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**Praxis as Parables:
A Fresh Approach to Reading
Liberation Theology**

Elijah Smith

Doctor of Philosophy
The University of Edinburgh
2024



Abstract of Thesis

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This thesis addresses the question, 'How can liberation theology be enhanced, emboldened and refreshed in reading the praxis at its heart through the genre of parable?' In the first two chapters of this thesis, I explore the foundations and general development of two waves of liberation theology. In these opening chapters, I argue that liberation theology is based on the theological assumptions that the Christian God is the God of history and the God of the poor. In the second chapter, I consider the second wave of liberation theology and how it builds upon these assumptions through exploring the universality of liberation theology. This is explored in terms of the systematisation of liberation theology and critical reflection on the praxis of different groups of marginalised people beyond the exclusive sphere of 'the poor'.

In the third chapter, I argue for the possibility of engaging with the praxis of the margins as parable. I do this by first engaging with Karl Barth's 'true parables of the kingdom of God' (*Doctrine of Reconciliation* §69) before exploring approaches to the interpretation of biblical parables. I place special emphasis on John Dominic Crossan's use of the actantial structure of Algirdas Julien Greimas. I conclude the chapter by referencing Paul Ricoeur's 1971 essay 'The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as Text' and presenting a method for exploring praxis as parables based on Crossan's actantial structure.

In the second half of the thesis, I employ the actantial analysis of three extended examples drawn from the first wave of liberation theology. These are organised by the three spheres put forward by Clodovis and Leonardo Boff: the Solentiname community of Nicaragua (popular, chapter four), the life, ministry and death of Óscar Romero (pastoral, chapter five) and the life and theology of Leonardo Boff (professional, chapter six).

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This thesis addresses the question, 'How can liberation theology be enhanced, emboldened and refreshed in reading the praxis at its heart through the genre of parable?' In this thesis, I approach this question by first exploring the development of liberation theology through its two waves (chapters one and two). I argue that liberation theology is based on the theological assumptions that the Christian God is the God of history and the God of the poor and oppressed.

In the third chapter, I make a case for engaging with the lived realities of the margins in terms of the biblical literary genre of parable. I explore the concept of parable through Karl Barth's 'true parables of the kingdom of God' and John Dominic Crossan's use of the 'actantial structure' of Algirdas Julien Greimas in interpreting parables. I conclude this chapter by referencing Paul Ricœur's 1971 essay 'The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as Text' and presenting a method for exploring the lived realities of the poor and marginalised as parables based on Crossan's actantial structure.

In the second half of the thesis, I employ the method from chapter three in exploring of three extended examples drawn from the first wave of liberation theology: the Solentiname community of Nicaragua (the 'popular' sphere, focussing on the liberation theology developed in local communities, chapter four), the life, ministry and death of Óscar Romero of El Salvador (the 'pastoral' sphere, focussing on how religious leaders make use of the lived realities of local communities in their preaching, teaching and leadership, chapter five) and the life and theology of Leonardo Boff of Brazil (the 'professional' sphere, focussing on more rigorous academic engagement with the lived realities of the popular sphere, chapter six).

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*Dedicated to the memory of
all those who have died for the cause of liberation,*

*as well as to the memories of
Marcella Althaus-Reid (1952-1999) &
Ernesto Cardenal (1925-2020)*

*and to
John Miller*

PRAXIS AS PARABLES: A FRESH APPROACH TO READING LIBERATION THEOLOGY

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E. Smith
Glasgow
The Feast Day of St Andrew, 2022

A B B R E V I A T I O N S

CEBs	Base ecclesial communities (Spanish: <i>comunidades eclesiales de base</i> ; Portuguese: <i>comunidades eclesiais de base</i>)
CEDES	Episcopal Conference of El Salvador (Spanish: <i>Conferencia Episcopal de El Salvador</i>)
CELAM	Latin American Episcopal Council (Spanish: <i>Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano</i>)
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency, United States
EATWOT	Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians
FECCAS	Christian Federation of Salvadoran <i>Campesinos</i> (Spanish: <i>Federación Cristiana de Campesinos Salvadoreños</i>), El Salvador
FSLN	Sandinista National Liberation Front (Spanish: <i>Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional</i>), Nicaragua
IPLA	Latin American Pastoral Institute (Spanish: <i>Instituto Pastoral Latinoamericano</i>), Quito, Ecuador
ISEDET	Higher Evangelical Institute of Theological Studies (Spanish: <i>Instituto Superior Evangélico de Estudios Teológicos</i>), Buenos Aires, Argentina
MNR	National Revolutionary Movement (Spanish: <i>Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario</i>), Bolivia
ORDEN	Democratic Nationalist Organization (Spanish: <i>Organización Democrática Nacionalista</i>), El Salvador
SEDAC	Episcopal Secretariat of Central America and Panama (Spanish: <i>Secretariado Episcopal de América Central y Panamá</i>)
YSAX	Radio station call sign of the Archdiocese of San Salvador, El Salvador

INTRODUCTION

‘The perception of misery, and protest against that misery, move the Christian conscience to act,’ writes Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff.¹ This simple statement encapsulates the whole endeavour of the movement that has become known as liberation theology. Beginning in Latin America the 1960s, liberation theology has since found expression in all corners of the world, growing beyond the bounds of Latin America and even Christianity itself, and facing institutional challenges from both political and ecclesial authorities.² This thesis is written to develop and then to employ a fresh way of reading liberation theology. In this context, ‘reading’ does not consist solely of the act of imbibing the textual data on a surface level, but also of a more active and inductive experience of interpretation. My argument is that this reading may be enriched by drawing upon the biblical genre of parable. By ‘parable’, I am referring to the genre consistent with the biblical parables found within the Synoptic Gospels, namely the sections of Jesus of Nazareth’s teachings which approach the reality of the Christian life and the kingdom of God in a roundabout—and therefore, surprising—way so as to bring about a deeper understanding in the minds of the hearers. Within the form of parable, Biblical parables are commonly, though not exclusively narrative in form. Throughout this thesis I explore parables in terms of their narrative qualities.³

¹ Leonardo Boff in Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, *Salvation and Liberation: In Search of a Balance Between Faith and Politics*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1984), 3.

² By ‘Latin America’, I am referring to the countries in the Americas which were colonised by the Spanish, Portuguese and French empires, namely Mexico and the countries of Central America, the Caribbean and South America.

³ While ‘The Parable of the Good Samaritan’ (Luke 10.30-37) is presented in narrative form, other sayings within the Synoptic Gospels, such as ‘The Parable of the Mustard Seed’ (Matthew 13.31-32, Mark 4.30-32 and Luke 13.18-19) can take the form of similes and other figures of speech. This is explored in greater detail in third chapter and in Appendix 2, ‘A Brief Overview of Approaches to the Interpretation of Biblical Parables’.

With regard to the roundabout and surprising ways that parables function, I mean that, invariably, the parables take the raw materials of everyday life (such as landowner-worker relations) and turn them on their heads so as to subvert common sensibilities and the assumptions of the status quo. Jesus invites the hearers of the parables into the narrative by using elements which would have been understood, but are presented and interpreted in this indirect manner (the nature of parables is explored further in chapter three). As the interpretation and implications of biblical parables provide special insight to the hearer within these teachings, I argue that taking the lived realities (praxis) within liberation theology, comprehending them as ‘lived texts’ and then reading them as parables—that is, as roundabout depictions of the reality of the kingdom of God—provides additional authoritative weight to liberation theology’s methodology and conclusions. In this process, I also argue that reading liberation theology through the lens of parable can yield novel implications for the Christian Church and society.

I. Thesis Structure

In order to accomplish the task above, this thesis is divided into six chapters. The first two chapters lay out the basic methodologies and arguments presented by liberation theology, with specific emphases which will come to bear on later chapters. Chapter one focuses on what I call the first wave of liberation theology. Based upon the theological implications that the Christian God is both the God of history and the God of the poor, I explore the early development of liberation theology as a *movement* (as opposed to a ‘theology’ in the classical sense) from its genesis in the late 1960s through the early 1980s. In order to develop a fuller picture of the first wave and to

assist in building toward a method for exploring praxis as parable, this chapter focusses on an analysis of five liberation theologians and six key written texts from the first wave: Gutiérrez's *A Theology of Liberation* (1971), Leonardo Boff's *Jesus Christ Liberator* (1972) and *Ecclesiogenesis* (1977), Juan Luis Segundo's *The Liberation of Theology* (1975), James Cone's *A Black Theology of Liberation* (1970) and J. Severino Croatto's *Biblical Hermeneutics* (1984).

Chapter two builds upon the conclusions of the first chapter, exploring the second wave, which I argue is characterised by a concentration on the universality of liberation theology, focussing on the process of its systematisation as well as the ways in which the concept of the 'God of the poor' has been broadened so as to apply to all social margins, exploring the identity of 'the least of these' from the Gospel of Matthew.⁴ Here, I analyse five major categories in brief: the broadening of liberation theology's scope in terms of systematic theology, as well as those who are oppressed and marginalised based upon ethnicity (Black theology), gender (feminist theology) and sexuality. This is followed by a particular emphasis on Leonardo Boff's work on ecological liberation theology as well as the use of parables in the second wave. Chapter two concludes with an exploration of the liberating implications of ecology for 'the least of these'.

Having argued that liberation theology is based upon critical reflection on the praxis of the poor and marginalised so as to yield transformative implications for the whole of the Christian Church, in the third chapter I formulate a methodology for reading these critical reflections and the praxis of the poor and marginalised

⁴ Matthew 25.31-40. Unless otherwise noted, the Scripture quotations contained herein are from The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible, Anglicized Edition, copyright © 1989, 1995 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America and are used by permission. All rights reserved.

themselves in a parabolic (i.e. indirect and subversive) manner. This chapter introduces and outlines a concrete relationship between that process of critical reflection and the potential for engaging with praxis through a particular hermeneutical method that is applied to the genre of parable. This begins with an exploration of a theological rationale for engagement with subjects outside the sphere of Christendom (i.e. the Bible and the tradition of the Church) as parables, developed through an analysis of the work of Karl Barth (especially within §69 of the Doctrine of Reconciliation from his *Church Dogmatics*). This is followed by an analysis of the biblical concept of ‘parable’, namely the parables of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels, producing some preliminary concepts regarding the nature of parables and how they function. Here, I provide a brief overview of hermeneutical methodologies employed throughout history, with a special focus on the way that John Dominic Crossan makes use of Algirdas Julien Greimas’ actantial structure. Given that these approaches treat parable as a *text*, further rationale for the engagement with praxis as parables and how Greimas’ actantial structure can be employed is developed with a treatment of the work of Paul Ricœur, with a special emphasis on his paper, ‘The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as Text’. This chapter concludes with an outline of a methodology that I present for exploring praxis as parables. This emerges from the conclusions found throughout, that praxis can also be seen as a text, and therefore, as ‘parables of the kingdom’ and subject to similar hermeneutical analyses. In doing so, I establish how this understanding of the parables’ function might be used to open a new opportunity for understanding the transformative potential of critical reflection on lived realities for the life, structure and work of the Church.

The final three chapters employ the chapter three's methodology through worked examples, utilising the three levels of liberation theology put forward by Brazilian Clodovis and Leonardo Boff in 1986's *Introducing Liberation Theology*: popular, pastoral and professional. While these three levels can be distinguished from each other in one sense, they represent a natural continuum of the whole movement of liberation theology, with each possessing an intimate relationship to the poor and oppressed. Due to the natural constraints of a thesis, each of the three examples of these spheres I have chosen are taken from the same geographical context (Latin America) and are representatives of the first wave of liberation theology, though this is not to suggest that other examples cannot be subjected to the same parabolic analysis.

In order to read the praxis of the margins as parables, I approach each of the these chapters from the perspective of a progression. The first step in this progression is analysing how the biblical parables are read and reinterpreted by the popular level of liberation theology. As I argue in chapters one and two, liberation theology begins with the praxis of the poor and marginalised – the critical reflection of a community on their particular circumstances, illuminating the Christian message in conjunction with study of the Bible. For this, I make use of Ernesto Cardenal's *The Gospel in Solentiname* in chapter four, which contains the direct critical reflections of the poor and oppressed within the base ecclesial community—referred to as a 'CEB' (Spanish: *comunidad eclesial de base*)—of the Solentiname community in Nicaragua in the 1970s. Here, *The Gospel in Solentiname* is explored from the perspective of Greimas' actantial structure as presented by Crossan, taking the form of the Solentiname community's discussions around three parables: 'The Good Samaritan', 'The Wedding

Feast' and 'The Workers in the Vineyard'. This is followed by an analysis of the Solentiname community's discussion concerning 'The Expulsion of the Merchants from the Temple' event from the Gospel of Matthew. The next step in the progression of analysing praxis as parables is to explore how the lived realities of the poor and marginalised, imbued with the authority granted to them as special participants in the kingdom of God, might also function in this parabolic manner. This is explored in the concluding section of chapter four, consisting of a study of the Solentiname community's praxis itself considered as 'text' and therefore, as parable.

The progression of the steps from direct interpretation of biblical parables as new parables in and of themselves to reading the praxis of the popular sphere as fresh parables for the Church is then followed by that the interpretation of biblical parables and the lived reality of one representative of the pastoral sphere (the second level put forward in *Introducing Liberation Theology*) and how this praxis might also function as parables. Although Salvadoran archbishop Óscar Romero never considered himself a 'liberation theologian', his life, ministry and death has come to embody this pastoral sphere within liberation theology in the minds of many Latin Americans. This chapter explores Romero's biography and how various events and Romero's framing of parables within his sermons can be analysed in terms of Crossan's parabolic model. The last 'parable' to be explored in this chapter concerns how Romero's assassination in 1980 is an embodiment of parable and the impact of this event on both Salvadoran society and subsequent Latin American liberation theology.

The sixth chapter of the body of this thesis explores the third and final level of liberation theology outlined in *Introducing Liberation Theology*, making use of the life and career of Leonardo Boff. This represents the final step in the progression explored

in the final three chapters of this thesis. This step addresses the professional sphere and how the interpretation of biblical parables and the lived reality of one representative of both the pastoral and academic sphere might function as parables. Unlike the Central American examples in chapter four (Nicaragua) and five (El Salvador), Boff is a representative of South America (Brazil) and his work spans the spheres of both the Church (as a priest) and academia (as a lay theologian, latterly). Boff's expressions and experiences also set him apart from other Latin American liberation theologians both in the severity of his criticisms of the institutional Church and his eventual demission of the institutional pastoral tie. Here, I explore Boff's theology until 1984, emphasising how his theology addresses ecclesiology. This is followed by an analysis of Boff's confrontations between the institutional Church and his resultant 'lay theology' with an emphasis on broader implications of the realities of the poor and marginalised. Chapter six concludes with a tentative assessment of Boff's praxis through the lens of parabolic analysis.

The conclusion of this thesis presents a summary of the arguments I have made and explores several constraints inherent in my project. These include the limitations in any subjective identification of appropriate parables and actants for analysis as well as the acknowledged constraints tied to the context which I have chosen, specifically, the first wave of liberation theology in Latin America. The conclusion closes with a brief presentation of various implications for further research and implementation of the I have methodology developed and employed.

II. Three Preliminary Notes

Before moving into the main body of this thesis, it is valuable to explore three initial considerations in brief: the concept of ecclesial authority in relation to liberation theology, the three levels of liberation theology as presented in *Introducing Liberation Theology* and the biblical concept of parable in relation to liberation theology.

A. Authority

The interplay between messages given and messages received is a basic example of what can be interpreted linguistically as *discourse*, that which is at the heart of what Paul Ricœur calls the ‘vast circle of exchanged messages’.⁵ The interpretation of these messages may produce what may be considered some degree of authority. Ricœur argues that in a given discourse, there exists the opportunity for both ‘imaginary’ (or ‘fictive’) and ‘the real’.⁶ The fictive is the result of the subjective human assessment of a narrative (history). It is with this in mind that a critical hermeneutic may be employed, one in which the fictive may be questioned and analysed.

While religious thought may be analysed with a critical hermeneutic, the disentangling of the fictive from the real is subject to some rule of authority. Within the Catholic tradition, from which the first wave of liberation theology emerged, the issue of authority is tied invariably to the Magisterium. As Christopher Rowland observes, ‘[l]iberation theologians see themselves engaged in mediation between the poor and the Magisterium together with the appropriate “secular” wisdom that contributes to

⁵ Paul Ricœur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 5.

⁶ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 1*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 64.

theological reflection (*Gaudium et Spes* 62), though with a clear commitment to the poor rather than being neutral theological brokers'.⁷ It is liberation theology's emergence in response to the Second Vatican Council that leads to their dependence on the critical reflections of the poor and oppressed within base ecclesial communities (CEBs) for the development of its theology. Yet, by the early 1980s, scarcely a decade since the emergence of liberation theology in Latin America, the Vatican had grown more hostile toward this perspective, insisting on a reorientation of the Latin American Church's concept of the Magisterium.

Pope John Paul II's resistance toward the authority of liberation theology is typified in a sermon delivered in Managua, Nicaragua on 4 March 1983. In this sermon, John Paul insists that 'the unity of the Church is called into question when the powerful factors which constitute and maintain it — faith itself, the revealed Word, the sacraments, *obedience to the bishops and to the pope*, the sense of vocation and mutual responsibility in Christ's mission in the world — are relegated to a position inferior to earthly considerations, unacceptable ideological commitments, temporal options, even concepts of the Church which supplant the true one.'⁸ He accuses some within the Church of presenting 'parallel magisteria', and insists that 'these tendencies toward separation' must be overcome by '*submission to our doctrinal concepts* and of our pastoral projects to the *magisterium of the Church*, represented by the pope and the bishops.'⁹ This sermon, delivered in Managua's *Plaza 19 De Julio* (19 July Square, commemorating the 1979 Sandinista overthrow of the oppressive Somoza government), reveals John Paul's antagonism toward liberation theology, a struggle

⁷ Christopher Rowland in 'Introduction: the theology of liberation', Rowland, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 9.

⁸ John Paul II, 'Unity of the Church', *The Pope Speaks* 28 (Oct 1983), 207.

⁹ *Ibid*, 208.

the Vatican had been waging against liberation theologians and the likes of Belgian Dominican theologian Edward Schillebeeckx (1914-2009), both behind closed doors and in the public sphere. If liberation theology is to be considered a viable and authoritative school of thought within the Christian Church, let alone the Catholic Church, it is essential to explore the source of such an authority. This authoritative thread is explored in greater detail in the first chapter's analysis of the God of history and the God of the Poor as well as in the subsequent parabolic rationale and methodology developed in chapter three and employed in chapters four through six.

B. The Three Levels of Liberation Theology

As mentioned before, in *Introducing Liberation Theology*, Leonardo and Clodovis Boff reflect on the development of liberation theology in Latin America, observing that the 'doing' of liberation theology is exercised on three levels.¹⁰ The first level is that of the popular, the encounter between the 'Christian faith and the situation of oppression' (praxis).¹¹ Informed by the popular, the second level of liberation theology is the pastoral level. By this, Leonardo and Clodovis Boff define pastoral liberation theology as 'the theology that sheds the light of the saving word on the reality of injustice so as to inspire the church to struggle for liberation.'¹² The third and final level of liberation theology is that of the professional, a more systematic and articulate expression of liberation theology. Leonardo and Clodovis Boff emphasise the necessity for the professional level to keep the two previous levels in mind as their

¹⁰ At the time, both were priests and would have considered themselves liberation theologians. Since that time, Leonardo Boff would leave the priesthood and Clodovis Boff would come to distance himself from the movement.

¹¹ Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1987), 11.

¹² Ibid, 17.

‘rich and fruitful thinking... feeds the professional work through which liberation theology has become known throughout the world.’ In this way, ‘the liberation theology of [Peruvian Dominican liberation theologian] Gustavo Gutiérrez is substantially the same as that of a Christian laborer in northeastern Brazil.’¹³

It is valuable to emphasise that these three levels presented in *Introducing Liberation Theology* are not without their limits. For a start, Clodovis and Leonardo Boff are writing from a Catholic Latin American context and as such, they perceive the structures through which liberation theology emerges in that light. The endeavours of the CEBs in the ‘popular level’ of which they conceive is tied to the Latin American reaction to the Second Vatican Council, urging the laity to take a greater role in the life of the Church. This is not to say that parallel practices within other Christian traditions are excluded from this level, but that the way hierarchy is addressed will differ invariably beyond the sphere of the Catholic Church in Latin America. These levels may also look different beyond the Latin American, the Catholic or even the *Christian* context. Other such liberative movements focussing on different aspects of marginalisation (beyond the strict confines of economic depravity) are found both within Latin America and throughout the rest of the world (for example, the Islamic liberation theologies that have emerged, especially in the last several decades¹⁴). As is explored in greater detail in this thesis, a variety of liberation theologies within the Christian context arose both during the earliest stages of Latin American liberation theology (the late sixties and early seventies) and in the years since.

¹³ Ibid, 14.

¹⁴ See Farid Esack, *Quran, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997), Hamid Dabashi, *Islamic Liberation Theology: Resisting the Empire* (London: Routledge, 2008) and Shadaab Rahemtulla, *Qur'an of the Oppressed: Liberation Theology and Gender Justice in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

C. Parables

While neither Clodovis nor Leonardo Boff could anticipate the full breadth of liberation theology that would follow, the three levels they presented in 1986 still provide a helpful framework for analysing the shape of liberation theology. In terms of the thesis that follows, these three levels function as organisational guides in my development of the general expressions of liberation theology that are explored parabolically, that is, in analysing praxis—which lies at the heart of liberation theology—as parables in chapters four through six. The potential for parabolic analysis (and the way that parables and, in turn, praxis affect the hearer) is present in all three of these expressions of liberation theology and, as is demonstrated in the last half of this thesis, provide the field of liberation theology with an additional tool with which praxis may be reflected upon critically.

As mentioned in the outline of chapter three above, this thesis makes use of a particular model for parabolic analysis, namely, the actantial analysis put forward by Crossan. It is important to note here that this thesis is not a New Testament study. While there are many historical approaches to analysing biblical parables—explored in brief in chapter three and in greater detail in Appendix 2—I have determined that Crossan’s model is best-suited for the approach I develop for two primary reasons. The first reason is that Crossan’s model is inherently subversive in that it is based upon the assumption that the nature of parables present a challenge to the status quo (what Crossan describes as a ‘raid on the articulate’). This is mirrored by the nature of liberation theology which sees the critical reflection on praxis analyse the reality of a system of oppression and present a challenge from the lived reality of the oppressed. The second factor which makes Crossan’s approach especially suited for reading

liberation theology is that it presents an easily applicable and repeatable formula for analysing various actants (or players) in differing contexts. This is especially useful in exploring the different subjects presented in chapters four through six.

Within the three expressions of liberation theology put forward by Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, the concept of parable can function on at least the two following levels: what these communities and individuals produce and the narrative of their own stories (reading faith and experiences together to help signpost to the reality of the kingdom of God). Within this thesis, I argue that parables are not just saying something that can be said differently, in different verbal formulations. Parables *must* be expressed in the parabolic form in order to achieve their function – not the mere conveyance of information, but something that prompts a deep reflection and rethinking. In the context of liberation theology, the challenge of the poor and oppressed does not consist of the mere transmission of data. If this were the case, close readings of statistics concerning poverty and oppression may be sufficient to bring about societal and ecclesial transformation. Instead, reading liberation theology through the lens of parable is done in a way that is not simply ‘another way of saying something’, but in a manner that is distinct and cannot be obtained any other way (given liberation theology’s ‘preferential option for the poor’).

With the six chapters of this thesis outlined and these three considerations in mind, it is necessary to now analyse liberation theology itself, its development and a brief overview of its trajectory throughout the first and second waves, which are the primary concerns of the first two chapters.

CHAPTER ONE

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THE FIRST WAVE OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY (1968-1984)

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explore and present the primary foci of the first wave of Latin American liberation theology which provide a broader social and theological context for parabolic explorations in later chapters. I argue that this first wave began in 1968, with Gustavo Gutiérrez's delivery of '*Hacia una teología de liberación*' (English: 'Towards a Theology of Liberation', presented at a conference in Chimbote, Peru in 1968 and published in 1969) as well as the Second Episcopal Conference of Latin America (held in Medellín in 1968), both of which were a response to the post-conciliar atmosphere within the Catholic Church. In order to develop a fuller picture of the first wave and to assist in building toward a method for exploring praxis as parable, this chapter focusses on an analysis of five liberation theologians and six key written texts from the first wave: Gutiérrez's *A Theology of Liberation* (1971), Leonardo Boff's *Jesus Christ Liberator* (1972) and *Ecclesiogenesis* (1977), Juan Luis Segundo's *The Liberation of Theology* (1975), James Cone's *A Black Theology of Liberation* (1970) and J. Severino Croatto's *Biblical Hermeneutics* (1984). This chapter concludes with an introduction to the life of assassinated Salvadoran Archbishop Óscar Romero, a prominent example of the pastoral level of liberation theology.

I. God of History, God of the Poor

When exploring the early development of liberation theology, I argue that twin theological assumptions regarding God's relationship to human activity are a

necessary starting point. Clodovis Boff comments that the epistemological identity of liberation theology is both fluid (in that ‘the visage of liberation theology has not yet acquired its complete physiognomy’) and concrete, ‘[having] acquired a certain delineation.’¹ In this ‘certain delineation’, the first major assumption to be considered—and perhaps the most significant—is the concept of *the God of history*. In this, God and faith are not seen as ahistorical, ethereal matters as is often assumed in more ‘traditional’ theologies and as such, philosophical rationality and even psycho-social analysis themselves do not cohere with this most basic assumption of liberation theology. Spanish-Salvadorian Jesuit priest and theologian Ignacio Ellacuría (1930-1989) comments,

History thus becomes a proof of God because history is itself a demonstration of God: only in history is God understood in relation to humanity, and humanity in relation to God. (Here we include biographical and personal human experience by extension; that experience itself is not historical, but it has characteristics of historicity, which permit this extension.) If God is not understood in history as the Lord of history, that is, as God who intervenes in history, then God is not understood as the whole, rich, and free, mysterious and accessible, scandalous and hope-giving God.²

Therefore, within the concept of the God of history, the whole of human history cannot be divided into two distinct histories, ‘one profane and one sacred’.³ To understand human history is to understand the working of the God of history.

Peruvian Dominican priest and theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez (*b.* 1928) draws out how this concept relates to the task of liberation theology his first major work, *Teología de la liberación* (published in 1971, and translated into English as *A Theology*

¹ Clodovis Boff, ‘Epistemology and Method of Theology of Liberation,’ in Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino, eds, *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, trans. the Department of Books and Libraries of the Spanish Ministry of Culture (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1993), 57.

² Ignacio Ellacuría, ‘The Historicity of Christian Salvation,’ in Ellacuría and Sobrino, 258.

³ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, trans. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (London: SCM Press, 2001), 151.

of Liberation, which was published in 1973), making use of the work of French Dominican theologian Christian Duquoc (1926-2008), among others: 'What mattered [in the past] to the theologian was the way persons worked in relation to their transcendent end; what matters to [the theologian] today is what they *do*'.⁴ In this, the totality of human history is unified as 'there is only one human destiny, irreversibly assumed by Christ, the Lord of history.'⁵ The interwoven relationship between this God of history and human history is the very basis for liberation theology's focus on praxis.⁶ Because God has worked throughout history, as is testified throughout the narrative of the Bible, the working of God is also evident in the praxis of God's people and especially, as is explored in the next section, in the praxis of the poor and oppressed. The ways in which God has worked throughout history reveal the divine character, leading to the understanding that God's desires remain consistent in the present and will remain consistent in the future. This enables liberation theologians to reflect critically on the ways in which God *has worked, is working* and *will continue to work* in human history, a history which is also God's history.

The assumption that the God of Christianity is the God of history challenges many preconceived notions of the reading of the Bible and the conceptualisation of

⁴ Christian Duquoc, 'Eschatologie et réalités terrestres,' *Lumière et Vie* 9, no 50 (November-December 1960), 5, as quoted in Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 337 n11. Italics mine.

⁵ Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 151.

⁶ This raises the criticism that liberation theology is an 'uncritical [borrowing] from Marxist ideology'. (See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, introduction to '*Instruction on Certain Aspects*'; '*Instruction on Certain Aspects* VI.10.'). The alignment between the concept of the God of history as this critical reflection on praxis espoused as the starting point for liberation theology created tension between the liberation theologians and the Catholic Church as Marxism was seen as entirely incompatible with the teaching of the Church. (See John Paul II, '*Fides et ratio*'). Gutiérrez's early writings do not give credit to Marx for liberation theology's concept of praxis, though these writings fall short of defining praxis explicitly. While the Marxist use of historical praxis stresses 'the social analysis that guides revolutionary activity', in 1986's *The Truth Shall Make You Free: Confrontations*, Gutiérrez provides a more explicit definition of his concept of praxis, involving 'a transforming activity marked and illuminated by Christian love.' Arthur F. McGovern, *Liberation Theology and Its Critics: Toward an Assessment* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1989), 32-3.

Christianity as a whole. In 1989's *Liberating Exegesis: The Challenge of Liberation Theology to Biblical Studies*, Christopher Rowland and Mark Corner observe the prevalence of 'the well-trodden paths of the historical-critical method' within the majority of academic circles.⁷ While this reconstruction of the ancient context of the Bible has proven invaluable in a certain sense, there exists a void within this method, which leaves a richer application of the Bible to present human situations wanting. Rowland and Corner comment, 'When we use the Bible in wrestling with the contemporary problems of Christian discipleship we find that our exegetical efforts frequently have not been matched with the skills necessary for the provision of illumination from the Bible on the exploration of those questions which our generation is asking.'⁸ This challenge results in a great chasm between exegetical methodologies, with one side stressing the reliability, exactness and necessity of the historical-critical method in judging all interpretations of the Bible, while another side casts doubt on former approach's ability to grasp the historical context in full. This latter side stresses that, irrespective of the '*conscious* intention of the original author, different levels of meaning can become apparent to later interpreters'.⁹

While the 'historical quest' within Christian theology is of value, even in enacting the historical-critical method, all interpreters are subject to their own contemporary historical contexts and prejudices: 'it is not just *ancient* history that is important.'¹⁰ Liberation theology's approach to the Bible is distinct from the two extremes mentioned above in that it employs the subjective praxis of the people in self-conscious manner.

⁷ Christopher Rowland and Mark Corner, *Liberating Exegesis: The Challenge of Liberation Theology to Biblical Studies* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 35.

⁸ Ibid, 35.

⁹ Ibid, 36.

¹⁰ Ibid, 37.

Anglican priest and Old Testament scholar John Goldingay comments, 'It is not merely possible, preferable, or dangerous to be influenced in the way one reads the Bible by the way one lives. It is inevitable; this is simply a feature of human understanding in any sphere.'¹¹ Goldingay emphasises the importance of being aware of one's biases when approaching the Bible, something also emphasised within liberation theology. In *Liberación de la teología* (English: *The Liberation of Theology*), Uruguayan Jesuit priest and theologian Juan Luis Segundo (1925-1996) writes,

[The] fundamental difference between the traditional academic theologian and the liberation theologian is that the latter feels compelled at every step to combine the disciplines that open up the past with the disciplines that help to explain the present. And he feels this necessity is precisely in the task or working out and elaborating theology, that is the say, in the task of interpreting the word of God as it is addressed to us here and now.¹²

In order for a theology to be a *liberation* theology in the sense that it is expressed in the first wave, it does not merely look for liberation in a particular text, but employs the specific method of considering praxis as a text in and of itself alongside the text of the Bible. I argue that this necessary unity between human history and salvation history is echoed throughout all of liberation theology and leads to a complex hermeneutic that does not rely on traditional biblical interpretation alone.

In conjunction with this first major assumption—that the God of the Christian faith is the God of history—liberation theologians also stress that the God of the Christian faith is the God of the margins, namely, the *God of the poor*. This is what Rowland and Corner describe as the 'hermeneutical key' to liberation theology and is

¹¹ John Goldingay, 'The Hermeneutics of Liberation Theology,' *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 4, no. 2 (1 December 1982), 134.

¹² Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology*, trans. John Drury (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1977), 8. Within *The Liberation of Theology*, we also find Segundo's determination that every 'theology is political'. (74) As is discussed later in this chapter, Segundo argues that liberation theology is distinct from other theologies in that it 'consciously and explicitly accepts its relationship with politics.' (75).

expressed in liberation theology's preferential option for the poor. It is this critical reflection on the praxis of the poor that provides liberation theology with its liberating character, that the Christian might conceive of one's faith in terms of liberation from oppression. In the context of Latin America in particular, the critical reflection on the praxis of the poor with which the first wave of liberation theology is concerned primarily is something that takes place in the base ecclesial communities (CEBs).

In 1986's *La verdad los hará libres: confrontaciones* (published in English in 1990 as *The Truth Shall Make You Free: Confrontations*), Gutiérrez observes the transition in Latin American reality that began in the middle of the twentieth century.¹³ Once relatively absent in both society and the Church, the poor 'have gradually become active agents of their own destiny, initiating the solid process that is altering the condition of this world's poor and despoiled.'¹⁴ This ecclesiastical influence of this process is evident in various documents produced by the Catholic Church in Latin America, especially those arising from the second meeting of the Latin American Episcopal Council (Spanish: *Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano*, or CELAM), which was held at Medellín, Colombia in 1968, acknowledging 'the *solidarity of the Church* with the Latin American reality.'¹⁵ By the time of the CELAM conference of 1979, held at Puebla, Mexico, an explicit affirmation of the preferential option for the poor (as well as for the work taking place among the CEBs) is articulated.¹⁶

This shift in focus is not only the result of increased awareness of the oppressive plight of the majority of people in Latin America, but also following

¹³ See Gutiérrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free: Confrontations*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1990), 8-9.

¹⁴ Gutiérrez, 'Option for the Poor,' in Ellacuría and Sobrino, eds, *Mysterium Liberationis*, 236.

¹⁵ Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 122.

¹⁶ McGovern, 15.

consideration of a major theme found within the Bible. This privileged place of the poor in the kingdom of God is emphasised throughout. Italian pastor and theologian Sergio Rostagno (*b.* 1934) observes that within the ancient Eastern world, “Life” includes a notion of *strength*, which thins out in the sick but has its complete and perfect manifestation in success, victory, and riches (Ps. 128).¹⁷ Yet, within this notion of strength is exposed the reality that ‘riches and poverty are the antithetical results of exploitation’, and in this antithesis, God sides with the poor.¹⁸ Rostagno writes,

The fact that Yahweh is on the side of the poor is always a genuine protest against those who trample right and justice underfoot. On the other hand, passages like [1 Samuel 2.1-10] suggest the notion that God is particularly close to the poor, that the state of poverty constitutes a privileged situation of proximity to God.¹⁹

Within the Bible, God’s alignment with the poor is expressed most fully in the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth as presented in the Gospels. From the Christian perspective, it is the person of Jesus who is the culmination and fulfilment of God’s historical action in the Hebrew Scriptures, the ultimate demonstration of the unity between God’s history with human history — what Gutiérrez calls ‘a “Christo-finalized” history.’²⁰ This ‘Christo-finalized’ history enables people of faith to apprehend more readily the way in which the God of history intersects with their own experience of life — their praxis. Uruguayan liberation theologian Julio de Santa Ana (*b.* 1934) writes,

Jesus affirms the privilege of the poor, since He proclaims that they are to inherit the Kingdom. God, who undertakes to correct human mistakes, will give the keys of the Kingdom to the poor, for in the Kingdom justice will reign. It is natural that the victims of injustice and exploitation should be the first to receive the privilege of the Kingdom. Moreover, In Jesus we find a model of the way of life

¹⁷ Sergio Rostagno, ‘The Bible: Is an Interclass Reading Legitimate?’ in Norman K. Gottwald, ed., *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1983), 63.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 63.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 64.

²⁰ Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 151.

of the poor man who is also a 'servant of Yahweh'; he is not resigned to his poverty, but practises the hope which kindles hope in others too.²¹

II. The Emergence of 'Liberation Theology'

The involvement of religious leaders in the petitioning for and defending of the rights of oppressed peoples (especially indigenous peoples) in the Americas is rooted in the early days of Spanish colonisation with the efforts of a number of Spanish missionary theologians, including Antonio de Montesinos (c. 1475-1545) and Bartolomé de Las Casas (c. 1484-1566).²² Waves of national revolutions followed in later centuries. It is my argument that the particular political, economic and ecclesiastical climate of Latin America by the middle of the twentieth century paved the way for significant developments in the way that the Christian Church would address the challenges faced by the oppressed.

These years were a time of especially great change in Latin America. In 1951, Jacobo Arbenz was inaugurated as the democratically-elected president of Guatemala and, with the help of his close friends in the Communist Party, brought sweeping changes, including land reform and 'a sustained effort to modernise the country's physical infrastructure.'²³ According to the World Bank, these two reforms proved 'essential to the economic development of Guatemala.'²⁴ Ultimately, Arbenz' programme, which resulted in the distribution of land for some 100,000 peasants within the first eighteen months of his tenure, proved deeply unpopular with powerful

²¹ Julio de Santa Ana, *Good News to the Poor: The Challenge of the Poor in the History of the Church*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1979), 95.

²² See Appendix 1, 'Proto-Liberation Theology'.

²³ Piero Gleijeses, 'The Agrarian Reform of Jacobo Arbenz,' *Journal of Latin American Studies* 21, no 3 (1989), 453.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 453.

landowners. Tensions grew during Arbenz' presidency until June 1954, when the United States orchestrated his overthrow.²⁵

Many other revolutions continued throughout Latin America. In 1952, the National Revolutionary Movement (Spanish: *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario*, or MNR) came to power in Bolivia, bringing agrarian reform and the nationalisation of the nation's tin mines.²⁶ This movement would collapse, not at the hands of a direct invasion orchestrated by the United States, but, in part, because of the party's internal tensions exacerbated by Bolivia's continued economic dependency on the United States.²⁷ Another example is found in the Cuban Revolution, which took place in 1959 and was followed by numerous attempts by the United States to either depose or assassinate Fidel Castro, culminating in the Missile Crisis of 1962.²⁸ Only days before this crisis, a new Ecumenical council began at the Vatican.

A. A New Ecumenical Council

The Second Vatican Council was the result of a proposal from Pope John XXIII made in early 1959 in order to address the Church's responsibility 'to define clearly and distinguish between what is sacred principle and eternal gospel and what belongs rather to the changing times.'²⁹ This Council was intended to be an *aggiornamento*, 'a renewal that was an updating or modernization'.³⁰ A month before the Council began,

²⁵ Eric Selbin, *Modern Latin American Revolutions* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1993), 81.

²⁶ Ibid, 40.

²⁷ Stephen Zunes, 'The United States and Bolivia: The Taming of a Revolution, 1952-1957,' *Latin American Perspectives* 28, no. 5 (September 2001), 34-7.

²⁸ Michael Dunne, 'Perfect Failure: the USA, Cuba and the Bay of Pigs, 1961,' *Political Quarterly* 82, no 3 (July 2011), 456-7.

²⁹ Brian Stanley, *Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A World History* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2018), 201.

³⁰ Ibid, 201.

the Pope made a radio broadcast in which he expressed the necessity for the proceedings to explore the mission of the Church 'as it is and wishes to be, as the Church of all, and particularly as the Church of the poor.'³¹

The work of the four sessions of the Second Vatican Council between 1962 and 1965 represents a struggle between two competing ecclesiologies. One camp maintained the staunch conservatism expressed by the First Vatican Council (1869-1870), seeking to 'assert the unique character of the Catholic Church as a sacred monarchy in which unchallengeable divine authority flowed downwards from the pope as the Vicar of Christ, through the bishops as the pope's representatives to the priesthood, and eventually to the faithful'. The opposing camp presented 'an alternative, more collegial and confident vision of the church as the missionary people of God, a transnational fellowship of the faithful called in their entirety to take the gospel into the world under the leadership of the bishops as the descendants of the apostles.'³² Ultimately, concessions were made by both sides, but a number of positions found in the resultant documents would have a significant impact on the first wave of liberation theology. By and large, these documents point to a much more progressive outlook, especially regarding ecclesiology, liturgy and the laity.

In terms of a new ecclesiology, the second constitution, promulgated by Pope Paul VI (who became pontiff after the death of John in 1963), *Lumen gentium*, the *Dogmatic Constitution of the Church*, expresses 'the importance of the principle of collegiality and the desirability of the creation of episcopal conferences to formulate policy, thereby suggesting that the episcopacy should have important powers returned

³¹ Ibid, 202.

³² Ibid, 202.

to them which, over the past centuries, Rome had removed.’³³ Bishops are defined as ‘vicars and ambassadors of Christ’ rather than ‘the vicars of the Roman pontiff, for they exercise an authority that is proper to them, and are quite correctly called “prelates”, heads of the people whom they govern’.³⁴ Individual churches are therefore defined in terms of their dioceses, though among them, each church is also deemed legitimate, not simply due to their proximity to their respective bishops:

A bishop marked with the fullness of the sacrament of Orders, is ‘the steward of the grace of the supreme priesthood,’ especially in the Eucharist, which he offers or causes to be offered, and by which the Church continually lives and grows. This Church of Christ is truly present in all legitimate local congregations of the faithful which, united with their pastors, are themselves called churches in the New Testament. For in their locality these are the new People called by God, in the Holy Spirit and in much fullness. In them the faithful are gathered together by the preaching of the Gospel of Christ, and the mystery of the Lord’s Supper is celebrated, that by the food and blood of the Lord’s body the whole brotherhood may be joined together... In these communities, though frequently small and poor, or living in the Diaspora, Christ is present, and in virtue of His presence there is brought together one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. For ‘the partaking of the body and blood of Christ does nothing other than make us be transformed into that which we consume’.³⁵

With this recasting of the hierarchy of the Church also comes an increased focus on the laity, including the reversal of the position maintained by Vatican I that the Mass is to be celebrated in Latin exclusively. Now, encouragement was given to celebrate the Mass in the language of the local people, providing a more inclusive and participatory liturgical experience.

In conjunction with these other reforms, the spirit of John XXIII’s programme of *aggiornamento*, with a special focus on characterising the Church as ‘the Church of

³³ Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of Vatican II: Western European Progressive Catholicism in the Long Sixties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 10.

³⁴ Documents of the Second Vatican Council, ‘*Lumen gentium* 27,’ The Holy See, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html (accessed 5 November 2018).

³⁵ Ibid, ‘*Lumen gentium* 26.’

the poor', was emphasised by the Second Vatican Council. The composition of the Church presented in *Lumen gentium* places an emphasis on being a body that 'encompasses with love all who are afflicted with human suffering, and in the poor and afflicted sees the image of its poor and suffering Founder'.³⁶ This principle is reinforced in the fourth and final constitution of the Council, *Gaudium et spes*, the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, in which the Church's responsibility to 'those who are poor or in any way afflicted' is expressed.³⁷ This responsibility is based in the Church's understanding that 'God intended the earth with everything contained in it for the use of all human beings and peoples.' As a result, the Church must ensure that, 'under the leadership of justice and in the company of charity, created goods should be in abundance for all in like manner.'³⁸ In these words, echoes of the early Spanish missionaries like Las Casas can be heard, as well as a prophetic voice that would call forth the first wave of liberation theology.

B. The Conference at Medellín

The period from the commencement of Second Vatican Council (1962) until the conference at Medellín (1968) can be characterised as the '*preparatory phase*' of liberation theology.³⁹ These two events did not *produce* the first wave of liberation theology so much as they acted as catalysts for ongoing and further development of the movement. I argue that 'movement' is the best way of expressing the nature of the

³⁶ Ibid, '*Lumen gentium* 8.'

³⁷ Joseph Gremillion, ed., *The Gospel of Peace and Justice: Catholic Social Teaching Since Pope John* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1976), 243.

³⁸ Documents of the Second Vatican Council, '*Gaudium et spes* 69,' The Holy See, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html (accessed 5 November 2018).

³⁹ Rosino Gibellini, *The Liberation Theology Debate*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1986), 1.

first wave of liberation theology, as opposed to a ‘theology’ in a traditional sense of the word. In theory, the first wave of liberation theology is not characterised as a system of dogmatic claims or arguments, but as a new way of coming to theological understanding and realisation – a new way of *doing* the task of theology. Therefore, it can be said that the conclusions of the Second Vatican Council and Medellín helped to cultivate the ecclesiastical context in which the first wave of liberation theology would grow and be enacted.

The general caricature of the Church—especially the Catholic Church—over the last few centuries of having ‘acquired an organizational form with a heavily hierarchical framework and a juridical understanding of relationships among Christians, thus producing mechanical, reified inequalities and inequities’ is not reflective of the broad experience of the Church, especially the bodies of Christian believers at the ‘ground’ or ‘base’ level.⁴⁰ In Latin America in particular, these CEBs were borne of the experiences of communities caught in the midst of political, economic and ecclesiastical change. Largely, these experiences were (and are) characterised by suffering on the margins. According to Leonardo Boff, the emergence of CEBs signifies ‘a new ecclesiological experience, a renaissance of very church, and hence, an action of the Spirit on the horizon of the matters urgent for our time.’⁴¹ As a result of this ‘new ecclesiological experience’, the lives and realities of the CEBs (i.e., their praxis), specifically in Latin America, ‘are the very stuff out of which liberation theology grows, for they are the “poor in action” of which liberation theology is but a

⁴⁰ Leonardo Boff, *Ecclesiology: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1986), 1.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 1.

reflection.⁴² In this way, liberation theology is a type of contextual theology.⁴³ Similar movements have taken and are taking place throughout the world, but in this focus on the first wave of liberation theology, this chapter is looking toward Latin America primarily, where the broadest, most coherent and significant expression of what is now called liberation theology began.

CELAM was established in 1955, when the First Episcopal Conference of Latin America was held. Between 1955 and 1968, CELAM held eleven regular meetings, with each expressing a more progressive direction for the Catholic Church in Latin America.⁴⁴ Not wanting to let the progressive momentum of the Second Vatican Council pass by Latin America without an adequate response, CELAM held the conference at Medellín from 24 August to 6 September 1968.

The theme of this second conference was '*La presencia de la iglesia en la actual transformación de América Latina a la luz del Vaticano II*' (English: 'The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of Vatican II'). American missionary and humanitarian worker Carolyn Kurtz comments, 'Three hundred million under these bishops' care in Latin America were living in poverty and experience the daily injustice of political oppression.'⁴⁵ As these church leaders were growing more aware of the challenges that their respective dioceses faced—especially

⁴² Deane William Fenn, *Third World Liberation Theologies: An Introductory Survey* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1986), 12.

⁴³ Christopher Rowland, 'Liberation Theology,' in Kathryn Tanner, John Webster and Iain Torrance, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 634.

⁴⁴ See Enrique Dussel, *A History of the Church in Latin America: Colonialism to Liberation (1492-1979)*, trans. Alan Neely (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1981), 141-144.

⁴⁵ Carolyn Kurtz in her introduction to Óscar Romero, *The Scandal of Redemption: When God Liberates the poor, Saves Sinners, and Heals Nations*, ed. Carolyn Kurtz (Walden, New York: Plough Publishing House, 2018), 3.

in terms of social, political and economic oppression—they produced sixteen documents, the primary focus of which can be summarised in the following passages:

By its own vocation Latin America will undertake its liberation at the cost of whatever sacrifice...

The Lord's distinct commandment to 'evangelize the poor' ought to bring us to a distribution of resources and apostolic personnel that effectively gives preference to the poorest and most needy sectors.⁴⁶

An honest engagement with experience of the poor in Latin America played a significant role throughout the conference, describing it as 'dismal poverty, which in many cases becomes inhuman wretchedness'.⁴⁷ As a result, the preferential option for the poor became a necessity for the bishops. These emphases on liberation and the poor are found throughout the conclusions reached by the assembly at Medellín, emphases which will have been influenced by the contributions of Gutiérrez, who served as significant theological advisor at the conference.⁴⁸

III. Gustavo Gutiérrez

Gutiérrez is recognised as 'the preeminent Latin American liberation theologian'.⁴⁹ Only a few weeks before the conference at Medellín, he presented the paper, 'Towards a Theology of Liberation' at a meeting in Chimbote in his native Peru.⁵⁰ In addressing the challenges facing Latin America, Gutiérrez argued for the use of the word 'liberation' (*liberación*) instead of 'development' (*desarrollo*), as, at that time, the world of social sciences had adopted 'liberation' so as to stress the

⁴⁶ As quoted in Ferm, 11.

⁴⁷ O. Ernesto Valiente, 'The Reception of Vatican II in Latin America,' *Theological Studies* 73, no. 4 (December 2012), 805.

⁴⁸ Lilian Calles Barger, *The World Come of Age: An Intellectual History of Liberation Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 28.

⁴⁹ Ferm, 16.

⁵⁰ Stanley E. Porter, Michael A. Hayes and David Tombs, eds., *Faith in the Millennium* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 38.

dependency of Latin America.⁵¹ (This will be expanded upon in the exploration of *A Theology of Liberation* below.) The use of liberation also enabled Gutiérrez to tie both the socio-political and theological senses of the expression together: ‘God acted in history to save a people from every form of enslavement.’⁵²

Gutiérrez was born into a poor family in Lima in 1928. Additionally, he is a *mestizo*, a ‘half-blood’, someone of mixed European and native descent, and as such he experienced racial discrimination in his early years. When he had first entered university in Peru, he aspired to be a psychiatrist and was involved deeply in political activism. Gutiérrez’s trajectory after this point mirrors that of many other figures within this first wave of liberation theology. These individuals all come from the Roman Catholic tradition. For most of those who were born in Latin America, such as Óscar Romero of El Salvador, Juan Luis Segundo of Uruguay, José Severino Croatto of Argentina and Hugo Assmann and Leonardo Boff of Brazil, initial studies gave way to further study and training in continental Europe. Other first wave liberation theologians, such as the Spanish-born Jesuit priests Jon Sobrino and Ignacio Ellacuría, studied in their native European context before relocating to Latin America to serve in the Church and to teach in the academy. As a result, the first wave of liberation theology is very much engaged with European philosophy and theology, both in terms of convergence as well as divergence.

Gutiérrez began his theological studies at what was then the *Faculté de théologie* at Louvain, Belgium before moving onto further studies at Lyon. In 1959, upon completion of his studies, Gutiérrez returned to his native Peru, where he was

⁵¹ McGovern, 8-9.

⁵² *Ibid*, 9.

confronted with the extremes of poverty, which he began to see as ‘destructive, structural, and class centered, something that required an uprooting rather than charity.’⁵³ He was ordained that same year and made his home in the Lima slum of Rímac.⁵⁴

Over the coming years, Gutiérrez came to the realisation that he could not reconcile this impoverished existence with the intellectual discipline of theology he had been taught in Europe. He found the traditional discipline too far removed from the reality of the people to be of any great relevance. Therefore, he determined that there must be another way forward, another way of experiencing and demonstrating a faith that bears living significance. By 1964, Gutiérrez had developed a refined approach to theology, defining the task as ‘critical reflection on *praxis*’.⁵⁵ He continued to develop this approach in the aforementioned paper, ‘Towards a Theology of Liberation’, as well as its fuller expression in his seminal work, *A Theology of Liberation*, which is now explored.

A Theology of Liberation

A Theology of Liberation has been described as Gutiérrez’s ‘answer to the question, What is the proper role of theology and of the theologian in the attempt to be faithful both to the Christian gospel and to the poor of Latin America?’⁵⁶ Perhaps it would be more appropriate to amend the shape of the question, as it presupposes that faithfulness to the Christian gospel can somehow be differentiated from faithfulness to the poor. This is made clear in his 1988 introduction to the revised edition in which

⁵³ Barger, 28.

⁵⁴ Ferm, 16.

⁵⁵ McGovern, 8.

⁵⁶ Ferm, 17.

Gutiérrez quotes from Pope John XXIII, in a statement dictated shortly before his death: 'It is not that the Gospel has changed: it is that we have begun to understand it better.'⁵⁷ In seeking to better understand the gospel in the context of Latin America, Gutiérrez begins with a critical reflection on the task of theology, both as it is understood in a classical sense, as well as how it is understood in the scheme of a theology of liberation.

Gutiérrez writes, 'Theological reflection – that is, the understanding of the faith – arises spontaneously and inevitably in the believer, in all those who have accepted the gift of the Word of God.'⁵⁸ Therefore, when any Christian conceives of the thing called faith, they are doing theology. Gutiérrez makes clear to point out that while any believer might do theology, whatever that may entail is dependent on context. In classical terms, theology is characterized as 'wisdom' and as 'rational knowledge'. In classifying theology as wisdom, Gutiérrez means a theology that comes from a life cut-off from the concerns of the present life.⁵⁹ He observes the dichotomy between the broader theology expressed in the reflections of theologians like the Greek Fathers and a more narrow, personal theology expressed in the reflections of theologians like Thomas à Kempis. In classifying theology as rational knowledge, Gutiérrez explores the theological task that emerged as '[from] the twelfth century on, theology [began] to establish itself as a science', as a way of bringing logic and reason into the discipline.⁶⁰ This results in a more explicit systemisation of theology.

While Gutiérrez is not suggesting that these forms of theology be abandoned, he wishes to transcend them in order to develop a more 'lived-out' way of doing

⁵⁷ Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 43.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 47.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 48.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 49.

theological reflection.⁶¹ It is helpful to be reminded that liberation theology is not a theology *per se*, but a way of *doing* theology. As such, Gutiérrez makes it the task of liberation theology to function as a critical reflection on praxis: 'Theology *follows*; it is the second step.'⁶² It is important to note that for Gutiérrez, praxis is not merely 'what we do', but rather, that to which Christian communities are committed and with which these communities are engaged critically – what French philosopher Paul Ricœur describes as 'meaningful action'.⁶³ Gutiérrez sees this as exemplified historically in Augustine's *The City of God*, which he considers to be 'based on a true analysis of the signs of the times and the demands with which they challenge the Christian community'.⁶⁴ He appeals to eminent Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth in appealing to the incarnation in the way that God is revealed through 'the *anthropological aspects* of revelation': 'Man is the measure of all things, since God became man.'⁶⁵ To accomplish the task of engaging critically, the Church is called to be open 'to the totality of human history', which, in turn, 'allows theology to fulfil its critical function vis-à-vis ecclesial praxis without narrowness.'⁶⁶ This openness then allows theology to 'both [grow] and, in a certain sense, [change]', thus emphasising

⁶¹ Ferm, 17; 'Theology as a critical reflection of Christian praxis in the light of the Word does not replace the other functions of theology, such as wisdom and rational knowledge; rather it presupposes and needs them. But this is not all. We are not concerned here with a mere juxtaposition. The critical function of theology necessarily leads to redefinition of these other two tasks. Henceforth, wisdom and rational knowledge will more explicitly have ecclesial praxis as their point of departure and their context.' Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 57.

