which privileges and enshrines Euro-American thinking by constituting itself in (i) the classification and reclassification of the planet population (the concept of culture becomes crucial in this task) (ii) institutional structures which function to articulate and manage such classifications (state, university, church etc.) (iii) the definition of spaces appropriate to such goals (iv) an epistemological perspective that articulates, legitimates and channels its production of knowledge. Walter D. Mignolo explains that “Eurocentrism becomes, therefore, a metaphor to describe the coloniality of power from the perspective of subalternity. From the epistemological perspective, European local knowledge and histories have been projected to global designs....”<sup>6</sup>

Third, decolonial thought seeks to produce knowledge formed from the colonial difference. What is needed is a new way of thinking, not new ideas. As such, if one speaks from the perspective of the colonial difference, one also speaks from what Mignolo calls the “colonial wound” and therefore the “other paradigm” does privilege the knowledge from these spaces of oppression, the victims of modernity, but with the realization that even though it is produced from “outside” modernity it still is linked to the modern project. The colonial wound is created by coloniality. So decolonial thought gives rise to an ethics and a politics of *pluriversality* (a combination of the words “plural” and “universality”). Standing in opposition to global and totalitarian designs, created in the name of

universality (which usually means a particularity claiming to be universal), pluriversality is an attempt to make visible and viable a multiplicity of knowledges, forms of being, and visions of the world. Pluriversality is equality-in-difference, the possibility that many worlds can fit in one world. It is the future alternative to modernity/coloniality.”<sup>7</sup> Decolonial thinkers see this as occurring across many disciplines and many facets of life, hence they assert the “transdisciplinary” and “transcultural” nature of decolonial thinking. This mixture of perspectives works to unmask the “purity” of disciplines and the so-called “universality” of modernity.

### III. Border Thinking

How then do we overcome the colonial difference and the coloniality of power with the accompanying recognition that we, and our knowledge, are shaped by them? Mignolo draws attention to what he calls border thinking:

*“...the transcending of the colonial difference can only be done from a perspective of subalternity, from decolonization, and therefore, from a new epistemological terrain where border thinking works...Border thinking can only be such from a subaltern perspective, never from a territorial (e.g. inside modernity) one. Border thinking from a territorial perspective becomes a machine of appropriation of the colonial difference/a/nces; the colonial difference as an object of study rather than as an epistemological potential. Border thinking from the perspective of subalternity is a machine for intellectual decolonization”.*<sup>8</sup>

So it is not a territorial/geographic grounded space that can then become commodified but an epistemological space that generates intellectual decolonization. This border thinking is still within the imaginary of the modern world system but is repressed by the coloniality of power, which controls the conceptualization of knowledge. However, this power becomes exposed when the colonial difference, the conditions of the colonial “other”, the subaltern, the silenced and classified peoples, is recognized. This border thinking is primarily a way of thinking “*from dichotomous concepts rather than ordering the world in dichotomies*”.<sup>9</sup>

Our normal tendency is to reconcile dichotomies or to resolve them into whole systems, which then enshrine the colonial difference and continues the inside/outside structures of the coloniality of power. Our still deep desire to be the “included” the “insider” in the modern world system keeps us entrenching rather than overcoming the colonial difference. Instead of using our dichotomous reality as a means for decolonization we favor coloniality and the difference it inscribes because it legitimates our existence and production of knowledge according to its own logic. Our desire *to be* (and to be highly acclaimed) in this system blinds us to the potential of not being able to be in this modern world system. On the contrary:

*“Not being able to be where one is is the promise of an epistemological potential and a cosmopolitan transnationalism that could overcome the limits and violent conditions generated by being always able to be where one belongs. I am where I think.”<sup>10</sup>*

This border thinking echoes the activity of transgression presented earlier on the discussion about limits. It gives epistemological roots to an activity of transgression that allows us to not be confined (not being able to be where one is) by our “normal” identifiers (being always able to be where one belongs). The potential for this crossing of boundaries relies in no small part on the naming of our accustomed boundaries in ways that indicate our dislocation from the very place we inhabit.

#### IV. Forced Contexts

Attempting to construct theological language that expresses our dislocation from the very place we inhabit, some years ago I spoke of the contexts in which we do theology in the Caribbean as forced contexts.<sup>11</sup> I find it relevant here again in trying to unravel transgressive theological moments especially in light of structures of coloniality.

I asserted in reference to Caribbean theological reflection that we must be aware of the fact that, at least in the Caribbean, the past, present and continuing situation of exploitation is one that is forced upon the region. I emphasized that theology is an expression of that space of confrontation that we inhabit. The situation of being forced and having to exist in a space of confrontation with exploitative structures shapes the struggle for genuine liberation. As such, I outlined some characteristics of theology shaped by forced contexts, which give some voice to what could also be considered characteristics of transgressive theologies.

The first characteristic is precisely its forced nature, whereby we do not have the luxury of “choices”. The so-called availability of choices is an illusion of self-determination, which is provided by, and is a concession from, the dominant political and cultural economy. As a result, such self-determination merely replicates the ideology of dominant structure(s) and is legitimated by it. This, as we have presented above, is constitutive of colonial structures. Those subject to the illusion of self-determination are thus really forced into a particular stance and are bereft of meaningful choices related to their condition of exploitation in the drive toward liberation. Having no real choices except what is handed out by the structures of exploitation clearly situates the forced individual in the position that freedom is therefore not dependent on will, and the so-called choices made by the will. The genuine activity of the oppressed and colonized is not the result of “reasonable choices” made based on some exercise of the will, nor the development of the “character” of the individual to be informed in one’s “choices”. On the contrary, will and freedom are no

longer issues of compatibility. Indeed, freedom is to be had irrespective of what is considered self-determination, and by a studied destruction of illusions created by such willing. This adjusts our understanding of human agency as based not on the possibility and availability of choice but on the lack thereof. Our actions are determined not by the splendid possibilities before us but by the urgency of our present condition. Our freedom and liberation from exploitation is therefore not dependent on the possibility of new and alternative structures (though these are needed), but on our resistance to the present condition of exploitation. The future has no promise for an exploited and forced people, except more of the same.

In this sense, and this is the second characteristic, freedom is not to be understood in the light of hope, but in the light of despair. It is the condition of being forced that propels us to identify and move towards what is urgent in their existing and continuing situation. The condition of being forced can generate a hope which deprives us of an understanding of the structural roots of our condition and so gives the illusion of freedom from oppressed conditions. This is best depicted in the carnivalesque, which perpetuates the illusion of freedom by means of a momentary release that captures the imagination in such a manner that liberation is situated within its confines. This detracts from the need for a more lasting liberative condition, by suggesting that mimicry contains the dynamic for continued resistance. However, this mimicry replicates the dominance already existing and more often than not becomes a tool of the dominant political economy to further the economic, political and cultural hegemony of those in power. This momentary and captivating sense of freedom offered by the carnivalesque is therefore an expression of the false hope that can be generated by forced conditions that are based solely on the mimicking of available possibilities. The freedom that is gained in the light of such hope is only an uneasy submission to the fate of being forced and exploited. It is a hope filled with hollow rhetoric, recurrent oppression, and false ideology. The illusion of self-determination and the misunderstanding that freedom can be had in the light of hope are shattered by the condition of the forced. The only freedom that can be had is in the full recognition of the forced and despairing situation created by exploitation, which propels us to confront such structures.

This leads to the third characteristic: the non-essentiality of the human condition. There is no essential condition of the human that can be appealed to in determining some prescription for the human condition. If this is the case, appeals to dignity, cultural identity and genealogy are themselves pseudo issues that take away from, and in some cases deliberately sidetrack, the movement towards liberation. These appeals are based on the misunderstanding that there is some essential human

condition to which we strive and which reflexively shines forth from our common human experience. This commonality, however, often is a veiled (and not so veiled) attempt at further manipulation and exploitation. Many times, even notions of liberation appeal to this essential ontological condition. The non-essentiality of the human condition forces us to strive towards the realization of a condition, which allows us to be most fully human yet most fully free. Freedom, from this perspective, is the ability to maintain one's course of confrontation with empty concepts, false prophets, and the evil and exploitation they perpetuate in order to deny the realization of our best selves. Isn't this the example of Job? Job shows that when we stand against, and in the face of, "worthless physicians" with their hollow promises and false understandings we are able to present our true selves. Though portrayed as heretical by resisting and remaining steadfast in the face of a dominant culture, such a person turns out to be the means through which others will themselves be vindicated and saved. The lesson of Job, and of "forced" peoples everywhere, is that liberation from oppression and exploitation is to be found in the task of recognizing, exposing, standing fast in the face of, and deconstructing exploitative structures, structures of coloniality. The individualistic way in which we understand what it means to be human is based on the classical understanding of our having some essential human nature and identity grounded in the individual as a singular being. The call to emphasize the non-essentiality of the human condition also therefore underscores that our identities take shape in solidarity with others. Only because of community do I have meaningful *human* existence.

These characteristics I presented on what I call forced contexts for theological reflection seem to still be appropriate as we explore transgressive and transgressing theologies. Indeed, forced contexts shape the limits and boundaries that beg for transgression and necessitate theologies that can pluriversally address in trans-disciplinary fashion the many worlds we inhabit in this one world. At the heart of the forced context however, is the notion that the associations and relationships forged are not voluntary. I would like to explore briefly this notion of involuntary associations.

## V. Involuntary Associations

From the perspective of the colonized it is easy to speak of the colonial relationship as an involuntary one, but one can also understand that the colonizer finds him/herself pressed into relationships with the "natives" and even uneasy "friendships" that create complex relational realities. These complex relationships are inscribed in historical readings that either debase or destroy the history of the colonized, or include the colonized as the noble native. So how are the colonized, especially in an

area like the Caribbean that has no discernible “indigenous” population like Africa, Asia and Latin America, to construct their history? Guyanese writer and thinker Wilson Harris would argue that it has to be based on what he calls the native matrix, the narratives generated not only by the peoples of the region but by relationships that have taken place in its space, even and especially the involuntary associations that occur amongst peoples. Historiography becomes a way of arriving in tradition, <sup>12</sup> a sort of “creolization of the chasm within illuminations drawn from, or nursed from, the fabric of involuntary associations embedded in humanity”. <sup>13</sup> In other words, traditions, and native cultures are never “pure” and one unearths the “native” in the transcultural associations that involuntarily take place routinely. The native is not an archetype of purity and involuntary associations become the basis for the genesis of “native” expressions.

To me, this explicit recognition of how our epistemologies, relationships, communities, histories and possibilities are shaped and forged by the involuntary associations of our lives, privileges transgression. It shatters the homogenization of worlds and realizes the founding creolization of our spaces, physically, mentally, and spiritually. If we take this to be worthwhile, or at least the genuine point of departure for our forays into understanding and undertaking what it means to transgress and to be transgressed, then we begin to see the eclectic way in which we actually come to reside within the spaces we inhabit. Transgression allows and promotes the eclectic, and methodologically, is itself possible because of eclecticism.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, instead of summarizing what I’ve presented above, I’d like to promote eclecticism as a transgressive theological style. The power of eclecticism is the drawing on a multitude of varying methods and sources in order to better understand and describe the foci of research. This is welcome and necessary to my mind if we are to address the complex realities of our communities and their search for truth. Eclecticism has been traditionally criticized because its transgression of disciplinary boundaries seemed to not allow for continuity and consistency in theory and thought. However, since we have come to realize that “continuity” and “consistency” are oftentimes synonymous with control and domination I think we have become aware that what has passed for “sound method” is itself based on discontinuous and inconsistent theory that maintains and perpetrates domination. Eclecticism in fact is more consistent and grounded in the nature of involuntary associations that make up human living. As method, eclecticism allows for a greater range of insight and recognizes the impurity and interrelatedness of our traditions and faiths.

In this manner, eclecticism is a form of relativity or similar to (but not the same as) Maria Pilar Aquino's term, respectivity.<sup>14</sup> We engage our work relative to, in respect to, other persons, cultures, faith traditions and epistemologies. Understood in this way I think relativism has been unfairly stigmatized. We are all relative to one another and our theologies and epistemologies are also done in respect to one another. This can only be dangerous to imperial discourses and totalizing narratives. The macronarrated nature of our world, evidenced by the many, even contradictory, narratives that belie homogenized narratives of diverse peoples in common spaces, presents us with the challenge and need to engage theological reflections that address these changing realities. Eclecticism allows for this, and theologies that are transgressive may well be how we better relate to the boundaries we cross every day.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Paul Ricoeur, "The Specificity of Religious Language", *Semeia* 4, 1975, 107-145, p. 142.
- <sup>2</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, New York, 1979.
- <sup>3</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, translated by George Eliot, Prometheus Books, New York, 1989.
- <sup>4</sup> Gregory A. Banazak & Luis Reyes Ceja, "The Challenge and Promise of Decolonial Thought to Biblical Interpretation", *Postscripts* 4.1 (2008) 113–127, p. 116.
- <sup>5</sup> Cf. Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Social Classification", in Mabel Morana, Enrique Dussel, Carlos A. Jauregui, eds., *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2008.
- <sup>6</sup> Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 2000, p. 17.
- <sup>7</sup> Gregory A. Banazak & Luis Reyes Ceja, "The Challenge and Promise of Decolonial Thought to Biblical Interpretation", *Postscripts* 4.1 (2008) 113–127, p. 118.
- <sup>8</sup> Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 2000, p. 45.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.85.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 334.
- <sup>11</sup> Gerald M. Boodoo, "Understanding Church and Theology in the Caribbean Today", in Peter C. Phan and Diana Hayes, eds., *Many Faces, One Church: Cultural Diversity and the American Catholic Experience*, Rowman and Littlefield, 2005.
- <sup>12</sup> Wilson Harris, "Creoleness: The Crossroads of a Civilization?", in Andrew Bundy, ed., *The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination: Selected Essays of Wilson Harris*, Routledge, New York, 1999, pp. 243.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 241.
- <sup>14</sup> Maria Pilar Aquino, "Theological Method in US Latino/a Theology: Toward and Incultural Theology for the Third Millennium", in Orlando O. Espín and Miguel H. Díaz, eds., *From the Heart of Our People: Latino/a Explorations in Catholic Systematic Theology*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1999, 6-48. p. 22.







# Engaged Pedagogy

## A theological interpretation

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### Introduction

It was the first day of my undergraduate African American Christianity course and I was confident that this course was going to be an easy “A.” Walking to my seat, I thought to myself that there was no way that, I, an African American Christian was going to be challenged by anything in an African American Christianity course. At best, this course would be a review of what I already knew to be the truth. As I took my seat, the professor walked in and abruptly slammed his notes and the text book onto a podium and belted out these words, “God is dead!” These words rendered the entire class silent. As I looked at my syllabus to check to see if I was in the proper course, the professor broke into the silence with these words, “Good morning, this course is a critical reflection on the “mixed-upedness” of African American Christianity in the Atlantic World.” Throughout the remainder of the course this enigmatic professor made it a habit to always render the class silent.

Silence in the hands of this professor became a pedagogical tool. Through silence he challenged the reactionary moral responses of his students to the complex problems of violence, enslavement, and the commodification of human bodies in what he, via Charles Long, termed the emergence of the Atlantic World.<sup>1</sup> As students we were responsible for actively engaging the local reality of *silence* that lay buried beneath the history of the Atlantic World. African American Christianity was presented as a “turbulent voyage” where the presence of God was *scandalously* revealed by what seemed to be God’s absence in the violence of enslave-

ment and insurrection. Against this backdrop the professor's Nietzschean proclamation, "God is dead," was used to place both himself and his students into a posture of critical reflection. Rather than requiring us to memorize and report on theories concerning the problems of modernity and African American Christianity, we were seen as fellow intellectuals who were responsible for bringing our own reflections to the discussion. His performance of teaching would not allow us to be passive stenographers of his lectures—he rarely performed lectures, he usually told stories. He used stories and talked about current events in the surrounding community as a way of illuminating the ideas in the readings.

With this narrative as a starting point, the work that follows is an explication on the theological significance of the *performance* of teaching and pedagogy in the modern world. The historical focus on modernity is aimed at illuminating how pedagogy functions as a component within the modern power dynamic that has been termed by cultural theorist Anibal Quijano as the "coloniality of power."<sup>2</sup> Along with Quijano, contemporary decolonial thinkers have provided sustained analyses on Euro-centrism, commodification, racialization, and the politics of knowledge in the modern world.<sup>3</sup> The phenomenon of teaching however has yet to be specifically analyzed in conversation with the insights from current decolonial thought. Moreover, pedagogy as a hermeneutical category has also been undervalued in theological analysis as a site for interrogating theological praxis and the theological imagination. Pedagogy is seen here as a historical phenomenon with theological implications. These theological implications manifest themselves in the modern world particularly when theological educators and teachers of Christian instruction employ pedagogy in order to replicate, deconstruct, reform, or delink themselves from the colonial imaginary.

Within this in mind, I will contend that the performance of teaching in theological and Christian educational settings is revelatory of how the subjects of theological anthropology are imagined. For clarity, I will use the term colonial pedagogy to refer to the performances of teaching that replicate the colonial hierarchy. Conversely, I will use the term decolonial pedagogy to refer to those pedagogies that critically try to decenter or delink themselves from the colonial anthropological imaginary. My focus will be limited to the phenomenon of colonial pedagogy as it pertains to the education of enslaved Africans and black Americans of the Atlantic World. I recognize that the argument could be extended to deal with histories of Amer-Indians and other colonized groups of the Americas. Nevertheless, the decision here is an attempt to limit the scope of the argument as well as to speak from my social location as a black American.

The reflection will be divided into three major sections. The first section will be an analysis of two primary texts. The first is a letter concerning the Christian instruction of slaves composed by Dr. Gibson the Bishop of London 1727.<sup>4</sup> The second is a campaign speech given by a Mississippi Governor in regards to the public education of black Americans in the post-Reconstruction era.<sup>5</sup> The analysis of these texts will highlight some of the early forms of colonial pedagogy and how they maintained the coloniality of power by enforcing a view of the subjugated learner as unfit subjects for intellectual development. In this model the subjugated are never able to fully arrive as embodied subjects that are themselves representative as centers of knowledge and knowledge production. Secondly, I will look at the work of Carter G. Woodson and W.E.B Du Bois as early examples of trying to decolonize pedagogies born out of the “racial caste” that stretched from enslavement, weakened during Reconstruction, and re-entrenched during the post-Reconstruction Jim Crow era.<sup>16</sup> I use the insights of these scholars to highlight their use of theory to re-think the content and methods for the formal education of black Americans. Both of these scholars suggest that the education of African Americans should be based on a rigorous educational theory that is supported by an equally rigorous understanding of the history and social conditions of black Americans. In their analyses of those black Americans who had received formal educational training, (college or greater) they reveal that the study of Eurocentric canons of knowledge did not adequately equip black Americans to critically engage what Du Bois described as “the problem of the color line.”<sup>7</sup> With the educational theory of these thinkers in mind I will turn to the third part of the reflection, which is focused on the theological implications of colonial pedagogy.

In this section, I will offer a way towards a decolonial theological pedagogy of radical openness. To do this, I will draw upon the insights of bell hooks’ “engaged pedagogy” and the history of religions scholarship of James Noel. Noel’s critique of the inability of black theology to engage the “ineffable violence of enslavement” helps to articulate the effects of the colonial imagination on the victims of the Atlantic World.<sup>8</sup> Reflecting on Noel’s critique of black theology, I suggest that the emergence of the Atlantic world brought with it the erasure of human beings as radically open. Following this assessment and the analysis of the two primary texts I contend that Noel’s critique points towards the need for a pedagogy that recovers educators and learners as human persons that are radically open and from a theological perspective radically open to God. I argue that the performance of pedagogy is a practice of articulating their regard for their own humanity and the humanity of the learner. To conclude, I point to bell hooks’ concept of engaged pedagogy and a contemporary perfor-

mance of engaged pedagogy by process womanist theologian Monica A. Coleman. Together, these two thinkers will illustrate what a decolonial pedagogy looks like in practice. It is my aim that the above method of action will provide a path towards a theological pedagogy that is based on a theological anthropology of radical openness.

## Theologizing Colonial Pedagogy in the Emergence of the Atlantic World

The broad historical framework being used here is best characterized in the work of Charles Long, and more recently in the works of James Noel and Paul Gilroy, who characterize modernity as the emergence of the Atlantic World. This period (1492-present) is most notably characterized by the contact amongst Amer-Indian, African and European cultures. The analysis that follows is limited to two primary texts that is embedded in this historical setting of contact were pedagogy was often used by European colonialists to produce order between themselves and the “others” of the Atlantic World. <sup>9</sup> The first texts to be examined are excerpts from Charles Colcock Jones’ book, *The Religious Education of the Negro in the United States* published in 1842. <sup>10</sup> Second will be an examination of texts excerpted from Horace M. Bond’s text *The Education of the Negro in the American Social Order*, published originally in 1934. <sup>11</sup>

Jones’ text is a compilation of census records of colonial English Christian planters and correspondences with their Bishops and religious leaders. The following excerpt is taken from composed by Dr. Gibson, reported as the Bishop of London in 1727. The letter in its entirety is a motivational letter to the planter colonies urging them to take responsibility for the Christian education of their households as well as their slaves. In what follows Dr. Gibson refers specifically to the redeemed nature of the Christian and the potential of redemption for enslaved Negroes. He writes:

*...let me beseech you to consider yourselves not only as masters, but as Christian Masters who stand obliged by your profession to do all that your station and condition enable you to do towards breaking the power of Satan and enlarging the kingdom of Christ, and as having a great opportunity put into your hands of helping on this work, by the influence which God has given you over such a number of heathen idolaters [the enslaved,] who still continue under the dominion of Satan. In the next place let me beseech you to consider them not barely as slaves, and upon the same level with laboring beasts, but as men slaves and women-slaves who have the same frame and faculties with yourselves and have souls capable of being made eternally happy, and reason and understanding to receive instruction in order to it. If they came from abroad, let it not be said that they are as far from the knowledge of Christ in a Christian country as when they dwelt among pagan idolaters... Make*

*them sensible, by the general tenor of your behavior...that is to say, mild, gentle and merciful, and that as oft as you exercise vigor and severity it is wholly owing to their idleness or obstinacy. By these means you will open their hearts to instruction and prepare them to receive the truths of the Gospel.* <sup>12</sup>

The words of the Bishop reveal that the readers may have doubts concerning the qualitative anthropology of the slave. The apologetic tone suggested in the words, “let me beseech you” reveals the Bishop’s intent to convince the reader of the theological anthropology which places the slave and the enslaved “at the same level.” The Africans, despite their depraved state of heathenness, share with the English planters the capacity for reason, eternal happiness, and the ability to receive instruction. However, what lays hidden is the qualitative ontological difference between the planters as instructors and the enslaved that are utterly dependent on their masters and mistresses knowledge of the Gospels, not only for their moral development but for their salvation in the next life. From a theological anthropological lens, the African is objectified as the standard by which the quality of Christianity within the planter colonies was being measured. They were the objects by which the planters could actualize their Christian piety. The Bishop makes mention of this when he almost sarcastically remarks, “let it not be said that they are as far from the knowledge of Christ in a Christian country as when they dwelt among pagan idolaters...” What is more telling is the Bishop’s reference to children born in the Americas as optimal candidates for Christian instruction.

While the Bishop holds to a theological anthropology that holds out for the redemption of all human persons his depiction of the obstacles facing the Christian instruction of Negroes indicates that he sees the colonial planters as the possessors of the knowledge of the Gospels. On the other hand the enslaved, especially those born into slavery should be prepared to passively accept the religion of their oppressors. Christian conversion, the Bishop conceives, is accomplished by “preparing the heart” of the enslaved showing them the moral example of “good Christian life” which includes sobriety, temperance, and chastity. The rationale of the Bishop’s argument is that the example of the good Christian life will reveal the inherent goodness of the enslaver and thereby make the slave open to Christian instruction. The Bishop, like so many others reported in Jones’ project had not given any in-depth consideration to the moral consciousness of the enslaved as capable of deducing that there was nothing sober, temper, or chase about possessing human beings as chattel. Moreover, planters themselves were constantly aware, as the history of insurrections suggests, of the fact that the rationality of the slave was open to more than just Christian instruction but also to the destruction of the dehumanizing forces of enslavement.

The problem with the pedagogy and the performance of Christian instruction in that context was its foundation on the anthropological assumptions about the absolute knowledge of the planters and the absolute dependency of the enslaved on the planters, in order to know. This as J. Kameron Carter has recently argued resulted in an ambiguous theological foundation for black Christian religion.<sup>13</sup> In similar fashion, Willie James Jennings's work calls for a reimagining of Christian identity that allows Christians of different cultures to engage in cultural intimacy. Such a move Jennings argues is necessary to break what Christian moderns have imagined as the impenetrable interiority of race.<sup>14</sup> The "color line" as Du Bois predicted must be rigorously understood in order that it might be surpassed. What theologians of black Christian religion have usually done methodologically with their theological analysis of modernity, racialization and the Christian imagination would seem to be for nought if the teaching of their insights re-performs, via bad pedagogy, the colonizing logic, which dehumanizes and objectifies the subjects of education—teachers and students.

### Post-Reconstruction, the State, and the Politicization of Colonial Pedagogy

Horace Bond's text takes a look at religious instruction of Negroes across the Reconstruction and the post-Reconstruction era. The excerpt used here is taken from a speech given by Governor Vardaman, during his campaign for Governor in 1903.<sup>15</sup> According to Bond's commentary on the speech, Vardaman, who was primarily a voice of poor whites, used this speech to convince voters that the hard economic times of the post-Reconstruction era demanded a swing in support from the freed slaves to poor whites.<sup>15</sup> The gradual acceptance of discriminatory practices of redirecting state funding based on race entrenched itself in Jim Crowism and was made illegal in *Brown vs. The Board of Education* Supreme Court case. However, the point that is significant to this discussion is the collective theological imagination of the voting population that Governor Vardaman hinges his speech on. The speech reads:

*It was natural and quite reasonable, immediately after the civil war, especially by those who had made but a superficial study of the Negro, to expect that freedom, equal educational facilities and the example and precept of the white man would have the effect of improving his morals and make a better man of him generally. But it has not, I am sorry to say. As a race, he is deteriorating morally every day...Slavery is the only process by which he [the Negro] has ever been partially civilized. God Almighty created the Negro for a menial – he is essentially a servant.... When left to himself he has universally gone back to the barbarism of his native jungles. While a few mixed breeds and freaks of the race may possess qualities which justify them to aspire above that station,*

*the fact still remains that the race is fit for that and nothing more... The evidence is over whelming and the conclusion inevitable...Money spent today for the maintenance of public schools for negroes is robbery of the white man, and a waste upon the negro...you rob the white child of the advantages it would afford him, and you spend it upon the Negro in an effort to make of the Negro what God Almighty never intended should be made, and which men cannot accomplish.* <sup>17</sup>

Vardaman's speech, Bond argues, was characteristic of many of the sentiments of Southerners prior to the legalization of Jim Crowism in Southern States. The politicians banked on the racist ideology of the white masses, which reflected that blacks were not suitable for more than menial labor. Moreover, politicians like Vardaman buttressed their political rhetoric by also appealing to the collective theological imagination concerning the ontological inferiority of black bodies. Vardaman, a successful politician, would not have used the theologically bolstered argument concerning the "menial" nature of Negroes if he did not think it would be convincing to his constituency. This serves as some evidence of how the social and religious imagination carries with it the trace of ontological racial hierarchy. <sup>18</sup> As Bond makes clear in his commentary on the economic status of Southern public schools, the failure of the Reconstruction projects were often uncritically blamed on the natural moral inferiority of black Americans. Vardaman's speech is an example of the successful transfer of the colonial pedagogy that politicized the white supremacy that already had been previously engrained into the Christian Instruction pedagogies of enslavement.

The myth of the natural racial inferiority of blacks, Bond reports, was used to conceal the economic crisis of antebellum South who had not been able to organize alternative economic systems of acquiring capital. <sup>19</sup> As the Southern states realized that education of their citizens would be indispensable to the task of economic survival many states had to find creative ways stretch the tax dollars of their citizens. As Bond's extensive research shows, many Southern States were so economically poor that they were largely unable to formally educate the entirety of their white populations. Nevertheless, diversion of educational funds from black schools in predominately black counties to white schools in those same counties, was one of the ways the Southern States attempted to "save money" and uplift poor whites into a more active participation in the industrial economy. <sup>20</sup> This resulted in gross inequalities. For instance, from 1908-1909 Noxubee County MS reported a school age black population of 13,048 and a white school age population of 1,528. <sup>21</sup> Out of the 13,048 only 6,330 were enrolled in school compared to 1,022 of the white school age population. Moreover, the expenditure per capita for

white students was \$20.00 per student in comparison to the \$1.69 spent on each black student.<sup>22</sup> The underlying rationale regarding the diversion practices was to reverse the competitive advantage that black school age children would receive by virtue of being in the dominant population within the “Black Belt” counties.<sup>23</sup> The reversal occurred not simply by diverting funds to white students but by overspending. White students in Black Belt counties received up to 7 times as many dollars as students who were in predominately white counties.<sup>24</sup> These statistics reveal that the redistribution practices were not only detrimental to black students but to white students in predominately white counties as well.

On a daily basis black students were reminded by virtue of the state structure, that their schooling was of lesser value than their white counter parts. The generational effects of the Jim Crow era on the psyche of black Americans in the south can never be fully known but it can be said with certainty that public education opportunities of black Americans in Southern States have always lagged behind that of white Americans. For this reason, many black intellectuals have been adamant about producing theories of black education that resist the colonial pedagogies that dominated not only the administration of education but also the content of education. Carter G. Woodson’s, *Mis-Education of the Negro* and Du Bois’ essays, “Negro Education” and “The Negro College” give some insight into the effects of colonial pedagogy on black Americans. It is to these insights that I know turn.

### Resisting Colonial Pedagogy through Black Educational Theory

In his research of black public education, Du Bois affirms that the education of black Americans should not be a mere replication of the educational practices of the white institutions of his historical context. In his essay on the Negro College he wrote:

*...the American Negro problem is and must be the center of the Negro American University. It has got to be. You are teaching Negroes. There is no use pretending that you are teaching Chinese or that you are teaching white Americans or that you are teaching citizens of the World. You are teaching American Negroes in 1933, and they are the subjects of a caste system in the Republic of the United States of America...*<sup>25</sup>

With these words and throughout the rest of this and other writings Du Bois theorized a future for America that depended greatly upon how it was going to educate the vast population of black Americans who simply had very few options for survival without educational development.<sup>26</sup> This institution Du Bois intuited had to be primarily dedicated to understanding the historical, spiritual, sociological, and economic condi-

tions of Black Americans. Woodson, similar to Du Bois, was critical of the ways in which systems of philanthropy and “mis-education” robbed black communities of the ability to build substantive reserves of wealth which could be used to build autonomous social institutions founded on the theories and strivings of black peoples. In the *Mis-Education of the Negro*, Woodson comments on the deleterious effects of White supremacy on the education of black Americans (Negroes). This is particularly illustrated in his analysis of how “educated Negroes,”—black Americans trained in American institutions of higher learning, rarely were able to harness their training in order to galvanize successful racial uplift projects. Using black churches as an example Woodson argued that black Americans trained in theology often leave behind the religious congregations of their birth and make little effort to fortify these institutions with the knowledge they have gained from theological training. He laments the failure of the Negro Church to continue its growth with the help of educated persons when he writes:

*In the church...the Negro has had sufficient freedom to develop this institution [black Churches] in his own way; but he has failed to do so. His religion is merely a loan from the whites who have enslaved and segregated the Negroes; and the organization, though largely an independent Negro institution is dominated by the thought of the oppressors of the race. The “educated” Negro minister is so trained as to drift away from the masses and the illiterate preachers into whose hands the people inevitably fall are unable to develop a doctrine and procedure of their own.* <sup>27</sup>

The inevitable phenomenon that sprawls out of this for Woodson is the ubiquitous presence of black store front churches in major cities such as Washington D.C. The flight of “the talented tenth”<sup>28</sup> or what E. Franklin Frazier would later pejoratively identify as the “Black Bourgeoisie” created a crisis in the education of black Americans that one could argue is still present in the contemporary setting. As black Americans became college educated they began to separate themselves from the masses of un-educated black persons. Woodson’s argument is that the education of black Americans often leads them to conclude that they too, like their white educated counter parts, must separate themselves from the “backward” ways of “uneducated” blacks.<sup>30</sup> Woodson labels this phenomenon as a component in the “mis-education” of black Americans. Alternatively, Woodson’s theory of education suggests that educated blacks should work cooperatively to build sustainable institutions from which stores of autonomous wealth could be created for the economic uplift of black communities.

Woodson contended that in order for black Americans to advance, the so called “educated” amongst them needed to be *re-educated* about

the plight of everyday black-Americans. Woodson, like Du Bois, was unsatisfied with the forms of education that educated blacks away from their people rather than back towards them. In addition to this, Woodson called for the unification of the many black Christian denominational churches such that they could pool resources to build universities of their own. He argued that the education of black Americans should lead them to serve the lowly rather than programs aimed at allowing black Americans to live as “aristocrats.”<sup>31</sup> Fundamental to Woodson’s educational model would be a shift from a colonial pedagogy to a pedagogy that allowed black Americans to be subjects within the educational project. This included learning about the history, literature, and cultures of Africa as well as the cultures of enslaved blacks. Woodson’s black educational theory can be described as a humanizing pedagogy which re-educated blacks about their personhood in ways that resituated them as subjects rather objects of history. It was only after this heightened awareness of their own humanity Woodson thought black Americans could begin a true process of integration. While both Woodson and Du Bois’ theories were sound, neither of them came to full fruition in a comprehensive institutional form. Much ink has been spilled on the historical events surrounding the application of Du Bois’ and Woodson’s model for the education of black Americans. However, what is important for this discussion is how these two thinkers made use of theory in order to decenter Eurocentric knowledge as the goal for black intellectual development. This I will argue is a theoretical insight that has far reaching theological implications.

### **Engaged Pedagogy as a Performative Act of Decolonizing Colonial Anthropology**

As stated earlier I want to consider colonial pedagogy as a theological problem that is embedded in the historical contact of the cultures included in the emergence of the Atlantic World. The narratives above give some content to the historical nature of colonial pedagogy as it related specifically to the North American reality of enslavement and anti-black racism. In what follows I want to argue that colonial pedagogy presents a theological problem in so far as it disrupts a fundamental theological anthropological imperative of openness to God.<sup>32</sup> This is resultant when instructors and teachers are interpreted as absolute or ontologically superior sources of knowledge. This colonial relationship between students and teachers is partially implicated in the ambiguous matrix of reactionary responses to white knowledge and religion which range from an uncritical skepticism to passive assimilation into Anglo-American and European epistemology and religiosity. The hermeneutical lens of pedagogy offers yet another way to attempt to traverse this matrix.

## Decolonizing Pedagogy through Practice

In a recent article, on the difficulties of implementing critical pedagogical and engaged pedagogical methods, Monica A. Coleman, a process womanist theologian, argued that her students, who were predominately black, female and Christian, were unable to think of themselves or other African Americans as disadvantaged in comparison to their white counterparts.<sup>33</sup> Coleman expressed her unpreparedness to deal with her student's resistance to her postmodern pedagogical techniques, which included things like posing problems and questions.<sup>34</sup> Coleman hypothesized, after several conversations with her students that the likely problem was the uncritical ways that they had been trained in their Churches which were centered on ministries of self-help and financial prosperity.<sup>35</sup> Pointing to research on the prosperity gospel movement, which extends from reconstruction to the present, Coleman contended, that her students were caught in what contemporary black religion scholars have interpreted as a new trend in black religiosity. This growing trend is characterized by a focus on economic well being rather than the prophetic character of "the black church" commonly discussed by black theologians.<sup>36</sup> Coleman highlights that her students were *deeply faithful* to this new black religiosity, which made them resistant to asking questions or engaging questions that challenged their faith.

Coleman's narrative reveals that the teaching of theology, even in its most decolonial forms, can easily make an idol of its own problematization of the historical reality. In terms of Freirian critical pedagogy the problem is the power differential between teachers and pupils that sees the teacher as the absolute possessor of knowledge and the student as the passive dependent recipient. Education in this configuration amounts to the student becoming an object or an unconscious receptacle of the teacher's knowledge.<sup>38</sup> Freire refers to this phenomenon as the "banking model of education" and labels it as one of the principal tools of oppressing disenfranchised classes.<sup>39</sup> In Coleman's context, which is drastically different from Freire's context of grassroots revolution, her students are conditioned and rewarded for being noble participants in the banking model of education. Complete reliance on the critical pedagogical method inhibited her ability to teach towards a goal of transformation. Given her situation she intuited that some use of "banking methods" would be necessary in order to achieve the goal of critical pedagogy in which both teachers and students are subjects in the education process. Had she continued on her predetermined path, Coleman would have likely re-performed the very "colonizing" that her method set out to critique. Her students would have been reduced to blank objects on which she could "bank" her teaching agenda.

## This is not a simple question of teaching but a question regarding theological praxis

If theology is in part, as Gustavo Gutiérrez suggests a “critical reflection on historical praxis,” then it seems to follow that the performance of teaching theology is also a site of evaluating praxis.<sup>40</sup> As suggested in the narrative articulated at the start of this reflection, the performance of pedagogy provides an opportunity to put into practice ones theological anthropology. Nevertheless, Coleman’s example articulates the conflict that occurs when students trained by “banking models” which carry the dehumanizing colonial anthropology enter into spaces where they are expected to perform in more holistic subjects. James Noel’s work, *Black Religion and the Imagination of Matter in the Atlantic World*, provides a theological mediation on this contact between the colonial and decolonial forms of anthropology that arise in the Atlantic World.<sup>41</sup>

In an essay entitled “African American Religious Consciousness,” Noel uses the insights from Saint John of the Cross’s *Dark Night of the Soul* and the *Cloud of Unknowing* as analogies for mediating a theological interpretation of the Middle Passage.<sup>42</sup> Being careful not to equate the context of Christian mysticism with the violent terror of the Middle Passage, Noel uses the signification of the *voluntary silence* in these two Christian Mystic works to draw an analogy to the *coercive enforced silence* of chattel slavery.<sup>43</sup> Noel contends that Black Theology has all too often, with its focus on “speech acts” and “political acts” over looked the silence to which black speech points.<sup>44</sup> Noel articulates the analogy between the mystics and the silence in black religious experience when he writes:

*In the black religious experience, we are not dealing with the voluntary assumption of religious exercises. We are quite the contrary dealing with a mode of oppression that has meant anything but religious. This mode was designed to turn human beings into commodities. In other words, they were to be transformed into things. This is equivalent to the complete loss of being. This is equivalent to entering the state of Non-Being...There is a poverty of images in Protestant [black Protestant] discourse to signify the involuntary movement into and out of this state other than the symbolism of death and resurrection...<sup>45</sup>*

Noel contends that the process of unknowing and the darkness imaged in the “dark night of the soul” are representative of a longing for unity with God. Union with God requires the purging and emptying of the soul, which plunges the mystic deeper into darkness. The darkness is miserable because it tears the mystic away from their sense and desire for their current state of being. The practice of emptying the soul of its worldly desires produces a longing for the complete annihilation of the

soul.<sup>46</sup> Noel tries to strike an analogy between the longing for annihilation and enforced annihilation of the humanity of Africans who during the Middle Passage descended into “Non-Being” or “Nothingness.”<sup>47</sup> “Non-Being” signifies descent into enslavement, the commodification of the body, and displacement from the geographical sources of being and a number of other processes. From this perspective, Noel contends that the “primal mood” in black consciousness and black religion is “Nothingness.” Nothingness and its ineffability are carried in the visual imagery of the “cloud” and “darkness” for the mystics and audibly in the “moan” which is engrained in black worship, singing and culture.<sup>48</sup> In his analysis of the moan, Noel writes:

*Meaning had to be spoken through something more primal than the particularity of language... The moan became the first vocalization of a new spiritual vocabulary... The Divine was invoked and acknowledged in the moan.*<sup>49</sup>

Because of this, Noel argues that “Pneumatology preceded Christology in the religious history of African Americans.” The moan from Noel’s perspective is the ineffable tonal symbol system used to communicate the slave’s intuition of the Divine, which would later be associated with the God of the Exodus Narrative and eventually the God of Jesus.<sup>50</sup> To be clear, Noel’s theory is but one way of articulating the black religious experience. Long’s use of *opacity*<sup>51</sup> and Delores Williams use of *wilderness*<sup>52</sup> are representative of other ways of signifying the religious experiences of black Americans.

These theories signify via silence, wilderness, non-being, nothingness and opacity, a radical openness and longing for an unmediated experience of God. Signifying this longing is a radical act of insurgency to the colonial pedagogical systems, which relegated the enslaved to the category of *beathen*. As seen in Gibson’s letter and Vardaman’s speech the enslaved were interpreted by their colonial masters as completely dependent on the symbol systems of the Anglo-American for actualizing their humanity as well as their theological imagination. The theories of Du Bois and Woodson, suggest an-other anthropology. Both of their theories suggest that, by *returning* to their history, black Americans could recover insights that were unintelligible to those whose imagination was restricted to the colonial interpretation of black humanity. Noel’s theological mediation on the *moan* reflects this “return to history.” Such a return is hinged upon Noel’s radical openness to the humanity of the black historical subject as authors of their own history that often speak through cultural expressions such as *moans* and *shouts*.<sup>53</sup> Noel’s interpretation of the religious consciousness of black subjects performatively recovers the black subalterns as subjects that are open rather than given. The black

subaltern subjects of history are viewed as commodified humans rather than commodities, enslaved humans rather than slaves, signifiers of religion rather than the signified.

I interpret Noel's religious historical work as a decolonial practice of humanizing black bodies of history such that they can be read as subjects in history rather than as mere things. Similarly, the performance of teaching and the content of teaching must not only humanize contemporary subjects—teachers and students—but also the human subjects of history that are implicated in how teachers and students imagine their present humanity. The performance of pedagogy is also an opportunity to retell and construct a different history. This opportunity however cannot be met lightly in our current context. Monica A. Coleman's reflection on transforming pedagogy highlights that students, who are anxious about their post-graduate employability, interpret educators and subject matter in utilitarian type ways that are hard to deconstruct. As Coleman's model suggests, students resist critical pedagogy methods of problem posing because responding to problems requires critical engagement rather than passive digestion and regurgitation of information. Moreover, teachers are constantly faced with the fact that students see their course, especially courses in the humanities, as mere stepping-stones on their way to the next step in their academic career.

The hermeneutical lens of pedagogy allows for a particular vantage point in assessing and interrogating the phenomenon that is the commodification of education. When students see the entirety of education through the lens of increasing their social status they reduce the subjects of education into mere things to be conquered for the sake of a greater goal of landing their dream job. In this scenario, the black subaltern historical subjects that may be introduced by teaching transgressive subject matter, such as James Noel's book in a course in religious studies are continually commodified, albeit posthumously. This re-commodification is often reflected in student apathy about learning what seems to be extraneous information about the past and the reactionary apathy of some educators who nihilistically proclaim that, "Students do not want to learn."