⁶² Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 55.

⁶³ See Paul Ricœur, 'The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as Text,' *Social Research* 38, no. 3 (Autumn 1971): 529-562.

⁶⁴ Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 50.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 51, quoting from Karl Barth, *Christengemeinde und Bürgergemeinde* (Zollikon–Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1946), 36.

⁶⁶ Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 56.

the moving characteristic of liberation theology, always addressing the 'signs of the times' in order to yield something relevant from and for the faithful.⁶⁷

In approaching the theological task of 'critical reflection on praxis', Gutiérrez states that one must first differentiate between models of 'development' and 'liberation/dependence' when apprehending the 'signs of the times'. Within the scheme of 'development', countries which are deemed 'undeveloped' or 'developing' are confronted with the expectation that they must somehow grow into 'developed' countries by way of imitating the historical processes through which these 'developed' countries came to their current state. Gutiérrez observes that 'poor countries are not interested in modeling themselves after the rich countries, among other reasons because they are increasingly more convinced that the status of the latter is the fruit of injustice and coercion.'⁶⁸ As an alternative, he sees the scheme of 'liberation/dependence' as a more suitable option. In this, Gutiérrez explores liberation in both the sociological and theological terms. Sociologically, liberation can approach both '*exterior* pressures' (Marx) as well as 'interior liberation' (Freud). Theologically, liberation is typified in the work of Christ. This is characterised by freedom:

The freedom to which we are called presupposes the going out of oneself, the breaking down of our selfishness and of all the structures that support our selfishness; the foundation of this freedom is openness to others. The fullness of liberation – a free gift from Christ – is communion with God and with other human beings.⁶⁹

One essential element to grasp here is that, in order for any liberation theology to be a critical reflection on praxis, it will call for liberation here and now.⁷⁰ There is a danger

⁶⁷ Ibid, 56.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 61.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 75.

⁷⁰ 'Salvation is not something otherworldly, in regard to which the present life is merely a test. Salvation – the communion of human beings with God and among themselves – is something which embraces all human reality, transforms it, and leads it to its fullness in Christ'. Ibid, 149.

in any 'over-spiritualisation' of liberation in that, in its narrowed scope, it does not call for contextual praxis.

This concept prompts a longer discussion on different aspects of what it means to be 'the Church' in the world. It is valuable to acknowledge that throughout the entirety of *A Theology of Liberation*, Gutiérrez seeks to solidify the notion above by challenging systems that have in any way caused a rift between the Church and the reality of the world. He presents the Church in Latin America as in transition, having been established during the Counter-Reformation and having maintained a defensive attitude throughout its history.⁷¹ He also observes a recent shift in attitude and finds a Church more 'politically aware and... acquiring a greater knowledge of the current Latin American reality, especially in its root causes.'⁷² Gutiérrez makes a point of acknowledging the commitment of different sectors of Christians to the work of liberation. In this, he argues that it is 'to the oppressed that the Church should address itself and not so much to the oppressors'.⁷³ This is to say that 'as its primary duty', the Church is called to concern itself with the oppressed. Gutiérrez writes,

In Latin America the world in which the Christian community must live and celebrate its eschatological hope is the world of social revolution; the Church's task must be defined in relation to this. Its fidelity to the Gospel leaves it no alternative: the Church must be the visible sign of the presence of the Lord within the aspiration for liberation and the struggle for a more human and just society. Only in this way will the message of love which the Church bears be made credible and efficacious.⁷⁴

This 'primary duty' also finds expression in eschatological terms (thanks in part to an appropriation of Marx's concept of self-realisation).⁷⁵ In any useful eschatology

⁷¹ Ibid, 115.

⁷² Ibid, 115.

⁷³ Ibid, 131.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 234.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 66-71.

‘terrestrial realities’ are not disregarded. Instead, the future breaks into the present. This leads to an increased hope, which is not characterised by fanciful musing upon the future: ‘When that which is “yet-not-conscious” becomes a conscious act, it is no longer a state of mind; it assumes a concrete utopic function, mobilizing human action in history. Hope emerges as the key to human existence oriented towards the future, because it transforms the present.’⁷⁶

The sum of each of these parts is the attempt of the theology of liberation ‘to reflect on the experience and meaning of the faith based on the commitment to abolish injustice and to build a new society’.⁷⁷ In order to accomplish this, the ‘authentic theology of liberation’ will free those who suffer from oppression to ‘freely raise their voice and express themselves directly and creatively in society in the heart of the People of God’. Ultimately, in Gutiérrez’s scheme, it is the oppressed who must be the ‘protagonists of their own liberation.’⁷⁸

IV. Leonardo Boff

Gutiérrez was far from alone in this new approach to theology in Latin America. From Brazil comes another significant figure within the first wave (and beyond) in Leonardo Boff. Boff was born in Concórdia in 1938. He began his studies in theology and philosophy in his home country before entering the Franciscan order in 1959 and becoming ordained as a priest in 1964. Boff left South America for Europe to continue his studies and received a doctorate from Munich under the supervision of German

⁷⁶ Ibid, 201.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 269.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 269.

Franciscan Bonaventura Kloppenburg.⁷⁹ Upon returning to Brazil, Boff found himself caught up in the changes taking place in Latin America. He became a prolific author, though, with the publication of his controversial *Church: Charism and Power* (1981), the Vatican lost patience with his theological positions and prohibited him from giving public lectures or publishing for a year in 1985.⁸⁰ Eventually, he left the priesthood and was appointed to a professorship at the University of the State of Rio de Janeiro.

A. *Jesus Christ Liberator*

When *Jesus Cristo libertador* (English: *Jesus Christ Liberator*) was first published in 1972, the State forbade the use of the word '*libertação*' (English: liberation) in all media. As a result, 'the book did not say all that its author wanted to say; it said what could be said.'⁸¹ 'Nevertheless', Boff writes in the Preface to the English translation, 'the liberation message was understood by Christians'.⁸² The primary aim of *Jesus Christ Liberator* is to present a Christology that is relevant to liberation theology in Latin America. Boff aims to accomplish this by approaching the matter with five particular criteria. The first criterion emphasises the 'Primacy of the Anthropological Element over the Ecclesiastical'. In this, Boff seeks to emphasise the particular importance placed on the 'human person' in Latin American liberation theology. This positive element is also infused with a negative scepticism of the

⁷⁹ Ondina E. González and Justo L. González. *Christianity in Latin America: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 255.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 266.

⁸¹ Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology for Our Time*, trans. Patrick Hughes (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1978), xii.

⁸² Ibid, xii.

Church, which Boff sees as derived from reproductions of European models of dogmatic structure, as opposed to a Church *for* Latin America.⁸³

Boff's second criterion within *Jesus Christ Liberator* is that of the 'Primacy of the Utopian Element over the Factual'. Boff wishes to develop a Christology that has a future focus. In this, the present is not abandoned, but is perfected, delivering 'a world totally reconciled'.⁸⁴ The next criterion is the 'Primacy of the Critical Element over the Dogmatic'. Here, Boff is interested in promoting 'a dialogue between faith and the world', as opposed to a self-defensive, reactionary and repressive dogmatism. He writes, 'Criticism refines and purifies the core of the Christian experience so that it can be made incarnate within the historical experience we are living.'⁸⁵

The fourth criterion Boff presents is that of the 'Primacy of the Social over the Personal', in which he stresses the need to challenge 'structural evils that transcend individual ones'.⁸⁶ In order to deliver the 'immense portions of the population' that experience marginalisation as a result of their oppression, the Christian must 'participate, *critically*, in the global upsurge of liberation that Latin American society is undergoing... [giving] special attention to the nobodies and those without a voice'.⁸⁷ This critical participation leads into Boff's final criterion, that of the 'Primacy of Orthopraxis over Orthodoxy'. Essentially, Boff is arguing that 'correct acting in the light of Christ' is more important than 'correct thinking about Christ'.⁸⁸ He stresses that 'for the primitive church the essential did not consist in the reduction of the message of

⁸³ Ibid, 44.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 44-5.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 45.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 46.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 46.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 46.

Christ to systematic categories of intellectual comprehension but in creating new habits of acting and living in the world.’⁸⁹

Even at this early stage in his writings, issues which would prove provocative to the conservatism of the institutional Church can be found, but with these five criteria in mind, Boff paints Jesus as the ‘Liberator of the human condition’⁹⁰ and ‘all that is authentically human’⁹¹. As such, ‘Jesus’ intention was not to establish a new church, but to make clear the dominant qualities of a fully human being.’⁹² According to Boff, in order for a Christology to prove relevant to Latin America, the Jesus it proclaims must be a Jesus who is the liberator of the oppressed, and the preaching of the kingdom must be that of social revolution.⁹³

It is valuable to acknowledge that to formulate and enact his five criteria, Boff begins from a place of exploring the study of the historical Jesus and its relationship to the Christ of faith. The continuity between the two is something that has been developed indirectly in that ‘the primitive community made explicit what had been implicit in the words, demands, attitudes, and comportment of Jesus.’⁹⁴ Boff acknowledges the limitations of an historical-critical interpretation of Jesus, namely that it does not account for the experience of the ‘researcher’, producing an incompatibility between the subject and the object, and therefore, lacks religious comprehension. He observes that this incompatibility is, ‘since the time of Schleiermacher, normally called the hermeneutic circle.’ The result of this scheme is that in the present, ‘Jesus is known not only through the study, replete with faith, of

⁸⁹ Ibid, 47.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 160.

⁹¹ Ibid, 89.

⁹² Ferm, 30.

⁹³ L. Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 231.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 13.

the Gospel texts, but principally through the community of faith called church.⁹⁵ Boff comments,

[W]e cannot simply speak *about* Jesus as we would speak about other objects. We can only speak *with him as a starting point*, as people touched by the significance of his reality. We come to him with that which we are and have, inserted into an unavoidable socio-historical context. ... Consequently, a Christology thought out and vitally tested in Latin America must have characteristics of its own.⁹⁶

It is important to note here that Boff sees the value of making use of non-Latin American sources in his task: 'The predominantly foreign literature that we cite ought not to delude anyone. It is with preoccupations that are ours alone, taken from our Latin American context, that we will reread not only the old text of the New Testament but also the most recent commentaries written in Europe. The facts will [then] be situated within other coordinates and will be projected within an appropriate [Latin American] horizon.'⁹⁷ Elsewhere, Boff also acknowledges, 'Whether we wish it or not, we are inheritors of the christological discussions of the last decades, though the questions will be framed within our Latin American horizons.' He appeals to Kierkegaard: 'Be quiet, recollect yourself, because it is the Absolute,' as well as how this phrase was repeated by Bonhoeffer 'as he began his treatise on Jesus Christ.'⁹⁸

In exploring where Christ might be found today, Boff argues that the 'resurrected Jesus is present and active in a special way in those who in the vast ambit of history and life carry forward his cause.' This occurs 'independent[ly] of their ideological colorings or adhesion to some religion of Christian belief.'⁹⁹ This is valuable in the project of justifying the authority of the praxis of the poor (and how this praxis

⁹⁵ Ibid, 39.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 43.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 43.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 47.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 219.

might function in a parabolic manner) as Boff contends that the presence of the resurrected Jesus is found '[w]herever people seek the good, justice, humanitarian love, solidarity, communion, and understanding between people, wherever they dedicate themselves to overcoming their own egoism, making this world more human and fraternal, and opening themselves to the normative Transcendent for their lives'. In these places, 'we can say, with all certainty, that the resurrected one is present, because the cause for which he lived, suffered, was tried and executed is being carried forward.'¹⁰⁰ For Boff, this presence is experienced more profoundly within the lives of avowed Christians, 'those who have opted to follow him and imitate him in faith, love, and explicit adhesion to his divine reality and absolute meaning for our existence before God.'¹⁰¹ Through this presence, Jesus does bring a new church, but an entirely new order – the kingdom of God.

B. Ecclesiogenesis

Although Leonardo Boff has produced a large number of works exploring liberation theology (both during and after the 'first wave' phase), his ecclesiology as expressed in *Ecclesiogenesis* is of particular value in this exploration of the first wave at this stage. Published in 1977, it expresses Boff's understanding of how the CEBs 'reinvent' the Church through their very being.

As is found within his criteria for a Latin American Christology, Boff sees the function of the community of the faithful as anthropological, communal and characterised by praxis. This includes the need for oppressed peoples to organise for

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 219.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 220.

liberating action. In living out this existence, the Christian life within CEBs 'is characterized by the absence of alienating structures, by direct relationships, by reciprocity, by a deep communion, by mutual assistance, by communality of gospel ideals, by equality among members.'¹⁰² Boff continues with his thesis that Jesus did not come to establish a new church, but to bring the kingdom.¹⁰³ As a result, Boff sees the CEBs as an opportunity to 'de-privatise' the Christian faith. He does not suggest doing away with the institutional Church, but acknowledges that the institutional Church and the CEBs function in very different ways. He writes, '[The] basic church communities, while signifying the communitarian aspect of Christianity, and signifying it within the church, cannot pretend to constitute a global alternative to the church as an institution. They can only be its ferment for renewal.'¹⁰⁴ As part of that renewal, CEBs can be more open to ecclesial transformation, which leads Boff to a reflection on the concept of ministries within the Church. He argues that the closed or open nature of ministries within the Church is predicated upon the particular model of church. In a hierarchical model, inequality is assumed necessarily. The same cannot be said of CEBs: 'The basic communities concretize a conception of church as a communion of sisters and brothers, as church-community, church-body-of-Christ, church-People-of-God.'¹⁰⁵ This opens the door for his later discussion of the possibility of laypersons leading in celebrations of the sacraments.

Boff concludes *Ecclesiogenesis* with this exploration the sacraments and highlights that the 'history of the sacraments shows us that for all or nearly all of the sacraments there are extraordinary ministers... Could there be such for the

¹⁰² L. Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis*, 4.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 47.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 6.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 27.

eucharist?’¹⁰⁶ This prompts another theological reflection: are women not part of the universal priesthood of the Church? Here, Boff considers the conformist nature of the Church and argues that ‘[all] official faith institutions are male in their tone.’¹⁰⁷ Therefore, it would not be appropriate for a woman to simply ‘slot in’ to an ecclesiastical role preassigned to men. He states, ‘[women] should articulate their priesthood in their own way.’¹⁰⁸ Being that he is writing in the context of CEBs, Boff does not go so far as to suggest an institutional shift with regard to women in the priesthood explicitly. Instead, as he sees these base ecclesial communities as the laboratories for the reinvention, it is not difficult to see how this same principle might apply to the Church as a whole. Even here are found hints at the advances championed in the second wave of liberation theology.

V. Juan Luis Segundo

The body of material that defines, theorises, outlines and reflects upon this first wave of liberation theology is vast. Even in these early years, the movement faced additional challenges—both from within the Church and from academics and theologians—and the first wave moved into new phases, building on earlier texts and presenting new methodologies. This pertains to fourth text I will explore, *Liberación de la teología* (English: *The Liberation of Theology*), which was written by the Uruguayan Jesuit priest Juan Luis Segundo (1925-1996) and published in 1975.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 69.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 89.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 89.

A. *The Liberation of Theology*

The Liberation of Theology is based on a series of lectures Segundo delivered at Harvard Divinity School the previous year.¹⁰⁹ In this work, Segundo explores how the task of liberation theology as ‘challenging the non-Christian ideological elements in theology and in traditional presentations of the Christian message.’¹¹⁰ As the title suggests, in the continuing development of liberation theology, it is the field of theology *itself* that requires liberation. Segundo writes, ‘My past and present experience has taught me that theology... continues to be taught in an autonomous way’, both ‘with respect to future professors of theology’ and ‘with respect to average people who will only use theology vis-à-vis the real-life problems that face ordinary people.’¹¹¹ By ‘autonomous’, Segundo is referring to theology’s dependence on the Bible, but he is quick to acknowledge that theology is not ‘immune to the ideological tendencies and struggles of the present day.’¹¹² Liberation theology is distinct from traditional theology in that it is suspicious that ‘anything and everything involving ideas, including theology, is intimately bound up with existing social situation in at least an unconscious way.’¹¹³ According to Segundo, the ideologies that underpin theology often reflect the ‘voice of the ruling classes and their selfish interests’ rather than the ‘voice of Christ’.¹¹⁴

To test the ideological assumptions of a given theology so as to liberate it, Segundo employs the ‘hermeneutic circle’ (a term which was explored only briefly by Leonardo Boff in *Jesus Christ Liberator*). In Segundo’s particular scheme, this circle

¹⁰⁹ Barger, 47.

¹¹⁰ McGovern, 40.

¹¹¹ Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology*, trans. John Drury (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1977), 7.

¹¹² *Ibid*, 7.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 8.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 42.

is characterised by ‘the continuing change in our interpretation of the Bible which is dictated by the continuing changes in our present-day reality, both individual and societal.’¹¹⁵ In order to relate the past to the present in a meaningful way, Segundo argues that this task must make use of its own methodology. He draws on German Lutheran theologian Rudolf Bultmann’s method of ‘interpreting the Scriptures, and the New Testament in particular.’¹¹⁶

Segundo’s hermeneutic circle has two preconditions. The first is that it asks questions that are ‘profound and enriching’ and are ‘suspicious about our real situation’ and the second is that it provides ‘a new interpretation of the Bible that is equally profound and enriching.’¹¹⁷ Among other ideologies, he applies this to sociology, with a special emphasis on Marx. Segundo determines that Marxism is unable to complete the circle. While he observes that Ricœur regards Marx, Freud and Nietzsche as ‘great masters of “suspicion”’, Segundo argues that Marx ‘does not seem to have ever entertained the suspicion that ideology could have warped the thinking of the theologians and interpreters of Scripture so that they ended up unwittingly interpreting it in a sense that served the interests of the ruling classes.’¹¹⁸ Instead, Marx ‘takes the

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 8.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 8.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 9.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 17. For one take on Ricœur’s ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’, see Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 32-3. This suspicion of a distorted theology due to flawed ideology would be ‘entertained’ by German Marxist Ernst Bloch (1885-1977) of the Frankfurt School. Writing in 1972, Bloch concludes that, upon analysing the Christian Bible, the reputed motto inscribed on sixteenth-century German peasant leader, Florian Geyer’s sword—‘*Nulla crux, nulla corona*’, ‘No cross, no crown’—‘could be the motto of a Christianity free, at last, from alienation. And the far-reaching, inexhaustible depths of emancipation in those words could also serve as a motto for a Marxism aware of its depths.’ See Ernst Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity*, trans. J. T. Swann (London: Verso, 2009), 256. As Segundo concerns himself with the writings of Marx, rather than Marxism, in this section, he does not acknowledge Bloch’s position.

easy way out of disqualifying religion in general insofar as he views it as an autonomous and ahistorical monolith.¹¹⁹

Segundo also explores the work of German philosopher Max Weber (1864-1920), who, alongside Marx, is considered one of the founders of the field of sociology. In particular, Segundo is interested in how Weber relates Calvinism and capitalism in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (published in German as *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus* in 1905). As is the case with Marx, Segundo argues that Weber does not complete the hermeneutic circle due to detached perspective:

Weber is not interested in finding a more authentic and richer theology to liberate people from the anxiety and loneliness which, among other things, are part of the influence of Calvinist theology on their society. For the sake of extending the range of knowledge as far as possible, Weber simply wants to make comparisons between different religious ideas insofar as they exert influence on different economic attitudes. There is no personal commitment involved.¹²⁰

Segundo determines that such a lack of commitment is the result of ‘a certain type of academicism which posits ideological neutrality as the ultimate criterion’, making the completion of the hermeneutic circle impossible.¹²¹

B. Completing the Hermeneutic Circle

Segundo’s fourth and final sample attempt at completing the hermeneutic circle comes in the form of a lengthy engagement with American Black theologian James H. Cone (1936-2018) and his 1970 book, *A Black Theology of Liberation*. Segundo observes Cone’s ‘consciously accepted partiality’ and makes sure to note that this

¹¹⁹ Segundo, 17.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 24.

¹²¹ Ibid, 25.

does not delimit the potential for universality.¹²² Even with this caution, Segundo demonstrates that Cone's theology meets this universal standard. While Cone's theology is specific in that it demonstrates clear and decisive commitment—arguing that 'Black Theology will not spend too much time trying to answer the critics *because it is accountable only to the black community*.'¹²³—Segundo contends that '[t]he universality that is renounced on the horizontal level is recovered in spades on a deeper level of the human condition—i.e., where it is revealed to us in an oppressed community that is still in need of liberation.'¹²⁴ Cone also demonstrates an awareness 'of ideological mechanisms and takes them into account in his theologizing'.¹²⁵ Segundo uses the example of how Cone acknowledges the inevitable influence of 'white theology' on Black theology:

[O]ppression always means that the communication skills of an oppressed community are determined to a large degree by the oppressors. That is precisely the meaning of oppression! Since black theologians are trained in white seminaries and white thinkers make decisions about the structure and scope of theology, it is not possible for black religionists to separate themselves *immediately* from white thought.¹²⁶

In this uncovering of ideological mechanisms, Cone is able to fulfil the third stage of the hermeneutical circle 'with a new experience of theology and with an act of will to place it in the service of the Black community. Thus the new direction to be taken by scriptural interpretation will be dictated by the uncovering of the mechanisms of ideology and by the will to root them out of theology.'¹²⁷ Therefore, the hermeneutical circle is completed in Cone's assertion 'that orthodoxy possesses no ultimate criterion

¹²² Ibid, 25-6.

¹²³ James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2010), 10, as quoted in Segundo, 26.

¹²⁴ Segundo, 26.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 27.

¹²⁶ Cone, 65, as quoted in Segundo, 27.

¹²⁷ Segundo, 29.

in itself' as one 'arrive[s] at the [final truth] by orthopraxis.'¹²⁸ In this same sense, Segundo considers Barth's 'crucial question for theology' to be akin to the approach of liberation theology in its 'profound concern to rely solely and exclusively on divine revelation and to rule out divine constructs fashioned by human thought', casting suspicion on 'the dangers of idolatry stemming from philosophy and to the dangers stemming from the ideologies that are inevitably bound up with the socio-political struggle.'¹²⁹

In working through how theology must be liberated, Segundo turns to politics and determines that every 'theology is political'.¹³⁰ Any theology will prove itself as valuable, within the scheme of Segundo's hermeneutical circle, not as a result of the product of 'theology', which can be manipulated by ideology, but in the assumptions behind any hermeneutical methodology. Liberation theology distinguishes itself because it 'consciously and explicitly accepts its relationship with politics.'¹³¹ He then levels this criticism against 'academic theology': 'When academic theology accuses liberation theology of being political and engaging in politics, thus ignoring its own tie-up with the political status quo it is really looking for a scapegoat to squelch its own guilt complex.'¹³² With this in mind, Segundo reiterates Gutiérrez's fundamental argument that theology is the second step in the process of developing a liberation theology. The first step is that of commitment, in particular, 'a personal commitment to the oppressed.'¹³³ Ideology cannot be separated from faith, but through this

¹²⁸ Ibid, 32.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 45.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 74.

¹³¹ Ibid, 75.

¹³² Ibid, 75.

¹³³ Ibid, 81.

commitment, both ideology and the resultant faith can be tested and refined through experience.

VI. James Cone & *A Black Theology of Liberation*

Although Black theology is overlooked largely within the first wave of Latin American liberation theology (with the notable exception of Segundo's engagement with Cone above), its place in a broader exploration of the first wave (and its subsequent influence on the second wave) ought not be overlooked. In 1969, a year after the CELAM conference at Medellín, Cone published *Black Theology and Black Power*, considered by American Black theologian Dwight N. Hopkins to be the 'first coherent theological book' of Black theology.¹³⁴ But I argue that it is in a further exploration of Cone's subsequent work, the aforementioned *A Black Theology of Liberation*, that can be seen as the fullest expression of this early Black liberation theology. Here, Cone defines Christian theology as 'a theology of liberation.' In other words, 'It is a rational study of the being of God in the world in light of the existential situation of an oppressed community, relating the forces of liberation to the essence of the gospel, which is Jesus Christ.'¹³⁵

According to Cone, the very advent of Black theology arises from the reality of the dominance of an 'American white theology' that does not 'relate the gospel of Jesus to the pain of being black in a white racist society.'¹³⁶ In order to maintain a Black theology that challenges 'the oppressive character of white society', this Black theology must 'begin by affirming [its] identity in terms of the reality that is anti-white.'

¹³⁴ Dwight N. Hopkins and Edward P. Antonio, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Black Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 15.

¹³⁵ Cone, 1.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 5.

As such, 'blackness' is seen in this context—as 'poverty' is seen in the context of the first wave in Latin America—as the most adequate symbol of the dimensions of divine activity in America.¹³⁷ Cone considers divine activity 'inseparable from black history'. He writes, 'If God is not for us, if God is not against white racists, then God is a murderer, and we had better kill God.'¹³⁸ What Cone means by this is that it is the task of Black theology—in light of black history and reality—to destroy false gods, idols, that do not represent the liberation inherent to the Christian God, much akin to Segundo's use of the hermeneutics of suspicion.

As was explored by Segundo in *The Liberation of Theology*, Cone appeals to a warning from Barth, that Christians must avoid bringing God under the 'management' of humanity, and comments that Black theology 'is aware of the danger of identifying the world of human beings with the word of God.'¹³⁹ Cone argues that while Barth's warning is 'appropriate for the situation in which it was given', such a warning is 'not for blacks in America'.¹⁴⁰

Cone returns to his engagement with Barth for his fourth source of Black theology, namely that of revelation. Revelation comes at this point in Cone's analysis as he writes that it is not 'comprehensible from a black theological perspective without a prior understanding of the concrete manifestation of revelation in the black community as seen in the black experience, black history, and black culture' because revelation is something that occurs in human history.¹⁴¹ Cone argues that, for white American theology, the revelation of God through Jesus Christ is something 'confined

¹³⁷ Ibid, 8.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 28.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 28.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 28.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 31.

to the first century'. This disables theology from being able to see the way that God's revelation is at work in the here and now. Cone writes,

For black theology, revelation is not *just* a past event or a contemporary event in which it is difficult to recognize the activity of God. *Revelation is a black event*—it is what blacks are doing about their liberation. I have spoken of the black experience, black history, and black culture as theological sources because they are God at work liberating the oppressed.¹⁴²

Cone goes to far as to say that, within American society, '[there] can be no other medium for encountering the contemporary revelatory event of God' apart from Black theology.¹⁴³

Subsequent works of Black theology challenge and build upon *A Black Theology of Liberation*.¹⁴⁴ Not negating the specific experience of blacks in America, later Black theology, associated with the second wave of liberation theology, adopts a more inclusive language of both blacks *and the poor*. In his introduction to 2002's *Heart and Head: Black Theology – Past, Present, and Future*, Hopkins writes, 'Black theology is the interplay between the pain of oppression and the promise of liberation found in the Bible, on one hand, and a similar existence experienced by African Americans and poor people today.'¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Ibid, 31-2.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 32.

¹⁴⁴ It is valuable to note here that, relatively early on, the issue of feminism became a major feature of Black theology. In 1979, American black theologian Jacquelyn Grant published the article 'Black Theology and Black Woman'. For Grant, all previous Black theology had been done from the perspective of 'Black male experiences'. We will explore feminist perspectives of liberation theology in the second wave in our following section. See Hopkins, 'A Black Theology of Liberation,' *Black Theology* 3, no.1 (January 2005), 19-20. Further exploration of the development of Black feminist theology, known as 'Womanist theology', is explored in the next chapter.

¹⁴⁵ Dwight N. Hopkins, *Heart and Head: Black Theology – Past, Present, and Future* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 7. For a helpful look at the first wave's relationship to Black theology, see George C. L. Cummings, *A Common Journey: Black Theology (USA) and Latin American Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1990).

VII. José Severino Croatto

The final written text explored in this chapter comes from José Severino Croatto, who was born in Sampacho, Córdoba, Argentina in 1930. After studies in Argentina and Rome, he was ordained as a priest and held various teaching positions, including a post at the *Instituto Superior Evangélico de Estudios Teológicos* (English: Higher Evangelical Institute of Theological Studies, or 'ISEDET') in Buenos Aires in 1975, becoming the first Catholic to teach at the Protestant seminary. Before taking up this post, he had published several works, including 1973's *Liberación y libertad: Pautas hermenéuticas* (literally, 'Liberation and Freedom: Hermeneutical Guidelines' and published in English as *Exodus: A Hermeneutics of Freedom* in 1981). That work explores the Book of Exodus through the lens of a Ricœurian hermeneutic, but it is in a later short work, 1984's *Hermenéutica bíblica: Para una teoría de la lectura como producción sentido* (English: *Biblical Hermeneutics: Toward a Theory of Reading as the Production of Meaning*) that further implementation of the thought of Ricœur pertains to the relationship between praxis and the production of meaning, leading to an approach that is especially relevant to the aim of this thesis.

Biblical Hermeneutics

In opening *Biblical Hermeneutics*, Croatto analyses three major hermeneutical phases throughout history. The first he presents is that of the 'modern era', propagated by the likes of Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricœur. The 'theological offshoots' of the modern era (as Croatto labels them), such as 'Fuchs, Ebeling, Bultmann and the post-Bultmannians', are 'pre-Ricouerian, and particularly

concerned to assign as special value to the biblical *word* as present “event”.¹⁴⁶ This approach, with a special emphasis on Ricoeur (who ‘[looks] not only at what lies “behind” a text, but at what lies “in front of” it’), is Croatto’s preferred hermeneutical method (as opposed to the two other phases which Croatto outlines: ‘the Middle Ages’ and ‘Philo of Alexandria’).¹⁴⁷ While this outline (and his subsequent outline of five historical methods for biblical hermeneutics) is a profound oversimplification of the complexity of hermeneutical approaches throughout history, Croatto uses this brief analysis as mere introductory material in order to set the stage for what he wishes to argue:

The point of departure of this work is the conviction that the Bible is not a closed deposit that has already ‘said’ it all. It is a text that speaks to us in the present. But it speaks as a *text*—not as a generic exhortation to spur our decision-making. ...

[The] interpreter *enlarges* the *meaning* of the text being interpreted.¹⁴⁸

While he argues that he is contributing nothing new (‘I shall be inventing nothing’¹⁴⁹), he seeks to develop a theory of hermeneutics based on Ricoeur’s sense of production of meaning (as is made clear in the English title of the book).

In order to accomplish this aim, he devotes the first chapter of *Biblical Hermeneutics* to a reading of Ricoeur’s work primarily, expressing the necessary move from semiotics to hermeneutics. In this move, Croatto presents the distinction between ‘language’ and ‘speech’. While language is a mere system of signs, it is ‘activated’ by ‘having it *used to say something about something*’.¹⁵⁰ Therefore, language can have

¹⁴⁶ J. Severino Croatto, *Biblical Hermeneutics: Toward a Theory of Reading as the Production of Meaning*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1987), 3.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 3.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, ix, 1.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, ix.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 14. See Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 128-133.

meaning in the closure presented through the procedure of *sending, receiving* and setting in a *context* or 'horizon of understanding'.¹⁵¹ This amounts to the act of *discourse*. While the 'sender', 'receiver' and 'horizon' of a discourse disappear when the discourse is closed ('The author, as someone "speaking," disappears and can no longer be interviewed for the meaning of what he or she has "said"'), the 'appearance of a new *receiver*' calls for the doing of hermeneutics.¹⁵² It is in this hermeneutical act that reading becomes the production of meaning, as opposed to the mere discovery of pre-extant meaning.

After exploring the 'facts of language that will help to explain the hermeneutical phenomenon'¹⁵³, in the second chapter, Croatto moves into the primary focus of *Biblical Hermeneutics* – praxis and interpretation. He acknowledges the plurality of readings so far as there is a plurality of 'new receivers'. These new receivers come to the text with 'a practice, an important event, a worldview, a state of oppression, a liberation process, and experience of grace and salvation, or the like.'¹⁵⁴ With each of these 'events', the text is brought into 'a form of closure, and therefore of interpretation.' Interpretation is an inevitable part of approaching any text. In order to demonstrate the production of meaning in the light of historical context, Croatto makes reference to the Book of Joshua, when the Israelites cross the River Jordan.¹⁵⁵ As heirs to the Hebrew tradition, this crossing is interpreted in light of the crossing of the Red Sea in the Exodus event. In this way, a context or horizon does not produce meaning in the form of 'a simple cause-and-effect relationship, in which the cause may

¹⁵¹ Croatto, 14.

¹⁵² Ibid, 16-17.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 13.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 36.

¹⁵⁵ Joshua 3-5.

just as well disappear once the effect is produced, having no relationship of meaning with it.¹⁵⁶ Resultantly, the 'originary' event (in this context, the crossing of the Red Sea) is seen as a 'founding' event when viewed at a distance, in light of new events (the crossing of the River Jordan). Croatto determines that 'any "historist" reading of the biblical texts will be impoverishing.'¹⁵⁷ The Exodus event of crossing the Red Sea is not confined, but its significance 'overspills' into the new event.¹⁵⁸

Croatto acknowledges the conflict between closure and openness (monosemy and polysemy), with each interpretation, arising from different contexts or horizons, 'seeking to appropriate *all* meaning.'¹⁵⁹ He resolves this tension by arguing that the movement from monosemy to polysemy is cyclical: 'The event is open to many readings, each of which closes the meaning, only to have it opened once more, and so on; the process can be repeated many, many times.'¹⁶⁰ Here, he appeals to *tradition* and *canon*, the former being more open to redaction and the latter being a movement toward closure. While his reference to the supposed canon developed at the Council of Jamnia is problematic in light of contemporary scholarship, he highlights the incongruity of certain Christian canons developed throughout history. Croatto addresses this tension with the concept of inspiration. He writes, 'The relevance conferred on the biblical text because it is *God's revelation* has tended to detract attention from the human process of its production', namely, through the assumption that God has inspired its authors. Yet, in light of the Ricœurian move from semiotics to interpretation in the first chapter of *Biblical Hermeneutics*, the author has

¹⁵⁶ Croatto, 37.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 37.

¹⁵⁸ Croatto uses the additional biblical example of the Book of Isaiah interpreting the return from Babylonian captivity as a 'new exodus' (see Isaiah 11.15-16; 19.16-25; 43.16-21; 51.9-11). Croatto, 39.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 40.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 41.

‘disappeared’: ‘We read a *text*, not an author.’¹⁶¹ Presupposing that God is *the God of history*, ‘[if] inspiration has to do with the veracity of the biblical texts, then it should not be considered to attach to the authors but to the texts themselves.’ In this way, inspiration can be seen as a ‘*textual* phenomenon.’¹⁶²

While Croatto argues that the canon cannot be changed, he points out that commentaries and other literature, such as the Hebrew *targum* and *midrash*, act as ‘re-creative’ forces and that these ‘event-accounts’ can be initiated by ‘the group that does the authoritative rereading of the Old Testament—[such as] the Christian church.’¹⁶³ As ‘[all] reading is production of meaning’ which emerges from particular contexts or horizons, ‘what is genuinely relevant is not the “behind” of a text, but its “ahead,” its “forward”—what it suggests as a pertinent message for the life of the one who receives or seeks it out.’¹⁶⁴

Reading the Bible from the context of the ‘base’ is made difficult due to both the length and complexity of the text as well as the fact that, ‘by and large, ... the Bible is a book put together and structured... by a comfortable middle class generally alienated from the people.’¹⁶⁵ Croatto argues that this is more evident in the Old Testament, ‘where the ideology of the south—of Judah, and of Jerusalem in particular, where the governing class resided—is set in high relief.’ Yet, the Bible is advantageous to ‘a creative, liberative reading’ in that its origin is one ‘of the Israelites as a people... *in a liberation process*.’¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 46.

¹⁶² Ibid, 46-7.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 48.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 50.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 51.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 51.

One way in which Croatto aims to open biblical hermeneutics to new horizons is through an analysis of *intertextuality* and *intratextuality*. He observes the transition of intertextuality to intratextuality within the Book of Amos, which can be divided into two sections ‘of contradictory tenor’. The first (1.1-9.10) is one consisting of prophetic denunciations against the powerful who perpetuate social sins against the powerless. The second (9.11-15) switches tone, proclaiming the ‘restoration of the Davidic dynasty and great future prosperity.’¹⁶⁷ If the Book of Amos is to be read as a single text (that is to say, the reader is apprehending the *text* and not any possible *author* or *authors*), it follows that the condemnation of the first section is not irrevocable and instead, in light of the second section, the promise of God to God’s people may be fulfilled — that in recovering ‘fidelity to the God of liberation’, *that* God ‘will deliver Israel from a new oppression, that of the Babylonian exile.’¹⁶⁸

Further examples of the movement from intertextuality to intratextuality are presented, emphasising the early Church’s rereading of the Old Testament ‘as a *single text* (on the semiotic level) with a single hermeneutic key (the Easter mystery).’ In taking the Hebrew scripture as a single unit, as opposed to jettisoning seemingly irrelevant material (such as the Book of Leviticus), the early Church ‘had no consciousness of a distinctive “founding”’. Instead, ‘it understood itself as the reinterpretation of *Israel*.’¹⁶⁹ Croatto reiterates his argument that reading the Bible from the perspective of the oppressed is in keeping with the origin of the Bible, which ‘was marked by profound experiences of suffering and oppression, liberation and grace, in

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 55.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 56.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 59.

which Israelite faith could recognize the savior God in a liberative dimension.¹⁷⁰ This is not to suggest that the Bible is not universal. Croatto writes,

No one is excluded. All social classes are interdependent. There are texts in the Bible addressed explicitly to the wealthy, to oppressors—and the poor and oppressed hear these texts *as so addressed*, because their status in life is conditioned by that of the privileged. The Bible sets in high relief God's preference for the oppressed, the marginalized, the sick, sinners, and so on. Its message is received by them as hope. At the same time, it is received by those who are responsible for this reality, but in their case it is received as judgment—or as an invitation to conversion.¹⁷¹

For Croatto, this makes reading from the perspective of 'the lowly of the earth' especially 'pertinent'.

In his concluding chapter, Croatto argues that the hermeneutical process of rereading 'is part of the very message of the Bible.'¹⁷² The production of meaning is therefore the result of both exegesis (emerging from the text) and eisegesis ('getting into' the text) and as such, Croatto argues that '*eisegesis is exegesis*.' He writes, 'The two are inseparable in the act of the production of meaning that constitutes a reading.'¹⁷³ When, say, a political reading of the Bible from the perspective of liberation theology is criticised, 'the critic is making an option that is itself political'—calling back to Segundo's insistence that all theology is political— '... seeking to "closure" a reading because its space is taken by another reading of the same genus (the political) but with a different content.'¹⁷⁴ In other words, the process by which the base rereads the Bible is, from the perspective of context, no different from the process by which the status quo rereads the Bible. What is different is that the base rereads the Bible from the context of poverty and oppression.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 60.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 62-3.

¹⁷² Ibid, 68.

¹⁷³ Ibid, 67.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 68.

In Croatto's scheme, revelation is not confined to a conservative boundaries of 'the life of Israel and the lifetime of the apostles, the witness of Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection.' While 'Christ is the crowning point, the highest point, of God's manifestation in salvation history', the Bible demonstrates that 'God is primarily revealed *in the events* of human history.'¹⁷⁵ Croatto asks,

But are we to be left with nothing more than a word to 'illuminate' human events, the vicissitudes of a people or peoples? Is God saying nothing new in the struggles of the oppressed, in the processes of liberation, in the contribution of the human sciences to a deeper knowledge of humankind and its problems, to a knowledge of reality and its oppressive structures, to a knowledge of human creative capacities in their thrust to build a new humankind in a new society?¹⁷⁶

If the God of the Christian faith is the God of history and the God of the poor, then the answer to Croatto's query above must be a resounding 'No!' It is precisely because the God of the Christian faith is the God of history and the God of the poor that Croatto determines that the hermeneutic he has presented 'guarantees the legitimacy of grass-roots theologies such as the theology of liberation.'¹⁷⁷

VIII. Óscar Romero

Returning briefly to Segundo's *Liberation of Theology*, in order for theology to be liberated, it must call into question whether or not its ideologies are coherent with the task of liberation. A tangible example of this is found in the person of Óscar Romero. Although Romero (now *Saint* Óscar Romero) never called himself a 'liberation theologian', I argue that his words, actions and eventual martyrdom reflect the heart of the first wave of liberation theology. Although a later chapter explores his

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 71-2.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 74.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 80.

life and ministry and apply a parabolic hermeneutic to that life and ministry, a more cursory survey of Romero, placing him within the historical context of the first wave, is undertaken here.

Romero was born in Ciudad Barrios, El Salvador in 1917. He first sensed a calling to the priesthood at age thirteen and was ordained at twenty-five.¹⁷⁸ After studies in Rome, Romero returned to El Salvador and became parish priest at Anamorós before moving on to San Miguel, where he served for more than two decades. When he became a bishop in 1970, he would not have been counted among the progressive Salvadoran clergy emerging from the developments of the Second Vatican Council and Medellín. This perception would continue into 1977, when he was appointed Archbishop of San Salvador, the highest ecclesiastical office in the country. His life and ministry would take dramatic turn only seventeen days after his installation.

Rutilio Grande, a Jesuit priest, was a close friend of Romero's, but one of a very different political disposition. In previous years, when the Salvadoran government had acted unjustly, Romero had taken a more docile and complicit stance.¹⁷⁹ The same cannot be said of Grande, who challenged poverty and oppression very vocally and organised *campesinos* (peasant farmers) to press for land reform. In response, on the afternoon of 12 March 1977, Grande was murdered along with two *campesinos*.¹⁸⁰ 'Romero wept openly while holding Father Rutilio's remains.'¹⁸¹ Previously, 'Rutilio had been a problem for Archbishop Romero', writes Spanish-born, Salvadoran Jesuit

¹⁷⁸ Carolyn Kurtz, 'Who Was Oscar Romero?' in Romero, *Scandal of Redemption*, 2.

¹⁷⁹ Kurtz writes, 'Though increasingly trouble by what he saw, he was still attempting to walk a line. When the police massacred five peasants in his district, he protested strongly in a letter to the president but kept his public comments to a minimum.' Romero, 5-6.

¹⁸⁰ Jon Sobrino, *Archbishop Romero: Memories and Reflections*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2016), 1.

¹⁸¹ González and González, 262.

priest Jon Sobrino.¹⁸² After Grande's assassination, as Romero reflected on his friend's life and death, he also reflected on his own life and ministry. 'He understood very soon that, as archbishop, he must clarify for the people the nature of the church—explain its prophetic denunciation and its defense of the poor.'¹⁸³ Romero excommunicated those who had committed the assassination, but remained faithful to the gospel: 'My dear criminals, we want to tell you that we love you and we ask God to pour forth repentance into your hearts.'¹⁸⁴

A Prophetic Archbishop

Romero's attack on the powerful oppressors grew, and as a steady stream of more killings by right-wing forces came to the attention of the nation, so too did Romero's prophetic words:

We have never preached violence, except the violence of love that led Christ to be nailed to a cross. We preach only the violence that we must each do to ourselves to overcome selfishness and to eliminate the cruel inequalities among us. This is not the violence of the sword, the violence of hatred. It is the violence of love and fraternity, the violence that chooses to beat weapons into sickles for work.¹⁸⁵

In his homilies, Romero would recount the terrible news of the preceding week and make plain the inconsistencies of the 'official version' of various instances. He exposed the complicity of the government in the countless assassinations. These homilies were broadcast across the nation, drawing such wrath from his opponents that the radio station from which his homilies were transmitted was bombed, twice.¹⁸⁶ Though not a liberation theologian in name, Romero saw liberation as central to the Christian faith:

¹⁸² Sobrino, 8.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 11.

¹⁸⁴ Romero, 8.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 10.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 11.

The word 'liberation' bothers many people, but it is the reality of Christ's redemption. Liberation does not mean only redemption after death, so that people should just conform to the system while they are alive. No, liberation is redemption that is already beginning on this earth. Liberation means that the exploitation of one human being by another no longer exists in the world. Liberation means redemption that seeks to free people from every form of slavery.¹⁸⁷

His prophetic voice caused controversy with the Church hierarchy and he faced opposition from 'all but one of his fellow bishops' in El Salvador.¹⁸⁸

The atmosphere in El Salvador was growing more hostile and in increasing numbers, those who spoke out against the oppressors faced dire consequences. During his time as archbishop, a period of only three years, 'dozens of priests who spoke out against the violence of the regime and the economic inequalities of the country were imprisoned, tortured, or expelled. Five were murdered.'¹⁸⁹ Still, Romero persisted, and his ministry was by no means limited to public proclamation of the gospel message. He was a prolific writer of pastoral letters and he was often found visiting CEBs, where he was never above being a student of the poor and their experiences.

Throughout his homilies, the presentation his ecclesiastical position as an archbishop—part of and subject to institutional Church—is melded with his ideological transformation toward the praxis of the poor. In his homily from 15 July 1979, Romero speaks of how 'Christ has Entrusted Us with a Prophetic Mission'. When he speaks of 'us', he is identifying himself and the institution with the people of El Salvador, namely, the poor and oppressed of El Salvador, 'the prophetic people'.¹⁹⁰ He declares, 'The

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 107.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 12.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 13.

¹⁹⁰ Óscar Romero, *A Prophetic Bishop Speaks to his People: The Complete Homilies of Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero*, vol. 5, trans. Joseph V. Owens (Miami: Convivium Press, 2016), 121.

struggle is to free people from all forms of earthly slavery. That is why we cannot be a true people of God if we want to talk only about confessing our personal sins in order to be free of them, but then refuse to struggle also against the injustice around us.’¹⁹¹

In another homily from that same year, Romero preaches about how the Church is to live in a manner that ‘Prolongs the Priestly Liberation of Christ’, commending Christians to ‘never grow weary of denouncing the idolatry of wealth, which makes human greatness consist in simply *having* and forgets that true greatness consists in *being*.’ He also declares that the Church ‘must also denounce and unmask ... the idolization of power’.¹⁹²

For Romero, the programme of God, the God who ‘comes to save in history’ is done in collaboration with the people: ‘The tremendous role of the church is to make the project of God’s history a reality within the history of humankind; her job is to see that God’s history is reflected in the concrete activities of the people and to endorse everything that mirrors God’s salvation project in history.’¹⁹³ These concrete activities are tied directly to the experience of the poor, stating, ‘True poverty means being preferentially concerned for the poor as if their cause were our own. That is why we must feel that we also are poor and depend for our strength on God in every situation.’¹⁹⁴ As is the case with Segundo’s use of the hermeneutics of suspicion, Romero argues that this can only be accomplished through a conversion which ‘will [only] be lasting and profound if we are capable of criticizing our false way of viewing the world and its people.’ Romero states,

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 121.

¹⁹² Ibid, 452-3.

¹⁹³ Óscar Romero, *A Prophetic Bishop Speaks to his People: The Complete Homilies of Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero*, vol. 6, trans. Joseph V. Owens (Miami: Convivium Press, 2016), 45.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, 73.

You have to learn to examine the world and the people in it and to judge them by your own criteria. Christians must learn to fine-tune their Christian criteria. The wealthy must be able to criticize their own world of affluence; why are they so rich, and why are there so many poor people all around them? ... What I mean to say with all this is that we must not live our lives according to what others say or according to society's norms.¹⁹⁵

So potent was Romero's prophetic message of liberation for the poor and condemnation of the powerful that he would meet the same tragic fate as his friend Grande. While leading a memorial mass on 24 March 1980, Romero was assassinated by a gunman. Even in death, Romero continued to speak to Latin America. Gutiérrez writes, 'Oscar Romero... tolled like a bell, loud enough to awaken the most indifferent to such events. Surrender to death – unsought but serenely accepted – has been a sign of many within the Christian community in Latin America.'¹⁹⁶

Conclusion

Beginning with the shift in ecclesiastical attitudes that arose from the Second Vatican Council, this chapter has explored how the 1968 CELAM conference at Medellín and the early writings of Gutiérrez, Boff and Segundo established liberation theology as an academic discipline. These early stages brought together the praxis of poor communities in Latin America with sociological analysis in order to produce a robust methodology for a new way of doing the theological task. Within the six significant written texts and the lived text of Romero's life and ministry, the assumptions of the God of history and the God of the poor have been expounded upon and have yielded pertinent conclusions, not only for the movement from the first wave

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 77.

¹⁹⁶ Gustavo Gutiérrez, 'The task and content of liberation theology' in Christopher Rowland, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 34.

to the second wave of liberation theology, but also for the eventual task of exploring how the praxis of prominent players (both individuals and wider groups) in liberation theology might be interpreted in a parabolic way in order to enrich the field of liberation theology and its potential for ecclesial and societal transformation.

In addition to establishing the basic framework for liberation theology, the first wave texts explored in this chapter also give some indication of the tidal changes that would go on to form the second wave of liberation theology. Alongside the principles established, such as the concepts of the God of history and the God of the poor, the essential relationship between praxis as the first step and liberation theology as the second step, other emphases bear particular importance to the changes that would follow. This is perhaps most evident in Segundo's *The Liberation of Theology* in which he not only explores Cone's Black theology, but also provides the methodological basis for a hermeneutics of suspicion that would challenge greater systems of oppression beyond those affecting the poor.

The exploration of the first wave of liberation theology throughout this chapter is admittedly brief. Many more thinkers and texts could be explored. Additionally, as the field has continued to grow, it has continued to engage with different ideas and criticisms, from CEBs as well as from pastors and academics (the popular, pastoral and professional levels of Leonardo and Clodovis Boff's scheme).¹⁹⁷ It is also important to note that the thinking of the liberation theologians explored in this chapter—especially Gutiérrez, Boff, Segundo, Cone and Croatto—did not remain static following these early years. Segundo, Cone and Croatto continued to write and

¹⁹⁷ Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1987), 13.

teach until their deaths in 1996, 2004 and 2018, respectively. Both Gutiérrez and especially Boff have remained significant voices within the second wave of liberation theology.

As is explored in the next chapter, the first wave has faced many criticisms since its earliest days. The motivations of many of these critics are clear, as they represent the very power structures that preserve the ideological status quo and therefore contribute to the oppression within society. Still, other critics cannot be written off so readily, the most exciting of which are those who see fit to engage with the discussion and bring with them helpful correctives and new insights of the second wave. At this stage, perhaps what is most valuable to remember is that as both a movement and a contextual practice, liberation theology has never been a rigid dogma. As such, it is free to grow, expand and adapt so as to maintain its essential character of critical reflection on praxis that is liberating in character, demonstrates a preference for the oppressed and calls forth social revolution.

CHAPTER TWO

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THE SECOND WAVE OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY (1984 - present)

Introduction

In the twenty-fifth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew is found the last of Jesus' four great discourses before his crucifixion. Opening what is sometimes referred to as 'The Judgement of the Nations', Jesus speaks of 'the Son of Man com[ing] in his glory'. This 'Son of Man' will then 'sit on the throne of his glory.'¹ Elsewhere in Matthew, this concept of the Son of Man sitting on a throne is linked with judgment.² After taking up the throne, '[all] the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.'³ Jesus then speaks favourably of the sheep and less favourably of the goats. The identity of these two parties as well as of 'the least of these' are matters of much debate within biblical studies. Given Jesus' description of the least of these (hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick, imprisoned) and that he is delivering this teaching *to his disciples*, one can conclude that here Jesus is referring to the kingdom marker of caring for those who are poor and in need, something that is emphasised often throughout Jesus' teaching in the Gospels.⁴

This passage from Matthew presents the reader with a double-barrelled question: who are 'the least of these' and how broadly might concern for 'the least'

¹ Matthew 25.31.

² Ibid 16.27 and 19.28, which are drawn from Daniel 7.13-14. See Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2008), 549.

³ Matthew 25.32.

⁴ For a fuller discussion of the interpretive issues surrounding this passage, see Snodgrass, 543-64.

open eyes to see the scope of the liberating activity of God? In pursuing a new way of approaching praxis (which lies at the heart of liberation theology) through an analysis of praxis as parable, the first chapter of this thesis explored the context in which liberation theology first emerged in Latin America (and in the United States through the work of James Cone). Here, I continue this pursuit through an exploration of the question above as addressed by the second wave of liberation theology.

Emerging from conflict within the Catholic Church regarding the first wave of liberation theology in the mid-1980s—exemplified by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s Instruction on Certain Aspects of the ‘Theology of Liberation’ (*Libertatis Nuntius*, 1984)—Italian theologian Rosino Gibellini produced *Il Dibattito sulla Teologia della Liberazione* in 1986 (published in English as *The Liberation Theology Debate* in 1987). After outlining the development of the first wave of liberation theology from 1968, Gibellini concludes the book by posing the question, ‘Where is the theology of liberation going?’⁵ He addresses this question in conversation with Clodovis Boff, younger brother of Leonardo Boff, who, alongside Jon Sobrino, Gibellini considers to be representative of the ‘second generation of Latin American liberation theologians.’⁶

Gibellini’s discussion with Clodovis Boff focuses largely on the latter’s epistemology as presented in *Theology and Praxis* (1978), namely, that unlike the priority given to philosophical mediation employed in ‘European and North Atlantic theology’, liberation theology employs ‘socio-analytical mediation’, making use of social sciences and is therefore based on the praxis of the faith communities. Gibellini writes, ‘The theology of liberation arises out of the linkage of socio-analytical mediation

⁵ Rosino Gibellini, *The Liberation Theology Debate*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1986), 88-95.

⁶ *Ibid*, 88.

with hermeneutical mediation.⁷ In employing this socio-analytical mediation (a term coined by Hugo Assmann), liberation theology ‘comes up against the social sciences’, according to Boff.⁸ This happens as a result of the conflict between the faithful and their specific situation of poverty and oppression in the context of Latin America (and elsewhere). Here, Boff reinforces the ‘organic, indeed umbilical relationship’ between liberation theology and base ecclesial communities (CEBs). ‘If the theology of liberation detaches itself from this context, it makes itself absolutely incomprehensible.’⁹ This line then prompts the question of Marxism in liberation theology, which is used in only an instrumental way by CEBs and, in turn, liberation theologians. Boff repeats this reduction of the use of Marxism within the first wave of liberation theology in the 1990 volume *Mysterium Liberationis*.¹⁰ Rather than functioning at the service of Marxism, Boff sees liberation theology as having ‘a critical and corrective relationship with it’. He writes, ‘The church communities sense where Marxism does not give an explanation, where it is limited, and they go beyond it’.¹¹

For Boff, it is a movement beyond both of the systems capitalism and Marxism that undergirds the first wave of liberation theology’s aim to develop ‘a more humane historical programme’.¹² In order to accomplish this aim, Boff makes clear that the ‘first attitude of theologians of liberation is that of listening’.¹³ The first wave assumes that the praxis of CEBs is authoritative, speaking reality into the reflections of theologians

⁷ Ibid, 88.

⁸ Ibid, 89.

⁹ Ibid, 89.

¹⁰ Clodovis Boff in Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino, eds, *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, trans. the Department of Books and Libraries of the Spanish Ministry of Culture (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1993), 76-7.

¹¹ Gibellini, 90.

¹² Ibid, 91. Perhaps rather curiously, this expression of a humane movement beyond both capitalism and Marxism coheres with Pope John Paul II’s 1981 encyclical, *Laborem exercens* (‘Through Work’).

¹³ Ibid, 93.

and clerics alike, existing in autonomous and complementary communion with one another. This is seen not a threat to the authority of the Church, but as a proper functioning of the *magisterium*.¹⁴ From Boff's point of view, the criticisms that arose because of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's *Instructions* from 1984 and 1986 propelled the conversation of liberation theology into a more universal sphere, as was one of Gustavo Gutiérrez's stated intentions in writing 1971's *A Theology of Liberation*.¹⁵

As expressed in the previous chapter, the first wave of liberation theology is best understood as a 'movement', in a constant state of evolution, based upon continual critical reflection on and alongside the praxis of the poor. In response to the challenges faced by the movement the 1980s, the first wave has been compelled to make more significant shifts beyond its steady reinvention. The resultant liberation theologies that have emerged from these shifts constitute the second wave of liberation theology. In response to the question raised from the Gospel of Matthew—who are 'the least of these' and how broadly might concern for 'the least' open up our eyes to see the scope of the liberating activity of God?—a significant portion of this chapter will explore the broadening of the scope of liberation theology in the second wave, emphasising five major categories which I argue form the basis for the second wave of liberation theology. As with the first wave, the second wave of liberation theology does not make a substantial use of the rich hermeneutical resource provided by the genre of parable. Though, like the first wave, there are aspects of the second

¹⁴ Ibid, 93.

¹⁵ Ibid, 95; Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, trans. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (London: SCM Press, 2001), 58.

wave that lend themselves to this possibility and those will be discussed in the penultimate section of this chapter.

The first category explored in this chapter sees the broadening of liberation theology's scope in terms of systematic theology, with a brief look at 1990's *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, edited by Spanish-born Jesuit priest Ignacio Ellacuría (1930-1989) and Jon Sobrino. This is followed by a brief exploration of various answers to the question of the identity of 'the least of these'. Addressing the criticism regarding the narrowness of the lens with which the first wave sees the liberating elements of the Gospel—focusing so exclusively on the preferential option for the poor that it ignores the Gospel's implications for other oppressed peoples—the rest of the chapter explores liberation theology in light of those who are oppressed and marginalised. Due to the constraints of this thesis, my analysis in later chapters consists primarily of an exploration of praxis as parables within the first wave of liberation theology. As a result, the second section of this chapter involves a relatively brief overview of the primary themes of the second wave of liberation theology (based upon ethnicity [Black theology], gender [feminist theology] and sexuality) before a more focussed exploration of the liberating implications of ecology for 'the least of these' and Leonardo Boff's work in this field.

I. Systematising Liberation Theology

Even within the earliest expressions of liberation theology, the ultimate scope of this new method of theological exploration is presented as necessarily broad. In addition to Gutiérrez's desire expressed in *A Theology of Liberation*—that liberation theology might 'contribute to the life and reflection of the universal Christian

community’—Leonardo and Clodovis Boff share a similar sentiment in 1986’s *Introducing Liberation Theology*, appealing to ‘all theologies’.¹⁶ They argue that liberation theology is incomplete in that it, functioning in the context of their historical setting, is ‘a stage in the great process of overall liberation.’¹⁷ As such, liberation theology is not ‘an absolute, everlasting, or perennial theology.’¹⁸ Despite the ‘incomplete’ nature of liberation theology, Leonardo and Clodovis Boff argue that liberation theology is not ‘a partial theology, one more theological treatise to add to so many others.’ Instead, it has implications for ‘the whole body of theological investigation’.¹⁹ This acts as a call to all theologians to ‘work out the social-liberative dimension of faith’ in the hope that once this dimension is embraced fully, the name ‘liberation theology’ might be done away with, ‘because by then all theologies will be liberation theologies in their own way—otherwise they will not be Christian theologies.’²⁰

A. Mysterium Liberationis

The first major attempt at a systematic approach to liberation theology came in Ellacuría and Sobrino’s 1990 two-volume work, *Mysterium Liberationis: Conceptos Fundamentales de la Teología de la Liberación* (published as a single volume in English as *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology* in 1993). Ellacuría, who joined the Jesuits in 1947, had been serving in El Salvador since 1948. Sobrino became a Jesuit in 1957 and joined his fellow-Spaniard Ellacuría in El

¹⁶ Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 58; Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1987), 91-2.

¹⁷ Boff and Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 91.

¹⁸ Ibid, 91.

¹⁹ Ibid, 91-2.

²⁰ Ibid, 92.

Salvador the following year. The work on *Mysterium Liberationis* began thirty years later, when Ellacuría and Sobrino developed the structure and themes and compiled a list of contributors. Both Ellacuría and Sobrino had been controversial voices for justice during the Salvadoran Civil War (1979-1992), which had already silenced many such voices, including that of murdered Archbishop Óscar Romero in 1980. By the late 1980s, the conflict was in its closing stages, but additional lives would still be claimed.

Most of the manuscripts for *Mysterium Liberationis* had been submitted by late 1989, when Sobrino, who was visiting Thailand, received devastating news from home. Ellacuría, along with seven others—five Jesuit priests, Juan Ramón Moreno, Amando López, Segundo Montes, Ignacio Martín-Baró, Joaquín López y López, their cook, Julia Elba and her daughter Celina—had been murdered by Salvadoran government forces at the Archbishop Romero Centre at José Simeón Cañas Central American University (Spanish: *Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas*), San Salvador.²¹ Had he not been away, it is likely that Sobrino would have shared the fate of his sisters and brothers in San Salvador. With Ellacuría's death, Sobrino lost one of his closest friends, his co-editor and a major contributor to *Mysterium Liberationis*. The murdered Moreno was an additional contributor. Sobrino also received word that not only had he lost these sisters and brothers, but that several offices, including a portion of his office where he was keeping the book's manuscripts, had been destroyed by the Salvadoran forces. Reflecting on this cataclysmic personal crisis in the revised preface to 1993's *Systematic Theology: Perspectives from Liberation Theology* (an abridged version of *Mysterium Liberationis*), Sorbino writes,

²¹ Jon Sobrino in the Preface to Sobrino and Ignacio Ellacuría, eds., *Systematic Theology: Perspectives from Liberation Theology*, trans. the Department of Books and Libraries of the Spanish Ministry of Culture (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1993), vii.

It is only from amidst oppression, carried to its maximal expression in martyrdom, that the theology of liberation can be understood. A true theology of liberation, which would attempt to 'take the crucified people down from the cross,' in Ignacio Ellacuría's words, must be prepared to share the fate of that people. This is what Ignacio Ellacuría's martyrdom, better than any theological word, expresses, and that martyrdom is the best hermeneutics for understanding this book.²²

The murder of Ellacuría and his sisters and brothers demonstrate the horrific reality of the task of liberation theology, serving to reinforce both its necessity and urgency. Clodovis Boff comments that the 'principal historical merit of the theology of liberation has been to have introduced into the church the cry of the masses of the poor – and this from the starting point of the *particular viewpoint* of these masses', namely, the viewpoint of the oppressed.²³ That those who spoke out so powerfully on behalf of the oppressed were themselves silenced so violently served to highlight the severity of the immediate plight of the oppressed. In light of this urgent reality and despite this major tragedy, *Mysterium Liberationis* was ready to be published in 1990.

Responding to perceptions that a systematisation of liberation theology would indicate its death, Sobrino argues that systematisation, in this instance, does the opposite. In *Mysterium Liberationis*, Sobrino sees the scope of liberation theology being multiplied, 'providing an opportunity and challenge for greater theological rigor, for serious dialogue among the theologians of Latin America and other climes, for raising of consciousness with respect to this theology, both in its achievements and in its limitations, as well as its agenda for tomorrow.'²⁴ Instead of undermining the task of liberation theology, systematisation opens up new avenues by which broader theological constructs can be analysed through the lens of liberation.

²² Ibid, viii.

²³ Ellacuría and Sobrino, 63.

²⁴ Ibid, x.

Mysterium Liberationis is organised into two parts. The first part is a focus on the history, methodology and distinctive features of the theology of liberation from the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM) conference at Medellín in 1968 until the late 1980s (i.e., the first wave of liberation theology). The second part forms the bulk of *Mysterium Liberationis* and consists of an exploration of the ‘systematic contents’ of liberation theology, with a focus on ‘the basic themes of all theology from the perspective of liberation theology’ divided into five sections.²⁵ These consist of explorations of liberating relationships, first, between transcendence and concrete history (1), the liberating reality of God (2) and of creation (3), and the liberating realities of the Church (4) and of humanity (5). Within these relationships, various chapters address familiar territory explored in the first wave, including the option for the poor, salvation history, the response of liberation theology to the ‘signs of the times’, Christology, the kingdom of God, the people of God and base ecclesial communities. Other distinctive systematic topics found in *Mysterium Liberationis* include deeper reflections on the trinity, grace, sin, sacraments and hope.

B. *In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ*

While *Mysterium Liberationis* discusses a great many topics, among its 35 chapters—with the exception of one chapter devoted to ‘Women and the Theology of Liberation’ (written by Brazilian feminist theologians Ana María Tapedino and Margarida L. Ribeiro Brandão)—the issues of ethnicity, gender, sexuality and ecology have little or no mention. In 1992, Gustavo Gutiérrez published *En Busca de los*

²⁵ Ibid, x.

Pobres de Jesucristo (English: *In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ*).²⁶ Using the life and theology of sixteenth-century Spanish missionary theologian Bartolomé de Las Casas as a template, Gutiérrez constructs an approach to systematic theology that challenges many of the assumptions of traditional Catholic systematic theology. Its central theme is summarised very helpfully by American sociologist Christian Smith:

It goes like this: if one begins with the basic, inescapable gospel commitments to love and to work for the salvation of one's neighbor, and if one then experiences firsthand the unjust slaughter of the poor by a brutal social system, and if one *then* discovers that the Church's established theology is actively legitimating this lethal social system, then one will have *no option* but to modify radically that theology so that it actually promotes, rather than violates, the gospel imperatives of love and evangelization.²⁷

While this same thesis is espoused throughout *Mysterium Liberationis*, Gutiérrez's use of Las Casas is not only inventive, but it opens the door for discussion of Las Casas' most glaring shortcoming – the advocacy of the use of increased African slave labour instead of natives from the Americas, an advocacy that began as early as 1516.²⁸

In his treatment on this matter, Gutiérrez observes that at no point in his advocacy for the importation and utilisation of African slave labour does Las Casas 'consider the legitimacy of slavery'. In this way, Las Casas 'merely adopts the mentality of his age in its regard.'²⁹ By 1547, Las Casas' mentality began to shift. It was then that he was first exposed to the writings of certain Portuguese historians that detailed 'the manner in which Africans were subjected to slavery.'³⁰ With this enlightenment,

²⁶ *En Busca de los Pobres de Jesucristo* was published in English as *Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ* in 1993.

²⁷ Christian Smith, 'Las Casas as Theological Counteroffensive: An Interpretation of Gustavo Gutiérrez's *Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ*,' *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 41, no. 1 (March 2002), 70.

²⁸ Gutiérrez, *Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1993), 324.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 325.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 325.

Las Casas realised that the Africans were experiencing the same oppression as the native peoples of the Americas, toward whose liberation he had been working for many years. He expressed deep regret for his ignorant advocacy and was convinced that, even in his ignorance, he might not be excused from the judgment of God.

One weakness of Gutiérrez's treatment of Las Casas and African slave labour has to do with the way that Gutiérrez intends to use the example of Las Casas. As Gutiérrez is seeking to challenge the Church's systematic theology where it demonstrates complicity in oppressive structures, he might well be presenting Las Casas in this manner so as to tell the Church, 'He saw the error of his ways and changed – and so can we.' In this way, the issue of African slave labour in the sixteenth century is merely an analogy for the necessary transformation of the Church. Gutiérrez even quotes a 1992 speech made by John Paul II during a visit to the Senegalese island of Gorée (an important historic site in the African slave trade) in which he asks for the 'forgiveness of heaven' for the Church's complicity in historical slavery. Gutiérrez writes, 'This penitential attitude ought to be a guideline for behaviour in analogous historical situations, such as in Latin America today.'³¹ While there is value in seeing the analogy of this 'penitential attitude', Gutiérrez, in this narrow focus, fails to capitalise on the opportunity to elaborate on the continued suffering of peoples of African descent in the Americas and the ways in which their praxis might inform liberation theology. In order to address this challenge—that of an ethnic liberation theology—one must look elsewhere in the second wave.

³¹ Ibid, 330.

II. A Brief Overview of the Second Wave³²

As mentioned before, the primary themes found within the second wave consist of liberation theology based upon ethnicity (Black theology), gender (feminist theology), sexuality and ecology. The brief overview here serves to illuminate the context of Leonardo Boff's progression into the field of ecological liberation theology.

Within the field of ethnic liberation theology, the most prominent field explored in the second wave is that of Black theology.³³ As is seen in the first chapter in the exploration of James Cone's *A Black Theology of Liberation*, Black theology has its genesis in the late 1960s. Black theology resembles very closely the critical reflection on praxis at the heart of the first wave of liberation theology, highlight what may be seen as a major oversight on the part of the theologians associated with that stage of the movement as Black theology (as well as the other second wave liberation theologies discussed) finds no significant place in the first wave of liberation theology.

Perhaps the fact that Black theology is largely absent within the first wave can be seen as a matter of context. The historical and social situation out of which Black theology emerged is very different from the historical and social situation out of which liberation theology—as it is defined in this and previous chapters—emerged. Writing in 1996, Belgian-born Catholic theologian and priest, José Comblin (1923-2011) argues that theologies such as 'indigenous theology, black theology, or feminist theology' are distinct from liberation theology. According to Comblin, liberation

³² A more detailed summary of the primary themes within the second wave of liberation theology can be found in Appendix Two.

³³ It is valuable to note that the 'Black theology' to which we are referring here has a different origin from some other Black theologies, such as Black theology in South Africa (BTSA). As space is limited here, the primary focus of this section is that of Black theology in the United States (BTUSA). For a brief discussion of BTSA, see Mokgethi Motlhabi, 'The history of black theology in South Africa' in Dwight N. Hopkins and Edward P. Antonio, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Black Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 224-33.

theology exists *within* Christianity, asking how early Christianity—the Church of the poor—has been transformed into the present Christianity—the Church complicit in oppressive structures. On the other hand, indigenous theology, Black theology and feminist theology, have '[as] as rule, ... been unwilling to be thus assimilated—and they are quite right.'³⁶ Comblin writes, 'Their problem is inculturation, the distance between the culture of Western christendom and their own culture, as well as colonialism, which imposed a specific Christian culture along with Western ways.'³⁷ While Comblin argues that this 'inculturation' paints these liberation theologies as distinct from his definition of liberation theology, his argument presupposes that Latin American liberation theology is the only acceptable 'brand' of liberation theology. Additionally, Comblin seems unwilling to accept the relevance of these theologies in the Latin American context. Elsewhere, Gutiérrez acknowledges the shortcomings of the first wave of liberation theology in terms of Black theology. Within his introduction to the 1988 revised edition of *A Theology of Liberation*, he makes mention of the 'racial question', which he considers 'a major challenge to the Christian community, and one to which are *only now* beginning to respond.'³⁸ The specific response to which he is referring is the decision of the Catholic Church in Brazil to dedicate 1988 'to calling attention to the plight of the black population'.³⁹ During the second wave, the incorporation of Black theology into the broader field of liberation theology is evident.

³⁶ José Comblin, *Called for Freedom: The Changing Context of Liberation Theology*, trans. Phillip Berryman (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1998), 214-5.

³⁷ Ibid, 215.

³⁸ Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 12. Italics mine.

³⁹ Ibid, 273n8. At the beginning of 1988, the Brazilian bishops wrote the following statement: 'The Campaign of Fellowship 1988 is one more summons to the preferential option for the poor for which the gospel calls. The black community is suffering the consequences of its past enslavement. But awareness of this also makes us aware of other social sectors in Brazil that are not given sufficient attention by the liberating fellowship of Christians and by Brazilians generally in their solidarity with one another'.

As mentioned earlier, Comblin also considers feminist theology to be a distinct discipline from liberation theology. This is because, according to Comblin, '[the] starting point of feminist theology is a question of almost the entire history of humankind, within which Christianity is seen as one phenomenon.'⁴³ While liberation theology questions the development of Christianity from within, '[for] women the problem is more radical.' Comblin writes, 'It is not enough to return to early Christianity; the solution will not be found there.'⁴⁴ Once again, Comblin adopts a very narrow concept of liberation theology, one which is subject to the same critique as before. In terms of the relationship between Black theology and feminist theology, the issue of sexism within Black theology did not remain unnoticed by its proponents. In his preface to the 1986 edition, Cone expresses his view that 'the problem of sexism in the black community and society as a whole' is the 'most glaring limitation of *A Black Theology of Liberation*'.⁴⁷ In the same section of his introduction to the 1988 revised edition of *A Theology of Liberation* where Gutiérrez makes mention of the 'racial question' facing the Christian community, he also mentions the increased attention that liberation theology is paying to the 'intolerable situation' in which women find themselves.⁴⁸ These and other expressions from proponents of both Latin American liberation theology and Black theology indicate that by at least the late 1980s, feminism's

To give the first wave Latin American liberation theologians the benefit of the doubt with regard to what may be seen as their historic lack of 'attention to the plight of the black population', with the opinions expressed by Comblin, combined with the specific historical and social context of Latin America, liberation theologians may well have considered people of African descent—a people who experienced and continue to experience disproportionate marginalisation and oppression—to be included in the 'preferential option for the poor.' Even if this is the case, the fact remains that there were streams of Black theology (and other liberating theologies) beyond the context of Latin America and that these streams were known, at least in part, to the theologians of the first wave, as is evidenced by Juan Luis Segundo's engagement with Cone's thought in 1975's *The Liberation of Theology*.

⁴³ Comblin, 215.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 215.

⁴⁷ Cone, xx.

⁴⁸ Gutiérrez, *Liberation*, 12.

relationship to Christian liberation is seen as an increasingly essential part of the endeavour of theologies of liberation. Yet, as with the historical development of Black theology, feminist theology was gaining momentum alongside the first wave of liberation theology in Latin America.

A unified concept of feminist theology is expressed by English Catholic feminist theologian Mary Grey. For Grey, '[feminist] theology is a global theology, or rather, a family of contextual theologies committed to the struggle for justice for woman and the transformation of society.'⁷¹ In this, the relationship between feminist theology and the second wave of liberation theology can be seen more clearly. As a global, contextual theology, feminist theology can be defined as 'a critical theology of liberation engaged in the reconstruction of theology and religion in the service of this transformation process, in the specificity of the many contexts in which women live.'⁷²

Perhaps the most amorphous category of the second wave of liberation theology is that which addresses sexuality, and there are several reasons for this. Among these reasons is the fact that the definitions and parameters of the category 'sexuality' to have shifted over time. An added challenge to a liberation theology of sexuality is the persistent doctrinal resistance to expressions of sexuality beyond the bounds of that which is considered 'heteronormative'. These ecclesiastical challenges have proven more severe and enduring than even those facing feminist theology. While feminist theology resists the traditional position based upon biblical interpretations that women are excluded from positions of leadership and are to 'remain silent' within the Church, the very *being* of those who do not fall in line with so-

⁷¹ Rowland, 105.

⁷² Ibid, 105.

called heteronormative sexuality is called into question by traditional doctrinal notions. Discriminatory terminology—including the labelling non-heteronormative sexuality as a ‘choice’, a ‘lifestyle’ and even a ‘preference’ (the latter used by some early proponents of gay liberation, albeit, with self-aware qualification⁷⁸)—persists within both cultural and ecclesiastical discussions of sexuality, not taking into account growing biological and psychological evidence of predisposition to a spectrum of sexual realities.⁷⁹ Within the context of the second wave, the emergence of a liberation of sexuality and gender plays an essential role in the outworking of a fully-human liberation theology.

III. Ecological Liberation Theology – Leonardo Boff & Ecology

The final theme of second wave liberation theology that will be explored in this chapter is that of ecological liberation. In an article from *Science* in March 1967, American historian Lynn White, Jr (1907-1987) explores what he calls ‘The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis’. In this article, he observes that ‘[all] forms of life modify their contexts.’¹⁰⁸ He considers human influence particularly noteworthy and comments that ‘the impact of our race upon the environment has so increased in force that it has changed in essence.’¹⁰⁹ White notes that this impact is linked especially strongly with Western tradition and within that, Western Christianity in particular. He writes,

⁷⁸ Malcolm Macourt, ed., *Towards a Theology of Gay Liberation* (London: SCM, 1977), 3.

⁷⁹ For further discussion, see Neil Messer, ‘Contributions from Biology’ and Brendan Callaghan, ‘Contributions from Psychology’ in Adrian Thatcher, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality, and Gender* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 69-104.

¹⁰⁸ Lynn White, Jr, ‘The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis’, *Science* 155, no. 3767 (10 March 1967), 1203.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 1203.

Eastern theology has been intellectualist. Western theology has been voluntarist. The Greek saint contemplates; the Western saint acts. The implications of Christianity for the conquest of nature would emerge more easily in the Western atmosphere.¹¹⁰

White argues that the Franciscan tradition sought to resist the Western conflict between humanity and nature, but ultimately, '[he] failed.' '[Orthodox] Christian arrogance toward nature' remains the dominant force within Western Christianity. In this troubled time of ecological crisis, there is a challenge to the Church. White writes, 'I propose Francis as a patron saint for ecologists.'¹¹¹ Feminist theologians would go on to share a similar view of rejection of Western Christian arrogance toward nature and see such an arrogance as symptomatic of the patriarchy within the Christian tradition. Based on White's suggestion that Francis be the 'patron saint for ecologists', it is perhaps unsurprising that the most prominent voice for ecological liberation in the second wave is that of a Franciscan liberation theologian – Leonardo Boff.

In his 1993 book, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm* (published originally in Portuguese as *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade*, English: *Ecology, Globalisation, Spirituality*), Boff shares an imaginative sermon preached from the mouth of a statue of Christ on the Mount of Corcovado in Rio de Janeiro, in which he declares,

Blessed and vast lands of Latin America! It is my great desire that amid all the nations, among all these nations of God, you will express my hospitality and geniality, my love of life, my openness and lack of calculation, and my humanitarian grace and that of your Heavenly Father.

Watch over the forests and mountains, the great Cordigliera and the banks of the Amazon, the rivers flowing with water and the deep valleys, the wild animals and the many varieties of birds. They are your brothers and sisters.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 1206.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 1207.

¹¹⁹ Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm*, trans. John Cumming (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1995), 2.

For Boff, this 'hospitality and geniality,' 'love of life' and 'humanitarian grace' of God is expressed in the new ecological paradigm for liberation theology. Like Ruether, he adopts a broad concept of ecology, one that 'encompasses not only nature (natural ecology) but culture and society (human ecology, social ecology, and so on).'¹²⁰ Within this concept, 'everything is related to everything else in all respects.'¹²¹ In this, ecology adopts a holistic approach.

Boff acknowledges argument that, ecology 'is a luxury of the rich' and that the damage done to the environment is attributed primarily to industrialised nations. While he accepts this, he also highlights the global implications of ecology. He writes, 'We have to face up to the problem that has begun to stir the conscience of the rich, but to conceive it appropriately and to proffer a different solution that respects the interests of all human beings and of nature, starting from the fate of the most threatened persons and creatures.'¹²² Boff also acknowledges the greater global consciousness regarding the ecological disaster facing the world. He finds this expressed through various projects and practice, including ecotechnology, ecopolitics, social ecology, ecoethics, mental (intellectual) ecology and lastly, in the spiritual project of cosmic mysticism. Boff writes, 'When we speak of mysticism, we think of a fundamental and all-inclusive experience, by means of which we embrace the totality of things, an organic totality as it were, replete with meaning and value.'¹²³

For Boff, mysticism and spirituality are related, as '[spirituality] is that attitude which puts life at the center, and defends and promotes life against all the mechanisms

¹²⁰ Ibid, 9.

¹²¹ Ibid, 10.

¹²² Ibid, 13.

¹²³ Ibid, 36.

of death, desiccation, or stagnation.¹²⁴ Spirituality is therefore not the antithesis of bodily existence, but of 'death and everything associated with the system of death, understood in the widest sense of biological, social, and existential death (failure, humiliation, and oppression).'¹²⁵ This means that '[we] can no longer pretend to stand as gods above all other aspects of the universe', but 'must promote solidarity with all living beings, starting with the least favored'.¹²⁶ Here, Boff is highlighting a major theme of his ecological theology, one that solidifies it as an ecological theology of liberation. When one starts with the 'least', those who suffer most as a result of systems of oppression, *oppressors* are exposed and called into question (as Ellacuría's crucified people, by their very existence, act as judges). In agreement with claims of White and of the ecofeminists, Boff argues that Christianity—specifically, Western Christianity—is exposed as contributing a 'decisive influence' in the ecological crisis. 'Self-criticism comes first', writes Boff.¹²⁷

In order to combat this trend within Christianity, Boff appeals to the challenges brought by developing a liberation of creation theology. This can be expressed in the nature of the trinity, which, like ecology, shares a unified and holistic 'interplay of relations'.¹²⁸ He writes, 'The ecclesial community must feel part of the human community, and the human community has to feel that it is part of the cosmic community. They all form part of the trinitarian community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.'¹²⁹ Boff also sees a correlation between the Holy Spirit, which mirrors the

¹²⁴ Ibid, 36.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 36-7.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 37.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 43.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 48.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 48.

cosmos, consisting of ‘energy in a permanently interactive state’.¹³⁰ Boff draws a correlation between the ‘cosmic ubiquity of the Spirit’ and his brand of pantheism, which ‘starts from the distinction between God and the creature, yet always maintains the relationship between them.’¹³¹ As one might expect, Boff sees Francis as a Western archetype for this type of ecological thinking. He observes that Francis’ contemporaries were unanimous in their confirmation of ‘the profound empathy he felt with and for all creatures.’¹³² Boff characterises this empathy as ‘outward ecology’, but he also emphasises Francis’ ‘inward ecology’, manifested in his reflections and writings. In Franciscan ecology, Boff also observes an inevitable option for the poor that ‘accords with tender love for the creation.’¹³³

Boff revisits this sense of connectedness and its relationship to liberation theology in his 1995 book, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (published originally in Portuguese as *Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito dos Pobres*), the aim of which is ‘to connect the cry of oppressed with the cry of the Earth.’¹³⁴ This connection begins with a reorientation in our understanding of the earth as our homeland. In this we must realise that the earth is ill and, according to Boff, this illness is felt most keenly by the poor. To support his claim, he presents a series of statistics: ‘79% of humankind lives in the immense and poor South; 1 billion people live in the state of absolute poverty; 3 billion (out of 5.3 billion) do not have enough to eat; 60 million die of hunger every year; and 14 million young people under fifteen years of age die each year as a result

¹³⁰ Ibid, 49.

¹³¹ Ibid, 50-1.

¹³² Ibid, 52.

¹³³ Ibid, 53.

¹³⁴ Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, trans. Phillip Berryman (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1997), xi.

of hunger-caused diseases.¹³⁵ Boff sees a great disparity between ‘well-off countries’ and this immense population of the poor. This, combined with the havoc being wrought against other living species, forms the context of the challenge of the ecological crisis.

In *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, Boff explores several causes behind the ecological crisis and its corresponding loss of connectedness between humanity and nature in greater detail. First, he observes the claim that technology is the root of the ecological crisis and while he acknowledges that ‘classical technology is energy-hungry, dirty, and ecologically destabilizing’, ‘any technology is adopted within a model of development.’¹³⁶ It is then ‘the current model of *development*’ that forms Boff’s second cause. Within this model, the aim of a country is to demonstrate ‘higher rates in the production of goods and services every year.’¹³⁷ Such a model of ‘unlimited growth’ is ecologically unsustainable, leading to ‘the invention of destructive (rather than productive) forces and the historic and social production of illness and death of Earth’s species and of everything composing the Earth.’¹³⁸

Boff also condemns models of society that contribute to these previous causes, including both capitalism and Marxism. These two models inform another cause, anthropocentrism, which then informs ‘androcentric and dominating *civilization*’.¹³⁹ The last cause that Boff explores is that of religion, which he considers ‘connectedness distorted by power’. He holds Judeo-Christian tradition ‘largely responsible for the

¹³⁵ Ibid, 1. According to a 2015 analysis by the World Bank, ‘Nearly 1.1 billion fewer people are living in extreme poverty than in 1990.’ While this trend is promising, the reduction in poverty has proven uneven: ‘Two regions, East Asia and Pacific (47 million extreme poor) and Europe and Central Asia (7 million) have reduced extreme poverty to below 3 percent, achieving the 2030 target.’ At the same time, ‘More than half of the extreme poor live in Sub-Saharan Africa. In fact, the number of poor in the region increased by 9 million’. See Understanding Poverty, ‘Poverty: Overview’ World Bank, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/overview> (accessed 17 February 2019).

¹³⁶ Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 64-5.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 65.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 65.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 71.

destructive thrust of the ecological dinosaur of dominating power.¹⁴⁰ This calls back to Boff's demand for the Church's self-criticism in *Ecology and Liberation*. Within this criticism, he highlights both patriarchy and monotheism as contributing factors in the Church's dominating posture, both producing social and political systems of oppression.¹⁴¹

In order to remedy the disconnectedness that plagues the earth, Boff argues that liberation theology and ecology—both of which 'start from two bleeding wounds': poverty and the 'systematic assault on the earth'—must work in partnership.¹⁴² From ecology, liberation theology 'should draw... the emerging world view or cosmology; that is, the vision that understands Earth as a living superorganism connected to the entire universe'.¹⁴³ This will then expand the horizons of liberation, which includes all of humanity, rich and poor, since 'all are oppressed by a paradigm—abuse of the Earth, consumerism, denial of otherness, and of the inherent value of each being—that enslaves us all'.¹⁴⁴ From liberation theology, ecology gains the option for the poor in order to 'bring human beings to realize that they are a large earthly family together with other species and to discover their way back to the community of the other living beings, the community of the planet and the cosmos'.¹⁴⁵ The conversation of ecological liberation theology remains ever-present due to the ongoing global conscientisation regarding the climate crisis.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 75.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 78-9.

¹⁴² Ibid, 104.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 112.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 113.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 113.

IV. Biblical Parables in the Second Wave

While the first wave referenced the Bible extensively, the professional sphere of the second wave has tended to make less use of it. This can be explained by the second wave's relationship to the first wave — that it is building upon what has gone before and taking many of the methodologies and presuppositions of the first wave for granted except where challenged explicitly. Despite this difference, the Bible does appear within the literature of the second wave, although its use is not altogether very different from the use of the Bible in the first wave. Namely, the parables of the Gospels are not approached as distinct literary forms in their own right. Instead, the parables are indistinguishable from the rest of the content of Gospels in terms of hermeneutic approach. For example, within the lengthy *Mysterium Liberationis*, the parables referenced can be reduced to mere illustrations. The parable of the 'Labourers in the Vineyard' (Matthew 20.1-16) is presented alongside the Beatitudes and Woes (Luke 6.20-26) as an illustration of the reversal of 'firsts' and 'lasts' in the kingdom of God.¹⁴⁶ The sole reference to the parable of the 'Good Samaritan' within *Mysterium Liberationis* is taken as part of an illustration of the mercy of God in Jesus' confrontation with the religious leaders.¹⁴⁷

The most explicit treatment of parable within the professional sphere of the second wave of liberation theology can be found in British theologians Christopher Rowland and Mark Corner's *Liberating Exegesis: The Challenge of Liberation Theology to Biblical Studies* (1989). The majority of the work concerns the way in

¹⁴⁶ Ellacuría and Sobrino, 241.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 413.

which the field of biblical studies might be transformed based on the methodology of liberation theology, namely through critical reflection on praxis.

Rowland and Corner observe the prevalence of ‘the well-trodden paths of the historical-critical method’ within the majority of academic circles.¹⁴⁸ While this reconstruction of the ancient context of the Bible has proven invaluable in a certain sense, Rowland and Corner see a major gap within this method, which leaves a richer application of the Bible to present human situations wanting. They write, ‘When we use the Bible in wrestling with the contemporary problems of Christian discipleship we find that our exegetical efforts frequently have not been matched with the skills necessary for the provision of illumination from the Bible on the exploration of those questions which our generation is asking.’¹⁴⁹ This challenge results in a great chasm between exegetical methodologies, with one side stressing the reliability, exactness and necessity of the historical-critical method in judging all interpretations of the Bible, while another side casts doubt on former approach’s ability to grasp the historical context in full. Regardless of that ancient context, this latter side stresses that, irrespective of the ‘*conscious*’ intention of the original author, different levels of meaning can become apparent to later interpreters’.¹⁵⁰ Rowland and Corner concede that the historical quest is of value, but observe that even in enacting the historical-critical method, all interpreters are subject to their own contemporary historical contexts and prejudices: ‘it is not just *ancient* history that is important.’¹⁵¹ An illustration

¹⁴⁸ Christopher Rowland and Mark Corner, *Liberating Exegesis: The Challenge of Liberation Theology to Biblical Studies* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 35.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 35.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 36.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, 37.

of this 'liberating exegesis' is found in the first chapter, which focusses on the worked example of the parables.

Rowland and Corner consider the parables to be 'a very important area for examination ... since the parable represents the form in which much of Jesus' teaching was encapsulated.'¹⁵² Not only this, but the parables are able to convey that teaching 'in a way that subsequent generations can appropriate and apply to their own time.'¹⁵³ In the first part of this chapter, Rowland and Corner depend heavily on the collection *Parables of Today*, which was produced within CEBs in São Paulo. The methodology of *Parables of Today* is expressed as such:

The groups start with the slide sequence [adapting the parables to their contemporary experiences] which gets them in touch with the familiar scenes of ordinary life... After the short slide sequence a group is asked to discuss the story. They should recall similar experiences, identify with various characters in the story and share what their feelings might have been. At another meeting the biblical text is read and discussed and a comparison is made with the story from life. It is only at the end of the process that a commentary [consisting of recent scholarship] is read and discussed and any insights drawn from the reflection which relate to the present call to discipleship in the community... Users of the study pack are told that Jesus used these stories so that everyone could understand what he wanted to say, particularly the poor to whom they were in the main directed.¹⁵⁴

In the procedure above, the most basic methodological assumption made in *Parables of Today* (and, therefore, in Rowland and Corner's writing) is 'that God's bias is to the poor', a sentiment shared with the earliest presuppositions of liberation theology.¹⁵⁵

The first two parables approached are those of the 'Lost Sheep' (Matthew 18.10-14) and the 'Last Judgement' (Matthew 25.31-46). These are taken directly from the studies provided in *Parables of Today*. Rowland and Corner observe that within

¹⁵² Ibid, 7.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 7-8.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 9.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 9.

the Brazilian take on the 'Last Judgement', in particular, is that 'there is a wider perspective than that offered by the Matthean original. There is a reason given for the suffering of those little ones in whom the Son of Man is to be met: oppression.' They also observe how 'the identity of those in need is not confined to members of the Church. It encompasses all those who are victims of injustice and violence.'¹⁵⁶ Rowland and Corner conclude that the approach of *Parables of Today* subverts the ways in which 'the First World approach' to the Bible is contaminated with 'clear-cut assumptions about what is religious and what is not, and about where Christ is to be found and where he is not.'¹⁵⁷ They quote from Dutch-born Brazilian missionary and biblical scholar Carlos Mesters:

The Bible must be read with the 'head', with the 'heart' and with the 'feet'. The feet are very important. The Bible was written as the product of a journey. It is only by following with our own feet the same journey that we can get to know all the meaning of the Bible for us.¹⁵⁸

In the second half of the chapter, Rowland and Corner analyse two additional parables: the 'Labourers in the Vineyard' (Matthew 20.1-16) and the 'Dives and Lazarus' (Luke 16.19-31). In this analysis, they emphasise the need to explore the 'socio-economic context of a gospel passage'.¹⁵⁹ For example, with the 'Labourers in the Vineyard', they explore the exploitation that such labourers would face in society, 'highlight[ing] their need to organize.' Rowland and Corner write, 'Only collaboration could provide the means by which they might improve their situation.'¹⁶⁰ This socio-economic context enables liberationists to reflect not only on the socio-economic context of the ancient text, but also the context of the reader.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 11.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 12.

¹⁵⁸ As quoted in Rowland and Corner, 13.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 20.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 20-23.

For Rowland and Corner, '[parables] are intended to be universal in their application, ... [but] they can possess such universality only if they are open to reinterpretation in the present context.'¹⁶¹ They highlight that the parables present 'truth' that 'can be expressed in no other way' and argue that, by its nature, liberation theology is an especially powerful context in which the parables can be interpreted.¹⁶² In this manner, Rowland and Corner's approach is distinct from most other approaches to the parables within both the first and second waves of liberation theology. Even with this acknowledgment, their reading of the parables remains illustrative and analogous and they present no methodology by which the praxis of the poor might, in and of itself, be interpreted as parable.

Conclusion – An Additional Consideration

Throughout even the earliest writings of the first wave of liberation theology, the endeavour of critical reflection on praxis involved not only reflection, but imagination. In *A Theology of Liberation*, Gutiérrez argues that the revolutionary context and experiences of Latin America 'makes utopian thought viable and highlights its wealth of possibilities'.¹⁶³ Throughout this chapter, I have explored the expanding horizons of the second wave of liberation theology, asking the double-barrelled question, who are 'the least of these' and how broadly might concern for the least open our eyes to see the scope of the liberating activity of God? This question has been explored in the context of the systematising of liberation theology as well as in the liberation theologies of ethnicity (Black theology), gender (feminist theology), sexuality and ecology. Within

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 32.

¹⁶² Ibid, 32.

¹⁶³ Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 217.

these streams, several particular trends emerge. As with the first wave, the second wave of liberation theology begins with praxis. The theologies that emerge from that praxis are critical reflections that produce a theology that is liberating in character. In addition to the first wave's preferential option for the poor, other preferences are also expressed, specifically, preferences for *all* who are marginalised, whether that be based on colour, gender or sexuality. Lastly, it has been observed that, like the first wave, the second wave calls for social revolution and transformation.

This chapter has shown that these categories are not constrained to any single stream within the second wave. Within Black theology, one finds the emergence of feminists who found that their voice was best expressed in a theology of their own: Womanist theology. Within feminist theology, there has been the emergence of ecofeminism. Given more time and space, many more interrelations between these theologies could be explored, as well as new, perhaps previously unheard-of interrelations that might well be arising in the present from communities of the poor, communities of colour, communities of women, communities of different expressions of sexuality and gender, all around the world. What has been explored in this chapter are particular streams within several tides, not professing to encompass the whole of what may be labelled the 'second wave', but as a sample of some of the history, inspirations, methodologies and applications of some of these streams.

Within the diversity of the second wave, there is also the possibility of exclusivistic fragmentation. Prominent Argentine second wave liberation theologian, Ivan Petrella explores the future of liberation theology in *Beyond Liberation Theology: A Polemic* (2008). Within his reflections, he makes a particular appeal against what he calls 'monochromatism', expressed in second wave liberation theologies in the

United States in particular. He writes, 'Monochromatism is... evident when theologians of a particular ethnic or racial group refuse to look beyond the parameters of that group, as well as the parameters of their discipline, for tools and resources useful to the cause of liberation.'¹⁶⁵ Petrella makes a particularly scathing condemnation of monochromatism's prevalence within Black theology. He highlights how Cone was criticised for his reliance on white, European theologians (Barth and Tillich, in particular) in *A Black Theology of Liberation* and how even Cone himself repented of this. Petrella also observes how monochromatism was carried on through Cone's successors, including Wilmore and Hopkins.¹⁶⁶ Regarding Hopkins, Petrella also observes his restrictive reliance on figures like King, Malcolm X and Cone and asks, 'Why this insistence on staying within the parameters of blackness when it comes to social analysis and political construction? Why not turn to contemporary social theory of different colours?' He continues, 'While Martin Luther King Jr, Malcolm X and James Cone are obvious potential sources for black theology, they are not the most current nor the most useful resource If one is interested in developing a political and economic vision of content applicable to the twenty-first century'.¹⁶⁷

Although Petrella directs his criticism of monochromatism to those who define their liberation theologies by colour, this can also be seen as a warning for every other stream of second wave liberation theology. This is not at all to say that distinct theologies are unnecessary in the expanded horizon of the second wave. What might be taken away is a warning not to commit the same error as Latin American liberation theologians committed in the first wave, that of focussing so narrowly on one

¹⁶⁵ Ivan Petrella, *Beyond Liberation Theology: A Polemic* (London: SCM Press, 2008), 84.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 86-92.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 91.

implication of liberation theology that we cannot acknowledge the value and importance of other implications. Black theology, feminist theology, theology of sexuality and ecological theology all remain, but they exist in complex relationships with one another and together, give a better understanding of the broader tide of liberation theology.

In addition to exploring the general shape of the second wave of liberation theology, I have also explored several approaches to parables found within this secondary movement. As is the case with the first wave of liberation theology, while the tools for a more specialised engagement of the potential relationship between praxis and parable are present, even Rowland and Corner do not take the further step of exploring how the praxis of the poor and marginalised might function in a unique manner. In order to explore this possibility, the following chapter investigates several methodological criteria before establishing a basic structure for analysing praxis as parable.

CHAPTER THREE

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PARABLES & PRAXIS

Introduction

As is explored in the previous two chapters, liberation theology emerged from the understanding that the poor and the marginalised have a special function within the kingdom of God. Their praxis is called to inform the life and innerworkings of the Church through critical reflection and it also acts as a challenge to the status quo. The aim of this chapter is to explore how the concept of parable might contribute to a better understanding of how that praxis might work to transform the Church. As is established in the first chapter, liberation theology is based on the presupposition that the God of the Christian faith is both the God of history—that is to say, that God is revealed through the experience of humanity throughout history—as well as the God of the poor and marginalised. That the praxis of the poor and the marginalised contains a particular authority in terms of the potential for informing the life, structure and work of the Christian Church is reinforced both throughout Scripture as well as in the proclamation of the Church. Liberation theology itself is defined by the movement of taking the praxis of the poor and marginalised and, through critical reflection, utilising various tools, including the social sciences, in order to speak to and challenge the power structures of the Church. The chapter introduces and outlines a concrete relationship between that process of critical reflection and the potential for engaging with praxis through a particular hermeneutical method that is applied to the genre of parable.

In order to make this argument, several steps are followed in this chapter. The first is an exploration of a theological rationale for engagement with subjects outside the sphere of Christendom (i.e., the Bible and the tradition of the Church) as parables. This rationale is developed through a reflection on the work of Karl Barth (especially within §69 Doctrine of Reconciliation from his *Church Dogmatics*). Here, the concept of 'secular parables' is outlined, laying the foundations for a bridge between praxis and parabolic analysis. With this established, the biblical concept of 'parable' will be analysed. This concept will be explored in the parables of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels, producing some preliminary concepts regarding the nature of parables and how they function. This will consist of a brief overview of hermeneutical methodologies employed throughout history, with a special focus on the way that Dan Otto Via and John Dominic Crossan make use of Algirdas Julien Greimas' actantial structure.

As the approaches above treat parable as a *text*, further rationale for the engagement with praxis as parables and how Greimas' actantial structure can be employed is developed with a treatment of the work of Paul Ricoeur, especially his paper, 'The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as Text'. This chapter concludes with an outline of a methodology for exploring praxis as parables that emerges from the conclusions found throughout the chapter, namely that the praxis of the poor and marginalised is theologically authoritative, that praxis can also be seen as a text, and therefore, as 'parables of the kingdom' and subject to similar hermeneutical analyses. In doing so, I seek to establish how this understanding of the parables' function might be used to open a fresh avenue for understanding the transformative potential of critical reflection on lived realities for the life, structure and work of the Church.

I. 'True parables of the kingdom of God' beyond Christendom

In the Christian faith, the revelation of the kingdom of God is always mediated by something. Within the Church, this is expressed most universally through the Bible and through Sacraments. These things are perceived as the 'means of grace' through which the kingdom of God may be apprehended by the faithful. While the Sacraments bear a close association with the divine grace, they are—like parables—*signs* of that grace and as such, as Kierkegaard writes, they signify 'something else than that which [they] immediately' are. In seeking out the possibility of the praxis of the poor within liberation theology to function as parables of the kingdom of God, an analysis of how the Gospel parables function is only a beginning. What remains is to develop a theological rationale for how this praxis might be revelatory in a manner similar to that of the parables of Jesus, to explore how the praxis of the poor and marginalised might be seen as text and to explore how praxis might function in a manner similar to that of these parables.

A. Schleiermacher and Religious Experience

As explored in previous chapters, liberation theology is the result of critical reflection on praxis, with praxis being the lived realities and experiences of the poor (as well as other marginalised communities). Throughout the history of the Church and into the present, the relationship of the Christian faith to human experience has taken various forms. Few have had as much influence on the discussion of this relationship over the last few centuries as German Protestant theologian Friedrich

Schleiermacher.¹ In his 1799 work *Über die Religion: Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* (English: *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*), Schleiermacher entreats the reader ‘to become familiar with this concept: intuition of the universe ... the highest and most universal formula of religion on the basis of which you should be able to find every place in religion, from which you may determine its essence and its limits.’² For Schleiermacher, the subject’s experience of the universe is the result of the universe acting upon the subject and religion functions in the same manner. He writes,

The universe exists in uninterrupted activity and reveals itself to us every moment. Every form that it brings forth, every being to which it gives separate existence according to the fullness of life, every occurrence that spills forth from its rich, ever-fruitful womb, is an action of the same upon us. Thus to accept everything individual as a part of the whole and everything limited as a representation of the infinite is religion.³

Within this broad concept of religion, it follows that Schleiermacher’s concept of revelation is equally broad: ‘What is revelation? Every original and new intuition of the universe is one’.⁴ Decades later, when the mature Schleiermacher wrote his *magnum opus*, *Der christliche Glaube* (English: *The Christian Faith*), his position had evolved. Unlike *On Religion*, *The Christian Faith* is written as a dogmatic theological treatise directed toward Christians, presenting religious experience as a ‘feeling of absolute

¹ Born into the pietistic traditions of the Moravians in 1768, Schleiermacher’s education and experiences had exposed him to the philosophical, theological and cultural ideals of the Enlightenment and Romanticism, especially prevalent in Berlin, where he was living and serving as a Reformed chaplain by the 1790s. See Richard Crouter’s introduction to Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), xvi-xvii. At the urging of several ‘cultured’ friends, including German Romantic literary figures Friedrich Schlegel and Henriette Herz, Schleiermacher began writing *On Religion* in 1799, when he had taken up a temporary post in Potsdam. Schleiermacher is taking up a challenge of explaining his views on religion in the wake of the rampant scepticism of his time, but he also expresses fear of suppression from another front, that of the authorities within the Church. Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, xvii.

² Ibid, 24.

³ Ibid, 25.

⁴ Ibid, 49.

dependence' (*schlechthiniges Abhängigkeitsgefühl*).⁵ South African theologian Wessel Bentley comments, 'Schleiermacher made a clear distinction between the self and the notion of God. The self becomes aware that it does not exist in isolation, but that its identity is subjective, moved by the *other*, leading the self to the conclusion that the self can only be authentically so by acknowledging its part in something bigger than itself.'⁶ As for revelation in *The Christian Faith*, Jesus occupies a more central place than in *On Religion*, namely demonstrating the fullness of the God-consciousness (in inextricable relationship to self-consciousness): 'The Redeemer... is like all men in virtue of the identity of human nature, but distinguished from them all by the constant potency of His God-consciousness, which was a veritable existence of God in Him.'⁷

While a distinction is often drawn between the Schleiermacher of *On Religion* and the Schleiermacher of *The Christian Faith*, the mature Schleiermacher never renounced his earlier views. In his introduction to the 1996 Cambridge edition of *On Religion*, American scholar Richard Crouter writes, 'Both works share a strategy of moving from abstract to more concrete structures of experience; for both religion arises from immediate self-consciousness and expresses itself individually and socially within a historical community of faith.'⁸

⁵ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (Berkeley, California: Aprocryphile Press, 2011), 12.

⁶ Wessel Bentley, 'Schleiermacher: God-consciousness and religious identity,' *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 74, no. 4 (28 August 2019), 4.

⁷ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 385.

⁸ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, xi.

B. 'Parables of the kingdom' in §69 of Barth's Doctrine of Reconciliation

In developing a theological rationale for seeing the praxis of the poor as parables of the kingdom of God, it might seem prudent to build upon the work of Schleiermacher and his academic heirs. Yet, an even more helpful aid in my development of the idea of *parables of the kingdom* comes from what may seem at first to be an unlikely source, that of Barth. Barth's influence—perhaps especially for a Protestant theologian on the largely-Catholic first wave—is significant.⁹ What makes him an unlikely candidate is the contrast he presents—especially in his early works—to the openness of Schleiermacher's views on revelation. Indeed, a forceful '*Nein!*' has come to represent many caricatures of Barth's theology as it pertains to revelation. Elsewhere, I argue that the reason for this characterisation of Barth has less to do with the breadth of his theology and more to do with a general unfamiliarity with both his historical context and the evolution of his thought over time.¹⁰

⁹ Marcella Althaus-Reid acknowledges Barth as 'a theologian of vast influence on the first wave of liberation theology' in her chapter 'From Liberation Theology to Indecent Theology: The Trouble with Normality in Theology' from Ivan Petrella, *Latin American Liberation Theology: The Next Generation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2005), 31. In 1983, George Hunsinger published a fascinating article drawing largely favourable comparisons between Barth and liberation theologians, though at times, his characterisation of liberation theology is quite off the mark. For example, while he sees a significant amount of agreement between his understanding of Barth and his understanding of liberation theology, he asks, 'Does not the Bible have something strong and incisive to say about the spiritual poverty which can and often does accompany material wealth? ... Is not Gutierrez's silence on the destitution of spiritual poverty, Barth might go on to ask, a symptom of the fundamental problem which seems to plague his entire work?' George Hunsinger, 'Karl Barth and Liberation Theology,' *The Journal of Religion* 63, no. 3 (July 1983): 247-263. As has been explored in previous chapters, spiritual poverty is not alien to the first wave of liberation theology. With that being expressed, the first wave of liberation theology does not see itself as the exhaustive expression of liberation as it pertains to theological matters (being a way of *doing* theology and not a dogmatic theology). Still, even early Gutiérrez explores the ambiguities associated with 'poverty'. See the chapter 'Poverty: Solidarity and Protest,' the final chapter in Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, trans. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (London: SCM Press, 2001), 253-270.

¹⁰ See Elijah Wade Smith, "'Let Anyone with Ears to Hear, Listen!'" Pop Music as Parables of the Kingdom of God,' (PhD diss., University of St Andrews, 2015), Smith, 61-87. Like Schleiermacher, Barth was born into a relatively conservative family. While studying at the University of Bern, Barth became acquainted with the writings of Kant and after continuing his studies in Berlin under liberal theologian Adolf von Harnack, he 'began to abandon many of the conservative and positivistic theological assumptions upheld by his father.' See Smith, 64. By 1908, Barth had relocated to Marburg to study under Wilhelm Herrmann, in whom Barth saw both a Kantian and 'a pupil of the younger

Barth describes the change that had taken place within his thinking from his early academic career in a 1956 lecture entitled, 'Die Menschlichkeit Gottes' (English: 'The Humanity of God'). He begins the lecture by declaring,

The humanity of God! Rightly understood that is bound to mean God's relation to and turning toward man. It signifies the God who speaks with man in promise and command. It represents God's existence, intercession, and activity for man, the intercourse God holds with him, and the free grace in which He wills to be and is nothing other than the God of man.¹¹

Barth follows this by exhorting his audience (a meeting of *der Tagung des Schweiz. Ref. Pfarrvereins*, the Swiss Reformed Ministers' Association) that their task 'should suggest a *change in direction* [*Wendung*] in the thinking of evangelical theology.'¹²

While the concern of evangelical theology of the past had been that of the *deity* of

Schleiermacher.' See Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His life from letters and autobiographical texts*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM, 1976), 40.