The performance of teaching can be seen as a mechanism of resistance as well as a constructive space that can traverse the impasse between teachers and students in the contemporary setting in North America. Similar to Noel's retelling of history, teaching requires an insurrectional break with the normative view that reduces the act of teaching to an economic transaction between producers and consumers. A decolonizing pedagogy resists, deconstructs, and points towards possibilities for delinking from the stranglehold of the global market economy. As

Du Bois argued in his call for a Negro College, education primarily takes only two persons; teachers and students. When this relationship, again understood anthropologically as openness, is at the center of the practice of education then there is an opportunity to resist the replication of coloniality that is not only reflected in the content of education, but within the delivery of education. Simply “banking” transgressive topics is not enough. What good does it do to have de-colonizing theological views of the person if we teach them in colonizing ways? Similar to the relationship Noel strikes between himself, a contemporary subject, and the African captives who moan from the belly of the ship. Teaching must also allow us to hear the *moans* of intellectuals (students and teachers) held captive by the totalizing effects of the coloniality of power. Like the slaves in the ship, students and teachers especially amongst the subalterns of modernity, require pedagogy’s that evoke, what Eurocentric moderns have written off as *exotic* or *heathen*, to be the basis for humanizing performances of teaching. Bell hooks’ engaged pedagogy is one such attempt at teaching from the ineffable sources of those who as Walter Mignolo contends speak from the *colonial difference*.<sup>54</sup>

### Towards a Decolonial Pedagogy of Mutual Openness

In her text, *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks describes her engaged pedagogy as a mutual process of self-actualization between students and teachers.<sup>55</sup> Drawing on Thich Nhat Han’s engaged Buddhism and revising Paulo Freire’s *conscientização*, hooks argues for an engaged pedagogy, which emphasizes the self-actualization of the teacher and the promotion of their own well-being.<sup>56</sup> This is the basic state that allows teachers to empower their students. Thich Nhat Han argued that the “helping professional should be directed toward his or herself first...if the helper is unhappy he or she cannot help many people.” While hooks does not go extensively into the Buddhist concept of happiness especially as it is related to Thich Nhat Han’s interpretation of Buddhist philosophy, it should be noted that happiness here is not the typical western notion associated with emotions. It is however more akin to what hooks describes as well being. The state that results when one is able to actualize their best articulation of themselves.

In harmony with Thich Nhat Han, hooks laments the fact that institutions of higher learning rarely see teachers as healers or as having a responsibility to be self-actualized. Hooks critiques what she experienced as an inability or lack of focus in universities on the idea of “the intellectual as someone who sought to be whole.”<sup>57</sup> In addition, she highlights the “objectification of teachers within bourgeois educational structures”<sup>58</sup> and the ways that they were forced to embody the mind

body split. This split is akin to what has been aforementioned in the process of Christianizing the enslaved with the expectation that they only see freedom as an ideal that could be embodied in the next life. Commenting on this objectification she writes, “The only important aspect of our identity [of academics or teachers] was whether or not our minds functioned whether we were able to do our jobs in the classroom.”<sup>59</sup> Read in conjunction with Quijano’s coloniality of power and the narratives above, teachers in the bourgeois centers of knowledge are also not totally free. They are seen, similar to the enslaved, as working objects, mere things rather than embodied knowers.

Hooks’ engaged pedagogy is purposefully focused on the embodied nature of teachers and students that resists the mind/body duality that she finds is overwhelmingly understood as given in western centers of knowledge. Performing hooks’ engaged pedagogy and decentering the pedagogical assumptions of Euro-centrism about learners and teachers is no easy task. Commenting on this difficulty in the setting of teaching *Africana Philosophy*, George Yancy writes, “Shifting the locus of representation without changing the ways in which students engage ideas only reinscribes unexamined normative assumptions and reinforces intellectual rigidity.” Commenting further on this difficulty in the context of teaching *Africana Philosophy*, Yancey argues that teaching *Africana* thought requires more than simply replacing Anglo-American and European thinkers with black thinkers. Instead, he contends that the teaching of *Africana Philosophy* should guide students in their comprehension of how black thinkers interrogate the racial, ethical, and sociopolitical assumptions in Anglo-American and European thought.

With hooks in mind, my proposal for a decolonizing theological pedagogy is a call for a performance of educating that reflects a basic theological anthropology of openness to God. As hooks intimates in the closing of her book openness to the human can be imagined when teaching is seen not only as an act of freedom but also an act of erotic love.<sup>61</sup> Theologically considered, teaching and educating from this perspective is about a collaborative process that recognizes that human beings are actualize their openness to God by responding to God’s creation as unfinished. Hook’s engaged pedagogy, when performed, is a decolonial performance that calls into question and interrogates the normative assumptions about what teachers and student should be and what they should become. Alternatively, decolonial pedagogy recognizes that both teachers and students are radically open self-actualizing entities on their way to wholeness rather than the ends of tenure or employment. Teaching theology with the insights of engaged pedagogy offer us not only an opportunity to teach progressive theological anthropologies that leave open the mystery of the relationship between humanity and God,

but they also require us to perform this openness in the way that teachers engage learners and the way that learners engage teachers. Black educational theory, decolonial theory, and decolonial theological projects are articulations that suggest not only the need for a change of content but a need for a new vocabulary of teaching, one that can carry the *silence* of the embodied intellectuals that moan their teaching. Given this reality, more theological work needs to be done on how Christian education and the teaching of theology are representations of unspoken theological anthropologies. It is my hope that this brief reflection has been a step in that direction.

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## Notes:

- <sup>1</sup> Charles H. Long, "Indigenous People, Materialities, and Religion: Outline for a New Orientation to Religious Meaning," in *Religion and Global Culture: New Terrain in the Study of Religion and the Work of Charles H. Long* ed. Jennifer I. M. Reid (New York: Lexington Books, 2003), 117.
- <sup>2</sup> Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," in *Latin America Otherwise*, ed. Mabel Moraña, Enrique D. Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).
- <sup>3</sup> Mabel Moraña, Enrique D. Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui, *Coloniality at Large : Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, Latin America Otherwise (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). See also. Walter Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs : Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).
- <sup>4</sup> Charles Colcock Jones, *The Religious Instruction of the Negroes in the United States* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 23-25.
- <sup>5</sup> Horace Mann Bond, *The Education of the Negro in the American Social Order* (New York: Octagon Books, 1966), 101-115.

- 6 W. E. B. Du Bois and Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Writings*, The Library of America (New York, N.Y.: Literary Classics of the United States : Distributed to the trade in the U.S. and Canada by Viking Press, 1986).1010-1019 Carter Godwin Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (African World Press, 1990).
- 7 W. E. B. Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover 1994), 9.
- 8 James A. Noel, *Black Religion and the Imagination of Matter in the Atlantic World*, 1st ed., *Black Religion/Womanist Thought/Social Justice* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 15-36.
- 9 Charles H. Long, *Significations : Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion*, Series in Philosophical and Cultural Studies in Religion (Aurora, Colo.: Davies Group, 1999); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic : Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 1-40. Noel, *Black Religion and the Imagination of Matter in the Atlantic World*, 15-36.
- 10 Jones, *The Religious Instruction of the Negroes in the United States*, 23-25.
- 11 Bond, *The Education of the Negro in the American Social Order*, 101-115.
- 12 Jones, *The Religious Instruction of the Negroes in the United States*, 23-25.
- 13 J. Kameron Carter, *Race : A Theological Account* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). Here Carter analyses the historicizing, theologizing, and signifying of race in the works of Raboteau, Cone, and Long(respectively). His work argues that the union of the modern colonial racial imaginary and the Christian imaginary has come to “a point of crisis” and requires a new Christian theological discourse. In particular, he sees the cultural theology of black theologians as trapped within the ambiguities of race that emerge in the modern world. From this perspective he contends that we need a new Christian discourse that does not allow culture seen through the lens of race to reproduce replications of supersessionism. The reasoning employed by Carter is akin to what I am arguing here in terms of pedagogy being an opportunity to put into decolonial anthropologies into practice.
- 14 W.J. Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (Yale University Press, 2010), 291-294.
- 15 Bond, *The Education of the Negro in the American Social Order*, 101-105.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 99-101.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 101-103.
- 18 For more on the theological beginnings of racialization see Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race*. See also Long, *Significations : Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion*.
- 19 Bond, *The Education of the Negro in the American Social Order*. For post-reconstruction era trends see pages 103-115, 152-171. Here Bond shows how the advancements in the industry and the education of white caused increases in expenditures and state distributions for teacher salaries and the cost of education per capita. Bond highlights the exponential growth in these distributions in comparison to the already gross inequalities suffered by the black school aged population.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 96-101.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 103-105.
- 22 *Ibid.*

- 23 Ibid., 115.
- 24 Ibid., 95-96.
- 25 W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Negro College " in *Writings*, ed. Nathan Huggins (New York: Literary Classics, 1986), 101.
- 26 W. E. B. Du Bois, "Negro Education," ed. Nathan Huggins (New York: Literary Classics, 1986). For a more complete commentary on Du Bois educational theory see: W. E. B. Du Bois and Eugene F. Provenzo, *Du Bois on Education* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).
- 27 Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, 57-58.
- 28 Ibid.p. 54 Term is usually attributed to Du Bois. He used it to denote the small black intellectual vanguard that he thought would be the catalyst for racial uplift. See W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Talented Tenth," in *The Negro Problem: A Series of Articles by Representative American Negroes of Today* (New York: James Pott & Company, 1903).
- 29 Edward Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie*, Collier Books, (New York,: Collier Books, 1962).
- 30 Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, 56-57.
- 31 Ibid., 149.
- 32 My focus on "openness to God" this is not exclusive of openness to other religious or cultural ways of seeing the human as unfinished in counter distinction from the colonial social structures which reinforced the imagination of the human person as ontologically and existentially given.
- 33 The reader should note that Coleman's sentiments about her relationship with her students is not being used to universalize her problem but to offer a way into a critical discourse on the theological significance of pedagogy.
- 34 Monica A. Coleman, "Transforming to Teach: Teaching the Black College Student," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 10, no. 2 (2007), 97.
- 35 Ibid., 97-98.
- 36 Ibid., 98-99.
- 37 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New rev. 20th-Anniversary ed. (New York: Continuum, 1993).72-74
- 38 Ibid., 76.
- 39 Ibid., 72.
- 40 Gustavo Gutiérrez, Caridad Inda, and John Eagleson, *A Theology of Liberation : History, Politics, and Salvation*, Rev. ed., *Scm Classics* (London: SCM, 2001).
- 41 J.A. Noel, *Black Religion and the Imagination of Matter in the Atlantic World* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
- 42 Ibid., 68-75.
- 43 Ibid., 70.
- 44 Ibid., 69.
- 45 Ibid., 70.

- <sup>46</sup> Ibid., 72.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid., 73.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid., 74-75. See also pages 151-153 where Noel describes the moan as the primal mood and the ineffable vocabulary of black religious consciousness.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid., 152.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>51</sup> Long, *Significations : Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion*.p.117-118,121-122
- <sup>52</sup> Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness : The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993).
- <sup>53</sup> Noel, *Black Religion and the Imagination of Matter in the Atlantic World*, 117-118.
- <sup>54</sup> Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs : Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, 276. Here, Mignolo argues that scholars social scientists and humanist are “being invited to look for models and genealogies beyond the colonial languages of the modern period and their authoritative foundations...” This among other things constitutes the colonial difference or other loci of announcing. Noel’s moan is an example of this decolonial genealogical work and hooks engaged body are in harmony with what Mignolo sees as the colonial difference.
- <sup>55</sup> bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress : Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York ; London: Routledge, 1994), 15.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid.,14.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid., 16.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>60</sup> Yancy, George “Engaging Whiteness and the Practice of Freedom: The Creation of Subversive Academic Spaces,” in *Critical Perspectives on bell hooks*, ed. Maria del Guadalupe Davidson and George Yancy. (New York:, Routledge, 2009),p.51.
- <sup>61</sup> Hooks, *Ibid.*, 191-194.







# Palestinian Theology of Reconciliation

## A Cry of Hope in the Absence of All Hope

Michel Elias ANDRAOS

### Introduction

Palestinians are often depicted in the West as violent people and one rarely hears about their cry for peace and reconciliation. It is also rare to hear in theological for about the endeavor of Palestinian Christians and their theology of reconciliation that has been emerging out of their long struggle. In the Western Christian context in general, the post Holocaust complex relationship between Western Christians and the Jewish people left no space for hearing the theological voices of Palestinian Christians. These voices had to be silenced or ignored.

The Palestinian people living under occupation by the State of Israel have been systemically denied their fundamental human rights and oppressed for more than six decades, caught in one of the most complex and prolonged conflicts in the world today. Their *Nakba* (Catastrophe) that began in 1948, which many Palestinian and Israeli writers also refer to as the beginning of an ethnic cleansing, has been an ongoing experience of systemic oppression, humiliation and domination. <sup>1</sup> In this context, Palestinian Christians have been developing a contextual theology of reconciliation and liberation that deals with key themes of Christian faith and theology such as forgiveness and the love of enemy in the particular context of occupation. Many Palestinian church leaders, theologians and religious movements participate in the development of this theology as they struggle to deal with their painful reality of occupation and suffering. The main purpose of this contextual theology, these theologians note, is to sustain the survival of their communities living under occupation who have to deal with resentment, anger, hatred, and frustration on daily basis. In addition, Palestinian theologians contend that a contextual theology

of reconciliation, which includes nurturing a spirituality and practice, generates a moral force that strengthens their people's hope and will to resist the multiple forms of systemic violence they experience in daily life. These theologians have been tackling this topic for a number of years and have articulated their theology in many publications, some of which will be discussed below. <sup>2</sup> In 2009, an ecumenical group of church leaders and activists participated in writing the document "A Moment of Truth: A word of Faith, Hope and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering," known as *Kairos Palestine*,<sup>3</sup> that outlines, among other things, their vision for reconciliation in view of a life in freedom for all the peoples involved in the conflict. This document, according to its authors, is the product of several years of theological reflection and prayerful deliberations. In the introduction, the authors note that "We, a group of Christian Palestinians, after prayer, reflection and an exchange of opinion, cry out from within the suffering in our country, under the Israeli occupation, with a cry of hope in the absence of all hope, ...." <sup>4</sup> The foundation of this theological, concrete and historical hope, in the absence of all hope, and the vision for reconciliation articulated in the *Kairos* document will be discussed below.

This article is not about the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and it does not attempt to present a "balanced" perspective on that conflict. The article is mainly about pointing to an emerging contextual Palestinian Christian theology of reconciliation that has been silenced. From the perspective of its authors, this theology contributes to bringing justice to the Palestinian people and to promoting peace and reconciliation in the Middle East. It is a form of transgressive theology that breaks through the dominant theological construct that Jewish theologian Marc Ellis calls "the interfaith ecumenical deal." By this Ellis means

*the interfaith ecumenical dialogue, the post-Holocaust place where Jews and Christians have mended their relationship. Israel was huge in this dialogue. Christians supported Israel as repentance for anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. Then as Israel became more controversial with their abuse of Palestinians, Christians remained silent. Non-support and, worse, criticism of Israeli policies, was seen by the Jewish dialoguers as backtracking to anti-Semitism. That's where the dialogue became a deal: Silence on the Christian side brings no criticism of anti-Semitism from the Jewish side.* <sup>5</sup>

The works by Palestinian liberation theologians cover many areas of research, e.g. historical background to the conflict, biblical hermeneutics, analysis of Zionist ideology, Christian Zionism, etc. I choose to focus on the theology of reconciliation because I believe it has been a central-if not the central-axis of Palestinian theology, which has not

been given enough attention. The connection between liberation and reconciliation in this theological movement is, in my opinion, one of its main characteristics. The same applies to the *Kairos* document, as I will demonstrate below. Palestinian Christians are not leading this movement in a political vacuum. They are part of a broader struggle that includes Jewish, Muslim, Christian and non-religious groups, both Palestinian and Israelis. This article highlights the specific contribution of a particular movement among Palestinian Christians.

## Palestinian Liberation Theology and Reconciliation

Palestinian theologians' main focus has been the analysis of and theological reflection on the injustice that their people have been enduring for more than six decades. Their theology is primarily a cry for justice. Many other liberation theologies emerged around the world over the past few decades as a result of theological reflection on injustice and on the praxis for social transformation from a faith perspective. In Latin America, the focus of liberation theologies has been primarily on the violence of poverty, exclusion and marginalization of the poor, and the analysis of economic and sociopolitical structures that cause poverty. These theologies have advocated for an option for the poor as a way for transforming social inequalities and establishing social justice. Other liberation theologies, such as among the Black and Latino/a communities in the U.S., have been focusing on the analysis of racism and the call for racial justice and equality, which also include economic inclusion. Native American theologians in North America have been focusing their analysis on the violence of colonialism, the loss of their land and the cultural oppression of their peoples. They demand land rights, autonomy, and restitution for the destructions of their cultures and ways of life. For Palestinian theologians, the focus of their theology has primarily been the analysis of the historical injustice that has been done to their people since the *Nakba* (1948). They demand an end to the occupation of their land and basic human rights according to international law for their people to live in peace and dignity. Palestinian theological writings have consistently focused on an analysis of their history and experience of injustice since the middle of the twentieth century. They offer an analysis on how their voice and narrative have been silenced, and the telling of the truth about their story stymied and manipulated. In the opinion of these theologians, the failure of the international community and world organizations to do them justice at all levels, and the ongoing humiliation as the result of living under occupation have created a situation in which people feel deep anger and resentment, and a systemic destruction that many call ethnic cleansing and apartheid. Justice and telling the truth about their situation under occupation, they claim, is their minimal demand as a first step on the

road toward reconciliation. A main focus of several Palestinian theological writings has been to develop a theology of nonviolence that could help prevent accumulated anger, frustration and resentment, resulting from the ongoing systemic humiliation and denial of basic human rights and dignity, from destroying the morale of their people. Another main challenge this theology has also been facing is how to interpret the central Christian command to love one's enemy and work for peace and reconciliation in such a context of systemic violence.

A number of Palestinian theologians have addressed these questions. In this section, I will particularly focus on the work of Naim Ateek, as one example, and try to give a summary of his theology on the questions raised above. The two foci of his theology, liberation and reconciliation, are reflected in the titles of his main works: *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (1989), written shortly after the first *Intifada*, and *A Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation*, published almost twenty years later. These two books tell the story of the journey of this theology to which many movements and other theologians have contributed. This theology is not the creation or invention of the writer. In his latter book, Ateek notes that since the early 1990s "we were and continue to be on a journey charting the way for justice, peace and reconciliation (in that order)." <sup>6</sup> Several centers for theological reflection in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and other cities of Palestine and Israel, and many international partners in solidarity with them, have been instrumental in supporting the development of this theological movement. Sabeel, the ecumenical Palestinian liberation theology center in East Jerusalem, founded in 1990, and the Diyar Consortium in Bethlehem, which began under a different name also in the mid 1990s, are only two examples. <sup>7</sup>

In *Justice and Only Justice*, Ateek points out that the purpose of doing a Palestinian theology of liberation is to help Palestinian Christians "come to terms with the most excruciating issues of the Israel-Palestine conflict. It is a proposal that will offer hope..." <sup>8</sup> This hope, according to Ateek, is founded on the premise that peace is possible. Based on an analysis of the Jewish and Christian prophetic tradition, the first step toward achieving that peace and reconciliation, argues Ateek, is to demand and work for justice. He writes,

*Peace is knocking at our door, but the door has not been opened. The door of peace is reached only through the door of justice. ... Where peace is, a meal is prepared; it is the feast of reconciliation ready to be celebrated. There is, however, no entrance except through the door of justice.* <sup>9</sup>

This theology offers Palestinian Christians an alternative vision to the reality of hatred and resentment in which they live, and a nonviolent

way for resisting their enemy, the occupier. Ateek's theological reflections on the Christian commandment "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you," offers profound insights for understanding the significance of this teaching of Jesus in a situation of injustice and violence. Ateek's reflection is not abstract but rather contextual and concrete in a real situation of oppression and hatred. What other options do occupied and oppressed people have for dealing with a powerful occupying state? Hate and resentment can only lead to destructive violence; nonviolent struggle and resistance nurtured by hope and love open the possibility for change. Transforming the relationship to the enemy from hate and resentment to hope for their transformation, generates a spiritual force that sustains the just and nonviolent struggle of the oppressed to resist until the transformation of the situation and the enemy take place. In this context, the Christian teaching about loving the enemy, embedded in a practice of nonviolence becomes a practical theology that produces social and personal transformation and provides a way out from a vicious cycle of violence towards building peace and reconciliation. The vicious cycle of violence is destructive of both the occupied and the occupier, the victim and the victimizer, in this case of both the Israelis and the Palestinians. There is a profound human wisdom and spiritual power in this teaching that opens alternative possibilities for reconciliation in a situation that in many ways has reached a dead end. Palestinian liberation theological writings in general have promoted this vision and spiritual practice. These writings, which are a reflection on the praxis of struggle of many Palestinian Christian communities and movements, also inform their political public discourse and advocacy work. Ateek affirms that "so often it is those who have suffered most at the hands of others who are capable of offering forgiveness and love."<sup>10</sup> This statement reveals the mystery of the power of forgiveness and its potential for spiritual and social transformation. Following this statement, however, the author also affirms that

*To keep struggling against hate and to practice forgiveness need not mean abdicating one's rights or renouncing injustice. ... What is unjust is unjust. And Palestinian Christians should stand on these principles and insist that justice must be done. They should never give up their rights, but neither should they give in to hate.*<sup>11</sup>

For Ateek, sustaining such a commitment to transform unjust and violent situation, and to bring about reconciliation, includes a three-fold challenge: 1) it is a constant daily struggle against hate and resentment; 2) one needs to always keep in mind that the struggle is long term; and, 3) there will be ups and downs along the road through which one has to persevere, be steadfast and not lose sight of faith in the power of God in

this process.<sup>12</sup> These steps are constitutive elements of a practical theology of resistance and reconciliation in the Palestinian context.

The final chapter of *A Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation* offers a comprehensive summary of the journey toward reconciliation of the Palestinian Christian movements and communities represented in the book. According to Ateek, "This book is a plea for the use of nonviolence in conflict resolution," given the chronic injustice and the absence of a power that can deal justly with this conflict. The author makes reference in this chapter to what he calls the "giants of peace" that have preceded us: Martin Luther King Jr., Bishop Desmond Tutu, who has been very active in supporting Sabeel's work, and Mohandas Gandhi, who, Ateek notes, served as an inspiration to both Tutu and King.<sup>13</sup> *Cry for Reconciliation* speaks about the clear commitment to nonviolence of many Palestinian Christian communities and roots this in the long tradition of nonviolent struggles as well as in the message of the Christian gospel. In her book *Occupied with Nonviolence: A Palestinian Woman Speaks*, Palestinian Christian peace activist and church leader Jean Zaru, who has consciously made a commitment to nonviolent struggle, notes that "Rather than resorting to desperate forms of violence, I am convinced that active nonviolence is still the only path to resist the occupation and the structures of domination."<sup>14</sup> Zaru affirms that, although in the Palestinian context today this choice is not easy to sustain, many have embraced it. She writes,

*Today, Palestinians find themselves embedded in structures that neglect and discard their humanity and human rights, and only acts of resistance can transform these structures. And I, along with many others, have opted for the path of active nonviolent resistance. To resist is to be human and yet nonviolent resistance is not easy. It requires constant, hard work.*<sup>15</sup>

Like Ateek, Zaru also affirms, based on her experience, "that too often the will and the strength to end the oppression and violence comes from those who bear the oppression and violence in their own lives and very rarely from privileged and powerful persons and nations."<sup>16</sup>

Ateek's book concludes with clarifying and repeating the steps of the process that has become rooted in a tradition of nonviolent resistance: analyze the roots of the conflict; demand an end to the occupation; and, the application of justice according to international law. After justice comes peace, which then can begin the healing process toward reconciliation and forgiveness, he argues. Ateek also strongly believes, along with several other Palestinian theologians and activists, "that many Palestinians, though now experiencing the oppressive measures of Israeli occupation, will live in peace, accept to be reconciled, and even offer forgiveness."<sup>17</sup>

## Reconciliation and the *Kairos Palestine* Movement

The *Kairos Palestine* document, collectively written by a group of Palestinian activists and church leaders, among them Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Greek Orthodox bishops, was made public at a press conference in Bethlehem on December 11, 2009. *Kairos Palestine* proposes a somewhat similar theology to the one outlined above. The document is the result of a broad consultation based on the praxis of reconciliation rooted in the real experience and daily life of Palestinian Christian communities and movements. This brief document (only 12 pages) is foregrounded in a clear theological vision, and is broad in its analysis and scope. It does not repeat the whole history of the *Nakba*, but it clearly outlines in the first section the harsh reality of daily life under occupation for the Palestinians, such as:

*The separation wall erected on Palestinian territory, a large part of which has been confiscated for this purpose, has turned our towns and villages into prisons, separating them from one another, making them dispersed and divided cantons. ... Israeli settlements ravage our land in the name of God and in the name of force, controlling our natural resources, including water and agricultural land, .... Reality is the daily humiliation to which we are subjected at the military checkpoints, as we make our way to jobs, schools or hospitals, .... Reality is the separation between members of the same family, making family life impossible for thousands of Palestinians. ... The thousands of prisoners languishing in Israeli prisons are part of our reality.*

The document outlines the principles of an inclusive theological and moral vision of hope for peace and reconciliation, which becomes the foundation for proposed actions of solidarity at the local and international levels. It also challenges the local Palestinian institutional churches to support the struggle for peace of their people. One of the key international actions the writers of the document call for is supporting the commercial boycott of the occupation as a tool for putting pressure on the State of Israel with the clear objective of ending the occupation.

In the second part, the document affirms an inclusive theology of the equal dignity of all peoples before God. This theology provides the foundation for the ensuing vision of faith, ethical and political horizon, as well as the basis for reconciliation. The authors of the document say that based on their experience of dehumanization as a result of the prolonged occupation, they affirm the following: "We believe that every human being is created in God's image and likeness and that every one's dignity is derived from the dignity of the Almighty One. We believe that this dignity is one and the same in each and all of us." (*Kairos*, 2.1) In a situation of occupation and humiliation, where two groups of people are

caught in a vicious cycle of mutual dehumanization in order to legitimize injustice and violence, such an affirmation is not easy to make. For the writers of the document, this is not a theoretical affirmation; rather, it is coming from a collective lived experience and struggle as a community of faith. In his reflection on *Kairos Palestine*, Michel Sabbah, Patriarch Emeritus of the Latin (Roman Catholic) Church of Jerusalem, and one of the writers of the document, notes that

*The document affirms that all human beings are created in the image of God... The most significant sinful aspect is to subject a human being created in the image and likeness of God to the conditions of servility and humiliation. It is enough to simply stand one day at a checkpoint to see how Palestinians are treated as they pass through, and how human dignity is violated.* <sup>18</sup>

For the Palestinian Christian communities, this document serves as an affirmation of their dignity and that of their enemy amidst a dehumanizing situation in which they live. The authors declare that "the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land is a sin against God and humanity because it deprives the Palestinians of their basic human rights, bestowed by God. It distorts the image of God in the Israeli who has become an occupier just as it distorts this image in the Palestinian living under occupation." (*Kairos*, 2.5)

*Kairos Palestine's* theology of reconciliation, note the authors, is anchored in a profound hope that comes from a vision and experience of faith in God: "our hope remains strong, because it is from God." (3.1) Hope, they affirm,

*is the capacity to see God in the midst of trouble, and to be co-workers with the Holy Spirit who is dwelling in us. From this vision derives the strength to be steadfast, remain firm and work to change the reality in which we find ourselves. Hope means not giving in to evil but rather standing up to it and continuing to resist it.* (3.2)

Among the concrete signs of hope mentioned in the document are: vibrant parish communities; involvement of many young people in peace and justice ministry; the presence of many centers for theological reflection on social reality; ecumenical collaboration; and interfaith dialogue. However, one of the most important signs of hope, according to the authors, is "the steadfastness of the generations, the belief in the justice of their cause and the continuity of memory, which does not forget the "*Nakba*" (catastrophe) and its significance. Likewise significant is the developing awareness among many Churches throughout the world and their desire to know the truth about what is going on here." (3.3.3) The authors are conscious that these actions of hope from small and not so powerful groups have not been able to transform the reality yet, but

they are also confident that these committed actions prepare the way for future peace and reconciliation. "We see a determination among many to overcome the resentments of the past and to be ready for reconciliation once justice has been restored." they affirm. (3.3.4) The authors of *Kairos Palestine* believe that the communities they represent express a deep readiness for forgiveness and reconciliation once justice is restored. The restoration of justice is the main goal of their resistance and key to reconciliation, they maintain. They articulate in the document the determination of their communities to resist and achieve reconciliation. They believe that this determination is a requirement of their faith in God in their context and affirm that "our option as Christians in the face of the Israeli occupation is to resist. Resistance is a right and a duty for the Christian. But it is resistance with love as its logic. It is thus a creative resistance for it must find human ways that engage the humanity of the enemy." (4.2.3) The authors of the document critique the traditional religious practice of their churches and their leadership that did not pay attention in the past to the need of denouncing the injustice and making a commitment to work for reconciliation and peace. The authors see the document as a call for the wider Palestinian Christian communities to get involved in the struggle against occupation, for building a just peace, and for challenging their churches to support the people in their struggle for peace. In line with the wave of grassroots protests for dignity in the Arab World, this document is an affirmation that people can change situations of oppression: "The people want peace with justice!" Palestinian Christians declare in this document a daring hope, instead of fear and frustration, and live in faith that the situation of oppression and injustice is going to change.

Obviously, for such a theology of reconciliation to produce effective action in such a complex situation of occupation and violence, international solidarity is crucial. The authors of *Kairos Palestine* appeal to world churches and the international community to stand in solidarity with the Palestinian cry for reconciliation and take their share of responsibility for bringing about a just peace. Several churches around the world have already responded to this appeal and in countries such as Canada and the U.S. more mainline churches are taking position to stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people in their struggle. At its 41st General Assembly in August 2012, the United Church of Canada approved a proposal for using economic sanctions and boycott of products from the illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank in order to put pressure on the State of Israel for ending the occupation.<sup>19</sup> Several other main churches in the U.S. have made similar resolutions over the past year. Most recently, on October 15, 2012, fifteen prominent leaders of major churches in the U.S. wrote a letter urging the Congress

*to undertake careful scrutiny to ensure that our aid is not supporting actions by the government of Israel that undermine prospects for peace. We urge Congress to hold hearings to examine Israel's compliance, and we request regular reporting on compliance and the withholding of military aid for non-compliance.*

Many of these initiatives have been partly in response to the *Kairos* document and the call for international nonviolent actions for ending the occupation of Palestine. <sup>20</sup>

## Conclusion

A key aspect of the theology of reconciliation outlined above is that Palestinian theologians and activists are telling the story of the oppression and suffering of their people, and that after a long struggle, some international communities and churches are willing to listen and respond. "Violence tries to destroy the narratives that sustain people's identities and substitute narratives of its own," tells us theologian Robert Schreiter. This negation, he adds, "is intended not only to destroy the narrative of the victim, but to pave the way for the oppressor's narrative. What is at issue here is the fact that we humans cannot survive without a narrative of identity." <sup>21</sup>

Palestinian theologians and activists are well aware of this, and they know in faith that they have already taken the first firm steps towards reconstructing a new narrative of reconciliation. They have broken the imposed silence, rejected the narrative of the lie, and are "resisting the breakdown of their own narrative," to use Schreiter's words. Mitri Raheb notes that "A major problem with us [Palestinian Christians] is not only did we lose our land in 1948 (what we call the Nakbah, or catastrophe) but equally tragic is that we also lost our narrative." <sup>22</sup> The writings by Palestinian theologians and activists, without exception, begin with telling and reconstructing the story of the catastrophe of their people and their daily struggle and suffering under occupation. In her book on non-violence, Jean Zaru notes that "I have dedicated most of my life, for nearly forty years, to sharing the truth. That means offering the narrative of our lives, a narrative that so often is forgotten and neglected." <sup>23</sup>

The new narrative of the Palestinian Christian writers mentioned above is inclusive. It imagines a common future in peace for all the peoples and religious communities in Palestine and Israel, living side by side and building a peaceful future together for all. In his *Justice and Only Justice*, Ateek acknowledges that it is not easy for Palestinians to be conscious of and sensitive to Jewish history, particularly the Holocaust, and the role this played in the creation of the State of Israel. "Admittedly," he notes, "we as Palestinians have refused to accept, much less internal-

ize, the horrible tragedy of the Holocaust. ... We must understand the importance and significance of the Holocaust to the Jews while insisting that the Jews understand the importance and significance of the tragedy of Palestine for the Palestinians." <sup>24</sup> Once mutually recognized, and the mistakes of the past acknowledged, the shared story of suffering, according to Jewish theologian Marc Ellis, could become the basis for a common reconciled future. In his words, " Thus, the inclusive liturgy of destruction sees the history of Palestinian and Jew as now intimately woven together, the bond of suffering as the way forward for both peoples." <sup>25</sup>

In *The Reconciliation of Peoples*, theologian Gregory Baum notes that "the victims often tell their stories in a manner that demonizes the conqueror .... Reconciliation demands that the parties involved be willing to examine their own history critically, recognize the distortions of their self-understanding, and humbly acknowledge the place assigned to the opponent in their own story." <sup>26</sup> In their new narrative, as Ateek notes above, Palestinian theologians are acknowledging that it has not been easy for them to understand the importance and significance of the Holocaust to the Jews, but the change of attitude and understanding is happening. <sup>27</sup>

The Palestinian theologians I make reference to, and the theology and Christian communities they represent, are a witness to a transformation that has already taken place. They now have a voice and are constructing their own narrative; they share a daring faith and hope, which are concrete and coming out of their lived experience and struggle, not out of their wishful thinking. Their theology is proposed in humility. They represent the smallest Christian community in the Middle East, yet it is a community that has suffered significantly over the last few decades.

Betrayed and abandoned by the international community, the Palestinian Christian communities are offering a cry of reconciliation, rooted in a vision of faith and hope that God in whom they put their trust can act to transform their history. The full story of the suffering of Palestinian people has not been heard yet. More powerful and dominant narratives about the conflict, both in the Middle East and in the West, spoke with much louder voices that obscured and suppressed the telling of the truth about their experience of suffering. The theology of reconciliation outlined in this essay that is emerging out of the long experience of suffering discussed above is not only about telling the story of the past, and neither does this theology dwell on describing the suffering of the present. Rather, it is announced to the Palestinian people, to the Israelis, and to the international community as "a cry of hope in the absence of all hope." The insult to the dignity of the Palestinian people, like the insult to the dignity of any people, is an insult to the dignity of all humanity.

For me, as a Middle Eastern Christian theologian in North America, the cry for reconciliation outlined above is a sign of hope for the present and future, and for the possibility of a life of dignity for all of us.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> There are numerous historical works on this topic. See for example the works by noted Israeli author Ilan Pappé, "Calling a Spade a Spade: The 1948 Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine," *Cornerstone* 43 (Winter 2007); and *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oneworld, 2007).
- <sup>2</sup> Just to name a few of the most common titles that have been published in English, see Naim Stifan Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (Orbis Books, 1989); *A Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation* (Orbis Books, 2008); Mary E. Jensen and Elias Chacour, *We Belong to the Land: The Story of a Palestinian Israeli Who Lives for Peace & Reconciliation* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2001); Mitri Raheb, *I Am a Palestinian Christian* (Fortress Press, 1995); Jean Zaru, *Occupied with Nonviolence: A Palestinian Woman Speaks* (Fortress Press, 2008).
- <sup>3</sup> [www.oikoumene.org/fr/documentation/documents/other-ecumenical-bodies/un-moment-de-verite.html](http://www.oikoumene.org/fr/documentation/documents/other-ecumenical-bodies/un-moment-de-verite.html)
- <sup>4</sup> "A Moment of Truth," Introduction.
- <sup>5</sup> Marc Ellis, "Exile and the Prophetic: The Interfaith Ecumenical Deal is Dead," *Mondoweiss*, November 12, 2012, <http://mondoweiss.net/2012/11/exile-and-the-prophetic-the-inter-faith-ecumenical-deal-is-dead.html>.
- <sup>6</sup> Ateek, *A Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation*, 10.
- <sup>7</sup> See <[sabeel.org](http://sabeel.org)> and <[www.diyar.ps](http://www.diyar.ps)>.
- <sup>8</sup> Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice*, 176.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 176–177; See also *A Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation*, 187.
- <sup>10</sup> Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice*, 184.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 186–187.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.
- <sup>13</sup> Ateek, *A Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation*, 179.
- <sup>14</sup> Zaru, *Occupied with Nonviolence*, 70.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.
- <sup>17</sup> Ateek, *A Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation*, 187.
- <sup>18</sup> Michel Sabbah, "Reflections on the Palestinian Kairos Document," *Cornerstone*, no. 56 (Spring 2010): 10–11.
- <sup>19</sup> <<http://www.gc41.ca/news/israelpalestine-proposal-passed>>, accessed December 3, 2012. The Working Group on Israel/Palestine Policy of United Church of Canada prepared prior to the 41st General Assembly a comprehensive report on the conflict, which served as a background for the debate and resolution. The report is available at <<http://www.united-church.ca/fr/communications/news/releases/120501b>>.

- <sup>20</sup> For understanding why the mainline churches in North America have so far been timid in critiquing the injustices committed by the State of Israel against the Palestinians, see Gregory Baum, “Is Denouncing the Occupation Antisemitic?,” *The Ecumenist* 47, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 1-5; Ellis, “Exile and the Prophetic: The Interfaith Ecumenical Deal is Dead.”
- <sup>21</sup> Robert J. Schreiter, *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order* (Orbis Books, 1992), 34–5.
- <sup>22</sup> Mitri Raheb, *The Biblical Text in the Context of Occupation: Towards a new Hermeneutics of Liberation (Contextual Theology)*, ed. Mitri Raheb (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012), 26.
- <sup>23</sup> Zaru, *Occupied with Nonviolence*, 74.
- <sup>24</sup> Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice*, 168–69.
- <sup>25</sup> Marc H Ellis, *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation: The Challenge of the 21st Century*, 3rd ed. (Baylor University Press, 2004), 163.
- <sup>26</sup> Gregory Baum and Harold Wells, eds., *The Reconciliation of Peoples: Challenge to the Churches* (Orbis Books, 1997), 190–91.
- <sup>27</sup> Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice*, 168–173.







# When “Imperial” Love Hurts Our Neighbors

## Islamophobia and Korean Protestant Churches in the US

Nami KIM

*Love God and love your neighbor as yourself.*

### Prologue: “Pray for Your Muslim Sisters and Brothers during Ramadan”

On a hot summer day in August, a group of women and men of Asian descent were busy handing out colorful flyers in big shopping complexes located in a metropolitan city in the American South. The flyers show a picture of a woman whose hair and face are covered, with the exception of her eyes, along with the passage written in Korean, Chinese, and English that says Christians should pray for their Muslim sisters and brothers during the month of Ramadan. <sup>1</sup> A poster that reads, “Christians, Rise Up with Prayer: An Intercessory Prayer Movement for Muslim Brothers and Sisters during Ramadan” was also placed in local Korean newspapers in several major cities in the United States. <sup>2</sup> These activities follow the actions of a group of Christian leaders in the Middle East <sup>3</sup> who started the *30-Days of Prayer* for Muslims during the month of Ramadan in 1992, a year after the end of the first Gulf War (i.e., Operation Desert Storm). Since then, the *30-Days of Prayer* has become a worldwide Christian movement that encourages Christians to pray for Muslims—both individual and group prayers—during Ramadan under the banner, *Love Your (Muslim) Neighbor through Prayer*. <sup>4</sup> And a growing number of immigrant Korean churches in the United States have participated in the *30-Days of Prayer* since the mid-2000s. <sup>5</sup> The goal of the *30-Days of Prayer* is to “pray for all Muslim people groups until all are reached.” <sup>6</sup> When the ultimate purpose of loving Muslim neighbors through prayer is to evangelize them, then, for whom and for what is such love intended?

We live in a political climate in which racial profiling of Muslims continues and mosques are attacked within the borders of the United States while the U.S. war on terror is still under way globally. Although the number of U.S. immigrant Korean churches that are currently participating in the *30-Days of Prayer* and similar prayer mobilizations may not seem significant, a critical response is required when some conservative <sup>7</sup> U.S. immigrant Korean churches' support and participation in the evangelizing efforts of a transnational Christian prayer movement target Muslims both in the United States and in other nations. The motto, Loving Muslims through Prayer, promoted by the *30-Days of Prayer* movement may sound fine, and even noble, as it is in stark contrast to the incendiary rhetoric of hatred and hostility towards Islam and Muslims that well-known conservative/fundamentalist Christian leaders and groups in the United States, such as Jerry Farwell, Pat Robertson, and Franklin Graham, among others, unapologetically employ. Further, the *30-Days of Prayer* movement urges Christians to see "Islamic militants" through "God's eyes," while it distinguishes between the Muslim population, the movement's primary target, and those they label "Islamic militants."<sup>8</sup> However, the Christian prayer movement portrays Muslims as largely ignorant, naïve, hopeless, and incapable followers of Islam, or as "victims of extremist Islam,"<sup>9</sup> for they have either been born into Islam, and therefore have no control over their choice of religion, or they have been deprived of opportunities to encounter or experience religious alternatives such as Christianity. This depiction of Muslims, however, is not the opposite of stereotyping Muslims as potential terrorists or perpetrators of violence. Rather, to use Gary Okihiro's phrase, both depictions of Muslims "form a circular relationship that moves in either direction."<sup>10</sup> In other words, both "abject" Muslims, who have no agency, and "militant" Muslims, who act solely through violence, are on a continuum. This approach to Islam and Muslims, gently framed as "love Muslims through prayer," then, also perpetuates Islamophobia, for it reinforces certain anti-Muslim ideologies and stereotypes—that Muslims are inferior, traditional, oppressed, victimized, an abject "other."

In this essay I discuss the ways in which Christian discourse that deploys this putatively sensible framework of *love your (Muslim) neighbor through prayer* reinscribes Islamophobia. For this, I examine written and visual resources produced and circulated by the *30-Days of Prayer* network and its participating mission organizations and churches as well as statements and op-eds written by Christian missionaries and ministers who participate in the movement, including Korean American Christians. Primarily drawing from Muslim feminist scholar-activist Jasmin Zine's conceptualization of Islamophobia, in this essay I define Islamophobia not simply as a personal attitude of fear or ignorance toward Islam and

Muslims but in relation to systems of power and domination that operate on multiple levels: individual, ideological, and systemic.<sup>11</sup>

The examination of the involvement of U.S. immigrant Korean churches in the *30-Days of Prayer* for Muslims during Ramadan provides a window into understanding how transnational Christian organizations, networks, and churches play a role in sustaining and promulgating Islamophobia through a particular discursive construction of Islam and Muslims that has serious *effects* in the context of a global war on terror, or what some call a war against Muslims. A critical examination of Islamophobia inscribed in Christian discourse on Islam and Muslims can help disclose the complex interplay of U.S. military imperialism, racism, sexism, Christian exceptionalism, and power differentials among racial and ethnic minorities, especially when “Muslims” have become “the newest population of outcasts”<sup>12</sup> in the post-9/11 United States. This kind of examination is needed when, as Sikh scholar Jaideep Singh alerts us, “religion” in North America has become a “particularly powerful method of classifying the ‘enemy’ or ‘other’ in national life in recent years, impacting primarily non-Christian people of color.”<sup>13</sup> U.S. racial/ethnic minority scholars need to critically reflect on the complicity that racial and ethnic minority Christians enact in maintaining the U.S. military imperialist project as well as Christian superiority through participation in a transnational Christian movement that contributes to providing ideological bases for justifying U.S. military interventions in the Muslim majority world as well as local surveillances of Muslim communities inside U.S. borders.