Among other things, the outbreak of the First World War secured Barth's break from the liberal theology of his time in university. He was horrified at the endorsement of Kaiser Wilhelm II and Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg's war policy by 'almost all' of his German teachers in 'Der Aufruf an die Kulturwelt!' (English: 'The Appeal to the Cultural World'). Ibid, 81. In Barth's view, this endorsement proved to be the 'unmasking' of Schleiermacher: 'In a decisive way all the theology expressed in the manifesto and everything that followed it ... proved to be founded and governed by him.' Ibid, 82. As a result, he saw the need to build the task of theology upon another foundation, and for that, he turned to the Bible. See John Webster, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 20. This refocus produced the first edition of *Der Römerbrief* (English: *The Epistle to the Romans*), which was published in 1919. By the time the second edition was published in 1922, it became 'the most influential text of [this] new theological movement', namely, dialectical theology. See Eberhard Jüngel, *Karl Barth: A Theological Legacy*, trans. Garrett E. Paul (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 25. In the preface to his second edition of *Romans*, Barth writes, 'if I have a system, it is limited to a recognition of what Kierkegaard called the "infinite qualitative distinction" between time and eternity, and to my regarding this as possessing negative as well as positive significance: "God is in heaven, and thou art on earth."' Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 10. This position came to characterise many perceptions of Barth. Barth acknowledges this caricature in the foreword to the American edition of *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction* (1963). Commenting on his lecture tour of the United States, he writes, 'my American readers for their part may now have gotten to know me somewhat more concretely; they may have noticed that I am neither the "prophet," the "monumental patriarch," nor the "giant of theology," as which I was here and there described, and just as little the gloomy theological gladiator and fire-eater whom many there have had before their eyes from the times of my early commentary on *Romans* and the angry "No!" to Brunner.' Barth follows by describing himself as 'a normal human being who is considerably involved in all sorts of human affairs'. See Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, trans. Grover Foley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1963), x.

¹¹ Barth, *The Humanity of God*, trans. Thomas Wieser and John Newton Thomas (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 37.

¹² Ibid, 37.

God, 'a God absolutely unique in His relation to man and the world, overpoweringly lofty and distant, strange, yes even wholly other', here he suggests that concern for the *humanity* of God has moved to the forefront.¹³ In this change of thinking, God is seen as the '*partner* of man' and as such, God 'proves and reveals' Godself.¹⁴

A fuller exploration of this partnership in which God proves and reveals Godself is found in §69, 'The Glory of the Mediator' in the fourth volume of Barth's *Church Dogmatics, The Doctrine of Reconciliation* (published as *Die Lehre von der Versöhnung* in 1959). In this section, Barth explores 'reconciliation as revelation', his 'third problem of the doctrine of reconciliation'.¹⁵ He writes, 'The third problem of the doctrine of reconciliation is thus proposed and set by the simple fact that, as reconciliation takes place, it also declares itself.'¹⁶ This is manifested as what Barth calls, the 'Light of Life', Jesus Christ himself:

Wholly and utterly in the fulfilment of His life-act, this One is Logos. He is the 'Word of life' (1 John 1.1), and therefore the 'light of life.' But in the fulfilment of his life-act He is wholly and utterly Logos, or, as we have said already, light, name, revelation and truth.¹⁷

In the 'light of life', 'God and the world, however they may oppose or contradict one another...exist together in an inviolable and indissoluble co-existence and conjunction.'¹⁸ Jesus is 'the light which lightens every man, the truth which affects and convinces every man, the revelation which comes to every man, the Word which is

¹³ Ibid, 37. Barth writes, 'We are or ought now to be engaged in this change, not in opposition to but none the less in *distinction* from an earlier change.'

¹⁴ Ibid, 45.

¹⁵ Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* 3.1, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961), 38. Barth outlines his three problems of the doctrine of reconciliation in part 1. See Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* 1, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 128-35.

¹⁶ Barth, *CD IV/3.1*, 10.

¹⁷ Ibid, 47.

¹⁸ Ibid, 39-40.

spoken to every man.’¹⁹ Barth maintains his christocentric position, that there is ‘no other light of life [is] outside or alongside His’, while also arguing that this exclusivity is not to detract from the potential of that light to affect human history.²⁰ ‘Our thesis is simply that the capacity of Jesus Christ to create these human witnesses is not restricted to His working on and in prophets and apostles and what is thus made possible and actual in His community. His capacity transcends the limits of this sphere.’²¹

Barth proposes that the Word that is Jesus Christ transcends this sphere through ‘true words which are not spoken in the Bible or the Church, but which have to be regarded as true in relation to the one Word of God, and therefore heard like this Word, and together with it.’²² He refers to these words as ‘parables of the kingdom’ and as the community of faith that is the Church ‘is commissioned and empowered to proclaim’ Jesus Christ in the world, ‘not only *may* but *must* accept the fact that there are such words and that it must hear them too’.²³ For Barth, the grace of God expressed so powerfully through reconciliation cannot be contained in the sphere of Christendom. He writes,

In the very light of this narrower and smaller sphere of the Bible and the Church, we cannot possibly think that He cannot speak, and His speech cannot be attested, outside this sphere. We who in contrast to others have our place and task here, and to whom it is given to know what others do not know, can and must expect that His voice will also be heard without. We can and must be prepared to encounter ‘parables of the kingdom’ in the full biblical sense, not merely in the witness of the Bible and the various arrangements, works and words of the Christian Church, but also in the secular sphere.²⁴

¹⁹ Ibid, 74.

²⁰ Ibid, 86.

²¹ Ibid, 118.

²² Ibid, 114.

²³ Ibid, 114. Italics mine.

²⁴ Ibid, 117. Elsewhere, I write, ‘Barth considers these witnesses outside of the Christian sphere to be parables of the Kingdom “in the full biblical sense”. The question then arises: what does he mean by this? The word Barth uses here is *Gleichnis* (pl. *Gleichnisse*), which appears nearly 250 times

These 'parables of the kingdom' are encountered in the outer sphere by virtue of God's 'free revelation of grace.'²⁵ It is in the freedom of God that this revelation occurs, for '[even] if humanity rejects God, God has accepted humanity in Christ, thus making way for the potential of true references of God.'²⁶ Barth writes, 'For Him neither the militant godlessness of the outer periphery of the community, nor the intricate heathenism of the inner, is an insurmountable barrier.' He continues,

[We should] have [no] illusions as to the antithesis between the kingdom of heaven and those of this earth. But in neither case should we have too little confidence in the One who extends His dominion also over the kingdoms of this earth, nor expect too little in the way of signs of this lordship.²⁷

While Barth might seem to be expressing a generosity akin to Schleiermacher's early openness regarding revelation, it is not Schleiermacher's 'cultured despisers' he is challenging here, but those within the 'inner sphere', those within the Church who possess an overly critical limitation in their view of what might be considered revelatory.

Barth distinguishes this reconciliatory revelation from that of Schleiermacher yet further with a warning that these parables of the kingdom found in the outer sphere are not to be not to be found by way of any natural theology, through which 'only abstract impartations concerning God's existence as the Supreme Being and Ruler of all things, and man's responsibility towards Him' might be attained.²⁸ Instead, Barth's

throughout his *Church Dogmatics* and most frequently within §69 (27). ... Within the context of §69 (and indeed, within the context of the entirety of the *Church Dogmatics*) what Barth means by *Gleichnis/Gleichnisse* can be understood as congruous with the parables of Jesus in the Gospels.' See Smith, 110.

²⁵ Barth, *CD* IV/3.1, 101.

²⁶ Smith, 109.

²⁷ Barth, *CD* IV/3.1, 121-2. See Smith, 109.

²⁸ Barth, *CD* IV/3.1, 121-2.

view retains a christocentric understanding of revelation. God *does* reveal Godself through reconciliation in human experience.²⁹

While elsewhere I have argued that the challenge presented in §69 compels the Church to look for ‘parables of the kingdom’ in the non-Christian sphere in particular³⁰, here, I wish to use Barth’s reasoning to argue for something of a middle ground. The praxis of the poor and the marginalised, the essence of liberation theology, is not something that necessarily takes place in the so-called ‘secular’ sphere. The systematised expressions of the first wave of liberation theology in Latin America are based on the prior understanding that the poor (in particular) develop their critical reflection on praxis through organic local bodies, such as ecclesial base communities (Spanish: *comunidades eclesiales de base*, or CEBs). Within CEBs, local communities employ their praxis in critical conjunction with the Bible to reach their conclusions. This process might well reside within the boundaries of Barth’s ‘inner sphere’ in principle, but the conclusions that follow from liberation theology are most decidedly opposed to ‘Christendom’ as it stands. The aforementioned preference for the poor and marginalised, in conjunction with Barth’s insistence that the ‘true words which are not spoken in the Bible or the Church, but which have to be regarded as true in relation to the one Word of God’ presents a positive theological rationale for the authority of the praxis of the poor and marginalised through the lens of parable.

²⁹ See Tony Clark, *Divine Revelation and Human Practice* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade, 2008), 1, 5-6.

³⁰ Smith, v.

II. What are parables and how do they function in the Synoptic Gospels?

Appealing to Tertullian in *Adversus Marcionem*, Barth writes, 'In the gospel Christ Himself is the kingdom of God.' As such, Christ 'is the mystery that cannot be imprisoned in any system of human conceptuality but can be revealed and known only in parables.'³¹ American New Testament scholar Arland Hultgren argues that Jesus' parables are his 'primary medium of revelation'.³² N.T. Wright argues that the parables function in this way by providing information about the *nature* of the kingdom of God and are also 'part of the *means* of bringing it to birth'.³³ This gives an indication of the what the parables do – that they are not mere transmission of data, but it is in the *parable event* that God might be apprehended. In order to better understand their function, it is necessary to first explore what parables are as presented in the Gospels.

Within the synoptic gospels, some form of the Greek word for parable, παραβολή appears 48 times. What is meant by parable is difficult to define, as the word is used in relation to a number of figures of speech, encompassing a variety of literary functions. American theologian Klyne Snodgrass writes, 'Hardly anything said about parables — whether defining them or explaining their characteristics — is true of all of them.'³⁴ To better understand their general function, Snodgrass outlines several categories that give breadth to the way in which the praxis of the poor and marginalised might be read as parables.

³¹ Karl Barth, *The Christian Life*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 353.

³² Arland J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2000), 1-2. See Smith, 123.

³³ N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 176. See Smith, 123.

³⁴ Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2008), 7.

A. Classifying biblical parables

Snodgrass' first category is that of aphoristic sayings, which can be seen as certain analogies, riddles, proverbs or instructions within the Synoptic Gospels. One example of this is found in the fifteenth chapter of Matthew's Gospel. While speaking to a crowd, Jesus says, 'Listen and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles.' Afterward, Peter appeals to Jesus: 'Explain this parable to us.'³⁵ Another such example is found in Mark's Gospel, when Jesus is casting out demons. A number of scribes seek to discredit the Nazarene by suggesting, 'He has Beelzebub, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.' The Gospel states, 'And [Jesus] called [the scribes] to him, and spoke to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand."³⁶ While these and a number of other aphoristic sayings throughout the Bible are labelled as parables (whether that be the Greek παραβολή or the Hebrew noun and verb לְפָנָי), aphorisms are not the primary focus of the study of parables in New Testament discourse.

Similitudes form Snodgrass' second category of parables. This category consists of extended similes, comparing the kingdom of God to something more tangible (though not necessarily 'typical') without the development of a plot.³⁷ An example is the well-known Parable of the Mustard Seed from Matthew 13.³⁸ While this parable includes multiple tenses ('The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that

³⁵ Matthew 15.10-5; cf. Mark 7.14-7.

³⁶ Mark 3.22-4.

³⁷ Snodgrass remarks, 'Often it is said that [similitudes] relate a *typical or recurring* event or process in real life and are expressed in the present tense, but neither is true. Tense is *not* a factor in distinguishing forms. Some have two or more tenses, and some use the aorist (e.g., the Leaven in Matt 13.33). Nor is a similitude necessarily a typical or recurring event. Is finding a treasure typical or recurring?' Snodgrass, 12.

³⁸ Matthew 13.31-2.

someone *took* [λαβὼν – aorist active participle] and *sowed* [ἐσπαίρεν – aorist active indicative]... but when it has *grown* [αύξηθῇ – aorist passive subjunctive] it *is* [ἐστὶν – present active indicative] the greatest of shrubs and *becomes* [γίνεται – present middle indicative] a tree...’), it includes no plot development and would not be considered a narrative. Similarly, Snodgrass’ third category, interrogative parables do not feature a story. Unlike questions used as a way to introduce a narrative or questions found within a narrative, interrogative parables ‘*are presented entirely as questions*’, such as the Parable of the Lost Coin (Luke 15.8-10).³⁹

The remaining categories presented by Snodgrass consist of narrative forms, the most commonly recognised parables. Double indirect narrative parables are labelled as such because they consist of a narrative that is entirely analogous to the hearer. This category is distinct from single indirect narrative parables, which will be addressed later. Among these double indirect parables, judicial parables are considered especially forceful due to their referential ambiguity. Snodgrass writes, ‘judicial parables elicit a self-condemnation from the hearer(s) through the aid of an image. The hearer is forced to judge the circumstances of the parable, and then the lens drops and one realizes that he or she has judge him or herself.’⁴⁰ One example is the Parable of the Two Sons from Matthew 21. This parable begins with a question, ‘What do you think?’, though this is used as an introduction—a call to the hearers to consider what will be said—as opposed to the questions asked by interrogative parables. Jesus tells the story of two sons who are charged by their father to work in the family vineyard. Initially, the first son refuses, deciding only later to work the

³⁹ Snodgrass, 12.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 13.

vineyard. The second son obeys his father's command with his words, though does not follow through. Jesus then asks the question, 'Which of the two did the will of the father?'⁴¹

The single indirect parables are distinct from the double indirect parables in that they seem to present a single subject that serves as an example—whether positively or negatively—to the hearer. Snodgrass writes, 'Either explicitly or implicitly the example story says, "Go and do [or do not do] likewise" (cf. Luke 10.37).'⁴² I agree with Snodgrass' assertion that labelling such parables as 'examples' 'is both inadequate and inappropriate'.⁴³ Perhaps the most well-known of these so-called 'example' parables is that of the Good Samaritan. It is worth noting that a number of scholars, such as Irish-American New Testament scholar John Dominic Crossan, reject this sense of 'example'. For Crossan, the forms of 'parable' and 'example' as mutually exclusive, with the former offering a poetic, eschatological sense of the reality of the kingdom of God and the latter offering only a didactic tool through which the tradition might impose its own morality. Crossan contends that the structure of the Parable of the Good Samaritan as taken within the context of Luke 10.25-37 is the result of redaction. He observes the exchange presented in 10.25-8:

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he said, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, 'What is written in the law? What do you read there?' He answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.' And he said to him, 'You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.'⁴⁴

⁴¹ Matthew 21.28-32.

⁴² Snodgrass, 13-4.

⁴³ Ibid, 14.

⁴⁴ Luke 10.25-28.

While some form of this teaching is presented in the other Synoptic Gospels (cf. Matthew 22.34-40; Mark 12.28-34), Crossan argues that due to the fact that the other Gospels do not follow with the parable as is found in Luke's Gospel, that the Good Samaritan 'is not so intrinsically united with the previous unit as to be inseparable from it.'⁴⁵

Additionally, Crossan sees the parable's prefix (especially 10.27, 29) and suffix (10:36) as pulling in two divergent directions regarding the application of the parable. With these things in mind, he determines that 'it seems best to conclude that the originally separate units were Luke 10.25-28 (29) and 10:30-36 (37) and that they were united because of the common theme of πλησίον [neighbour], but with its divergent meanings not totally harmonized and so bearing witness to the divergent pieces of tradition in use'.⁴⁶ Crossan concludes that the parable was redacted in order to conform to the 'moral injunction' of tradition, ignoring the 'metaphorical challenge' of the original parable. He writes, 'If we abandon finally and completely the idea of an example, as deriving from the tradition and not from Jesus, [it is] possible to see this as a parable... The metaphorical point is that *just so* does the kingdom of God break abruptly into a person's consciousness and demand the overturn of prior values, closed options, set judgements, and established conclusions.'⁴⁷ Naturally, the view espoused by Crossan here stands opposed to the majority of commentators.

⁴⁵ John Dominic Crossan, 'Parable and Example in the Teaching of Jesus,' *Semeia* 1 (1974), 67.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 68. Dan Otto Via sees Crossan's treatment of the Parable of the Good Samaritan—in particular, the inclusion of verse 36 in 10.30-6—as structurally illogical. See Via, 'Parable and Example Story: A Literary-Structuralist Approach,' *Semeia* 1 (1974), 112.

⁴⁷ Crossan, 'Parable and Example', 76. While Crossan's conception of the 'kingdom of God' diverges from the orthodox Christian understanding, his treatment of parables in particular is a valuable addition in the broader discussion.

While Snodgrass acknowledges the insufficiency of the classification of example story, he maintains that ‘the attempt to show that they were originally metaphorical pictures of the reversal of the kingdom cannot suffice.’⁴⁸ He argues that single indirect parables are not purely metaphorical because they ‘do not juxtapose different realms; they are about the subjects they narrate: a Samaritan’s aid, the wealth of a rich fool, etc.’⁴⁹ While these types of parables are indirect in a particular sense, for example, by telling of a Samaritan (assuming the audience is not composed of Samaritans), they also address the hearer ‘directly by treating the subject at hand.’⁵⁰ Therefore, it is perhaps best to see these single indirect parables as neither fully metaphorical nor fully exemplary. The example of the Parable of the Good Samaritan functions as a direct treatment, through example, of what it means to be a good neighbour, but it also functions within the scheme of God’s programme in humanity, which is indeed a reversal of established sensibilities, contrary to Snodgrass’ assertion that this sense of reversal is not present in the very parabolic form itself (which is addressed in the following section).

Snodgrass’ final category is that of ‘How much more’ parables. These types of parables draw from a rabbinical logic, contrasting human action with the action of God. ‘How much more’ parables occur both in interrogative as well as narrative forms, but all present this contrast. Snodgrass writes, ‘They may not have explicit signals to warn that the parable functions to contrast human behaviour with God’s, but the context, the conclusion, or the nature of the parable usually leaves little doubt.’⁵¹ He presents as an example the Parable of the Unjust Judge (also known as the Parable of the

⁴⁸ Snodgrass, 14.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 14.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 15.

⁵¹ Ibid, 15.

Persistent Widow) from Luke 18. In this parable, Jesus presents ‘a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people’, which sets this character in clear contrast to God from the onset.⁵² This judge is approached by a woman who asks for ‘justice against [her] opponent.’ At first, the judge is reluctant, though, due to the widow’s persistent pleading, he eventually grants her justice, ‘so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.’ While Jesus does not use the words ‘how much more’ in this particular parable, he presents a just God that far exceeds the justice even this ‘unjust’ judge offers.

Speaking broadly, throughout all of these categories, Snodgrass sees the form of parable as ‘an expanded analogy used to convince and persuade.’⁵³ The parables act as signposts into the kingdom of God.⁵⁴ Yet beyond the mere conveyance of data, the parables are designed to *do* something to the listener – to inspire transformation.⁵⁵ In order to get at the heart of the argument in this chapter—that the praxis of the poor might function in a parabolic way—I will now explore how the parables accomplish this, beginning with their basic composition.

For the parables to be able to ‘convince and persuade’, they must first engage the hearer. They accomplish this through making use of various relatable components. Snodgrass observes that, with the exception of Mark’s version of the Parable of the Mustard Seed (4.30-2), every parable is anthropocentric – they focus on fictionalised depictions of realistic humans. This is the first component in enabling the hearer to

⁵² Luke 18.1-8.

⁵³ Snodgrass, 9.

⁵⁴ Peter Rhea Jones, *The Teaching of the Parables* (Nashville: Broadman, 1982), 28. While this kingdom-oriented concept is prevalent in contemporary discussion, early Christian literature does not interpret every parable as such. For further discussion see Charles W. Hedrick, *Parables as Poetic Fiction: The Creative Voice of Jesus* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1994), 7-35.

⁵⁵ See Appendix 2, ‘A Brief Overview of Approaches to the Interpretation of Parables’.

enter into the story. The second component is the use of what Welsh Anglican priest Geraint Vaughan Jones calls the ‘raw material’ of everyday life.⁵⁶ A sower, seeds, wheat, weeds, leaven, a fig tree, a sheep, debtors, sons, tenants, Pharisees, Samaritans, etc. These elements within parables would be well understood by those who heard the Gospels. With these in place, the parables often continue in their engagement by presenting something compelling. Sometimes these compelling elements remain relatable *to an extent*. For example, while treasure is something that the hearers could *comprehend*, finding treasure would not be understood as a common occurrence.⁵⁷ Other parables (especially within parables that do not feature narrative elements) never depart from everyday content. Snodgrass writes, ‘Some parables are neither vivid nor strange (e.g., Mark 13.28), and some leave no doubt about their application.’⁵⁸ What makes these parables and all other parables compelling beyond the most basic level of their content has to do with how they *work*.

B. Biblical parables as metaphor and indirect communication

Paul Ricœur enters into this discussion with ‘*Le “Royaume” dans les Paraboles de Jésus*’ (English: ‘The “Kingdom” in the Parables of Jesus’). In this article, Ricœur distinguishes parable from proclamation and proverb, writing, ‘Jesus teaches by means of metaphor (image) or comparison.’⁵⁹ He argues that whatever Jesus ‘intends to say is signified indirectly, by means of comparison.’⁶⁰ As a result, through the form

⁵⁶ G.V. Jones, 113.

⁵⁷ See the Parable of the Hidden Treasure, Matthew 13.44.

⁵⁸ Snodgrass, 7.

⁵⁹ Paul Ricœur, ‘The “Kingdom” in the Parables of Jesus,’ *Anglican Theological Review* 63 no. 2 (April 1981): 165. This was first published in French as ‘Le “Royaume” dans les Paraboles de Jésus,’ *Etudes théologiques et religieuses* 51 (1976): 15-19.

⁶⁰ Ricœur, ‘Kingdom,’ 166.

of parables, an 'ordinary incident is given an extraordinary twist,' and while they 'convey a literal sense', this sense 'is overturned in its identity by another trait of extraordinariness or extravagance within the plot: the action in the plot is always outlandish when seen in terms of expected behavior.'⁶¹ Ricœur writes,

Jesus nowhere says *what* the Kingdom is. He limits himself to saying *what it resembles*. That in itself is very instructive. Jesus does not speak like a theologian; he does not teach by means of concepts (general ideas conceived by the intellect), but rather by means of images. Whatever he intends to say is signified indirectly, by means of comparison. Thus does he make himself understood by all, both the ignorant and the wise. The symbol gives rise to thought; we might even say it compels one to reflect...it obliges one to reconsider things, to come to a new decision.⁶²

In other words, the in presenting the kingdom of God in parabolic form, Jesus presents a logical scandal to the hearer which functions by way of 're-orientation by disorientation.'⁶³ The kingdom is presented as a story, not 'as a given state of affairs,' but as a 'drama'.⁶⁴ This progression of narrative 'begins in an ordinary manner, only to turn to the fantastic, but to a fantastic that remains a fantastic of the everyday, without the supernatural, as it appears in fairy tales or in myths.'⁶⁵ 'The extraordinary in the ordinary,' Ricœur writes, 'that is what baffles one and leads one to ask: Why is this story told?'⁶⁶

⁶¹ David E. Klemm, *The Hermeneutical Theory of Paul Ricœur: A Constructive Analysis* (Lewisburg, Pennsylvania: Bucknell University Press, 1983), 115. See Smith, 126-7.

⁶² Ricœur, 'Kingdom,' 166. In his article, 'Paradox Gives Rise to Metaphor,' Crossan provides a helpful interpretation of Ricœur's conclusion here. For Crossan, the heart of the function of the parable—described by Ricœur as surprise, astonishment, shock and provocation, and described elsewhere as 'extravagance'—is paradox, the aspects of which are 'evinced by Jesus' parables in terms of their pragmatics, their semantics, and their syntactics.' For more on this, see Crossan, 'Paradox Gives Rise to Metaphor: Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics and the Parables of Jesus,' *Biblical Research* 24 (January 1979): 20-37. See Smith, 126-7.

⁶³ Ricœur, 'Biblical Hermeneutics,' *Semeia* 4 (1975): 114.

⁶⁴ Ricœur, 'Kingdom,' 166.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 167.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 167.

Ricœur does not see the kingdom of God as the 'ultimate reference of the parables'. Instead, their ultimate reference is 'human reality in its wholeness'.⁶⁷ This is problematic in that it leaves open the possibility that the parables are divorced from their original revolutionary context, perhaps hindering a critical reflection on praxis as parable. The thoughts of Canadian-born English theologian Janet Soskice in *Metaphor and Religious Language* (1985) present a helpful dialogue with Ricœur's thoughts regarding parable and metaphor. Soskice sees Ricœur's view as problematic as it comes 'perilously close to committing... to both a "dual sense" and a "dual truth" thesis' in which the 'metaphor has at the same time a literal meaning and a metaphorical one'.⁶⁸ While she defines metaphor as 'that figure of speech whereby we speak about one thing in terms which are seen to be suggestive of another', she argues for 'theological realism' over and above what she considers to be Ricœur's 'idealism'.⁶⁹

For Soskice, Jesus' parables 'get at' a particular thing, whereas Ricœur argues that the meaning of 'written discourse is cut off from its original author and context'.⁷⁰ She maintains that humanistic assumptions of literary structuralists like Ricœur fail to account for how a metaphor 'can say something genuinely new'.⁷¹ While Soskice's view may assume that human experience alone may not bring about this 'new' thing, her challenge remains useful while held in tension with Ricœur's views as this maintains the possibility that something that transcends earthly reality may also play a part in how parables function.

⁶⁷ Ricœur, 'Biblical Hermeneutics,' 127.

⁶⁸ Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 84-6. See Smith, 128.

⁶⁹ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical narrative in the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: A study in hermeneutics and theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 75. See Smith, 127-8.

⁷⁰ Vanhoozer, 84n91. See Smith, 128.

⁷¹ Vanhoozer, 76. Soskice, 89. See Smith, 128.

At this point I return to discussing the paradox inherent in parables. While many scholars, especially those who employ the literary-structuralist approach as explored above, view parables as essentially narrative in form, it is important to be reminded of Snodgrass' observation that throughout the Synoptic Gospels, the category of parable is applied to numerous non-narrative figures of speech like aphorisms and similitudes. Taken together, the parables 'create an imaginary world that reflects reality.'⁷² However they are presented, the parables create an 'internal juxtaposition' by somehow contrasting the ordinary and the extraordinary.⁷³ As I have written, in creating this internal juxtaposition, they do not function as mere transmission of data, but, in their very nature, they 'also *enact* the way in which the Kingdom comes... [by setting] two unlike things beside each other and [often] through a drama of tragedy and comedy they challenge the hearer and draw them into a new understanding.'⁷⁴ Returning to this indirect nature of parabolic form, I now engage with Søren Kierkegaard's treatment of the concept of the 'impossibility of direct communication' as presented in *Training in Christianity* (first published in Danish as *Indøvelse i Christendom* in 1850).⁷⁵

Training in Christianity—which Kierkegaard considered to be the 'most perfect and truest thing I have written'⁷⁶ (and written under his familiar pseudonym, Anti-Climacus)—is composed of three parts. The second of these parts is a focus on what Kierkegaard calls 'The Offense' (borrowing from Jesus' words from Matthew 11.6:

⁷² Snodgrass, 8.

⁷³ P. R. Jones, 29.

⁷⁴ Smith, 131.

⁷⁵ Søren Kierkegaard, *Training in Christianity and the Edifying Discourse Which 'Accompanied' It*, trans. Walter Lowrie (New York: Vintage, 2004), 119.

⁷⁶ As quoted in Stephen Backhouse, *Kierkegaard: A Single Life* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2016), 255.

‘And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me’). This ‘offense’ is tied up in the whole being of Jesus, being the ‘God-Man’ who is perceived by onlookers ‘as a mere human individual who comes into collision with the established order.’⁷⁷ The nature of this offense is made more clear in Jesus’ own words (and actions) from Matthew 11. When approached by the disciples of John the Baptist concerning whether or not he is the Messiah for whom they have been waiting. Jesus’ response here is indirect. He tells John’s disciples,

Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me.⁷⁸

While Jesus does not answer with a direct ‘yes’ or ‘no’, he offers something more significant. Prior to his imprisonment, John heralded his baptismal ministry by quoting from the prophet Isaiah:

The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.⁷⁹

While Jesus could have responded to John by giving data (a simple, ‘Yes, I am the Messiah’), he instead chooses to offer his actions as evidence of his Messiahship—‘the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news brought to them’—all taken from the Book of Isaiah as evidences of the presence of the kingdom of God.⁸⁰ In this way, John, who by sending his messengers had demonstrated what Crossan would describe as his oppositional deep structure of his expectation, would have his

⁷⁷ Kierkegaard, 71. See Smith, 131.

⁷⁸ Matthew 11.4b-6.

⁷⁹ Ibid 3.3b; cf. Isaiah 40.3.

⁸⁰ See Isaiah 29.18-9; 35.5-6; 61.1.

understanding transformed beyond what could have been conveyed by a direct 'yes'. In Kierkegaard's scheme, this sense of indirect communication is essential to person of Jesus.

While the concept of 'the God-Man as a sign' is not understood as a contradiction, 'a sign of contradiction is a sign which contains in its very constitution a contradiction.'⁸¹ According to Kierkegaard, direct communication of the sign of contradiction is an impossibility. Ultimately, it is in the God-Man's essential contradiction and the impossibility of direct communication that causes Jesus' 'unrecognizableness':

And so unrecognizableness, the absolute unrecognizableness, is this: being God, to be also an individual man. To be the individual man (whether it be a distinguished or a lowly man is here irrelevant), is the greatest possible, the infinitely qualitative, remove from being God, and therefore the profoundest incognito.⁸²

Even if the God-Man were to say something directly, that fact he is 'the sign of contradiction', 'a perceivably normal man who is also God is saying this direct thing then converts that directness into indirectness'.⁸³ This is reflected in the teaching that proceeds from the God-Man, for while the teaching might be conveyed directly—for example, in the form of parables—'by virtue of both the communicator (sign of contradiction) and the communication (internal juxtaposition), their significance is indirect.'⁸⁴ In order for the listener to apprehend the significance of a parable, they must 'undo the [dialectical] knot for [themselves].' This reinforces the idea that the parables 'are designed to bring about a change, transformation and understanding, not to simply communicate data. [While] direct communication might convey

⁸¹ Kierkegaard, 109. See Smith, 131-2.

⁸² Ibid, 112. See Smith, 132.

⁸³ Smith, 133; Kierkegaard, 120.

⁸⁴ Smith, 133.

information, indirect communication causes the listener to learn and to be transformed.⁸⁵

What has been explored above is only a brief look at what parables are and how they function to bring about transformation. The parables of Jesus might provide information about the nature of the kingdom of God, but as parable events, they are also part of the means of bringing that reality to birth in the lives and actions of the hearer. This is accomplished as the parables take on various forms, from similitudes and interrogation to structures that feature plot development, such as single and double indirect parables. These forms cause the listener to challenge oneself and to challenge established sensibilities. Parables are indirect signposts, designed to inspire transformation and to direct the hearer to the reality of the kingdom of God. This happens as the raw material of everyday life is developed into a scheme that points beyond the ordinary into a realm of the extraordinary. The literary-structuralist view presents Greimas' actantial scheme, which Crossan sees as a demonstration of how the parables act as 'a raid on the articulate'.

Ricoeur observes that through the parables, Jesus does not say what the kingdom is, but what it resembles, which facilitates transformation (re-orientation by disorientation). Kierkegaard posits that through Jesus, one encounters the paradox that is the God-Man, the sign of contradiction and that this indirectness is essential to the way in which the God of 'infinite qualitative distinction' interacts with human existence. In this inherent indirectness, the hearer is challenged to undo the dialectical

⁸⁵ Ibid; See Snodgrass, 8.

knot, which brings transformation. This paradox is also the essence of the necessary 'Offense' brought by the one who is the sign of contradiction.

D. Actantial structure in biblical parables

As has been explored and argued above, the genre of biblical parable contains several categories that act as indirect signs that point beyond their subjects themselves, namely, toward the nature of the kingdom of God. A helpful tool in exploring the biblical parables as paradox—and one essential in this exploration of praxis as parables—can be found in the literary-structuralist model. American biblical scholar Dan Otto Via's *The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension* (1967) presents the literary-structuralist model of interpreting the parables, in which narrative might point outwardly. This can be accomplished in what Via describes later as the 'actantiel analysis' (borrowed from Greimas⁸⁶), defining the actant accordingly:

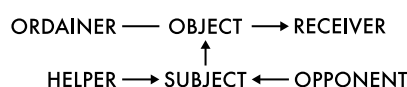
An actant is not a character but is a function, role, or status whose quality is to be the subject of our participant in a constant action. The actant is perhaps usually a personal character, but it may be an object, institution, feeling, disposition, condition, etc. Grammatically it corresponds to the present participle. A story may have any number of characters but no more than six actants, though it may have fewer. This means that one actant may be represented in several characters and that one character may fulfil more than one actant.⁸⁷

Within narrative parables in particular, the actant is the centrepiece of the action. A graphical depiction of the actantial scheme features the **subject** either desires an **object** and/or to communicate this desire to a **recipient**. The object proceeds from

⁸⁶ A.-J. Greimas, *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method*, trans. Daniele McDowell, Ronald Schleifer and Alan Velie (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 197-221.

⁸⁷ Via, 'Parable and Example Story,' 107. See Smith, 124-5.

an **ordainer** (also called the helper or giver) and in seeking this object, ‘the subject may be aided by a **helper**... or impeded by an **opponent**’.⁸⁸



Crossan also makes use of Greimas’ structure in his work with parables, such as in his treatment of the Parable of the Good Samaritan (as taken in Luke 10:30b-35).⁸⁹ Via does not view the Good Samaritan as a parable due to what he perceives as an operational failure within the actantial scheme, with the Samaritan operating as both the subject and the ordainer.⁹⁰ For Crossan, a sense of a ‘double actant’ does not preclude operational coherence within the actantial scheme. He sees ‘that any such study requires a certain delicacy in literary judgment and that disagreement between scholars neither invalidates their theory nor disqualifies their analyses from serious consideration.’⁹¹ Even with this epistemological generosity in mind, Crossan acknowledges the need for a solution to the *impasse*. His ‘tentative solution’

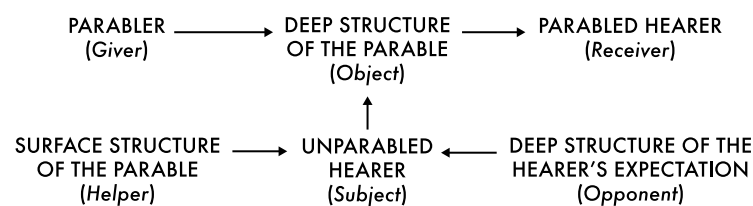
⁸⁸ Ibid, 108. Marcella Althaus-Reid explores Ricoeur’s dependence on Greimas’ actantial analysis in her study of structural semantics and levels of signification in her PhD dissertation. See Althaus-Reid, ‘Paul Ricoeur and the Methodology of the Theology of Liberation: The Hermeneutics of J. Severino Croatto, Juan Luis Segundo and Clodovis Boff,’ (PhD diss., University of St Andrews, 1993), 39-42.

⁸⁹ As mentioned before, Via sees Crossan’s treatment of this parable as structurally illogical. For his part, Via does not view the Parable of the Good Samaritan (and all other parables that would fall into the traditional category of ‘example stories’ or Snodgrass’ category of single indirect parables) as a parable at all. He writes, ‘All of the narrative parables manifest sequential causality at some point, but it does not appear at all in The Good Samaritan’. Via, ‘Parable and Example Story,’ 116. Via continues, ‘To be a metaphor of the kingdom of God the semantic tension would have to be between the ordainer and subject, but in The Good Samaritan those actants are identical. Therefore, this narrative is a metaphor which gives a new meaning to the responsibilities of neighbourliness but is not a metaphor of the kingdom of God, and on this ground it is not a parable’. Ibid, 119.

⁹⁰ Via explores his exclusionary rationale further in ‘The Relationship of Form to Content in the Parables: The Wedding Feast’ *Interpretation* 25, no. 2 (1 April 1971): 171-184. Here, he contrasts the Wedding Feast, which he does not consider a ‘true parable’ with eight narrative parables (the Talents, the Ten Maidens, the Wedding Guest, the Unforgiving Servant, the Wicked Tenants, the Workers in the Vineyard, the Unjust Steward and the Prodigal Son). These eight narrative parables ‘present a union of form and content so that meaning depends as much on form as on content.’ Ibid, 174. The Wedding Feast does not reflect this unity as a result of its content, namely, that ‘the whole story is not informed by the fate of one person (or group).’ Ibid, 180. This eliminates any ‘unifying effect’ in the Wedding Feast, with no main character to ‘undergo some kind of change of existence.’ Ibid, 181. See Smith, 124.

⁹¹ Crossan, ‘The Good Samaritan: Towards a Generic Definition of Parable,’ *Semeia* 2 (1974): 91.

approaches the Good Samaritan from the ‘axis of Communication’.⁹² In order to see this, he appeals to Roland Barthes’ 1966 article, ‘Introduction à l’analyse structural des récits’ (English: ‘Introduction to the structural analysis of stories’). In exploring Greimas’ actantial scheme, Barthes acknowledges that, within ‘many stories’, two persons may occupy the role of subject, even at the most fundamental level, as ‘un *duel de personnes*’ (‘a *duel* of people’).⁹³ This is best observed from the level of narration, what Crossan explores as the axis of Communication. Crossan asks, ‘is the final outcome in the *parable* or the *parabled*?’⁹⁴ Here, he draws a distinction between the parabler (one who delivers the parable) and the parabled (one to whom the parable is communicated). This then opens Greimas’ actantial scheme to the parable as event, communicated to the parabled in the following way:



Seen in this way, the Parable of the Good Samaritan functions on multiple levels, its most significant being the way that it functions as ‘an attack on the hearer on the most profound level’, in its challenge to expectations.⁹⁵ Crossan writes, ‘A *parable* is a story whose artistic surface structure allows its deep structure to invade one’s hearing in direct contradiction to the deep structure of one’s expectation. It is an attack on world, a raid on the articulate.’⁹⁶ The reality of the Samaritan’s ‘goodness’ in the parable is undeniable and in the first-century Jewish context, this reality functions as an attack

⁹² Ibid, 92.

⁹³ Roland Barthes, ‘Introduction à l’analyse structural des récits,’ *Communications* 8 (1966): 18.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 95. Italics mine.

⁹⁵ Crossan, ‘The Good Samaritan,’ 96.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 98.

on 'the security with which one knows good from evil and who or what represents each possibility within one's established world.'⁹⁷

For Crossan, this paradoxical undermining of expectation characterises all parables and in turn, this parabolic scheme permeates all of faith. Crossan writes, 'In the openness of authentic disclosure we admit the possibility of something unknown, even contradictory to our world; for we *put into question* our own faculties – for instance, reason, will, the senses – rather than blindly measuring and evaluating what is real on the basis of these.'⁹⁸ Jesus' role in the Christian faith is not a mere addition to the canon, but a complete revaluation of each of the sensibilities and conclusions of that faith.⁹⁹ As mentioned before, Crossan's approach is not accepted universally. Snodgrass makes certain to highlight Crossan's parabolic interpretations as options within *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, though the majority of conclusions contradict Crossan's fixation on the subversive interpretation of the parables. Crossan's general approach to the New Testament is not without its complications. As mentioned earlier, Crossan does not view every text described as 'parable' within the Gospels as parables. Additionally, his underlying presuppositions concerning the reality of the Christian faith (such as the position that Jesus' divinity is metaphorical) do not cohere with liberation theology's general credal underpinnings.

I argue that while Greimas did not anticipate the use of his actantial model in the interpretation of parables, and while Crossan's definition of parable is limited, the

⁹⁷ Ibid, 97-8.

⁹⁸ L.M. Vail, *Heidegger and Ontological Differences* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1972), 64. See Smith, 126.

⁹⁹ See John C. Hoffman, 'Story as Mythoparabolic Medium: Reflections on Crossan's Interpretation of the Parables of Jesus,' *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 37 no. 4 (1983): 323-333. See Smith, 126.

actantial model remains a useful tool here. Greimas argues that his scheme presents a necessarily ‘transformational sequence’, ‘a logical “before” and “after”’.¹⁰⁰ In utilising Greimas’ model, Crossan stays true to this sense, offering a reading of the New Testament that is subversive and revolutionary. This coheres both with the parabolic form itself (subversive in its reinterpretation and reversal of the ‘raw material’ of everyday life) as well as the revolutionary presuppositions of liberation theology as explored in the first two chapters of this thesis. It is my argument that Crossan’s use of the actantial model in his reading of the Gospel parables does not necessitate a rejection of orthodox Christian faith and this model also proves especially useful in the exploration of praxis as parables in the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

Having argued previously that the praxis of the poor and marginalised has a special authority in the kingdom of God, this chapter has argued for the possibility that this praxis may be approached through the lens of parabolic form. Having then explored several ways in which biblical parables function—including through textual analysis—taking Barth’s concept of ‘parables of the kingdom’ might enable one to approach the praxis of the poor and the marginalised from the perspective of Crossan’s use of Greimas’ actantial model, one in which the expectations of the hearer are inverted. Being that this actantial model applies to text within the field literary structuralism, it is now therefore fitting to ask the question: might the praxis of the poor and marginalised function as *text*? In the rest of this chapter, I explore this question in brief with the aid of Ricoeur before engaging in a tentative actantial analysis of the praxis of the poor and marginalised.

¹⁰⁰ Greimas, 195.

III. Action as Text

In his 1971 article, 'The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as Text,' Ricœur opens with a consideration of German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey's concept of *Auslegung* (English: interpretation or exegesis), which 'covers only a limited category of signs, those which are fixed by writing, including all the sorts of documents and monuments which entail a fixation similar to writing.'¹⁰¹ With this in mind, Ricœur explores how 'the human sciences' might be able to be interpreted as texts under the two conditions that 'their *object* displays some of the features constitutive of a text as text,' and that 'their *methodology* develops the same kind of procedures as those of *Auslegung* or text-interpretation.'¹⁰² This premise ties to liberation theology's relationship to the 'human sciences' and how the methodology of liberation theology might be read as text, as would therefore be subject to textual analysis. Ricœur begins by first exploring the suitability of the paradigm of 'text' in relation to the social sciences.

In analysing the paradigm of the text, Ricœur presents the 'distinction between spoken and written language' in terms of *discourse*, which he calls 'language-event or linguistic usage.'¹⁰³ In this scheme, discourse—consisting of the basic unit of the 'linguistics of the sentence', as opposed the *sign*, which 'is the basic unit of language'—functions based on four particular traits. The first of these traits is that discourse is necessarily temporal. While 'the language system is virtual and outside of time', discourse has a temporal beginning and end.¹⁰⁴ The second trait is that—

¹⁰¹ Ricœur, 'The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as Text,' *Social Research* 38, no. 3 (Autumn 1971), 529.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, 529.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 530.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 530.

unlike language, which has no subject ('in the sense that the question "Who is speaking?" does not apply at its level')—'discourse refers back to its speaker by means of a complex set of indicators such as the personal pronouns.'¹⁰⁵ The third trait is that 'discourse is always about something.' Ricœur writes, 'It is in discourse that the symbolic function of language is actualized.' The fourth and final trait is that, within discourse, 'all messages are exchanged.'¹⁰⁶

At this point in the article, Ricœur proceeds to analyse how the four traits above are demonstrated differently in both spoken and written language before exploring how 'meaningful action' might fare as text when assessed with these four criteria. With the first criterion, discourse as language-event presents the 'problem of fixation', which results in inscription. Non-textual systems do not face this problem as '[the] atemporal system neither appears nor disappears; it does not happen.'¹⁰⁷ Discourse, on the other hand, presents 'intentional exteriorization' in which '[the] locutionary act exteriorizes itself in the sentence' and 'thought grammatical paradigms ... which permit its identification and re-identification.'¹⁰⁸ Similarly, action is fixed and may become objectified 'by some inner traits of the actions which are similar to the structure of the speech-act and which make doing a kind of utterance.'¹⁰⁹ Liberation theology has not been developed as mere self-referential utterances, but as something which is intended to have external implications, namely, to transform the Church.

Ricœur explores the second criterion as what he calls the 'automization of action'. This 'automization' is the result of the social dimension of action. Just as a text

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 530-1.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 531.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 532.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 533.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 538.

becomes 'detached from its author, an action is detached from its agent' since 'our deeds escape us and have effects which we did not intend.'¹¹⁰ These effects have the same function as inscription. Ricœur writes,

Social time... is not only something that flees; it is also the place of durable effects, of persisting patterns. An action leaves a 'trace,' it makes its 'mark' when it contributes to the emergence of such patterns which become the *documents* of human action.¹¹¹

If the third criterion of discourse depends upon something's symbolic function, Ricœur argues that an action is meaningful (and therefore, coherent with this third criterion) if its '*importance*... goes "beyond" its *relevance* to its initial situation.'¹¹² This is to say that the relevance of a particular action to a situation 'other than the one in which this action occurred.' If an action has this ability, it 'exceeds, overcomes, transcends the social conditions of its production and may be reenacted in new social contexts.'¹¹³ This third criterion is related closely to the fourth, which sees human action manifested as an 'open work'. As such, meaningful action 'is *addressed* to an indefinite range of possible "readers."' Ricœur writes, 'All significant events and deeds are, in this way, opened to this kind of practical interpretation through present *praxis*.'¹¹⁴ For Ricœur, meaningful human action is a text as a result of it satisfying all essential criteria of a meaningful text. Therefore, it can be addressed, scrutinised and utilised as a text. Writing in 1977, he states, 'on the one hand, the notion of text is a

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 541.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 542.

¹¹² Ibid, 543.

¹¹³ Ibid, 543.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 544.

good *paradigm* for human action, on the other hand, action is a good *referent* for a whole category of texts.’¹¹⁵

If Ricœur’s analysis of ‘meaningful action as text’ is taken, liberation theology meets each of these criteria. The praxis that lies at the heart of liberation theology takes place within time – a given beginning and end to the experiences of the poor and marginalised. The examples analysed in the following chapters feature this temporal nature – the Solentiname Community’s place within the history of the Nicaraguan Revolution, Óscar Romero’s experiences that culminated in his assassination and Leonardo Boff’s evolving place within the first and second waves of liberation theology. Additionally, as mentioned before liberation theology presupposes the ‘automization’ of its own action in that it has been developed as a practice in order that its conclusions might have a broader impact on the Church and society than their immediate context. This lends itself to what Ricœur calls ‘open work’, ‘this kind of practical interpretation through present *praxis*.’ When each of these criteria are considered in turn, it can be seen how the praxis of the poor and oppressed might function in a parabolic manner.

IV. Praxis as Parable

Throughout this chapter, I have explored various aspects of how the praxis of the poor and marginalised might be examined as parables. This argument is based on praxis satisfying a number of essential criteria. I began with the understanding that the Christian God is best understood as the God of history and the God of the poor.

¹¹⁵ Ricœur, ‘Expliquer et comprendre: Sur quelques connexions remarquables entre la théorie du texte, la théorie de l’action et la théorie de l’histoire,’ *Revue philosophique de Louvain* 75, no. 25 (February 1977), 139. Translation mine.

With this established, it is possible to see the praxis of the poor and marginalised as possessing a particular authority in terms of speaking to the life, structure and work of the Christian Church. The possibility that this praxis might be understood as parabolic in form is reinforced by the work of Barth, who argues that the grace and freedom of God necessitates that 'true parables of the kingdom of God' exist beyond the sphere of the Bible and Church tradition (Christendom). These 'true' or 'secular parables' may function in an unwitting manner — while it might not be the intention of the subject(s) to convey a parabolic truth, divine revelation may be gleaned from these parables none the less. This is bolstered by the arguments presented by Kierkegaard and Soskice that all communication is indirect.

As parabolic analysis is focussed on dealing with semantic structures, I have also explored how Ricœur justifies the analysis of 'meaningful action' as text. As the praxis of the poor and marginalised as understood in liberation theology is explored in conjunction with 'the human sciences', it may be interpreted as lived text under the condition that both 'their *object* displays some of the features constitutive of a text as text,' and that 'their *methodology* develops the same kind of procedures as those of *Auslegung* or text-interpretation.' Ricœur sees fit to text whether or not an action might fit into the category of text by looking for four particular traits: that the action (discourse event) is necessarily temporal, it features a subject or subjects, it is *about* something and that it 'is *addressed* to an indefinite range of possible "readers."' In this manner, '[all] significant events and deeds are, in this way, opened to this kind of practical interpretation through present *praxis*.' With these laid out, the meaningful action of the praxis of the poor and marginalised can be addressed, scrutinised and utilised as a

text.¹¹⁶ This will be reinforced further by presenting the ways that various examples of praxis in the following three chapters have a meaningful impact on various bodies (such as inspiring a greater social consciousness within a community).

Once the above has been tested against a particular example of praxis, the categories of parable as presented by Snodgrass may be considered. Is a particular example of praxis demonstrative of aphoristic sayings, similitudes or narrative forms, whether that be double indirect narrative parables, judicial parables, single indirect narrative parables, example stories or 'How much more' parables. Among narrative examples in particular, the final step in analysis in my scheme involves employing Greimas' actantial structure, applying actantial roles to the various players within the lived narrative in order to demonstrate the subversion—and therefore, necessary challenge and transformation—of previously held beliefs and ideologies of the hearer.

Conclusion

The parables of the Synoptic Gospels function in various ways in order to produce kingdom-oriented transformation in the hearer.¹¹⁷ One significant way this has been observed is by way of the actantial structure employed by Crossan, in particular. Keeping in mind both the possibility of the existence of 'parables of the kingdom' beyond the confines of the Bible as presented by Barth and Ricoeur's argument that meaningful action functions in a manner similar to text, it is now possible to test how the products of liberation theology might function in a manner similar to that of biblical

¹¹⁶ It is valuable to note that these four criteria overlap with Juan Luis Segundo's hermeneutical circle as explored in the first chapter.

¹¹⁷ Wright, 176.

parables. To aid in this process, it is helpful to be reminded of the various stages that exist in liberation theology.

Firstly, liberation theology begins with praxis. At the heart of all liberation theologies (within the first wave, in particular) is a focus on the base as their starting point. Working from the conclusions from Vatican II and Medellín, the first wave liberation theologians express the validity of the committed practice of local communities of Christians in developing their theologies. It is the experiences of the people—both in experiencing the ugliness of oppression and the beauty of living out their faith in community—that informs every other aspect of liberation theology. It is only after the ‘doing’ of faith that a liberation theology may follow as the ‘second step’. Therefore, it is only through critical reflection on the experiences and realities of communities that a liberation theology can prove meaningful and relevant to them.

Once critical reflection on praxis has been established, liberating action follows. When confronted with the challenges and insights that arise from praxis, it is the responsibility of a liberation theology to respond to that reality. This response is not merely a statement condemning oppressors, but a participation in the liberating action of a people. Gutiérrez observes that while the ‘annunciation of the Gospel... has... a politicizing function’,

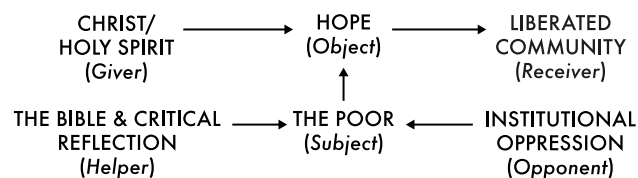
...this is made real and meaningful only by living and announcing the Gospel from within a commitment to liberation, only in concrete, effective solidarity with people and exploited social classes. Only by participating in their struggles can we understand the implications of the Gospel message and make it have an impact on history.¹¹⁸

The last key component of any liberation theology is a broad call for social revolution. It is not enough for a liberation theology to address the plight of the oppressed as if it

¹¹⁸ Gutiérrez, 241

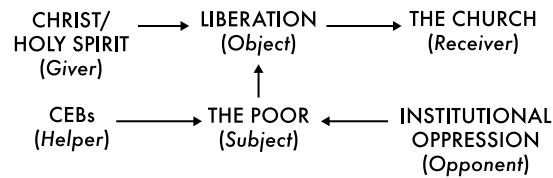
exists in isolation. Oppression is the result of a system that enables that oppression to function. This means that liberation theology has something critical to say about every level of society that contributes to oppression. This is a challenge to the fabric of every institution. Gutiérrez expresses this as ‘eschatological hope’.¹¹⁹ It is essential to see that eschatological hope not only as a future reality, but as the future breaking into the present.

In looking at these various stages, how might the actantial scheme be employed? The challenge for this scheme has to do with the seemingly innumerable ways in which the experiences of the poor and the stages of liberation theology might be configured. There are several actants within the scheme that seem fixed. That God occupies the role of ‘Giver’ is essential, so too is the placement of some form of institutional oppression within the role of ‘Opponent’. One potential actantial configuration of the most basic stage of liberation theology is the following:

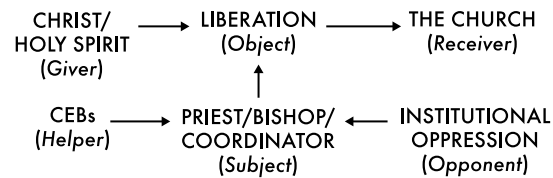


Here, the poor (Subject) are experiencing institutional oppression (Opponent). Aided by the Bible and critical reflection on their praxis (Helper), the poor desire hope (Object) that proceeds from Christ and the Holy Spirit (Giver). Through their active hope, the poor become the liberated community (Receiver). Or perhaps this most basic stage is best reflected by the following structure:

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 234.



In *Ecclesiogenesis*, Leonardo Boff makes clear that it is the CEBs that reinvent the Church. Therefore, in this scheme, the CEBs are the helper of the poor, the object is liberation and the receiver is the reinvented Church. Drawing from Boff's reconstructions of ecclesial hierarchy from *Ecclesiogenesis* and *Church: Charism and Power*, perhaps it the actantial scheme can resemble the following:



As is shown by what is proposed above, the task of analysing liberation theology as parable by way of actantial schemes is not as clear-cut as one might desire. While the models above might prove coherent on some level, in order to better understand praxis as parable within liberation theology, it would be beneficial to approach these actants in a more systematic way. To do this, the following chapters explore the three levels of liberation theology presented by Leonardo and Clodovis Boff in *Introducing Liberation Theology* (1986) as represented by the Solentiname community (popular), Óscar Romero (pastoral), and the life and work of Leonardo Boff (professional). Within each of the following three chapters, in addition to how the parables might be read and interpreted by the Solentiname community, Óscar Romero and Leonardo Boff, I also explore these subjects from the point of view of biography and employ both of these elements— textual-critical reflections and the praxis of these subjects themselves—in approaching the actantial scheme for parabolic analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR

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THE PARABLES OF SOLENTINAME

Introduction

In order to read the praxis of the margins as parable, I will approach each of the following chapters from the perspective of a progression. The first step in this progression is analysing how the biblical parables are read and reinterpreted by what Clodovis and Leonardo Boff refer to as the ‘popular level’ of liberation theology (I). As I have argued in previous chapters, liberation theology begins with the praxis of the poor and marginalised – the critical reflection of a community on their particular circumstances, illuminating the Christian message in conjunction with study of the Bible. The next step in this progression is to analyse how the lived realities of the poor and marginalised, imbued with the authority granted to them as special participants in the kingdom of God, might also function in this parabolic manner (II). These first two steps form the basis of this chapter. In the following chapter, the interpretation of biblical parables and the lived reality of one representative of the ‘pastoral sphere’ might also function as parables (III). The final chapter of this thesis will then make the final step, addressing the ‘professional sphere’ and how the interpretation of biblical parables and the lived reality of one representative of both the pastoral and academic sphere might function as parables (IV).

In receiving his doctorate in theology from the Catholic Institute of Lyons in 1985, Gustavo Gutiérrez was asked by Christian Duquoc, ‘What set of instruments am I to use in order to show [the] unity [of “Christo-finalized” history], in this century and

in light of our present experience, that is, in the world that you said, a few hours ago, is characterized by the unjust suffering of the innocent?’¹ In his response, Gutiérrez makes clear, ‘I believe I have no other tool than my personal and pastoral experience. That is perhaps not the best answer, but I confess that it is my contact with that people which enables me to see better both the unity and the distinctions of which I have spoken.’² Ernesto Cardenal’s *El Evangelio en Solentiname* (published in three volumes from 1975 until 1977 and published in English as *The Gospel in Solentiname*) is a direct account of biblical reflections which took place during local studies in the archipelago of Solentiname, Nicaragua. This account reflects the ‘popular’ sphere of liberation theology, expressed in the colloquial and candid words of the laypeople of the Solentiname community.

The basic presuppositions of liberation theology are that God is both the God of history and the God of the poor. These presuppositions give weight to the authority of the praxis (and critical reflection on this praxis) of the poor, but in order to see this as parabolic in function and subject to parabolic analysis, it is helpful to return briefly to the rationale set forth by Karl Barth in the previous chapter. Barth writes, ‘Even the formal and general truth must be considered that God and man are in any case bound and live together... We do not have God here and man there; God is the God of man and man the man of God.’³ In this, whether words are ‘true words’ is subject to scrutiny. Barth argues that ‘such words must be in the closest material and substantial conformity and agreement with the one Word of God Himself and therefore with that

¹ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free: Confrontations*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1990), 21.

² Ibid, 23.

³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* 3.1, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961), 43.

of His one Prophet Jesus Christ.⁴ Barth maintains his christocentric argument by making clear that these true words are distinct from Christ, while maintaining essential agreement.⁵ Additionally, '[those] who speak [these true words] must in some way be commissioned, moved and empowered to attest it... He must have encountered in some way those who speak these words, giving Himself to be seen and heard and perceived and known by them... This word must have demonstrated to these men and their words the grace of its real presence, in the power of which they as men are empowered and authorised, quite beyond any capacity of their own, to declare it with their human words, and thus to show themselves to be speakers of true words.'⁶ Barth is in agreement with the concepts of the God of history and the God of the poor, arguing that the Church—the established, human-driven institution—is 'opposed to Jesus Christ ... [who is] the partisan of the poor'.⁷ Therefore, the authority that comes from the poor is of a special order.

With regard to parables themselves, Barth argues that within the New Testament, 'parables are as it were the prototype of the order in which there can be other true words alongside the one Word of God, created and determined by it, exactly corresponding to it, fully serving it and therefore enjoying its power and authority.'⁸ These true words as parables 'are uttered in individual places and situations in which the community and its members find themselves in world history, at individual points in their history in this time which move to its end but still endures.'⁹ With these two

⁴ Ibid, 111.

⁵ Ibid, 111.

⁶ Ibid, 111.

⁷ Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His life from letters and autobiographical texts*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM, 1976), 70.

⁸ Barth, 113.

⁹ Ibid, 131.

things considered—that the poor have a special (and oppositional) place in the kingdom of God and that the authority of the true words being tied to specific historical situations—it is easier to see how the Solentiname community's words might function as parables, as signs which point to the kingdom of God.

To better understand *The Gospel in Solentiname* and the praxis of the local people, it is valuable to first look at its context, as it has been established that liberation theology is a *contextual* theology. In this chapter, I explore *The Gospel in Solentiname* by first taking a brief look at the socio-political history of Nicaragua in the decades leading up to the 1979 revolution. Following this, based upon the conclusions from chapter three, I explore *The Gospel in Solentiname* from the perspective of Greimas' actantial structure as is presented by John Dominic Crossan as a means by which parables are interpreted. This will take the form of the Solentiname community's discussions around three parables: 'The Good Samaritan', 'The Wedding Feast' and 'The Workers in the Vineyard'. This is followed by an analysis of the Solentiname community's discussion concerning 'The Expulsion of the Merchants from the Temple' from the Gospel of Matthew. This chapter concludes with a study of the Solentiname community's praxis considered as 'text' based on the criteria set forth by Paul Ricoeur in his 1971 essay, 'The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as Text'.

I. The Context of Solentiname: Ernesto Cardenal and the Political Climate of Nicaragua

Ernesto Cardenal Martínez was born into an upper-class family in Granada, Nicaragua—situated on the north-western shore of Lake Nicaragua—on 20 January 1925. At this time, soldiers from the United States had been occupying the country for 13 years. This occupation was in place to ensure the preservation of US interests in

the country (such as banking, the exploitation of resources and the control of a potential second transisthmian waterway, after the Panama Canal).¹⁰ The US maintained control through supporting a series of Conservative presidents, 'who had neither the military strength nor the popular backing to maintain themselves in power'.¹¹ This occupation ended in November 1925, when the US Government was convinced that the Nicaraguan Conservatives could maintain control without the presence of US troops. The following year, this assumption would be challenged, with the Liberals staging a rebellion, prompting the Conservatives to appeal to the US, who reoccupied Nicaragua from 1926 until 1933.¹² Such domestic unrest and imperialistic exploitation from the US would characterise the socio-political climate of Nicaragua throughout Cardenal's life.

From an early age, Cardenal demonstrated an aptitude for creative expression, writing his first poem at the age of seven.¹³ At this time, a certain Anastasio Somoza García (1898-1956) had gained sufficient favour among the occupying US forces in Nicaragua that he was able to establish *la Guardia Nacional* ('the National Guard'). When the US Marines departed for the second time, in 1933 Somoza worked to consolidate political power through *la Guardia*, eliminating his political rivals,

¹⁰ Thomas W. Walker and Christine J. Wade, *Nicaragua: Emerging from the Shadow of the Eagle* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 24-5. The United States played a major role in Nicaraguan affairs since after the Spanish colonial period (1522-1822), when the discovery of gold in California prompted the US to turn to Nicaragua as 'the site for an interoceanic transit route' (Ibid, 15). The early interference of the US manifested itself most bizarrely in the so-called 'Walker Affair', when the Nicaraguan Liberals turned to 'San Francisco-based soldier of fortune' William Walker for help against the Conservatives in 1854. Walker and a group of soldiers arrived in Nicaragua in 1855 and by 1856, Walker had installed himself as President of Nicaragua. Walker encouraged 'foreign investment and the increased exploitation of Nicaraguan resources' before being ousted in 1857 (Ibid, 15-6).

¹¹ Ibid, 25.

¹² Ibid, 26-7.

¹³ Candace LaBalle, 'Ernesto Cardenal' in Ashyia N. Henderson and Ralph G. Zerboni, eds., *Contemporary Hispanic Biography, Vol. 3* (Detroit, Michigan: Gale, 2003), 57.

culminating in the overthrow of the democratically-elected Juan B. Sacasa in 1936.¹⁴ Sacasa was exiled to the United States, while the Somoza 'dynasty' would exercise effective dictatorial rule Nicaragua for the next four decades, more often than not, towing the line of the foreign policy of the United States and establishing Nicaragua as a base of operations for the CIA's machinations in Latin America (including the 1954 overthrow of Guatemala's Jacobo Arbenz).¹⁵

During these early years of the Somoza regime, Cardenal's well-to-do family remained relatively unscathed, and the young Ernesto received a Jesuit education in Granada. In 1943, he left Nicaragua to study literature at the National University of Mexico before travelling to Columbia University, New York in 1948 to spend two years studying North American literature. While studying, Cardenal grew more disillusioned with the Somoza regime and, upon his return to Nicaragua in the early 1950s, he became more politically active. He joined the *Unión Nacional de Acción Popular* (the 'National Union for Popular Action' or UNAP), who, on 3 April 1954, staged the unsuccessful 'April Rebellion' against Somoza's presidential palace.¹⁶ Cardenal, who took part in the rebellion and escaped with his life, wrote his famous poem, '*Hora 0*' ('Zero Hour') about these events. In the poem, Cardenal documents the contemporary exploitative actions of the United States with the assistance of Somoza government in Nicaragua and calls back to the 1934 assassination of Nicaraguan revolutionary Augusto César Sandino (after whom the revolutionary *Sandinistas* would go on to name themselves). He writes,

As the sonofabitch Roosevelt said to Sumner Welles:
'Somoza is a sonofabitch

¹⁴ Walker and Wade, 34-5.

¹⁵ Ibid, 35-6.

¹⁶ Henderson and Zerboni, 58.

but he's ours.'

A slave to foreigners
and a tyrant to his people
imposed by intervention
and kept in power by nonintervention
SOMOZA FOREVER¹⁷

This characterisation of Somoza is, among other things, demonstrated by the dependent capitalism that shaped Nicaragua's economic policy. While Nicaragua had been an historical exporter of coffee and beef, the national portfolio had diversified to include several other exports, chiefly cotton. From 1949 to 1955, Nicaragua had gone from exporting 379 metric tons to 43,971 metric tons per annum.¹⁸ A significant amount of land that had been farmed by peasants to produce domestic staples had been transformed into cotton plantations. Walker and Wade compare this to the nineteenth-century 'coffee boom' in Nicaragua: 'Once again independent farmers were transformed into a rootless rural proletariat in the name of "progress" and "development" for the privileged few.'¹⁹

On 20 September 1956, Somoza attended a reception while campaigning for a fourth term as president when he was approached by Rigoberto López Pérez, a young poet, who shot Somoza five times before bodyguards had subdued him with bullets of their own. López, who died of his injuries a few days later, had written to his mother, 'What I have done is a duty that any Nicaraguan who truly loves his country should have done a long time ago.'²⁰ Yet the Somoza dynasty would not end with the assassination of Anastasio Somoza García. His US-educated sons, Luís and

¹⁷ Ernesto Cardenal, *Zero Hour and Other Documentary Poems*, trans. Donald D. Walsh, *et al.* (New York: New Directions, 1980), 14.

¹⁸ Walker and Wade, 47.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁰ From Mayo Antonio Sánchez, *Nicaragua Año Cero* (Mexico City: Editorial Diana, 1979), 96, as quoted in Walker and Wade, 36.

Anastasio, were poised within the Nicaraguan government for any such eventuality. At the time of his father's death, Luís was president of the Congress, which gave him the constitutional power to assume the presidency should it be vacated. With Luís Somoza Debayle, who was 'elected' the following year, dependent economics in Nicaragua continued. While this elder Somoza son sought to lower the family's public profile in Nicaragua, his policies worked alongside the US-sponsored 'Alliance for Progress' to present a 'democratic Nicaragua' (that also kept US-dependent interests at the heart of the Nicaraguan economy) and he retained his hold on power even after the end of his presidential term in 1963 through subsequent puppet presidents René Schick Gutiérrez and Lorenzo Guerrero.²¹

In the time between the failed April Rebellion and the assassination of Anastasio Somoza García, Cardenal had experienced a spiritual awakening and renounced violence. At the suggestion of his grandmother Agustina, he determined that he ought to enter a religious order. In May 1957, he became a novice at a Trappist monastery in Gethsemane, Kentucky, under the spiritual direction of fellow poet, Thomas Merton (1915-1968). With Merton's guidance, Cardenal became convinced 'that his surest communication with God would be through people, not through solitary contemplation.'²² It was during his two years with Merton that the seeds of the eventual community of Solentiname were planted. Cardenal writes,

Merton began to present me new ideas about the [eventual community in Latin America]: a small, revolutionary monastery, perhaps without a habit, in which a simple life was lived in contact with the land, with the Indians and with God, and where the arts are cultivated not merely as an 'apostolate', but for the value that

²¹ Walker and Wade, 37.

²² Rudolf J. Siebert, 'Ernesto Cardenal and the Nicaraguan Revolution: From Theological Theory to Revolutionary Praxis,' *CrossCurrents* 30, no. 3 (Autumn 1980): 241.

they have in themselves; and which would also be in contact with the artistic movements of the capital and writers and artists could come to rest or create.²³

To move this plan along, Cardenal left the United States for Mexico, where he studied theology at Cuernavaca for two years. In 1961, he relocated to Colombia, where he trained for the priesthood at the *Seminario de Cristo Sacerdote* ('Seminary of Christ the Priest') near the town of La Ceja in the Andes.²⁴

During Cardenal's time away from Nicaragua, the government continued its 'business as usual' exploitation of the *campesinos* (peasants) for the benefit of the few (and the interests of the United States). As mentioned before, Luís Somoza was intent on giving the impression of democratic reform. In 1959, he even had the constitution reformed to prevent presidential re-election (this limitation also included members of his own family, like his younger brother, Anastasio, who had been leading *la Guardia* since 1955).²⁵ Yet, free elections were anything but. Despite resistance from groups such as the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (English: Sandinista National Liberation Front, or FSLN) who were formed in 1961, *la Guardia* continued to grow in power (thanks to the backing of the United States government) and exercised strict measures to suppress would-be revolutionary combatants.

Cardenal was ordained as a priest in his hometown of Granada in 1965, during the puppet-presidency of Luís Somoza's successor, René Schick. The following year, the base ecclesial community on the 38-island archipelago of Solentiname was established. Located in the southeast of Lake Nicaragua, 'Solentiname was a place no one visited', writes Cardenal. He continues,

²³ Cardenal, *Vida perdida: Memorias I*. (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2013) *Digitalia*, <https://www-digitaliapublishing-com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/a/43257>. Translation mine.

²⁴ Cardenal, *La ínsulas extrañas: Memorias II* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2013) *Digitalia*, <https://www-digitaliapublishing-com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/a/43256>.

²⁵ Walker and Wade, 37.

On the lake you only went to the places where boats arrived, which were a few ports (unless you had a private yacht, and very few did). And also, why come? [There] is another archipelago very similar to Solentiname off the coast of Chontales, El Nancital, [on the north-east shores of Lake Nicaragua], and no one arrives there.²⁶

Cardenal goes on to quote San Carlos-raised singer Fernando Silva's poem 'Solentiname': 'Solentiname was nothing more than the background of a landscape / the more or less blurred vision that one has / from San Carlos'.²⁷ Just as Solentiname occupied both the social and geographical inverse of Granada (on the north-western shores of the lake), Cardenal would adopt a contrasting lifestyle to the complacent, upper-class existence of his youth. The commune was called *la Nuestra Señora de Solentiname* ('Our Lady of Solentiname') and there, Cardenal lived and served primarily among *campesinos*.

The struggle of the poor of Nicaragua would worsen during Cardenal's early years in Solentiname. President Schick died on 3 August 1966 and, according to the constitution, was succeeded by another puppet-president, Lorenzo Guerrero. Luís Somoza's hold over the government would only be released upon his death from a heart attack on 13 April 1967. This opened the door for his younger brother, Anastasio, to finally seek the nation's highest political office. When elections came in June 1967, Anastasio's oppressive *Guardia* ensured his victory, and with his ascension came 'the end of an era of cosmetic liberalization and the return to a cruder and harsher style of dictatorship'.²⁸ Effectively, Anastasio Somoza's rule would continue throughout the remainder of Cardenal's time in Solentiname and shape the concerns and eventual fate of the community.

²⁶ Cardenal, *La ínsulas extrañas*.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Wade and Walker, 38.

II. The Praxis of Solentiname

The Gospel in Solentiname is the direct product of the experiences of the residents of Solentiname. As had been prescribed by Merton, Solentiname became a small lay-monastic community, centred on the simple lives of the *campesinos*. There, creative practice was cultivated, resulting in it becoming something of a 'primitivist art commune', attracting creative types from across in Nicaragua and beyond.²⁹ Cardenal established art workshops in painting, sculpture, dance and poetry, and encouraged the people of Solentiname to produce their own images of paradise on the lake. For the *campesinos* in Solentiname, the paradise they envisaged captured both the utopian hope as well as the subversion that their existence on the islands demonstrated. The exercising of communal religious devotion in Solentiname was characterised by the critical reflection on their praxis. Cardenal writes,

Every Sunday in Solentiname... instead of a sermon we held a dialogue on the gospel reading. The *campesinos'* discussions were often more profound than those of many theologians, but they reflected the simplicity of the gospel readings themselves. That is not surprising. The *gospel*, or good news (good news to the poor), was written for them, by people like them.³⁰

In addition to these dialogues, the community developed what they called the *Misa campesina*, 'Peasant Mass', which was performed every Sunday.³¹ Andrew Bradstock and Christopher Rowland comment, 'The Misa Campesina, set to music by the Nicaraguan composer Carlos Mejía Godoy, is a lively adaptation of the traditional Catholic Mass using the language of the people.' They continue, writing, 'In each of its

²⁹ Ileana L. Selejan, 'War in paradise: Solentiname and the Sandinista revolution,' *Visual Studies* 30, No. 2 (2015), 151.

³⁰ Cardenal, *The Gospel in Solentiname*, trans. Donald D. Walsh (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2010), xi.

³¹ Cardenal, *La ínsulas extrañas*. A full English version of this Mass is included as a chapter in Andrew Bradstock and Christopher Rowland, eds., *Radical Christian Writings: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 243-46.

main sections – Entry, Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Offering, Meditation, Sanctus, Communion Song, and Farewell Song – it attempts to “demystify” the Christ of more conventional liturgies, and portray him, without stooping to irreverence, as one of the people, a *compañero* in the struggle to forge the new society.’³²

In addition to this counter-cultural practice, several other developments played significant roles in the praxis of Solentiname. One such development was Cardenal’s three-month visit to Cuba in 1970 (chronicled in his 1972 book, *En Cuba*). There, he experienced what he calls his ‘second conversion’ after witnessing the possibilities of a revolution in Nicaragua much like the one that had occurred in Cuba in 1959. He saw similarities between the equitable redistribution of goods under Cuban communism as he had been experiencing in Solentiname. While accepting the relative poverty of the Cuban economy, he also observed, for example, that a communist might love the Cuban system of rationing ‘because you are a communist, [but] I love it because I find it evangelical.’ Comparing the relative scarcity of goods to his commitments as a monk, he writes, ‘May they never have too much abundance. This ration card is like what we eat in Solentiname’.³³

Through numerous conversations, Cardenal determined that the repression that had followed the Cuban revolution as the result of the remnants of the regime of ousted Cuban leader Batista.³⁴ The Marxism of the Cuban revolution, with all its flaws, had merit. Cardenal recalls a note from Nicaraguan poet José Coronel (1906-1994) to Solentiname: ‘[The] communist cannot convert to Christianity without ceasing to be a communist exclusively, while the Christian can become a communist (Marxist-

³² Bradstock and Rowland, 243.

³³ Cardenal, *La ínsulas extrañas*. Translation mine.

³⁴ Ibid.

Leninist) and become even *more* Christian.³⁵ If the ideals of community and expression practiced in Solentiname could be incorporated into a Nicaraguan revolution, Cardenal believed that it could be a success — that is, it might benefit the masses, the poor and oppressed, rather than a select few. It is clear that his stance on the use of armed struggle had also evolved and Solentiname became something of a centre for revolutionary thought, with many (including Cardenal) joining the *Sandinista* (FSLN) cause.

Public resentment of the Somoza regime continued to increase over the coming years. When a 1972 earthquake killed more than 10,000 people and left hundreds of thousands homeless in the capital city of Managua, the government pocketed the foreign aid (while *la Guardia* was permitted to loot).³⁶ New ‘emergency taxes’ even turned many of the economic elite toward the *Sandinistas*. The rigged election of 1974 precipitated a successful *Sandinista* guerrilla operation that December, prompting Somoza to impose martial law, sending *la Guardia* into rural Nicaragua to root out subversive factions. Walker and Wade write, ‘In supposed pursuit of that objective, the Guard engaged in extensive pillage, arbitrary imprisonment, torture, rape, and summary execution of hundreds of peasants.’³⁷ ‘In all,’ they write, ‘by the middle of the decade, Somoza stood out as one of the worst human rights violators in the Western Hemisphere.’³⁸

These atrocities were made known intimately to the Catholic Church in Nicaragua by way of many missionaries stationed in the countryside and in January 1977, the Catholic Bishop’s Conference of Nicaragua ‘drafted a pastoral condemning

³⁵ Ibid. Translation mine.

³⁶ Walker and Wade, 40.

³⁷ Ibid, 41.

³⁸ Ibid, 41.

the state of terror which had forced many campesinos to flee their homes, the arbitrary detentions, tortures and executions without trial, and the destruction of homes.³⁹ Throughout 1977, the United States government placed greater pressure on Somoza to lift restrictions with the threat of removing foreign aid. Accordingly, in September, martial law ceased and the press was allowed to operate in relative freedom. With this new freedom, many papers were able to report on the activities of the opposition as well as expose the regime's human rights violations and deep-rooted corruption.⁴⁰

In October, the emboldened *Sandinistas* launched offensives against *la Guardia* outposts across the nation, including the outpost in San Carlos, on the south-eastern shore of Lake Nicaragua (not far from Solentiname).⁴¹ Several members of the community had participated in the operation in San Carlos, and, in retaliation, Cardenal was forced to flee to Costa Rica and the commune was destroyed by *la Guardia*. The following month, Cardenal addressed the people of his home country: 'Solentiname had paradisiacal beauty, however, as is seen, no paradise is possible for now in Nicaragua'.⁴²

Up until the destruction of the commune in 1977, revolutionary re-readings of the Bible continued in lieu of homilies in Solentiname. These discussions took place in a number of settings. While most were held in the church, accompanied by the *Misa campesina*, others were held 'in a thatched hut' which the community 'had built across from the church for meetings and shared meals after the mass.'⁴³ Still others took

³⁹ Philip J. Williams, 'The Catholic Hierarchy in the Nicaraguan Revolution,' *Journal of Latin American Studies* 17, No. 2 (November 1985), 357.

⁴⁰ Walker and Wade, 42.

⁴¹ Ibid 42-3; LaBalle, 59.

⁴² Selejan, 160.

⁴³ Cardenal, *Solentiname*, xi.

place in the open air, on various islands within the archipelago as well as in a 'small coastal village across the way'.⁴⁴ The basic format of these discussions was as follows:

First we passed out copies of the gospel to those who could read. Some people couldn't read, especially the elderly and those who lived farthest away from the school. One of the best readers (usually a boy or girl) would read aloud the whole passage that we were going to discuss. Then we talked about it, verse by verse.⁴⁵

Cardenal describes the basic demography of the islands: only the largest of the 38 islands in the archipelago were populated by some 1,000 people made up of around 90 families. He writes, 'Most of the houses are made of straw, scattered widely along the shore of each island.'⁴⁶ While not everyone on the islands joined with the *Nuestra Señora de Solentiname* for a number of reasons (some as practical as not having the means of transportation, while other reasons were more due to ideological differences, whether those be an adherence to more traditional forms of communal worship or because of 'anticommunist propaganda, and perhaps also by fear', for example), Cardenal names several of the major voices recorded in *The Gospel in Solentiname*:

The Colombian poet William Agudelo and his wife Teresita... along with their two small children, Irene and Juan... Marcelino was a mystic. Olivia was more theological. Rebeca, Marcelino's wife, always talked about love. Laureano saw everything in terms of revolution. Elvis was always thinking about the perfect society of the future. Felipe, another youth, was constantly aware of the proletarian struggle. His father, old Tomas Peña, couldn't read but spoke out of a deep wisdom. Alejandro, Olivia's son, was a youth leader; he had guidance to offer everyone, especially other young people. Pancho was a conservative, but later took a different position. Julio Mairena was a staunch defender of equality. His brother Oscar always talked about unity.⁴⁷

Several of the names above, as well as a few others from the community, are named as having taken part in the *Sandinista* action in San Carlos in October 1977: Alejandro,

⁴⁴ Ibid, xi.

⁴⁵ Ibid, xi.

⁴⁶ Ibid, xii.

⁴⁷ Ibid, xii.

Laureano, Felipe, Donald, Elvis, Julio Ramon, Gloria, Myrian, Ivan and Bosco. Among them, Cardenal names Felipe, Elvis, Donald, Laureano and Alejandro as ‘martyrs of the revolution’.

Long before the events of October 1977, Cardenal had sensed the value of these dialogues. In order to preserve them, he began to utilise tape recording. With these recordings in his possession, Cardenal began to transcribe and edit them. He organised them for publication in the order of the Gospel narrative itself (as opposed to chronological order). In 1975, the first volume of *The Gospel in Solentiname* was published. This would be followed by three more volumes published (outside of Nicaragua, where it was banned) over the next two years.

III. The Praxis of Solentiname as Parable: Four Parabolic Studies

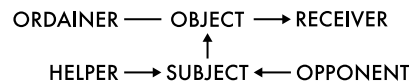
Liberation theology is critical reflection on praxis and the whole of *The Gospel of Solentiname* consists of this critical reflection. As the discussions in the book cover the parables that John Dominic Crossan analyses with the actantial structure, they are especially useful in opening how the Solentiname community’s critical reflection on praxis can facilitate re-readings of these parables. Three of these parables are explored here. Additionally, with the help of Ricœur, gathering a wider picture of the praxis of the Solentiname community lends itself to actantial analysis as parable.

A. The ‘Single-Giver’ Model

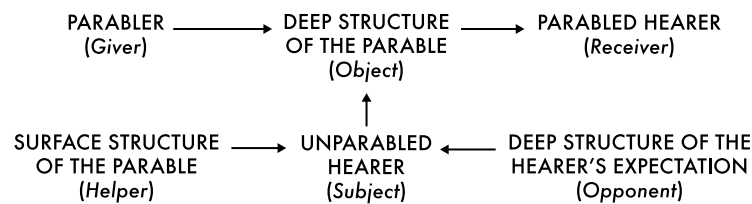
i. The Good Samaritan

As was explored in the previous chapter, Crossan makes use of Greimas’ actantial structure for his analysis of narrative parables, with a special emphasis on

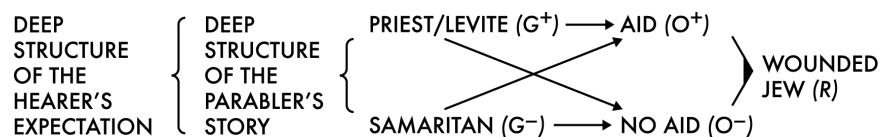
‘The Good Samaritan’. Crossan presents the following model taken from Greimas’ actantial structure:



Crossan goes on to populate this matrix as it applies to the genre of parable in the following way:



Here, Crossan observes a ‘clash of structures’, ‘a duel between the Speaker and the Hearer but at a much deeper level than that in riddles (clearly evident on the surface of the text) or even in charms (less clearly so evident).’⁴⁸ When applying this to ‘The Good Samaritan’, he develops the following model:



In this model, the deep structure of the hearer’s expectation is subverted by the deep structure of the parabler’s story. The ‘G’ represents potential Givers of the Object (‘O’). The expectations of the hearer are represented by the ‘+’ and ‘-’, while the Receiver is represented by ‘R’. It is assumed that the deep structure of traditional first-century Hebrew hearer would yield an expectation that the wounded Jew (R) would receive aid (O+) from the priest or the Levite (G+). Instead, it is the Samaritan (G-, from whom the hearer would *not expect aid to be given* [O-]) who offers this aid (O+). This reversal

⁴⁸ John Dominic Crossan, ‘The Good Samaritan: Towards a Generic Definition of Parable,’ *Semeia* 2 (1974), 96.

of expectation in the hearing of the narrative is represented by the crossed arrows. At this stage, it is helpful to explore how the Solentiname community deals with 'The Good Samaritan'.

The discussion of 'The Good Samaritan' begins with the broader context of Luke 10, when 'A teacher of the law stood up and said to [Jesus], to lay a trap for him: "Master, what must I do to win eternal life?"'.⁴⁹ Cardenal links this question to their context in Nicaragua: 'It's as if a supporter of [the Somoza] regime should ask us what we think of the Gospels.' One of those in attendance, Laureano replies that Jesus could have responded by saying, 'Take from the rich what they have and distribute it among the poor', though Laureano acknowledges that such a response would have been 'dangerous'.⁵⁰ Even in this simple introduction to the context of the parable, the Solentiname community sees how it relates to their context. Jesus is going to say something counter-cultural, something dangerous, just as their very existence is an affront to the status quo.

Jesus responds by asking the teacher of the law about what is written in the Hebrew scriptures with regard to the law, with the teacher answering, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind; and love your neighbor as you love yourself.'⁵¹ Jesus affirms the teacher of the law's response, though the teacher feels the need to defend himself further. The Solentiname community sees how, already, 'In trying to catch Jesus in a trap, he was the one who fell into the trap.'⁵² When identifying the teacher of the law's expectant

⁴⁹ Luke 10.25, as quoted in Cardenal, *Solentiname*, 331. All further Scripture references are taken from the translation in *The Gospel in Solentiname*, unless noted otherwise.

⁵⁰ Cardenal, *Solentiname*, 331.

⁵¹ Luke 10.27.

⁵² Cardenal, *Solentiname*, 332.

answer to the question, 'And who is my neighbor?', one of the others in attendance, Alejandro, comments, '[The teacher of the law] thought [his neighbours] were the people who lived across the street, who surely were well-to-do like him.' Another attendee, Olivia, comments with her own response, 'Your neighbors are all of humanity, that's what this fellow didn't know, that his neighbors are everybody.'⁵³

In the following verses, Jesus tells the story of a man who is assaulted and then ignored by religious leaders, first a priest and then a Levite. A third person approaches, a Samaritan (who would have been considered a heretic by conservative Israelites), who responds to seeing the wounded man by taking care of him. Jesus then asks the teacher of the law, "'Well, then which of those three does it seem to you was the neighbor of the man assaulted by the thieves?" The teacher of the law said: "The one who took pity on him." Then Jesus said to him: "Go you and do the same."⁵⁴ Olivia is quick to point out, '[Jesus] gave [the teacher of the law] as an example a person of another race and another religion so we can know that everybody is a neighbor. He gave as an example one who wasn't a neighbor but just the opposite, an enemy.'⁵⁵ This comment demonstrates an understanding of the same subversion of expectation, the 'raid on the articulate' that is presented in Crossan's model in which the Samaritan (G-) gives aid (O+) to the wounded Jew (R).

The Solentiname community continues in its analysis of this parable by identifying other actants. The priest and the Levite (G+) are akin to religious people who are not sympathetic toward the struggles of the poor and marginalised (Laureano refers to these struggles as the 'people's problems'). The community then explores

⁵³ Ibid, 332.

⁵⁴ Luke 10.36-7.

⁵⁵ Cardenal, *Solentiname*, 333.

how the love of God is tied to the love of the neighbour. One member, Elvis, comments, 'The fact is that in your neighbor there's God. It's not that the love of God gets left out, it's that those who love their neighbor are right there loving God.'⁵⁶ Alejandro comments,

It's too bad that [the teacher of the law] didn't go on asking, because now they lay the same trap for us, and they tell us that stuff about the Samaritan is all very well, but that what's most important is the spiritual part, religion, the love of God. And if he'd asked more questions, this would have come out clearer.⁵⁷

Cardenal insists that Jesus' message is clear, 'but his words have been interpreted in a way that makes them unclear.'⁵⁸ Later on, one unnamed member of the community comments, 'The government likes to have sermons just about the love of God, about the salvation of the soul, and about heaven. I believe they even pay for those radio sermons. That gringo preacher, Spencer, who preaches every day sweetly about the spiritual salvation of Christ, he's probably a CIA agent.'⁵⁹ Laureano comments, 'God is all of us who love each other. And all of us who don't love each other and are screwing the people, that's the devil.' Whether or not the government or the CIA pays preachers like this Spencer to deliver messages that do not relate to the praxis of the poor and oppressed, it is understood by the community of Solentiname that this sort of esoteric message is 'in league' with the agenda of the oppressors.

Unlike the oppressors and their allies, the Samaritan is likened to people who show the love of God. Laureano names revolutionaries as 'the good Samaritan of the parable, the good companion, the good comrade'.⁶⁰ This highlights the wave that 'revolution' and 'love' are united in the thinking of the Solentiname community. He later

⁵⁶ Ibid, 335.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 335.

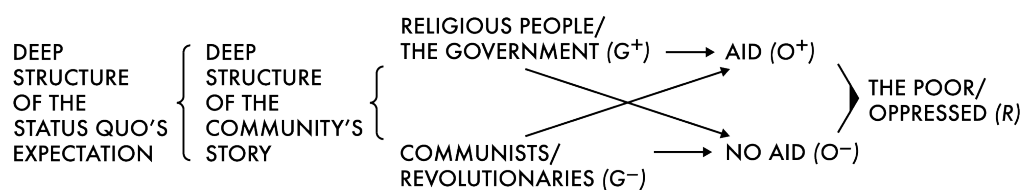
⁵⁸ Ibid, 335.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 336.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 334.

comments, 'And while religion went along that road without looking at the wounded man, communism, which didn't believe in God, has been the good companion that took up the wounded man and took him to a shelter where he could have food and a roof and clothing and medicine, all free.'⁶¹

In this context, the *campesinos* of the community can be seen as 'parablers', with the 'deep structure of the parable' formed by their praxis. Their critical reflection on praxis is then the parable itself. Through the doing of liberation theology, the parable is presented to the 'unparabled hearer' (whether that be the Somoza regime, the establishment of the Church or those whose form whom the praxis of the *campesinos* is alien). The Objects of Crossan's analysis of 'The Good Samaritan' can remain the same as aid (O+) and no aid (O-), which, according to Laureano's comments above, might be taking the oppressed to a 'shelter where he could have food and a roof and clothing and medicine, all free'. The Receivers are the poor and oppressed. In this scheme, Crossan's model above can be modified in the following manner:



Presenting this scheme in such a way is not to suggest that this is the only way in which one might analyse the Solentiname community's reflections on 'The Good Samaritan', but just one cohesive option. One way in which the above might be deconstructed has to do with the fact that the line between 'communists/revolutionaries' and the 'poor/oppressed' in the context of pre-revolution

⁶¹ Ibid, 337.

Nicaragua is not always clear. Additionally, within the context of liberation ideology, the oppressed function as agents of their own liberation.

While giving these things due consideration, individual parables are not exhaustive theological treatises. The Solentiname community might well understand itself as poor and oppressed (as it was composed primarily of *campesinos*), but in reflecting on their own praxis, they are also able to see the actants above as distinct players in their own right. The very parable they develop through critical reflection on their own praxis is also a parable for themselves. Olivia comments, ‘It’s hard to be a Christian, like the Samaritan was. It’s easier to be just religious, like so many Catholics are, and be praying to God in the temple.’⁶² In this way, all of the Christian community is called to be transformed by the reading of the Gospel.

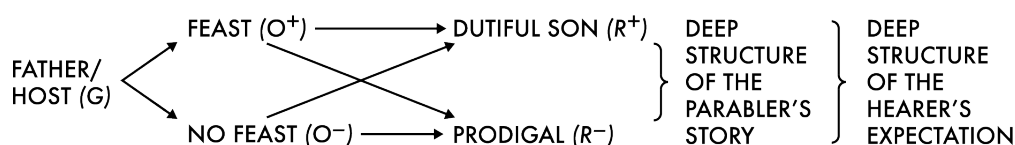
In applying this actantial model to other texts, the structure of the analyses might be altered. Crossan identifies several parables that ‘stand out immediately because of the ease with which they can be analyzed structurally in terms of Giver, Object, and Receiver’, like ‘the Prodigal Son (Luke 15.11-32), the Great Supper (Matt 22.1-10; Luke 14. 16-24; Gos Thom 64), the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16.19-26[27-31]), the Places at [the] Table (Luke 14.7-10) and the Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18.10-14)’.⁶³ The actants from these parables can be arranged in the following way:

	GIVER	OBJECT ⁺	OBJECT ⁻	RECEIVER ⁺	RECEIVER ⁻
PRODIGAL	FATHER/HOST	FEAST	NO FEAST	DUTIFUL SON	PRODIGAL
SUPPER	HOST	FEAST	NO FEAST	INVITED GUESTS	UNINVITED
LAZARUS	ABRAHAM	HEAVEN	HELL	RICH MAN	LAZARUS
PLACES	HOST	HONOUR	NO HONOUR	FIRST-PLACED	LAST-PLACED
PHAR/PUBL	GOD	ACCEPTANCE	NO ACCEPT.	PHAR. PRAYER	PUBL. PRAYER

⁶² Ibid, 336.

⁶³ Crossan, 99.

Unlike 'The Good Samaritan' (with two Givers and one Receiver), each of these parables follow the form of having one Giver and two Receivers. Even with this model, the deep structure of the parables undermines the expectations of the hearer. For example, 'The Prodigal Son' might follow this model:



While the hearer might anticipate that the son (R-) who cursed the father (G) and squandered his inheritance will not be invited to the feast (O-), the resultant story subverts this expectation, with the dutiful son (R+) refusing to participate.

ii. The Wedding Feast

To further explore this single-Giver model, I turn to the Solentiname community's discourse on 'The Wedding Feast' (to which Crossan refers above as 'the Great Supper'). As with each of the discourses, this begins with the Gospel reading, taken from Matthew 22. In the opening verses, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a feast arranged by a king for the wedding of his son. 'He sent his servants to call those who had been invited, but they would not come.'⁶⁴ Immediately, the community picks up on the concept of a large banquet with joy and love. Olivia comments, 'Jesus compares the kingdom of God with a wedding feast first, because that kingdom is a love like the love of two people that join in matrimony, and second, because the wedding feast is the most joyful of feasts, and that kingdom is a great joy, a great feast.'⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Matthew 22.4.

⁶⁵ Cardenal, *Solentiname*, 433.

Another attendee, Manuel comments, 'Christ is the son; and our union with him is like the union of a couple', while another, Felipe comments, 'I think this ought to be cleared up a little: the truth is that when you join Christ is when you join the others, the comrades.' He continues, 'To be joined to Christ without being joined to the others isn't possible. To be joined to the rest is to be joined to Christ.'⁶⁶ Jesus tells of the king sending another servant to call on the invited guests, informing them of the great feast prepared, 'But the guests did not heed him. One of them went to his estates, another to his affairs.'⁶⁷ Laureano is disturbed by this latter refusal, revealing his animosity toward the wealthy: 'Those were the rich. People that were in business, and people with lots of property; all they think about is their affairs, their property.'⁶⁸

The gulf between the wealthy and the poor in the context of Nicaragua is further revealed by the gathering's response to the following verses, telling of how, after this second refusal, the king declares that 'those guests did not deserve to come.' Instead, the servants are ordered to go out into the streets and invite any people they meet. Olivia comments, 'It seems to me that this verse refers to the simple class, to poor people like us.'⁶⁹ Within the context of the commune at Solentiname, the attendees are puzzled at the invited guests' refusals. They cannot understand how such a joyful and generous invitation would be rejected and they see themselves as the 'anybodys', the poor and marginalised, the powerless who would not have been invited in the first instance. These new invitees are eager to join, 'Even though', adding a bit of levity, 'it was only tamales.'⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Ibid, 433.

⁶⁷ Matthew 22.5.

⁶⁸ Cardenal, *Solentiname*, 434.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 435.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 436.

The Gospel reading then tells of one of these newly invited guests who came, but was not wearing appropriate attire. This guest was then excluded from the feast. Laureano feels bad for this guest, identifying with the idea of not having appropriate clothing.⁷¹ Cardenal proposes that it was likely that the king had provided appropriate clothing, though this individual, like those who had been invited initially, had ‘snubbed the king when he didn’t accept the clothes’.⁷² Another attendee, Donald comments, ‘And that one, wouldn’t he be there to spy on the others?’ This indicates the very real sense of danger that these members of the community felt in speaking about the Gospel in terms of their own praxis. Felipe comments, ‘That one arrived to join the party but he wasn’t with the spirit of the feast, he wasn’t sharing in the joy, and that’s why he didn’t want to put on that garment’. He continues,

Man, look, I think we’re having this meeting and we’re talking here about the revolution, about love (for me, love is the revolution, and that we ought to united and maybe there’s some shit that listening, snooping on what we’re talking about, our plan, and that bastard goes to the authorities and we find out he’s a spy (that occurs to me because they’ve just said that man of the parable could be a spy and then we’d get rid of him quick, because the group’s not going to get screwed on account of him. Maybe the same thing happened at that wedding. That’s why the king got sore and condemned him.⁷³

It is evident from these words that the whole wedding feast scenario is perceived in terms of the revolution, the liberation of the poor and oppressed in Nicaragua from the Somoza regime. This perception also indicates the Solentiname community’s sense of their experiences in relation to eschatology, calling back to Gutiérrez’s comments in *A Theology of Liberation*:

In Latin America the world in which the Christian community must live and celebrate its eschatological hope is the world of social revolution; the Church’s task must be defined in relation to this. Its fidelity to the Gospel leaves it no

⁷¹ Ibid, 437.

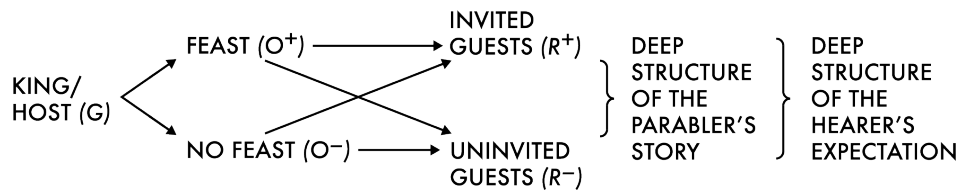
⁷² Ibid, 437.

⁷³ Ibid, 437.

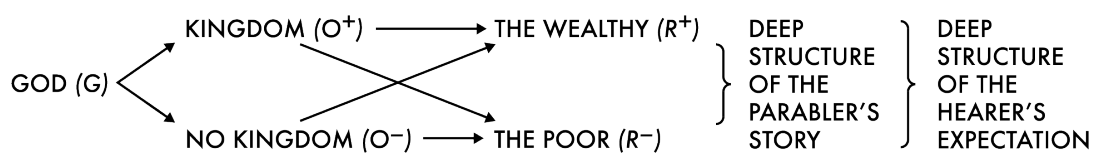
alternative: the Church must be the visible sign of the presence of the Lord within the aspiration for liberation and the struggle for a more human and just society. Only in this way will the message of love which the Church bears be made credible and efficacious.⁷⁴

Earlier in the conversation, Olivia references the kingdom of God in this way: ‘The kingdom of God isn’t on earth yet because the meal isn’t shared yet. It’s love that’s going to cause that sharing on earth, right?’⁷⁵ Later on in the discussion, Olivia comments, ‘Long ago, the kingdom of heaven would have been established, but through thinking about the God in heaven we haven’t been concerned about the gods that suffer on earth.’⁷⁶ For the Solentiname community, the coming of the kingdom of God is tied directly to the experiences of those who suffer. They see revolutionary action as that which will inaugurate the kingdom in their context.

On the surface, the ‘The Wedding Feast’ may be modelled in this way:



With the Solentiname community’s re-reading, this model can be adapted as such:



The wedding feast is no longer simply a wedding feast, but the presence of the kingdom of God (O+), given by God (G). In designating the expectant receiver of the invitation to the kingdom (R+), the community points toward the wealthy, but this could be any group or individual who rejects the loving kingdom of God through either taking

⁷⁴ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, trans. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (London: SCM Press, 2001), 234.

⁷⁵ Cardenal, *Solentiname*, 434.

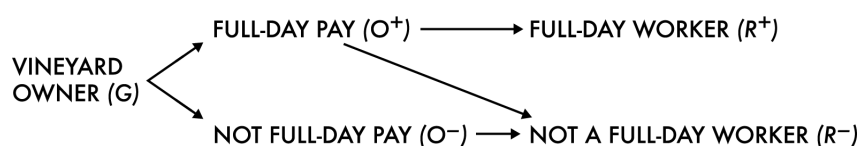
⁷⁶ Ibid, 438.

a position of either *disinterest* (ignoring Olivia's 'gods that suffer on earth') or *active contribution* (through collusion with the government) to the suffering of the poor. In their context, the wealthy and well-connected are those who might be *expected* to be invited to the kingdom feast, but it is the poor to whom the kingdom is given. The whole of this parable—both in the initial model above and in the re-reading—is perceived as eschatological (Jesus opens the parable by likening it to the 'kingdom of heaven'), and, in the context of Solentiname, necessarily revolutionary.

B. The 'Single-Reversal' Model

The Workers in the Vineyard

Within the comments of the two parabolic discourses above, there can also be found examples of what Crossan calls a 'single reversal' model. While both 'The Good Samaritan' and 'The Wedding Feast' feature double reversals (represented by the crossed arrows in the middle of the diagrams), Crossan makes a special note using 'the story of the Vineyard Workers (Matt 20.1-13[14-15])' as an example.⁷⁷ He models this parable in the following manner:



Even without the double reversal, this parable still conveys the undermining of the deep structure of the hearer's expectation that a full-day worker (R+) will receive full-day pay (O+) while a non-full-day worker (R-) will not (O-). In the discussion of neighbours during their dialogue on 'The Good Samaritan', the Solentiname community elicits this single reversal model, even if they do not correspond directly to

⁷⁷ Crossan, 99.

the actants within parable at hand. As mentioned before, Olivia comments, 'Your neighbors are all of humanity, that's what this fellow didn't know, that his neighbors are everybody.'⁷⁸ In the same discussion, a 'South American hippie' in attendance comments, 'But our enemies are also part of God because they're also human beings. If they do evil it's maybe because they're mistaken, and we must love them.'⁷⁹ The Solentiname community's discussion surrounding 'The Workers in the Vineyard' is an example of these single reversal sentiments expressed in direct correlation to the text at hand.

In response to the vineyard owner's giving of full-day's pay to the workers who came later, the unanimous sense of the community is that the owner was 'in the right': Oscar comments, 'I don't think the boss was unfair, because he didn't care about the work or the profits it would bring... The ones who worked more were angry, of course. I can understand them, but they had no right to complain. The boss wanted to get them all together so that none would be idle.' Oscar is followed by Manuel, 'It wasn't unjust... [the vineyard owner isn't] taking anything from [the full-day worker], it's a favor that he's doing [for the worker who came later].'⁸⁰ Olivia observes that the standard practice in society is the opposite of what happens in the parable, stating, 'It seems that in that parable Jesus is telling us that in the new society everybody's doing to get the same amount.'⁸¹ William follows with a rendering of the popular slogan from Marx' 1875 'Critique of the Gotha Programme': 'Not according to the work but according to the need.'⁸²

⁷⁸ Cardenal, *Solentiname*, 332.

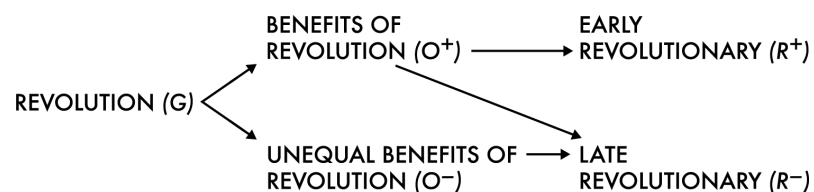
⁷⁹ Ibid, 337.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 381.

⁸¹ Ibid, 381.

⁸² Ibid, 381.

In addition to the critique of contemporary society, the Solentiname community also see how principles from 'The Workers in the Vineyard' apply to their sense of revolution and loves. Bosco comments, '[It] seems to me that when you make a revolution, the first ones that work in it shouldn't demand more than the others who join it at the end. Because the revolution is equality. It makes everybody the same.' Bosco's wife, Esperanza follows with the rhetorical question, 'And that also means that it's never too late to work in the revolution, right?'⁸³ In the formulation above, the model of 'The Workers in the Vineyard' might look like this:



Unlike previous parables, the Giver in the model above does not feature a 'character' as such. This demonstrates Dan Otto Via's assertion that '[an] actant is not a character but is a function, role or status who quality is to be the subject of or participant in a constant action. The actant is perhaps usually a personal character, but it may be an object, institution, feeling, disposition, condition, etc.'⁸⁴ The model above makes clear that this anticipated revolution is not simply a revolution against the Somoza regime, but against all unjust standards of their present society that might invade even the ranks of the revolution. This is like the sentiments expressed by the Cubans with whom Cardenal associated during his first visit to Cuba in 1970 – the suppression that exists in post-revolutionary Cuba is the result of the continued influence of pre-revolutionary ideals.

⁸³ Ibid, 382.

⁸⁴ Dan Otto Via, 'Parable and Example Story: A Literary-Structuralist Approach,' *Semeia* 1 (1974), 107.

C. A Parabolic Analysis of a Non-Parabolic Text

Up to this point, I have only modelled the Solentiname community's discussions on texts that pertain to Gospel parables (and parables that have received treatment from Crossan, at that). It is also vital for my argument to explore how their discussions might pertain to a non-parabolic text (that is to say, a pericope of the Gospel that is not designated as a 'parable') as well as how their very praxis might be modelled according to the actantial scheme.

The Expulsion of the Merchants from the Temple

I begin with an example of the former and for this, I will explore the Solentiname community's discussion on 'The Expulsion of the Merchants from the Temple' in Matthew 21.12-17. The Gospel reading tells of Jesus entering the temple, where he 'threw out all those who were selling and buying there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the stands of the pigeon sellers; and he said to them: "In the Scriptures it says: 'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of thieves.'" ⁸⁵ Olivia is the first to respond:

OLIVIA: 'I think he drove them out because they were exploiting people, because all trade is exploitation, and not because they were profaning the temple with cows and other animals. The desecration of the temple was the exploitation.'

GLORIA: 'And, as I see it, that action was against all those people that trade with religion.'

WILLIAM: 'And in general against all the people who have made use of religion (of the various religions down through history) to maintain a system of exploitation.'

ESPERANZA: 'the difference between the temples before and the temples now is that now there are no animals in the temples. But the traders are still inside.'

ALEJANDRO: 'They make no distinction between robbery and trade.'

⁸⁵ Matthew 21.12-13.

BOSCO: 'Well, trade is appropriating the surplus-value of another; if not, it's not business.'⁸⁶

This discussion is reined in by Cardenal, who points out that 'the trading concession in the temple were in the hands of a few powerful families, among them the family of the high priest.'⁸⁷ In this way, Jesus' actions can be seen as a condemnation, not simply against merchants, but against the ruling class, 'the highest authorities who were responsible for that organization.' After further discussion regarding the vices and virtues of trading (to be clear, this discussion consisted mostly of the 'vices'), another attendee, Natalia, comments, 'Any trading that's done without charity, that's what's bad.'⁸⁸ Cardenal goes on to explain some of the context of trading within the temple and how various Gospel writers treat the 'temple cleansing' event. Gloria asks, 'And the Romans let [Jesus] do [this]?' Cardenal responds by stating that the Romans were very concerned about the temple as it pertained to political power, but that Jesus' actions in this text would have been perceived as 'an internal struggle of the Jews.'⁸⁹ William is quick pick up on this idea of internal struggle and non-intervention: 'Just as the U.S. intervention in our countries doesn't meddle in partisan struggles, when they think those struggle don't threaten their interests, and that instead those internal divisions favor their interests.'⁹⁰ Later, William comments that Jesus' actions must have been symbolic, '[because] the following day the merchants were going to be right back again. It seems to me he wasn't interested in purifying that temple of Jerusalem; his action was projected toward the future.'⁹¹

⁸⁶ Cardenal, *Solentiname*, 426.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 426.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 427.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 428.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 428.

⁹¹ Ibid, 429.

Even within this opening discussion, the Solentiname community cannot help but see parallels to their own praxis. They observe corruption among the elites, both within and beyond the bounds of the Church. They observe the way in which their economic system increases the wealth of the wealthy while exploiting the poor. They also observe how a foreign power is not especially interested in the internal struggles in Nicaragua, but instead, seeks to exploit these struggles for their own political and economic gain. Lastly, they observe how Jesus' actions were symbolic in that they point toward an eschatological hope.

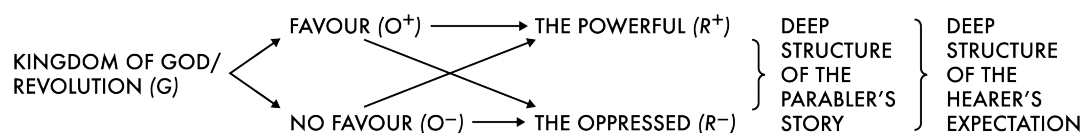
The Gospel text then tells of Jesus healing blind and disabled people who approached him in the temple, compelling children to shout, 'hosanna to the Son of King David!' This concerns the religious authorities, who ask, 'Do you hear what they are saying?'⁹² The members of the community observe the way that the young people were behind Jesus' words and actions and how the passion of the young concerns the authorities. Julio comments, 'I see young people shouting now as they shouted when they were with Jesus in the temple. The young people now want a change too, and this shouting is not pleasing the rich, the ones who are enjoying their privileges, and so they try to shut them up.' He continues, 'They really don't want to hear the young people shouting "Hurray for change! Hurray for joy!" Because what they want is to have oppression and sadness... And that's why they killed him. And they'll go right on killing anyone that wants a change, a new kingdom, a revolution.'⁹³ Felipe comments, 'After he drove out the traders Jesus taught them in the temple. He was probably conscientizing them. He was probably teaching Christianity and talking against the

⁹² Matthew 21.14-16a.