## Defining Islamophobia

Islamophobia, conventionally referred to as a “fear or hatred of Islam and its adherents,” is a contested term.<sup>14</sup> Those who are engaged in critical race studies have argued that this definition of Islamophobia is too narrow to capture actions that have been exercised, on multiple levels, against Islam and Muslims, especially since 9/11. In her article entitled “Anti-Islamophobia Education as Transformative Pedagogy,” Zine points out the limited definition of Islamophobia and urges us to extend it. Zine states:

*By labeling Islamophobia as an essentially “irrational” fear, this conception denies the logic and rationality of social dominance and oppression, which operates on multiple social, ideological, and systemic levels. Therefore, to capture the complex dimensions through which Islamophobia operates, it is necessary to extend the definition from its limited conception as a “fear and hatred of Islam and Muslims” and acknowledge that these attitudes are intrinsically linked to individual,*

*ideological, and systemic forms of oppression that support the logic and rationale of specific power relations.*<sup>15</sup>

This way of conceptualizing Islamophobia is helpful, for it guides us in understanding Islamophobia and Islamophobic attitudes—not just as a fear or ignorance of Islam and Muslims but as they relate to systems of power on individual, ideological, and structural levels. Islamophobia understood this way is crucial when “Muslims,” as a group of people, have been “singled out as a race or an outcast group.”<sup>16</sup> In other words, as philosopher Falguni Sheth points out, “Muslims” have become racialized in the post-9/11 context.<sup>17</sup> By “racialization,” Sheth does not mean “pregiven racial identities,” but, rather, the “process of delineating a population in contrast to a dominant (or powerful) population and a corresponding political tension; this population can be highlighted according to any range of characteristics—none of which have to be ‘racial’ qua phenotype or blood or physical characteristics; they might be religious, economic, social, etc.”<sup>18</sup> As she demonstrates, Muslims are racialized as a “new species,” not because they have been a “coherent group as a race” but because they have become “the focus of the state.”<sup>19</sup> To put it differently, Muslims are portrayed to be a population that is “threatening and in need of discipline/taming.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, conceptualizing Islamophobia as more than an individual fear or bias against Islam and Muslims is important and necessary because it allows us to directly address anti-Muslim racism and its ideological underpinnings.

### **Love Your (Muslim) Neighbor through Prayer**

The *30-Days of Prayer*, as a 10/40 Window project,<sup>21</sup> has been a coordinated effort in North America since 1993 and is endorsed by various Christian organizations.<sup>22</sup> Its prayer guidebooks and other resources, which rely on the framework of *love your (Muslim) neighbor through prayer*, have been adopted by Christians around the world including Korean and Korean American Christians. In contrast to discourses that vilify “Muslims” as terrorists or perpetrators of violence, a Christian discourse that deploys this seemingly moderate framework considers Islam to be a religion that needs to be understood *first* without being disparaged as sinful or evil, and does not depict Muslims (whose gender and ethnic differences are often unspecified) to be a threat. For instance, in its guidelines on Christians’ prayers for Muslims in the United States, the *30-Days of Prayer* states that Christians should be “*the first to fight stereotypes and Islamophobia. Attitudes need to be in line with scriptural values concerning ‘our neighbours.’*”<sup>23</sup> As part of their position, the *30-Days of Prayer* introduces basic tenants of Islam and the religion’s history. Further, the *30-Days of Prayer* emphasizes common values shared by Christians and Muslims, such as “faithfulness (to God and in relationships), honesty,

compassion, honour, humility, chastity, self-sacrifice, mercy and love.”<sup>24</sup>

The *Mission Network News*, which makes available a prayer guide entitled “30 Days of Prayer for the Muslim World,” also strives to encourage Christians to “know” about Islam. The *News* shares some of the “positive” aspects of Islam by listing the following: (1) Muslims claim Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Ishmael as major figures in their religion; (2) Muslims also have a positive view of Jesus; and (3) during Ramadan, “Muslims abstain from earthly pleasures and curb evil intentions and desires as an act of obedience and submission to their god, believing it serves as atonement for sins, errors, and mistakes.” It also adds that Christians should reject the generalization of viewing all Muslims as terrorists.<sup>25</sup> The Christian discourse that is based on this framework of *love your (Muslim) neighbor through prayer* seems genuinely interested in learning about and understanding Islam by distancing itself from other Christian discourses that portray Islam as an inherently violent religion that conspires to take over the world under Islamic law. However, the *30-Days of Prayer* movement is very clear that such efforts are not a sign of approving Islamic religious practices. Instead, as stated in one of the prayer goals called “Assurance of Salvation,” Christians pray that Muslims could never know “the assurance of salvation through Jesus, something Islam can never offer them.”<sup>26</sup> A response by a Korean missionary, who explains the importance of the *30-Days of Prayer* to immigrant Korean Christians, affirms this goal. He states:

*Through the 30-Days of Prayer, Christians pray that Muslims will accept Jesus as their Christ.... If we approach Muslims with hostility it will generate antipathy among Muslims towards Christianity. Such antipathy will further render Muslims to close their minds to the gospel. Also, if we avoid Muslims out of fear or reject them, they will not have an opportunity to experience the love of Jesus Christ. Thus, we need to embrace Muslims with the love of God the Father and Christ's cross during the 30-Days of prayer.*<sup>27</sup>

As characterized here, Muslims are the people whom Christians should “embrace” rather than fear so that Muslims can “accept Jesus as their Christ.” In fact, the *30-Days of Prayer* calls on Christians to pray for Muslims with a threefold purpose: (1) “for [a] greater breakthrough for the Gospel among Muslims”; (2) “an increased commitment to prayer by Christians”; and (3) “for more missionaries to be released to work among Muslims.”<sup>28</sup> Acquiring a presumably more balanced understanding of Islam is encouraged by the *30-Days of Prayer*, because it will eventually help Christians to be better prepared for carrying out evangelizing missions among the increasing Muslim populations locally and globally.

In understanding the cultural and social issues that “Muslims” face in “their societies,” the *30-Days of Prayer* relies on a clear-cut binary

between societies constituted by “Muslims” and those populated by “Westerners.”<sup>29</sup> Though the *30-Days of Prayer* classifies Muslims based on geographical location, thereby noting heterogeneity among Muslims, it nonetheless adheres to the distinction between “Western societies” and “African and Oriental Islamic societies” when explaining cultural differences. For instance, “Western societies” represent: “Individualism... Time oriented (exact, for example: one arrives on time), Future oriented... Performance oriented (ability and accomplishments are important), Freedom to show weakness, Egalitarian relationships/Direct communication, Analytical thinking/concept oriented.”<sup>30</sup> In contrast, “African and Oriental Islamic societies” represent: “Community/group oriented, Event oriented... Present oriented... Status oriented (class, age, family and reputation are important), Fear of showing weakness or admitting failures (shame cultures), Indirect communication (seeking to not offend or to dishonour), Holistic thinking/experience/circumstance oriented.”<sup>31</sup> This essentialized dichotomy between “Western societies” and “African and Oriental Islamic societies” reifies both societies as unchanging and monolithic, ignoring the complex political, economic, social, cultural, and religious dynamics that have taken place in and across these societies. This colonial legacy of dividing the world into “the West and the Rest” is used as a guiding index to “understand” societies rooted in Islam.

One of the interesting aspects of the *30-Days of Prayer* in relation to women is that Christian women who are married to or are dating Muslim men are the major female voices on the *30-Days of Prayer* website. Christian women provide advice on how to handle a “cross-cultural marriage,” one of the social issues the *30-Days of Prayer* addresses. Most of the postings are directed at Christian women who are married to Muslim men, dealing with various issues that arise regarding a “cross-cultural marriage.” In most of the stories and testimonies, Muslim men are portrayed as open and flexible during the courtship but change once they marry. From one Christian spouse’s perspective, her Muslim husband changed completely *from* an “ideal” man whom any woman would dream of marrying *to* a religiously strict and fervant man who is “so focused on rules, regulations and merciless rituals” that their “romantic relationship” took a turn for “the worse.”<sup>32</sup> The stories of Christian women on the website send out a subtle but firm message that Muslim men “change” after they marry and therefore are deemed untrustworthy, and that Christian women should keep their faith in Jesus Christ even through submission to their Muslim husbands, hoping that Muslim men will eventually be influenced by their Christian wives’ deeds. Here an interesting, but not surprising, shift is made in these women’s testimonies, one that reinforces the submission of wives to their husbands regardless of religious difference.

With reference to Muslim women, the *30-Days of Prayer* does not necessarily depict Muslim women in a completely negative light. However, visual representation of Muslim women from various regions is quite homogeneous in that most of the Muslim women whose photos appear on the website wear head scarves, hijab, or burkah, even though the *30-Days of Prayer* states that not all Muslim women wear them. With the exception of one Muslim woman who explains why Muslim women wear head scarves, hijab, or cover their entire body, Muslim women are presented visually on the website primarily as covered women, but not as speaking agents.

Additionally, the fate of Muslim women and girls is addressed in detail on the site, where the *30-Days of Prayer* depicts the poverty that is prevalent in the “Muslim world.” In the *30-Days of Prayer*, Muslims in so-called developing regions in general are portrayed as hopeless, poor, exploited, ignorant, unloved, and suffering, thereby desperately requiring Christian care, aid, support, intervention, and love. This is certainly different from an unapologetically antagonistic depiction of Muslims as deceptive, fanatic, aggressive, and violent. However, this way of portraying Muslims only relegates Muslims to victim status without agency in what is presumed to be their politically and socially corrupt system based on Islam. This is in opposition to the view of Christians as agents who are ready to lead their suffering Muslim brothers and sisters to Christianity—the religion that will save them and that is the firm foundation of civilized, developed “Western” societies. Such a view of Islam and Muslims is echoed in a statement made by a representative of Operation Mobilization Korean American Ministries (OM KAM), a mission organization that has urged Korean Americans to participate in the *30-Days of Prayer* movement. He states, “People tend to think that Muslims are the perpetrators of violence and terrorists, but actually Muslims themselves are the victims who suffer most because of Islam. Muslims want to escape the political and cultural system that is based on Islam more than anybody else, but to no avail. They need Jesus Christ.<sup>33</sup> I hope that Korean Americans actively participate in bringing Muslims into Jesus Christ.” In a similar vein, an op-ed piece in a local Korean American newspaper addresses why Christians, specifically Korean American Christians, should pray for Muslims:

*One of the reasons Korean churches should pray for Muslims is their number.... The majority of them does not know Jesus Christ and his gospel, and has been deprived of an opportunity to hear him (Jesus Christ).... Furthermore, we need to pray for inhumane and old-fashioned things that are happening in Islamic countries. There are themes for our prayers found here and there, such as dictatorship, (the violation of) women’s human rights, and terror. At the same time, the Korean church*

*needs to learn from the growth of Islam instead of viewing it only as a threat.... We need to learn and examine the factors behind such an amazing growth in Islam (500 percent) instead of fearing it.... We hope that Korean Christians try hard to learn more about Islam and pray for the missions for Muslims during Ramadan.*<sup>34</sup>

The inclusion of “(the violation of) women’s human rights” as a theme for Christian prayer for Muslims during Ramadan shows how feminist values and expressions are (mis)appropriated in conservative Christian discourse, breeding the perspectives that Islam stands for patriarchal oppression and control, and that Muslims, especially Muslim women, are victims of Islam. Here Islam is identified as the source of inhumane and outdated misogynist practices, and an unspecified monolithic group of “Muslim women” retains the description that they are voiceless victims of the violation of women’s human rights, and are, thereby, in need of Christian prayer and helping hands.

It is not just the key players of the U.S.-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan who have framed Islamic states as the adversaries of women (i.e., against women’s human rights and gender equality), a viewpoint that helped create the justification for launching the U.S. war on terror.<sup>35</sup> Conservative Christians, including conservative Korean American Christians, have also “prayed” for Muslim women’s human rights as if “Christian women,” unlike “Muslim women,” enjoy women’s rights free from “inhumane and old-fashioned things.”<sup>36</sup> It is ironic that Korean American churches are concerned about Muslim women’s human rights when the majority of Korean American churches are not proactively committed to gender and sexual justice within the church and in society in general. At the same time, it is not surprising that Korean churches are willing to learn from Islam the factors behind its rapid growth, since “growth”—church size and membership—has been considered one of the most discernible indicators of “success” in conservative Korean Christianity in both the United States and South Korea.

Another example that sets the binary opposition between Islam as the foundation of all social problems and Christianity as the solution for them can be found in the *30-Days of Prayer* website posting entitled “The Poor and Needy around the Muslim World.” It states:

*Although there are many reasons for poverty within the Muslim world, a major reason is the hopelessness that often grips their lives. . . . In the absolutely worst cases, men stop providing for their family and work only to provide for themselves.... Fearful parents marry their daughters at a young age to avoid the possibility of the girl not being a virgin on her wedding night and so that they do not have to provide for her any longer. The ugly face of poverty creates and contributes to a variety of woes so hideous that only our heavenly Father can bear their*

*pain.... God wants to release programs for every social ill, plans to solve every individual problem, and compassionate Christian workers for every people group! Pray to the Lord of the harvest to send forth workers for each of these nations who have such immense needs.<sup>37</sup>*

The binary opposition established between Islam and Christianity fixes one religion, Christianity, as being morally, spiritually, and socially superior to the other, Islam. The inferiority of Islam is reflected in the “Muslim world,” where people are hopeless, suggesting that Muslims are in need of Christian help in order to solve social problems and that Islam is antithetical to progress, equality, justice, and freedom, all of which are highly valued in Christianity. Furthermore, implicit in this statement is the subtle yet unambiguous condemnation of Muslim men who are incapable of providing for the family, even to the point of marrying off their young daughters. This criticism of Muslim men who cannot play the role of family provider in the midst of poverty dovetails with another indictment of Muslim female children’s ill fate in a poor Muslim community, that is, they are portrayed as victims of poverty. The chief reason for poverty in this discourse is a decontextualized notion of “hopelessness” within the “Muslim world,” and there is no substantive explanation given as to why “hopelessness” is prevalent in the “Muslim world.” War, military conflict, and political instability are mentioned as reasons for poverty, but there is little connection made between poverty and Western colonial and neocolonial history in the “Muslim world.” The *30-Days of Prayer* stresses that the “Muslim world” lags behind, and that Christians, who represent the civilized Western world, should make great efforts to pull Muslims up out of poverty by “civilizing/christianizing” them.

### **Prayer for Muslim Neighbors in the Name of (Imperial) Love**

Separate from the discourses that readily condemn Islam and Muslims, there is the Christian discourse that deploys a seemingly commendable framework of *love your (Muslim) neighbor through prayer*. It does not rush to revile Islam and Muslims, and it even warns against taking an extreme position on Islam, thereby raising concerns over the unfiltered portrait of Islam as an outright evil force, and Muslims as serious threats to society. Thus, it may be viewed as not directly or immediately generating fear of Islam and Muslims on an individual level. However, it reinforces Islamophobia on an ideological level, which in turn assists the United States’ “war against Muslims” and the U.S. “civilizing mission” that is directed at Muslims around the world. This is enacted by consistently depicting Muslims in general as being uninformed, naïve, incapable of governing themselves, untrustworthy, irresponsible, and even immoral (marrying off their young daughters due to poverty) and Islam as the primary source of Muslims’ poverty-stricken and misogynist

societies. Implicit is the belief that if these “incapable” Muslims do not accept Christians’ reaching hands, thereby refusing to become “civilized/christianized,” they must be the fervent followers of their religion who can turn into perpetrators of violence at any time, like ruthless terrorists. Further, the purpose of “understanding” Islam is to provide Christians with reasons to keep steadfast in holding to an idea of Christian superiority that is grounded in the notion of the one true God, the true Messiah, and the good news, all of which can help overcome the social ills pervasive in the Muslim community. After all, what needs to be “understood” about Islam is its falsifications and flaws and the negative impact these have on Muslims.

All this is based on the conviction that Christians are on the right path, whereas Muslims are on the road to jeopardy. Accordingly, it is believed that the United States, as the pinnacle of Western civilization that embodies the values of freedom, democracy, and equality, should lead the decaying Muslim world, and that Muslims should be led to the civilizing religion of Christianity in order to escape the unmistakably despicable Muslim world that is built on Islam. Like American exceptionalism, what we find here is Christian exceptionalism, that is, only Christianity is seen to exemplify freedom, equality, progress, human rights, and even prosperity. One of the discursive effects of the conservative Christian discourse that relies on the framework of “loving Muslims through prayer,” then, includes a justification of the U.S. war on terror. In other words, the U.S. occupation of Islamic societies and the overthrow of rogue leaders and corrupt political systems are ideologically justified because these actions are considered redemptive for the Muslims who are suffering under tyranny. This in turn can provide a safer environment for Christian missionaries to evangelize Muslims. All these rescuing efforts will also help mission organizations and networks garner the tangible support from Christian churches and individuals that is necessary for the continuation of evangelizing missions in the “Muslim world” and for Muslims everywhere. To put it differently, the conservative Christian discourse that urges *love your (Muslim) neighbor through prayer* becomes a material force for supporting evangelical activities for Muslims by galvanizing Christians around the world to participate in them directly or indirectly. In this sense, the seemingly laudable motto used in the *30-Days of Prayer* can be said to be a strategic repositioning of Christian attitudes towards Muslims and Islam as love for neighbors, which helps many Christians join without reservation. In this mobilization effort, Korean American Christians who participate in the *30-Days of Prayer* for Muslims face the risk of becoming a “spiritually model minority,” one that stands out due to the “spiritual” zeal to evangelize their Muslim “neighbors,” both nearby and afar, by joining the saving mission of Muslims. While such mission

provokes the Western missionary narrative where white men and women save uncivilized men and women of color, it opens up another dimension of post/colonial logic—that is, Christian men and women of color who join the saving mission of brown Muslim men and women.

After all, Muslims are “loved” only as destitute victims who need paternalistic Christian help. The “Muslims” for whom Christians pray through their transnational prayer network are considered discrete from unrepentant “bad” Muslims. However, there is no guarantee that these “good” Muslim neighbors will not turn into “bad” Muslims, especially if they show signs of resistance, nonconformity, or dissent. In other words, if our Muslim neighbors are seen to exercise any form of agency, then, they may end up being perceived as “bad” Muslims (read, Islamic militants or potential terrorists and therefore serious threats to society). The fact that Muslims are viewed and treated according to this dichotomy indicates that Islamophobia, going beyond a psychological fear or ignorance, operates on ideological and structural levels by recognizing “Muslims *qua* Muslims, but on the terms of racism (i.e., as though a discretely ethnicised group).”<sup>38</sup> As AbdoolKarim Vakil argues, “hostility to Islam cannot be separated from discrimination against Muslims in the neat and the unproblematic ways.” Furthermore, “moderate,” “considerate,” or a seemingly positive view of Islam and Muslims can help deter anti-Muslim racism from being identified and therefore letting it remain unchallenged.

### Epilogue: Questioning “Christian Love” for “Muslim” Neighbors

Christians need to ask themselves what they mean when they say they love their Muslim neighbors through prayer. Christians need to ask if they want to be treated by their Muslim neighbors the way Christians would treat them. To put it differently, can any Christians who “pray for the Muslims” during Ramadan say that they would feel fine, or “feel loved,” when their Muslim neighbors pray for them because they see their Christian neighbors as victims of Christianity, a false religion, and thus in need of being led to Islam? Are Christians willing to accept and even welcome a Muslim’s right to “proselytize” Christians in the same neighborhood and feel appreciated for their concern and care for their Christian neighbors?

If Christians continue to overlook or refuse to see how their evangelizing activities, including seemingly harmless “prayer,” are implicated with the ongoing U.S. military hegemony in the Middle East, as well as in other parts of the world, they are “spiritualizing Christ’s emphasis on love, as if his love is indifferent to social and political justice,”<sup>40</sup> which is a powerful way of maintaining the imperial project. Loving my/our

neighbors for the sake of my/our noble purpose is simply an “instrumentalized love,” that is, an instrument needed for Christians’ righteous civilizing mission.

Ultimately, in the polar opposition of Us versus Them, “Muslim” neighbors cannot possibly be like “Us,” whether they are “good” or “bad.” If they are “bad” Muslims, they are against “Us.” If they are “good,” neighbor-like, yet incapable, irresponsible, undependable, and hopeless, then, they still cannot possibly be like “Us.” If they can ever be considered to be “like” (approximating) “Us,” it is only when they become completely submissive or subordinate to what “we” want them to do—accept Jesus as the savior (read, convert to Christianity) and become grateful and dutiful followers of (Western) civilization. Conservative Christians’ efforts to love their Muslim neighbors through prayer can only fail because they cannot possibly appreciate “the otherness” of Muslims. Love for whom and for what should be asked before trying to *love my/our neighbor through prayer*.

## Notes:

- <sup>1</sup> Approximately ten immigrant Korean churches in the same metropolitan city, including the largest immigrant Korean Presbyterian church in the area, also advertised their prayer meetings in a local Korean newspaper during Ramadan, urging Christian participation. See: [www.atl.christianitydaily.com/view.htm?code=oc&id=185302](http://www.atl.christianitydaily.com/view.htm?code=oc&id=185302) (August 24, 2009). (accessed August 20, 2012).
- <sup>2</sup> See [www.atl.christianitydaily.com/view.htm?code=mw&id=185280](http://www.atl.christianitydaily.com/view.htm?code=mw&id=185280) (August 22, 2009) (accessed August 18, 2012). Also see <http://www.met24.egloos.com/2734985> (July 24, 2009) (accessed August 18, 2012).
- <sup>3</sup> The term “Middle East” is a contested phrase, as many scholars have pointed out. However, I use this term in this essay primarily due to the fact that it is the most commonly used term that refers to the region.
- <sup>4</sup> See [www.30-days.net/sights/muslims-are-your-neighbors/](http://www.30-days.net/sights/muslims-are-your-neighbors/) (accessed July 14, 2012). Also see [www.30-days.net/ministry/aboutus/](http://www.30-days.net/ministry/aboutus/) (accessed July 14, 2012).
- <sup>5</sup> According to the Alliance of the Southern California Mission Organizations, about ninety immigrant Korean churches in fifteen U.S. states participated in the *30-Days of Prayer* movement in 2009. See [www.koreadaily.com/news/read.asp?art\\_id=897503](http://www.koreadaily.com/news/read.asp?art_id=897503) (accessed August 11, 2012).
- <sup>6</sup> See [www.30-days.net/category/ministry/](http://www.30-days.net/category/ministry/) (accessed July 18, 2012). Also see [www.30-days.net/ramadan/the-last-of-the-unreached/](http://www.30-days.net/ramadan/the-last-of-the-unreached/) (accessed July 18, 2012).
- <sup>7</sup> I use the term “conservative” to indicate both theological and political conservatism.
- <sup>8</sup> See [www.30-days.net/islam/culture/peace/](http://www.30-days.net/islam/culture/peace/) (accessed November 25, 2012).
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> Gary Y. Okhiro, *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture*

(Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 142.

- 11 See Jasmin Zine, "Anti-Islamophobia Education as Transformative Pedagogy: Reflections from the Educational Front Lines," *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 21, no. 3 (2004): 110-119. It is not my intention to establish a "correct" or an "alternative" interpretation of Islam in this essay. In other words, I do not seek to provide a more "accurate" or an "objective" view of Islam and its adherents.
- 12 Falguni A. Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 11.
- 13 Jaideep Singh, "The Racialization of Minoritized Religious Identity: Constructing Sacred Sites at the Intersection of White and Christian Supremacy," in *Revealing the Sacred in Asian and Pacific America*, ed. Jane Naomi Iwamura and Paul Spickard (New York: Routledge, 2003), 88. Also see Nami Kim, "Collaborative Dissonance: Gender and Theology in Asian Pacific America," in *New Overtures: Asian North American Theology in the 21st Century*, ed. Eleazar Fernandez, *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Religion* 3, no. 2 (January 2012): 1–26.
- 14 On the matter of how the term "Islamophobia" has been used in different contexts, see S. Sayyid and AbdoolKarim Vakil, eds., *Thinking Through Islamophobia: Global Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). For the origin of the term, see [www.insted.co.uk/anti-muslim-racism.pdf](http://www.insted.co.uk/anti-muslim-racism.pdf) (accessed July 10, 2012), and [www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/islamophobia.pdf](http://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/islamophobia.pdf) (accessed July 12, 2012).
- 15 Zine, "Anti-Islamophobia Education as Transformative Pedagogy," 113.
- 16 Sheth, *Toward a Political Philosophy of Race*, 51.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 87.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 51.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 87.
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 The "10/40 Window," a term coined by Luis Bush in 1990, refers to those countries located between 10 degrees and 40 degrees north latitude. See <http://www.ad2000.org/1040broc.htm> (accessed May 10, 2010).
- 22 The Christian organizations that endorse the *30-Days of Prayer* include the Global Prayer Track (formerly of the AD2000 & Beyond Movement), Youth With A Mission (YWAM), Operation Mobilization (OM), Open Door (OD), Frontiers, the Evangelical Alliances of Europe, and Transformations Africa, as well as other mission organizations and churches around the world. See [www.30-days.net/ministry/thatsaid/](http://www.30-days.net/ministry/thatsaid/) (accessed September 19, 2012). Korean and Korean American branches of some of these transnational mission organizations, such as OM KAM (Operation Mobilization Korean American Ministries), YWAM, and OD, have led the *30-Days of Prayer* movement in Korean churches—in both the United States and in South Korea.
- 23 See [www.30-days.net/muslims/muslims-in/america-north/usa-islam/](http://www.30-days.net/muslims/muslims-in/america-north/usa-islam/) (accessed September 19, 2012), emphasis in original.
- 24 See [www.30-days.net/ramadan/why-pray-for-muslims/](http://www.30-days.net/ramadan/why-pray-for-muslims/) (accessed September 19, 2012).
- 25 "Ramadan to Kick Off Christian Prayer Effort," *Mission Network News* (June 6, 2012), [www.mnnonline.org/article/17299](http://www.mnnonline.org/article/17299) (accessed July 12, 2012).
- 26 See [www.30-days.net/ramadan/praying/](http://www.30-days.net/ramadan/praying/) (accessed July 12, 2012).

- <sup>27</sup> “The Reasons for (Christian) Prayer during the Month of Ramadan,” *Christian Daily* (August 20, 2009), [www.atl.christianitydaily.com/view.htm?code=mw&id=185265](http://www.atl.christianitydaily.com/view.htm?code=mw&id=185265) (accessed August 20, 2012).
- <sup>28</sup> See [www.30-days.net/ministry/aboutus/](http://www.30-days.net/ministry/aboutus/) (accessed July 20, 2012).
- <sup>29</sup> See [www.30-days.net/islam/issues/muslim-attitudes/](http://www.30-days.net/islam/issues/muslim-attitudes/) (accessed September 19, 2012).
- <sup>30</sup> “The Gospel and Culture,” *30-Days Prayer Network*, [www.30-days.net/islam/culture/religious\\_cultural/](http://www.30-days.net/islam/culture/religious_cultural/) (accessed September 19, 2012).
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>32</sup> See [www.30-days.net/islam/issues/i-married-a-muslim/](http://www.30-days.net/islam/issues/i-married-a-muslim/) (accessed September 19, 2012).
- <sup>33</sup> “It Is a Time for Korean American Church to Lead the Mission for the Islamic World,” *Christian Daily* (August 14, 2012), [www.chdaily.co.kr/news/20120814/8945.html](http://www.chdaily.co.kr/news/20120814/8945.html) (accessed August 22, 2012).
- <sup>34</sup> “Our (Christian) Attitudes towards Ramadan,” *Christian Daily* (August 18, 2009), [www.atl.christianitydaily.com/view.htm?code=oc&id=185251](http://www.atl.christianitydaily.com/view.htm?code=oc&id=185251) (accessed August 20, 2012).
- <sup>35</sup> See Nami Kim, “Transformative ‘Moves’ to Join: A Transnational Feminist Pedagogical Practice,” in *Keeping the Light: Women of Faith: Scholarship, Activism, and the Next Generation*, ed. Melanie L. Harris and Kate M. Ott (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011).
- <sup>36</sup> See Gargi Bhattacharyya, *Dangerous Brown Men: Exploiting Sex, Violence and Feminism in the War on Terror* (New York: Zed Books, 2008).
- <sup>37</sup> “The Poor and Needy around the Muslim World,” *30-Days Prayer Network*, [www.30-days.net/islam/issues/poor-needy/](http://www.30-days.net/islam/issues/poor-needy/) (accessed August 30, 2012).
- <sup>38</sup> David Tyrer, “‘Flooding the Embankments’: Race Bio-Politics and Sovereignty,” in *Thinking Through Islamophobia*, 95.
- <sup>39</sup> AbdoolKarim Vakil, “Who’s Afraid of Islamophobia?” in *Thinking Through Islamophobia*, 276.
- <sup>40</sup> James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Harper San Francisco, 1975), 227.
- <sup>41</sup> See Kwok Pui-lan and Jeorg Rieger, *Occupy Religion: Theology of the Multitude* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012), 103–104.





# Letting Go of Race

## Reflections from a Historical Theological View

Phillip J. LINDEN, Jr., S.S.J.

### Introduction

To be in conversation with diversity from the perspective of race means viewing the global creation of contemporary *identity politics* as implicated in the redefinition of what it means to be a person. The present-day experience of diversity is commensurate with violence and the rise of new violence. The breakup of the current nation-state and the rise of global state conglomerates in the city and urban driven economies, spawn the spiral of violence. The offspring of this violence calls into question what Cornel West refers to in his *Democracy Matters* when he discusses the three “dominating, antidemocratic dogmas promoted by the most powerful forces in our world... rendering American democracy vacuous.”<sup>1</sup> Summarized as follows, the dogmas are: 1) free market fundamentalism morphed into corporate scandals; 2) aggressive militarism characterized by American preemptive warfare and 3) the escalating authoritarianism through the internationalization of control.<sup>2</sup> Cornel West is responding to “democracy” as the George W. Bush Administration implemented it, but it does not reflect on the history of democracy in America. The Patriot Act enforces levels of control that imply all are enemies of the State, thereby placing the ontological/epistemological warfare of cosmopolitanism and the market driven economy against citizens. The rupture caused by these global shifts must prompt questions from a theological-historical view.

At stake in all of this is a sense of meaning for peoples caught in the tumult of global ideas associated with the violence brought about by diversity. This brings us further to new levels of dehumanization, instead of establishing alternative ways of thinking or understanding.

The point of departure consists of defining what “historical” means in the “theological-historical” approach. I use the *Écoles des Annales* thinker, Fernand Braudel’s approach to history. Braudel engages in history

from the perspective of the long timespan (*longue durée*) whereby we can use a new and innovative context for a search of the root causes of an apparent historical deviation experienced in the creation of the modern nation-state. Braudel sees the limitations of the usual "event by event" method of doing history. His solution is what he refers to as the existence of three levels of time. He establishes a transitional structure that allows the consideration of history in both a short and long expanse of time. The longtime span permits an observation of the "slow changes" taking place in the social and economic dimensions. These "slow changes" include new events that are like explosions that he calls conjunctures. In using the long time-span, a new plot emerges. Its objective is to get beyond individual event history (*l'histoire événementielle*).<sup>3</sup>

In this essay, I use Braudel's approach to get beyond a positivistic history, that is, beyond accepting and/or telling a story, presented with dogmatic certainty. It is the nature of positivistic history to focus on battles, conquests, and events. The common factor in a positivistic approach to history is that it goes hand in hand with concealing the voiceless: those who are victims of the perpetrators of that history. The positivistic histories are usually the creation of conquerors.<sup>4</sup>

The Braudelian approach to history is a history of the whole of human experience with a strong emphasis on economic and social conditions of the victims. In the historical method of Braudel, I see the historical presence as fundamentally a critical one that consists in (de) construction. I will come back to this approach to the past after defining the geographical space related to race and diversity.

### Theological-Historical View

A theological historical examination of diversity in the United States black experience calls for a reflection on the historical and theological roots of the of race. The starting point of this reflection is to acknowledge the negative implications in the rise of the United States as a *civil or economic society*, using slaves as its currency and the ex-slaves now seeking equal participation in that civil society. This also means an analysis of the real historical and theological roots in the rising of the *civil or economic society*.<sup>5</sup>

Accordingly, the theological-historical view involves a re-description of the original situation that confronts how we usually talk about the past. Rejecting this approach rejects the primacy of the individual and upholds the conceptualization of history merely as contiguous events. The theological-historical approach is one of seeing within the broad landscape (long time span) the manifestation of intentions that underlie historical transformations.

This consideration of a long time span confronts the interpretive circumscriptions of the shorter span. As described here, the approach from the long time span provides a real second order reflection that assesses the event in a broader context characterized by the slow development of civilization. Underneath the history of individuals and their frenzied time consciousness, there lies a broader stream of anonymous events deploying its slow persisting rhythm of economic systems into social and political institutions, and into the world of ideas. Lifting the reflection to this real level, the level of the economic and social basis, means acknowledging that what has happened has taken shape mostly by gradually changing socio economic realities.

Whether anything is new, is the question that arises in this method. The response is that a lot is new. However, these new instances appear as eruptions. They are like the waves that rise and fall on the ocean surface often appearing as discontinued or descriptive moments within the historical context. Just as upon seeing an ocean one does not focus only on the waves, focusing just on episodic history, the eruptions (events, dates, and individuals) are problematic. The theological view of history can possibly solve this problem in that it can open a broader perspective. The theological permits us to see that the slow changes will appear first in the economic domain and then spread as new eruptions into other domains. This spreading happens without the distinctive and/or dominant input of human agents in history.

This theological-historical view intends to establish integrity as a basis for understanding what the black experience means. Its purpose is to establish a renewed contact with the whole situation of exploited and oppressed descendants of slavery: and especially those peoples around the world undermined and preyed upon because of the global interests of the United States.

Thus far, approaches to understanding and resolving the problem of the black experience emphasize the recounting of events and episodes that have taken place in the establishment of blacks in the United States from slavery to the present. However, the overarching problem is that these events did not happen in isolation. The theological historical method calls for these events to be looked at from the broader intentions and goals of the establishment of the Atlantic world, namely, the creation of a society rooted in self interest.

### **The Rise of the Atlantic World and the Theological-Historical View: The Context of the African American Experience**

Race has consistently been the focal point for interpreting the black experience in the United States. This has led to a few assumptions. One assumption is that slavery is racial, and that racism is the source of all

problems for blacks in America. This assumption means that the color of people's skin was decisive in the formation of New World slavery and slave trading. Another assumption is that the solution to the problem of race must itself be an intense advocating of the racial reality; thus, the fixation on cultural identity or forms associated with the peoples of color. These two assumptions have a long history in the worldview of blacks in the United States; however, an examination into the source and role of the category of race within the modern nation state reveals such assumptions constitutive of structures of concealment.

Several thinkers as J. Kameron Carter would suggest that politics and economics associated with blackness created the negative and binary "other" of whiteness. He goes on to say that the cultural sensibilities forged from the encounter of Africans with Europeans in the establishing of the USA during the seventeenth century have lasted into the twenty-first century. According to Carter, the effects of this issue of "binary other" have shaped the social political liability of globalism insofar as this form of late-modern capitalism (globalism) requires its own negative *others*.

The slave trade of African persons began in the context of a burgeoning new class of merchant adventurer traders. Their activity was one of many factors that contributed to the dissolution of the pre modern society. This activity provided a space for the formation of new modes of being in the world. This period saw the rise of novel philosophies, new political and economic theories, the reordering of governmental structures, the perversion of values, and nascent a/religious sentiments;<sup>6</sup> all necessitated in the process of legitimizing the merchant adventurer traders' mind set and their way of life.

Slavery, in this context, was born of the need for the maximization of profit. Therefore, modern slavery, as a labor system, differed from the master servant model prominent in the sixteenth and seventeenth century Iberian Peninsula. This new slavery involved the total commodification of the slave, resulting in an owner property model that we call chattel slavery.

The process of cultural contact, political expediency, and socio-economic justification formulated not only the issue but also the idea of race. In other words, the concept of race emerged as an intellectual structure. The merchant adventurer trader set it up for the sole purpose of maintaining class interests and dominance. The merchant-adventurer-trader forged the concept of race from the beginning, as a tool of control. Given this, conversation about race centered on identity politics or politics of recognition and deliberative democracy seems to be unwarranted.<sup>7</sup>

If we accept that race was not the precondition for slavery, but rather its product, we must ask ourselves what is the efficacy in advo-

cating such a notion of race. Why not confront the economic political structures that created it? For if race were a product of the problem, how can the second assumption—that race and the concomitant orientation toward cultural forms—possibly be a solution? In fact, as a categorial structure, such a mode of discourse also never even addresses the problem of the creation of a society rooted in self interest. With the global society superseding the modern nation state,<sup>8</sup> I contend that race and ethnicity in the form of cultural diversity and race might indeed be the solution; but, the solution for whose problem?

With race established as a seemingly fundamental absolute in global society, the justification for this absolute finds expression in the concept of diversity. Indeed, diversity has emerged as a significant concept within the changing world; it is the primary way of talking about the coexistence of various peoples within the global society. Synonymous with multi culturalism, diversity refers to a quality of being that is open to and/or accepts many different cultures or individuals from various ethnic groups in different parts of the world. Diversity, as concept, also implies a concern for rights issues, associated with race, gender, sexual orientation, and as well as various disabilities. As an attempt at inclusivity, it has exerted tremendous force in contemporary society among struggling peoples.

As with race, to remain at the definitional level is to remain oblivious of the material power of intellectual structures of control, such as “silver rites.”<sup>9</sup> As a concept used in the service of socio political formations, diversity is neither neutral nor innocuous. Portrayed as something better, diversity, in its role, in its current context of globalization, like race, is but a tool for refashioning the current context into something other than its present form. In line with the theological historical view, this entails linking diversity with the formation of present and future new global markets, the political and economic forces that diversity serves.

Globalization with its constant creation of wider *spaces of capital* and its resultant fragmentation, according to the critical geographer, David Harvey, attests to wider parameters of exploration of the meaning of diversity when used by groups like blacks, African Americans and others.<sup>10</sup> David Harvey links the changes in economics and cultures as vital in understanding the meaning of diversity. He claims that in the “worship of fragments,” when we refer to “separation” or “difference or *otherness*,” we ultimately *construct* those who are *other* in [our] own image.”<sup>11</sup> Harvey asserts that the pursuit of any universalism creates an atmosphere for massive destructions of various cultures. It has a similar effect even on whole societies, probably not excluding the actions of current American domestic, foreign/international policies. What he argues is that keeping sacred these various fragments supports the accumulation of capital that

in turn “not only thrives upon but actively produces social difference and heterogeneity.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, the worship of fragmentation even in terms of diversity bears caution. We need, therefore, carefully to steer a course that gets us beyond these positions.

The political dimension of diversity involves a new mode of governance, new politics. This exists in the modern nation state where there are new models. They do not depend on the desires, and hopes of peoples or money capitalism superseding the model government with which we are most familiar.

Diversity in its economic dimension takes us beyond the classical understanding of capitalism. For example, it uses money in order to make more money. “Geopolitical pluralism” is one neologism used to describe this stage of advanced capitalism; its concern is strategically to foster political independence/emancipation for the purposes of economic expansion. Accumulation of wealth, however, is not the issue; it is a matter of control of the exploitation of resources, both natural and human. The move from a money economy represents a new technique in the attainment of that objective.

As Joseph Washington astutely observed many years ago, “a universally geared technological economy...cannot permit racial conflicts, which tend to disrupt a well oiled organized society or rob it of necessary though colored cogs.”<sup>13</sup> Money was the means by which the political economy integrated these “colored cogs” into the global society; that is money was the means of controlling oppositional forces. American blacks see the dominance of racial monism in the post civil rights era as the strategic operation in the nullification of structural criticism. With the disintegration of the Black Panther Party and the simultaneous implementation of the civil rights agenda, race became the prominent mode of critique among black Americans. Thus, the political economy was not an acceptable target of black American criticism.

Firstborn peoples in the United States enjoy the privilege of being in the center, reaping the benefits of globalization. People who live on the periphery are not fortunate to have the same privilege. The fact that money in a global society does not carry the weight that it did for firstborns inside the borders of the United States requires new forms of oppositional nullification. In spite of affluence for some natives, the black experience over the last forty years, from the perspective of this critical view, has provided the answer to the problem of global legitimization of the political economy. The black experience represents a successful model for the incorporation of non Western peoples into global society. It has done so by an emphasis on ethnic culture and diversity. The banner of (religious) freedom fostered religious pluralism (the privatization

of religion), just as ethnic or national pluralism thrives under the banner of diversity. In this way, cultural exploitation, the strategic fostering of political emancipation functions as the new form of capital, the new means of social control.

Therefore, race and diversity continue as tools of suppression and not visions of freedom. Race and diversity function as agents of new life for peoples who seek inclusion into the dominant global economy on deeper levels. By new life, I mean that the global economy is more successful than ever in how it brings “the other” (peoples/cultures) into subjection with concepts like race or *democracy*.

The strongest example of this is that blacks, though not a part of the dominant market economy in America between the late 1940’s and early 1950’s, were self-sufficient. Except for a proportionately few elite black Americans, those who sought a place in the dominant political economy, black Americans did not have a stake in that system. However, the growing independence black Americans from the United States capitalist economy became a threat to the dominant economy as the controls of the of the Federal Reserve did not influence, as do various independent international nations today. With these nations, as with black Americans, the question is not race. Democracy becomes the manner of forcing compliance.

### The Native: A Reinterpretation

In light of a theological-historical view, certain issues characterize race and the *experience of race* within the context of the United States. These issues occur over against an emerging Atlantic world and its economic and political interests, including slavery and slave trading. The first issue is an emphasis on the terminology used to describe people of color. I choose to use the term natives. This issue is inclusive of related issues like diversity and the quest of *black theology* and its mixed goal of accommodation into a society that itself is exploitive. These issues lead to another, namely, the problem of political emancipation and its policies of inclusion, as opposed to a more rooted transformation and renewal in the face of suffering and despoilation in contemporary society today.