⁹³ Cardenal, *Solentiname*, 430, 431.

temple.’ Laureano follows, ‘Now the big churches are full of rich people, people from the Bank of America and from all the big banks, and the priests are preaching to them. But I don’t think their preaching is worth a damn.’⁹⁴

This discussion of ‘The Expulsion of the Merchants from the Temple’ requires some unpacking. Firstly, the Solentiname community identifies the ‘powerful’ (R+) as the antagonists of the text, whether this be the religious authorities, the civil authorities or the economic elite. The same antagonists in the Gospel reading are the antagonists in the context of Solentiname. The protagonist is Jesus, with his symbolic actions of expelling the merchants and healing which point to the eschatological reality of the kingdom of God. This is expressed as conscientisation and revolution in the context of Solentiname (G). Through his words and actions, Jesus brings this conscientisation to the young, the poor and those who yearn for and require revolution. As with the antagonists, these subjects are the same as are found in the context of Solentiname and might be reduced to the oppressed (R-). This can be modelled in the following way:



As with the double reversal in the parables of ‘The Good Samaritan’ and ‘The Wedding Feast’, this scheme presents the double reversal of favour (O+) and no favour (O-) in the kingdom of God (G). It might be expected that the religious, powerful and economic elites (R+) are to receive favour, just as they had received in the temple and just as they received in the context of 1970s Nicaragua, but the coming of the kingdom of

⁹⁴ Ibid, 431.

God through the social revolution demanded by liberation theology instead delivers favour to the oppressed (R-).

IV. The Praxis of Solentiname as Parable

While I have explored some of the Solentiname community's discussions of biblical texts found within *The Gospel in Solentiname*, it is still important to the way in which their praxis, the story of *la Nuestra Señora de Solentiname* and how that praxis might be read as text and therefore as one of Barth's 'true parables of the kingdom of God'. For this, I return to Ricœur's textual model in 'The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as Text'. As explored in the previous chapter, for action to be considered as text it must cohere with four criteria. The first is that discourse is necessarily temporal.⁹⁵ This is distinct from both 'living speech' (which 'has the character of a fleeting event') in that it is fixed in time.⁹⁶ An action that is to be considered as text must become a 'speech-act', which can be 'identified and re-identified as having the same meaning.'⁹⁷ In this, Ricœur is not suggesting a narrow concept of 'meaning', but one which might anchor his other three criteria in that it possesses the possibility of meaning. The next criterion is that this 'speech-act', characterised by the 'autonomization of action'. Just as a text becomes 'detached from its author, an action is detached from its agent' since 'our deeds escape us and have effects which we did not intend.'⁹⁸ For his third criterion, Ricœur argues that an action is meaningful if its '*importance*... goes "beyond" its *relevance* to its initial situation.'⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Paul Ricœur, 'The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as Text,' *Social Research* 38, no. 3 (Autumn 1971), 530.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 531.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 534.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 541.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 543.

Lastly, a speech-act must exchange meaning. While a written text is limited, perhaps to those who can read, or even to those who can read a specific language, meaningful action as speech-act has more universal access.¹⁰⁰ Taking the praxis of the Solentiname community as text, one can see how it fits each of these traits: it is temporal in that it took place during a specific period of time; it refers to the subject of the community of Solentiname, but the importance of which is not bound to the understandings of the members of the community and it is universal in that it can be apprehended beyond the boundaries of written text.

What remains in order to consider the praxis of Solentiname as parable is to identify a specific event which is to be assessed. Here, I consider the meaningful action that ultimately brought about the destruction of the commune in October 1977 and the role that members of the Solentiname would play in the 1979 Nicaraguan Revolution.

Solentiname and the Nicaraguan Revolution

About the time between establishing *la Nuestra Señora de Solentiname* in 1966 and the *Sandinista* action in San Carlos in 1977, Cardenal comments, 'All of us in the community were radicalized by [our] discussions of the gospel.' He continues,

Little by little we came to identify with the revolutionary movement in Nicaragua, until at some point we became a part of it. Some of the young people wanted to leave the community and become guerrilla fighters. I was having a hard time holding them back. They didn't go then, in part because of a message from legendary guerrilla leader, Commander Marcos, saying that we had to hold the Solentiname community together; it was important to the revolution in social, political and military, tactical and strategic terms.

We soon found out why he said military; that was when the youth of the community were called to participate in the armed struggle, attacking the army barracks in nearby San Carlos as part of a general insurrection. After training

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 537.

in secret, some boys and girls from the community and other *compañeros* overran the barracks at San Carlos, but had to withdraw because the insurrection didn't take place as planned in other places. Some of the people who were discussing the gospel in this book took part in the action: Alejandro, Laureano, Felipe, Donald, Elvis, Julio Ramon, Gloria, Myriam, Ivan, and Bosco. The Somoza army razed our community in retaliation, and I had to go into exile with the other people of Solentiname, although I had not taken part in the armed action.¹⁰¹

In the text above, several potential actants can be identified. The first is a sense of revolutionary identity, which can be anticipated in the discussions from *The Gospel in Solentiname*. Another is the general sense that the Solentiname community played a valuable role in pre-revolutionary Nicaragua. The action taken in San Carlos as well as the members of the community that took part in this action can also be taken as potential actants. The last potential actant is the destruction of the community and the resultant exile of its members.

The text could end and by analysed there, but the 'triumph of the revolution' provides a degree of narrative closure. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, Cardenal names several martyrs from the Solentiname community: 'Felipe, Elvis and Donald became martyrs of the revolution before the triumph; later, Laureano and Alejandro. They are buried beside the little church where we held the dialogues—except for Felipe, who was buried symbolically because we don't know what happened to his body; he was last seen carrying an injured person, being chased by the soldiers.'¹⁰² These members of the community enacted the ultimate meaningful action for the sake of the revolution in their sacrifice.

After intense fighting during the 1978-79 War of Liberation ('many Nicaraguans are quick to point out that the term ["civil war"] does not fit because it implies armed

¹⁰¹ Cardenal, *Solentiname*, xiii-xiv.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, xv.

conflict between two major national factions'¹⁰³), and after Somoza fled the country for the United States, on 19 July 1979, the *Sandinistas* 'entered Managua and accepted the surrender of most of what was left of the National Guard.'¹⁰⁴ The war was over and the Somoza regime was no more. Walker and Wade comment,

If the old political system had been 'of, by, and for' a tiny privileged elite, the revolutionary system that replaced it was clearly based in and oriented toward the interests of the impoverished majority. Whereas democracy under the Somozas meant rigged elections, the empty rhetoric of corrupt elite-oriented parties, and the suppression of popular political participation, the new political system not only featured competitive internationally supervised elections but, more important, involved and depended upon the mobilized voluntary participation of hundreds of thousands of ordinary citizens. For the first time in Nicaraguan history, the impoverished majority came to have a voice and power in many aspects of the decision making that affected their lives.¹⁰⁵

Although *Sandinista* rule of Nicaragua would decline in the late 1980s, the successful revolution of 1979 was a seismic shift in the realities of the poor and oppressed in Nicaragua. The Solentiname community would play a role in this new Nicaragua, including formal roles such as Laureano and Alejandro becoming captains in the *Sandinista* army and Cardenal being given a governmental position as Minister of Culture.¹⁰⁶

The narrative above can lend itself to many different formulations of parabolic models. This is not to suggest that the parabolic model is not suitable for analysing this meaningful action as text, but that the text itself is so rich with meaning that it produces a myriad of possible parabolic formulations. If a broad model is taken, parallels can be observed between the story of Solentiname and the Nicaraguan Revolution and 'The Good Samaritan'. In this scheme, the Somoza regime occupies

¹⁰³ Walker and Wade, 57.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 64.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 73.

¹⁰⁶ Jean-Pierre Reed, 'Religious Dialogue in the Nicaraguan Revolution,' *Politics and Religion* 1 (2008), 281.

the place of the priest/Levite (G+). With control of *la Guardia*, the [admittedly tenuous] support of foreign powers like the United States as well as the Nicaraguan elites who had most to lose from a revolution, it might be expected that the Somoza regime's hold on power would be secure. With that power, it might also be expected that the government would be the body that brings liberation (O+, akin to 'aid' in 'The Good Samaritan') to the poor and oppressed (who act as Receiver [R], akin to the wounded Jew in 'The Good Samaritan'). The *Sandinistas* are like the Samaritan, the unlikely Givers (G-), seeming destined for defeat (O-) after many failed attempts at revolution since their formation in 1961. This scheme in this formation can be modelled in the following way:



While the model above could be seen as 'Nicaragua's story', it is also very much a story of the Solentiname community. In this instance, *unlike* the parabolic models taken from re-readings of Gospel texts, the reality of the lived situation is identical to the deep structure of the community's story. As such, the story reaches out to new audiences and contexts and is interpreted in terms of the way that it points, as a sign, to the kingdom of God. This is the power of the authority of the praxis of the poor when used as parable. In other words, the poor and oppressed exist as living parables, that to which Gutiérrez refers as 'the irruption of the poor.'¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 8.

Conclusion – After *The Gospel in Solentiname*

In this chapter I have argued that the praxis of the poor and oppressed has a special authority to speak truth to the Church and society at large. The focus of this chapter is on the ‘popular’ sphere of liberation theology as proposed by Leonardo and Clodovis Boff. I have done this by first establishing a broader Nicaraguan context before taking a closer look at *The Gospel in Solentiname* and the praxis of the Solentiname community and exploring them as parables through John Dominic Crossan’s use of actantial structure. Taken as parables, these stories offer new insights to the truth of the Christian message, prompting the reader to disentangle the ‘dialectical knot’ presented in Kierkegaard’s exploration of indirect communication. When Cardenal published his collection of the Solentiname community’s critical reflections on the Bible, it was given the title *El Evangelio en Solentiname*. I argue that significance can be read into Cardenal’s choice of wording. The word ‘*en*’ can imply that this is the expression of the Gospel itself in Solentiname, not merely a collection of what were interpretations *from* (‘*de*’) the Solentiname community. Given the argument of this chapter, the weight of ‘*en*’ can be seen as a further expression of the authority with which the parabolic implications of the Solentiname community are realised. They are not simply making comments, but are enacting the fullness of the Gospel itself, what Barth calls true parables of the kingdom of God ‘in the full biblical sense’.¹⁰⁸

An objection might be raised that every challenge to religion or religious structures cannot be held in the same authority as the parables of the Gospels as

¹⁰⁸ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV: *The Doctrine of Reconciliation* 3.1, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961), 117

these could refute the most basic foundations of Christian belief. The example of Marxism is one of these objections, an objection that was also put forward by many critics of liberation theology, including the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1984's 'Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation"'. But just as Marxism's atheistic presuppositions fail to complete Juan Luis Segundo's hermeneutical circle (as seen in Chapter 1), I contest to such objections against the use of the praxis of the poor as parables for the same reasons. While some Marxists maintain atheism as an essential tenet of their beliefs, recalling José Coronel's words to Ernesto Cardenal, '[The] communist cannot convert to Christianity without ceasing to be a communist exclusively, while the Christian can become a communist (Marxist-Leninist) and become even *more* Christian.'

Following the revolution, Cardenal returned to Nicaragua from his exile in Costa Rica and as mentioned before, was made Minister of Culture, a position he held until 1987. During his tenure as Minister of Culture, in 1983 Pope John Paul II visited Nicaragua. He was greeted by Cardenal on the tarmac after landing in Managua. A photograph of the event captured the moment the pontiff wagged his finger toward a kneeling, smiling Cardenal. He is reported to have said to Cardenal (who had been ordered to leave his governmental post), 'You must sort out your affairs with the church.'¹⁰⁹ Later that year, a 'new Code of Canon Law' was drafted, forbidding members of the priesthood from holding 'public offices that involve participation in the exercise of civil power'.¹¹⁰ As a result of his refusal to leave his post, in 1984 Cardenal,

¹⁰⁹ 'Building Utopia,' *The Economist* (7 March 2020), 82.

¹¹⁰ 'Los sacerdotes-ministros suspendidos "a divinis",' *Revista Envío* No. 50 (August 1985): <https://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/462>. Translation mine.

along with three other priests (including his brother, Fernando), was suspended from exercising his duty as a priest (*'a divinis'*).¹¹¹ Despite leaving his ministerial post in 1987, the suspension remained in effect for 35 years, when in February 2019, it was lifted by Pope Francis. Cardenal died 13 months later at the age of 95.

Due to his close association with the Solentiname community, as well as his eventful life, it might seem natural to analyse Ernesto Cardenal's praxis as parable with the actantial scheme. Indeed, this would be fruitful in terms of the exploration of Leonardo and Clodovis Boff's second sphere of liberation theology, that of the 'pastoral' level. While potential parables of Ernesto Cardenal might come to be addressed elsewhere, in the following chapter I will turn to another priest in Latin America, El Salvador's Óscar Romero in order to continue to develop the possibilities of praxis as parable within liberation theology.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER FIVE

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A PROPHETIC ARCHBISHOP: THE PARABLES OF ÓSCAR ROMERO

Introduction

This chapter continues the exploration of praxis as parable observed in the previous chapter, proceeding into the third stage of the progression of my analysis. There, I argued how the praxis of the poor might function in a parabolic manner by using the context of the Solentiname community in Nicaragua. That analysis was rooted in Leonardo and Clodovis Boff's first sphere of liberation theology, that of the 'popular'. The second major category they present is that of the 'pastoral' sphere. By this, they define pastoral liberation theology as 'the theology that sheds the light of the saving word on the reality of injustice to inspire the church to struggle for liberation.'¹ In order for the pastoral to be enacted, it must first be informed by the popular, by witnessing the reality of the popular sphere, for example, through the reflections of the ecclesial base communities or CEBs. Only after first observing this reality can the pastoral sphere move into the realm of critical assessment, of analysing the world and the reflections of the popular and identifying that from which the popular demand liberation. The pastoral level does all of this in conjunction with the popular level, not offering a solution from above in a hierarchical fashion but walking alongside the popular and discerning a way forward, out of their 'situation of oppression', together. The expression of this pastoral sphere is demonstrated through *pastoral action*, which

¹ Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1987), 17.

Leonardo and Clodovis Boff see as coming in the form of sermons, talks and pastoral instructions and guidelines.²

When developing their three level of liberation theology for *Introducing Liberation Theology* (prior to its publication in 1986, six years after the assassination of Monseñor Óscar Romero, archbishop of San Salvador), one could imagine that the martyred archbishop was, in large part, Leonardo and Clodovis Boff's inspiration. In the decades since, the name Óscar Romero has come to embody the pastoral level of liberation theology, and all this despite the fact that the man never considered himself a 'liberation theologian' as such. Given this, it would be an error to either diminish or dismiss the place of Romero within the history of Latin American liberation theology. Spanish-born Salvadoran liberation theologian Jon Sobrino comments on the oft-repeated allegation that liberation theologians have 'manipulated' Romero to suit their own aims and interests: 'I must sincerely say that, if there was any manipulation, Archbishop Romero manipulated us more than we manipulated him. Archbishop Romero gave us more than we gave him. That is my conviction, and my hope.'³

Although Romero would not have adopted the title of 'liberation theologian', neither would he have adopted the title of 'professional theologian'. Historian and Romero biographer Roberto Morozzo della Rocca writes, 'His reading focused on the documents of the magisterium, patristic texts, biblical commentaries, and the lives of saints, and it was usually related to his preaching. He devoted much more time to

² Ibid, 13.

³ Jon Sobrino, *Archbishop Romero: Memories and Reflections*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2016), 25.

prayer than to scholarly reading.’⁴ Whatever degree of a formal ‘liberation theology’ Romero might have been willing to accept in the years leading up to his death, it is certain that he found this emergent theology difficult with which to cope in the early 1970s. The very fact that, until the last few years of his life, Romero was a well-connected representative of the status quo in the Catholic Church and in El Salvador, would have been seen as an impediment to the progression of the aims of liberation theology makes his story a very powerful example of the way that parables undermine the expectations of the hearer, the ‘unparabled’.

What happened to Óscar Romero that brought any degree of personal transformation with regard to liberation theology? A full answer to that question would be well beyond the scope of the space afforded in this chapter, but a look at the shape—and the changing shape—of Romero’s life helps in understanding his relationship to liberation theology in the pastoral sphere and, ultimately, as a parable or collection of parables. Up to this point, several Romero biographies have been published. This chapter draws on these narratives, but to a different end. Many biographies have sought to exploit Romero as a martyr on behalf of the institutional Church, while others have painted him as an outright liberation theologian. I argue that the reality of Romero’s life and ministry lies somewhere in between these two camps, or, at the very least, one who occupied both sides of this argument at different points in his life. I begin by first exploring Romero’s early life and education in El Salvador and how these experiences began to shape his worldview. I then explore Romero’s further education and ordination in Rome before his return to El Salvador. One popular

⁴ Roberto Morozzo della Rocca, *Oscar Romero: Prophet of Hope*, trans. Michael J. Miller (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2015), 145.

conception of 'pre-1977' Romero is that of an ardent traditionalist (it is his perceived traditionalism that gains him such favour within the hierarchy of the Catholic Church that results in his nomination for the position of archbishop).

I. The Pre-Archbishopric Life of Óscar Romero

While aspects of a more 'socially conscious' pre-1977 Romero are present in his life, this part of the chapter will be concerned with the words and actions that make him an unlikely candidate for the 'icon of Latin American liberation theology' that he was to become. This exploration is then followed by events which precipitated a 'conversion' in Romero's life, namely the death of his friend, Jesuit priest Rutilio Grande. It is in this shift that Romero's embodiment as a parable first takes shape and this event will be assessed in terms of John Dominic Crossan's parabolic model (as explored in previous chapters) before moving into analyses of several parables presented in Romero's sermons during his time as archbishop of San Salvador. Romero's framing of these parables provides further insight, not only into the use of biblical parables within liberation theology, but also how liberation theology might present fresh insights to the concepts presented in the Bible. The last 'parable' to be explored in this chapter concerns Romero's assassination in 1980 and the impact of this event on both Salvadoran society and subsequent Latin American liberation theology.

A. The Early Years

Óscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdámez was born to Guadalupe de Jesús Galdámez and Santos Romero in the eastern Salvadoran town of Ciudad Barrios on 15 August

1917. Óscar was the second of eight children that Guadalupe bore with Santos (Santos had also fathered another child illegitimately). The Romeros lived on a small plot of land that had been inherited by Guadalupe. While the family was not among the poorest of the poor in El Salvador—that social stratum being occupied primarily by the *campesinos*, the landless peasant farmers—the Romeros were *mestizos* (an ethnic mix of indigenous and Spanish blood) and the children shared common beds.⁵ At that time, Ciudad Barrios, despite being named after politician and coffee magnate, Gerardo Barrios, was small, relatively isolated (accessible only by foot or horseback) and had no electricity.⁶

The contraction of polio at age four inhibited Romero's mobility and speech, having 'long-range consequences on his character, accentuating his intelligence and thoughtfulness.'⁷ Romero adopted his mother's Catholic faith at a young age, with one of his brothers recalling, 'Of all of us... he was probably the one who prayed the most.'⁸ His idea of play seemed to revolve around his faith and he was often found donning one of his mother's aprons, pretending to lead religious processions.⁹ If any progress was to be made toward the priesthood, encouragement would not come from Santos Romero, who preferred the idea of his second-eldest child taking up a trade. At age eleven or twelve, when the young Romero had completed the general education that

⁵ Della Rocca, 3.

⁶⁶ Kerry Walters, *Saint Oscar Romero: Pastor, Prophet, Martyr* (Cincinnati: Franciscan Media, 2018), 2.

⁷ Della Rocca, 3.

⁸ Walters, 4.

⁹ *Ibid*, 4. In adulthood, Romero told of a childhood memory, a visit by the local bishop, Juan Antonio Dueñas to Ciudad Barrios. The young Romero became Dueñas' shadow, following him around the town. Eventually, Dueñas addressed Romero and asked him what he wished to be when he was older. Romero answered, 'Well, I... I would like to be a priest!' To this, Dueñas responded, 'You, my boy, are going to be a bishop!'

was available in Ciudad Barrios, his father arranged for his son to be an apprentice in carpentry.

Romero was adept at his apprenticeship, yet he—along with the diocesan vicar, Father Benito Calvo and even the mayor of Ciudad Barrios, Alfonso Leiva—appealed to his father that he might be allowed to pursue a religious education.¹⁰ Eventually, with the help of financial assistance from the local bishop, Santos agreed to send his son to the minor seminary in San Miguel, some 40 kilometres south of Ciudad Barrios.

B. Education in San Miguel

Romero was 13 when he left Ciudad Barrios in 1930. In San Miguel, he was taught by the Claretian Fathers and lived a relatively monastic way of life, waking at half five to attend Mass at half six, followed by breakfast and eight hours of lessons. While he remained somewhat shy and introspective, Romero appreciated the fellowship he found at the seminary, describing ‘the seminarians and their Claretian mentors as a genuinely close family.’¹¹

In Romero’s second year at San Miguel, El Salvador experienced great economic and social distress as a result of worldwide financial collapse. While the production of coffee beans had long been the major driving force of the Salvadoran economy, the Great Depression halved global demand for the crop. This resulted in a serious reduction of wages for the already-impooverished *campesinos*, who were now earning less than fifteen percent of what they had earned before the collapse.¹² Many

¹⁰ Della Rocca, 3.

¹¹ Ibid, 8.

¹² Ibid, 10. See Jeffrey L. Gould and Aldo A. Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness: Revolution, Repression, and Memory in El Salvador, 1920-1932* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2008), 20.

campesinos found themselves out of work and, having little if any productive land of their own in order to grow food for subsistence and market value, unrest grew.

January 1931 saw the first free multiparty election in El Salvador, resulting in a victory for Arturo Araujo of the Labour Party (Spanish: *Partido Laborista*), who ran on a shared ticket with Maximiliano Hernández Martínez of the National Republican Party (Spanish: *Partido Nacional Pro-Patria*). By December, Araujo's own Minister of War, General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez led the Salvadoran army in a *coup d'état*, resulting in Hernández Martínez' military government. Romero would never know his home nation without some form of military dictatorship ever again.

The Hernández Martínez government began as it would continue, oppressively and without mercy. On 22 January 1932, a rebellion broke out in the southwest, led by many thousands of *campesinos* and indigenous Pipils, and supported by Agustín Farabundo Martí and his Communist Party (Spanish: *Partido Comunista*).¹³ Hernández Martínez acted swiftly, sending in the army, and crushing the rebellion within a week. Over the next month, the army would continue the killing, making harsh examples out of the *campesinos*, the Pipils and the communists, including Farabundo Martí. More than 30,000 people were killed in what became known as *la Matanza* (English: 'the Slaughter').¹⁴

Despite the ongoing chaos in El Salvador, the minor seminary at San Miguel continued in its day-to-day operations. Romero remained there until he graduated in 1935. Previously, it would have been possible for Romero to continue his journey to the priesthood at San Miguel, which, in addition to its education of youths, also offered

¹³ Walters, 10.

¹⁴ Walters, 10-11; Michael E. Lee, *Revolutionary Saint: The Theological Legacy of Óscar Romero* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2018), 12, 192-3.

further training for adults. That option was removed when, in 1936, the Spanish Civil War began and the seminary staff was depleted by the recalling of Spanish Claretians to fill the void left by others who had already been killed in the conflict.¹⁵ The following year, Bishop Juan Antonio Dueñas referred Romero to San José de la Montaña, the Jesuit seminary in the capital city, San Salvador.

By 1937, Dueñas was able to secure financial sponsorship in order that Romero, along with two other graduates of the seminary in San Miguel, might move to Rome to train for the priesthood at the Gregorian University. It was also arranged that while studying, the young seminarians would stay at the Pontifical Latin American College (Spanish: *Colegio Pío Latino Americano*), where they would be reunited with another graduate of San Miguel, Rafael Valladares.¹⁶ After an eleven-day journey from El Salvador, the three Salvadoran seminarians reached Rome, which would be Romero's home for the next six years.

C. The Roman Years

Just as the impact of his early years in El Salvador are evident in Romero's later life and work, so too, and perhaps more so, are the years he spent away. Both the Gregorian University and the Pontifical Latin American College were run by Jesuits and while he was in Rome, Ignatian spirituality played a major role in Romero's life. In 1972, Romero wrote in his personal diary,

The exercises of Saint Ignatius... are a personal effort to put Christianity into practice. They are not the great general principles of revelation or of the magisterium, but personal conversation with God. 'I have seen God,' Jacob said. This must be my yearning: 'Speak to me, Lord.'¹⁷

¹⁵ Walters, 13.

¹⁶ Della Rocca, 4.

¹⁷ Walters, 6

Additionally, Romero absorbed the ecclesial atmosphere of Rome itself with great enthusiasm. Romero writes, 'The privilege of studying in Rome was valuable not so much for the scholarly aspect as for the moral support of a priestly education completed in the Roman setting. Rome is the most beautiful symbol and synthesis of the Church.' Romero continues,

Eternal Rome, while continuing to be the same through the centuries, takes on the historical characteristics that correspond to the individual personalities of the popes. It is a miracle of Providence: each pope embodies in his way of being the aspect that is most needed at that time in the life of the Church.¹⁸

In his perspective, what made Rome so significant was the presence of the pope, and for Romero, this 'miracle of Providence' was embodied in Pius XI, who Romero called, 'the Pontiff of imperial stature' (Spanish: '*Pontífice de talla imperial*').¹⁹

Romero's deep admiration for Pius extended to other aspects of the pontiff's rule, including his emphasis on social justice, exemplified in his 1931 encyclical 'Fortieth year' (Latin: '*Quadragesimo Anno*', marking 40 years since Pope Leo XIII's call for 'revolutionary change' in '*Rerum Novarum*'), which condemns both capitalism and communism.²⁰ Romero also admired Pius' embracing of technology in order to spread the message of the Church, with the pope's installation of a radio station in the newly-established Vatican City in 1931. With this, Pius became the first pope to use radio regularly (which served as a model for Romero's later ministry).²¹

In September 1939, Nazi Germany invaded Poland and the Second World War began. By June 1940, Italy had entered the war on the side of Nazi Germany. With

¹⁸ Della Rocca, 7-8.

¹⁹ Walters, 19.

²⁰ Encyclicals of Pius XI, '*Quadragesimo Anno*,' The Holy See, http://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19310515_quadragesimo-anno.html (accessed 10 January 2022).

²¹ Walters, 18.

Rome having become a potential target for Allied bombardment, the administrators at the Pontifical Latin American College desired to send their seminarians back home. But with the danger of a transatlantic crossing, the Latin American students, including Romero, remained in Rome. Life in Rome grew more difficult. The army's wellbeing was prioritised and food became scarcer throughout Italy. Nevertheless, Romero continued in his studies and received his licentiate in theology in 1941. The following year, he turned 24 (the minimum age requirement for the taking of Holy Orders in Canon Law at that time) and was ordained in April.²²

D. Return to El Salvador

After ordination, Romero began a doctorate, focussing on Spanish Jesuit Luis de la Puente's mid-sixteenth century work *Meditations on the Mysteries of Our Holy Faith* (Spanish: *Meditaciones de los misterios de nuestra santa fe*), but his studies were interrupted when, in the summer of 1943, Rome was bombed by the Allies. As a result, Bishop Dueñas' successor, Miguel Angel Machado recalled Romero back to El Salvador, a journey that, due to the global unrest during the Second World War, took more than four months.²³

Within a fortnight of his arrival, on 11 January 1944, Romero celebrated his first Mass at Ciudad Barrios and by the spring, he was serving as the priest in the small village of Anamorós, about 70 kilometres east of his hometown. His time in Anamorós would be short, however, as after only three months, Bishop Machado called him to be his secretary in San Miguel. At that time, the large city of San Miguel, with some

²² Ibid, 22.

²³ Ibid, 23-4; della Roca, 9.

500,000 Catholics, was being served by only 21 priests and young, Roman-educated priests like Romero and Valladares would have been seen as precious commodities.

Up to this point in the narrative of Romero's life story, the basic trajectory of his experiences, perspectives and character are up for little debate. Following his return to El Salvador and his appointment in San Miguel, Salvadoran perspectives on Romero take diverging routes. Many characterise the pre-1977 Romero as an ecclesial bureaucrat and an ardent traditionalist, while others argue that Romero's life and practice remained relatively consistent from 1944 until his death, whether that be as a faithful, 'by-the-book' Catholic or as a revolutionary voice from the onset.²⁴ Whatever his position between 1944 and 1977, Romero's life took such a dramatic turn in 1977 that it ought to be considered a 'conversion' of some sort. I suggest that Romero occupied multiple camps, that the conservative Salvadoran seminarian who remained devoted to the Catholic Church also experienced ongoing transformation and maturation toward a profound sense of justice that would result in his martyrdom. In the following section, I examine the pre-1977 Romero as a traditionalist.

E. Romero the Traditionalist

When Romero went to work under Machado in San Miguel, his 'tasks included tedious administrative work involved in overseeing the diocese's parishes, answering and filing correspondence, and in general making himself available for whatever task the bishop required of him.'²⁵ While serving in this role, Romero began to make

²⁴ Due to the limitations of space in this chapter, I refer to Walters' *Saint Oscar Romero: Pastor, Prophet, Martyr*, in which he explores more socially conscious aspects of Romero's pre-1977 ministry. Despite a definite concern for social justice, Romero's pre-1977 ministry remained reflective of both his neo-Scholastic worldview and as mentioned before, the general disposition of the Church leadership in El Salvador during his lifetime.

²⁵ Walters, 28.

enemies among the clergy, something that would become commonplace throughout the rest of his life. Among other things, he was known for his 'sartorial propriety', criticising fellow priests who did not wear their cassocks (reflecting Romero's attitude toward perceived impropriety among the clergy). In turn, his fellow priests 'thought him too authoritarian, too coldly unimaginative, a regular company man and stickler for the rules.'²⁶ Romero biographer Kerry Walters writes, 'On at least one occasion, some of them unsuccessfully petitioned Machado to clip his secretary's wings.'²⁷

During these years, Romero was also known for his willingness 'to work with power brokers in his own nation', akin to Pius XI's early arrangements with Mussolini and Hitler.²⁸ He was 'on friendly terms with San Miguel's wealthy *cafetaleros*', those who made their fortunes from exploitative coffee plantations.²⁹ Later in his career, while he was serving as an auxiliary bishop in San Salvador, Romero had also befriended Colonel Arturo Armando Molina, who seized power from the democratically-elected Christian Democratic president José Napoleón Duarte Fuentes in 1972. Molina's actions received no condemnation from the Episcopal Conference of El Salvador (Spanish: *Conferencia Episcopal de El Salvador*, or CEDES), of which Romero was secretary at the time.³⁰ CEDES complicity in Molina's regime extended to the military government's crackdown on the liberal University of El Salvador, resulting in the arrest of more than 800 members of the faculty and student body, the forced exile of the university's top administrators and the closure of the university for more than a year.³¹ One of Romero's fellow priests recalls, 'The Bishop's Conference

²⁶ Ibid, 33.

²⁷ Ibid, 33.

²⁸ Walters, 19.

²⁹ Ibid, 31.

³⁰ Ibid, 50.

³¹ Della Rocca, 33.

published a paid ad in the newspapers, written and signed by Monseñor Romero as secretary, defending the occupation of the university with a rationalization taken straight from the government's statement: that the university was a hotbed of subversion and that it was necessary to take measures against it.³² Della Rocca writes, '[The] Salvadoran bishops supported the stable military and oligarchical governments rather than the opposition composed of reform-minded Christian Democrats.'³³

Romero's scepticism of liberal Catholicism can be traced back to his education, especially in Rome. One of Romero's friends and fellow Salvadoran priest José Inocencio Alas comments, 'The theological training [Romero] received is dogmatic and doctrinaire. It is applied equally to the eighth century as to the Middle Ages or the modern day. It is not committed to an historical time and place; it's abstract. It demands blind obedience to Rome's authority.'³⁴ Liberation theologian Michael E. Lee characterises this perspective as 'neo-scholastic' theology. He argues that although this type of 'traditional' theology is influenced by 'medieval Scholastic theologians, primarily Thomas Aquinas', it is more reminiscent of Catholic theology in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries rather than 'the creative synthesis of Aquinas.'³⁵ He writes,

Neo-Scholastic theology has been called a deductive approach because its content is deduced from abstract ideas. In this approach, knowledge of the faith

³² As quoted in Walters, 50-1.

³³ Della Rocca, 42. Walters recounts the story of Romero's visit to the parish of Zacamil in San Salvador shortly after the government's actions at the university: '[Romero] accepted [the invitation to Zacamil], but was clearly wary of what awaited him. He was right to be, because the priests and laypersons gathered there immediately challenged his support of the government. Romero responded defensively and in a high-handed tone. "I want to tell you," he scolded, "that I don't agree with the one-sided way in which you have been using your faith!" Accusations and counteraccusations flew back and forth until Romero shouted, "You're not doing pastoral work here at all. You're doing political work! And you haven't called me to a Mass. You've called me to a meeting of subversives!" Walters, 51.

³⁴ Will, x.

³⁵ Lee, 6-7.

requires neither context (of either the believer or the beliefs) nor development. Human experience does not add new questions; the answers are already given in revelation, and the 'deposit of faith' is seen as an unchanging commodity that is mastered, applied, and defended from threats.³⁶

This neo-Scholastic method took Aquinas' concepts of 'natural' and 'supernatural' and applied them to a broad range of epistemological dualisms, 'such as body/soul, nature/grace, natural/spiritual, world/church, and so on', and with the ceding of the Papal States to a unified Italy in 1870, it marked 'the first time in over a millennium that the Bishop of Rome had not been a temporal ruler of lands and a military.'³⁷ With this, the 'spiritual' came to represent the exclusive domain of the Catholic Church. Armed with this neo-Scholastic traditionalism, Romero was often hostile toward reform, especially that which sought to supplant spiritual existence with material existence, or indeed, that which sought to conflate the two.

Throughout his time in San Miguel and San Salvador, Romero often occupied himself with attacks on Marxism, arguing that 'Communism claims to create a new kind of people... The specific trait of a human being is religiosity... Without religion, he is no more than an animal.' He continues, 'Well, then, this is what Communism claims: to uproot from [the human being] any religious sentiment.'³⁸ While Romero was relatively optimistic concerning the productions of the Second Vatican Council, he had reservations concerning how the post-conciliar Church in El Salvador would use the reforms. According to Walters, Romero opposed those priests who 'treated the reforms of Vatican II as licenses to step outside the boundaries defined by the Church... using Vatican II as a pretext for conflating political agitation with the tenets

³⁶ Ibid, 7.

³⁷ Ibid, 8.

³⁸ Della Rocca, 15.

of faith.³⁹ In response to the Second Vatican Council and in light of significant changes that had been taking place within the mindset of the Catholic Church in Latin America, the Latin American Episcopal Council, (Spanish: *Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano*, or CELAM) called a second conference, which was held in Medellín from 24 August to 6 September 1968.

While serving as CEDES secretary in San Salvador, Romero stayed in the Jesuit seminary where he had studied between San Miguel and Rome, San José de la Montaña.⁴⁰ There, he found the Jesuits embracing the recommendations of Medellín with great enthusiasm. Romero was sceptical, afraid that the conclusions reached at the conference were dangerous in that they ‘went too far and risked destabilizing the Church’ as well as conflating ‘a political agenda with Christian mission, hereby bestowing a misguided imprimatur upon the class warfare favored by Marxists.’⁴¹ For Romero, much of this new ‘liberation theology’ propagated by so many at Medellín was, at best, dependent heavily on Marxism, or, at worst, a direct instrument of Communists. As a result, an acquaintance of his at that time ‘recalled that Romero’s face would go taut and his lower lip twitch at the mere mention of Medellín.’⁴²

Around this same time, Romero was appointed as executive secretary of the Episcopal Secretariat of Central America and Panama (Spanish: *Secretariado Episcopal de América Central y Panamá*, or SEDAC). While serving in that capacity,

³⁹ Walters, 39.

⁴⁰ Many, if not most residents of San José de la Montaña viewed Romero with disdain and suspicion. One such resident, Salvador Carranza, comments, ‘I didn’t like him. He was an insignificant being, a shadow that went by clinging to the walls... He had his world, and it was not like ours. He started off on the wrong foot from the very beginning.’ María López Vigil, *Oscar Romero: Memories in Mosaic*, trans. Kathy Ogle (EPICA: Washington DC, 2000), 37-8.

⁴¹ Ibid, 46.

⁴² Ibid, 46.

many of the bishops within SEDAC believed that their executive secretary, whom they held in high regard, ought to also be a bishop. They appealed to Luis Chávez, the Archbishop of San Salvador to find a way for Romero to both serve as a bishop and have time away from the diocese to perform his duties as executive secretary. Although Chávez disagreed with Romero's negative disposition toward many of the conclusions at Medellín, his recommendation went forward and in April 1970, Romero received word from the papal nuncio that he would become Auxiliary Bishop of San Salvador. His installation as auxiliary bishop on 21 June was led by Romero's only friend from San José de la Montaña, Jesuit priest Rutilio Grande García, but the many wealthy and powerful in attendance, including the Salvadoran president, Fidel Sánchez Hernández, reinforced the idea among many of his fellow priests in El Salvador that Romero was too comfortable with the status quo.⁴³ As a testament of Romero's unpopularity among certain spheres of the clergy, a group of 'socially committed priests known as the "Nacional" had composed a letter of protest at [his] appointment.'⁴⁴

While a secretary with CEDES and SEDAC, Romero would make the occasional statement condemning those who he believed were enemies of the Church, namely Marxists, and as a bishop, his indignation would only find a larger platform from which to launch. During the 1970 Pastoral Week of Reflection (from 22 to 26 June) in which Archbishop Chávez 'met with the nation's priests to discuss how to apply Medellín's social justice principles locally', the newly-installed auxiliary bishop Romero was scarcely seen.⁴⁵ Despite this, within a few weeks he had published a

⁴³ Ibid, 49.

⁴⁴ Lee, 31.

⁴⁵ Walters, 49; Lee, 30.

scathing article in *Orientación*, the diocesan newspaper, in which he condemned a number of Jesuits who had attended the meetings, accusing them of propagating Marxism in the place of the Christian Gospel.⁴⁶ Despite this conflict, Chávez appreciated Romero's 'priestly spirit and untiring efforts' and appointed him as the editor of *Orientación*.⁴⁷

Through the medium of print, Romero continued in his attacks, especially against those who he considered to be Jesuit Marxists. Walters notes that during Romero's tenure as editor of *Orientación*, 'the paper took a sharp turn to the right, focusing on traditional moral issues, such as alcoholism and drug abuse, avoiding thorny criticisms of high-level governmental and oligarchical corruption'.⁴⁸ For example, rather than condemn what was effectively his friend Molina's *coup d'état* over the Duarte government in 1972, *Orientación* defended Molina's government over the leftist policies of the Christian Democrats. Romero's ire returned to the Jesuits in May 1973, when he published another notorious article in the paper, 'Liberating Education, but Christian and without Demagoguery' (Spanish: '*Educación Liberadora pero Cristiana y sin Demagogia*'). In this article, he attacked the Latin American educational system, which he considered 'abstract, formalistic, and uncritical'.⁴⁹ The most damaging of the article's condemnations was that the institutions exploited the 'innate generosity and restlessness of our young people in order to start them down the paths of demagoguery and Marxism (and we do not use this word lightly; the works

⁴⁶ Walters, 49; Lee, 30.

⁴⁷ Della Rocca, 32; Walters, 49.

⁴⁸ Walters, 49.

⁴⁹ Della Rocca, 34.

and writings themselves that are circulated at a certain college, with their manifestly Red origins, are what prompt us to use it).⁵⁰

The 'certain college' to which the article refers was unmistakably the Jesuit-run *Externado San José*, a university-level boarding school in San Salvador. After the article was published in *Orientación*, other, non-religious newspapers purported that the opinion of the article was the official opinion of the Archdiocese of San Salvador, causing a national controversy. Given the terror brought down upon the University of El Salvador the previous year (it was still closed at the time of the article's publication), the Jesuits and the Externado were in genuine peril. The Procurator General of the Republic brought an investigation, accusing the school of 'teaching classes of Marxist orientation'.⁵¹ Molina even gave serious consideration to taking a similar course of action against the *Externado* as he did with the national university.⁵² The infuriated Jesuit provincial, Francisco Estrada demanded that Romero answer for his claims, which Estrada argued were 'outrageous'.⁵³

In order to mitigate some of the controversy, Archbishop Chávez organised the diocese's own investigation into the *Externado's* curriculum, ultimately finding no evidence for the claims made in the *Orientación* article.⁵⁴ Romero was then instructed by Chávez to publish these findings, which he did, though 'on the paper's last page and editorialized that the findings were questionable'.⁵⁵ The following year, Romero left his role as auxiliary bishop to take up his new position as bishop of Santiago de

⁵⁰ Ibid, 34.

⁵¹ Lee, 36.

⁵² Ibid, 36.

⁵³ Walters, 52.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 53.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 53.

María. In his final editorial in *Orientación*, it seems that Romero did not back down from his persistent condemnation of those who espoused liberation theology:

In the name of faith, those who have lost their faith have tried to struggle against the faith. And this is very sad, truly sad. For our part, we have preferred to adhere to that which is certain, to cling with fear and trembling to the Rock of Peter...instead of leaping like reckless and foolhardy acrobats into the speculations of the imprudent thinkers of social movements of dubious origin.⁵⁶

Romero's polemic did not cease entirely when he became bishop of Santiago de María. Jesuit priest and liberation theologian Jon Sobrino (who was born in Spain and relocated to serve in El Salvador) recalls one particular celebration of the Feast of Our Lord Jesus Christ the Divine Saviour, the national patronal feast of El Salvador on 6 August 1976. During these annual ceremonies, 'a well-known priest or ecclesiastic would be invited to pronounce a solemn homily on that day in the presence of all the bishops, government officials, diplomatic corps, and so on.'⁵⁷ Romero had been chosen to deliver the homily and while Sobrino was not in attendance that morning, a recording of Romero's speech was given to him by a fellow priest later that day. Sobrino recalls,

I turned on the recorder and chills went up my spine. Bishop Romero's first point was a criticism of the christologies being developed in El Salvador—'rationalistic, revolutionary, hate-filled christologies.' Bishop Romero had begun his homily with a virulent criticism of my own christology!⁵⁸

Although Romero remained critical of liberation theology—and it is helpful to point out that *all of Romero's earlier critiques and political positions* had been very popular among the vast majority of bishops in El Salvador at that time, with the notable exceptions of Archbishop Chávez and his auxiliary bishop, Arturo Rivera, who had

⁵⁶ Ibid, 56.

⁵⁷ Sobrino, *Archbishop Romero*, 3.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 3.

served concurrently with Romero—his time as bishop of Santiago de María began to ‘stir in him the beginnings of an awareness that Medellín’s analysis of the Church’s mission was worthy of serious consideration.’⁵⁹

Even after 1977, Romero would not abandon his neo-Scholastic ideals entirely. As an archbishop, his commitment to and endorsement of the institutional Church cannot be dismissed as mere ecclesial posturing. In sermons, he often paid tribute to the sacraments, the ecclesial hierarchy, especially the pope (including sermons entitled, ‘The Divine Saviour and the Pope, Sign of God with us’ and ‘The Pope: the Deputy of Christ in the Church’) and the Catholic Church. Romero always remained committed to these traditional institutions. Yet, Romero’s traditional worldview could not remain fully intact when he went to the diocese of Santiago de María.

Romero’s only published theological writing from his time at the diocese of Santiago de María came in the form of a pastoral letter, issued at Pentecost Sunday, 18 May 1975. While the continuation of his neo-Scholastic thinking is displayed clearly (he writes of the Church ‘in a hierarchical manner; he emphasizes the sacraments as “the great official channels by which grace is communicated”; and he speaks of conversion exclusively in terms of those “without faith”’), the pastoral letter also ‘reveals Romero’s compassion toward and growing awareness of the plight of the poor and the need to address it’, writing, ‘We are seriously concerned about another obstacle in the way of the Spirit of Pentecost. ... We are referring to the injustice caused by the social, economic, and political inequality in which our people live.’⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Walters, 59.

⁶⁰ Lee, 37.

While such injustice could be observed throughout El Salvador at that time, the situation in the diocese was particularly bad, being the poorest in the country.⁶¹

Romero's introverted and difficult attitudes had not won him much favour in San Salvador, but when he went to his new diocese, he determined that things would be different. He developed a more collegial relationship with the priests in the diocese, beginning even before he had taken the bishop's seat: '[He] intended to listen to them, seek their counsel, and welcome genuine collaboration with them. He even invited them to offer criticisms of his performance as bishop, a potential public humiliation he would have thought intolerable during his years as auxiliary bishop of San Salvador.'⁶² Romero rediscovered the pastoral fervour he had displayed while serving in San Miguel for more than two decades. In San Salvador, Romero had been something of an overbearing administrator, but the enthusiasm he brought to his ministry throughout the vast diocese of Santiago de María would sometimes frustrate his priests 'by failing to record baptisms and marriages', something *auxiliary bishop* Romero would *never* have done.⁶³ This exuberant pastoral attitude is also reflected in the title of Romero's weekly column in the diocesan newsletter, *El Apóstol*, which he called 'The Pastor's Voice', rather than 'The Bishop's Voice'.⁶⁴

Romero's pastoral actions brought him into incredibly close contact with the poverty and oppression within the diocese. During his tenure, the unjust situation in which the *campesinos* of the diocese found themselves would sometimes result in unrest. In order to intimidate the *campesinos* in the region, the government would send in the National Guard for periodical raids. One such raid occurred in just after midnight

⁶¹ Walters, 59; della Rocca, 48.

⁶² Walters, 61.

⁶³ Ibid, 62.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 62.

on 21 June in the small village of Tres Calles. This particular incident resulted in the murder of five *campesinos*, who had been macheted to death.⁶⁵ Romero visited Tres Calles the following morning and was so distressed by what had transpired that he took advantage of one of his powerful connections, writing to Molina directly. He wrote, 'I am fulfilling my duty as Diocesan Bishop... by expressing to you my respectful but firm protest for the way in which a "security force" illegitimately claims the right to kill and mistreat.'⁶⁶ He 'described the torment of the victims' family members and of the "dear faithful of the canton of Tres Calles" and their feelings of "terror and indignation."⁶⁷ Despite this promising start, Romero was overly cautious with the wording of the letter, making certain to stress his 'pastoral' intentions and affirming Molina's 'personal values'. Romero also assured the president that he would not make his concerns public.⁶⁸ The neo-Scholastic was not yet ready to assume such a revolutionary role and the Molina government never investigated the incident at Tres Calles.

At that time, Romero maintained the problematic position of not exculpating the dead from their own fate. In his view, 'the victims of oppression... [were] ideologically driven disruptors who often hid behind and misused the Gospel.'⁶⁹ Therefore, he remained antagonistic to those who encouraged such 'disruption'. One such 'hotbed of subversion' was an instructional centre called *Los Naranjos*, the 'Orange Grove'. There, Passionist priests trained *campesinos* to develop CEBs in accordance with the instructions from Medellín. One of the founders of the institution, Juan Macho Merino,

⁶⁵ Ibid, 63; della Rocca, 52.

⁶⁶ Walters, 64.

⁶⁷ Della Rocca, 52-3.

⁶⁸ Walters, 64.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 65.

had already been deported by the Salvadoran government. Romero's relationship with *Los Naranjos* was complicated. While he protested Macho's deportation (and was successful in securing Macho's admittance back into El Salvador), Romero was also suspicious of the institution he had established. In response to protests in San Salvador by a number of students and priests—including one who was linked to *Los Naranjos*—Romero closed the institution, reopening it only on the condition that the 'political and sociological thrust of its curriculum was toned down, and actual instruction was conducted at a parish level, under the watchful supervision of parish priests' and the local bishop, Romero himself.⁷⁰

Although his time as bishop of Santiago de María would be short, its impact proved significant in Romero's continued transformation. His ongoing friendship with Macho encouraged Romero to pay closer attention to the conclusions reached at Medellín since, as Macho argued, 'I have to believe in the assistance of the Spirit at Medellín as much as at Vatican II, because if I deny that there was a special assistance of the Spirit at Medellín, I'd be one step away from denying it in the Vatican, and this I cannot do.'⁷¹ Romero had never conceived of the conference in that manner and, according to Macho, '[from] then on he began to cite Medellín.' Giving consideration to the authority of a gathering of bishops was one matter, but accepting that gathering's revolutionary implications was quite another. For all intents and purposes, Romero remained in the camp of the traditionalists, which placed him in a surprising position after Archbishop Chávez announced his retirement in December 1976.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 66.

⁷¹ Lee, 57.

At that time, the 75-year-old Chávez (who had been serving in the role since 1938) found El Salvador in the midst of a national crisis. Escalating violence between the governmental forces and the *campesinos* was widespread and the president, wary of the archbishop's protests, was no longer accepting Chávez' calls.⁷² For his part, Chávez believed that Rivera, his like-minded auxiliary bishop, ought to take his place, but the Holy See had other plans. Romero's handling of the tensions arising from the *Los Naranjos* centre in 1975 had impressed Emanuele Gerada, the papal *nuncio* in El Salvador, who, in turn, began to float Romero as an ideal archbishop when Chávez eventually retired. It was precisely Romero's perceived traditionalism—as opposed to Chávez and Rivera's pro-Medellín stance—that made him a favourite, both with the Vatican and among the religious and social elite in El Salvador.⁷³ They knew Romero for his condemnation of exponents of liberation theology, especially the troublesome Jesuits, but the Romero they received in 1977 would not be the Romero they thought they *knew* in 1976.

II. The Revolutionary Archbishop

Romero had only been at Santiago de María for two years before he learned that he was to become the next archbishop of San Salvador, the leader of the Catholic Church in El Salvador. The appointment was not something he had entertained, having wanted—should the opportunity have presented itself—to be bishop of San Miguel, the place where he had studied and served for half of his life. The trust that the Vatican had placed in him was flattering, but the daunting task of leading the nation

⁷² Della Rocca, 63.

⁷³ Walters, 67.

through such a difficult period caused him to doubt his suitability.⁷⁴ Yet Romero was able to push through his anxieties, at least enough to accept the nomination. In an interview he gave on 10 February 1977, the day that official news of his ascendancy was announced, Romero gave those who had put their conservative hopes in him cause for relief. In the interview, Romero 'insisted that the Church had to keep to the center, mindful of the need for justice but focused primarily on traditional pastoral duties, not politics.'⁷⁵ For the wealthy and powerful, the more the Church avoided the issue of politics, the better.

Concerning the increasing unrest in El Salvador, della Rocca comments, 'The internal cause of the crisis was unusual, for it did not result from underdevelopment but from growth.'⁷⁶ El Salvador's gross national product had been increasing steadily since 1960. The military oligarchy had ruled the nation for decades and during these latter years of growth, El Salvador had actually become more modernised and diversified. When at one point the nation produced only coffee, '[other] crops suitable for export had been planted (cotton and sugar cane), industrial activity had been launched, and a good infrastructure had been put in place.'⁷⁷ Though, while all of this economic and industrial growth had taken place, it did not benefit all Salvadorans equally. The same military regimes that had facilitated El Salvador's modernisation were also determined to retain their power through the disenfranchisement of the masses. One adage that had circulated was that 'fourteen families of the oligarchy

⁷⁴ Della Rocca, 64.

⁷⁵ Walters, 76.

⁷⁶ Della Rocca, 56.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 57.

controlled the entire Salvadoran economy.’ While this was hyperbole, the disparity between the wealthy few and the impoverished many was significant.⁷⁸

Della Rocca also observes the significance of the ‘external cause’ of unrest within El Salvador, namely, the ongoing Cold War and the associated conflicts between the Soviet-backed left-wing and the United States-backed right-wing factions. A revolutionary wave had been sweeping across Latin America for several decades, exemplified by Castro in Cuba and the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. Della Rocca writes, ‘A lot of blood would flow beginning in 1977. People disappeared, the lives of the peasants no longer had value, the guerrillas kidnapped and killed in retaliation, and the civil war that would break out in 1980 had begun to brew.’⁷⁹

At this time, the Catholic Church also saw its place in Salvadoran society shifting. For many years, the ruling classes found support in the upper echelons of the Church and, in turn, the ruling classes supported the Church. As the numbers of Catholics within resistance groups grew—in part, due to the influence of CEBs—the relationship between the elites and the Church began to break down. Molina’s antipathy toward Archbishop Chávez is but one example of this growing rift. Chávez’ successor would receive similar treatment. When Romero was finally installed as the prelate of the Catholic Church in El Salvador on 22 February 1977, he, along with several other bishops, paid a visit to Molina that same day. Molina, who had lost favour with the ruling classes due to a 1976 policy of agrarian reform, had been dropped from his role as leader and was replaced by another general, Carlos Humberto Romero.⁸⁰ Two days earlier, Carlos Romero had won the general election (through fraud) and

⁷⁸ Ibid, 57.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 57.

⁸⁰ Walters, 80.

the sitting-duck Molina was simply warming his seat until the transition of power in July.⁸¹ When Romero and company met with the outgoing president, he did not take the opportunity to extend any well-wishes to the new archbishop of San Salvador. 'Instead he bitterly told the bishops that the Church had strayed from the right path and needed to be brought back in.'⁸²

A. Rutilio Grande

The reality in El Salvador in the late 1970s was that large swathes of the Catholic Church—especially the retired Chávez and the Jesuits—had indeed undermined the oppressive landowners by helping to organise the *campesinos* into unions. One such problematic Jesuit was Rutilio Grande, Romero's only friend from San José de la Montaña and the very same who had led in the service for Romero's installation as auxiliary bishop in 1970. Grande was born in what was then the village (now a town) of El Paisnal, El Salvador on 5 July 1928. He was youngest of seven children and grew up in a poor household. Like Romero, Grande's idea of play was that of pretending to be a priest.⁸³ He had also been noted as a potential candidate for the priesthood from a young age (it was actually Archbishop Chávez, Romero's predecessor, who had first spotted him) and when he was 12, he moved to San Salvador to study at the minor seminary of San José de la Montaña. Grande followed his studies there by joining the Society of Jesus and was ordained as a Jesuit priest in Spain in 1959.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Ibid; della Rozza, 64.

⁸² Della Rozza, 65.

⁸³ Walters, 83.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 83.

In 1967, Grande returned to El Salvador in order to teach at San José de la Montaña and it was there that he and Romero first met and became good friends, despite their ten-year age difference and deeply divergent visions for the future of the Church in El Salvador.⁸⁵ In 1972, after having spent some time at the Latin American Pastoral Institute (Spanish: *Instituto Pastoral Latinoamericano*, or IPLA) in Quito, Ecuador, Grande returned to El Salvador to serve as a parish priest in and around Aguilares, which included his hometown of El Paisnal.⁸⁶ It was there that he ministered to those among what he called ‘the massive oppressed majorities’ of Salvadoran *campesinos*.⁸⁷ His methodology was taken straight from Medellín and involved establishing ‘mission zones’ with his pastoral team where ‘they would simply talk with people about their personal and communal problems.’⁸⁸ When asked what she remembered about Grande, one elderly woman recalled, ‘What I remember about him most of all is that one day he asked me what I thought. ... No one had ever asked me that in all of my 70 years.’⁸⁹ Over a four-year period, Grande helped to organise around two thousand *campesinos* into a number of CEBs, where they would talk, listen, reflect and minister to one another ‘with results that reliance on a priest could never have achieved’.⁹⁰

Grande’s work among the *campesinos* in the area did not go unnoticed by the local landowners. In December 1976, one such landowner, Eduardo Orellana, confronted a number of *campesinos* from the Christian labour unions. During the encounter, firearms were discharged and Orellana was killed. While some suggested

⁸⁵ Ibid, 84.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 84.

⁸⁷ Della Rozza, 67.

⁸⁸ Lee, 23.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 23.

⁹⁰ Della Rozza, 67; Lee, 23.

that Orellana had been shot by his own brother on accident, Orellana's neighbouring landowners seized the opportunity to place the blame on the *campesinos* and the priests who had encouraged them, including Grande.⁹¹ Of Grande, della Rozza writes, 'He did not oppose the actions of peasants who demanded better wages in the name of Christian justice and who banded together to achieve this. But he was a peaceful man who did not want social change to be brought through violence.'⁹²

A short time after Orellana's death, a Colombian priest in the neighbouring town of Apopa, who worked alongside Grande and the CEBs was taken, beaten and deported by the National Guard, evidently as a way to intimidate Grande and discourage the work that he was doing.⁹³ After this incident, Grande and a number of others had gathered for a peaceful demonstration in Apopa. During a Mass that was held at the protest, Grande likened the ruling classes and the *campesinos* to 'Cains' and 'Abels', respectively. He spoke out against the powerful, arguing that 'to learn and preach the Gospel was a dangerous challenge to the nation's Cains.' Grande also pointed out to the 'Abels' in attendance that 'in Christianity, one must be willing to give his of her life in service for a just order, in order to save others, for the values of the Gospel.'⁹⁴

Reports of Grande's demonstration must have reached the power brokers, who had been growing increasingly distressed by his ministry among the *campesinos*. Here, Grande stated frankly that the existence of the Gospel—or at least in their minds, the Gospel that he propagated—was a direct threat to their very way of life. His message had been heard and a month later, a reply came in the form of deadly

⁹¹ Walters, 85.

⁹² Della Rozza, 67.

⁹³ Walters, 85.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 85-6.

violence. On the afternoon of Saturday, 12 March 1977, Grande and four *campesinos*—two adults and two children—were travelling on the short road from Aguilares to El Painsal where he was to celebrate Mass, when they were attacked by gunmen. All three of the adults were killed, while the traumatised children ran back to Aguilares with the horrific news.⁹⁵

Later that day, Romero received word from Molina about the incident and the archbishop arrived in Aguilares that evening. ‘Romero wept openly while holding Father Rutilio’s remains.’⁹⁶ One of those present, Jon Sobrino recalls,

Uppermost on our minds that night, then, was the dead body of Rutilio, but I was also mightily struck by the serious preoccupied face of Archbishop Romero. Here was an ecclesiastic of whom I had heard only that he was very conservative and not very courageous. Here he was, beginning his archiepiscopal ministry not amid a series of solemn celebrations but awash in arrests, torture, the expulsion of priests, and now, suddenly, the blood of Rutilio Grande, one of the priests with whom he had been on the most familiar terms. Who could have foretold that the growing repression of *campesinos* and laborers...would so quickly come to this?⁹⁷

Romero struggled to make sense of what had transpired and how he, only 18 days into his new ministerial role, was to steer the Catholic Church in El Salvador through what had become unfathomably turbulent waters. Sobrino reflects on what he suspects was going through Romero’s heart: ‘Surely he was uneasy. But in the midst of his uneasiness in those first moments, with all of his hesitancy about what to do, I think he was forming the high resolve to react in whatever way God might ask: he was making an authentic option for the poor, who had been represented, a scant hour before, by hundreds of *campesinos* gathered about three corpses, helpless in the face

⁹⁵ Ibid, 86.

⁹⁶ Ondina E. González and Justo L. González, *Christianity in Latin America: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 262.

⁹⁷ Jon Sobrino, *Archbishop Romero: Memories and Reflections*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2016), 2.

of the repression they had already suffered and knowing full well that there was more to come.⁹⁸

Two days after the murders, Romero delivered the homily at Grande's requiem Mass, entitled, 'The Motivation of Love'. In the homily, Romero mentions that if the occasion 'were an ordinary funeral', he would speak 'about the human and personal relationship that [he] shared with Father Rutilio Grand whom [he] consider[s] a brother.' Instead, Romero argues that such an occasion is the time 'to proclaim, in the presence of these bodies, a message for all of us who continue the pilgrimage of life.'⁹⁹ Romero then poses the question, 'What does the church contribute to this universal struggle for liberation from so much misery?'¹⁰⁰ Here, he appeals to Pope Paul VI's 1975 Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, decrying the injustices faced by those 'who remain on the margin of life, suffering from famine, chronic disease, illiteracy, poverty'.¹⁰¹ Romero declares that '[the] church cannot be absent from this struggle for liberation; its presence in this struggle to life up and dignify human beings must be a very original message—a unique way of being present that the world may not understand but that provides the seed and the promise of victory and success.'¹⁰²

Romero concludes the homily by highlighting the undercurrent of Grande's ministry (and the ministries to which all of the faithful are called), namely, the motivation of love. Referring once again to *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, he speaks for the Salvadoran bishops in declaring that they 'do not raise [their] voice for revenge', but 'are concerned about the things of God who commands us to live him above all things

⁹⁸ Ibid, 6.

⁹⁹ Óscar Romero, *A Prophetic Bishop Speaks to his People: The Complete Homilies of Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero*, vol. 1, trans. Joseph V. Owens (Miami: Convivium Press, 2015), 59.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 59.

¹⁰¹ *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 30 as quoted in Romero, *Homilies* 1, 59-60.

¹⁰² Ibid, 60.

and to love others as we love ourselves (Mark 12.30-31).'¹⁰³ He characterises true love as that which 'moved Father Rutilio Grande as he died with the two *campesinos* by his side.' This love is demonstrative of the love of the Church and '[it] is precisely because it is love that inspires us, sisters and brothers, that we want to tell those responsible that we love them... Brother criminals, we love you, and we ask God to pour forth repentance into your hearts because the church is incapable of hatred; the church has no enemies.'¹⁰⁴

B. Romero the Prophet and Parable

Even as early as this first homily after Grande's death, it is shown that the incident had a profound effect on Romero. Feeling a need to take extraordinary measures, as prelate of El Salvador, Romero '[issued] to the faithful a dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass in their own parishes' so that Salvadoran Catholics might gather in San Salvador for a *misa única*, 'a single national Mass' on Sunday, 20 March.¹⁰⁵ Romero's decision was met with opposition, both from the Church hierarchy—who considered the *misa única* 'highly imprudent and politicizing'—as well as from '[members] of the oligarchy, military, and other right-wing elements', who considered the move 'communist and subversive.'¹⁰⁶ Despite these objections, one hundred thousand worshippers gathered in the cathedral and its neighbouring plaza and streets. The Mass was transmitted through loudspeakers for those outside of the cathedral and broadcast over the radio—as was Archbishop Romero's custom and

¹⁰³ Ibid, 62.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 62.

¹⁰⁵ Walters, 87.

¹⁰⁶ Lee, 48.

had been throughout his career, drawing from the example of his great hero, Pius XI—for those who could not make the journey to San Salvador.

Romero welcomed those in attendance stating, 'As the lowliest member of the whole church family, but chosen by God to be the sign of unity, this bishop thanks you warmly for joining him in giving the awaiting world the church's word.'¹⁰⁷ In the homily, he thanked the priests that had come, appealing to the death of his comrade: 'Many of [the priests here] risk danger and even the greatest sacrifice, the one which Father Grande made.' These words were met with applause, to which Romero expressed joy, stating,

That applause ratifies the profound joy that I feel in my heart as I take possession of this archdiocese. I feel that my own weaknesses and my own inabilities find their complement, their power, and their courage in this united priesthood. Beloved priests, let us remain united in the authentic truth of the Gospel. This is another way for me to say, as Christ's humble successor and representative here in the archdiocese, that anyone who attacks one of my priests, attacks me.¹⁰⁸

With these words, Romero aligned himself not with the powerful, but with God and God's servants, including the priesthood. Both liberals and conservatives were confounded by the archbishop. Sobrino reflects on the astonishment he felt at Romero's changed disposition: 'An archbishop was actually asking us to help him—persons whom a few weeks before he had regarded as suspect, as Marxist!'¹⁰⁹

Many commentators have called this brief period in Romero's life his 'conversion'. Romero never considered the incident in early 1977 a 'conversion' as such. Instead, he saw it as a 'change of attitude' or 'a development in the process of awareness' that awoke in him a 'special pastoral *fortaleza*', enabling 'him to stand up

¹⁰⁷ Romero, *Homilies* 1, 64.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 66.

¹⁰⁹ Sobrino, 5.

to the forces of repression crippling El Salvador.’¹¹⁰ He writes, ‘I believed in conscience... that God was calling me’ to occupy a position ‘that contrasted with my temperament and my “conservative” inclinations.’¹¹¹ While he did not see it as a conversion, many outsiders, especially those who at one point had been considered Romero’s enemies, could see it as *nothing but* a conversion. Sobrino comments, ‘Whether one actually calls it a conversion or not, the radical change that took place in Archbishop Romero on the occasion of Rutilio’s murder was one of the most impressive things anyone around him, including myself, had ever seen.’¹¹²

While the Romero of the early 1970s shied away from confrontations with the powerful, the changed Romero made challenges to and denunciations of the powerful a regular feature of his life. Only three days after the *misa única*, Romero met with Molina ‘and presented him with several requests: to explain the circumstances of Rutilio Grande’s murder; to guarantee the freedom and safety of the many threatened priests and catechists; to allow deported priests to reenter the country; and to stop violent organizations like the Democratic Nationalist Organization (*Organización Democrática Nacionalista*, ORDEN), which was a private militia, protecting the interests of wealthy landowners.’¹¹³ Molina always insisted to Romero that the government had nothing to do with Grande’s murder, but the archbishop was sceptical. As prelate of El Salvador, Romero was expected to play an official role at state functions, but Romero vowed to boycott such a role until an investigation into Grande’s

¹¹⁰ Walters, 89.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 89.

¹¹² Sobrino, 7. For further discussion of the nuance of Romero’s ‘conversion’ see Chapter 2, ‘Romero and Conversion: New Eyes and a New Home’, in Lee, 44-85.

¹¹³ Della Rozza, 70.

murder had commenced. Such an investigation never materialised and Romero was conspicuously absent from state functions throughout his time as archbishop.¹¹⁴

The ongoing rift between the oligarchy and the Catholic Church began to widen even before Grande was murdered. As Chávez announced that he was stepping down in December 1976, the four main Salvadoran newspapers, all supportive of the government and its allies, began to print a number of paid anti-clerical advertisements. By May 1977, 62 had been published. During that same period, an additional 32 anti-clerical newspaper editorials also appeared.¹¹⁵ More menacingly, the right-wing slogan, '*Haga patria, mate a un cura*' ('Be patriotic, kill a priest') began to appear in public places in increasing numbers. Sobrino observes that while a number of arrests and expulsions of priests had occurred in El Salvador before 1977, 'for a priest to be murdered in El Salvador was unheard of' before Grande's death.¹¹⁶ It would not be long before many more people would be counted alongside Grande.

In April 1977, the government's Minister of Foreign Affairs and member of one of the most powerful families in the oligarchy, Mauricio Borgonovo Pohl was kidnapped by a left-wing guerrilla faction. The government refused to negotiate for his release and Borgonovo's body was discovered on 10 May. The following day, a young priest called Alfonso Navarro, as well as a boy who was with him, was killed by a far-right group. The assassins were seeking retribution for Borgonovo's murder and intended to kill a Jesuit priest, though Navarro was not actually a member of the Society of Jesus.¹¹⁷ The anti-clerical terror campaign continued. On 20 June 1977, death threats

¹¹⁴ Walters, 88.

¹¹⁵ Della Rozza, 62.

¹¹⁶ Sobrino, 1.

¹¹⁷ Della Rozza, 71.

were issued to all Jesuit priests in the country.¹¹⁸ By the summer of 1979, three more priests—Neto Barrera, Octavio Ortiz and Rafael Palacios—would be assassinated.¹¹⁹ Eventually, the targets extended beyond the clergy and many laypeople were murdered. Della Rozza writes,

It became dangerous to own a Bible or a Gospel, especially in rural areas. Even a photograph of Romero or a copy of [the diocesan newspaper] were reasons enough for being murdered. In some areas people were killed just for going to Mass. This is how about fifteen people died in Chalatenango, and more would probably have perished but religious services were suspended.¹²⁰

Along with the countless number of *campesinos*, death and terror ruled over much of El Salvador. For Romero the archbishop and prelate, the reality of bloodshed in his country was a continual theme. He lamented the situation, but also found hope and some measure of joy in what he saw as a transformation in the Church's identity in El Salvador:

I rejoice, brothers and sisters, that they have murdered priests in this country. ... For it would be very sad if in a country where so many Salvadorans are murdered, the church could not also count priests among the murdered ones. ... It is a sign that the church has become incarnate in poverty. ... A church that does not suffer persecution, that church should be fearful. It is not the true church of Jesus.¹²¹

This association between the Church and the poor signifies the moment when Romero passed from a priest to one who possesses a unique authority within the parabolic scheme I propose. It is in this intimate association that Romero becomes an example of the pastoral sphere of liberation theology. When he leads the people of El Salvador as a voice for the poor and oppressed, his words prove emboldening for the cause of

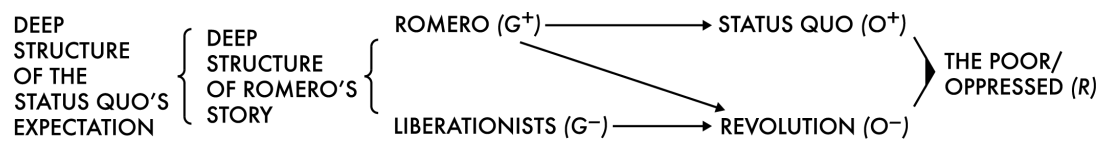
¹¹⁸ Sobrino, 2.

¹¹⁹ Della Rozza, 84-5.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 84.

¹²¹ As quoted by Sobrino in Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino, eds, *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, trans. the Department of Books and Libraries of the Spanish Ministry of Culture (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1993), 625.

the margins and condemning for those who are guilty of oppression. Additionally, this event is parabolic in and of itself, as can be illustrated below:



In the actantial scheme presented above, I approach Romero's 'conversion' from the perspective of the status quo, the powerful and well-connected in the Church hierarchy and Salvadoran society. In appointing Romero as archbishop (G+), he is expected to remain an ardent traditionalist, protecting the interests of the status quo (O+). For the most part, liberationists (G-)—who had very different interests from those in power, namely revolution (O-)—also expect Romero to be an antagonist toward their revolutionary cause. The parabolic effect takes place in Romero's transformation (represented by the diagonal arrow). Following (or perhaps, *culminating in*) the death of Grande and other murdered priests and *campesinos* (events which themselves may be considered parables *in Romero's life*), Romero cannot continue as had been expected. In a very tangible way, he had encountered the liberationist reality that 'poverty is death', and in order to challenge the whole 'situation of oppression' in El Salvador, he needed to make use of every resource at his disposal, the most fundamental of which was his preaching.

The early homilies from Romero's time as archbishop of San Salvador are strikingly insightful, taking abstract theological ideas and relating them to the lived realities of the people. One example is his homily from Trinity Sunday 1977 entitled, 'The Church, A Communion of People with God'. For all intents and purposes, the title might suggest an inward focus and at times, the sermon does delve into theological abstractions as well as a faint hint of neo-Scholasticism. Despite this, Romero also

states that the Church is 'in intimate dialogue with the world, for nothing human is foreign to her.' He continues by calling 'upon the laity in a special way... because lay people are becoming ever more aware of discharging their role as church in the world.'¹²² Such a concrete acknowledgement of the laity as 'church in the world' seems like it could come straight from Medellín, the very same Medellín that would cause a younger Romero to grimace.

By July 1977, Romero's homilies would typically open with a new section called 'Life of the church'. In this section, he comments on the various ecclesial goings-on in the archdiocese. By September, Romero would open with another section, 'Events of the week'. In this section, Romero comments on events in the life of the nation that go beyond the ecclesial sphere. Beginning in May 1978, these supplemental sections would move to the close of the homily. It is in these sections that Romero issues his greatest challenges to the ruling classes. On 30 October 1977, 'he explained the fivefold structure of his homilies': '*comforting the victims, repudiating the crime, supporting the just demands of the people, giving hope to the people, and announcing the transcendence of God, beyond all our goals.*'¹²³ Through his homilies, Romero recounts the terrible news of the preceding week and makes plain the inconsistencies of the 'official versions' of various instances. Above all, he seeks to bring genuine comfort and hope to those who were suffering.

Importantly, Romero does not offer this comfort and hope as an opulent archbishop living in the luxury of a palace in the capital. Sobrino comments, 'He refused the beautiful palace and went to live in the Divine Providence Hospital, in a

¹²² Romero, *Homilies* 1, 147.

¹²³ Jon Sobrino, *No Salvation outside the Poor: Prophetic-Utopian Essays*, trans. Margaret Wilde and Joseph Owens (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2008), 119; see Romero, *Homilies* 1, 395-6.

little room next to the sacristy. Thus, not only were the powers cheated in their hopes for a nice, pliable ecclesiastical puppet, but the new archbishop was actually going to oppose them' through exposing their complicity in the countless assassinations and aligning the Church with the suffering.¹²⁴ As Romero preached on 17 February 1980, only weeks before he would be assassinated: '[Believe] me, sisters and brothers—those who commit themselves to the poor must experience the same fate of the poor. And in El Salvador we know what the fate of the poor is: being disappeared, being tortured, being arrested, being found dead.'¹²⁵ Sobrino calls Romero a prophet, and by that he means that 'Archbishop Romero was a prophet not only in that contemporary acceptance of the term according to which we can be said to have a "prophetic church," for example, but even in the strict sense in which the great prophets of Israel, whose line culminated in John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth, were prophets.'¹²⁶

Through his preaching, Romero often explores the parables of the Gospels and how they relate to the Salvadoran reality of his time. This includes challenges to both the powerful and the powerless, both the faithful and the faithless. For the Christian, the parables act as challenges to complicity, hypocrisy and spiritual complacency. Romero's favourite parable for the Church is that of the Good Samaritan. Romero declares, 'To separate evangelization and promotion is to forget the great commandment of love, which means loving our neighbour, being concerned about the needs of others in their concrete situations, and helping them as the good Samaritan

¹²⁴ Sobrino, *Archbishop Romero*, 7.

¹²⁵ Óscar Romero, *A Prophetic Bishop Speaks to his People: The Complete Homilies of Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero*, vol. 6, trans. Joseph V. Owens (Miami: Convivium Press, 2016), 273.

¹²⁶ Sobrino, *Archbishop Romero*, 85.

helped the wounded man on the road (Luke 10.29-37).¹²⁷ In order to be that ‘Good Samaritan’, Romero refers to the interior being, calling on the Church to ‘be converted in heart... In the parable of the Samaritan, Christ is directly speaking about people of the church, not only priests.’ Romero continues, ‘Let us reflect then, beloved religious... we all have to examine our conscious in the light of this sincere parable of the Good Samaritan. Let us not be content with denouncing the sins and defects of the sinful world. We have to begin, as we do at the start of Mass, by beating our breasts and recognizing our own faults because our love of neighbour and our knowledge of ourselves should flow from such sincerity and love.’¹²⁸ Once the Church has been able to recognise its faults it will be able to encounter the ‘languishing multitude that today cries out from their situation of marginalization’ (those who are ‘as the Medellín document tells us, “a liberation that reaches them from nowhere else”,’) in an efficacious and sincere way, like the good Samaritan.¹²⁹

The parable of the Good Samaritan features heavily in Romero’s words from 2 April 1978, the Second Sunday of Easter. Only two weeks earlier, during Holy Week, there was an attack on the Christian Federation of Salvadoran *campesinos* (Spanish: *Federación Cristiana de Campesinos Salvadoreños*, or FECCAS) perpetrated by governmental forces and ORDEN. During the confrontation in the town of San Pedro Perulapán, six *campesinos* were killed and a further 68 disappeared.¹³⁰ While the right-wing newspapers placed the blame on FECCAS, on 2 April, Romero read out a statement that had been prepared by the archdiocese. In this statement, Romero

¹²⁷ Romero, *Homilies* 1, 73.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 188.

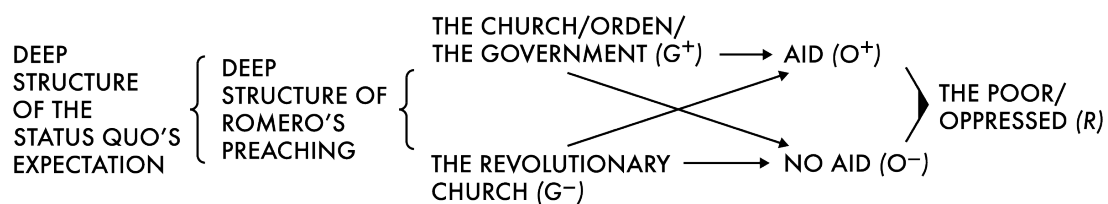
¹²⁹ Ibid, 360.

¹³⁰ Daniel H. Levine, ed., *Religion and Political Conflict in Latin America* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 70.

corrected the errors from the newspapers, calling out the true aggressors. He also related the events to the Parable of the good Samaritan:

We also find today people who lie wounded on many roads of our country. We know their wounds from the past and those they suffer now as a result of the events [in San Pedro Perulapán]. This nation lies wounded, and we cannot just keep our distance as the priest and Levite did in the parable. We must draw close like the Good Samaritan and heal the wounds.¹³¹

Elsewhere, Romero also appeals to the Good Samaritan in terms of transcendent reality regarding the Christian's attitude to the poor. He declares that the preferential option for the poor 'is not demagoguery but pure Gospel.'¹³² Romero states, 'They represent Jesus to the eyes of our faith... If we see the poor only as foolish rivals who are going to spoil my party, then naturally they bother us. But when we embrace them, as Christ embraced the leper (Mark 1.40-41), and when we lift them up as the Good Samaritan lifted up the wounded man on the highway (Luke 10.33-35), this is transcendence because what is done for them is done for Christ (Matt 25.40).' He concludes, 'Only transcendence can give us the perspective for social justice: Christ among the little ones.'¹³³ In this context, the Parable of the Good Samaritan (which was presented previously in both John Dominic Crossan's model and in the context of the community of Solentiname) can be modelled in the following way:



Here, it is the deep structure of Romero's preaching that acts as the challenge to the expectation of the status quo (here, represented by the expectation of all

¹³¹ Romero, *Homilies* 2, 342-3.

¹³² Romero, *Homilies* 5, 360.

¹³³ Ibid, 360.

Salvadorans, not merely those in power). The Parable of the Good Samaritan is no mere abstract exhortation to the religious, but a challenge to the whole of society. While the media was defending the narrative of the status quo, represented here by the government, ORDEN and the Church establishment (G+), Romero calls on a transformed, revolutionary Church (G-) to address the challenges being faced by the poor and oppressed (R) in El Salvador.

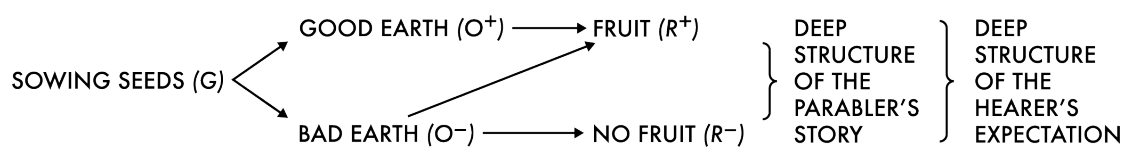
At the heart of Romero's preaching is the call for the Church to play an active role in addressing issues of justice and liberation, both in introspective critique of its complicity in the situation of oppression and in active critique of society at large. In his use of the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-23, Mark 4:1-20 and Luke 8:4-15) Romero states that the seed is the word of God, defined in his context by the encounter of Christ with the reality of oppression in El Salvador. Different parties will respond to that seed in different ways. For Romero, the Church's calling is to sow the word through evangelising. This first involves challenging 'the unjust criteria of the world' in order that 'people's consciences both individually and collectively' might be converted. The second step involves 'incarnating' that converted conscience, living out faith 'and pointing out the concrete deeds that are contrary to this doctrine—that's when conflicts arise.'¹³⁴ 'The third element of evangelization', according to Romero, 'is the explicit announcement.' He states, 'It's not enough to give good example and then be silent when one should speak.'¹³⁵ Ultimately, this fruit of the seed enables the sown to become sowers, the 'person who is evangelized must evangelize others.' As the kingdom of God takes root in the Christian community, 'it is like a mustard seed, but it

¹³⁴ Romero, *Homilies* 3, 108.

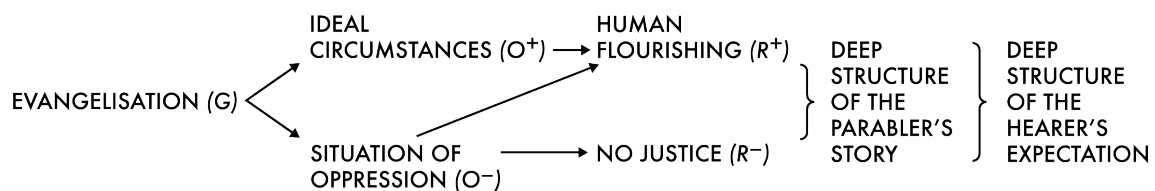
¹³⁵ *Ibid*, 109.

has an expansive force that nobody can resist despite opposition from the bad fish and the noxious weeds (Matt 13.31).¹³⁶

While the parable in the context of the Gospel does not present a reversal of expectation (any hearer could understand that 'good earth' yields growth, while bad earth yields the opposite), Romero takes this parable one step further, suggesting that even in the midst of opposition, the actions of the Church on behalf of injustice will yield fruit. This reading of the parable is an example of single reversal, modelled below:



Taken this way, Romero's application of evangelisation might look like this:



While it might be expected that the work of liberation, referred to as evangelisation (G), would not flourish (R-) in a situation of oppression (O-), Romero presents a model in which human flourishing (R+) takes place in any context. He argues this based upon the principle that God works through the Church to accomplish the ideals of the kingdom of God, namely, that the poor and oppressed will be liberated from their situation.

Romero sees his position as archbishop as a call to all Salvadorans. As a result, he directs appeals to all strata of society. To the powerful, Romero encourages a transformation that he equates to conversion. Appealing to the Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12.31-21), in a homily he recorded for the radio to be broadcast on 31 July

¹³⁶ Ibid, 161.

1977, Romero states, 'That rich man's whole happiness consisted in reaping a great harvest, filling up his barns, and enjoying his possessions in a life of leisure. He forgot about death, and he forgot about God.' According to Romero, 'the mission of the church in today's world' is that of, 'urging people to view with transcendence their own attitudes and all the political, economic, and social realities of earth.' He states,

Temporal duties, human rights, everything belonging to the earth—all of these are of great interest to the church, not because they are goals of her mission but because her mission is precisely to give them a transcendent meaning and to orient people's hearts toward God. Once converted to God, these hearts will create a better world, a world more in conformity with the will of God, a world in which we feel we are brothers and sisters, all with a sense of transcendence toward the Creator.¹³⁷

The danger of remaining blind to the transcendent reality of God is explored through the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16.19-31). Romero observes that wealth and power creates insensitivity to the poor and points to the current situation of abuse of private property at the expense of the *campesinos* in El Salvador:

Besides this false concept of private property, what is most terrible is this: it hardens people and makes them insensitive to others. ... How beautiful is this biblical concept of poverty and wealth! It is not evil to possess things. Would that we were all rich! What is evil is insensitivity. What is wonderful is when those who *have* share! ... This is what the church preaches: God has given these goods to everyone so that together we can make this world, which was created by God for the happiness of all, a foretaste of the kingdom of heaven.¹³⁸

For Romero, the universality of the Christian message is a charge to all people, not simply those of faith. He states, 'We ought to be filled with enthusiasm to know that no one, not one of us, is excluded from salvation. God calls everyone, and therefore the church cries out for justice and rejects the scandal of the Pharisees; she repudiates violence, lies, crimes, and persecution.'¹³⁹ With this universal call comes

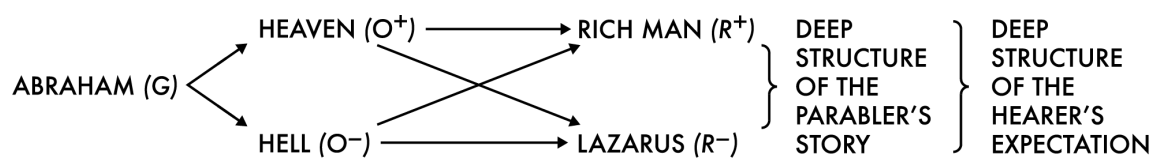
¹³⁷ Romero, *Homilies* 1, 227-8.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, 325-7.

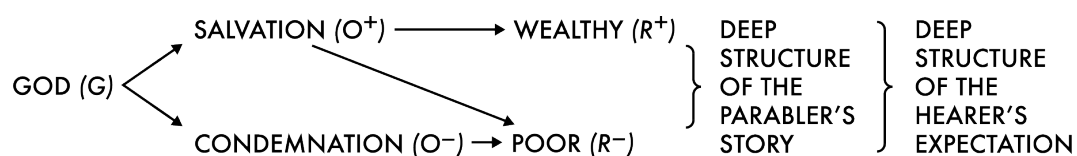
¹³⁹ Romero, *Homilies* 2, 200.

the need for forgiveness. In the midst of crying out for justice, the Church ‘never cries out for vengeance; she always speaks with love and calls sinners to repentance, for God desires to save them. God invites those who have killed and slandered and persecuted to return to him. They are the prodigal sons whom the father is waiting to save’.¹⁴⁰

In terms of the Rich Man and Lazarus, Crossan groups this parable with the Prodigal Son, the Great Supper, the Places at the Table and the Pharisee and the Publican, each featuring a double reversal of expectation as is modelled below:¹⁴¹



Romero offers additional comment on the Rich Man and Lazarus, arguing that the wealthy (R⁺) are invited into the salvation of the kingdom of God (O⁺) alongside the poor (R⁻). It is in their repentance and sharing that this model might take the form of a single reversal:



Here, Romero does not undermine the common interpretation offered by Crossan, but emphasises the loving and forgiving nature of liberation theology in the invitation to those in power to participate in the programme of justice and equality at the heart of the Christian faith.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 200.

¹⁴¹ John Dominic Crossan, 'The Good Samaritan: Towards a Generic Definition of Parable,' *Semeia* 2 (1974), 99.

In a similar manner, the Parable of the Prodigal Son is especially significant in Romero's homilies because he believes that it is 'the parable of Christian reconciliation', a reconciliation between the oppressors and the oppressed and between both parties and God.¹⁴² For example, in his homily on 11 November 1979, Romero uses the Parable of the Prodigal Son to address ORDEN explicitly: 'I now call upon the members of ORDEN to take advantage of this moment to be converted and reintegrated into society.' In the same homily, Romero also calls upon the Church 'to be ready to receive them. Just as the father and brother received the prodigal son (Luke 15.11-32), let us receive all those who have been the cause of suffering—but never with vengeance, always with love. This is what Christians do.'¹⁴³ The following year, Romero again reminds all Salvadorans of their place in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, writing,

Here in El Salvador we really need to meditate on this parable of the prodigal son. Given the left's condemnation of the right and the right's hatred of the left, there seems to be no possibility of reconciliation. Those in the middle say, 'Wherever the violence comes from, give it to them both!' And so we live in polarized groups. ... We need a break from those barriers. We need to realise that there is one Father who loves us all and who is waiting for us to return.¹⁴⁴

Again and again, Romero reiterates that the only solution to the conflict is love, found in the forgiveness that God extends to all. To illustrate this, he appeals to the 'master who forgave a debtor who owed him a great deal but who in turn would not forgive someone who owed him only a small amount (Matt. 18 21-35). He states, 'Before God we are debtors who can never escape from indebtedness. ... And if God forgives me

¹⁴² Romero, *Homilies* 6, 371.

¹⁴³ Romero, *Homilies* 5, 487.

¹⁴⁴ Romero, *Homilies* 6, 372.

that eternal, infinite debt, how am I not going to forgive someone who has not committed an eternal offense against me, as serious as it may have been?’¹⁴⁵

Romero’s prophetic voice caused controversy with the Church hierarchy who perceived him as and faced opposition from ‘all but one of his fellow bishops’ in El Salvador, Arturo Rivera, who was at one time one of the traditionalist Romero’s critics.¹⁴⁶ In his sermon from 17 February 1980, Romero condemns poverty and observes that the suffering of the poor ‘is an accusation’, exposing ‘those who have created the conditions that make our people suffer such horrendous social injustice.’ He continues, ‘It is therefore the poor of who have marked out the truth path for the church. A church that does not join with the poor and denounce with them the injustices visited upon them is not the true church of Jesus Christ.’¹⁴⁷ Therefore, poverty exists, not only as a denunciation of injustice, but that it is ‘a spirituality and an attitude that opens up a Christian’s soul to God.’ Romero appeals to the conclusions of the 1979 CELAM conference at Puebla, Mexico, declaring that ‘the poor are the hope of Latin America’¹⁴⁸

Unbeknownst to Romero, Lent 1980 would be his final liturgical season, but his words resound with such power and conviction, it can be imagined that he knew full well that his time was coming to an end. In his homily from the Fourth Sunday of Lent, Romero states ‘that the nucleus or theme of the homily is that the reconciliation of all in Christ is the project of true liberation.’ In particular, he reflects on three concepts: ‘first, the history of Israel as a project of reconciliation; second, the parable of reconciliation’, that of the prodigal son, ‘in today’s gospel; and third, the reconciliation

¹⁴⁵ Romero, *Homilies* 3, 247.

¹⁴⁶ Kurtz in Romero, *Scandal of Redemption*, 12.

¹⁴⁷ Romero, *Homilies* 6, 266.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 269.

of all in Christ as the church's constant objective in offering her collaboration in this time of crisis.¹⁴⁹ Romero makes use of the Creation narrative from Genesis as well as the Exodus event and the eventual entry into the land promised to them by God in order to draw his people into the way that God continues to work in the present. He states, 'The land contains much of God, and therefore it groans when the unjust monopolize it and leave no space for others.'¹⁵⁰ As a result, '[agrarian] reform is a theological necessity', something that had been at the heart of the struggles of poor *campesinos* within El Salvador for decades.¹⁵¹ Regarding this struggle, Romero states,

A country's land cannot remain in the hands of just a few; it must be given to all so that all can share in the blessings God gives through the land. Each country has its own promised land in the territory allotted to it by geography, but we should always bear in mind that the land is a sign of justice and reconciliation; we should never forget this theological reality. There will be no true reconciliation between our people and God as long as there is no just distribution, as long as the good of our Salvadoran land do not bring benefits and happiness to all Salvadorans.¹⁵²

It is helpful to recall the Guatemalan presidency of Jacobo Arbenz in the early 1950s, mentioned in the first chapter, whose sweeping land reforms, which included provided land for some 100,000 peasants, resulted in his government being overthrown with the help of the United States.¹⁵³ This incident, along with numerous others within Latin America, demonstrate the institutional resistance to the changes for which Romero was calling in 1980. This call for reform is but a small taste of the weekly condemnations against the powerful issued by Romero.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 365.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 367.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 367-8.

¹⁵² Ibid, 368.

¹⁵³ Eric Selbin, *Modern Latin American Revolutions* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1993), 81.

In this same sermon, Romero returns to the Parable of the Good Samaritan, calling out the need for reconciliation in El Salvador, where political factions had become so polarised and where 'terror has been sown among our people so friends will even betray friends when they see them in trouble!' He continues, 'If only we could see Christ in the needy, in the tortured, in the prisoner, in the murder victim; if only we could see Christ in every human form dumped so disgracefully along our highways, we would discover that it was Christ who was dumped there, and we would gather that precious treasure with tenderness; we would kiss him and never be ashamed of him.'¹⁵⁴

In his final point, Romero appeals to Jesus' words in the Gospel of Luke, 'Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.'¹⁵⁵ His sermon becomes more personal, as he directs his reconciliatory focus inward as he and Paul 'are only sinful instruments, but through us God urges you to be reconciled.'¹⁵⁶ Romero states,

I feel more sorrow than anger when people insult and malign me. I feel sad for those poor blind folk who cannot see beyond the person. They should know that I feel no rancor or resentment. I am not offended by all those anonymous, rage-filled messages that arrive at my door or are announced in the press or are felt in the heart. My sorrow does not come from a sense of superiority but from gratitude to God, and it makes a plea to God: 'Lord, open their eyes. Lord, let them be converted. Lord, let them experience the joy of reconciliation with you instead of feeling the bitter hatred that is in their hearts.'¹⁵⁷

Romero's words here resemble the same sentiments he offered in his homily at Rutilio Grande's requiem Mass in 1977. He is speaking as a pastor to a nation, calling for non-violent reform and reconciliation so that those who are oppressed may be

¹⁵⁴ Romero, *Homilies*, 6, 373.

¹⁵⁵ Luke 10.16.

¹⁵⁶ Romero, *Homilies*, 6, 374.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 375.

liberated and those who are oppressors may be transformed. Despite this call, eight days later, Romero would preach one last homily before being assassinated.

That final homily was delivered during the Anniversary Mass for Sara Meardi de Pinto at the Chapel of the Divina Providencia Hospital, San Salvador on 24 March 1980. The late 'Doña Sarita' (an affectionate term, meaning 'little Mrs Sara')—described by Romero as one 'who dedicated all her cultural formation and graciousness to ... the true liberation of our people'¹⁵⁸—was the mother of Jorge Pinto, who was editor of the newspaper *El Independiente* and friend of Romero's. Only three weeks earlier, *El Independiente's* offices had been bombed. Reflecting on Doña Sarita's service in the cause of justice in the midst of suffering, Romero urges his listeners 'to view these things that are happening in our historical moment with a spirit of hope, generosity, and sacrifice.' He urges the Christian to view their work for justice as something that does not end with death, but is subsumed into God's Kingdom. And after calling the congregation to prayer for the consecration of the Host, Romero was gunned down at the altar.

During his time as archbishop, Romero grew to be a powerful voice for the poor and oppressed of El Salvador. He was also a powerful voice for non-partisan reconciliation. Della Rocca comments, 'As long as Romero was alive, El Salvador did not plunge into civil war. It began precisely in the wake of his death, for want of his efforts as a non-partisan peacemaker.'¹⁵⁹ His funeral Mass, held on Palm Sunday, 31 March, was attended by more than 50,000, 'including priests, monks and nuns, about twenty bishops, the Apostolic Nuncio Emmanuele Gerada, and Cardinal Ernesto

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 420.

¹⁵⁹ Della Rocca, 2.

Corripio Ahumada from Mexico City, representing the pope.¹⁶⁰ Mexican Presbyterian minister Jorge Lara-Braud (1931-2008) claims that some 250,000 people had gathered in the neighbouring Plaza Libertad and nearby streets.¹⁶¹ Walters writes that the thousands of mourners 'hadn't come just to pay their respects to a Church dignitary... [they] came because they loved Romero.'¹⁶² Sobrino records the words of one Salvadoran *campesino*: 'Monseñor Romero spoke the truth. He stood up for us, the poor. That is why they killed him.'¹⁶³

A great many more words concerning the impact of Romero's witness as a parable to El Salvador (and to Latin American liberation theology as a whole) can be mentioned, but one especially clear example of his parabolic legacy on the people of El Salvador is reflected in the observations of Salvadoran Anglican José Osvaldo Lopez:

With the life and works of Romero, I am certain that Jesus himself passed through El Salvador, leaving us a clear and strong message by his life example as a person and a pastor. Romero is for me not simply a pastoral model, but above all an enormous challenge, one that requires me as a Christian to assume a critical attitude against social and structural injustice.¹⁶⁴

Within El Salvador, Romero is associated intimately with Jesus. With this attitude in mind, how might Romero's death be seen as a parable? One model might focus on the context of his assassination and what followed, both within El Salvador and liberation theology as a whole.

¹⁶⁰ Cardinal Angelo Amato in his introduction to Óscar Romero, *The Church Cannot Remain Silent: Unpublished Letters and Other Writings*, trans. Gene Palumbo and Dinah Livingstone (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2016), xvi.

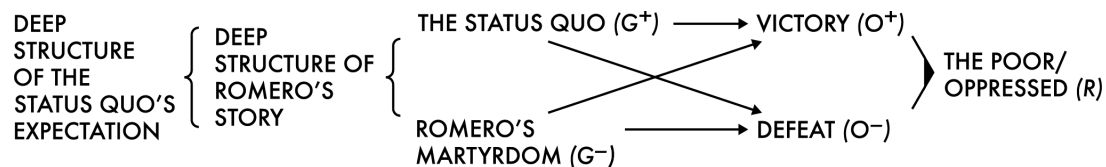
¹⁶¹ Vigil, 416.

¹⁶² Walters, xi.

¹⁶³ Sobrino, *Archbishop Romero*, 193.

¹⁶⁴ Romero, *Scandal of Redemption*, xi.

While the precise identity of those responsible for Romero's is convoluted (with fingers pointing toward the CIA, a Salvadoran military intelligence officer called Major Roberto D'Aubuisson, Salvadoran National Police detective, Oscar Perez Linares, among others¹⁶⁵), the 'status quo' or 'powerful' will suffice for these purposes. Such a killing (as well as the tens of thousands of political assassinations that took place in El Salvador before and during the Salvadoran Civil War) would have been perceived by the perpetrators as a means to an end, a silencing of one of the voices of revolution and unrest. The parable of the martyrdom of Óscar Romero can be modelled in the following way:



As is observed above, the status quo's expectation of victory (O+) is, at least in part, reversed as a result of Romero's witness and martyrdom (G-), which brings victory (O+) to the poor and oppressed (R) in the form of a hard-fought revolution. This example is presented not to say that Romero's life and death achieved this goal alone, nor is it to say that 'victory' in the Salvadoran Civil War was the type of utopia in which poverty and oppression were eliminated. Additionally, this model is not the only manner in which Romero's life and death might function in a parabolic way for the hearer (especially the people of El Salvador). Instead, this is but one example among many of how the praxis of the poor and oppressed might be interpreted through the authoritative and subversive lens of parable.

¹⁶⁵ Tom Gibb, 'The killing of Archbishop Oscar Romero was one of the most notorious crimes of the cold war. Was the CIA to blame?' *The Guardian*, 23 March 2000, <https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2000/mar/23/features11.g21>. (accessed 14 January 2022).

Conclusion – Saint Óscar Romero

The life and death of Óscar Romero provide a vivid and tragic illustration of the pastoral sphere of liberation theology espoused by Leonardo and Clodovis Boff. In this chapter, I have explored Romero's pre-1977 life and how his 'conversion' after the death of Rutilio Grande undermined popular expectations and galvanised the poor and oppressed in El Salvador. I have also analysed portions of some of his homilies and how his preaching functioned in a way that both challenged the status quo in its reflection of the praxis of the poor as well as presented counter-cultural reconciliation. Lastly, I discussed some implications that arise from Romero's martyrdom at the hands of the powerful. Through his intimate association with the poor, as well as his lasting effect on El Salvador and liberation theology, Romero's parables satisfy both Barth's criteria for 'true parables of the kingdom of God' and Ricoeur's criteria for 'meaningful action as text' (as explored in previous chapters). His popular impact on El Salvador is reflected in the accounts found in this chapter as well as a great many others, including those found in María López Vigil's excellent collection, *Oscar Romero: Memories in Mosaic*.

At Romero's funeral Mass, Ignacio Ellacuría, a Salvadoran colleague of Romero's who himself was killed by conservative extremists in 1989, said, 'God came through El Salvador in Monseñor Romero,' words echoed in the sentiments of José Osvaldo Lopez above.¹⁶⁶ Of these events, Gustavo Gutiérrez writes, 'Oscar Romero... tolled like a bell, loud enough to awaken the most indifferent to such events. Surrender to death – unsought but serenely accepted – has been a sign of many within the

¹⁶⁶ Sobrino, *Archbishop Romero*, 183.

Christian community in Latin America.¹⁶⁷ This 'serene' acceptance is illustrated in the final letter Romero ever wrote.

As mentioned before, throughout his time as archbishop, Romero's homilies had been broadcast by the radio station of the archdiocese, YSAX. As an ominous precursor to his own tragic fate, Romero's preaching drew such wrath from his opponents that the YSAX station was bombed, twice.¹⁶⁸ The second bombing occurred on 18 February 1980. In response, Romero received a message of support from Pedro Casaldáliga, bishop of São Félix, Brazil. On 24 March, the same day he was assassinated, Romero sent his reply:

Dear Brother in the Episcopate:

It is with deep affection that I thank you for your brotherly message of regret over the destruction of our radio station. Your warm support is a great inspiration to us as we strive to keep on with our mission of expressing the hopes and the anguish of the poor, in a spirit of joy at being accorded the privilege of running the same risks as they, as Jesus did by identifying with the causes of the dispossessed.

In the light of faith, and in intimate union of affection, prayer, and the triumph of the resurrection,

I remain,

Oscar A. Romero

Archbishop¹⁶⁹

Romero's words are poignant and encapsulate so much of his own life and witness. He identified with the poor and suffering, considering it a privilege, just as he had taken a transcendent joy in deaths of his priests, 'For it would be very sad if in a country where so many Salvadorans are murdered, the church could not also count priests among the murdered ones.' As much as Romero felt belonging to this class, they too took him as their own. After the end of the Salvadoran Civil War (c. 1980-1992),

¹⁶⁷ Gustavo Gutiérrez, 'The task and content of liberation theology' in Christopher Rowland, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 34.

¹⁶⁸ Romero, *Scandal of Redemption*, 11.

¹⁶⁹ Sobrino, *Archbishop Romero*, 32-3.

Romero's old friend and his successor—both at Santiago de María, and then, following Romero's death, as archbishop of San Salvador—Arturo Rivera, sent an application from the archdiocese to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.¹⁷⁰ The path to his 'official' sainthood within the Catholic Church would continue for more than two decades, until Romero's eventual canonisation, celebrated on 14 October 2018 and presided over by Latin America's first pope, Francis.

Long before his official canonisation, Romero's life, witness and martyrdom had made him a saint in the hearts of many Latin Americans. Sobrino recalls a poem entitled, 'Saint Romero of the Americas' ('*San Romero de América*'), that had been penned by Casaldáliga. '[It] has become a classic on our continent,' writes Sobrino. 'How many times have I read it in El Salvador, and how deeply it has moved my hearers and myself!'¹⁷¹ The poem culminates in the lines, *San Romero de América, pastor y mártir nuestro: ¡nadie hará callar tu última homilía!*, 'Saint Romero of America, our pastor and martyr: nobody will silence your final homily!'¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Lee, 184.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 37.

¹⁷² Koinonia, 'San Romero de América', <http://servicioskoinonia.org/romero/poesia.htm> (accessed 10 January 2022).

CHAPTER SIX

THE PARABLES OF LEONARDO BOFF

Introduction

Within Clodovis and Leonardo Boff's scheme from *Introducing Liberation Theology*, the three levels of liberation theology are presented as continuum, reflecting the 'same thing: faith confronted with oppression'.¹ While these three levels are, for the sake of analysis, presented as distinct spheres, they are each related to one another in an intimate way and cannot be separated from the principle of critical reflection on the praxis of the poor and oppressed. In the case of Ernesto Cardenal and the Solentiname community (as presented in chapter four), there is a clear relationship between the pastoral and the popular, though with a particular emphasis on the praxis of the poor as parables. With Óscar Romero (chapter five), one finds another explicit relationship between the pastoral and the popular spheres of liberation theology. In exploring the academic sphere, this continuum remains. The praxis of the poor and oppressed works through all three spheres is the starting point for all liberation theology. In my analysis, this sphere also represents the final step in the progression from the popular sphere's interpretation of the parables based upon their praxis (I), to the reading of their praxis itself as parable (II), to the same for the pastoral sphere (III). This final step finds expression in one who, through their intimate dependence on the popular sphere, continues to live out the authority of liberation theology, both in their scholarship and in their own praxis (IV).

¹ Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1987), 12

In considering Leonardo Boff, the central figure in this chapter, he is distinct from Romero in several ways. One major distinction is the fact that while Romero did not identify himself with liberation theology, Boff has been a major voice in the field for more than five decades. Another distinction is that while Romero faced institutional opposition (which culminated in his assassination), his rise to the archbishopric in El Salvador indicates that he held a relatively favourable place within the Catholic Church. Boff's relationship with the institutional Church stands in stark contrast to Romero's. Unlike Romero's strictly pastoral career, in Boff one first finds a priest who is also an academic, holding an academic post and analysing the implications of the popular and pastoral with academic rigour and creativity into more theoretical avenues. This is the professional sphere of liberation theology. While the discourse of the popular is (according to *Introducing Liberation Theology*) '[diffuse] and capillary, almost spontaneous' and that of the pastoral is '[organically] related to practice', the professional is '[detailed] and rigorous', exercising the 'logic of erudition' through '[socio]-analytical, hermeneutical, and theoretico-practical' methodologies.²

Despite its distinctiveness from the other two spheres of liberation theology, the professional, as part of this continuum, still possesses an intimate relationship to the poor and oppressed. As a result of this intimate connection (as with the pastoral sphere), professional liberation theology and the theologians who explore, develop and enact it, might also function as parables of the kingdom of God.

Among the many professional Latin American liberation theologians, Leonardo Boff is the focus of this chapter as his life and work emphasise an aspect of Latin American liberation theology that has yet to be explored in this thesis, both in content

² Ibid, 13.

as well as in geographical location. In previous chapters, I have explored aspects of liberation theology in the Central American countries of Nicaragua (Ernesto Cardenal and Solentiname) and El Salvador (Óscar Romero). At this stage, I turn my attention toward South America, namely Brazil. Boff's confrontations with Church hierarchy do not stand alone, as many other liberation theologians, such as Gustavo Gutiérrez, who was given formal warnings for his work (as mentioned previously) and Ernesto Cardenal, who was censured formally. I suggest that Boff stands alone due to both the severity of his criticisms of the institutional Church and his eventual demission of the institutional pastoral tie.

In this chapter, I explore Boff's theology until 1984, with a particular emphasis on how his theology addresses ecclesiology and makes [limited] use of Gospel parables. This is followed by a brief overview of the confrontations between the institutional Church and liberation theology leading up to the formal imposition of Boff's 'silence'. I explore Boff's confrontations with the institutional Church that precipitate his leaving of the priesthood and how these conflicts did not result in the cessation of his relationship with the poor and marginalised (therefore, maintaining his authoritative place as part of the continuum of liberation theology). Instead, he continued and *continues* the work of liberation theology in his exploration of the broader implications of the realities of the poor and marginalised. In this chapter, I touch upon his work concerning ecology and globalisation. This chapter concludes with a tentative look at Boff's praxis as analysed parabolically.

I. Early Years and Education

In this section, I explore Leonardo Boff's early life and education and survey the socio-political and ecclesiastical climate of Brazil in brief. In 1930, a revolution had unseated the post-colonial oligarchs in Brazil, who had exercised power from their relative seats in the individual states of the First Brazilian Republic. Under the leadership of Getúlio Vargas, power in Brazil had become more centralised.³ Resistance to Vargas' centralisation efforts and Vargas' own desire to undermine the prohibition of his possible re-election in 1938 (due to constitutional term-limits) led to the fabrication of a Communist plot to overthrow the government in late 1937 (the 'Cohen Plan').⁴ Having incited fear of the implications of such a plot (including the threat of 'massacres, rape and pillage, violation of people's homes, and the burning of churches'), on 10 November 1937, Vargas announced the establishment of 'a new political phase and the enactment of a constitutional charter': the *Estado Novo* ('New State') dictatorship.⁵ This new phase in Brazil's political climate was characterised by authoritarian rule in attempt to 'modernise' the country.