The concept of *Natives* is the basis for the “historical” idea of “race.” The term *natives* are a reference to those detribalized Amerindians, enslaved Africans, and Irish Catholics who did not embrace the British system. *Natives* have become the indigenous peoples of the Americas, the descendants of the peoples *created across the waters*. The use of the term is more than the delimiting of peoples by ethnic or geophysical attributes. The commingling of political and economic forces in the construction of the Americas is what *created* the native. Natives are a mixed people

(culturally). Moreover, natives are the by-products of conquest beginning with the rise of the liberal political economy. The political economy consists of all aspects of the society or civilization: its political process, how these relate to money and business, and how technology manages them. The political economy also determines behavioral patterns in the society, by that, forcing consent from its people and making its institutions (even religious institutions) subservient to it.<sup>14</sup> The existence of natives attests to a struggle for survival within that political economy up to the present. Natives have had various names depending on the confluence of certain forces and interests. The turbulent voyage of natives, living in the heart of the Americas, is one in which the political economy enforces their compliance in return for survival. This compliance has blurred the boundaries of the inviolable, the sacred, and the religious.

In the building of this broad-based sketch of natives is the distinguishing between political emancipation over against theological possibilities. The distinguishing characteristic of blacks or African Americans today is that they seek emancipation. However, what emancipation, and what does emancipation of *blacks* mean when the whole global society needs emancipation as human beings?

In the rise of the West, the conquest of the trader then and now maintains its dominance through the solidifying of the political economy into categories and structures. Charles H. Long describes the situation from the point of cultural contact. Hidden power that filters everything through what he calls “categorical and intellectual structures” that result in the victims (natives) either simply accusing those judged to be the sources of their situation or of seeking compensation for those woes (reparations) or they establish structures that do the same.

The concern is that what we might refer to as the various theologies (including *black* theologies) associated with natives in the United States today (e.g. African American, Black, Hispanic, womanist, feminist, sexual orientation, and gender theologies, firstborn peoples etc.) might be merely categorial structures. Through these categorial structures, the latencies of power operate to manipulate and control at the deeper levels of experience. This phenomenon also referred to as both exterior and interior pressures, which maintain dependence on the structures of exploitation and oppression. Not only this, but the structures do not lead to theological or historical integrity.<sup>16</sup>

The structure of cultural diversity yields new levels of control in two ways. First, it obscures the real fragmentation of particular ethnic concentrations, abstracting them from their historical origins, and re-embedding them in a well-oiled organized society. In this way, we can lose the meaning of conflict and emotional categories centered on indi-

vidual action abound. Second, it establishes diversity as an absolute. As such, diversity creates an illusion of acceptance for all. In the name of diversity massive attacks and destruction of other cultures, justifies the actions even of whole societies. In effect, we tolerate only one system of diversity; that is one's own.

Diversity thus keeps natives merely striving for emancipation of their group within the existing social, political, and economic reality. While the whole society stands in need of transformation. They are willing to live and thrive within their only existing context while they critique their exclusion from the "blessings" of the United States. Limited to the level of social or political emancipation, these efforts are an illusory pursuit of the maximization of self interests. Change in this situation has meant inclusion, not transformation.

In this light, the celebration of "uniqueness," "separation," or "difference" culturally causes some concern. Does this celebration of otherness not merely reflect the values of the dominant global understanding of culture? Focusing on their own interests, various groups no longer harbor consciousness of the broader concerns beyond themselves. The advanced or late capitalist worldview of globalism stresses cultural diversity. Such a worldview denies anything systematic or general in history. Thus, the change to a global political, economic society has resulted in the fragmentation of cultures on various levels. It is void of coherence, a common history or culture, or a common story.

Therefore, culturally speaking society organized along cultural lines limits itself to historical determination rather than being in conflict with its historical situation. This raises the question of whether today the focus on the black experience is not merely a revisionist approach, making use of the folkloric tradition, having little or no effective results. Such a position theoretically supports the status quo and does not open up the real meaning and potential of life in the human community.

So "letting go of race" opens up the potential of the human community authentically to attend to the transformation of the whole of society, or in theological terms, to the presence of the Kingdom of God. This potential challenges us to go beyond the limits of "politics of recognition" or identity conversations to a richer theological discourse that includes the triple "fronts" of the cultural, economic and political manipulation by interests or forces that seek use of "race" as a means of control. Therefore, what is the potential of theological-historical horizons beyond the limits of mere external performance as suggested by diversity?

### **Theological Considerations**

In a recent interview at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven for the *Fourth Newsletter of the Centre of Liberation Theologies: January 2012, I*

stated: “The theologian of today must be one who seeks to incorporate the Divine Mystery beyond the material and the power that the material can have over creation.”<sup>18</sup>

Thus, theological reflection is a reflection on the shifting nature of race and diversity and the *devolutionary* dimensions of the global political economy as a construction historically shifting in the rising tide of new world economies. We have inherited this human history – because of the way we bear the burden of the situation of contemporary and future victims. It is not enough that the theologian understand the genesis of and the future thrust of the struggles of peoples. We have in these historical realities the legacy of the Divine Mystery of God manifesting itself in history.

The only way to let go of race and its attendant issues of diversity in a theological manner is to focus on how the theologian lives in relationship to the world. Such an approach empowers the theologian to speak to the world about that Divine Mystery in a new way. We have the privilege of accessing that Mystery through what humanity suffers in history. The ongoing nature of that suffering reflects, points to, and represents the history of that Divine Mystery existing in the human context. Through this experience, we learn that the oppression of peoples is transformative, not in itself, but in what the Divine Mystery represents. The following assertion in the aforementioned interview is that theological discourse goes beyond being right or wrong. “For the theologian, orthopraxy or doing right, namely witnessing (martyrdom) with one’s life to the presence of the Divine, is of greater value in the midst of the capitalist materialization of the Mystery than being right.”<sup>19</sup>

Likewise, the interview indicates, that this can be accomplished “in the rediscovery of the eschatological dimension of all creation, the theologian in opening up to the future, by attending to the historical task of orienting and opening up ourselves to the gift which gives history its transcendent meaning: the full and definitive encounter with the Divine, and with other humans.” When theologians open themselves in this way, they can take the side of the victims when approaching contemporary questions in a multidisciplinary way, both within the discipline and collaborating with others, and combining life with an experience of God.

Previous comments on the meaning of historical praxis refer not to just remembering a past event, but refer to “rereading” that past event in light of the present. For example, the situation of poverty and oppression reread in light of/through the lens of the Gospels is a way of giving hope to victims of oppressive measures. This is especially so if the goal of this measure is the extension of global economic dominance. However, connecting to that rereading of history entails also reading into those past

events the causes of the social, political, and economic oppression.

In carrying out this approach to theology, not only includes but goes beyond a serious life of prayer. The theologian discovers the Divine Mystery as creating and recreating the world, in the human situation, in all its various dimensions.

One of the principal dimensions of letting go of race is what I refer to as *abiding*. Although this experience implies prayer, it is vital to indicate that prayer in this situation is dynamic. Abiding means living exposed to the suffering of the poor in the situation of the poor. Thus, abiding has eschatological significance. Abiding manifests itself as wholeness, in such an eschatological dimension. Using Xavier Zubiri's notions of engaging history, Ignacio Ellacuría refers to this process as "bearing the burden."<sup>20</sup>

Likewise, Jon Sobrino places this dimension of theology in the context historical praxis. That way theology is far more than a serious life of prayer. Prayer refers not just to remembering a past event, but refers to "rereading" that past event in light of the present. It means reading the suffering of Jesus from the situation of social, political, cultural victims. For example, the situation of poverty and oppression reread in light of/through the lens of the Gospels is a way of giving hope to victims of oppression – the Divine Mystery is transforming the earth. However, connecting to that rereading of history entails also reading into that past event the causes of the social, political, and economic oppression.<sup>21</sup>

## Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Cornel West, *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight against Imperialism*, New York: The Penguin Press, 2004, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3-7.

<sup>3</sup> Fernand Braudel. *On History*, trans. Sarah Matthews, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980, pp. 3-4.

<sup>4</sup> Braudel, pp. 8, 11.

<sup>5</sup> Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002, pp. viii, x, 4-5.

<sup>6</sup> Initially the basis of the economy in British America was slavery and slave-trading. The following selected bibliography certainly does not exhaust the studies on slavery in the States, but it provides an important insight into the role of the slave industry.

One of the foremost works on the slavery of British America is, W.E.B. DuBois, *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870*, intro. Philip S. Foner (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1970; originally published by Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1896). DuBois' work is significant because it is so thorough in its use of national and state governmental, legal and historical sources, e.g.,

colonial statutes, Congressional and State documents and archival materials, reports of anti-slavery societies, personal narratives and monographs on slavery. Unlike most of the studies on slavery in British America, Dubois' work is the only one to make a strong link between the geography of the Atlantic seaboard and its impact on the specific investment of each of the colonies. His approach, unlike many studies on slavery, does not ignore the vital role of the northern and New England colonies in slavery and slave-trading. Most often, by stressing the use of slaves in the cotton, sugar, tobacco, and indigo industries, studies focus on the southern colonies and states (Georgia, North and South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia and Kentucky) as the slave-bearing colonies. So that, by the middle of the 18th century, it appears that the only colonies actively involved in slavery were the southern colonies. In fact, that the impetus of the abolitionists' movement came from northern states does not mean they were blameless. The insight and research of DuBois translates instead into an effort to change the labor system from a slave to a free labor system. Such a move to free the slaves promised greater profits in a rapidly changing economy. Prompted by the changes brought on by industrialization beginning in the mid-19th century, slavery was no longer the most profitable source of labor for the expanding commercial interests.

An early classic and challenging study on the slave industry in British America is Thomas R.R. Cobb's work, *An Historical Sketch of Slavery from the Earliest Periods* (Philadelphia: T. & J.W. Johnson & Co.; Savannah: W. Thorne Williams, 1858).

The following works also substantiate that the British America was a society whose economy was based on slavery: David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution 1770-1823* (Ithaca, New York; London: Cornell University Press, 1975); Davis, "The continuing Contradiction of Slavery: A Comparison of British America and Latin America," *The Debate Over Slavery: Stanley Elkins and His Critics*, ed. Ann J. Lane (Urbana; Chicago; London: University of Illinois Press, 1971); Davis, *Slavery in the Colonial Chesapeake*, *The Foundations of America* (Williamsburg, VA: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1986).

Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800*, Institute of Early American History & Culture of Williamsburg, Virginia (Chapel Hill; London: University of North Carolina Press, 1986); Philip D. Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex: Essays in Atlantic History*, *Studies in Comparative World History* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848* (London; New York: Verso, 1988); Willie Lee Rose, ed. with commentary, *A Documentary History of Slavery in North America* (New York; London: Oxford University Press, 1976).

Edmund S. Morgan, "Slavery and Freedom: The American Paradox," *The Journal of American History*; formerly, *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 59, No. 1 (June 1972): 5-29; *Ibid.*, *American Slavery American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1975); Helen Tunnicliff Catterall, ed., *Judicial Cases concerning American Slavery and the Negro: Cases from the Courts of New England, the Middle States, and the District of Columbia*, With additions by James J. Hayden, Vol. IV (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1968); William Hand Browne, *Archives of Maryland: Proceedings and Acts of the General Assembly of Maryland*, January 1637/8-September 1664 and April 1666-June 1676 (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1883 and 1884).

Louis P. Hennighausen, *The Redemptioners and the German Society of Maryland: A Historical Sketch* (Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland, January 1888); Whittington B. Johnson, "The Origin and Nature of African Slavery in Seventeenth Century Maryland," *Maryland Historical Magazine*, Vol. 73, No. 3 (September 1978): 236-245.

The works of the Jesuits must be examined from two perspectives. The Jesuits existed as cofounders, collaborators, and investors in the founding of the Maryland colony. The lite-

rature on slavery, during this period, reflected a rejection of slavery and of slave trading spirit. From the Puritan invasions of the Maryland colony between 1644 and 1646, to the period since the suppression and reestablishment of the Jesuits in 1773 and 1803, respectively, the Jesuits have been actively involved in slavery. The type of literature on slavery produced by Jesuit reflected a different spirit. This literature shows Jesuit support and participation in slavery.

The following are some of the Jesuit literature: Andrew White, *A Relation of Maryland*, (orig., September 8, 1635. repr. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1966); Joseph Zwinge, S.J., "Our Fathers in the Colonization of Maryland," *Woodstock Letters* 36:78-92; [WL] Ibid., "The Jesuit Farms in Maryland," WL, 39:374-382; 40:65-77; 40:180-199; 41:53-77; 41:195-222; 41:275-291; 42:1-13; 42:137-150; 42:194-200; 43:83-89; 43:336-352; "Papers Relating to the Early History of the Maryland Mission. Annual Letters 1634-1642," WL, 10:209-224; 11:3-24; 11:117-140. Peter C. Finn, *The Slaves of the Jesuits in Maryland*, A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Georgetown University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of M.A. in History, Thesis #4418 (Washington, DC: Georgetown University, May 1974); Emmett Curran, S.J., "'Splendid Poverty:' Jesuit Slaveholding in Maryland, 1805-1838," *Catholics in the Old South*; Gilbert J. Garraghan, S.J., *The Jesuits of the Middle United States*, 3 Vols., Vol. 1 (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1983); Darold D. Wax, "Black Immigrants: The Slave Trade in Colonial Maryland," *Maryland Historical Magazine*, Vol. 73, No. 1 (March 1978): 30-45.

- 7 Amy Gutmann, Multiculturalism, p. xi, and Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity*, pp. 1-35.
- 8 The purpose of this text is not to illustrate this point beyond acknowledging the shifting of the world economy. To substantiate this position, I submit a few texts of Immanuel Wallerstein: (1998) *Utopistics: Or, Historical Choices of the Twenty-first Century*; (1999) *The End of the World as We Know It*; (2000) *The Essential Wallerstein*; (2003) *The Decline of American Power*.
- 9 "Silver Rites" is descriptive of what the two laws of 1963 and 1965, lumped together with the Brown v. Board of Education ruling by the Supreme Court constitutes the rights gained by blacks. I refer to these rights as "silver rights" in that as already expressed, they solidify the relationship of the *binary other* to the dominant political economy.
- 10 David Harvey, *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography*, New York: Routledge, 2001, p. 122.
- 11 Ibid., p. 122.
- 12 Ibid., p. 122.
- 13 Joseph R. Washington, "Are American Negro Churches Christian?" in James H. Cone and Gayraud Wilmore, *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, volumes 1 & 2, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1993, pp. 92-101, p. 93.
- 14 Phillip J. Linden Jr., "Part Three: Symposium. Stephen Ochs. Desegregating the Altar. The Josephites and the Struggle for Black Priests, 1871-1960" in *U.S. Catholic Historian*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Winter 1993): 138-140, 139.
- 15 Long, Charles H., *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986, pp. 5-7.
- 16 Long, p. 5.
- 17 Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual: A Historical Analysis of the Failure of Black Leadership*. New York: Quill, 1967, 1984.

- <sup>18</sup> Katholieke Universiteit Leuven for the Fourth Newsletter of the Centre of Liberation Theologies: January 2012.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup> Kevin Burke, *The Ground Beneath the Cross: The Theology of Ignacio Ellacuría*, Washington, DC.: Georgetown University Press, 2000, 2004, pp. 15-35; 43-60.
- <sup>21</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological View*. trans. Paul Burns and Francis McDonagh. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991, 1993, 2001, pp. 23-35.





# The Irruption of the Beloved

## Reciprocity in the preferential option for the poor

Joseph DREXLER-DREIS

Liberation theologians developed the preferential option for the poor as a discourse on God, based on Christian revelation and tradition, in response to the “irruption of the poor into history”: those who were formerly concealed making themselves present.<sup>1</sup> But when “the poor” is limited to a conceptual category, and the reciprocity that an irruption entails is concealed, the event of the irruption loses its transgressive character and its theological significance. The violence and upheaval that constitute the irruption is signified in a way that fits into a theological system, and thus only functions to confirm a fixed doctrine. I will question how theologians in the contemporary context can articulate an understanding of God by critically reflecting, in the light of Christian faith, on the active and creative irruptions of those who are excluded from western theological systems. I will argue for the need to draw on social analyses that exist beyond the constructed borders of western theology as mediations for theology, which lead to dynamic and dialogical discourses about God that emerge out of experiences within God’s creation. By drawing on the mediation of one of these experiences, Toni Morrison’s narrative analysis of love, I will show that the preferential option for the poor can only say something about God when it remains in a reciprocal relationship with the irruption of the beloved.

It is important to clarify what I mean by “irruption.” In the 1980s, Gustavo Gutiérrez described the historical event of “the irruption of the poor” as the expression of “the ‘major fact’ in the life of the Latin American church—the participation of Christians in the process of liberation.”<sup>2</sup> The “irruption” is from those whom Gutiérrez describes as the formerly

“absent”: those “of little or no importance, and without the opportunity to give expression themselves to their sufferings, their comradeships, their plans, their hopes.”<sup>3</sup> For Gutiérrez, this irruption is “a tough entry that asks permission of no one, and it is sometimes violent. The poor come with...their suffering, their culture, their odor, their race, their language, and the exploitation they are experiencing. When the poor break in, they do so with everything they are.”<sup>4</sup> It is this active irruption, operating out of an unorthodox rationality, that confronts theology

As liberation theology has continued to find new forms of expression, liberation theologians have developed and deepened their attempts to understand the reality of marginalized and oppressed peoples. They have done so by using, at least since the 1980s, cultural analyses as mediations that compliment socio-economic analyses.<sup>5</sup> This desire on the part of liberation theologians to constantly search for ways in which the structures at play in reality can be more clearly brought to the forefront opens up new spaces for theology. Taking advantage of this emerging space in which to theologically reflect on other knowledges, I will indicate the potential of a narrative concept of affective and reciprocal love, Toni Morrison’s 1987 novel *Beloved*, to contribute to a contemporary understanding of the preferential option for the poor.

There is a need to retrieve the process by which Latin American theologians first articulated the preferential option for the poor, but there is not a need to retrieve—in the sense of copying—the articulation itself. Despite being written two decades ago, *Beloved* provides insight into the contemporary social-political context that catalyzes a theological reflection on the contemporary articulation of the option for the poor.

In *Beloved*, Morrison re-tells the historical story of Margaret Garner, who escaped slavery in 1856 but was then captured by slave catchers. Rather than allow her daughter to be forced back into slavery, Garner killed her. To open up an imaginative space, Morrison tells a story using her own three principle characters: Sethe and her two daughters, Denver and Beloved.<sup>6</sup> After escaping slavery, the three women, along with Sethe’s two sons, live together at “124,” a house on the outskirts of Cincinnati. When slave catchers arrive to capture and return Sethe and her children to slavery, Sethe attempts to kill her two daughters and two sons, but only successfully kills one daughter. This child is buried, with “Beloved” written on the tombstone, and Sethe’s two sons eventually run away while her other daughter, Denver, stays with Sethe. “Beloved” remains in 124 as a ghostly presence until Paul D, a former slave with Sethe on the Kentucky plantation “Sweet Home,” shows up and kicks her ghost out. Beloved then returns as an embodied woman, and Denver, Sethe, and Paul D take her in to live with them at 124.

*Beloved*, as a narrative description of love, prompts at least three theological implications for an articulation of the preferential option for the poor: (1) the need for a social analysis that is in constant search of the roots of the structures that prohibit the actualization of loving praxes; (2) the awareness that the option for the poor is a discourse about God that arises from a historical situation, not a doctrine of God imposed onto historical contexts; and (3) the awareness that discourses about God cannot be fixed. These three theological implications result in a discourse on God that pays constant attention to the irruptions beyond the borders of the western mediations theology has traditionally drawn on, and that exists in a reciprocal relationship with these irruptions.

### ***Beloved* as a Narrative of Neoslavery: the Role of Social Analysis**

While *Beloved* is a narrative that finds a precedent in Margaret Garner's historical experience one and a half centuries ago, there are contemporary social conditions that prompt a return to this historical experience. Reading the text "not as a neoslave narrative, but rather as a 'narrative of neoslavery,'" Dennis Childs argues that the conditions portrayed in *Beloved*—racism that affects everyday lived experience, the dehumanization of prison life, the "right" that whites have over Black bodies—are not past conditions in the sense that they are gone.<sup>7</sup> Because of the persistence of these conditions, *Beloved* is important to consider in opening up a contemporary theological discourse on who God is. While I do not advocate the use of literature at the expense of traditional forms of analysis, drawing on literature can be important because it can reveal the materiality of injustices in ways the social sciences cannot. As a social analysis of love expressed through narrative, *Beloved* allows the complexities of love to surface, rather than limiting love to a definition, and opens up the potential of reciprocal love.

One of the aspects of Morrison's narrative that can provide a mediation for theology is her search into the social and psychological effects of the prison system. The modern penitentiary system is one of the various sites where a strong parallel appears between US American chattel slavery before 1865 and contemporary life in the United States.<sup>8</sup> Morrison's description of Paul D's prison experience—working on a chain gang while being entombed within a cage buried in the ground—is an example of what Childs calls her use of "strategic anachronism": Childs shows that Paul D's experience on the chain gang is more generally associated with the US prison experience in the late-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century, not the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup>

Paul D's experience leads him to the conclusion that he can only "love small." Having been a slave and a prisoner distorts the way he is

able to relate to other people. While hearing Sethe explain her love for her children, Paul D tries to come to terms with his own capability to love. Remembering his time as a prisoner in Alfred, Georgia, he thinks about not having the right or the permission to enjoy the sound of doves “because in that place mist, doves, sunlight, copper dirt, moon—everything belonged to the men who had the guns.”<sup>10</sup> But despite their guns, Paul D did not let the men stop him from loving. Finding a way out of the situation, he remembers, “you protected yourself and loved small. Picked the tiniest stars out of the sky to own; lay down with head twisted in order to see the loved one over the rim of the trench before you slept. Stole shy glances at her between the trees at chain-up. Grass blades, salamanders, spiders, woodpeckers, beetles, a kingdom of ants. Anything bigger wouldn’t do. A woman, a child, a brother—a big love like that would split you wide open in Alfred, Georgia.”<sup>11</sup>

By examining how severe oppression distorts the way that one is able to relate to other persons, Morrison reveals the social character of a historical context in a different way than the social sciences are capable of. While forced material poverty and imprisonment/enslavement have a number of implications that social analyses must continue to bring out, Morrison’s narrative reveals the limitations material oppression and imprisonment/enslavement have on being able to love. Further, through her use of narrative, Morrison opens up the possibility for Paul D to actively combat his social world by creating new types of relationships. Paul D starts with small, but extremely important, relationships with elements in the natural world that he encounters that are free from the oppression that he experiences. This gradually grows into a complex relationship with Sethe.

Gutiérrez affirms that social analysis has to get to the “roots” of the situation; otherwise they will only confuse the situation and the avenues of responding to it.<sup>12</sup> Morrison’s social analysis through narrative adds to this quest, deepening the understanding of God’s creation and the relationships embedded within it and developing an initial response. Because a theology that is transgressive must push past doctrinal borders by seeking a discourse about God that arises out of experiences within marginalized realities, such an existential analysis is needed.

### **Explaining Murder: the Failure of Discourse Disconnected from Lived Experience**

After Paul D stays on at 124, Stamp Paid, who works with Paul D, shows him a newspaper article about Sethe killing her daughter. Although he cannot read, Paul D knows a Black woman would not appear in the newspaper unless it was for something extremely out of the ordinary. But at the same time, Paul D recognizes that what is presented in the

paper is not Sethe's story; the story has been imposed on her. "This ain't her mouth. I know her mouth and this ain't it," Paul D says and repeats often.<sup>13</sup> "You forgetting I knew her before," Paul D tells Stamp Paid, "Back in Kentucky, when she was a girl. I didn't just make her acquaintance a few months ago. I been knowing her a long time. And I can tell you for sure: this ain't her mouth. May look like it, but it ain't."<sup>14</sup> Initially, Paul D takes his shared experience with Sethe to be more authoritative than the story imposed on her by the discursive power of the (white) newspaper. There is an alienation of the written word, a separation of it from the experience that it seeks to convey. While Sethe's attempt to explain to Paul D why she killed her daughter is important, only her ability to open up a new space from which Paul D can think will be able to provoke a mutual understanding. In this way, *Beloved* reveals the contextual nature of understanding.

When Paul D gets back to 124 and shows Sethe the newspaper clipping, the written word has gained a power above the experience of reality. When confronted with the newspaper clipping, Sethe tells Paul D about her experience at Sweet Home and escape from it: "I don't have to tell you about Sweet Home—what it was—but maybe you don't know what it was like for me to get away from there." When Sethe tells Paul D about the experience of being free and able to love whomever she wanted when she got out of Kentucky, he understands her: "He knew exactly what she meant: to get to a place where you could love anything you chose—not to need permission for desire—well now, that was freedom."<sup>16</sup> Like Paul D, who sought opportunities to "love small," Sethe associates freedom with a freedom to love and love the way she is compelled to love.

But Paul D is not, at this point, able to understand Sethe fully, which Sethe empathizes with. She knows that killing her child is not something discourse alone can explain, as the excess meaning of the murder cannot be conceptualized. All Sethe can tell Paul D in the end is, "I stopped him.... I took and put my babies where they'd be safe."<sup>17</sup> This is what scares Paul D:

*This here Sethe was new.... This here Sethe talked about love like any other woman; talked about baby clothes like any other woman, but what she meant could cleave the bone. This here Sethe talked about safety with a handsaw. This here new Sethe didn't know where the world stopped and she began. Suddenly he saw what Stamp Paid wanted him to see: more important than what Sethe had done was what she claimed. It scared him.*<sup>18</sup>

Sethe's act of love and subsequent description of it are unintelligible outside of Sweet Home and 124 and the experiences they contain

for her: her act of love lives with her. Even when Beloved is “dead,” she remains present with Sethe. And even as Sethe’s act of love becomes an event in the past, its presence, its being present, is not negated. Her description of her act is not of an act that has become an object; Sethe’s description lives with her act and constantly arises out of the historical experience that continues. Interpretation and praxis live uncomfortably together.

When Sethe attempts to convey her act through discourse that is separated from the act, even Paul D, who experienced Sweet Home with Sethe, cannot understand her fully. But he does understand the point she makes, which is what scares him. Sethe’s power here is in both her actions and the significance she claims for her actions: “thick love,” because “[l]ove is or it ain’t. Thin love ain’t love at all.”<sup>19</sup> Paul D tells Sethe her love is “too thick” and that “[t]here could have been a way. Some other way.”<sup>20</sup> Even though he recognizes that it is not Sethe’s mouth, Paul D takes the newspaper article, which has no loyalty to Sethe and her context, into account. Because of this, discourse fails between Sethe and “a forest sprang up between them; trackless and quiet.”<sup>21</sup> Paul D can only leave. Even though Paul D’s historical experience permits an understanding, his inability to reach the “thick love” that Sethe lives with—he can still only “love small”—prohibits him from understanding Sethe’s interpretation of her act.

If what gets theology going is “the irruption of reality” and “the irruption of the poor and of God in the poor,” as Jon Sobrino argues,<sup>22</sup> an orthodox praxis of love or an orthodox doctrine of God is not viable. Historical experiences of loving will always transgress these impositions. This affirms Clodovis Boff’s assertion that there is no “Christian love,” but only praxes of love that are subsequently interpreted as Christian, which follows from his distinction between the real and the awareness of the real. A praxis of love exists within the realm of the real; the theoretical construction of “Christian love” exists within the realm of the awareness of the real.<sup>23</sup>

This encounter with God in history is a key element of Gutiérrez’s work.<sup>24</sup> Within the tradition of liberation theology, but also transgressing the borders of its loci of enunciation, Marcella Althaus-Reid maintains this insistence that discourses on God have their foundations in a historical experience. For Althaus-Reid, one’s location within historical contexts is geographical but also epistemological. By seeing the epistemological aspect of context, Althaus-Reid can connect particular reflections on reality in order to unify them into what she calls “Queer Theology.”<sup>25</sup>

Queer Theologians insist on remaining loyal to the historical experiences that provoke theological reflection rather than being incorporated

into broader theological trends: they destabilize dogmatic concepts by returning to the real.<sup>26</sup> Queer theologians work from the epistemological and geographical context of “the Other side”:

*The Other side is in reality a pervasive space made up of innumerable Queer religious and political diasporas, and a space to be considered when doing contextual Queer Theology. The Good News is that at that edge...there is God.... The God who has come out, tired perhaps of being pushed to the edge by hegemonic and sexual systems in theology, has made god's sanctuary on the Other side. Our task and our joy is to find or simply recognise God sitting amongst us, at any time, in any gay bar or in the home of a camp friend who decorates her living room as a chapel and doesn't leave her rosary at home when going to a salsa bar.<sup>27</sup>*

Althaus-Reid prompts theologians to search for God in the spaces of God's creation that have been covered over by the norm of decency. Sethe's praxis of love is one of those spaces of creation.

Whereas Christian theology often insists on normative understandings of reality, Queer Theology is a transgressive theology that searches for counter-discourses within Christianity, spoken about using the grammar of “the Other.”<sup>28</sup> The grammar of the other, i.e., Sethe's attempt to explain her “thick love” to Paul D, is the irruption that Gutiérrez theologizes from: it is the forcing of space in western modern and postmodern discourses which, while they may talk of “the Other,” do not allow space for her grammar to emerge. By entering into the paradigm of Queerness and seeking to understand its grammar, the theologian can enter into the context of the other from an epistemological standpoint. For Althaus-Reid, this epistemic site does not represent the whole of the reality of “the Other side,” but is a crucial part of it.

Sethe's relationship with Beloved is precisely the type of loving relationship, and a grammar of Queerness, that theologians must look to in their search for the face of God. Sethe's love for her children despite prohibiting structures is a Queer way of loving—a form of compassion that God has made possible for her creation but has been covered over by systematized theologies. Sethe lives according to a Queer structure of holiness and a Queer code for loving her children, which condemns her in the eyes of Christianity:

*Queer Christians seem to be condemned to be outside the gates of the church and away from the presence of God, while in reality they know by their own lives of suffering and commitment to integral justice that they can claim not victim-hood but agency in their praxis. Queer dissidents in search of paths of holiness through social practices of justice in sexual, religious and political areas of their lives might well be reducing the hetero-God and church to impotency.<sup>29</sup>*

This is precisely why theologians need to listen to a social analysis such as *Beloved*. If the way those who are structurally and discursively excluded love is not taken into account in theology, a doctrine of God predicated on praxes of love becomes only a projection of dominant western attitudes of love. God ceases to be known through his incarnation in history, and becomes only a doctrine imposed onto history to conform to.

### The Need for Reciprocity in a Praxis of Love

*Beloved*, when interpreted theologically, shows that when humans' immanent encounters with each other become sites out of which to talk about God who is love, we become aware that discourses about who God is cannot be fixed. And moreover, we have to enter into paradigms that have been excluded in order to describe who God is. This becomes evident in a theological interpretation of one of the last scenes of the novel, where a dominant model of loving "the other" is destabilized. In this scene, the women of the community arrive at 124 after Denver asks them for help. When they arrive, Denver is waiting on the porch for Edward Bodwin, a white abolitionist, to take her to her first day of work as his maid. Morrison presents Bodwin as a man who has fixed things for the Black community, and as he rides up to 124, he thinks back to his activities as an abolitionist:

*Nothing since was as stimulating as the old days of letters, petitions, meetings, debates, recruitment, quarrels, rescue and downright sedition. Yet it had worked, more or less, and when it had not, he and his sister made themselves available to circumvent obstacles. As they had when a runaway slave woman lived in his homestead with her mother-in-law and got herself into a world of trouble. The Society managed to turn infanticide and the cry of savagery around, and build a further case for abolishing slavery.<sup>30</sup>*

<sup>4</sup>Bodwin is someone who, in typical modern liberal fashion, brings others' actions into his own narrative to strengthen its case.

When Bodwin arrives, Sethe has almost the same reaction as the last time a white man came to her house. Morrison uses almost the same words to describe what happens in Sethe's mind. But this time, with the ice pick she is using, Sethe charges towards the white man, not her own children, in order to protect *Beloved* and Denver. When Denver and the women of the community stop Sethe, *Beloved*, as a physical being, disappears. It is perhaps easy to not see Sethe's attempt to kill Bodwin as a continuation of her act of love for her children, but as a crazy or delusional act.<sup>31</sup> If this is the case, Sethe's agency and the reason she acts out of is denied, and her praxis of love is no longer seen as a legitimate

space out of which to theologize from. The norm of decency in theology can be maintained.

By the end of *Beloved*, Sethe's individual acts of loving exist within a larger community, and are even at times determined by that larger community. But they are never determined by the white arbiters of reason. Just as the white newspaper cannot tell Sethe's story, Bodwin cannot determine the significance of Sethe's act of love. Despite his liberalism, Bodwin is so distanced from the experiences of the Black community that he did not even know Sethe was trying to kill him. Stamp Paid tells Paul D afterward, "All he saw was some coloredwomen fighting. He thought Sethe was after one of them."<sup>32</sup>

Although academics often seek a uniform logic, it seems that a better model for interpreting the praxes of love in *Beloved* is what Chela<sup>33</sup> Sandoval has called a "differential" mode of oppositional consciousness. This is the mode of oppositional consciousness employed by what Sandoval calls "U.S. third world feminists": a diverse group of peoples whose unifying characteristic is that they are "internally colonized communities." Sandoval's differential mode of oppositional consciousness draws on at least four ideological forms of resistance that she sees different groups of oppressed peoples in the United States to have employed since the 1960s: "equal rights," "revolutionary," "Marxist," and "separatism."<sup>34</sup> The "differential" ideological mode sets these different modes of resistance "into new processual relationships."<sup>35</sup> It chooses the mode of opposition that the particular context a movement is confronted with demands.

It is this pragmatic but theoretically unclean type of oppositional consciousness that Sethe operates out of and is also present in the broader context of the novel: at times Sethe resists slavery and "loves thickly" by killing her child so as not to let her be enslaved; in other instances Paul D "loves small"; at other times Sethe attacks a white abolitionist; and still at other times Sethe's community prevents her from attacking this abolitionist because, as Stamp Paid tells Paul D, Bodwin is "somebody never turned us down. Steady as a rock. I tell you something, if she had got to him, it'd be the worst thing in the world for us."<sup>36</sup> By making what Althaus-Reid calls "Queer Thinking"—thinking outside of the decent categories that support the structures of life in the United States<sup>37</sup>—delusional, we negate any possibility of meaning to arise from the acts of love Morrison brings out; all meaning becomes subsumed into local discourses of reason that have been made universal. It is for this reason that *Beloved* reveals the power of orthodox ways of loving: Sethe is rendered delusional, or even an animal by Paul D,<sup>38</sup> because she loves outside of orthodoxy and refuses to conform to white values and ways of loving.

When we consider this social analysis of love within the discipline of theology, and as saying something about God, the way Sethe loves and the way we interpret her loving praxis has concrete implications for who God is. The option for the poor is not an option for an abstract group; it is an option to enter into a particular type of relationship, within which the parties act reciprocally.<sup>39</sup> Our discourse on God is clarified as we reflect on the connections between historical praxis and divine revelation. Both historical praxis and divine revelation are products of an encounter with God in history that Gutiérrez grounds christologically: “the Word is not only a Word about God and about human nature: the Word is made human.... Human history, then, is the location of our encounter with God, in Christ.”<sup>40</sup>

It is important to question where and how that encounter takes place. Althaus-Reid reminds us that Queer realities—those sites of intimate relationships that have been concealed, in part by western theologies—also reveal the face of God, and if these sites are ignored, an aspect of God is also ignored. In this way, Althaus-Reid agrees with Gutiérrez and the first generation of liberation theologians that we know God from how God reveals herself in history. But Althaus-Reid emphasizes “that such revelation of God in history is also a revelation made through the history of human relationships, and intimate relations”; God’s revelation is *in* “the native’s orgy” and “the perceived tainted vulgarity of the Other’s intimate loving exchanges.”<sup>41</sup> It is also *in* Sethe’s relationship with her daughters.

This emphasis on God being revealed in relationships that are rejected and made illicit implies a dynamic, dialogical, and processual discourse on God. Rather than re-ordering relationships to fit into systematic norms, Althaus-Reid allows a Queer reality, and specifically the relationships within that reality, to reveal the face of God. This is a theology striving towards “a pedagogy of reciprocity,”<sup>42</sup> and is grounded in her open, flowing, and processual christology.

Althaus-Reid’s christology develops out of the way liberation theology has traditionally understood Christ. For liberation theologians, we encounter God in history: the irruption of the poor has a theological significance in that it says something about God. Gutiérrez, and the first generation of liberation theologians as a whole, enter into this discourse on God through christology:

*For Jesus is the irruption into history of the one by whom everything was made and everything was saved. This, then, is the fundamental hermeneutical circle: from humanity to God and from God to humanity, from history to faith and from faith to history, from the human word to the word of the Lord and from the word of the Lord to the human word, from the love of one’s brothers and sisters to the love of the Father and*

*from the love of the Father to love of one's brothers and sisters, from human justice to God's holiness and from God's holiness to human justice.*<sup>43</sup>

It is from the encounter with the irruption of the poor that Christians encounter Christ. And Christians know this because of the revelation God has given.

Althaus-Reid develops a “critical Christology of hope,” in which she: (1) understands Christ from the experience of being an embodied woman; (2) describes Christ in a way that is “open” and “in process,” and always in dialogue with the historical situation; and (3) understands that salvation is a communitarian process such that “Christ becomes a communitarian messiah, made in the midst of a historical process and in dialogue with the people.”<sup>44</sup> By using these three principles, Althaus-Reid reinterprets the three classical foci of christology. In *Jesus' birth*, she focuses on the “generative theme” by reading the New Testament as “part of an incomplete process of conscientization” and develops a “Christ in process,” within the model of a “dialogical messianism.”<sup>45</sup> She finds a precedent for this model in New Testament dialogues where Jesus responds to questions with further questions. In *Jesus' life*, Althaus-Reid considers the community of women that surrounded Jesus and became part of the development of the messiah. Seeing the messiah as constructed through dialogue is in opposition to a dogmatic christology, which Althaus-Reid likens to what Paulo Freire called the “banking” model of education, where the teacher deposits knowledge into the students.<sup>46</sup> Finally, *Christ's death and resurrection* points to the construction of a collective utopia for women. If Christ as a messiah is constructed by a community, then communities “can assume a creative role which gives it identity and challenges the symbolic structures of oppression which exist in the ‘banking Christology.’ This is important, because there is a profound relationship between narrative and action, between praxis and symbolic order.”<sup>47</sup> Rooted in reality and in understandings of how reality can be transformed, when communities excluded from society construct utopias, they are co-constructing the horizon about which Jesus preached: the Kingdom of God.

Like Gutiérrez, Althaus-Reid affirms that we encounter God in history, and both open up this encounter christologically. It is through God's entrance into history through Christ, and God's continued presence in history through Christ, that we see the face of God. Althaus-Reid's contribution pushes theologians to more clearly focus on how ways of loving, especially Queer ways of loving, irrupt into history. If the irruption of those whose ways of loving is suppressed—if the irruption of the beloved present in Morrison's narrative is covered over—the encounter with God

is also suppressed. It is for this reason that we must search, with Althaus-Reid, for the face of the Queer God in history. To do this, we will have to seek Queer expressions of love such as Sethe's, and historical analyses that can clarify the social and political conditions that necessitate such expressions. Thus, social scientific analyses will have to be continued to be deepened by analysis that are able to reveal aspects of lived experience that are not always readily apparent in the analyses that the social sciences are capable of producing. When these analyses continue to bring the lived experience of the marginalized to the forefront, discourse on God will become increasingly destabilized.

## Conclusion

By drawing on Toni Morrison's analysis in *Beloved*, I sought to reveal the Queer, excluded, and indecent intimate relationships that can say something about who God is. This led to questioning how the preferential option for the poor has been articulated within liberation theology and allowed me to argue for the need to affirm the importance of the irruption of the beloved for the preferential option for the poor as a discourse about God. This affirmation offers at least three criteria for contemporary transgressive theologies: (1) analyses of historical suffering that expose the structural limitations to loving relationships are needed to articulate a fuller understanding of who God is; (2) discourse about God arises out of a commitment to groups of peoples and historical experiences; and (3) because of God's incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth, theology must be dialogical and rely on the irruption of realities that have been excluded as its starting point. With these three criteria, theological discourses on God will by necessity exist in a reciprocal relationship with expressions of lived experiences within reality, and make a preferential option for those queer experiences that have been excluded.

## Notes:

- <sup>1</sup> On "the irruption of the poor," see Gustavo Gutiérrez's use of this term in: "The Irruption of the Poor in Latin America and the Christian Communities of the Common People," in Sergio Torres and John Eagleson, eds., *The Challenge of Basic Christian Communities* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1981), 107-12; *Power of the Poor in History*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983), 75-107; *The Truth Shall Set You Free*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990); and *The God of Life*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), 84-91.
- <sup>2</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Expanding the View," introduction to *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, rev. ed., trans. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988), xx.
- <sup>3</sup> Gutiérrez, "Expanding the View," xx.
- <sup>4</sup> Gutiérrez, "The Irruption of the Poor," 108.

- 5 See Adolfo Abascal-Jaen, "Latin-American Theology Paradigm Shift or Development-Deepening?" in *Liberation Theologies on Shifting Grounds: A Clash of Socio-Economic and Cultural Paradigms*, 395-401, ed. Georges De Schrijver (Leuven: Peeters Press, 1998), and Diego Irarrazaval, "Understanding Love: The Basic Paradigm in Latin-American Theology," in *Liberation Theologies on Shifting Grounds*, 112-29. Several theologians have observed this. In his 1988 introduction to the 15th anniversary edition of *A Theology of Liberation*, Gustavo Gutiérrez writes that "[t]he world of the poor is a universe in which the socio-economic aspect is basic but not all inclusive" and that "[t]he situation of racial and cultural minorities and of women among us is a challenge to pastoral care and to commitment on the part of the Christian churches; it is therefore also a challenge to theological reflection" ("Expanding the View," xxi-xxii). Georges De Schrijver has called this, in stronger terms, a "shift" in liberation theology's paradigm. See "Paradigm Shift in Third-World Theologies of Liberation: From Socio-Economic Analysis to Cultural Analysis?" in *Liberation Theologies on Shifting Grounds*, 3-83.
- 6 See Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Vintage International, 1987), xvii.
- 7 See Dennis Childs, "'You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet': Beloved the American Chain Gang, and the Middle Passage Remix" *American Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (June 2009): 275.
- 8 See Childs, "'You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet,'" 274-75. *Collateral Costs: Incarceration's Effect on Economic Mobility*, a study by Pew's Economic Mobility Project and its Public Safety Performance Project (2010), shows that the United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world (753 per 100,000 people), and has more inmates than the top 35 European countries combined, which is divided along racial lines: in 2010, 37 percent of working age Black males without a high school degree were incarcerated, three times greater than the same population of white males. This far exceeds working age Black males without a high school degree who have a job (26 percent). In addition, there are 2.7 million children, or 1 in every 28, who have a parent behind bars. For Black children, it is 1 in 9. Of these parents behind bars, two-thirds are incarcerated for non-violent crimes.
- 9 See Childs, "'You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet,'" 285.
- 10 Morrison, *Beloved*, 191.
- 11 Morrison, *Beloved*, 191.
- 12 See Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 16-17.
- 13 Morrison, *Beloved*, 183.
- 14 Morrison, *Beloved*, 185.
- 15 Morrison, *Beloved*, 190.
- 16 Morrison, *Beloved*, 191.
- 17 Morrison, *Beloved*, 193.
- 18 Morrison, *Beloved*, 193, my emphasis.
- 19 Morrison, *Beloved*, 194.
- 20 Morrison, *Beloved*, 194.
- 21 Morrison, *Beloved*, 194.
- 22 Jon Sobrino, "Jesus of Galilee from the Salvadoran Context: Compassion, Hope, and Following the Light of the Cross," *Theological Studies* 70 (2009): 447-48.
- 23 See Boff, *Theology and Praxis*, 100-04.
- 24 See, for example, Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 106-20.

- <sup>25</sup> See Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Queer God* (London: Routledge, 2004), 26.
- <sup>26</sup> Queer Theology is “a broader category whose permanent intent is invisibility...its aim is not to reflect any normative project while allowing a creative process made of the interactions of different orders to happen” (Althaus-Reid, *Queer God*, 27).
- <sup>27</sup> Althaus-Reid, *Queer God*, 4.
- <sup>28</sup> See Althaus-Reid, *Queer God*, 40.
- <sup>29</sup> Althaus-Reid, *Queer God*, 165.
- <sup>30</sup> Morrison, *Beloved*, 307.
- <sup>31</sup> James Berger, for example, sees it as “delusional.” See his “Ghosts of Liberalism: Morrison’s *Beloved* and the Moynihan Report,” *PMLA* 111, no. 3 (May, 1996): 417.
- <sup>32</sup> Morrison, *Beloved*, 312.
- <sup>33</sup> Chela Sandoval, “U.S. Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World,” *GENDERS* 10 (Spring 1991): 1.
- <sup>34</sup> Sandoval, “U.S. Third World Feminism,” 12-13.
- <sup>35</sup> Sandoval, “U.S. Third World Feminism,” 12.
- <sup>36</sup> Morrison, *Beloved*, 312.
- <sup>37</sup> See Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000), 2.
- <sup>38</sup> After Sethe tries to explain infanticide to Paul D, he says “There could have been a way. Some other way.... You got two feet, Sethe, not four” (Morrison, *Beloved*, 194).
- <sup>39</sup> Gutiérrez makes this clear in his notion of liberation. His contrast between the developmentalist and liberationist perspective has to do, in part, with the agency of the subject and the presence of reciprocity in the relationship: a “humanistic approach attempts to place the notion of development in a wider context: a historical vision in which humankind assumes control of [its] own destiny. But this leads precisely to a change of perspective which—after certain additions and corrections—we would prefer to call liberation” (Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 16).
- <sup>40</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 106.
- <sup>41</sup> Althaus-Reid, *Queer God*, 38.
- <sup>42</sup> See Marcella Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology: Readings on Poverty, Sexual Identity and God* (London: SCM Press, 2004), 152.
- <sup>43</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Power of the Poor in History*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983), 61.
- <sup>44</sup> Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist to Indecent*, 48.
- <sup>45</sup> Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist to Indecent*, 53-53.
- <sup>46</sup> See Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist to Indecent*, 57. On the banking model of education, see Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 1974), 57-74
- <sup>47</sup> Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist to Indecent*, 58.







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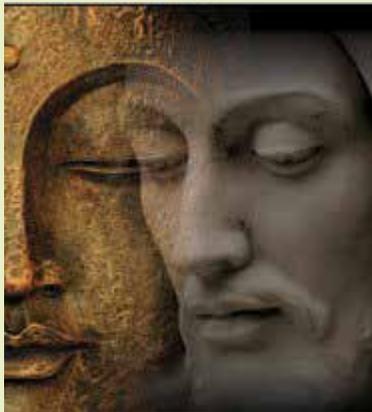
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# Humanistic Buddhism, compassion and liberation from suffering

**Leandro DURAZZO**

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*Eu também tô do lado de Jesus  
só que acho que ele se esqueceu  
de dizer que na Terra a gente tem  
de arranjar um jeitinho pra viver*  
Gilberto Gil - Procissão

We are told that the Buddha was fated to accomplish one of two great destinies: he could become a king, fairly ruling a large territory with wise and good hand, or he could become a teacher, spiritual master of the whole world. He became a teacher. From the beginning of his life as enlightened he taught about liberation, about eradicating the ignorance, and told all the sentient beings that they should pay attention to their behaviours within the world. As long as all things are impermanent – because time, this tyrant, never stops to pass – the beings in search of liberation should act conforming this understanding. It would not be possible, with the vision of an unpredictable and impermanent world, to delay to another future life the correction of one's own attitude.

Differently from Christianity, Indian Buddhism had a cyclic vision of life and rebirth: after death all being would rebirth again in an endless chain of repetition. The liberation would be the overcome of this return, its transcendence.

Then, with a vision over successive rebirths, what could a Buddhist do to overcome this condition? Act, said Buddha. Act correctly, with mindfulness in all attitudes and inter-relations presented by life. Think, said Buddha. Think about the correct conduct, the proper way to dedicate oneself to the others, to the whole beings who exist – not only the

humans but all the sentient beings, even the rocks and mountains which, at first glance, feel nothing.

Buddha was not a king, at last, but his enlightenment and teaching still guide the behaviour of those who are not monks, those who still live in the secular life – as the Christian would name it. Even the monks, retired from the common life, understand the importance of leading a mindful life in society. We are told that the Buddha always remained close to the society, to the people and the governors. Enlightened, he never retreated to any deep cave, ignoring the problems of the world, the suffering of the beings.

What he did is what we still do nowadays, when the Buddhism pays attention to the world in which it finds itself. Humanistic Buddhism, engaged, compromised. Because since its beginning, 2500 years ago, the inter-relationship between all beings, events and attitudes is the heart of the Buddhist practice. The heart of enlightenment is the understanding that there is no isolated event, that there is no suffering without a relation with other occurrences.

Nowadays, with global communications, ecological/environmental/social crisis, Buddhism starts to see that its action in the world has to be more than simply contemplative. Contemplation remains but the behaviour, the correct action – born from an attained contemplation, from a seed of wisdom and compassion – should give ways to the practitioner to contribute with a wider panorama.

While it modernizes itself, Buddhism meets other cultural influences – the West and even the dynamic and modernized East. These meetings allow the Dharma to expand imply detachment from ancient cultural elements. Women, for instance, were almost totally excluded from Buddhism at first, but now they are the most responsables for the flourishing and spreading of the Buddhas' message. The enormous presence of nuns revitalizes the Buddhist practice because it frees the religion from patriarchal and conservative Indian (and Chinese, and Japanese...) characteristics.

The contemporary relativization of an institutional structure – that still exists but becomes more and more flexible because of the wider contacts and dialogues between practitioners, scholars and Dharma teachers – favors the widespread practice of Buddhism anywhere, something that the basic ecclesial communities already experienced. The connection with an official tradition remains, with institutionalized ceremonies and investitures, but an opportunity of a dialogue very akin to the modern and investigative mentality of a lay West also arises.

We can assume that the lay thinkers are powerful allies of engaged and humanistic Buddhism, because they force the Dharma to review itself, to understand itself under new places and times. There are things

that still, however, there are same things that remains just as the faith to the Christians inspired by the spirituality of liberation. In Buddhism what remains is the understanding of impermanence, of inter-relationship between all phenomenas and the possibility of enlightenment. Possibility of liberation, too.

A big challenge to us, Buddhists, born and grown-up within a society, is to find the correct way to act in this same social world, this complex plan so many times aggressive and unruled. I believe that the Christians inspired by liberation also have this common challenge as the structures within which we all live, which are impermanent because permanence is only possible out of time, condition our lives, our positions.

Budhism, engaged or not, is a cosmovision that does not deal with Eternity. If there is God, Final Judgment, transcendental Grace, it does not matter to us as a matter of faith. What are we concerned about is this world and life, the action that takes place right now in all instants. We are concerned about the attention to the possibilities that exist now, within time. Doctrinally, there will never be an agreement between Buddhists and Christians about divine dimension, the Father's one – although there will never be disagreement neither. It is safe to say that the Buddhists will not polemize about transcendence because the concrete reality of the Verb made flesh, this historical dimension in which we are all together, it is the core of attention.

It is why it cannot be said that Buddhism considers reality only as an illusion, a meaningless flow of chaos and irrationality. We do say that reality is an endless flow, but its meaningless only exists according to our incapacity to see the relations between all things. When we ignore the appeal to compassion for the beings and the world, Buddhism runs the risk to exclude itself from reality and to judge it as unworthy. But this would be a distorted and equivocal view of the Buddha's message – a wrong view that the engaged Buddhism, conscious not only of mind but also of concrete reality, comes to set in order.

Then, how can we act together? Which will be our attitudes of compassion and solidarity in this world of injustice, ignorance and suffering? If something still lacks in the Latin American Buddhism I believe it is the organization and deeds that the theology of liberation already could accomplish. I believe it is possible and desirable that we deepen our dialogues, partnerships, projects and activities, for all beings' sake.

The action for a fairest and compassionate world is essential. Action which the spirituality of liberation calls struggle and the Buddhism would call right action. There are not different attitudes because the right action – plus right speech and livelihood – is the core of the Buddhist ethical path. No one who follows the Buddha's Dharma can ignore the

urgency of acting properly and talking about injustices, structural ignorance, the greed and hate that our social system stimulates. Struggle, say the Christians. Act, we say, and both verbs can become flesh of the same movement – because both are animated by compassion, the salvation and liberation of all those who suffer.

Nowadays, with so many opportunism in the midst of the so-called religious activities; with a large crisis ruining social structures and macro-institutions; in this moment, both Buddhism and spirituality of liberation, from the base, must find ways to occupy social spaces, to stimulate popular participation in the world and to orient their spiritual practice – their meeting with liberation. Buddhism is in the world, and from this world we rejoice for the reunion with the Christian brothers already in the struggle and acting for love and justice among the humans. □

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# Budismo humanista, compaixão e libertação do sofrimento

**Leandro DURAZZO**

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*Eu também tô do lado de Jesus  
só que acho que ele se esqueceu  
de dizer que na Terra a gente tem  
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Gilberto Gil - Procissão

Conta-se que o Buda estava destinado a cumprir um de dois destinos grandiosos: ou se tornava rei, governando com justiça, bondade e sabedoria um vasto território, ou se tornava professor, mestre espiritual de todo um mundo. Tornou-se professor. Ensinou, desde o início de sua vida de iluminado, que os seres em busca da libertação, da erradicação da ignorância, deveriam ficar atentos para suas condutas no mundo. Sendo tudo impermanente – porque o tempo, esse imperador, nunca deixa de correr – os seres em busca da libertação deveriam agir em conformidade com essa compreensão. Não seria possível, a partir da visão de um mundo inconstante e imprevisível, postergar para outras vidas a correção das próprias atitudes.

Diferente do cristianismo, o budismo da Índia tinha uma visão cíclica da vida, dos renascimentos: após a morte, todo ser tornaria a renascer, numa cadeia interminável de repetições. A libertação seria a superação desse retorno, sua transcendência.

Então, restando ao budista uma visão de renascimentos sucessivos, o que deveria ser feito para superar essa condição? Agir, dizia o Buda. Agir de forma correta, com a atenção plena em todas as atitudes e inter-relações que a vida apresenta. Pensar, dizia o Buda. Pensar sobre a forma correta de se portar, a forma correta de se dedicar ao próximo, a absolutamente todos os seres existentes – não só humanos, mas todos os seres sencientes, e até mesmo às pedras e montanhas que, à primeira vista, nada sentem.

Buda não foi um rei, no fim das contas, mas sua iluminação e ensinamento ainda hoje influenciam as atitudes daqueles que, não sendo monges, permanecem na vida cotidiana, no século – como diria o cristão. Mesmo os monges, os retirados da vida comum, percebem a importância da vivência consciente no plano social. É dito que o Buda esteve sempre junto das pessoas, do povo e dos governantes. Iluminado, nunca se retirou para o fundo de uma caverna, ignorando os problemas do mundo, o sofrimento dos seres.

O que Buda fez é o que até hoje se faz, quando o budismo presta atenção ao mundo em que se encontra. Budismo humanista, engajado, comprometido. Porque desde o princípio, há 2500 anos, a inter-relação entre todos os seres, acontecimentos e atitudes foi o coração do budismo e de sua prática. O coração da iluminação é a compreensão de que não há evento isolado, de que não há sofrimento cuja causa não esteja em relação com outros acontecimentos.

Hoje, com a globalização das comunicações, com a crise ambiental, energética e social, o budismo começa a compreender que sua atuação no mundo há de ser mais que apenas contemplativa. A contemplação se mantém, mas a conduta, a ação correta – fruto da contemplação realizada, de uma semente de sabedoria e compaixão – deve conceder ao praticante a oportunidade de contribuir com a melhora de um cenário mais amplo.

Enquanto se moderniza e encontra outros territórios culturais – o Ocidente, mesmo o Oriente modernizado e cada vez mais dinâmico – o budismo se expande, também, e deixa de carregar consigo uma série de elementos que sempre foram culturais, mas de outras paragens. As mulheres, por exemplo, quase completamente excluídas da vida monástica no princípio da religião, hoje são as que mais contribuem para o florescimento e expansão do Dharma – a mensagem do Buda. A enorme quantidade de monjas é algo que revitaliza a prática budista, porque pouco a pouco a vai destituindo das características de uma Índia (e China, e Japão...) patriarcal e conservadora.

A relativização contemporânea de uma estrutura institucional – que ainda existe, mas que vai se flexibilizando conforme os praticantes, estudiosos e professores do Dharma têm acesso a mais fontes, a mais contatos e diálogos – favorece a prática do budismo em qualquer lugar, algo que as comunidades eclesiais de base já experimentaram. O vínculo com uma tradição oficial permanece, com cerimônias e investiduras institucionalizadas, mas se abre também um espaço de debate muito afinado à mentalidade moderna e investigativa de um ocidente laico.

É seguro mesmo assumir que o budismo engajado, o budismo humanista, têm nos pensadores laicos grandes aliados, porque estes forçam o Dharma a se rever, a se compreender em novos tempos e espaços.

Há coisas que permanecem, entretanto, como a fé dos cristãos inspirados pela espiritualidade da libertação também permanece. No budismo, o que permanece é a compreensão da impermanência – por paradoxal que isso seja –, a compreensão da inter-relação de todos os fenômenos e a possibilidade de iluminação. De libertação, também.

Um grande desafio que se coloca para nós, budistas - que somos, antes de tudo, seres humanos nascidos e criados em sociedade -, é a forma mais correta de agir nesse mundo social, nessa esfera complexa que se apresenta muitas vezes tão agressiva e desregrada. Acredito que aos cristãos inspirados pela libertação, também, esse é um desafio comum. Porque as estruturas em que vivemos, que não são permanentes porque a única permanência possível é a que está fora do tempo, condicionam nossa vida, nossos posicionamentos.

O budismo – engajado ou não – é uma visão de mundo que não se ocupa com a Eternidade. Se há Deus, se há Juízo, se há a Graça transcendente, aos praticantes do Dharma não nos interessa como matéria de fé. O que nos interessa é o mundo e esta vida, e a atuação neste instante, sempre a cada instante. É a atenção às possibilidades existentes no agora, dentro do tempo. Doutrinariamente, entre budistas e cristãos nunca haverá uma concordância quanto à dimensão do divino, do Pai – embora, tampouco, vá haver discordância. É seguro dizer que os budistas não polemizarão sobre a transcendência, porque a realidade concreta da dimensão do Verbo feito carne, a dimensão histórica em que todos nos encontramos reunidos, é a tônica da atenção.

Por tudo isso, não é possível dizer que o budismo sempre enxerga na realidade apenas uma ilusão, fluxo sem sentido de caos e irracionalidade. Dizemos, sim, que a realidade é um fluxo interminável, mas sua falta de sentido só existe à medida em que não enxergamos as relações entre todas as coisas. À medida em que ignoramos o apelo da compaixão pelos seres e pelo mundo, o budismo corre o risco de se excluir da realidade, de julgar que ela não vale a pena. Mas esta seria uma visão distorcida e equivocada da mensagem do Buda – que o budismo humanista, engajado, consciente não só da mente mas também da realidade concreta, vem sanar.

Como agiremos em conjunto, então? Quais serão nossas atitudes de compaixão e solidariedade neste mundo de injustiças, ignorância e sofrimento? Se algo ainda falta para o budismo latinoamericano, para os budistas da América Latina, acredito ser a organização e experiência de atuação que a teologia da libertação já experimentou, e experimenta. Acredito ser possível e desejável que aprofundemos nossos diálogos, parcerias, projetos e atividades, pelo bem de todos os seres.

A ação por um mundo mais justo e compassivo é essencial. Ação que a libertação chama de luta e que o budismo chamaria de conduta cor-

reta. Não são atitudes diferentes, no fundo, porque a ação correta – junto à fala correta e ao modo de vida correto – faz parte do núcleo ético do caminho budista. Ninguém que siga o Dharma do Buda pode ignorar a urgência de agir e falar corretamente sobre as injustiças, sobre a ignorância estrutural, sobre a cobiça e o ódio que nosso sistema social estimula. Lutar, dizem os cristãos. Agir, dizemos nós. E ambos os verbos podem se fazer carne do mesmo movimento, do mesmo conjunto – porque ambos estão animados pela compaixão, a salvação e libertação de todos aqueles que sofrem.

Neste momento, em que encontramos tantos oportunismos em meio às atividades ditas religiosas; em que as estruturas das grandes instituições parecem ruir em meio a crises; neste momento o budismo e a espiritualidade da libertação, de base, devem encontrar formas de ocupar os espaços sociais, de estimular a participação popular no mundo e de orientar sua prática espiritual – seu encontro com a libertação. O budismo está no mundo, e é neste mundo que nos alegramos por encontrar os irmãos cristãos, já na luta e atuando pelo amor e justiça em meio aos homens. □



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# Contributions of Buddhist Thinking to Liberation Theology

**Faustino TEIXEIRA**

*PPCIR-UFJF*

From my present thinking about Buddhist spirituality and liberation spirituality I must highlight three important contributions of Buddhist tradition to a liberating spirituality:

**a. In line and attending to reality.**

Liberation theology always gave special importance to history as a means of realising salvation. There are no two histories, there was always that continental theology. A careful look to zen-buddhist tradition, mainly that influenced by Master Dogen, awakens us to the importance of the present moment, the everyday life as the place to practice our path. In his *Shobogenzo*, Dogen in various moments states that the daily heart is the path, everyday life is the place of “unusual liturgy” and “each thing sings the truth with nothing to add”. This spirituality of “immanence” is an important contribution I can see with clarity.

**b. The importance of detachment as a starting point for communion with nature and others**

This is another important contribution I see, also from the zen-buddhist tradition, particularly from a zen traditional story that talks of the ox and the shepherd. This story was magnificently worked by one of the great thinkers of the Kyoto School, Shizuteru Ueda. There are ten images that deal with the topic of becoming truly human. The first seven illustrate progressively the special moments that reflect the buddhist teachings such as meditation, discipline and unification in blessedness.

The eighth image is a signal of a new spiritual stage. Hence, what happened was a search of oneself. With the ninth stage the self is truly realised. The symbol that appears is of an empty circle, expressive of the zen tradition.

The explanation given is suggestive. To finish the process with an empty circle may give rise to misconceptions, favouring a limited understanding of the process, as if emptiness was a most important and supreme state, or the last term of zen discipline. In zen tradition this is evident. And the eighth image expresses this clearly and vividly. That is “nothing absolute nor infinitely open”. It is a nothing that does not close on itself, on the contrary it generates assertion. It is evidence of the precariousness of every duality and keeps going the dynamics of a process that is not fixed on this or on that.

As the preface of the illustration warns, you have to go beyond the state of Buddha: “Walk quickly to where there is no Buddha”. There is no way to reach the true self, myself, without going through that “fundamental death”. Buddhism talks of “dying the big death”, against which the physical death seems small. In this path through “pure nothingness”, where many people die and many people are born, is where the true self is affirmed, it appears initially in its absence as such, free of form in a radical infirmity, intangible, inexpressible”. Hence the empty circle.

This aspect corresponds in zen buddhism to the practice of *zazen*, who nothing thinks, nothing sees, nothing does “melted in the deepness without bottom of silence”. The next image, which represents the ninth stage, signals the presence of a tree that blooms next to a river. It is a simple image, typical of Japanese tradition. It is the “resurrection” process of the self, that breaks the dichotomy, between subject and object, of the elementary subjectivity coming from the death of the ego. It blooms itself, in its not “self”, together with the flowers and flows as well as the river.

As Ueda states “it is the resurrection from nothing, a radical transformation from absolute negation to a big “yes”. There is in Mahayana Buddhist tradition an intimate connection between vacuity, no-ego and compassion. It is meaningful to perceive that love which is non-discriminating belongs to the area of no-ego. Authentic love is the compassionate fruit of a process of bereavement and kenosis, symbolising the tenth stage, where we see the encounter between an old person and a young person. An encounter in the world. The old man is absolutely “devoid”, with a nude chest and nude feet, showing a wide smile. In the rich dynamics of the you and I appears the process of a true self resurrecting from nothing.

The dialogue starts from a deep silence, only broken by the mutual reverence of a bow. This bow is something more profound than just cour-

tesy. It is the “insertion into the unfathomability of the between, where the you and I do not exist. This is how the matrix of a new way of being in the world is affirmed, a “serene way of being”.

The path through nothing does not end in nothing, but it has consequences in the real world, and with a special intensity. When one passes from the “open infinite” of zazen, one’s existence in the world changes. But the world where the insertion takes place is now punctuated by a new seeing and being. It is permeated by an infinite that covers and transcends the world, animating the dynamics of compassion.

Liberation theology also understood that in a very special way throughout its history. The importance of bereavement, of the path through openness to a “life with spirit” as essential condition for a liberating act.

### **c. A compassion community**

As essential unfolding of the bereavement dynamics and clear openness to reality, we underline the new perspective of universal compassion. This is one of the fundamental learnings of the Buddhist tradition. As the Dalai Lama states, compassion (nying je) is the “capacity to participate and in a certain way share others suffering”. The compassion experience provokes mainly empathy and a fundamental notion of responsibility for every other person. But there is a novelty in this perspective from the Buddhist tradition. The necessary compassion does not only involve other human beings, but all life diversity and the environment. It does not highlight the human being from all the diversity involved in the environmental diversity.

As the Brazilian anthropologist stated, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, diversity “is a superior value for life. Life lives from diversity. Each time a different is vanished, there is death.” Compassion then situates the human being in a vital bond which breaks the anthropocentric logic which marked the modern western history. This was also a learning captured by the liberation theology throughout its history.

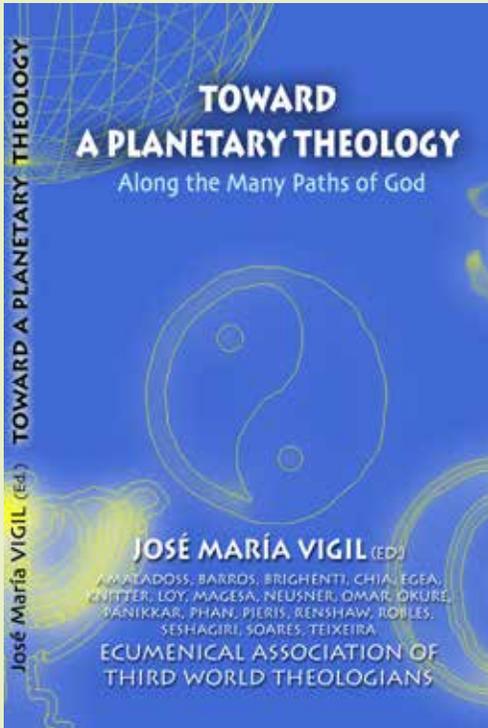


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# Contribuições da reflexão budista para a teologia da libertação

**Faustino TEIXEIRA**

*PPCIR-UFJF*

A partir de minhas reflexões atuais sobre a espiritualidade budista e a espiritualidade da libertação destaco três importantes contribuições da tradição budista para a espiritualidade libertadora:

## **a) A sintonia e atenção ao real.**

A teologia da libertação sempre deu singular importância à história como espaço de realização da salvação. Não há duas histórias, sempre insistiu essa teologia continental. Um olhar atento para a tradição zen-budista, sobretudo aquela marcada pelo influxo do Mestre Dôgen, suscita o despertar para a importância fundamental do instante presente, do cotidiano como o lugar da prática do caminho. Em seu Shôbôgenzô, Dôgen assinala em vários momentos que o coração cotidiano é o caminho, que a vida de todos os dias é o espaço de uma “inusitada liturgia”, e que “cada coisa canta a verdade sem nada acrescentar”. Essa espiritualidade da “imanensidade” é uma contribuição importante que percebo, e com muita clareza.

## **b) A centralidade do desapego como ponto de arranque para a comunhão com a natureza e o outro**

É outra importante contribuição que percebo, também a partir da tradição zen budista, em particular de uma tradicional história zen que fala do boi e do pastor. Essa história foi magnificamente trabalhada por um dos grandes pensadores da Escola de Kyoto, Shizuteru Ueda. São dez imagens que tratam o tema do tornar-se verdadeiramente ser humano. As

sete primeiras ilustrações retratam em progressão os momentos singulares que traduzem os ensinamentos budistas como a meditação, a disciplina e a unificação na bem-aventurança.

É com a oitava ilustração que se dá a sinalização de uma estação espiritual nova. Até então, o que ocorria era uma busca a caminho de si mesmo. Com a nova estação procede a realização do verdadeiro si-mesmo. O símbolo que aparece é o do círculo vazio, expressivo da tradição zen.

A explicação que se dá é sugestiva. Concluir o processo com o círculo vazio pode gerar equívocos, no sentido de favorecer um entendimento limitado de todo o processo, como se a vacuidade fosse o estado mais importante e supremo, ou o termo último da disciplina zen. Na tradição zen isto está muito evidente, e a oitava ilustração o expressa de forma clara e viva. Trata-se aqui do "nada absoluto no infinitamente aberto". É um nada que não se encerra em si mesmo, mas que gera afirmação. Ele evidencia a precariedade de toda a dualidade e mantém acesa a dinâmica de um processo que não se fixa nem nisto nem naquilo.

Como alerta o prefácio da ilustração, há que ultrapassar a estância de Buda: "Caminhe veloz para onde não reside nenhum Buda". Não há como acessar o eu verdadeiro, o si mesmo, sem passar por essa "morte fundamental". Fala-se no budismo em "morrer a grande morte", diante da qual a morte física se apequena. É nesta passagem pelo "puro nada", onde muita gente se morre e muita gente se nasce, que se dá a afirmação do eu verdadeiro, que "se mostra inicialmente em sua ausência de eu como tal, livre de forma na infirmitade radical, intangível, inexprimível". Daí o círculo vazio.

Esse aspecto corresponde, no âmbito do zen budismo, à prática do zazen, que nada pensa, nada vê, nada faz, "fundido na profundidade sem fundo do silêncio". A ilustração seguinte, que representa a nona estação, sinaliza a presença de uma árvore que floresce junto ao rio. É uma imagem singela, bem típica da tradição japonesa. Trata-se do processo de "ressurreição" do eu, que rompe a dicotomia entre sujeito e objeto, da subjetividade elemental que procede da morte do ego. Floresce o si mesmo, em sua não "eudade", junto com as flores e flui também como o rio.

Como indica Ueda, "trata-se da ressurreição a partir do nada, da mudança radical da absoluta negação para o grande ´sim`. Há na tradição budista mahayana uma íntima conexão entre vacuidade, não ego e compaixão. É significativo perceber que o amor não discriminante pertence ao âmbito do não ego. O amor autêntico e compassivo é fruto de um processo de despojamento e kênose, desdobrando-se do esvaziar-se de si mesmo.

Na última ilustração, que simboliza a décima estação, visualizamos o encontro entre um ancião e um jovem. Um encontro que se dá no mundo. O ancião está totalmente "desprovido", de peito descoberto e com os pés nus, animado por um largo sorriso. Na rica dinâmica de um eu e tu realiza-se o processo do verdadeiro si-mesmo, ressuscitado do nada. O diálogo parte aqui de um profundo silêncio, quebrado apenas pela reverência do inclinar-se mutuamente. Esse inclinar-se é algo mais profundo que uma mera cortesia. Trata-se da "inserção na insondabilidade do entre, onde não existe mais nem eu nem tu. Firma-se, assim, a matriz de um modo novo de ser no mundo, um "modo de ser sereno".

A passagem pelo nada não se conclui no nada, mas repercute no mundo real, e com intensidade singular. Quando se levanta do "infinito aberto" do zazen, retorna-se outro à existência no mundo. Mas o mundo em que se dá a inserção é agora pontuado por um outro olhar e um outro modo de ser. Está impregnado de um infinito que abraça e transcende o mundo, animando a dinâmica da compaixão.

A teologia da libertação também entendeu isso de forma muito singular ao longo de sua trajetória história. A importância do despojamento, da passagem pelo desapego e abertura à "vida com espírito" como condição essencial para o empenho libertador.

### c) A ecumene da compaixão

Como desdobramento essencial da dinâmica de desapego e abertura desarmada ao real, destaca-se uma perspectiva novidadeira de compaixão universal. É um dos aprendizados fundamentais facultados pela tradição budista. Como sinaliza Dalai Lama, a compaixão (*nying je*) é a "capacidade de participar e, de certa forma, partilhar do sofrimento alheio". A experiência de compaixão suscita sobretudo empatia, e uma fundamental noção de responsabilidade por todos os semelhantes.

Mas há algo novidadeiro nessa perspectiva apontada pela tradição budista. A compaixão requerida não envolve apenas os outros humanos, mas toda a diversidade da vida e o ambiente circundante. Não há como destacar o ser humano de toda essa diversidade que envolve também a diversidade ambiental.

Como tem evidenciado o antropólogo brasileiro, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, a diversidade "é um valor superior para a vida. A vida vive da diferença. Toda vez que uma diferença se anula, há morte". A compaixão situa, assim, o ser humano num elo vital que rompe a lógica antropocêntrica que marcou a moderna trajetória ocidental.

Foi também um dos aprendizados captados pela teologia da libertação ao longo de sua trajetória.



# Per i molti cammini di Dio

VERSO UNA TEOLOGIA PLURALISTA,  
INTERRELIGIOSA, LAICA, PLANETARIA  
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# A teologia da libertação e a mística da interioridade

**Marcelo BARROS**

*EATWOT-América Latina*

Nenhuma religião se encontra em estado puro e o encontro entre crentes de uma e outra religião não acontece no genérico, isso é, dificilmente ocorre entre um cristão e um budista. O cristão ou será católico romano ou pentecostal ou protestante histórico e o budista será bem diferente se for do budismo zen, ou do budismo tibetano ou do budismo da terra pura. Sem falar que tanto o Cristianismo como o Budismo podem ter uma visão da fé que se poderia chamar de “libertadora” ou não. Tenho amigos budistas, mas o contato mais frequente em termos de diálogo tem sido com um brasileiro, descendente de japonês, professor de Universidade que no passado foi marxista dogmático e hoje é ainda uma pessoa comprometida com a causa social e política libertadora. Ele é um dos responsáveis por uma comunidade do Budismo da Terra Pura (theravada) em Brasília. Entre nós o diálogo tem sido em primeiro lugar de amizade e confiança, o que gera aceitação mútua e profundo respeito pelo caminho do outro. Mas, a partir daí, diversas vezes tem surgido um desejo que creio ser mútuo de aprender com o outro e escutar o que o Espírito diz a cada um através do outro.

Não tenho condições de afirmar o que ele (budista) tem aprendido ou pode aprender comigo cristão (que ele vê não como um cristão no sentido genérico, mas como um cristão que é católico ligado à teologia da libertação). Posso dizer que eu aprendi com ele a integrar em minha visão de mundo e de perspectiva libertadora a mística profunda da interioridade. Sei que essa mística não é exclusiva do budismo, mas é desenvolvida por diversas tradições espirituais orientais. No início, achei estranho que meu amigo com uma excelente formação sociológica e de esquerda tivesse justamente se tornado monge da escola da terra pura ou Amidismo (ligada ao Buda Amida, século XII), uma das linhas do budismo mais devocionais. O Budismo Zen é mais baseado na experiência pessoal e contém até o aprendizado de artes marciais como exercício de libertação.

Não precisamos procurar pontos de semelhança entre religiões para que essas possam dialogar e colaborar entre si. O verdadeiro diálogo não tem medo das diferenças, nem tem como espírito compreender o outro por uma espécie de inclusão que o torna palatável porque o assemelha a nós. O diálogo entre Cristianismo da Libertação e o Budismo em qualquer de suas escolas me parece que pode ser para os cristãos um bom para aprender a dar ao projeto de libertação social e político uma interioridade que se centra na irredutibilidade da pessoa e de seu caminho interior. O Budismo zen ensina aos fiéis os três segredos básicos do caminho de iluminação: o Buda (o mestre para escutar e com ele dialogar), o Darhma, os ensinamentos baseados na lei do universo e o Shanga, a comunidade. Isso lhe dá uma justa relação entre pessoa e comunidade, interioridade e dimensão social da fé. Tanto para os budistas, como para os cristãos comprometidos com a transformação do mundo, o diálogo e a unidade do serviço não se dará através da doutrina ou mesmo da prática devocional, mas da união no serviço à humanidade e às grandes causas do mundo atual.

Aloísius Pieris fazia distinção entre religiões cósmicas e religiões meta-cósmicas. As religiões da natureza, ou cósmicas, descobrem uma revelação divina contida nos elementos da natureza. As meta-cósmicas são chamadas a ver a revelação na história. Ele sustenta que as soterologias metacósmicas como o Hinduísmo, o Budismo ou o Cristianismo e o Islã se ligam e se integram para sobreviver com as religiões cósmicas de uma cultura ou de um povo. Por exemplo, as religiões da natureza, ou seja, as religiões índias e as afro-descendentes. Elementos destas práticas religiosas cósmicas podem ser supressas, outras guardadas e integradas, enquanto outras continuam subterraneamente uma existência secreta. Na visão deste teólogo, o casamento (dupla pertença) entre uma religião cósmica e uma meta-cósmica seria normal. O que ficaria difícil é a pessoa ser, ao mesmo tempo, cristão e muçulmano. A pessoa poderia ser, ao mesmo tempo, budista e hinduísta, mas não poderia ser budista e judeu. Pessoalmente, acho esta chave de leituras artificial. É claro que as religiões afro-americanas e as indígenas podem ser chamadas de “cósmicas”, mas, ao mesmo tempo, acreditam no Orum e o vêem presente aqui neste mundo. A revelação divina é sim feita pelos elementos da natureza, mas também através do êxtase e de experiências pessoais e comunitárias de tipo que se poderia chamar espiritual. □



# Zen Buddhism and Liberation Theology

## Is such a meeting possible?

### Notes from a viewpoint of holistic spirituality

**Rui Manuel GRÁCIO DAS NEVES**

*Catholic Priest of the Dominican Order and also Ordained Bodhisattva  
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Currently, from a holistic perspective, the question arises as to the possibility of combining the *esoteric* (interior) dimension with the *exoteric* (exterior) dimension. In other words, here comes an effort to overcome this dualism. One good candidate for this possible synthesis is Zen Buddhism, an ancient Asian tradition of spiritual practice, that assigns objectivity to integral liberation through previous "illumination" *satori* or "awakening". The other good candidate is the rather recent Liberation Theology born in Latin America. It seeks liberation for a people chained down by all kinds of economic, social, political, cultural, religious and even anthropological oppression that make difficult efforts to establish the "Kingdom of God" ["on earth just as it is in heaven". translator]

These are two very different but - in our opinion - complementary perspectives. Instead of *juxtaposing* these paradigms, our idea would rather be to "interbreed" them, "cross-fertilize" them, let each one be "shingled into" or "woven into" the other one. In our opinion, this would be the best method: from a holistic paradigm of integrality and wholeness.

**1. What is Zen Buddhism?** It is hard to define something that is, above all things, a personally lived experience; wisdom that seeks to get beyond concepts, categories and words. Like all Buddhism, it pretends to find enlightenment or *nirvana*, which in Japanese tradition is called *satori*. 'Zen', - the Japanese word 'meditation' (from Sanskrit *dhyana* through the Chinese *Ch'an*) - is the most liberal form of Buddhism. It's not so much interested in the study of Buddhist philosophy, or in the continuous recitation of the *sutras*, but rather in the practice of meditative sitting. Actually, *zazen*, means just that: sitting in meditation.

But we would be mistaken if we understood Zen simply as a technique of meditation that seeks to find mental serenity and peace of soul. Experiencing Zen is very difficult to describe in words: it means something like discovering the profound Truth of Life and Existence, where everything is the same and yet different. As in general with every good mysticism, the term “paradox” seems to be the best way to express oneself about Zen (the famous *ko'an*).

Zen takes off from a deep understanding of the Four Noble Truths of Buddha (the Enlightened One) and his Noble Eightfold Path. It believes that life itself is *impermanence* (*anitya* in Sanskrit, *anic-ca* in Pali) and tries to profoundly experience what is The Permanence, The Ultimate which is not destroyed by the ceaseless changing of the wheel *samsara*. But it's not a matter of taking refuge in an abstract world of ideas as in Plato, but rather of experiencing “The Permanence” in the midst of impermanence (*Ku*, is a vacuum which occurs in *shiki*, the form of all continually changing forms). In other words, living nirvana in *samsara*; living *awake* in the middle of a human existence which is intensely changing; living "in the eye" of the hurricane, in its very vortex.

One of its most typical figures is that of the “*bodhisattva*”. This is a being that takes a a vow not to enter illumination until all beings have also entered. In other words it is someone who is living intensely the experience of raising cosmic consciousness to its maximum expression. It would be a "holy person of cosmic consciousness”: someone devoid of self-seeking ego-centrism and totally devoted to the practice of incrementing the level of consciousness of the universe. In a certain way it's the expression “most Zen” of living Buddhist compassion ( Zen is part of the *Mahayana* tradition).

Furthermore, the practice of *zazen* is a *musotoku* practice i.e. disinterested. Anyone seeking to “get something” from the practice of Zen, has not yet discovered the true path to enlightenment, which is free from all habitual self interest and its expression through egocentrism. In fact, Zen believes that we are already enlightened - it's just that we are not as yet aware of it. It's not a question of “getting anywhere”. It's like the sculptor who “sees” the future figure hidden in the stone, and so the only thing she or he does is to remove that which “hides” that image. In like manner, of ourselves we are already perfect, awake illuminated. EXCEPT THAT (and this “except that” might involve an entire lifetime plus a few more “existences”) this means removing what prevents our seeing reality "just as it really is" - free of words and concepts. It's a lived experience of ultimate reality, without intermediaries - direct and immediate.

For the rest, Zen definitely takes part in Buddhist philosophy and therefore also in its ethics. Zen puts value on non-violence, peace, fair-

ness, respect for all beings, detachment, humility, and maintaining the mind fresh and brilliant to live our everyday life, in the here and now, with full attention. As highlighted by the Master Vietnamese Thich Nhat Hanh, the aforementioned (among other practices) promote building Peace in our environment.

**2. On the other hand, it seems that Liberation Theology takes off from different basic suppositions.** Born basically in a Latin American context, it has managed to be the Christian expression of living out justice and “the option for the poor”, as an expression of the solidarity of a God of Life, in line with the historical Jesus of the Gospels. It came to life on a continent where the vast majority of people are Christians and suffer under oppression. The question was: how to live Christianity in the context of de facto living under oppression.

The oppression was not just economic, although this was central to the problem. It was also political oppression (absence of truly democratic structures), gender oppression, ethnic oppression, inter-generational oppression. One of the great contributions of TL (Liberation Theology) was its concept of “structural evil”. That is, there exist not just individual sins, as lies, murder, stealing etc. There are also “sinful structures” (economic principles, strategies and tactics, political and social ideologies) that kill. And since that is so, there must also be structures that promote life. From early on, an anti-capitalist stance was predominant among women and men of TL. A good part of them were also defenders of “socialism with a human face”, participatory democracy (but not necessarily “social democrats”).

A new-reading of the history of Latin America and the Caribbean from the perspective of its victims was undertaken. Important person-ages were unearthed who had defended the natives of the continent and clearly voiced their tremendous proposal for a Church of the Poor, which reached its institutional culmination in CELAM [Latin American Episcopal Conference] first at its General Council at Medellín (Colombia in 1968) and then again at Puebla (Mexico in 1979). Both came to the defense of what some have come to call the “*preferential* option for the poor”. There were classical theological treatises rewritten from a Latin American perspective and, above all, there was a great flowering of pastoral defense of sectors of oppressed people; and a special element appeared on scene: namely the birth and flourishing of the CEB's (Christian Base Communities).

It would be too tedious to go through the entire process. To sum up I repeat that TL has not disappeared but rather has been a great movement of faith by the social and evangelical Christian conscience, in the

context of LAC (Latin America and the Caribbean). It has made efforts to overcome the *individualistic* approach mediated by European liberal progressive theology (and, in part by traditional theology). The core category now has become the “Kingdom of God”, as the utopia pushing History forward towards a more human and fraternal world.

**3.** Such being the case, one might ask if **it is possible to even think of uniting two paradigms, apparently so different, as are Zen Buddhism and Liberation Theology.** It would seem to be no easy task since their approaches arise from different suppositions. Nevertheless we believe it is possible to discover points of convergence, some of which must be plumed deeper. Here are a few brief notes about such points that could be further developed. We leave aside here the divergences which in our view are less important.

**3.1.** From a total or holistic view point, we have said that it is impossible to separate the esoteric (inner) from the exoteric (outer). They form the two faces of the same coin. Both are inter-dependent. There can be no true social and ecclesial commitment without experiencing internal self-liberation. And conversely, every inner experience tends to fulfill itself in an external action which is both social and historical. In this way, living out Liberation Theology can not become mere social assistance or political hyper-activism. Likewise neither can Zen contemplation wind up becoming mere meditative sitting. The *Mabayana* requirement of compassion, requires a certain type of compassionate outreach towards sentient beings and the entire Cosmos.

**3.2.** The issues of peace, ecology, rights and fundamental equality of all human and living beings are a series of themes that include, among others, convergence between “a social Zen” and “a living out of Liberation Theology”. Peace is seen as non-violence that possesses a very demanding spirituality. It becomes a non-violence of thought, word and action. TL also promotes -or should promote – a pastoral non-violence in defense of the human rights of the most oppressed. Besides, the “option for the poor” requires an interior self-negation and living coherence that springs from the very depth of our being. It can not be reduced to a merereclaiming, demanding or protest.

**3.3.** Liberation Theology springs from the deep spirituality of an encounter with the Living God. Solitude and silence are necessary and essential, just as was the custom of the Master of Galilee. Detachment from self-ego, revolutionary generosity, a mystique of service; freedom from seeking power, material accumulation and name popularity; a mystique of socially liberating sacrifice etc.; all these are, among other spiritual experiences, are the indispensable basis for a transforming Christian militancy.

In Zen, despite the absence of any personal God as such (in our opinion, not necessarily contradictory), the experience of emptiness (which is fulfillment) leads to an opening towards the miracle of cosmic existence and the beauty of every day; to a stripping off of anything like ideological absolutes or theoretical constructs pretending a definitive interpretation of history. Everything is temporary. Only the experience of nirvana provides that center from which to live the *samsara* wheel events of each day. Zen prevents stagnation in any pseudo-absolutes.

**3.4.** Living attentive to the here and now is a consequence of continual practice of meditation, a practice that requires much determination, sacrifice, perseverance, and stripping oneself, all of which sprouts from the inner silence of the mind. It's not that one meditates, but rather that one "is being meditated ". Meditation surges forth. No one is meditating nor is there "anything objective" being meditated.

Similarly, in TL, although there are strategies and tactics of action, they always arise from an analysis of objective reality. And this analysis has to be constructed with great realism: "telling it just as it is" and not as we might like it to be. Meditation being open to "REALITY", permits working with realism and hope in a reality that is social, economic and political, as signs of the presence (or absence) of the Kingdom in the world in which we live. Contemplating God present in history, in personal and collective events, is an important dimension of Liberation Theology.

**3.5.** Buddha and Jesus can be considered as two "complementary friends". A Christian, nevertheless, would never think of putting Christ on the same level as Buddha. But in any case, you can find points of convergence and transformation.

Here are some suggestions: Jesus expected each one to be true to oneself, without mask or hypocrisy; 'being' was more important than 'doing'. The practice of Buddhism is to recognize what we are, without frills or deception, in an ever changing world; to discover nirvana IN this changing world *samsara*, not apart from it. Or, as the Zen would say, discover vacuity en the form.

Jesus chose the most oppressed as the path to the Father. So "Father" and "Kingdom of God" are closely related. They are one and the same project of "more life", destroying idols of death, with everything that oppresses humans at all levels. That's precisely what the God of Jesus demands.

Buddha opted for using our critical sense: "accept as true only that which your reason sees as true": not what others tell you claiming that it comes from an authority. This is "to bet on" self-esteem and the ability to judge things. Paul tells us: "Examine everything well and hold fast to what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

And for both Buddha and Jesus, prayer / meditation were central moments of their own lives and existential testimonies. It was impossible to proceed in a method that didn't consciously incorporate detachment and meditative prayer.

### Concluding summary.

Although, as we said, on the subject of a personal deity, between Zen Buddhism and Liberation Theology there exist differences (not necessarily "opposition") both can (and should!) be considered complementary, as *yin* (zen) and *yang* (TL) in the Taoist tradition. Zen offers profound contemplation to Liberation Theology. TL assures Zen of social substance for living out *bodhisattva*, -- political compassion (from *polis*, city). "An awakened person" IS "a person with raised awareness".

Holistic spirituality can creatively integrate Zen and Liberation Theology.

*Translation by Justiniano Liebl*



## !NOVEDAD!

Está a punto de aparecer el libro  
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# Budismo zen y teología de la liberación

## ¿Es posible el encuentro?

### Apuntes desde una espiritualidad holística

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Actualmente, desde una perspectiva holística, se plantea la cuestión de poder conjugar una dimensión *esotérica* (interior) y una dimensión *exotérica* (exterior). En otras palabras: de intentar superar este dualismo. Dos buenas candidatas a esta síntesis son el budismo Zen, una milenaria tradición asiática de práctica espiritual, que “objetiva” la liberación interior por medio del *satori* o “despertar”, y la más reciente Teología de la Liberación, de matriz latinoamericana, que busca liberar a las personas oprimidas de todas las cadenas económicas, sociales, políticas, culturales, religiosas y antropológicas que les oprimen, desde la implementación práctica del “Reino de Dios”.

Son dos perspectivas muy diferentes, pero, en nuestra opinión *complementarias*. La cuestión sería no *yuxtaponer* ambos paradigmas sino entrecruzarlos, fecundarlos mutuamente, dejar que se imbriquen el uno en el otro. En nuestra opinión, la mejor manera de hacerlo es desde un paradigma holístico, un paradigma de integralidad y totalidad.

**1. ¿Qué es el Budismo Zen?** No es fácil definir algo que es ante todo algo vivencial, una sabiduría que pretende ir más allá de conceptos, categorías y palabras. Como todo Budismo, “pretende” encontrar la Iluminación, el *nirvana*, que en la tradición japonesa es denominado *satori*. El ‘Zen’, palabra japonesa que significa ‘meditación’ (del sánscrito *dhyana*, a través del chino *ch’an*), es la forma más liberal del budismo. No le interesa tanto el estudio de la filosofía budista, o la recitación continua de los *sutras*, sino antes bien la práctica del sentarse meditativo. En realidad, *zazen*, significa eso mismo: sentarse en meditación.

Pero nos equivocaríamos si entendiéramos simplemente el zen como una técnica de meditación que busque encontrar serenidad mental y paz de espíritu. La experiencia zenista es muy difícil de definir en palabras: significa algo así como encontrar la Verdad profunda de la Vida y de la Existencia, donde todo es uno y al mismo tiempo diverso. La paradoja es la mejor forma de expresarse del zen (los famosos *ko'an*), así como en general de toda buena mística.

El Zen parte de la comprensión profunda de las Cuatro Nobles Verdades del Buda (el Iluminado), así como de su Óctuple Noble Sendero. Cree que la vida como tal es *impermanentia* ('*anitya*' en sánscrito, '*anicca*', en pali) y trata de vivenciar profundamente lo que es lo Permanente, lo Último, lo que no es destruido por el cambio incesante de la rueda del *samsara*. Pero no se trata de refugiarse uno/a en un mundo abstracto de las Ideas como en Platón, sino de experimentar lo Permanente en medio de lo impermanente (*Ku*, el vacío, que se da en *shiki*, la forma, en todas las formas que cambian continuamente). En otras palabras, de vivir el nirvana en el *samsara*. El vivir *despiertos/as* en medio de una existencia humana que es intensamente cambiante. Vivir "en el ojo" del huracán, en medio de su vorágine.

Una de sus figuras más típicas es la del *bodhisattva*. Éste es un ser que hace el voto de no entrar en la Iluminación antes que todos los seres se hayan iluminado también. En otras palabras, es alguien que vive intensamente la experiencia de elevar la conciencia cósmica a su máxima expresión. Un "santón de la conciencia cósmica". Alguien desprovisto del egocentrismo/egoísmo, y entregado totalmente a la práctica de incrementar el nivel de conciencia del universo. De alguna manera, es la expresión más zen de la vivencia budista de la compasión (el Zen es de tradición *mahayana*).

Además, la práctica del zazen es una práctica *musotoku*, es decir, des-interesada. Quien busca algo en la práctica del zen, todavía no ha descubierto el verdadero camino de la iluminación, que es libre de toda práctica del interés, expresión del egocentrismo. De hecho, el zen cree que ya somos iluminados/as. Lo que ocurre es que todavía no somos conscientes de eso. No se trata de llegar a ninguna parte. Es como un escultor que mira su figura en la piedra, y lo único que trata de hacer es sacar lo que sobra y cubre la imagen. Del mismo modo, ya somos perfectos/as, despiertos/as, iluminados/as, en nosotros/as mismos/as. Sólo (un "sólo" que puede durar toda la vida y otras existencias más...) se trata de quitar aquello que impide contemplar la Realidad "tal como es", libre de palabras y conceptos. Tener la vivencia última de la Realidad, sin intermediarios, de manera directa e inmediata.

Por lo demás, el zen participa ciertamente de la filosofía budista y, por lo tanto, también de su ética. Los valores de la no-violencia, la paz, la ecuanimidad, el respeto por todos los seres, el des-apego, la humildad, y el conservar la mente fresca y radiante en la vivencia del día a día, en el aquí y ahora, en atención plena (como lo ha destacado el Maestro vietnamita Thich Nhat Hanh), son, entre otras prácticas, abonadoras de construir la Paz en nuestro entorno.

**2. La Teología de la Liberación parece partir de otros supuestos,** por su parte. En efecto, nacida en un contexto principalmente latinoamericano, ha procurado ser una expresión cristiana de una vivencia de la justicia y de la opción por las y los más pobres, como expresión de un Dios de la Vida solidario, en la línea del Jesús histórico de los Evangelios. Surgió en un continente donde la inmensa mayoría de gente era cristiana y oprimida. La cuestión era cómo poder vivir el cristianismo desde un contexto de opresión.

La opresión no era solamente económica, aunque éste era un aspecto central del problema. Era también una opresión política (ausencia de salidas verdaderamente democráticas), de género, étnica, intergeneracional... Uno de los grandes aportes de la teología de la liberación (TL) fue su concepción del pecado estructural. Es decir, no hay sólo pecados individuales (mentir, asesinar, robar...). Hay también estructuras de pecado (principios, estrategias y tácticas económicas, políticas, sociales, ideológicas) que dan muerte. Si esto es así, también habría estructuras que dan vida. Desde muy pronto, la postura anti-capitalista fue predominante en las y los teólogos de la liberación. Una buena parte de ellos y ellas fueron defensores de un socialismo de rostro humano, democrático (no necesariamente socialdemócrata), participativo.

Se dio una relectura de la historia de América Latina y el Caribe desde una perspectiva de sus víctimas. Se descubrieron voces importantes que habían defendido a los nativos del Continente y se vio la gran propuesta de una Iglesia de los Pobres, cuya culminación institucional fueron las Conferencias del CELAM, de Medellín (1968) y Puebla (1979), y su defensa de la opción por los pobres, que algunos llamaron *preferencial*. Hubo tratados teológicos clásicos re-escritos en óptica latinoamericana y, sobretudo, un gran florecer de pastorales sectoriales de defensa de las y los oprimidos, y sobre todo de las CEB's (Comunidades Eclesiales de Base).

Sería largo hablar de todo este proceso. Como conclusión, diría que la TL fue (y no ha desaparecido...) un gran movimiento de conciencia evangélico y social del cristianismo desde la fe, en el contexto de ALC (América Latina y el Caribe). Intentó superar la mediación *individualista*

del planteamiento de la teología progresista liberal europea (y, en parte, de la teología tradicional). La categoría central pasó a ser la del *Reino de Dios*, como utopía que empujaba la Historia hacia delante, hacia un mundo más fraterno y humano.

3. Puestas así las cosas, se puede preguntar uno/a **si es posible acercar ambos paradigmas, en apariencia tan diferentes, del zen budista y de la TL latinoamericana**. No parece una labor nada fácil, dado que son abordajes desde presupuestos diferentes. Sin embargo, en nuestra opinión es posible la existencia de convergencias, algunas de ellas a profundizar más. Veamos algunos breves apuntes de esto, a desarrollar en otro momento más ampliamente. Dejaremos aparte aquí las divergencias, que para nosotros son más secundarias.

**3.1.** Desde un punto de vista holístico, de totalidad, dijimos que es imposible separar lo esotérico (interior) de lo exotérico (exterior). Ambos son los dos lados de la misma moneda. Ambos son interdependientes. No puede haber auténtico compromiso social y eclesial sin una experiencia interior de auto-liberación. Y viceversa, toda experiencia interior tiende a plenificarse en una acción exterior, una acción social e histórica. De esta manera, la praxis de la TL no puede convertirse en mera asistencia social o hiperactivismo político. Ni tampoco, la contemplación zen puede quedarse en el mero sentarse meditativo. La exigencia *mahayana*, compasiva, exige un determinado tipo de proyección exterior misericordiosa hacia los seres sentientes y hacia todo el Cosmos.

**3.2.** Los temas de la Paz, la Ecología, los Derechos Humanos y la Igualdad Fundamental de todos los seres humanos y vivos, son, entre otros, una serie de temas convergentes entre un “zen social” y la TL. Una Paz vista como no-violencia que posee una espiritualidad bien exigente. Una no-violencia de pensamiento, palabra y acción. La TL también impulsa –o debe hacerlo– una pastoral no-violenta en la defensa de los derechos de las y los más oprimidos. Además, la opción por los pobres exige un despojamiento interior, una coherencia de vida que arranca desde lo más profundo de nuestros seres. No puede quedar reducido a un mero reclamar, exigir y protestar.

**3.3.** La TL brota de una Espiritualidad profunda del encuentro con el Dios Vivo. La soledad y el silencio son necesarios, imprescindibles, como solía hacerlo a menudo el Maestro de Galilea. El desapego del propio ego, la generosidad revolucionaria, la mística del servicio, el desapego del poder, del acumular y de la propia imagen, una mística del sacrificio socialmente liberador, etc., son, entre otras experiencias espirituales, una base imprescindible para una “militancia” cristiana transformadora.

En el Zen, aunque no hay la presencia de ningún Dios personal como tal (en nuestra opinión, tampoco lo contradice necesariamente), la

vivencia del vacío (que es plenitud) lleva a una apertura ante el milagro de la existencia del cosmos y de la belleza de cada día. Y a un despojarse de absolutos como los ideológicos o cualquier constructo teórico que pretenda una interpretación definitiva sobre la historia. Todo es provisional. Sólo la vivencia del nirvana proporciona ese centro desde el cual vivir el *samsara* de la rueda de acontecimientos de cada día. El zen impide estancarse en cualquier pseudo-absoluto.

**3.4.** Vivir atentos/as al Aquí y Ahora es una consecuencia de la práctica continua de la meditación, práctica que exige mucha determinación, capacidad de sacrificio en la perseverancia, despojamiento, todo ello brotando del silencio interior de la mente. No se medita, sino que se “es meditado”. La meditación surge. No hay ni meditador ni nada “objetivo” que meditar.

De la misma manera, en la TL, aunque se den estrategias y tácticas de acción, siempre surgen del Análisis de la Realidad. Y ésta tiene que ser construido con mucho realismo, “dejando las cosas ser-como-son” y no como nos gustaría que fueran. La apertura de la meditación a la Realidad con mayúscula, permite trabajar con realismo y esperanza en la realidad social, económica y política, como signos de la presencia del Reino en el mundo en que vivimos. Contemplar a Dios presente en la Historia, en los acontecimientos personales y colectivos, es una dimensión importante de la TL.

**3.5.** Buda y Jesús pueden ser así dos “amigos complementarios”. Un cristiano, con todo, nunca pondrá el mismo Cristo a la altura de Buda. Pero, en todo caso, puede encontrar puntos de convergencia y de transformación.

Sugiero aquí los siguientes: Jesús buscó que cada uno fuera él mismo o ella misma, sin máscaras ni hipocresías. ‘Ser’, más que ‘hacer’. La práctica búdica es tomar conciencia de lo que somos, sin adornos ni engaños, en un mundo siempre cambiante. Descubrir el nirvana en el *samsara*, no aparte de él. O, como diría el zen, descubrir el Vacío en la forma.

Jesús optó por las y los más oprimidos como Camino hacia el Padre. Así, ‘Padre’-‘Reino de Dios’-‘Pobres’ están íntimamente relacionados. Eran un mismo proyecto de más vida, acabando con los ídolos de la muerte, con todo lo que oprime al ser humano, a todos los niveles. El Dios de Jesús así lo demanda.

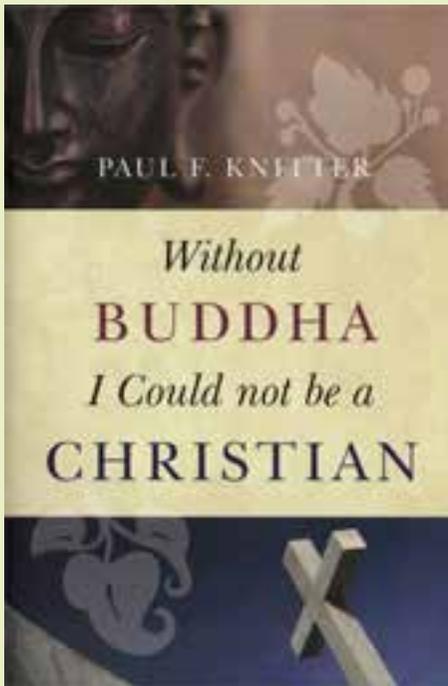
Buda apeló a que usásemos el sentido crítico: “acepta solamente aquello que tu razón vea como verdadero”. No lo que otros te digan o que afirmen venir de una autoridad. Es una apuesta por la propia autoestima y capacidad de juzgar las cosas. “Examinadlo todo y quedaos con lo que es bueno” (1 Ts 5,21), decía san Pablo.

Y para ambos, oración/meditación eran momentos centrales de sus propias vidas y testimonios existenciales. No era posible seguir adelante en una praxis que no incorporara conscientemente el desapego, mediante la oración/meditación.

### **Conclusión final.**

Aunque, como dijimos, en el tema de una Divinidad personal hay diferencias entre budismo zen y la teología de la liberación (no necesariamente oposición), ambos pueden (¡y deben!) ser complementarios, como *yin* (zen) y *yang* (TL) en la tradición taoísta. El zen dará profundidad contemplativa a la TL. La TL dará contenido a la vivencia de un *bodhisattva* social, una compasión política (de *polis*, ciudad) en el zen. Una persona 'despierta' es también aquí alguien concientizado.

Así, una espiritualidad holística integra a ambos creativamente. □



**New perspectives in inter-religious spirituality, by Paul Knitter**  
**[www.oneworld-publications.com](http://www.oneworld-publications.com), 240 pages.**



# No Duality? Which One of them?

## An outline for dialogue, since Liberación Spirituality

EATWOT's Latin American Theological Commission

SEE

### 1. History involving dualism and its avoidance is pretty well worn out.

*No dualism? O.K. but which ones? We have seen so many...*

With all the history we have lived through, and now at this precise moment are going through, with its critical analysis and awareness of shifting paradigms that we have lived through and which we are now beginning to experience, we take into account that there are many dualisms that persist for many of us and in our religious weltanschauung, which we are fortunately working at overcoming. For some time now many of us have been rooting out loads of dualisms. Some of the most obvious of which we can indicate as:

- Christianity and most religions have conceived the world as dualistic, i.e. divided into two: our world, and “the other higher world” upon which our own depends: - a sort of upper floor where “true reality” is located-- the gods and Platonic ideas that are eternal, immutable and divine. In accord with this dualistic view they have lived a divided existence.

Today, we are re-discovering that there are NO TWO worlds, that reality has NO TWO floors, that there is nothing above and that everything happens here below ... and that everything we thought of as going on “up stairs”, actually is happening right here below. We are definitely moving towards a Christianity without the classic dualism.

- Our Christian history shows that we have been very dependent upon Greek philosophical thought, and that we have become too deeply indebted to metaphysics, with its whole attic of “being and existence” –

well beyond the physical world and reality. Indeed, with profound duality, we came to the conclusion that metaphysical reality was the true, permanent, deep, eternal, reality which gave physical reality its "being", which was tenuous, almost unreal, merely apparent. We Christians have lived this dualism in the form of natural/supernatural, nature/grace, this world of earthly realities/the other transcendent world of the life of grace in souls ...

Every day that passes we are becoming more convinced of the need to overcome this dualism that seems an insurmountable part our religion. It remains stuck in our culture as an example of Greek culture through the Aristotelian and Thomistic approach, so that many of us view the Gospels and even Jesus himself through that philosophical filter. Today, in a post-metaphysical society, we have come to realize that this dualism is the result of that precise philosophical paradigm, and that as such, we can now overcome it by acculturating ourselves in an holistic paradigm without dualism.

- Dualism has dominated our Christian religion during many centuries: heaven/earth, this life/the other life. The lodestar of Christianity's religious firmament -- eternal salvation as the ultimate human destination with the soul's salvation and an eternal life in heaven -- has centered on MORALITY as the task of Christian life and its spirituality. For a very long time, the other world, - the world after death - has been more important for us than this world, and in any case we have actually had to live divided between two loyalties: to this world and to the next. All our symbolic religious and theological heritage exudes this dualism.

We have long since gotten over that concept and dualistic perspective of eternal "salvation", and have re-discovered that the Christian task is not to alienated us from this world, nor to go about thinking of another world, much less a life after death, but rather to concentrate on our concrete present reality and offering ourselves to the service of this life, following in the footsteps of Him who took on as his mission getting humans "to have life and life in abundance", and just letting the rest be given us besides.

- We can say that for way too much time in our history - almost always - the Divinity itself has led us into dualism, in so far as the very image *Theos* as represented to and by us was always SOMEONE different, transcendent, separated, radically and totally other. God, *theos*, has been for us, too realistically, a "Somebody" located in an upper world, "up there", "out there", upon Whom too realistically we depend, and Whom we address and with Whom we speak... always outside of ourselves, a very personalized "I-You" -- a radical dualism.

This also has become so profound that it has gotten to seem essential to Christianity. To believe or not in the existence of such a being outside the world (a duality in reference to it), conceived in this theistic model was taken as the “yes or no” of Christian faith. Either you believed in God and could in that case be a Christian or you were an atheist ... Fortunately, many Christians today are discovering that theism is only one possible model – certainly dualistic - which has filled a role - and for many can continue filling a role – but that today can be replaced to great advantage by other models that are not dualistic, and that do not concretize the “Mystery filled Reality” with which it puts us into contact.

- The dualism that is congenital with theism, makes duality echo and resound in all that relates to God. So for too long a time we have located God's world and His project outside of reality (dualism). We thought that on one hand we had our world, with its avatars, its problems - our problems, and on the other hand, in another world, in a higher world, outside, supernatural, belonging to God was located the area of His projection. So "sacred history", the 'Actions' of God, took place on a plane that was higher, different, without direct contact with our world. “Salvation History” was "another history”, "another story” that was spiritual, unworldly, unearthly, and in order for us to get involved in it, we would have to look with different eyes, see with a different kind of sight, *sub specie aeternitatis* (through the “eye-glass” of eternity).

Today -- and probably it has been Liberation Theology that has most insisted upon it, making it an achievement- peacefully possessed – at least by Liberation Spirituality --we have become convinced that there are NO TWO HISTORIES - one sacred and divine above our world - and the other secular and human, where we weave and cook up all our problems and sufferings. We have already overcome that dualism which for so long time maintained Christians and their historic commitment “retired from the world”. Now we are not willing to be subjected to any other dualism.

## 2. *The current Oriental offering does not come from dualism*

Since quite a while up till now, from all sides and everywhere we go, increasingly we meet with religious offers presented as non-dualism. Even at times, right on the street, we come across proliferating de-institutionalized secular initiatives, "off on their own", a kind of religious movement or spiritual social current, free and self-recreating, very powerful and enticing. One meets up with so many different varieties, and the most popular are more frequently supported by loads of ancestral wisdom and tradition

One hears presentations of this non-dualism in which, after having listened to the entire approach, one comes to realize not once to have heard the word poor, nor justice, nor hunger much less history, nor politics nor utopia, nor "God's project" or at least in any case, with more secular language as historical liberation...

The schematic message of this so popular non-duality comes to be an invitation to turn our attention back upon our own interior, and try to disconnect there from the noises and concerns of this world, in order to provoke within ourselves an inner silence capable of creating an atmosphere that is able to bring out a spark of connection with the Absolute, in an experience of mystical union with the Reality, a radical living experience that transforms us and brings forth within us the energy, light, compassion, a profound sense of wellbeing which enables us to meet and develop our entire existence in an appropriate manner.

## JUDGE

Coming from liberation spirituality we have a problem with these presentations of non-duality. We feel bad, because with this type of spiritual proposal we feel that they let sink or get thrown overboard spiritual values that are very dear to us and even seem essential from our spiritual viewpoint. Let's consider some of these difficulties.

### *Start from and return to reality*

- For us, part of spirituality being healthy is the fact that it takes off from reality and ends up again facing reality. For us, spirituality should "take off from reality, enlighten and transform it, in order to return again to transform it, and from this transformed reality, move on to a new cyclical process that spins and spins endlessly around reality", always spinning between God and reality. "This passion for reality - a genuine feature of Latin spirituality - becomes the touchstone to avoid sterile abstraction and keep centered on the concrete; to avoid becoming stuck in theory and keep coming back to the practical; to overcome mere interpretation and to reach transformation; in order to abandon idealism and spiritualism and keep your feet on the ground; the commitment and then getting it done".

This popular non-duality to which we refer would lead us in the opposite direction. It comes to tell us that the reality that we should be taking care of is the reality quietly hidden inside of us and not that other which is really not reality at all since it is directly involved with the street and work, family and society, politics and culture. It recommends us to set aside, or at most as our second priority, that daily reality, and search back into our interior consciousness, and try to convert this quiet interior

of ours into a “theological and spiritual place” par excellence. This kind of duality separates us from the reality in which we live and carry out our religious experience in unity, in symbiosis, in total oneness. With such an approach we become divided, we become dualistic: on one hand we have actual reality ... on the other a " really true reality that matters. "

### *Contemplatives in liberation*

- Movements of classic spirituality in the Christian tradition mostly experienced God in solitude (anchorites, the desert-fathers...); the prayer and work of the monastery (*ora et labora*, “pray and work”); the study and prayer preparing for preaching (*contemplata aliis tradere*, “deliver to others the fruit of contemplation”); apostolic activity (*contemplativus in actione*, “contemplative in apostolic activity”)... We believe that today, in creative fidelity to living tradition, it is up to us in Latin America to live contemplation in liberating action (*contemplativus in liberatione*); decoding the mixed reality of grace and sin, light and shadow, of justice and injustice, violence and peace... discovering in this historical process of liberation, the presence that “Breeze that blows where it wills”; discovering and trying to build the history of salvation in our one and only history; discovering Salvation in Liberation. When speaking as being "contemplatives in liberation» we speak of the experience of God typical of Latin American Christians. We live contemplation in total unity, without any duality, within history and its liberating processes. It's the secret, the heart, and the key of our spirituality. Without grasping this fact, it would be impossible to understand it; it would simply be misinterpreted as just another reductionism”.

We feel that some popular proposals of non-duality offer a duality unknown to us: they propose that we separate liberation from contemplation . The enlightenment, and contemplation, that we do in the midst of the process itself of liberation, we are now told ought to be achieved apart from the historical process of liberation, in an “out beyond” accessed by introspective methods of consciousness. This proposal would take us back to the duality/dualism already experienced by so many Christian spiritualities throughout our history (idealisms, spiritualisms, “evasionisms”...).

### *Bring the poor down from the cross*

“Bringing the poor down from the cross”, we become incarnate physically or spiritually in the world of the poor, of the victims, of "victims of injustice" of all kinds, and to live and to struggle for the total and full liberation, is for us, both the source and goal of our spirituality. “Bringing the poor down from the cross”, is both our highest spiritual experience and our greatest historic commitment, inseparable, and with-

out contradiction. This is our spiritual willingness to joins and rejoin the human and the divine, the historical and the eschatological, the screaming reality in that of our day to day living with the most profound depth of our religious experience. It's our way of being, our charism, our contribution to the universal concert of spiritualities.

Certain non-duality proposals question the spirituality of our practice of mercy (which for us makes concrete Love-Justice). They consider us in error so far as being searchers for the spiritual in the historic, in this worldliness, in ecological human liberation. They tell us that mercy can only be received as a gift when it is concomitant with an enlightenment achieved through the paths of consciousness, silence and withdrawal when faced by world history and its constant fluctuation and impermanence. We should be able to bear witness of our no-duality that exists between liberation and enlightenment (contemplation), between the human and the divine, the historical and that of consciousness.

In light of the dimensions and spiritual insights fundamental to our spirituality, to which we have referred, we believe that non-dual spiritualities that contain many presentations for the use of non-duality, when they come to establishing non-duality between the source of the mystery and its concrete realization in the historical day by day, get used with duality,.... There are non-duality approaches that separate from the actual daily and historical reality, of the poor, the victims, the crucified of history, and invite us to turn our eyes to a different reality - interior, conscience, quiet, away from the world and its history to the detriment of our spiritual realization in the midst of this world and this history, fully embodied in them. It's not enough to have the promise that the asceticism of internalization, silencing and disconnection will produce a profound change in ourselves and that will give us feelings and energies that will enable us to return to the real world and pursue mercy there ... We do not willing to renounce incarnation in reality as the necessary method and means of religious experience, of contemplation and enlightenment.

## ACT

Today, we recognize – it's our pluralistic convictions that attest to it, that no one religion is "the final truth" nor "the top number one" intended to replace all others in this world.

All religions are true, all valid ... and at the same time all are false in what they arrogate to themselves, since they are limited by nature, and in need of criticism and rounding out.

Likewise spiritualities, spiritual inclinations, charisms, spiritual families: all are true, and all have their grace, their gift, their charism, and

all of them are good and admirable, yet insufficient, limited and in need of criticism and enrichment.

In saying this we mean not only that there are many spiritualities, many concrete realizations of the reality that we call spirituality ... We mean that, in addition, there are different types of spirituality, and that although they are called by the same name of spirituality, nevertheless by their very nature and the lines of access that they manage towards The Mystery they are really different. (That is why, for one spirituality it may appear to its followers that another spirituality is not even a spirituality, or is deeply misguided. In questions of religions, theologies and spiritualities there is no sensed in looking for a least common denominator, a least common multiple, or even sometimes a simple common factor. Respect for a so-called "profound pluralism" may be more advisable attitude.

Being religious today is to be inter-religious and being spiritual would have to be being inter-spiritually.

We recognize the added value that represents for us the reminder by Eastern religions that we make regarding the mystical vision of unity with the Ultimate Foundation and The Mystery. We value it and we accept it and we want to be enriched by this perspective. We believe that it gives us a vocation, methods, experiences, a testimony useful for us, that we admire, and that we accept as enriching.

And still we claim another non-duality: *contemplatives in liberation*, liberation enlightenment, to be fully awake (not only interiorly, but in the historical-political). We can not abandon history, reality, politics, the world, the passion for the poor, contemplation (our "enlightenment", our "living awake") in history.

*Non duality? Better, no duality. Against all duality.*

We are against all these dualities that we've already experienced and against all duality. We are careful not to fall back into old or new dualities.

No dualism? Which? None of them, not even the dualities crouching under orders of non-duality, if there should be any.

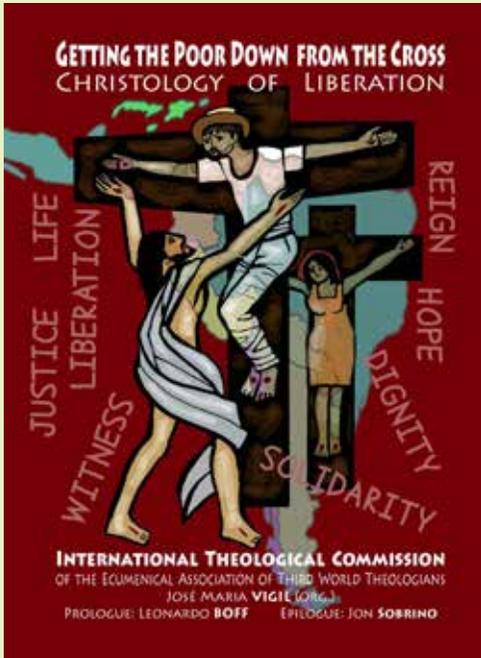
We can not accept any non-duality that would get us out of reality under the guise of non-duality, and ends up focusing our energies in the inner silent world of our consciousness.

We do not want to lose our non-duality liberating holistic-integral spirituality: historical-political eco-centric ...

# Getting the Poor Down From the Cross

## Cristology of Liberation

A classical work of EATWOT's International Theological Commission



*In 30 days after the «Notification» against Jon Sobrino, the EATWOT's International Theological Commission requested and collected the contributions of more than 40 theologians, from all over the world, to reflect and testify about their theological work, as «getting the poor down from the cross».*

*As a result, there is this digital book, which in its first week -40 days after the «Notification»- registered more than three thousand downloads.*

*It continues to be on line for downloading in several languages (English, Spanish, Italian) and in paper (English, Spanish, Portuguese).*

*Printable originals with full resolution can still be requested for local editions without profit purposes.*

**Getting the Poor Down from the Cross:** still on line digital edition, which was printed on paper in many places, 314 pp

**Bajar de la cruz a los pobres:** edición digital en línea, y también una edición en papel, por Dabar, México 293 pp.

**Descer da Cruz os Pobres:** edição só em papel, pela Paulinas, São Paulo, 357 pp

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# ¿No dualidad? ¿Cuál de ellas?

## Guión-esquema para un diálogo, desde la Espiritualidad de la Liberación

Comisión Teológica Latinoamericana  
de la EATWOT

VER

### 1. Una trabajada historia a vueltas con la dualidad y su superación.

*¿No dualidad? ¿Cuál? Hemos vivido muchas...*

Con toda la historia que hemos recorrido, y en este momento concreto que vivimos de toma de conciencia de los cambios de paradigma que hemos vivido y los que estamos comenzando a experimentar, nos damos cuenta de que son muchas las dualidades que hemos vivido, que aún persisten en muchos de nosotros y en nuestras cosmovisiones religiosas y de las que afortunadamente estamos en camino de superación. Hace tiempo que muchos de nosotros estamos superando dualidades; entre las más llamativas, podemos señalar:

- el cristianismo –y una gran parte de las religiones– han concebido el mundo dualmente, dividido en dos: este mundo nuestro, y otro mundo superior, situado arriba, del cual dependería el nuestro, una especie de piso superior en donde estaría radicada realmente la realidad verdadera y sus protagonistas, los dioses, las ideas platónicas (eternas, inmutables, divinas)... De ese mundo superior, el nuestro no sería más que un pálido reflejo, una sombra. Como consecuencia de esta visión dualista han vivido divididos...

Hoy día, a partir de la modernidad, estamos redescubriendo que no hay dos mundos, que la realidad no tiene dos pisos, que no hay nada «arriba», que todo acontece «aquí, abajo»... y que todo lo que pensábamos que estaba u ocurría arriba, está y ocurre en realidad abajo... Nosotros tratamos de caminar, decididamente, hacia un cristianismo sin esta dualidad clásica, sin dos pisos.

- En nuestra historia cristiana, aun sin saberlo, hemos vivido muy dependientes del pensamiento filosófico griego, que nos ha mantenido demasiado tiempo atados a la metafísica, a toda una trastienda óptica de ser y de existencia, meta-física, «más allá de lo físico», que por estar en ese «segundo piso» venía a ser considerada más real que lo real. En efecto, con profunda dualidad, llegábamos a considerar que la metafísica era la verdadera realidad, la permanente, la profunda, la eterna, la que daba el ser a la realidad física, endeble, casi irreal, meramente aparente, y despreciable. Los cristianos hemos vivido este dualismo en la forma de lo natural/sobrenatural, naturaleza/Gracia, el mundo de las realidades terrestres y el mundo transcendente de la vida de la Gracia en las almas, con el consiguiente *contemptus mundi* (desprecio del mundo)...

Cada día estamos comprendiendo mejor que tenemos que superar también esta dualidad que parecería que formaba parte esencial de nuestra religión, que se inculturó tan ejemplarmente en la cultura griega e hizo tan suyos los planteamientos aristotélicos y platónicos, de forma que muchos de nosotros hemos leído los Evangelios y a Jesús mismo desde ese filtro filosófico dualista, sin saberlo. Hoy, en una sociedad post-metafísica, descubrimos que ese dualismo, esa dualidad es fruto de un paradigma filosófico-cultural, y que, como tal, podemos ahora identificarla, aislarla, y superarla, inculturándonos ahora nosotros en otro paradigma, un paradigma unitario, sin esa dualidad de filiación helenista que en realidad no pertenece a nuestra tradición espiritual.

- En nuestra religión cristiana, durante muchos siglos, ha dominado el dualismo cielo/tierra, esta vida / la otra. La salvación eterna, el destino final del ser humano a una vida eterna en el cielo, la salvación del alma, han sido la estrella polar del firmamento religioso del cristianismo y de la cultura cristiana, que ha centrado enteramente la moral, los quehaceres de la vida cristiana y su espiritualidad. Así, durante mucho tiempo, el otro mundo, el mundo postmortal, ha sido más importante para nosotros que éste, y en todo caso hemos tenido que vivir divididos entre dos fidelidades: a este mundo y al otro. Todo nuestro patrimonio religioso simbólico y teológico rezuma esta dualidad.

Hace tiempo que hemos superado este concepto y esta perspectiva dualista de la «salvación» eterna, redescubriendo que la tarea cristiana no consiste en alienarse de este mundo, ni en vivir pensando en otro, ni en la vida después de la muerte, sino en concentrarnos en la realidad real y ponernos al servicio de la Vida, siguiendo los pasos de Aquel que vio su misión como conseguir que los seres humanos «tengan Vida y Vida en abundancia», y dejar que «lo demás se nos dé por añadidura».

- Podemos decir que durante demasiado tiempo en nuestra historia, casi desde siempre, la Divinidad misma nos ha dualizado, en cuanto que la imagen de *theos* que de ella nos hicimos, nos la representó como Alguien diferente, transcendente, separado, otro, radical y «totalmente otro». Dios, *theos*, ha sido para nosotros, demasiado realísticamente, un Alguien ubicado en el mundo de ahí arriba, ahí afuera, *up there, out there*, en un mundo del que dependemos, al que nos dirigimos, con el que hablamos... siempre fuera de nosotros, en un yo-tú muy personalista pero radicalmente dual.

También esta convicción ha sido tan profunda, que ha parecido esencial al cristianismo. Creer o no en la existencia de un tal ser exterior al mundo (dual respecto a él), concebido en ese modelo teísta, fue tenido como el sí o no de la fe cristiana. O se creía en Dios –y se podía en ese caso ser cristiano–, o se era ateo... Afortunadamente, una gran parte de los cristianos está descubriendo hoy que el teísmo es sólo un «modelo de representación» –ciertamente dualista–, que ha cumplido una función –y puede seguirla cumpliendo, para muchos– pero que también, puede ser sustituido hoy con ventaja por modelos no dualistas, no objetivizadores de la Realidad Mística a la que con él nos remitíamos.

- El dualismo que conlleva el teísmo, repercute y dualiza todo lo que se refiere a Dios. Así, durante demasiado tiempo hemos ubicado también fuera de la realidad (dualmente pues) el mundo de Dios y su proyecto. Hemos pensado que por una parte estaba nuestro mundo, con sus avatares, sus problemas –nuestros problemas–, y por otra parte había otro mundo, superior, externo, sobrenatural... de Dios. Así la «historia sagrada», las «acciones» de Dios, ocurrían, se daban en un plano superior, diferente, sin contacto directo con nuestro mundo; la «historia de la salvación» era otra historia, una historia otra, espiritual, no mundana, no terrenal, y que nosotros, para preocuparnos por ella, debíamos mirar con otros ojos, con otra mirada, *sub specie aeternitatis*.

Hoy día –y la teología de la liberación ha sido tal vez quien más ha insistido en ello, y ha hecho que esto sea ya un logro pacíficamente poseído–, estamos convencidos de que «no hay dos historias», una «historia sagrada» por encima de nuestro mundo, y otra profana y humana en la que se juegan todos nuestros problemas y sufrimientos. Nosotros ya superamos este dualismo que durante tanto tiempo retiró del mundo y de su compromiso histórico a los cristianos, y no queremos dejarnos someter a ninguna otra dualidad.

## 2. La oferta oriental actual que nos llega de no dualidad

Desde hace un tiempo nos llegan, crecientemente, ofertas religiosas que se presentan como «de la no dualidad». A veces son incluso ofertas a pie de calle, proliferando en iniciativas laicas, desinstitucionalizadas, «por libre», en una especie de movimiento religioso, o corriente espiritual libre, muy potente y seductora. Se puede encontrar variedades muy diferentes, y las más populares no son con frecuencia las más respaldadas la sabiduría y tradición ancestrales. Todas esas distintas expresiones de la no dualidad despiertan en nosotros una duda o una inquietud: ¿cómo se sitúan en relación a la transformación de la realidad?

El mensaje esquemático de estas no dualidades populares viene a ser una invitación a volver la atención al interior de nosotros mismos, y tratar de desconectar allí los ruidos y las preocupaciones de ese mundo, para provocar en nosotros un silencio interior, que cree una atmósfera capaz de hacer saltar un chispazo de conexión con el Absoluto, en una experiencia de unión mística con la «Realidad», que hará brotar en nosotros la energía, la luz, la compasión, el bienestar profundo que nos capacita para afrontar y desarrollar toda nuestra existencia de un modo adecuado.

Y ahí se abre el interrogante. Pues mientras para unos ese silencio parece ser punto de partida para una actitud de atención y responsabilidad hacia toda forma de existencia, para otros parece ser ya un punto de llegada. Hay presentaciones populares de esta no dualidad en las que, después de haber escuchado todo su planteamiento, uno cae en la cuenta de que no ha escuchado palabras como pobres, justicia, hambre... ni tampoco historia, política, Utopía, «proyecto de Dios»... o, en todo caso, con lenguaje más secular, nada equivalente a liberación histórica. Como si la transformación de la realidad fuera de otro orden, no fuera espiritual, o se siguiera por sí sola de la adquisición personal del bienestar profundo adquirido en el silencio retirado.

## JUZGAR

Desde la espiritualidad de la liberación tenemos problema frente a este tipo de presentaciones de no-dualidad. Nos sentimos mal, porque en tal propuesta espiritual sentimos que hacen agua, o que son sencillamente tirados por la borda, valores espirituales que a nosotros son muy queridos, o que incluso nos parecen esenciales, desde nuestro punto de vista espiritual. Veamos algunos de esos valores.

### *Partir de la realidad y volver a ella*

- Para nosotros, forma parte de una espiritualidad sana el hecho de que parta de la realidad y termine por abocar a la realidad. Para nosotros

la espiritualidad debe «partir de la realidad, iluminarla, y volver a ella para transformarla, y volver a partir de nuevo de esta realidad transformada, en un nuevo proceso cíclico que gira y gira interminablemente en torno a la realidad», a vueltas siempre con Dios y con la realidad. «Esta pasión por la realidad constituye un rasgo genuino de la espiritualidad latinoamericana, que se convierte en piedra de toque para evitar la abstracción estéril y para entrar en lo concreto; para no quedarnos en la teoría y venir a lo práctico; para superar la mera interpretación y llegar a la transformación; para abandonar todo idealismo y espiritualismo y poner los pies en el suelo: en el compromiso, en la praxis».

Esa no dualidad popular a la que nos referimos nos lleva por el camino opuesto. Nos viene a decir que la realidad que nos debe importar no es la realidad real, sino otra, una realidad escondida, interior, callada, que nada tiene que ver directamente con la realidad real de la calle y del trabajo, de la familia y de la sociedad, de la política y de la cultura. Nos recomienda poner a un lado, en un segundo término al menos, la realidad diaria, volver la mirada al interior de nuestra conciencia, y tratar de hacer de ese interior silencioso el lugar teológico y espiritual por excelencia para nosotros. Este tipo de dualidad nos separa de la realidad real en la que nosotros vivimos y hacemos la experiencia religiosa en unidad, en simultaneidad de niveles, en unión total. Un planteamiento así nos divide, nos dualiza: por una parte la realidad real... por otra la «verdadera realidad que importa».

#### *Contemplativos en la liberación*

- Los movimientos clásicos de espiritualidad de la tradición cristiana experimentaron a Dios sobre todo en la soledad (anacoretas, padres del desierto...), en la oración y el trabajo del monasterio (*ora et labora*, ora y trabaja), en el estudio y la oración para la predicación (*contemplata aliis tradere*, entregar a otros lo contemplado), en la acción apostólica (*contemplativus in actione*, contemplativo en la acción «apostólica»)... Nosotros creemos que hoy, en fidelidad creativa a esta tradición viva, nos toca a nosotros en América Latina vivir la contemplación en la acción liberadora (*contemplativus in liberatione*), descodificando la realidad mezclada de gracia y pecado, de luz y sombra, de justicia y de injusticia, de violencia y paz... descubriendo en ese proceso histórico de la liberación, la presencia del Viento que sopla donde quiere, descubriendo y tratando de construir la Historia de la Salvación en la única historia, descubriendo la Salvación en la Liberación. Al hablar pues de ser «contemplativos en la liberación» hablamos de la experiencia de Dios típica de los cristianos latinoamericanos. Vivimos la contemplación en unidad, sin dualidad ninguna con la historia y sus procesos liberadores. Es el secreto, el corazón, la clave de nuestra espiritualidad. Sin captar esto no es posible entenderla; sería malinterpretada como un reduccionismo cualquiera».

Algunas propuestas populares de no dualidad sentimos que nos hacen precisamente la oferta de una dualidad desconocida para nosotros: nos proponen separar la contemplación de la liberación. La iluminación, la contemplación, que nosotros buscamos en medio del proceso mismo de la liberación, deberíamos conseguirla –se nos dice– fuera de ese proceso histórico de liberación, en un más allá separado al que se accede por los métodos introspectivos de la conciencia. Aceptar esta propuesta nos retrotraería a la dualidad/dualismo que ya experimentaron tantas espiritualidades cristianas a lo largo de nuestra historia.

*Bajar de la cruz a los pobres*

«Bajar de la cruz a los pobres», encarnarnos física o espiritualmente en el mundo de los pobres, de las víctimas, de los «injusticiados» de cualquier tipo, y vivir y luchar por la Liberación integral y plena, es para nosotros, a la vez, fuente y meta de nuestra espiritualidad. «Bajar de la Cruz a los pobres» expresa a la vez nuestra máxima experiencia espiritual y nuestro máximo compromiso histórico, inseparablemente, y sin contradicción. Es nuestro talante espiritual, que junta y conjunta lo humano y lo divino, lo histórico y lo escatológico, la realidad más gritante en el hoy de cada día y lo más profundo de nuestra experiencia religiosa. Es nuestra manera de ser, nuestro carisma espiritual, nuestra contribución al concierto universal de las espiritualidades.

Ciertas propuestas populares de la no dualidad cuestionan la espiritualidad de nuestra práctica de la misericordia (que para nosotros es más concretamente Amor-Justicia). Nos consideran equivocados en cuanto buscadores de lo espiritual en lo histórico, en lo terrestre, en la liberación eco-humana. Nos dicen que la misericordia sólo puede recibirse como un don concomitante a una iluminación conseguida por los caminos interiores de la conciencia, del silencio, del recogimiento frente a la historia y su mundo de fluctuación constante e impermanente. Nosotros podemos testimoniar que en nuestra vivencia no hay dualidad vivida entre liberación e iluminación (contemplación), entre lo humano y lo divino, lo concienical y lo histórico.

A la luz de estas dimensiones e intuiciones espirituales fundamentales de nuestra espiritualidad, a las que nos hemos referido, creemos que la espiritualidad que contienen no pocas presentaciones populares de la no dualidad puede estar siendo dual, en cuanto que establece dualidad entre la fuente del misterio y su realización histórico-concreta diaria.... Esos planteamientos populares de no dualidad a los que nos referimos nos separan de la realidad real diaria e histórica, de los pobres, de las víctimas, de los crucificados de la historia, y nos invitan a volver nuestra mirada a otra realidad –interior, de conciencia, silenciosa, apartada del

mundo y de la historia–, en menoscabo de nuestra realización espiritual en medio de este mundo y esta historia, en total encarnación. No nos basta la promesa de que esa ascesis de interiorización, silenciamiento y desconexión producirá una transformación profunda de nosotros mismos y nos dotará de sentimientos y energías que nos habilitarán para volver al mundo real y ejercer en él la misericordia...

Nosotros no queremos renunciar a la encarnación en la realidad como marco –y como medio incluso– de experiencia religiosa, de contemplación, de iluminación. ¿Toda no dualidad con raíces en las religiones orientales presupone esa renuncia? ¿Sería ésa su propuesta? Lo dudamos, pues no nos faltan en esas tradiciones ejemplos de compromiso transformador con la realidad. Pero nos inquieta constatar que ésa parece ser la actitud más generalizada en lo que venimos llamando "propuestas populares de no dualidad", que tanta aceptación parecen encontrar.

## ACTUAR

Hoy reconocemos –nos lo atestiguan nuestras convicciones pluralistas– que ninguna religión es «la verdadera», ni «la» superior, ni la destinada a sustituir a todas las demás.

Todas las religiones son verdaderas, todas válidas... y a la vez todas son falsas en lo que se arrogan en exclusiva, limitadas por naturaleza, necesitadas de crítica y de complementación.

También las espiritualidades, los talentos espirituales, los carismas, las familias espirituales: todas son verdaderas, todas tienen su gracia, su don, y todas ellas son buenas y admirables, pero a la vez insuficientes, limitadas, necesitadas de crítica y de enriquecimiento.

Al decir lo anterior no sólo nos referimos a que hay muchas espiritualidades, muchas realizaciones concretas de una realidad que llamamos espiritualidad... Queremos decir que, además, hay diferentes tipos de espiritualidad, que aunque se llamen con el mismo nombre de espiritualidad, en realidad su naturaleza misma y los accesos que manejan hacia el Misterio son realmente diferentes. Por eso, desde una espiritualidad puede parecer a sus seguidores que otra espiritualidad no es tal, que ni siquiera es espiritualidad, o que está profundamente desorientada. En cuestión de religiones, teologías y espiritualidades no hay lugar a buscar un mínimo común denominador, o un mínimo común múltiplo, ni siquiera a veces un simple factor común. El llamado «pluralismo profundo» puede ser la actitud más recomendable.

Hoy día, cada vez más, ser religioso va a implicar ser inter-religioso, y ser espiritual conllevará serlo inter-espiritualmente.

Reconocemos el valor añadido que representa para nosotros el recordatorio que las religiones orientales nos hacen respecto a la visión mística de la unidad con el fundamento y con el Misterio mismo. Lo valo-

ramos y lo aceptamos, y queremos enriquecernos con esta perspectiva. Creemos que nos aporta un llamado, unos métodos, unas experiencias, un testimonio, que nos son útiles, que admiramos, y que acogemos para enriquecernos.

Pero si como algunos parecen querer decirnos –o al menos así se lo estamos captando–, esa vía de espiritualidad quedara circunscrita al interior de la persona, sin abocarnos al compromiso con la realidad sociopolítico-histórica, difícilmente podríamos avanzar en ese enriquecimiento mutuo. Pues una no-dualidad que nosotros reivindicamos es la que nos lleva a vivir y experimentar la contemplación «en» la liberación, a encontrar la iluminación «en» la liberación, y a estar despiertos integralmente, viviendo ese estado de vigilia no sólo en el interior, sino también en lo histórico-político.

*¿No dualidad? Sí, pero sin ninguna dualidad.*

Estamos contra todas aquellas dualidades que ya hemos experimentado en nuestro pasado itinerario histórico, y contra toda otra dualidad. Estamos atentos a no volver a caer en viejas ni nuevas dualidades.

¿No dualidad? ¿Cuál? Respondemos: ninguna de ellas, ni siquiera las dualidades agazapadas bajo un manto de no dualidad, si las hubiere.

Desde la espiritualidad de la liberación, nosotros no podemos aceptar una propuesta espiritual de no dualidad que nos saque de la realidad, que bajo capa de no dualidad acabe centrando nuestras energías en el mundo interior y silencioso de la conciencia, dualizándonos frente a la realidad.

No podemos abandonar la historia, la realidad, la política, el mundo, la pasión por los pobres, la contemplación (nuestra «iluminación», nuestro «vivir despiertos») vivida en la liberación y en la historia... Nosotros no queremos perder nuestra «no dualidad liberadora», nuestra espiritualidad holístico-integral: histórico-político-ecocéntrica... Bienvenidas sean todas las propuestas de espiritualidad no dual, siempre que no nos introduzcan en una nueva dualidad.





# Enlightenment and/in Liberation

## Seen from the Spirituality of Liberation

ANTHOLOGICAL TEXT

Pedro CASALDÁLIGA\*  
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### I. CONTEMPLATIVES IN LIBERATION

All that makes up the Christian liberation movement: liberation theology, church of the poor, base communities, Christian participation in popular movements, all the social and religious imagery of liberation—in poetry, music and literature— all the pastoral experience of working with the people built up over the years, the endless list of blood-witnesses who have validated this "journey" with their martyrdom... all this is inexplicable without the spiritual experience that forms the source-legacy inspiring and motivating this cloud of witnesses:

Behind any innovative action by the church, at the root of all true and new theology, lies a typical religious experience that constitutes the word-source: all the rest springs from this all-embracing experience; all the rest is simply the attempt to translate it within the framework of a historically-determined situation. It is only by starting from this presupposition that we can understand the great syntheses of the theologians of the past, such as St Augustine, St Anselm, St Thomas, St Bonaventure or Suárez, and of the present, such as Rahner and other masters of the spirit. All spiritual experience signifies a meeting with the new and challenging face of God, which emerges in the great challenges posed by historical conditions. <sup>1</sup>

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Excerpts of the book *The Spirituality of Liberation*, Burns & Oates, Great Britain 1994, published also by Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1994 and Claretian Publications at Manila, Quezon City, 1994, Philipinnes, under the title of *Political Holiness*.

Earlier movements of spirituality experienced God primarily in the desert (anchorites, the desert Fathers...), in prayer and monastic work (*ora et labora*, pray and work), in study and prayer for preaching (*contemplata aliis tradere*, passing on what is contemplated to others), in apostolic activity (*contemplativus in actione*, contemplative in action). <sup>2</sup>

We believe that today, in creative fidelity to this living tradition, we are called to live contemplation in liberative activity (*contemplativus in liberatione*), decoding surroundings made up of grace and sin, light and shade, justice and injustice, peace and violence, discovering in this historical process of liberation the presence of the Wind that blows where it will, uncovering and trying to build salvation history in the one history, finding salvation in liberation. In the wail of a child, or in the full-throated cry of a people (see Puebla 87-9), we try to "listen" to God, to turn ourselves into the very ear of the God who hears the cry of his people (Ex 3). (Contemplation, which has classically been defined as "seeing" without images, intuitively, can also be described as "hearing or listening" without images, intuitively, as an open radar in direct contact, as a solar panel face up to the sun, as standing before....)

The earlier Christian tradition instructed us in a model of prayer that only went up, without coming down. This is graphically suggested in John of the Cross' title, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*. The elevator of prayer could deposit us up there, in the clouds, doing nothing. This is not right, because neither does God need our prayers, nor is God up there in the clouds. The ones who need prayer are ourselves and our brothers and sisters, and we are not in the clouds either, but on the laborious and conflictive road to the building of the Reign. We believe we have to go up and come down, and that the farther up the mountain-side we get, the farther down we go and submerge ourselves in the kenosis of incarnation, of passionate concern for our history and surroundings.

So in speaking of being "contemplatives in liberation," we are speaking of the experience of God that is typical of Latin American Christians. This is the secret, the heart of, the key to our spirituality. Without realizing this, it is impossible to understand it; it would be misinterpreted as any old reductionism.

## **The Content and Context of Our Experience of God**

We have already said that the spirituality of liberation is characterized typically by its "realism," by its "passion for reality," by its hammering insistence on "starting from actual conditions and going back to them." So is it strange that its experience of God starts in and goes back to actual conditions? This is the first new aspect: the content, the field, the place from which we experience God is not the "purely spiritual" or

the "set apart from the world," nor the intellectual world of theological abstractions, but our actual situation as it presents itself to us in all its dimensions:

—the historical dimension: history itself, seen as the sphere of freedom, of human responsibility, of personal creativity in carrying out the task assigned to us by God;

—the political dimension: building up society, the tensions of living together, the balance of forces, the conflicts of interest between different sectors of society, with special emphasis on the "popular movement": the organized poor with their strategies, triumphs and defeats, their disappointments and hopes;

— the geopolitical dimension: national struggles for sovereignty and freedom, imperialism old and new, transnationalization and the global village, the wave of triumphalist neo-liberalism and the resistance of the poor, the readjustment of the old world order into a one-sided world with persistent efforts to introduce a "new world order";

— the daily problems of our lives: deteriorating living standards, shortages, the struggle to survive, the threat of social unrest, repression, unemployment, social fragmentation, street children, the drugs trade, the daily social consequences of the foreign debt burden, the shock of the "economic adjustments" imposed by international financial organs, the most real and "material" problems of our lives....<sup>3</sup>

It is in this "material reality" that we find our experience of God as contemplatives in liberation: "The liberating commitment has come to mean a genuine spiritual experience for many Christians, in the original and biblical sense of the term: a living in the Spirit that makes us see ourselves freely and creatively as children of the Father and brothers and sisters of one another."<sup>4</sup> We do not deny the value that "withdrawal," solitude, the "experience of the desert," has for us too. But if we stand aside, it is only for methodological, instrumental reasons, not for its own sake; we retreat "with the situation on our backs," with our hearts heavy with the world. We do not retreat from the world; we simply enter into its depth dimension, which for us is religious (see the section on "Political Holiness" below).

### **Agencies of this Experience of God**

The first agency for bringing about this experience is, logically, the reality itself. We cannot experience God in our situation if we remove ourselves from it. So it is a matter of being present in our situation: openness to what is around us, incarnation, "insertion" in it.... This is the agency that provides us with the matter or context in which we make this experience.

Another great agency is faith. <sup>5</sup> Faith gives us a contemplative view of our situation. It provides us with an "epistemological break": we see reality from another viewpoint, in a different perspective:

When we see with the eyes of faith, we no longer speak of simple structural injustices, but of a real collective situation of sin; we do not only say that the social outlook is dismaying, but denounce the situation as contrary to God's plan for history. Liberation is not seen just as a global social process, but as a way of bringing about and bringing forward the absolute liberation of Jesus Christ. <sup>6</sup>

The contemplation we speak of is done in the light of faith. We experience God in our conditions and in history, but in faith, through faith. It is the light that reveals presences and dimensions that would otherwise remain hidden.

Other tools we use are the various resources we can lay our hands on to help us understand our situation: sociological and economic analyses, anthropology, cultural studies, psychology, the accumulated experience of popular education, mass media, the see-judge-act methodology, techniques of participation, the way the people analyze their situation, and so on. With all of this, we try to make our Christian discernment of conditions: "Recourse to the help of the social sciences does not stem from mere intellectual curiosity, but from a deeply evangelical concern." <sup>9</sup>

Together with all these agencies (some more illuminating, such as the Bible; others more analytical, such as social studies, theology and the various pastoral methodologies), the one that completes the picture is the assiduous practice of prayer itself (see Luke 18:1). The experience of God is, in effect, a contemplative experience: "The presence of God in us cannot be known other than by experience; it cannot be expressed in words alone," in the words of the Dominican Office for the feast of St Thomas Aquinas. Or, as St John of the Cross put it: "Neither does human knowledge suffice to know how to understand it, nor experience to know how to tell it; because only those who go through it will know how to feel it, though not to tell it." <sup>10</sup> So personal prayer communal prayer, the spirit of faith that makes us approach things virtually spontaneously from a depth perspective, a habitual "state of prayer" (see 1 Thess. 5:16-18), and reaching a certain level of contemplation, are also agencies of our experience of God in the here and now of our situation.

Our experience tends to run these agencies together. None of them is sufficient in itself. We have to read the two books: the Bible and the book of life. We have to be illuminated by the word of God, but equally we have to make use of the analytical and hermeneutical tools, in an inter-disciplinary approach (as sanctioned already by Vatican II: see GS 62; PO 16; OT 15, 20). We have to sink ourselves in the Bible, but also

in conditions around us. We have to lend "one ear to the gospel and the other to the people," in the words of the Argentinian martyr-bishop Enrique Angelelli.

### Contemplating... from Where?

What we contemplate as "contemplatives in liberation" is not equally accessible from anywhere, from any point of view. Analogously to what happens with normal spatial vision, there is also "perspective" in matters of the spirit: the place we choose to look from influences what will be in the foreground, the middle ground and background, what will be emphasized and what hidden. Each viewing point brings its own perspective: "You don't think the same from a cottage as you do from a palace."

Some viewing points are better and some worse. Some show nothing and some give a specially good view. The best place for viewing history and the history of salvation is from the social situation of the poor:

The basic theological setting is the point of view of oppressed peoples in their struggle for liberation. Both because, this being the place where the meaning of human history is shown in greatest depth, it is natural for the divine presence to be shown therein its greatest depth, and because the choice of this place seems to be the geopolitical transference most coherent with the evangelical option for the outcasts. <sup>11</sup>

The outlook of the powerful obscures liberation: "The metropolises are prevented from having hope: they are threatened by their 'establishments,' which fear any future that denies them a place. In order to think, in the metropolises, one has, Being first, to 'become' an inhabitant of the Third World." <sup>12</sup> Being contemplative in liberation supposes an option for the poor.

The Lord Jesus himself laid this down clearly: "I thank you, Father,... because you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants" (Luke 10:21). Jesus does not contrast "wise and intelligent" with "stupid" but with "infants." The "wise and intelligent" he is referring to are therefore those who "share the wisdom of the great." Instead of this wisdom, Jesus opts for the alternative, that of infants, the only wisdom capable of understanding "these things," at which Jesus rejoices and gives exultant thanks. So there are things infants see, understand, contemplate, and to which the great remain blind. What are these things?

For Jesus, "these things" are none other than those he continually dwelt on: the Father's preferences, the things of the Reign, what is involved in proclaiming the good news to the poor, the lowly ones' longing for liberation, the struggle for a just and sharing society, the building of the Reign of God. In reality, it is simply common sense that the pow-

erful, the well-placed, the exploiters, the grandees of the system, should not be able to understand "these things." They don't even want to hear of good news for the poor. They don't look at things from the viewing point of liberation. They don't want to take part in the dynamics of the Reign: "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the Kingdom of God!" (Luke 18,24).

If we are to be able to contemplate "these things," we need to place ourselves in a setting from which they let themselves be contemplated, in the right social setting and with the correct perspective: that of "infants," that of the poor.

### **Contemplatives "in Liberation"**

This means various things. The first is that we contemplate life from the standpoint of the greater liberation discovered by faith, the standpoint of the Reign (the "formal object" or "pertinence" of contemplation). The situation that forms the object of our spiritual experience, looked at in the light of faith and from the option for the poor (from "infants"), is seen in the light of the overall march of liberation, the very course of the Reign that envelops the particular historical movements of our peoples and of each of us as individuals.

The next thing it means is that our contemplation takes place in the midst of a process of liberation (the "place in which" we contemplate, an environmental or passive *locus ubi*), with its attendant convulsions, conditionings, risks, limitations and possibilities. Where it does not take place is outside the world, in the clouds, on a heavenly Olympus, or purely inside oneself, in the abstract, in political neutrality, in purely intellectual contemplation.

Then, it means that within the overall situation we focus especially on the actual progress of liberation (the specific material object of our contemplation): the liberative actions of our peoples, their struggles to create a new, free "world order."

It means, too, that we view the process of liberation not from outside, but from inside, "in liberation," in what it actually involves, involved in it, taking part in its struggles, taking up its causes. We contemplate in liberation bringing it about at the same time, "liberating" (an active *locus ubi*) and liberating ourselves.

We contemplate liberating. And by contemplating, we also contribute to liberation.

### **"Contemplatives": What we see, What we contemplate**

Formerly, it used to be said that the "object" of contemplation was "divine things." So, according to St Thomas Aquinas, contemplation is "a

simple and intuitive vision of divine things, which proceeds from love and leads to love." St Francis of Sales gave a similar definition: "a loving, simple and permanent fixing of the mind on divine things." <sup>13</sup> It was the very "eternal future glory" already present in anticipation in the soul through grace. <sup>14</sup> These "divine things", as described by the various classical schools of asceticism and mysticism, are in effect far removed from the things of this world. So St Teresa of Avila could write: "For myself, I hold that when his Majesty bestows this favour, it is to those who push the things of this world to one side." And Pseudo-Dionysius, so influential in Christian mysticism, puts it another way: "Separated from the world of sense and the world of understanding, the soul enters into the mysterious darkness of a holy ignorance, and, abandoning all scientific knowledge, loses itself in the one whom no one can see or grasp; united with the unknown by the noblest part of itself, and because it renounces knowledge..." <sup>15</sup>

Even more, these schools often seem to propose a sort of competition or rivalry between attention devoted to "divine things" and that given to the "things of this world." So Blessed Henry Suso, pupil of Eckhart, influential spiritual director, inspirer of Thomas a Kempis, wrote: "Do not believe that it is enough for you to think of me for just an hour each day. Those who desire to hear inwardly my sweet words, and to understand the mysteries and secrets of my wisdom, should be with me all the time, always thinking of me. . . . Is it not shameful to have the Kingdom of God inside you, and to go out from it to think of creatures?" And even St Teresa could state: "I hold it to be impossible, if we were to take care to remind ourselves that we have such a guest within us, that we should give ourselves so much to the things of the world; since we should see how low they are compared to those we possess within us..." <sup>16</sup>

Without denying the element of correct intuition in what these great mystics and theologians meant by these expressions, we, here and now, in the particular historical situation of this continent (and, truth to tell, in any time and place, if we are to move beyond dualism and disincarnation), with all the experience we have built up, base our experience of God on different approaches and categories.

For us, the "divine things" that form the object of mystical contemplation can be none other than "these things" revealed by the Father to "infants" (see Luke 10:21-4). These are "the things of the Reign" (see the section on "Reign-Focus" above for the Reign's capacity for transforming all activities and situations generally held to be Christian into their genuine Christian selves). They determine its progress, the obstacles in its way, its preaching, its building-up, the way the good news is proclaimed to the poor, the action of the Spirit arousing longing for liberation and

raising the poor to their dignity as children and brothers and sisters in the longed-for coming of the Reign. <sup>17</sup>

These are certainly "divine things," but not in relation to any God—a God, for example, not essentially concerned in history and our situation, or one who can be appealed to without commitment. They are divine in reference to the God-of-the- Reign, to the God who has a plan for the whole of history and has called us to contemplation in bringing it about. That is, they are the "divine things" of the God of Jesus.

With the martyrs, the witnesses, the militants of the whole continent, radically committed to "these things," to the point of dying for them if necessary, for the sake of the Reign, we bear witness to our experience of God when we feel ourselves to be working with the Lord:

—in the unfinished creation, trying to continue and perfect it—as expressed in the theologies and spiritualities of work, of progress, of development;

— in cosmogenesis, biogenesis, noogenesis, cristogenesis: Teilhard de Chardin was not only a spiritual genius, but the spokesman for a spirituality latent in many Christians, much of which can be taken up by the spirituality of liberation, even if in different terms and opening its approaches out to new dimensions;

— in carrying out God's historical plan for the world, building the Utopia of God's Reign: the "Reign-focused" re-reading of Christianity proposed above has undoubtedly made the greatest contribution to many committed Christians having a very deep experience of God in the midst of their struggles and political activities;

—in works that liberate from oppression, bring full humanity, redeem humankind, build a new world, "completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" (Col. 1:24);

— in pressing Jesus' cause: saying that being a Christian in Latin America today implies "following Jesus, carrying on his work, pressing his cause in order to achieve his objective..." is not just a happy phrase, <sup>18</sup> but an accurate account of the spiritual experience of so many Latin Americans who are passionately committed to liberative struggles, to living the gospel where they are, to renewing pastoral and church work in general, based on following Jesus;

— in social change—a spiritual experience authoritatively expressed by Medellín: "Just as Israel of old, the first people (of God) felt the saving presence of God when God delivered them from the oppression of Egypt by the passage through the sea and led them to the promised land, so we also, the new people of God, cannot cease to feel God's saving passage in view of 'true development, which is the passage for each and all, from

conditions of life that are less human, to those that are more human";<sup>19</sup>

— in discerning the signs of the times so as to find traces of the Reign growing among us.

Putting all this into more theological language, we could say that the fact of being "contemplatives in liberation" makes us:

- experience God in the actual situation;
- contemplate the advances made by God's Reign in our history;
- "feel" transcendence in immanence;
- discover the history of salvation in the one and only history;
- discern eschatological salvation being built up in history;<sup>20</sup>
- grasp the "geopolitics" of God behind changing historical circumstances.<sup>21</sup>

This contemplation loads our lives with a deep sense of responsibility by making us realize that they are shot through with divine responsibilities: at the same time as we "make our own soul," we also "collaborate in another work... the completing of the world." 21 We know that in our historical struggles, by making the Reign progress, we are already bringing the new world into being, giving present shape to the absolute future we hope for, heaven.<sup>22</sup>

So we can love this world, this earth, this history, because for us it is not a sort of stage set to be burned once the performance of the "great theatre of the world" is over, nor is it a blank canvas on which we paint a picture as an exam, and are rewarded for having passed this with a salvation that has nothing to do with our present circumstances (heterosalvation).<sup>23</sup> We can love this earth and this toilsome human history because it is the Body of the One who is and who was, who came and who comes, whom we follow in hope under the veil of flesh. And because, in this earth and its immanence, the transcendent Reign we bear in our hands is growing.

The course of history is not a matter of indifference to us. Although faith tells us that the final triumph is certain, we know it is subjected, in the course of history, to the attacks of its enemies, and we give our lives to the task of hastening its coming.

We love this earth with its history because for us it is the only possible agency through which we can meet the Lord and the Reign. Longing for God and the Reign does not make us detach ourselves from this world and what it brings; we have nowhere to build eternity except history: "The earth is our only road to heaven," in the words of a famous missiologist. No one can accuse us of being deserters, of escaping, of not

committing ourselves, of not loving madly the cause of the human person, the cause of the poor, which is Jesus' cause, and indeed God's Cause.

This is how we know that what we are going through, our struggles for love and peace, for freedom and justice, to build a better and oppression-free world, "the values of human dignity, brotherhood and freedom, and indeed all the good fruits of our nature and enterprise," will be found again, "but freed of stain, burnished and transfigured. This will be so when Christ hands over to the Father a Kingdom eternal and universal: 'a Kingdom of truth and life, of holiness and grace, of justice, love, and peace.' On this earth that Kingdom is already present in mystery. When the Lord returns, it will be brought into full flower" (GS 39). We know that what we contemplate in liberation under the signs of fleetingness and weakness, we shall find again in eternity.

The promised restoration which we are awaiting has already begun in Christ, is carried forward in the mission of the Holy Spirit and through him continues.... The final age of the world has already come upon us (cf 1 Cor. 10:11). The renovation of the world has been irrevocably decreed and in this age is already anticipated.... However, until there is a new heaven and a new earth where justice dwells (cf 2 Pet. 3:13)... [we dwell among] creatures who groan and travail in pain until now and await the revelation of the sons of God (cf Rom. 8:19-22), [and although we have] the first fruits of the Spirit we groan within ourselves (cf Rom. 8:23) and desire to be with Christ (cf Phil. 1:23). (LG 48)

We feel ourselves to be present—and how present!—in immanence and transcendence, simultaneously, without conflict, though with a great tension in our hearts, deep down within ourselves: while on one hand we love this earth and its history so passionately, on the other we feel like "strangers and foreigners" (Hb. 11:13), citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20) and at the same time exiled far from the Lord (2 Cor. 5:6); we bear within ourselves the image of this "world that is passing away" (1 Cor. 7:31) and at the same time view things *sub specie aeternitatis*; "raised with Christ" (Col. 3:1), we know too that "what we will be has not yet been revealed" (1 John 3:2; cf 2 Cor. 5:6).

The more physically rooted in history we are, the more longingly eschatological we feel: for the spirituality of liberation, the 1930s debate between eschatologism and incarnationalism has been decisively resolved by the full conjugation of the two tendencies. The more we look for transcendence, the more we find it in immanence: the Kingdom of God is not another world, but this one, though "totally other."<sup>25</sup> This is why we go on uttering the most valid cry that has been shouted out in this world: "Your kingdom come!" (Luke 11:2); may this world pass and your Reign come: "Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20).

We do not contemplate heavenly resting-places, but try to listen to God's cry in the shout of reality: "It is a very strong temptation for Christians to feel moved by beautiful passages of theology while the human caravan passes then by, walking on hot coals," wrote Emmanuel Mounier.<sup>26</sup> We try to contemplate God in the burning bush of the liberation process, in which we hear the word God sends us, as to Moses, to set our people free. We try to listen to it obediently, with ob-audentia. Contemplation of liberation is always a call to renewed commitment to our actual surroundings.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> L. Boff, "Contemplativus in liberatione," in *Faith on the Edge* (San Francisco and London, 1989), pp. 80-88.
- <sup>2</sup> Boff, *ibid.*, gives a brief historical survey of the historical evolution of Christian contemplation. On the Platonic-Oriental mystic influence on Christian contemplation, see S. Galilea, "Espiritualidad de la liberacion," in *Religiosidad popular y pastoral* (Madrid, 1980), pp. 148ff. On the Catholic-Protestant polemics of the mid-century around the hellenization of Christian mysticism, see L. Bouyer, *Introduction a la vie spirituelle. Manuel de theologie ascetique et mystique* (Paris, 1962).
- <sup>3</sup> V. Codina, "Aprender a orar desde los pobres," in *De la modernidad a la solidaridad* (Lima, 1984), pp. 221-30.
- <sup>4</sup> G. Gutiérrez, "Prassi di liberazione e fede cristiana," in R. Gibellini (ed.), *La nuova frontiera de la teologia in America Latina* (Brescia, 1975), p. 35. Eng. trans. *Frontiers of Theology in Latin America* (Maryknoll, N.Y., 1979).
- <sup>5</sup> Casaldáliga, *El vuelo del Quetzal*, p. 128.
- <sup>6</sup> Boff, *La fe en la periferia*, p. 225.
- <sup>7</sup> H. de Lubac, *Esegese medievale, I quattro sensi delta Scritta* (Rome, 1952), pp. 220-21.
- <sup>8</sup> Culturas oprimidas e a evangelização na America Latina. Working document for 8th inter-church meeting of CEB's (Santa Maria, Brazil, 1991), p. 90.
- <sup>9</sup> Hilgert, *Jesus histórico*, p. 39. See also J. M. Castillo, *El discernimiento cristiano* (Salamanca, 1984); J. Sobrino, "Following Jesus as Discernment," «Concilium» 114 (1978).
- <sup>10</sup> St John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* (various editions), Prologue, 1.
- <sup>11</sup> Cf. G. Girardi, *La conquista, ¿con qué derecho?* (San Jose/ Managua, 1988), p. 14.
- <sup>12</sup> Cf. P. Freire, "Tercer mundo y teología," «Perspectivas del diálogo» 50 (1970), p. 305.
- <sup>13</sup> Cf. ST2-2, q. 180, a. 1, 6; A. Tanquerey, *Synopse de thologie ascetique et mystique* (Paris, 1932), p. 885. St Francis of Sales gives a similar definition: "a loving, simple and permanent fixing of the mind on divine things," *Treatise on the Love of God*, I, iv, c. 3.
- <sup>14</sup> J. Arintero, *La evolución mística* (Madrid, 1952), pp. 112-31.
- <sup>15</sup> St Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle, fourth dwelling*, chs. II and III. Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology*, ch. 1, 3.
- <sup>16</sup> Cf. Bl. Henry Suso, *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom* (London. 1982).

- <sup>17</sup> L. and C. Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, pp. 55-6.
- <sup>18</sup> Boff, *La fe en la periferia*, p. 44.
- <sup>19</sup> Medellm, "Introduction," 6, in A. T. Hennesly (ed.), *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History* (Maryknoll, N.Y., 1990), p. 96, see note 10.
- <sup>20</sup> Casaldáliga, *El vuelo del Quetzal*, pp. 19-20.
- <sup>21</sup> P. Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Milieu Divin* (London, 1964), p. 61.
- <sup>22</sup> L. Boff, *La vida más allá de la muerte* (Bogotá, 1983), p. 67; idem, *Hablemos de la otra vida* (Santander, 1978), p. 78 .
- <sup>23</sup> On the theme of *contemptus mundi*, see R. Bultot, *Doctrine du mépris du monde, en Occident, de S. Ambroise à Innocent III* (Louvain, n.d.).
- <sup>24</sup> For the current view of the relation between salvation and liberation, see C. and L. Boff, *Libertad y liberación* (Salamanca, 1982), pp. 84-98.
- <sup>25</sup> L. Boff, *Jesucristo el liberador*, p. 67. 26. E. Mounier, «Selections de théologie» 50 (1974), p. 177.

## I. POLITICAL HOLINESS

"Political holiness" is an expression that has been very successful in recent years in Latin America. There is no doubt that it accurately expresses a very strong intuition in Latin American spirituality. "The Christian tradition," Leonardo Boff tells us, "is familiar with ascetic saints, in control of their passions and faithfully keeping the laws of God and the church. But it has very little acquaintance with political saints and activist saints."<sup>1</sup> In other words, this is certainly something new, responding to a felt need, although at the same time this is a development that is already mature, consecrated in the lives of many witnesses and sealed by the blood of many martyrs.

Latin American political holiness is the holiness of all times, the traditional holiness of baptism and grace, of prayer and penance, of love and ascesis, of the eucharist and examination of conscience. It is, though, a holiness that expresses and channels the ethical-political "virtues" that the Spirit is calling forth in Latin America inside and outside the churches, absorbs them and allows itself to be transformed by the action of the Spirit fermenting underneath all the changes and reformulations in theology and biblical studies that have taken place in the churches of Latin America.

First of all, it is an outgoing holiness. It is a holiness that comes out of itself and looks for its brothers and sisters. The goal it sets itself is not to attain its own perfection, but to achieve life in abundance (cf John 10:10) for others. It is a holiness completely directed outside itself toward

God's plan for our history. It is a holiness that does not run away from the struggle, from modernity, from the big city, but faces them in the power of the Spirit. If the Spirit could do things in Egypt, or in Nineveh or in Babylon, it must be able to do things in São Paulo, in Bogota, in Lima or Los Angeles; in steelworks, in the revolution. If God is among the cooking pots, as St Teresa said, he is also among the trade unions, the political parties, and demands of the poor.

It is a holiness beyond the pale, in the world, in the midst of the world that God loved so much (John 3:16), the world to which God sent his Son to save it (John 3:17), the world to which God sends us (Matt. 28:19). It is a holiness of "being in the world," being world, not being part of the evil world (which is what Jesus meant). It is being in the world with our feet firmly planted on the ground, longing for the world to be different, for the world to become Reign. It is not a holiness that tries to save itself from the world, nor even to be saved in the world, but to save the world, and to save it with the world's help, in the sense that this holiness doesn't think that it is Christians alone who will save the world.

It is a holiness of the major virtues such as truthfulness, the struggle for justice and peace, for human rights—all human rights, not just individual human rights, civil, political and cultural, but the so-called third generation of human rights, economic and national—the struggle for international law, for the transformation of the community of the children of God, for the creation of new structures of fraternity (a socialized world, the New International Economic Order, a new United Nations, a world without a First and Third World). Political holiness turns all these into major virtues to correct or complement the classical virtues, which are more domestic, more individualistic, conventual or spiritualistic in their emphasis: modesty, custody of the senses, purification of intention, custody of the presence of God, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, ascetic sacrifices and mortifications, repetition of pious exclamations. These major virtues restore to a gospel context some canonized virtues of bourgeois education that are usually limited to one-to-one relationships, to the private sphere, (bourgeois) family life, the obsession with sexuality.<sup>2</sup> The political holiness of the spirituality of liberation is also the spirituality of the "structural" or "social" virtues, of the major virtues. We use these terms to make a parallel with the terms "structural sin" and "social sin" to refer to the practice of the Christian virtues which transcends the sphere of the individual or group and seeks a social application of them within the structural mechanisms of society. It should be noted, however, that the major virtues are not in conflict with the minor or domestic virtues; it is inconsistent to fight for the major virtues and fail in the essence of the domestic virtues. There is also no contradiction with the individual virtues; it is not enough to fight for a just society without being just oneself.

It is not a holiness that locks us into a narrow world of trifles.<sup>3</sup> It is the holiness of great causes: justice, peace, equality, fraternity, love fully realized and socially structured, the "civilization of love" in the full sense of the term, liberation, the new man and the new woman, the new world.... In other words it is the holiness of those who try to live and fight for the cause of Jesus.

It is a contemplative holiness. Faith gives it a contemplative vision of the world, enabling it to discover the presence of God in the events of the world. In the complex detail of the historical formation of the world it is able to contemplate the presence of the One who is and is to come, who guides history as its Lord. It is able to see the history of salvation in the history of every day. "Christian activists, used to the complexity of social phenomena, which are today extremely sophisticated and accessible only with the use of scientific methods, have to reinforce enormously their faith-vision in order to be able to detect in socio-historical mechanisms the presence or absence of God and his grace. As never before in history, there is a need for prayer combined with political shrewdness, a mystical sense allied with critical analysis of events."<sup>4</sup>

In essence, it is a holiness-for-the Reign, formed by active hope for it, the struggle to make it come, waiting for it as an eschatological event, but one made credible by historical achievements; by the search for instruments to hasten its coming. Here as in other things, the Reign is the reference, the Christian absolute, which gives a new shape to all Christian categories (see the section "Reign-Focus, above). Where until quite recently spirituality talked about "the life of grace," "supernatural life," "the quest of perfection," "the cultivation of the (inner and private) virtues," Latin American spirituality of liberation talks about the Reign as the ultimate reference point, of history as the site for the building of its Utopia, of the real world as its starting point and destination, of historical action for transformation as the commitment it demands, of "incarnate contemplative prayer" as the way to perceive and detect the Reign in the obscurity of history, of liberation as a synonym for redemption and of the poor as its principal beneficiaries (cf Luke 7:18ff; Matt. 25:31ff).<sup>5</sup> It is a holiness "lying in wait for the Kingdom."

It is a holiness that confronts the sin of the world, looks it in the face, condemns it prophetically and commits itself to correcting it. It does not flee from the world. Nor does it view the world with the optimistic eyes of the First World, as though the only evil in it consisted of minor accidental upsets. It goes into the world, gets its hands dirty, gets splashed with mud (and tears and blood). With this holiness believers bear the sin of the world, like the Servant of Yahweh (Isa. 52:13 - 53:12). They try to "take away the sin of the world" like the Lamb of God (John 1:29).

It is a holiness that does not run away from ambiguity. That is, it does not avoid commitment on the pretext that the causes at issue are not absolutely pure. It does not insist on angelic purity in the particular immediate choices among which it has to move before committing itself. It knows that in politics there is nothing perfect and nothing final. Politics is not for angels, and there are no germ-free choices in it. Political holiness does not shirk from supporting causes that in themselves are neither perfect nor totally holy. It does not put the purity of its own image above all else. "Clean hands" are the prerogative of those who don't get involved. This is a holiness that does not flee from conflict. It enters the world, and, since this world is marked by sin, divided and at odds, believers are challenged by the conflict, badmouthed by all sides. And in the conflict it declares itself always, without hesitation, on the side of the poor.

It is a holiness starting from a new position in society, from the social setting of the poor. For centuries holiness was thought of (in theology, in the churches, in the monasteries, in treatises on asceticism) as something detached from any social or political context. The model of holiness cultivated was the monastic model, a model allegedly a-political and a-historical, though many of those monks—following one political interest or another—led crusades, agrarian reforms and economic and educational transformations.<sup>6</sup> And it is a fact that those Christians who have been publicly recognized by the church as saints were mainly from a particular social class.<sup>7</sup> Political holiness places itself, consciously and critically, in the social setting of the poor.

It is a holiness characterized by a sensitivity to the majorities in our society, thinking according to the "logic of the majorities," and able to look at them whole, without letting the tree of the individual stop it from seeing the wood of the masses, without being an obstacle, through the assistentialism of aid, to effective justice and charity. This critical sensitivity is able to see the collective poor, not as a mere sum of individuals, but as an organic unit, as a class, as the people, as a marginalized race, as an oppressed culture, a subjugated gender.

It is an intelligent holiness, one that wants to act out an intelligent and effective love, analyzing situations, making use of analytical tools and ideological interpretations, used always with the necessary critical sense. It is an intelligent holiness, which tries to go to the causes and the structures, and not stop at the symptoms or momentary situations (cf Puebla 28-30; 41), which does not want to give as charity what is due in justice (AA 8). It is an intelligently "interdisciplinary" holiness, not narrowly clerical or modest and churchy, or timidly pious.

It is an ascetic and disciplined holiness, one that accepts the demands of politics, the need for organization, austerity, the exercise of the political virtues, the constant practice of discernment, analysis, teamwork.

Political holiness is also explicitly political. It does not claim to be a-political. It does not fall into the trap of believing that you can be non-political or neutral. It has broken with the taboo on politics imposed in recent centuries by those who wanted the churches to engage in politics without realizing it or without admitting it. It has rediscovered the connection between faith and politics, as has the universal church: "The Spirit is leading us to see more clearly that today holiness is not possible without a commitment to justice, without solidarity with the poor and oppressed. The model of holiness for the lay faithful has to include the social dimension in the transformation of the world according to God's plan" (1987 Synod, Message, 4). It has rediscovered an understanding of politics as "one of the highest forms of charity" (Pius XI), as "long-distance love" (Ricoeur) or "macro-charity" (Comblin).

Let us remember the sayings of three great witnesses. Emmanuel Mounier insisted, "Everything is politics, but politics is not everything." Mahatma Gandhi said, "Those who say religion has nothing to do with politics don't know anything about religion." And Desmond Tutu observed, "There is nothing more political than saying that religion has nothing to do with politics."

Political holiness is also the leaven of a holy politics. Many politicians have received their training in the journey of the churches with the poor, and have been educated in close contact with the base communities or with the various church bodies devoted to defending human rights, workers, peasants or indigenous peoples. This social ministry of the churches has encouraged the development of a typically Latin American method of popular education for transformation, internationally associated with the name of Paulo Freire.<sup>8</sup> It has made more obvious the need for a new type of politics (in contrast to the type of politics usual in Latin America: careerist, corrupt, unscrupulous, unprincipled, and lacking any genuine interest in serving the people). In some parts of Latin America this political holiness of the spirituality of liberation has made the church the institution that has accumulated most experience of working with the people, in the political holiness, the political *diakonia* of Christians.

It is a holiness that takes very seriously the priesthood of all believers (LG 2, 10ff). Political holiness also includes the realistic nature of holiness stressed by Vatican II (esp. LG 41): a holiness that must be worked out in everyday life, in our own situation and with our own responsibilities, without looking for esoteric paths. Traditionally holiness was understood in a very churchy way, spiritualistic and spiritualized (the "sanctification of the world" through the right intention, high mindedness, through the quasi-sacramental presence of Christians in the world). But there is no genuine sanctification if there is no real transformation.

A sanctification that left the world as it is, giving it religious legitimacy, would be a blasphemy. The true sanctification of the world implies its real, tangible transformation to make it more like the Reign of God.

Political holiness is a holiness of active hope, which is able to overcome the defeatism of the poor in the face of the status quo, the established powers, the regrouping of capitalism and imperialism, in the face of the wave of neo-liberalism, the thrust of capitalism against labour, North against South. It is a holiness capable of enduring the hours of darkness for the poor, upholding the asceticism of hope against all hope. It is a holiness that knows we shall never on this earth reach the total fulfilment of the Utopia of which we dream (the Reign), and that no particular achievement, no instrument, must be confused with the goal. The Reign is always more, greater and always further on.

It is an ecumenical holiness, able to join forces with all those who fight for these greater causes, believers and non-believers, Christians and non-Christians, Christians of one denomination and another. It can do this because it never loses sight of its goal and its great central cause, the Reign: that they may have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10).

### Notes:

- \* Excerpt of the book *Spirituality of Liberation*, Burns & Oates, Great Britain 1994, published also as *The Spirituality of Liberation*, by Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1994 and Claretian Publications at Manila, Quezon City, 1994, Philippines.
- <sup>1</sup> L. Boff, "*Spirituality and Politics*," Faith on the Edge, pp. 59- 107, quotation from p. 90.
- <sup>2</sup> On the need to break out of a version of Christianity that had become the political religion of the bourgeoisie, see J. B. Metz, *The Emergent Church: The Future of Christianity in a Postbourgeois World* (New York and London, 1981) pp. 67-81.
- <sup>3</sup> "You deal fairly with us, you don't pull fast ones on us," as the Nicaraguan Mass correctly says. See CIIR, *The Nicaraguan Mass* (London, 1986).
- <sup>4</sup> Cf. L. Boff, "*Contemplativus in liberatione*," in Faith on the Edge (San Francisco and London, 1980), pp. 80-88. See also the section "*Contemplatives in Liberation*," above.
- <sup>5</sup> When we use the term "liberation" we use it in a total sense, just as when we say "redemption" we do not use it in a sense reduced to a socio-economic or psycho-social aspect.
- <sup>6</sup> J. M. Vigil, *La política de la Iglesia apolítica. Una aportación a la teología política desde la historia* (Valencia, 1975).
- <sup>7</sup> P. Delooz, "The Social Function of the Canonization of Saints," *Concilium* 129 (1979), pp. 14-24.
- <sup>8</sup> On the "spirit of working with the people," cf. C. Boff, *Como trabalhar com o povo* (Petropolis, 1986), pp. 39-50.



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# **L'UTOPIE DE LA SOLIDARITÉ AU QUÉBEC**

**Contribution de la  
mouvance sociale chrétienne**



**Lise Baroni Michel Beaudin Céline Beaulieu  
Yvonne Bergeron Guy Côté**



## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REVIEWS

**RIBEIRO, Claudio de Oliveira - SOUZA, Daniel Santos, *Teologia das religiões em foco Um guia para visionários*. Paulinas, São Paulo 2012. (A Theology of Religions in Focus: a guide for visionaries)**

Review by Gilbráz ARAGÃO, Pernambuco University, Recife, PE, Brazil.

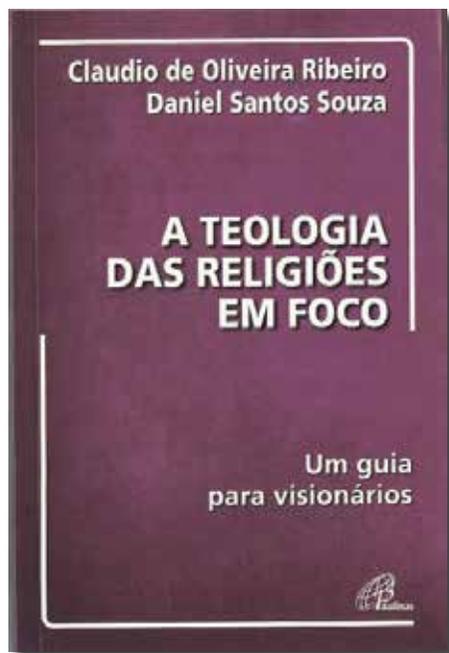


This work is a didactic synthesis of the main authors and subjects on theology of religions in its various theoretical perspectives in the Protestantism as well as in the Roman Catholicism. It discusses an ecumenical vision, introducing life trajectories, experiences with intra and inter-religious dialogue, and key concepts related to religious pluralism. It also includes some texts of the authors, all of them coming from different backgrounds, different continents, and different relationships within the academy and the church.



Para além das fronteiras religiosas, cresce a consciência de que deveríamos nos reconhecer como comunidade humana, geneticamente ligada com todos os seres vivos, evoluindo junto com a totalidade do cosmos. Nossa existência deve ser concebida como interdependência a todos os níveis, todos os povos e a terra inteira estamos ligados, de sorte que juntos é que devemos encarar nossa comum missão de salvar a vida.

Sendo assim, impossível que um só povo ou religião ou Igreja, um só sexo ou raça ou classe sejam a luz do mundo. Todos somos luz e treva, em comunitária evolução. Ne-



nhum triunfalismo, religioso ou de qualquer espécie, pode ter lugar nesse paradigma de universo, onde se procura permitir a vida a todos. Diante dessa aventura ecumenicista que – como um cristão pode interpretar – o Espírito de Deus está provocando no mundo, então, as tímidas tentativas de Igrejas cristãs para se reunirem em torno das palavras e do banquete de Jesus parecem muito pouco.

Há uma discussão teológica em curso, propondo até a mudança do conceito religioso de missão: ao invés de converter o mundo e implantar a minha Igreja, ajudar na disponibilização das mensagens de todas as tradições espirituais, para quem delas necessite em seu processo de educação (e transcendência) humana e humanizante, favorecendo assim a compreensão e a paz entre os povos.

Esse debate na teologia das religiões vem crescendo, em meio a grandes dificuldades, e por isso a coleção *Iniciação Teológica*, das Paulinas, acolheu este livro que ajuda a discernir sobre a dimensão salvífica das religiões e tradições espirituais. Os autores investigam as questões mais prementes e se propõem a mostrar o que teólogos e teólogas cristãos, de diferentes confissões e partes do mundo, estão dizendo a respeito do tema. O texto está organizado em cinco partes: *Abrindo horizontes*, *Desafio da questão cristológica*, *Diálogo e missão*, *Interpelações fundamentais* e *Espiritualidade ecumênica*.

Desde o século XIX, a compreensão das religiões tem desafiado a teólogos protestantes e católicos. A perspectiva pluralista das religiões, para além do exclusivismo e do simples inclusivismo, interpela o espírito do nosso tempo e, particularmente, o contexto teológico latino-americano, pela sua ambiência histórica de sincretismo/inculturação e pela sua vocação libertária. Vários teólogos e teólogas da libertação têm buscado encontrar palavras bem-ditas e uma nova lógica para pensar o diálogo entre as religiões.

Este livro, que organiza um panorama das contribuições de diferentes autores, oferece às pessoas e grupos um mapa para entender as principais questões em jogo na teologia das religiões e um guia para lidar com a contradição aparente da pluralidade de absolutos, considerando a complexidade da realidade e da verdade, exorcizando o princípio soberano da identidade vitoriosa

sobre toda diferença, acolhendo o paradoxo para além do princípio de não contradição e, sobretudo, incluindo ternariamente "o outro".

Gilbrás ARAGÃO



Más allá de las fronteras religiosas, crece la conciencia de que deberíamos reconocernos como comunidad humana, genéticamente ligada con todos los seres vivos, evolucionando junto con la totalidad del cosmos. Nuestra existencia debe ser concebida como interdependencia a todos los niveles. Todos los pueblos y la tierra entera estamos ligados, de suerte que juntos es como debemos encarar nuestra común misión de salvar la vida.

Siendo así, es imposible que un solo pueblo o religión o Iglesia, un sólo sexo o raza o clase sean la luz del mundo. Todos somos luz y tiniebla, en comunitaria evolución. Ningún triunfalismo, religioso o de cualquier especie, puede tener lugar en este paradigma de universo, en el que se busca posibilitar la vida a todos. Ante esta aventura ecuménica que –como un cristiano bien puede interpretar– el Espíritu de Dios está provocando en el mundo, los tímidos intentos de Iglesias cristianas para reunirse en torno a las palabras y al banquete de Jesús parecen muy poco.

Hay una discusión teológica en curso que propone incluso el cambio del concepto religioso de «misión»: en vez de convertir al mundo para implantar mi Iglesia, se trata más bien de ayudar a disponibilizar los mensajes de todas las tradiciones espirituales, para quien los necesite en su proceso de educación (y transcendencia) humana y humanizante, favoreciendo así la comprensión y la paz entre los pueblos.

Este debate en la teología de las religiones viene creciendo, en medio de grandes dificultades, y por eso la colección «*Iniciação Teológica*», de la editorial Paulinas,

ha acogido este libro, que ayuda a discernir sobre la dimensión salvífica de las religiones y las tradiciones espirituales. Los autores investigan las cuestiones más urgentes y se proponen mostrar lo que teólogos y teólogas cristianos, de diferentes confesiones y partes del mundo, están diciendo respecto del tema. El texto está organizado en cinco partes: Abriendo horizontes, Retos a la cuestión cristológica, Diálogo y misión, Interpelaciones fundamentales y Espiritualidad ecuménica.

Desde el siglo XIX, la comprensión de las religiones ha desafiado a teólogos protestantes y católicos. La perspectiva pluralista de las religiones, más allá del exclusivismo y del simple inclusivismo, interpela el espíritu de nuestro tiempo y, particularmente, el contexto teológico latinoamericano, por su vigencia histórica de sincretismo/

inculturación y por su vocación liberadora. Varios teólogos y teólogas de la liberación han tratado de encontrar palabras bien dichas y una nueva lógica para pensar el diálogo entre las religiones.

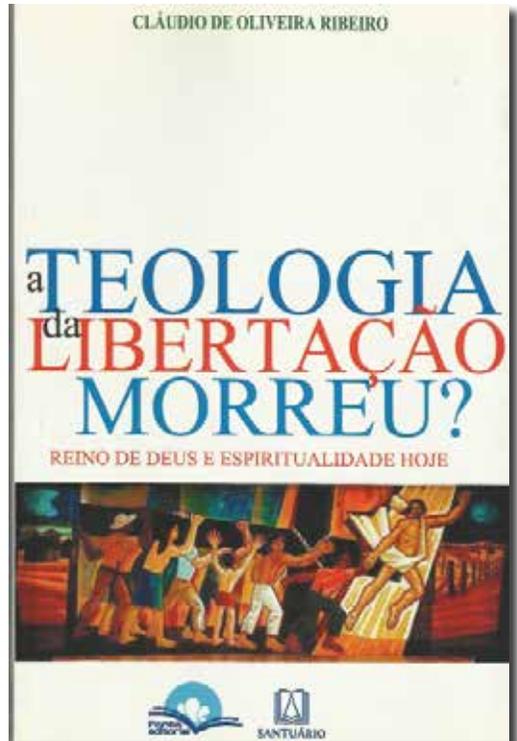
Este libro, que organiza un panorama de las aportaciones de diferentes autores, ofrece a las personas y grupos un mapa para entender las principales cuestiones que están en juego en la teología de las religiones y una guía para habérselas con la contradicción aparente de la pluralidad de absolutos, considerando la complejidad de la realidad y de la verdad, exorcizando el principio soberano de la identidad victoriosa sobre toda diferencia, acogiendo la paradoja más allá del principio de no contradicción y, sobre todo, incluyendo ternariamente "al otro".

Gilbrás ARAGÃO



**DE OLIVEIRA RIBEIRO**, Cláudio, *A Teologia da Libertação Morreu? Reino de Deus e Espiritualidade Hoje (Did Liberation Theology Die? The Reign of God and Spirituality Today)*. São Paulo: Fonte Editorial/Ed. Santuário, 2010.

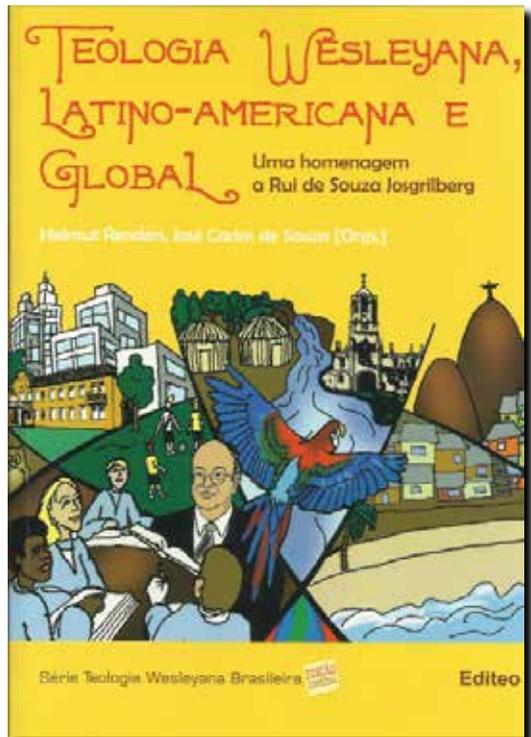
It addresses the major tensions between rationality and human subjectivity, especially those which are present in Marxism's heritage that marked the debate in Latin American Theology and Philosophy. The assumption is that socio-economic and political changes at the end of twentieth century symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall affected theology and Latin American pastoral work. Thus, new theoretical frames are required so that theological production may deepen and become more relevant



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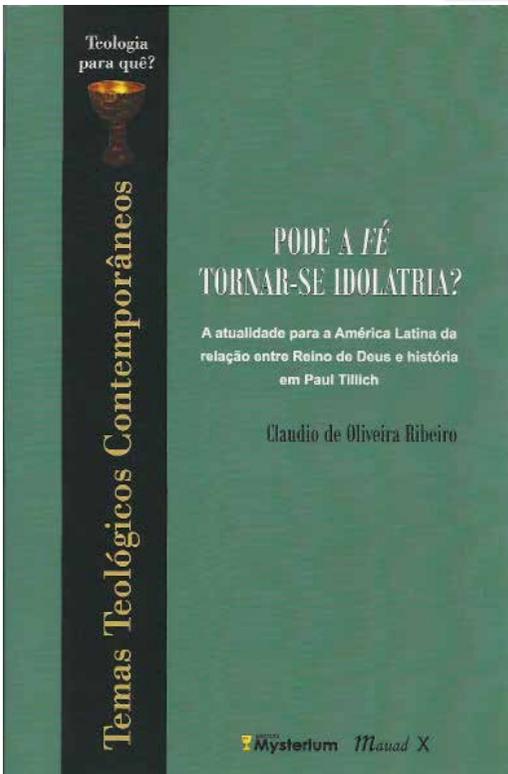
**RENDERS, Helmut & SOUZA, José Carlos** (orgs.). *Teologia Wesleyana Latino-Americana e Global*. São Bernardo do Campo: Editeo, 2011.

This book brings together texts in honor of Professor Rui de Souza Josgrilberg, and it highlights the importance of his work for Wesleyan theology. It also enhances the main aspects of a Latin American vision. The chapter "Por uma Teologia Wesleyana Latino-Americana" ("Towards a Latin American Wesleyan Theology") (p. 121-147) emphasizes the importance of the valorization of poor people, communitarian life and integrity of creation in Wesley's theology and in Latin American Liberation Theology as well.



**DE OLIVEIRA RIBEIRO, Cláudio**, *Pode a Fé Tornar-se Idolatria? A atualidade para a América Latina da relação entre Reino de Deus e história em Paul Tillich* (*Could Faith Become Idolatry? Reign of God and History in Paul Tillich, and its Relevance to Latin America.*). Rio de Janeiro: Mauad X, 2010.

It focuses on the tendencies of some sectors of Latin American Liberation Theology and Theology of Prosperity – inspired by socialism or capitalism – and their belief that they represent “the” Reign of God, which is theologically speaking characterized as idolatry. It utilizes as a framework the thought of protestant theologian Paul Tillich in order to think about the major challenges of socio-cultural and political Latin American reality, the debates concerning Marxism and the dimensions related to religious experience in this Continent.





**EATWOT, International Theological Commission, *Per i molti cammini di Dio, I (2004) & II (2005)***, EMI, Editoriale Missionaria Italiana, Bologna; vols. III (2010), IV (2011) & V (2012) by Pazzini Editore, Villa Verrucchio (RN), Italia.

Review by Rosino GIBELLINI.

Come ha messo felicemente in luce Philip Jenkins, in *La terza chiesa*, stiamo oggi attraversando un momento di trasformazione profonda nella storia delle religioni, un mutamento silenzioso che il cristianesimo ha conosciuto già nel secolo scorso, col suo centro di gravità spostatosi notevolmente verso il sud: Africa, America Latina, Asia (si badi, trattasi di aree soggette a vaste migrazioni tanto intra-continentali quanto inter-continentali). Questa tendenza è, con ogni probabilità, destinata a divenire più visibile, e di molto, nei prossimi decenni: col cristianesimo che dovrebbe godere di un autentico *boom* mondiale, anche se la grande maggioranza dei credenti non sarà bianca, né europea, né euroamericana. Anzi – come ipotizza l'autore sulla base delle proiezioni statistiche attualmente disponibili – nel 2050 solo un quinto dei tre miliardi di cristiani (delle diverse confessioni, sempre più omologate) sarà costituito da bianchi non-ispatici: eppure, ancora, le chiese dell'emisfero australe cristiano permangono pressoché invisibili agli osservatori del nord, mentre lo stesso già citato Samuel P. Huntington, nel *bestseller* che ha fondato nella *vulgata* corrente la teoria dello scontro fra le civiltà, si riferisce comunemente al cristianesimo come fenomeno occidentale e come se non potessero darsene altri. Da segnalare che la prima voce teologica a riflettere sul fenomeno è venuta dallo Sri Lanka: T. Balasuriya, *Teologia planetaria*, EMI, Bologna 1986.

In questo scenario decisamente *in progress*, ci pare importante presentare l'imponente progetto editoriale di inizia-

tiva della Commissione Teologica Latinoamericana dell'associazione ASETT/EATWOT (Associazione dei teologi e delle teologhe del terzo mondo). Esso si compone di cinque volumi pubblicati in spagnolo e portoghese, in inglese e ora anche in italiano (l'ultimo volume è apparso in ottobre 2012, per conto della casa editrice Pazzini che ha ripreso la pubblicazione degli ultimi tre volumi dopo che i primi due erano stati editi da EMI).

Secondo il progetto dei curatori, Jose Maria VIGIL, Luiza TOMITA e Marcelo BARRROS, i cinque tomi intendono proporre al lettore un percorso intorno al tema del pluralismo religioso decisamente articolato: mentre il **primo** volume della serie *Por los muchos caminos de Dios* (titolo italiano: *I volti del Dio liberatore*, EMI, Bologna 2003) cerca, attraverso il sottotitolo: *Sfide del pluralismo religioso alla teologia della liberazione*, di indicare appunto le prospettive che si aprono alla riflessione teologica con il riconoscimento del pluralismo, una prima risposta a tali sfide è quella raccolta con il **secondo** volume (anch'esso tradotto per i tipi EMI, 2004) con il sottotitolo: *Verso una teologia cristiana latinoamericana del pluralismo religioso*. Un **terzo** libro, invece, suggerisce un salto *epistemologico*, nell'intenzione di descrivere un'iniziale *Teologia latinoamericana pluralista della liberazione*, come recita il sottotitolo anche dell'edizione italiana ora edita da Pazzini, Villa Verrucchio (RN), 2010, che conserva il titolo originario del libro *Per i molti cammini di Dio*. Il **quarto** volume apre la stessa prospettiva teologica in ambito intercontinentale e non più solo latinoamericano,

mentre il **quinto** e ultimo traccia, non senza coraggio, la costruzione di una futura "teologia multireligiosa e pluralista della liberazione" in prospettiva mondiale. Il volume quarto è edito da Pazzini (2011), con il sottotitolo *Teologia liberatrice intercontinentale del pluralismo religioso*, mentre il quinto è stato apparso in ottobre del 2012, dallo stesso editore, con il titolo complessivo *Per i molti cammini di Dio: verso una teologia planetaria*, e con il sottotitolo *Verso una teologia pluralista, interreligiosa, laica, planetaria*.

Presentando la logica interna al percorso, dopo i titoli, nelle intenzioni di curatori e autori dei materiali (sono articoli di un gruppo variegato di teologi e teologhe) il primo volume si limita a segnalare le sfide del pluralismo, mentre i quattro successivi mirano a costruire positivamente una teologia del pluralismo. I primi due sono ancora alla ricerca di un paradigma pluralista, mentre gli altri tre lo assumono interamente; i primi tre sono latinoamericani, mentre gli altri due sono *mondiali* e, infine, i primi quattro sono di teologia cristiana, mentre il quinto si propone come teologia interreligiosa. Resta il fatto, sottolineano i curatori, che tutti sono volumi di teologia della liberazione.

Se questo impianto così articolato si sostiene vorremmo qui, anche se brevemente, provare a dare conto del quinto volume, dal momento che esso - almeno nell'intenzione degli autori - si propone come novità: quella rappresentata da una riflessione non più solamente cristiana sulle religioni e sul pluralismo, ma ora addirittura *multireligiosa* se non *pluralista*. Insomma: *una teologia pluralista del pluralismo religioso*. Strada non facile, certo. Anche per un'oggettiva difficoltà

metodologica se non epistemologica (da quale punto di vista? con quale metodo?).

Per questo la scelta da parte dei tre curatori del progetto editoriale è quella, nel tomo finale, di lanciare una domanda di partenza: dopo aver precisato il contesto da cui essi scrivono (quello della liberazione d'accordo, ma anche quello delle presenze multireligiose oppure ancora e tanto più della *doppia appartenenza* visto come identità religiosa che trascende l'identità confessionale), si chiedono se, mentre è possibile per l'esperienza religiosa del credente, non possa essere possibile anche per quella del teologo *ragionare* in termini transconfessionali. Oltretutto, sostengono ancora i curatori, se è vero che siamo in presenza di un nuovo tempo assiale, di un cambiamento d'epoca dove le religioni per come le abbiamo conosciute hanno esaurito il loro compito (quello di servire alle domande della società agricola che sta scomparendo lasciando repentinamente il posto alla società della conoscenza), non è il caso di pensare ad una sorta di *teologia post-religione*, ossia più in là delle *religioni agricole*? E non dovrebbe essere questa nuova teologia, davanti alle domande nuove, una teologia laica, pubblica, interreligiosa, planetaria e appunto pluralista? Questo si chiedono e chiedono a una serie di specialisti di diversa confessione, religione e competenza. I quali rispondono, con risposte che compongono, a mo' di cantiere aperto, il volume in questione. Con evidenti conclusioni altrettanto aperte.

Risponde, per esempio, M. Amaladoss, sostenendo, questo il titolo del suo articolo, di "essere cristiano indu": cosa che si sente di affermare anche a partire dalla propria biografia di indiano-cristiano.

Egli si sente cristiano-indù, precisando che quest'ultimo non è un sostantivo, ma un aggettivo, perché la meta non è il pluralismo, ma il non-dualismo; una lezione orientale in ordine all'identità. M. Barros, fra i curatori dell'opera, propone alla ricerca quella che egli definisce una *spiritualità trans-religiosa* capace di custodire la fragile trasparenza dell'Assoluto. Diversamente dalle parol e paludate delle teologie ufficiali che dicono per noi, l'esperienza religiosa personale sa che non trova mai tutte le parole per dire l'Eterno. Esso è confessato in tante e diverse esperienze spirituali: che posso conoscere senza abbandonare la mia. A. Brighenti, egli pure teologo sudamericano, segnala, in risposta alle domande iniziali, i problemi metodologici di una teologia pluralista. Se essa si presenta come trans-confessionale dobbiamo prima capire se è possibile una teologia trans-culturale per poter rispondere, dal momento che ogni grammatica religiosa si esprime in linguaggi culturali. La sfida davanti a noi è quella di procedere con rigore usando la sintassi (il che cosa) e insieme la semantica (il come) della teologia. Prima di pensare a una teologia transconfessionale, spiega l'autore, ciò che possiamo fare è una teologia pluriconfessionale e magari pluriculturale, finalmente in grado di occuparsi dell'esistenza e non solo dell'essenza delle persone.

Il volume prosegue raccogliendo gli spunti e le intuizioni di un fedele baha'i (A. Egea) che s'interroga sulla possibilità di una teologia transreligiosa; le brevi riflessioni di un buddhista (D. Loy), di un musulmano (I. Omar) e anche di un indù (K. L. Seshagiri Rao), ciascuno a suo modo *disponibile* a una teologia o anche solo a una riflessione che tenga nel do-

vuto conto la dimensione del pluralismo. Come intermezzo a questi contributi è presentata la proposta di un autorevole teologo *pluralista* quale il già citato P. Knitter, che riflette attorno al mistico e al profetico di ogni religione, in cui appare evidente che è "molto più importante fare fedelmente la verità che conoscerla pienamente", rivendicando una priorità dell'ortoprassi sull'ortodossia. Al dibattito partecipa anche un rappresentante del pensiero africano che, con L. Magea, mette in guardia dal trasformare una religione in ideologia, incapace questa di includere i punti di vista degli altri. Qui il contributo africano appare proprio quello di un certo allenamento nell'ascoltare e imparare da ciò che gli altri dicono. Alla domanda circa la possibilità di una teologia *trans-confessionale* non si esime neppure un contributo autorevole quale quello tracciato da R. Panikkar. Egli sostiene la necessità di una confessione di fede aperta e non fanatica, umile e non apodittica, dialogica e non solipsistica aiutando a interpretare la propria confessione di fede e liberandola dal rischio di ridursi a dottrina. Circa una cristologia pluralista ragiona il pensiero di A. Pieris, offrendo qui come possibilità quella di una "cristologia della liberazione delle religioni". Di una teologia post-religiosa e post-cristiana si occupa, invece, il saggio di J. A. Robles, da intendersi come spazio nel quale accogliere tutte le espressioni genuinamente religiose. Finalmente, dal mondo del sud viene una voce *divergente* anche in ordine al tema-problema del sincretismo. Infatti il lavoro di M. L. Soares ha l'obiettivo di aiutare a ripensare il sincretismo oltre l'accezione occidentale che lo pensa come equivalente di "c'è posto per tutto" e dentro la pratica delle esperienze religiose del sud che vivono la

doppia appartenenza e il sincretismo in generale come esperienza dove “c’è posto per tutti”. Oltre a una mistica religiosa disegnata da F. Texeira F., il futuro della teologia è descritto da J.M. Vigil, dove, secondo l’autore, la teologia che verrà non sarà segnata tanto dal *teo* come non sarà più tanto *logia*. Essa, invece, potrà essere ancora confessionale, ma saprà essere sempre di più ecumenica e sovra confessionale e in ogni caso pluralista. Una teologia comparativa capace di farsi carico delle parole degli altri; ancora di più sarà interreligiosa e sicuramente liberatrice. Insomma, tanto seducente futuro davanti.

Accogliere nel dibattito sul pluralismo religioso queste voci, magari ancora incipienti, può aiutare lo stesso a confrontarsi con una diversa interpretazione del tema-problema, invitare a vedere da altre prospettive, suggerire il futuro che

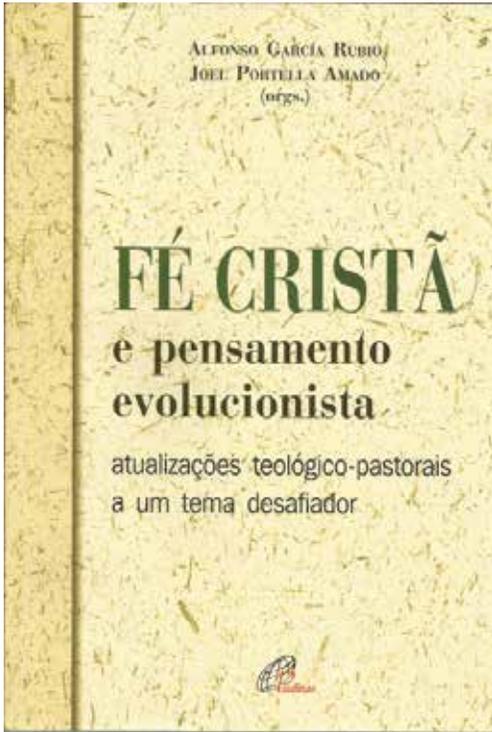
abbiamo davanti piuttosto che solo il patrimonio che ci portiamo dietro. E se queste *ragioni* non fossero sufficienti, lo dovrebbe essere, invece, come abbiamo delineato sopra, una consapevolezza *demografica* quando non *democratica* che ci avverte del “nuovo indirizzo di Dio” e della vitalità, certo sempre ambivalente, delle comunità religiose del sud globale, cristiane e non solo: “Se si guarda alla recente storia della Chiesa e della sua teologia, si potrebbe definire il XIX secolo come il secolo missionario, il XX secolo come il secolo ecumenico, e già si può intravedere il XXI secolo come il secolo di una Chiesa mondiale, che si realizza nelle diverse culture e nei diversi contesti sociali, praticando un’inculturazione, che appella nella reciprocità, alla pratica dell’inculturalità: la Chiesa mondiale è una comunità di apprendimento, una comunità dove si apprende reciprocamente”.



**Claudio DE OLIVEIRA RIBEIRO, *Libertação e gratuidade. Reflexões teológicas sobre a espiritualidade*, Paulinas, São Paulo 2013.**

Esta obra procura responder a um dos maiores desafios da atualidade, que é a vivência da espiritualidade dentro de um padrão que supere duas limitações: de um lado, o forte racionalismo presente no campo teológico, especialmente no contexto latino-americano; e de outro, a intensa onda de subjetivismos que marca o cenário religioso hoje. Para isso, a obra quer oferecer ao leitor encontros com dimensões fundamentais da fé que possam dar a ela o tônus bíblico e teológico necessário para que seja compromissada com a vida e com o Reino de Deus, abrindo-se para novos horizontes que valorizem a subjetividade humana, a visão ecumênica, a consciência ecológica e a vida comunitária. Este livro dirige-se a padres, pastores, pastoras, religiosos

e religiosas, lideranças leigas e pessoas interessadas no tema da espiritualidade. Embora seja um tema que tem sido bastante abordado em diferentes círculos, a obra traz uma marca singular que é a da pluralidade, pois se baseia em um leque amplo de autores e autoras, católicos e evangélicos, brasileiros e estrangeiros. Outro destaque é a abrangência dos temas, que vai desde aspectos básicos da fé cristã, como uma leitura popular da Bíblia, na lógica da integração entre a fé e a Bíblia, e de uma cristologia libertadora, até aspectos desafiadores, como a teologia ecumênica das religiões e a ecoteologia. Assim, os leitores terão um panorama das principais questões que interferem na vivência de uma espiritualidade autêntica e compromissada com a vida.



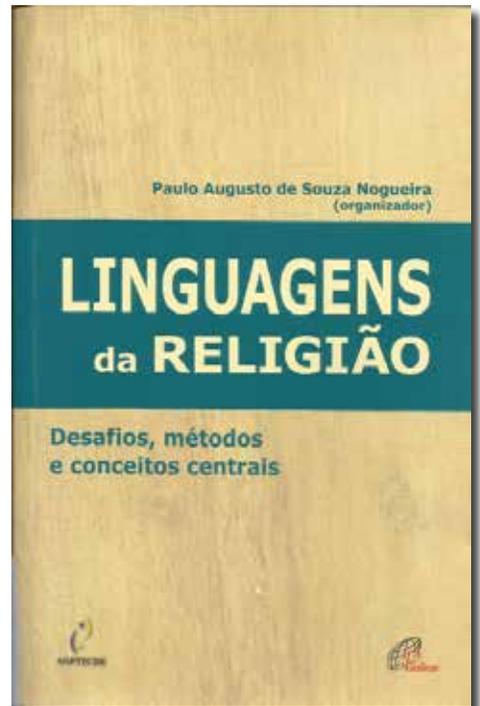
**GARCIA RUBIO, Afonso & AMADO, Joel Portella** (org.). *Fé Cristã e Pensamento Evolucionista. Aproximações teológico-pastorais a um tema desafiador*. São Paulo: Paulinas, 2012.

ENG

The book addresses the relationship between theology and natural science, especially on the conflicts between scientific evolutionist vision and the faith in a creator God, and reiterates that no contradiction is necessary between both visions. The chapter "Por uma teologia da criação que supere os fundamentalismos" ("Towards a theology of creation beyond fundamentalisms") (p. 133-153) focuses on the tensions between a theology of creation that presupposes an evolutionist perspective and biblical fundamentalism, and indicates some ways of overcoming both.

**DE SOUZA NOGUEIRA, Paulo Augusto**, "A importância da lógica plural para o método teológico" ("The importance of plural logic for theological studies") (p. 219-254). In: **NOGUEIRA, Paulo**. *Linguagens da Religião*. São Paulo: Paulinas, 2012.

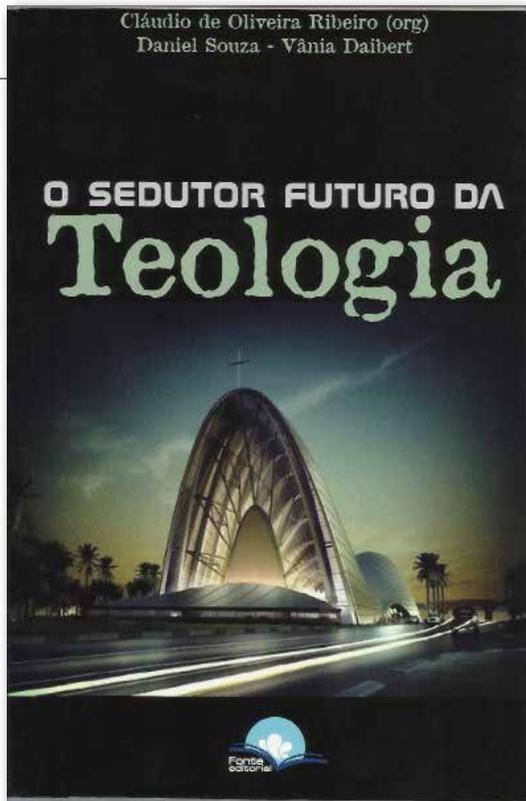
This book seeks to show that religion not only expresses its contents through language but it also structures itself by and through language. Religion participates in the language of culture and the communication system that engenders the meaning of life. The chapter in question presents a multiplicity of ways in which theological studies is challenged by the logic of plurality and by religious pluralism. Among them there is the importance of cultural studies for theological reflection and the emergence of an ecumenical theology of religions.



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**DE OLIVEIRA RIBEIRO,**  
**Cláudio - SOUZA, Daniel -**  
**DAIBERT, Vânia,** *O Sedutor Fu-*  
*turo da Teologia (The Attractive*  
*Future of Theology).* São Paulo:  
Fonte Editorial, 2012 (org.)

It analyzes the challenges of socio-cultural reality for theoretical reflection in theology and religious studies, focusing especially on the future of theological education and spirituality in Brazil. Vânia Daibert highlights issues like human sexuality, with special interest on homosexuality, and the reinforcement of inclusive ecclesiastic communities. Daniel Souza enhances some aspects of a pluralist Christology



Suggestions and proposals of the EATWOT's International Theological Commission through the International Review CONCILIUM, considered as global trends of theology.

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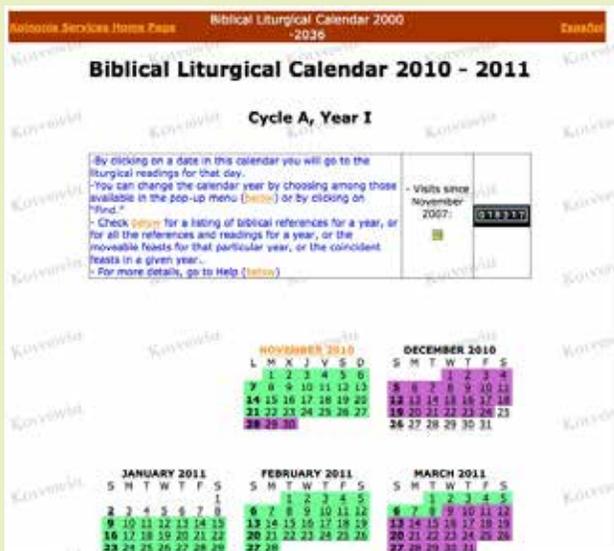
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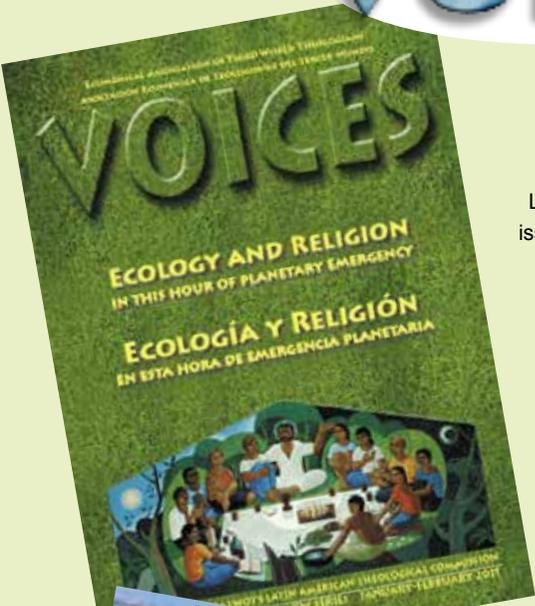
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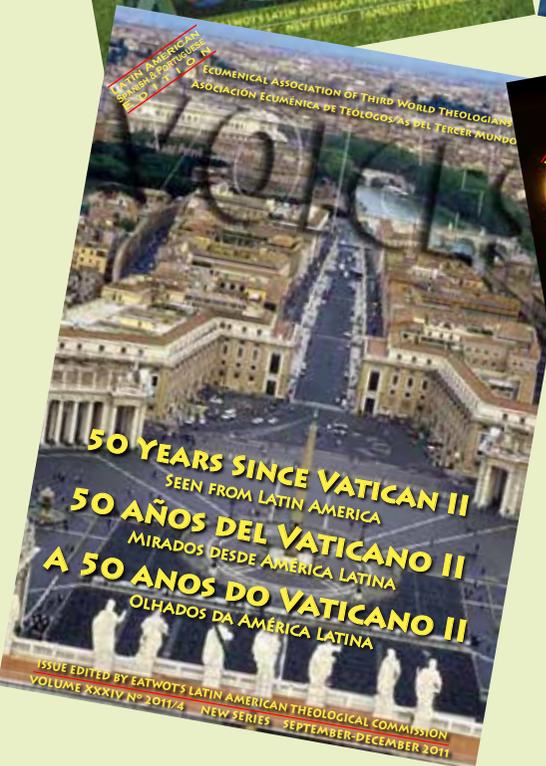
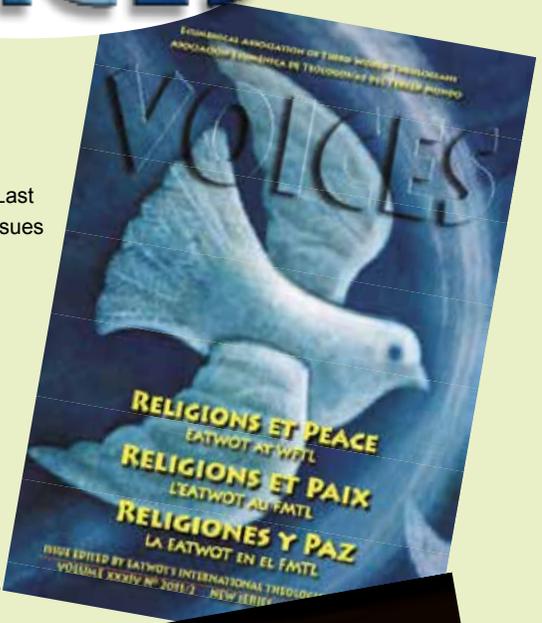
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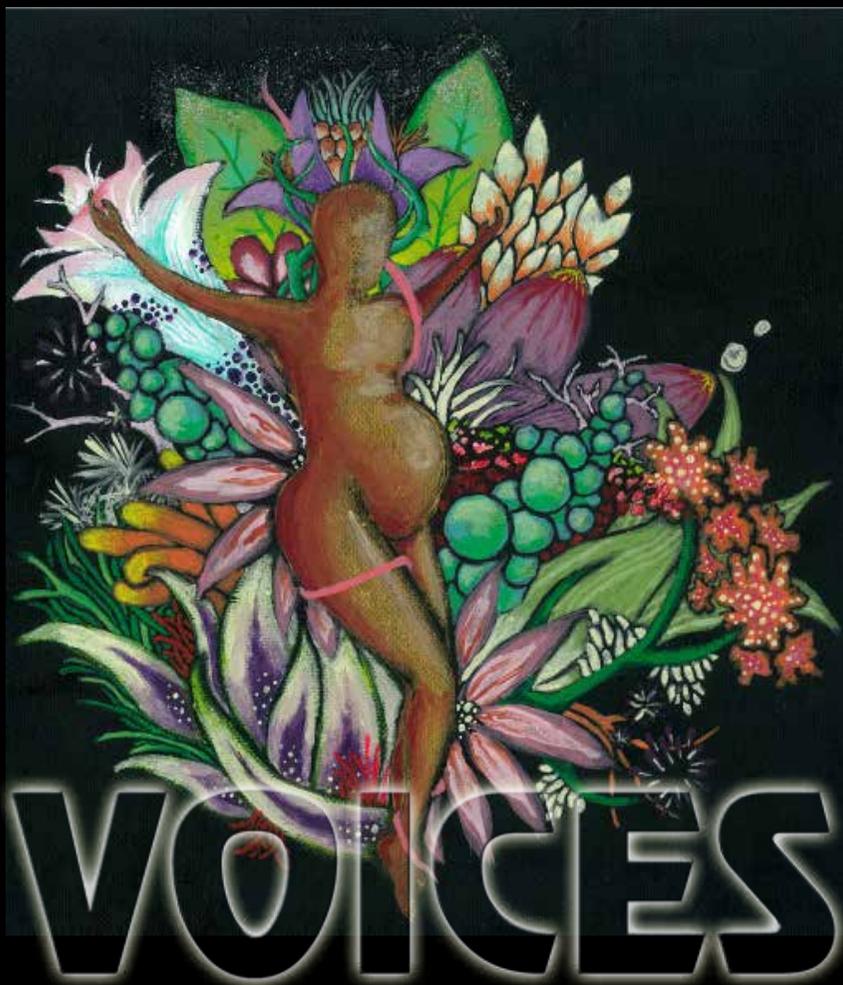
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