Unlike many other authoritarian governments in Latin America during the twentieth century, the *Estado Novo* did not depend solely on military power to achieve its aims. Instead, Vargas continued to exercise populist favour, '[relying] on the people to contain subversive activities' and not the armed forces.⁶ One major aspect of

³ Boris Fausto and Sergio Fausto, *A Concise History of Brazil*, trans. Arthur Brakel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 193.

⁴ Ibid, 210.

⁵ Ibid, 210-11.

⁶ According to an account by U.S. Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles when, in 1942, Vargas aligned Brazil with the United States against the Empire of Japan and rejected the resignation of two generals who opposed this move. Ibid, 213.

Vargas' popular favour was the close relationship that the government of Brazil had maintained with the Catholic Church (which had predated the 1930 revolution).

In the early stages of the *Estado Novo*, on 14 December 1938, Leonardo Boff was born in Concórdia, in the south-east of Brazil.⁷ He was the first son (followed by his brother, Clodovis in 1944) of Mansueto, a teacher, and Regina, who came from a family of farmers. Some early influences of Boff's eventual theology can be found in his parents, especially Mansueto, 'who identified himself with the cause of the poor, especially the blacks in Concórdia.'⁸ Boff began his studies in theology and philosophy in his home country (at Curitiba and Petrópolis) before entering the Franciscan order in 1959 and becoming ordained as a priest in 1964. As was the case with Gutiérrez and many other Latin American liberation theologians, Boff left South America for Europe to continue his studies and received a doctorate from the University of Munich under the supervision of German Franciscan Bonaventura Kloppenburg in 1970.⁹ While in Munich, Boff also worked as a research assistant to Karl Rahner, who would have a profound influence on Boff's theology.¹⁰

Upon returning to Brazil, Boff found himself caught up, both in the domestic climate of his home country and in the broader changes taking place in Latin American politics and religion. After the end of Vargas' first spell as leader in 1945, Brazil entered a period of relative democratisation until 1964, when a military government came to power. This military government was in power when Boff returned, and during this

⁷ Donald E. Waltermire, *The Liberation Christologies of Leonardo Boff and Jon Sobrino* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1994), 17.

⁸ Marie A. Conn, 'Plurality in Unity: The Ecclesiology of Leonardo Boff in Honor of His 70th Birthday,' *Theology Today* 66 (2009): 8.

⁹ Ondina E. González and Justo L. González, *Christianity in Latin America: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 255.

¹⁰ Conn, 8.

time, two specific experiences drew him into the field of liberation theology. In the light of both the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) and the 1968 Latin American Episcopal Council (Spanish: *Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano*, or CELAM) conference at Medellín, Colombia, Boff took up his role as priest in Petrópolis, a slum outside of Rio de Janeiro.

In Petrópolis, he found extreme poverty, working with ‘people who had to scavenge for food in garbage dumps’.¹¹ He also made frequent visits to the diocese of Acre-Purus, deep in the Amazon in the extreme west of Brazil. In both communities, he became enlightened to a fresh vision of the life of faith, one in which the hierarchical trappings of the institutional Church were traded for hope found in base ecclesial communities (CEBs). In these communities, reflection on praxis formed the heart of their Christian faith.

II. A Theology for Latin America

It is important to make a note of how Boff uses the Bible, especially in his early works. In the Solentiname community, their readings of the Gospel texts yield explicit reflections on the Gospel parables. As a result, parabolic analysis of these primary sources comes naturally. The same can be said of Óscar Romero’s homilies, which followed the Lectionary, thus lending themselves to a similarly explicit exploration of the Gospel parables. As one within the professional sphere of liberation theology, Boff is bringing a wide variety of sources together to develop liberation *theologies*. For example, in his developing of a contemporary Latin American christology in 1972’s *Jesus Cristo libertador* (English: *Jesus Christ Liberator*), Boff’s Biblical analysis

¹¹ Conn, 8.

consists primarily of narrative elements of the Gospels. What gives rise to his major conflicts with the institutional Church are Boff's critical reflections on ecclesiastical hierarchy and how this hierarchy is challenged when considering the praxis of the poor and marginalised. Therefore, this section differs from analyses in the two previous chapters in that it focuses on both the trajectory of Boff's critical engagement with the institutional Church and only brief reflections on his use of parables where they arise. Due to the constraints of this thesis, the following is not an exhaustive engagement with Boff's early work, nor is it an analysis of *each* mention of a Gospel parable in his writings. Instead, it is a selective overview of the general character of Boff's writings, emphasising parabolic analyses where they may be found as they pertain to the praxis of the poor and oppressed.

While serving as priest in Petrópolis, Boff also taught at the *Instituto Teológico Franciscano*, where his pastoral experiences built on the conclusions his doctoral thesis (published in German as *Die Kirche als Sakrament im Horizont der Welterfahrung* [English: *The Church as Sacrament from the Point of View of Secular Experience*] in 1972). As mentioned before, during these early years in Petrópolis, Boff published *Jesus Christ Liberator*. In terms of his conflict with civic authorities, the military government in power at the time of this book's publication in 1972 exercised 'severe political repression... exerted against broad segments of the church' forbade the use of the word '*libertação*' (English: liberation).¹² While Boff's work does not shy from criticisms of the civic status quo, it is against the *ecclesiastical* establishment that his criticisms find their most pointed expressions. These criticisms are often less

¹² Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology for Our Time*, trans. Patrick Hughes (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1978), xii.

explicit within *Jesus Christ Liberator* than they are in his later works, though even here, the subversive implications that flow from being 'Church' in the Latin American context are ever-present.

A. Ecclesiology and Parables in *Jesus Christ Liberator*

In the first chapter, I analysed *Jesus Christ Liberator* in brief. There, I observed Boff's primary focus, that of developing a christology that is relevant to Latin America, namely, relevant Latin American liberation theology. He presents five criteria by which he aims to accomplish this task. Among them, at least four can be seen as especially challenging to the institutional Church. In emphasising the primacy of the *anthropological element over the ecclesiastical*, Boff focuses on scepticism of the Church, especially where its dogmatic reproductions of European models do not align with the lived realities of those in Latin America. The creativity and spontaneity Boff sees in Latin America (for example, in CEBs) transcend the 'inherited traditional framework of a Greco-Roman understanding of the world.'¹³ Boff also emphasises the *primacy of the critical element over the dogmatic*, rejecting repressive dogmatism in favour of 'a dialogue between faith and the world', a reflection on the lived realities of Latin Americans.¹⁴ In this critical analysis, another of Boff's criteria emphasises the *primacy of the social over the personal*. In this, critical reflection undermines the 'structural evils that transcend individual ones', evils that exist both in society at large and within the institutional Church.¹⁵ The last of Boff's criteria emphasises the *primacy of orthopraxis over orthodoxy*, suggesting that 'correct acting in the light of Christ' is

¹³ Ibid, 44.

¹⁴ Ibid, 45.

¹⁵ Ibid, 46.

more important than 'correct thinking about Christ'.¹⁶ To be Christians, according to Boff, is not to assent to a set of 'systematic categories', but for the community to live in a way that epitomises the person of Jesus.¹⁷

In terms of how the implementation of these criteria are manifested parabolically in *Jesus Christ Liberator*, the Gospel parables tend to function as demonstrations of Jesus' deep understanding of the world. Boff writes, 'Jesus' look at the world is penetrating and without preconceptions; he goes immediately to the core of the problem. His parables show that he knows the whole reality of life, good and bad.'¹⁸ One example of Boff's analysis of Jesus' parables in this way is his grouping of the Parable of the Growing Seed (Mark 4.26ff), the Parable of the Mustard Seed (Matthew 13.31-2) and the Parable of the Yeast (Matthew 13.33). Here, he uses these parables to illustrate the breadth of the reality of the kingdom of God: 'The apparent littleness hides and promises a glorious future: A little yeast leavens all the flour; the seed grows and gives wheat in abundance; the mustard seed "once it is sown... grows into the biggest shrub of them all"'.¹⁹ Boff does not relate these parables to the praxis poor and marginalised directly, but instead illustrates the nature of the kingdom of God in a way that emphasises the utopian expectations of the people (an idea at the heart of both liberation theology and CEBs).

Utilised in this way, the Parable of the Mustard Seed, for example, might be modelled with John Dominic Crossan's actantial scheme in that with its modest size, the mustard seed might be *expected* to produce modest growth, unfit for habitation by the 'birds of the air'. Instead, this expectation is subverted by the reality that the

¹⁶ Ibid, 46.

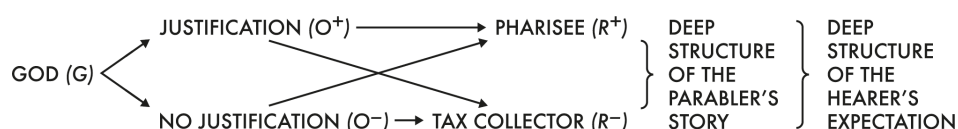
¹⁷ Ibid, 47.

¹⁸ Ibid, 86.

¹⁹ Ibid, 61.

mustard seed grows into a sizable shrub, capable of sheltering many birds. So too is the reality of the kingdom of God, which might appear to be modest (in the modest person of Jesus of Nazareth or indeed, with the modest CEBs). Boff emphasises the utopian expectation, in which the kingdom springs forth from the critical reflections and actions of CEBs.

Other parables which lend themselves to actantial analysis—as it is employed in previous chapters—are few throughout *Jesus Christ Liberator*, often illustrating ‘that Jesus is a person of extraordinary good sense’ in his understanding of ultimate reality.²⁰ One of the more straightforward uses of a parable is found in Boff’s exploration of the human condition and how the kingdom of God ‘implies a revolution of the human world’.²¹ Here, Boff appeals to the reversal of social conventions found in Jesus’ teaching, specifically the principle that the ‘first will be last, and the last will be first’.²² He illustrates by way of the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax-Collector from Luke 18.9-14. At face-value, this parable can be modelled as follows:



In the parable, a Pharisee and a tax-collector travel to the temple to pray. The Pharisee (R+), seen as the righteous individual in the context, is proud and thanks God that he is ‘not like other people... like this tax-collector.’²³ While he is praying, the tax-collector (R-), seen as an unrighteous individual, is standing in the back of the temple, unable to lift his head, humbled before God. The tax-collector begs for mercy from God as he knows that he is a sinner. Jesus concludes the parable by stating, ‘I tell you, [the tax-

²⁰ Ibid, 87.

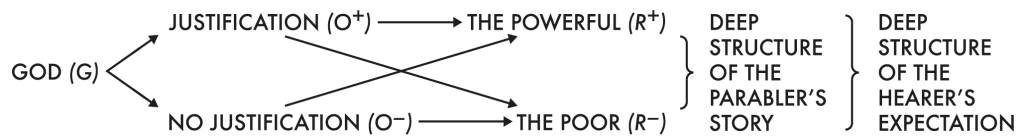
²¹ Ibid, 72.

²² Mark 10.31.

²³ Luke 18.11.

collector] went down to his home justified rather than the other' for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.'²⁴

The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax-Collector typifies the nature of the kingdom of God for Boff, who finds in it an illustration of the following:



It is the expectation of the status quo that the powerful and well-connected are those who receive favour and justification, not only in society, but also within the Church. Boff's reading of both the Bible and his experiences with the poor and marginalised tell him that it is *these* people to whom justification is given. The CEBs are thus the locus of revolution within Church and society.

Before moving beyond *Jesus Christ Liberator*, while all of Boff's other references to parables are *illustrative* of the character of Jesus and the nature of the kingdom of God (like the example above), the eleventh chapter, 'Where Can We Find the Resurrected Christ Today?', coheres with the endeavour of reading the praxis of the poor and marginalised as parables of the kingdom of God (as is done in the concluding sections of chapter four). In addressing the answer to this question, Boff states, 'Christianity did not present itself to the world as a religion that lives on the nostalgic memory of a happy event in the past. It emerged as an announcement and a joyful celebration of a presence, that of Christ resurrected.'²⁵ As such, Boff sees the *human being* as 'Christ's greatest sacrament', that is, as the image or sign of the grace and presence of Jesus.²⁶ This is not to say that humanity reflects this sacrament in

²⁴ Ibid 18.14.

²⁵ Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 206-7.

²⁶ Ibid, 217.

any given situation, just as the '[no] one can be defined or framed within one situation'.²⁷ Instead, it is '[the] other, when loved and accepted, in greatness and smallness, reveals a palpable transcendence.' As through Jesus, 'God appeared in a concrete form, assuming our human condition', 'each human being reminds us of the *human being* who was Jesus.'²⁸ Although Boff argues that *all* humans bear this significance, it is in the Church that Jesus 'achieves his highest level of historical concretion'.²⁹ The Christian community, especially as it is expressed in dynamic and creative ways (CEBs) is therefore a concrete sacrament of Jesus. I argue that it is in this 'sacramental' reality that the poor and marginalised might function as parables of the kingdom of God.

The way that the Church exists among poor and marginalised communities, as a sign through which the institutional Church may be transformed, is explored further in *Eclesiogênese: As comunidades eclesiais de base reinventam a Igreja* (published in 1977 and translated into English as *EcclesioGenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church*). Here, Boff expresses how CEBs accomplish this task of reinvention through their very existence. As this was explored in chapter one, my engagement with *EcclesioGenesis* here is constrained to a brief reiteration of its primary implications for the institutional Church as well as its use of the Gospel parables (which is admittedly limited).

As mentioned before, Boff sees the function of the community of the faithful as anthropological, communal and characterised by praxis. This includes the need for oppressed peoples to organise for liberating action. In living out this existence, the

²⁷ Ibid, 218.

²⁸ Ibid, 218.

²⁹ Ibid, 222.

Christian life within CEBs 'is characterized by the absence of alienating structures, by direct relationships, by reciprocity, by a deep communion, by mutual assistance, by communality of gospel ideals, by equality among members.'³⁰ Boff continues with his thesis that Jesus did not come to establish a new church, but to bring the kingdom of God.³¹ As a result, Boff sees the CEBs as an opportunity to 'de-privatise' the Christian faith. He does not suggest doing away with the institutional Church, but acknowledges that the institutional Church and the CEBs function in very different ways. He writes, '[The] basic church communities, while signifying the communitarian aspect of Christianity, and signifying it within the church, cannot pretend to constitute a global alternative to the church as an institution. They can only be its ferment for renewal.'³² As part of that renewal, CEBs can be more open and creative, which leads Boff to a reflection on the concept of ministries within the Church. He argues that the closed or open nature of ministries within the Church is predicated upon a particular model of church. In a hierarchical model, inequality is assumed *necessarily*. The same cannot be said of CEBs: 'The basic communities concretize a conception of church as a communion of sisters and brothers, as church-community, church-body-of-Christ, church-People-of-God.'³³

B. Ecclesiology and Parables in *Ecclesiogenesis*

In terms of the suitability of the presentation of the Gospel parables to be approached with actantial analysis, as with *Jesus Christ Liberator*, the Gospel

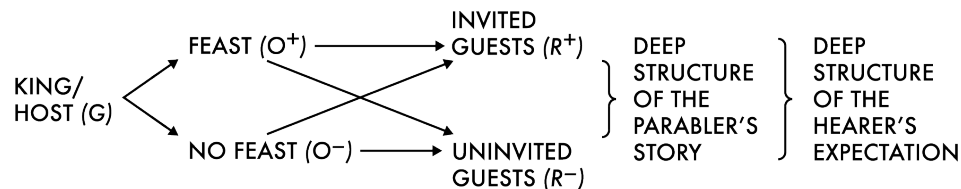
³⁰ Leonardo Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1986), 4.

³¹ Ibid, 47.

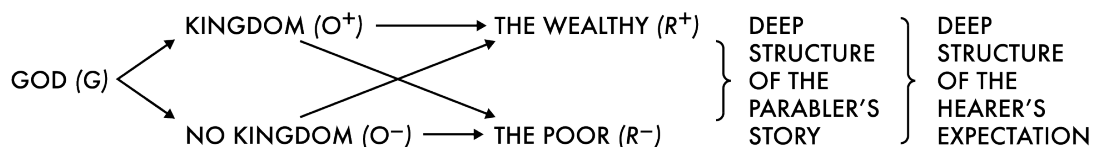
³² Ibid, 6.

³³ Ibid, 27.

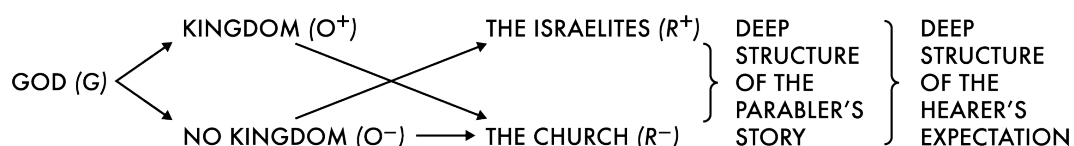
parables are virtually absent within *Ecclesiogenesis*, save for one explicit mention. This mention comes when Boff is exploring the bond between the Church and the kingdom of God. Here, he argues that the apostles had ‘taken up the elements that the historical Jesus had introduced, translated them for the new situation, and establish in the light of the Holy Spirit the basic structures of the church.’³⁴ Boff illustrates ‘new situation’ in his reading of the Parable of the Wedding Feast (Matthew 22.1-14), which is also explored by the Solentiname community as analysed in chapter four. In that chapter, I presented the Solentiname community’s interpretation in the following manner:



The original parable is depicted here, with the community’s re-reading modelled this way:

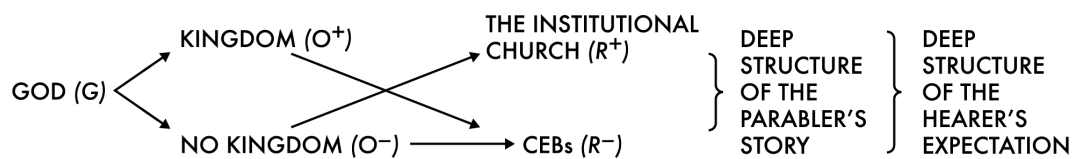


Boff’s use of this parable functions in a different, though related way. For Boff, the Church takes the place of the uninvited guests (R-), the Israelites as the invited guests (R+). Jesus’ challenge of the ‘old situation’ is inverted by the ‘new situation’ of the advent of the Church:



³⁴ Ibid, 57.

Here, Boff is not suggesting any sort of anti-Semitic exclusion of the Jews from the kingdom of God, but instead, he is suggesting that the continuity between Christ and the Church is about the inclusion of both Jews and Gentles (i.e. *all* people) in the ‘new situation’.³⁵ Within the context of his ‘reinvention’ of the Church in *Ecclesiogenesis*, in which the ‘new situation’ takes place in the form of CEBs, this parable can therefore be read in the following manner:



While this represents the extent to which Boff engages with the parables within *Ecclesiogenesis*, it is a significant example of parabolic analysis because it ties the re-reading of the Gospels through the lens of the poor and marginalised to his criticisms of the institutional church. Four years later, Boff published *Igreja: Carisma e poder* (English: *Church: Charism and Power*) in 1981, and there one finds his critique of the hierarchical authority of the Church yet more scathing.

C. *Church: Charism and Power*

While the parabolic analysis that is found in the two previous chapters has been less evident *explicitly* within Boff's writings, the *implicit* implications of the parabolic authority of CEBs are present throughout *Church: Charism and Power*. In building toward his ultimate thesis, Boff expounds how he sees the institutional Church working throughout history. He presents the model of 'Kingdom, world, and Church' and argues that these three 'elements...must be spelled out in proper order.'³⁶ Boff writes,

³⁵ Ibid, 57-8.

³⁶ Boff, *Church: Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church*, trans. John. W. Diercksmeier (London: SCM Press, 1985), 2.

First the Kingdom as the primary reality that gives rise to the others. Second is the world as the place where the Kingdom is concretized and the Church is realized. Finally, the Church is the anticipatory and sacramental realization of the Kingdom in the world, as well as the means whereby the Kingdom is anticipated most concretely in the world.³⁷

Boff warns of three dangers for the Church with regard to the confusion of these three elements. The first danger is that of conceiving of the kingdom of God and the Church as interchangeable concepts. In this context, by 'Church' he is referring primarily to the institutional Church. For Boff (as it is for Karl Barth as explored in chapter three), the kingdom of God is not bound to the confines of the Church. The kingdom of God is a broader concept and its boundaries are not limited to the dogmatic structures of the Church.

The second and third dangers are of conceiving of the world and the Church as interchangeable and of conceiving of the Church as wholly separate from both the kingdom of God and the world. In order to develop a 'new model' of Church, Boff argues that the Church must be understood as subject to the 'traumas of history' while also resisting the temptation to see its power as just one among many powers in the world.³⁸ In order to function properly in this scheme, the Church must see its connection to both the kingdom of God and the world and 'recognize the relative autonomy of the secular realm.'³⁹

Boff goes on to analyse how the Church has—in his view—erred in its observance of the proper relationships between these three elements throughout history. Within the model he calls 'the Church as City of God', the Church is turned in on itself and apathetic to the realities of the world (such as politics). Hierarchy

³⁷ Ibid, 2.

³⁸ Ibid, 2.

³⁹ Ibid, 2.

flourishes in this model because it 'is an essentially clerical Church, for without the clergy nothing decisive can happen within the community.'⁴⁰ The laity is dependent entirely on the clerical Church, who sees itself as the exclusive vehicle through which the kingdom finds expression and fulfilment.

Boff's calls his second historical model of Church 'the Church as *Mater et Magistra*' (English: 'mother and teacher'). This is the model of traditional colonialism, a partnership between the state and the Church in which the state 'provides for all of the Church's needs and guarantees its existence.'⁴¹ The Church functions as a parallel hierarchy to the state. Boff argues that with the end of colonialism, the Church adjusted this model, aligning itself with the powerful in order to continue as it had before. One example of how this finds expression is when the institution is the 'Church *for* the poor rather than the Church *with* or *of* the poor.'⁴² As partner of the status quo, this model of Church is rigid in its orthodoxy and resistant to innovation: 'The deposit of faith is presented as complete and perfect; nothing can be added to it and nothing can be taken away from it.'⁴³ Like the previous model, the Church as *mater et magistra* remains the exclusive expression of the kingdom of God and retains its corresponding hierarchy. In alignment with the status quo, this Church model is 'comfortable with authoritarian regimes; it never questions their legitimacy, only their abuses.'⁴⁴ Within Latin America specifically, Boff observes this model as lacking 'prophetic spirit', preserving an apolitical stance. In its reluctance to break its commitments to secular

⁴⁰ Ibid, 3.

⁴¹ Ibid, 4.

⁴² Ibid, 4.

⁴³ Ibid, 4.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 5.

institutions, it is not able 'to assume a critical stance toward the oppression that embitters the life of the poor.'⁴⁵

The third historical model which Boff presents is called 'the Church as Sacrament of Salvation'. Boff raises issue with the twentieth-century current of 'development' in Latin America. Within this model the Church participates in this development by opening itself to the challenges faced by the wider world, '[thus] the secular came to be of theological value.'⁴⁶ He sees the reforms of Vatican II as the natural outworking of this model, emphasising 'the fact that we must think of all reality in terms of the mystery of salvation and the universal offer of salvation.'⁴⁷ As a result, the Church has become more modernised, adapting 'to the spirit of the times.'⁴⁸ Still, even within this model, Boff sees a lack of *prophetic spirit*. The Church seeks to participate in and reform the current structures, though does so without challenging their foundations. In this, the Church's 'relationship with the poor will thus be defined from the perspective of the rich; the rich will be called upon to aid in the cause of the poor but without necessarily requiring a change in social class practices', and hierarchy is retained therein.⁴⁹

Boff sees each of these three models exercised to varying degrees in the Church throughout history, but believes that liberation theology offers a new model, reiterating the vitality of the CEBs from *Ecclesiogenesis*, 'a Church *from* the Poor'.⁵⁰ In addressing the implications of this 'Church from the Poor', Boff appeals to the 'Gospel Meaning of Authority'. He argues that the history of the Church and its power

⁴⁵ Ibid, 5.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 6.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 6.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 6.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 7.

⁵⁰ Ibid; italics mine.

‘points to the following conclusion: the goal [of the future of Christianity] is one of reform, the need to recreate a model for the institutional Church because of the model of power has given all it has to give.’⁵¹ He continues, ‘The sources of faith need to be reexamined, no longer with the eyes of those with power but with the eyes of all who have abandoned the perspective of power.’⁵² Boff explores this new model through the example of Jesus of Nazareth and *his* relationship to power:

Jesus did not preach the Church but rather the Kingdom of God that included liberation for the poor, comfort for those who cry, justice peace, forgiveness and love... The *exousia*, that is, the sovereignty, that appears in his attitudes and words I not power in terms of human power. It is the power of love.⁵³

Here, Boff appeals to the Gospel of Matthew: ‘If he proclaims that he “was given all power in heaven and on earth” (Matt 28.18) and passes this power on to the apostle, we must understand the nature of that power. It is the power of God.’⁵⁴ For Boff, the power of love by which Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God is one of inversion, calling the powerful to become servants. Following from this, Boff sees the ‘Church as People of God’ and in that, ‘[there] is a fundamental equality in the Church.’ He writes,

All are People of God. All share in Christ, directly and without mediation. Therefore, all share in the services of teaching, sanctifying, and organizing community. All are sent out on a mission; all are responsible for the unity of the community; all must be sanctified.⁵⁵

Boff sees this as a sharp contrast to the tendency of the Church, which has, throughout history, depended upon the retention of hierarchy in order to preserve power and authority, as he illustrates in his first three models of Church outlined above.

⁵¹ Ibid, 58.

⁵² Ibid, 59.

⁵³ Ibid, 59.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 59.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 133.

As an alternative, Boff makes clear that through the reinvention that comes from being 'a Church from the Poor', the Church is not 'doomed to carry out a purely preservative mission, contrary to the view held by orthodox Marxism; rather, because of its ideals and origins (the dangerous and subversive memory of Jesus of Nazareth crucified under Pontius Pilate), its mission is revolutionary.'⁵⁶ In order to accomplish this, the Church must experience a painful break with the ruling classes and be governed in an inverted way, illustrated in the simple diagram below.⁵⁷

Classical Ecclesiology



New Model



It is only when the Church is able to abandon this classical ecclesiology for the new model— abolishing the hierarchy that has made it the possessor of the means 'of religious production'— that it might be able to realise the proper relationship between the kingdom of God, the world and the Church.⁵⁸

Despite these pointed arguments, Boff does not insist on the complete eradication of the institutional Church. The CEBs and the institutional Church as seen as 'two expressions of the one Church of Christ and of the apostles.' He continues,

The institutional Church supports and encourages the base ecclesial communities; through them it is able to enter the popular sector and be made concrete by sharing in the painful passion as well as the hopes of the people. These ecclesial communities, in turn, are in communion with the institutional

⁵⁶ Ibid, 115.

⁵⁷ Derived from *ibid*, 133.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 111-5.

Church; they want their bishop, their priests and religious. In this way, the communities are put in touch with the grand apostolic tradition, guarantee their catholicity, and reaffirm the unity of the Church.⁵⁹

Even with this emphasis on the necessary interdependence between both expressions of the Church, the challenge presented to the Church's institutional structure in *Church: Charism and Power* proved a step too far for the ecclesiastical authorities.

III. Boff on Trial

As has been observed above, Boff's limited use of the Gospel parables in these early writings does not lend itself to the same sort of actantial analysis as that which is found in the previous two chapters. When considering Boff's life and work, the parabolic element is most evident in his own praxis, in the reality of his conflict with the institutional Church and what followed. Therefore, given the scarcity of the use of the Gospel parables in the texts above, these works are referenced due partly to their precipitation of Boff's conflict with the institutional Church, a conflict which was mirrored in the institutional responses to liberation theology in the mid-1980s, to which I now turn my attention.

A. Some Responses to Liberation Theology

From its earliest days, the first wave of liberation theology in Latin America faced opposition, not only from the institutional political structures, culminating in the suppression of liberating ideas and the assassination of Óscar Romero, Ignacio Ellacuría and so many others, but also from within the Church itself.⁶⁰ As mentioned

⁵⁹ Ibid, 126.

⁶⁰ One of the earliest criticisms of the first wave from outside of the Catholic Church came from American religious scholar Thomas G. Sanders in his 1973 article in the journal *Christianity and Crisis*

previously, during Pope John Paul II's visit to Nicaragua in 1983, the pontiff said to Ernesto Cardenal, 'You must sort out your affairs with the church.'⁶¹ The following year, Cardenal and three other Nicaraguan priests were suspended from exercising his duty as priests ('*a divinis*').⁶² In early 1983, Cardinal Prefect Joseph Ratzinger made a complaint to Gustavo Gutiérrez's superiors in Peru, with the accusation that Gutiérrez 'had given a Marxist slant to his understanding of the Christian faith'.⁶³ Alongside these and other institutional warnings and censures issued against liberation theologians, two official Vatican documents produced by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (*Congregatio pro Doctrina Fidei*, the modern incarnation of the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Roman and Universal Inquisition): *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the 'Theology of Liberation'* (1984) and *Instruction*

entitled, 'The Theology of Liberation: Christian Utopianism'. Writing at such an early stage in the development of the first wave, Sanders' main conversation partner is Gutiérrez's *A Theology of Liberation*. Sanders criticises what he considers to be liberation theology's "'soft" utopianism', against which Reformed American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr railed in developing his concept of 'Christian realism' decades before. Expressing a touch of American superiority (and demonstrating one aspect of the very developmental dependency against which Gutiérrez argues in *A Theology of Liberation*), Sanders sees this utopian movement as more or less inevitable in the developing context of Latin America, who had only recently passed through this stage that had been long finished in North American Protestantism. See Thomas G Sanders, 'The Theology of Liberation: Christian Utopianism,' *Christianity and Crisis* 33 (17 September 1973), 170. He labels the ideals of liberation theology as 'Confusion, not Enlightenment', writing, 'No Latin American decision-maker can base his judgments on liberation or the Kingdom of God'. Ibid, 170. For Sanders, so eager are these liberation theologians to act, that they reduce the kingdom of God to liberation. Instead, the realist acknowledges that 'Christians, though liberated from sin, continue to be human, i.e. sinners.' In this acknowledgment, the realist can 'fight from the real problems and possibilities of betterment', confronting 'these [Latin American] nations as they are.' Ibid, 172. What is particularly striking about Sanders' point here is that the first wave liberation theologians profess to be doing precisely as he instructs: they are engaged with their localities and nations 'as they are' for the large swathes of the population that suffer as a result of these 'real problems'. Theoretically, it is from these base ecclesial communities and their critical reflections on *praxis* that all first wave liberation theology has its starting point. Instead of coming away with some half-baked utopianism, those representative of this first wave see the kingdom of God and its corresponding liberation as the underlying truth of reality – 'Believing in the truth and putting into practice are two necessary and mutually implicative aspects of the following of Jesus, which is the obligatory setting for all theological reflection.' See Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free: Confrontations*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1990), 88-9.

⁶¹ 'Building Utopia,' *The Economist* (7 March 2020), 82.

⁶² Ibid, 82

⁶³ Deane William Ferm, *Third World Liberation Theologies: An Introductory Survey* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1986), 56-7; Paul E. Sigmund, *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads: Democracy or Revolution?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 156.

on Christian Freedom and Liberation (1986). The former is a more focussed attack on liberation theology, while the latter is the Congregation's attempt to develop its own picture of how a Catholic liberation theology might look.⁶⁴

As explored in the first chapter, the first wave of liberation theology began as a response to the social and economic circumstances in which so many found themselves in Latin America in light of the conclusions reached by the Second Vatican Council and the subsequent CELAM conference at Medellín. Throughout the 1970s, conservative resistance within the Church to liberation theology grew. In 1972, Colombian Monsignor Alfonso López Trujillo was elected general secretary of CELAM, the Latin American Episcopal Council.⁶⁵ Under his leadership, CELAM resisted many of the progressive challenges put forward at Medellín and the first wave of liberation theology that it spawned. In 1979, a new CELAM conference was held, this time, at Puebla, Mexico. Now-Bishop López Trujillo sought to enlist conference delegates that would condemn liberation theology and none of these progressive 'liberation theologians' were selected to take part.

The newly-elected Pope John Paul II addressed the opening session of the conference. During his speech, he declared that 'the church's mission is not political' and that 'the idea of Christ as political figure, a revolutionary, as the subversive man

⁶⁴ The depiction of liberation theology by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has been described by several commentators as a caricature. See González and González, 265; Ferm, 57. Responding to an earlier incarnation of the arguments presented, Juan Luis Segundo observes that, should liberation theology be reduced to these criticisms, 'the condemnation would be a deformation, a caricature, in which *no serious theologian in Latin America would be recognized*.' Juan Luis Segundo, *Theology and the Church: A Response to Cardinal Ratzinger and a Warning to the Whole Church*, trans. John W. Diercksmeier (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985), 3. While acknowledging that within the first *Instruction* in particular there may be found justifiable criticisms of the first wave of liberation theology, he denies 'that all its criticisms may be equally valid.' Ibid, 14. 'Yet,' Segundo writes, 'I do not think that the existence in the [1984 *Instruction*] of certain caricatures can become a universal escape hatch.' Ibid, 15. For the theologians representative of the first wave of liberation theology, there is a real case to answer.

⁶⁵ González and González, 264.

from Nazareth, does not tally with the church's catechesis'.⁶⁶ Despite this resistance, the conference at Puebla was tempered by the increasing popularity of liberation theology as well as a fear that outright condemnation of the movement would be seen as CELAM's endorsement of the oppressive military regimes throughout Latin America and against which the liberation theologians stood.⁶⁷ Ultimately, Puebla did not prove as ground-breaking as Medellín, but it did result in a more positive affirmation of a preferential option for the poor as well as base ecclesial communities (Spanish: *comunidades eclesiales de base*, or 'CEBs').⁶⁸

Puebla would not be the last word from the establishment on the place of liberation theology in the Catholic Church. The official response of the Vatican to the first wave would be driven by two key figures. Although Vatican II had been called by Pope John XXIII, by 1963, John had died and was replaced by Pope Paul VI. Paul served as the pontiff until his death in 1978, known as 'the year of three popes'. Following the brief reign of Pope John Paul I, who led the Catholic Church from 26 August until his death only 33 days later, Pope John Paul II was elected. The latter, along with Cardinal Prefect Joseph Ratzinger, were instrumental in setting the tone for the Vatican's relationship with liberation theology.

Pope Saint John Paul II, born Karol Wojtyła, was 19 when Germany invaded his native Poland. Upon liberation from Nazi occupation in 1945, Wojtyła found his country under another kind of foreign influence, that of the Soviet Union and communism. Inevitably, these experiences coloured his concerns as pontiff. In 1981,

⁶⁶ Arthur F. McGovern, *Liberation Theology and Its Critics: Toward an Assessment* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1989), 14; Christopher Rowland, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 212.

⁶⁷ González and González, 264.

⁶⁸ McGovern, 15.

three years after his ascendancy, John Paul II released his third encyclical, *Laborem exercens* ('Through Work'), in which he is critical of both capitalism and Marxism.⁶⁹

Joseph Ratzinger (later, styled Pope and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI) was born in Marktl-am-Inn, Germany in 1927.⁷⁰ After the Second World War, Ratzinger studied theology and was ordained as a priest in 1951. Cardinal Josef Frings, Archbishop of Cologne, brought Ratzinger to the Second Vatican Council as an expert advisor, where Ratzinger exercised significant influence, especially in the drafting of *Lumen gentium*.⁷¹ While Ratzinger had been numbered among the progressive reformers of Vatican II, his negative disposition toward Marxism proved increasingly explicit as time passed, shaped in part by his experience of his homeland divided, with East Germany living with the oppressive communism under which Poland also struggled. By the time of John Paul II's papacy, Ratzinger had become a Cardinal and in 1981, he was appointed as Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.⁷² It was from this position that Ratzinger drafted the two instructions pertaining to liberation theology. Neither of the Congregation's instructions mention any liberation theologians by name, nor do they reference any specific works of liberation theology. Despite this, these documents reflect a particular backdrop, that of the Church leadership engaged in an aggressive campaign against the teaching of liberation theology.

One foundational element of these two Vatican instructions concerns the issue of the authority by which the first wave of liberation theology comes to its conclusions and develops its models and methodologies, as well as the perceived implications of

⁶⁹ J. N. D. Kelly, *Oxford Dictionary of Popes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 327.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 329.

⁷¹ Ibid, 330.

⁷² Ibid, 330.

that authority (a rejection of hierarchy) on the legitimacy of the institutional Church.⁷³ Unlike most other criticisms found in the instructions, this appeal to authority relates specifically to the Catholic Church and its hierarchical episcopal governance, the basis for which is encapsulated within the teaching of the Roman Magisterium. Within this teaching, 'Sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God, committed to the Church.'⁷⁴ Appeals to the Magisterium pervade both instructions and with them is an inherent criticism of the authority of liberation theology. Exploring the issue of authority also illustrates how the criticisms raised in the Congregation's instructions formed only part of the Church's resistance to liberation theology. In what would become known as the 'Boff case', one finds a further demonstration of how the Vatican reacted to the liberation theology's challenge to Church hierarchy and authority.

B. The Silencing of Leonardo Boff

As I have argued in previous chapters, the 'parables' that can be derived from the popular and pastoral spheres of liberation theology is not limited to their written texts, but can be found in their praxis as *lived* text (Ricoeur). While Boff's engagement with the Gospel parables is limited in his writings, his lived text as one who reflects on the praxis of the poor and marginalised can be taken as a parable and analysed with the actantial structure (Greimas and Crossan) in order to yield 'true parables of the

⁷³ The issue of the authority by which the liberation theology developed is less prominent within the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's instructions than other criticisms, but is significant as it influenced how the Vatican challenged the movement and its proponents.

⁷⁴ Documents of the Second Vatican Council, '*Dei verbum* 10,' The Holy See, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html (accessed 10 December 2021).

kingdom of God' (Barth). For this task, I now turn to Boff's experiences when challenged by the institutional Church.

In early 1982, Boff's doctoral supervisor, Brazilian Franciscan priest Bonaventura Kloppenburg, wrote an early critique of *Church: Charism and Power* and other negative reviews from conservative clergy followed close behind.⁷⁵ Another Brazilian priest, Urbano Zilles published a review in which he accused Boff of beginning 'with the assumption that the institutional church as it now exists has nothing to do with the Gospel' and thinking that 'the church's present teaching was nothing but deception and illusion, that the task of theology was to "unmask and demystify it."'⁷⁶ Boff wrote a reply to Zilles' review in which he disagreed with the latter's assessment of his work.

Aware that the Vatican had already received complaints about *Church: Charism and Power*, Boff sent a copy of Zilles' review and his response to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.⁷⁷ Two months later, he received a reply from Cardinal Prefect Ratzinger, requesting that Boff also make a response to Kloppenburg's criticisms.⁷⁸ Over the coming years, Boff and Ratzinger exchanged correspondence. On 15 May 1984, Boff received a summons from Ratzinger to appear before the Congregation in order to answer challenges the body had regarding *Church: Charism and Power*.⁷⁹ Boff was eager to take advantage of the offer of a colloquy at the Vatican so that he might make a defence of his writings. He wrote to Ratzinger, seeking information on the exact nature of the challenges against him. On 16 June, Ratzinger responded,

⁷⁵ Harvey Cox, *The Silencing of Leonardo Boff: The Vatican and the Future of World Christianity* (London: Collins, 1988), 22.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 22.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 23.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 23.

⁷⁹ Boff, *Church*, vii.

stating that the colloquy would take place at the Vatican, between the two of them ('though in the presence of a third person selected by Ratzinger') and set a tentative date in early September.⁸⁰ For his part, Boff preferred that the colloquy would take place in Brazil, 'more in keeping with the Second Vatican Council's spirit of "collegiality"', though this was rejected by Ratzinger.⁸¹ Before Boff had the opportunity to meet with Ratzinger, the Congregation had already adopted and published its *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the 'Theology of Liberation'*.

Although, as mentioned before, the *Instruction* neither mentions any specific liberation theologians nor any specific writings, the critique of Boff is evident. Building upon the allegation that the liberation theology employs an 'uncritical [borrowing] from Marxist ideology', the *Instruction* accuses this particular 'conception of the Church of the People' of being 'a critique of the very structures of the Church', specifically, 'to the "sacramental and hierarchical structure" of the Church'.⁸² This very structure, it is argued, has been 'willed by the Lord Himself'.⁸³ Opposition to this structure is then seen as 'a denunciation of members of the hierarchy and the Magisterium as objective representatives of the ruling class which has to be opposed. Theologically, this position means that ministers take their origin from the people who therefore designate ministers of their own choice in accord with the needs of their historic revolutionary mission.'⁸⁴ This 'new hermeneutic' put forth by liberation theologians must be resisted

⁸⁰ Cox, 24.

⁸¹ Ibid, 24.

⁸² Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, '*Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation"* IX.13,' The Holy See, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19840806_theology-liberation_en.html (accessed 10 December 2018).

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

in favour of the authority of the Church as expressed in the Magisterium. The *Instruction* states,

Aware of the ecclesial character of their vocation, theologians will collaborate loyally and with a spirit of dialogue with the Magisterium of the Church. They will be able to recognize in the Magisterium a gift of Christ to His Church and will welcome its word and its directives with filial respect.⁸⁵

On 2 September, Boff arrived in Rome for his long-awaited colloquy with Ratzinger. The following day, he was called by Father Joseph Clemens (Ratzinger's private secretary) and Father Eugenio X. Aramburu (an associate of the Congregation), who expressed that his conversation with Ratzinger was to be a simple matter of clarification.⁸⁶ That same day, the *Instruction* was published (though the Vatican insisted the proximity of its release was mere coincidence).⁸⁷ In the coming days, Boff learned that his colloquy would in fact be more along the lines of an interrogation (similar to that which Edward Schillebeeckx had faced in the preceding years).

The colloquy took place on 7 September, which was, apparently unknown to the Vatican authorities, Brazilian Independence Day. That morning, after having celebrated the Mass, Boff was collected by representatives from the Congregation who refused his request to be accompanied 'at least to the outer gate of the Sacred Congregation's headquarters, by the Franciscan minister general.'⁸⁸ At the headquarters, Boff was welcomed 'by a smiling Cardinal Ratzinger'. Boff's inclination was to greet Ratzinger (who had been one of his teachers in Munich) in German, which had solved the 'language question' immediately.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Ibid, '*Instruction on Certain Aspects* X1.4'.

⁸⁶ Cox, 58.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 56.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 97.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 97.

During their conversation, Ratzinger pressed Boff on his understanding of 'the relationship between the church of Christ, the Roman Catholic church, and other Christian churches.'⁹⁰ Boff appealed to a change made to the *Lumen gentium* during Vatican II in which the text declaring that the Church of Christ 'is' (*est*) the Roman Catholic Church was modified so to read that the Church of Christ 'subsists in' (*subsistit in*) the Roman Catholic Church.⁹¹ He argued,

I do not say... that the true church of Christ 'does not really exist anywhere' [something he had been accused by his critics of saying]. Rather I believe that the church of Christ does 'subsist' in the Roman Catholic church. But it subsists there 'in the concrete form of promise and of faithfulness.'⁹²

Ratzinger disagreed with Boff's interpretation, stating that *substantia* (English: 'substance' or 'essence') expresses better the sense intended by *Lumen gentium*, the drafting of which he had been a part, with *substantia* suggesting 'that the church of Christ both is, and can only be, *fully* present in the Roman Catholic church.'⁹³ This reveals that, for Ratzinger, the issue of the primacy of the Catholic Church relates to the Roman Magisterium, the authority by which the institutional Church is legitimised. What is shown in the *Instruction* and in his conversation with Boff is that Ratzinger perceived the teaching of liberation theology to be a threat to that authority. After two hours of discussing the meaning of *subsistit*, Boff and Ratzinger reached an *impasse*. Their 'one-on-one' time together had expired and, after a time joined by Brazilian Cardinals Aloísio Lorscheider and Paulo Evaristo Arns, as well as Congregation officer Bishop Alberto Bovone, the colloquy was concluded.

⁹⁰ Cox, 98.

⁹¹ Ibid, 98.

⁹² Ibid, 99.

⁹³ Ibid, 99.

For Boff's part, the bothersome colloquy had passed, and he could continue with his work in Brazil. For the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, however, the issues with Boff's theology still required redress. In March of the following year, Boff received a 'Notification' from the Congregation, citing three errors in *Church: Charism and Power*. The introduction emphasised the issue of the Roman Magisterium, stating that 'praxis neither replaces the truth, but remains at the service of the truth consigned to us by the Lord'.⁹⁴ The first charge was that Boff had committed 'ecclesiological relativism' in his suggestion that the Church 'had adopted societal characteristics borrowed from contemporary Roman and later feudal society'.⁹⁵ The second alleged that he had espoused a 'relativistic interpretation of dogma as only good for a specific time and specific circumstances'.⁹⁶ The third criticised Boff's claim that the clergy had 'expropriated the spiritual means of production from the laity'.⁹⁷ It concluded, 'The options of L. Boff analysed here endanger the sound doctrine of the Faith which this congregation has the task of promoting and safeguarding'.⁹⁸ This Notification, along with Ratzinger's original letter to Boff concerning *Church: Charism and Power*, was made public.

Despite his disappointment with the publication of these items, Boff felt as if he had avoided a more severe disciplinary action, though this would follow. On 9 May 1985, the Franciscan authorities in Brazil were instructed by the Congregation to 'impose an "obedient [*obsequium*] silence for a convenient time"'.⁹⁹ With this, Boff was prohibited from preaching and giving interviews. He was also removed from his

⁹⁴ Sigmund, 160.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 160.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 160.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 160.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 160.

⁹⁹ Ibid; Cox, 105.

position of editor of *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira* (English: *Brazilian Ecclesiastical Magazine*) and 'his writings were to be subject to prior censorship.'¹⁰⁰

Responses to Boff's silencing ran down party lines. Opponents of liberation theology saw the move as a confirmation of their position. For them, the *Instruction*, along with Boff's censure, indicated the Vatican had established its position firmly. It was welcomed by a gathering of 'twenty-four critics of the movement... under the leadership of Cardinal López Trujillo' in Chile in July 1985.¹⁰¹ This group issued a 'Declaration of the Andes', stating that the teaching of liberation theology 'are incompatible with the Christian faith and fall out of line with the tradition and social teachings of the church, and they should be rejected.'¹⁰² The pope's position had also grown more critical of liberation theology, appointing an opponent of liberation theology, Archbishop Miguel Obando y Bravo of Nicaragua to the cardinalate (in place of the assassinated Óscar Romero). He also 'expressly warned against liberation theology' and issued 'condemnations of a "people's church" not subject to control by the hierarchy' during a visit to Africa.¹⁰³

On the side of liberation theology, the international mission centre of the Franciscan order had been critical of the Vatican's 'campaign against' Boff since before the colloquy. A statement issued in August 1984 'spoke of the millions of impoverished Latin Americans whom the Franciscan missionaries serve, many of whom find hope in liberation theology and who see Boff as a kind of protector.'¹⁰⁴ Franciscan Adriano Hypolito, Bishop of Nova Iguaçu, Brazil, commented that Boff's

¹⁰⁰ Sigmund, 160.

¹⁰¹ Cox, 108.

¹⁰² Ibid, 109.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 109.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 107.

silencing 'would give great satisfaction to the right-wingers in the Brazilian government and military.'¹⁰⁵ For Boff's part, he accepted the silence graciously, while not conceding defeat of his position.

Less than a year later, Boff's silence was lifted, but his rift with the Vatican would remain. He continued to write, publishing *A Trindade, a Sociedade e a Libertação* (English: *The Trinity, Society and Liberation*) in 1987. In this work, he explores the emphasis on the revelation of God's trinitarian character throughout history, building on the work of both Karl Rahner and Karl Barth. He derives from Jürgen Moltmann the removal of the concept of hierarchy within the Trinity and instead replaces this 'monotheism' with the view of a 'social' Trinity, what Boff calls a 'loving communion' and an 'open society.'¹⁰⁶ He states, 'The Trinity is not something thought out to explain human problems. It is the revelation of God as God is, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.'¹⁰⁷ Boff argues that '[human] society is a pointer on the road to the mystery of the Trinity, while the mystery of the Trinity, as we know it from revelation, is a pointer toward social life and its archetype.'¹⁰⁸ Therefore, divine society is the basis by which human society ought to be structured, free of hierarchy and its inevitable oppression. Boff also warns of more specific dangers for society that may result from theological misunderstandings, such as oppression (stressing the Father), authoritarianism (stressing the Son) or anarchy (stressing the Spirit).¹⁰⁹

As a result of Boff's continued propagation of liberation theology and its corresponding challenges to hierarchical structures, he was threatened with a second

¹⁰⁵ As quoted in Cox, 107.

¹⁰⁶ Vali-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity: Global Perspectives* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 276.

¹⁰⁷ Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998), 3.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 119.

¹⁰⁹ Kärkkäinen, 279.

imposition of silence. Finally, after more than a decade of conflict with and threats from the institutional Church, Boff had reached his 'limit'. He decided to leave the priesthood and in a letter from June 1992, he writes,

I am leaving the priestly ministry but not the church. I am leaving the Franciscan Order but not putting aside the tender and fraternal dream of St Francis of Assisi. I am and will always be a theologian who is Catholic and ecumenical, coming from the poor, opposed to their poverty and in favor of their liberation.¹¹⁰

C. Boff the Lay Theologian

Even as a lay theologian, Boff continued and continues to explore broad theological implications of liberation theology. Here, for the sake of space, I only explore two aspects briefly in order to illustrate a small portion of his post-1992 work: ecology and globalisation. When leaving the priesthood, he also left the *Instituto Teológico Franciscano*, where he had taught since 1970. In 1993, he joined the faculty of the *Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro* (the State University of Rio de Janeiro) as Professor of Ethics, Philosophy of Religion and Ecology, where he remained until retiring in 2001. After he departed the priesthood, the focus of Boff's work on ecological liberation theology would find its greatest expressions.

In his 1993 book, *Ecologia, Mundialização, Espiritualidade* (published in English as *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm*) Boff presents a holistic approach to ecological concerns, one in which a broad concept of ecology—one that 'encompasses not only nature (natural ecology) but culture and society (human ecology, social ecology, and so on)'—is presented.¹¹¹ As such, 'everything is related

¹¹⁰ Mev Puleo, *The Struggle is One: Voices and Visions of Liberation* (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1994), 163.

¹¹¹ Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm*, trans. John Cumming (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1995), 9.

to everything else in all respects' and the plight of the poor ('the most threatened persons and creatures') is seen as a direct result of global ecological exploitation.¹¹² In addressing the global ecological crisis, Boff appeals to spirituality, 'that attitude which puts life at the center, and defends and promotes life against all the mechanisms of death, desiccation, or stagnation.'¹¹³ Spirituality affirms material existence and it is the calling of Christians to 'promote solidarity with all living beings, starting with the least favored'.¹¹⁴ This connectedness is also explored in 1995's *Ecologia: Grito da Terra, Grito dos Pobres* (English: *Ecology: Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*), as was also explored in chapter two.

With the new century and his increased sense of global solidarity (what Boff calls 'The Global Phase of the Earth and of Humanity'¹¹⁵), Boff's reflections on ecology lend themselves to an exploration of globalisation and its implications for society and for liberation theology. In 2003, he released *Nova Era: A Civilização Planetária* (published in English as *Global Civilization: Challenges to Society and to Christianity*). Here, Boff argues that within the wide spectrum of globalisation, 'a new kind of consciousness' emerges. In this consciousness, human beings develop a broader sense of their existence, one in which they 'understand themselves as sons and daughters of the Earth and the result of ancient forces and energies that have been acting in the universe for billions of years.'¹¹⁶ Despite this global and cosmic consciousness, the reality of most of the human population is that of poverty and marginalisation, of a daily struggle to survive. This majority is that of a 'spectator-

¹¹² Ibid, 10, 13.

¹¹³ Ibid, 10, 13.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 37.

¹¹⁵ Leonardo Boff, *Global Civilization: Challenges to Society and to Christianity*, trans. Alexandre Guilherme (London: Equinox, 2005), 3.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 1.

society', of passive agents in the process of globalisation, yet Boff sees hope in the 'emerging global society'.¹¹⁷ In this, the passive agents can take an active role in society, though this is challenged because the 'awareness' of these agents 'is so fragmented and formed by the residues of so many cultures.'

In addressing the challenges of globalisation, Boff asks 'to what extent this new civilization forces Christianity to re-think itself, and, in doing so, to go back to its original ideals.'¹¹⁸ For Boff, the only way that Christianity might be globalised is through being characterised by liberation and a willingness to exchange ideas. As such, he presents 'faith' and 'Christian religion' as two distinct concepts. He writes, 'The process of globalization and the crisis in organized Christianity lead us back to paleo-Christianity, that is, to the Christian faith.'¹¹⁹ While faith is universal, religion 'is a fundamentalist understanding of faith' in which 'a particular variation of faith... excludes all those who subscribe to a different version of this faith.' Religion sees itself as congruous with faith exclusively and '[under] this particular light, differences create divisions, and divisions lead to religious wars.'¹²⁰ This is challenged by faith, which 'manifests itself primarily as utopia.' While this concept of 'utopia' might be considered unrealistic, the utopia of faith is one that sees hope and 'potentialities of the reality that have not been realised'. For Boff, these realities, and therefore utopia, gain 'an historical embodiment in all things that preserve, defend and promote life.'¹²¹

Since this time, Boff has continued to produce works of liberation theology, often concerning both globalisation, as explored in 2011's *Virtudes para um outro*

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 15-6.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 37.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 40.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 40.

¹²¹ Ibid, 41.

mundo possivel (published in English *Virtues: For Another Possible World*) and eco-spirituality, as explored in 2014's *Liberare la terra: Un'ecoteologia per un domani possibile* (published in English as *Toward an Eco-Spirituality*) and *Francis of Rome and Francis of Assisi: A New Spring in the Church*. In continuing the creative and innovative work of the professional sphere of liberation theology, Boff has demonstrated his evolving concern for the poor and marginalised, a concern that leads into the analysis of how his own praxis might function parabolically.

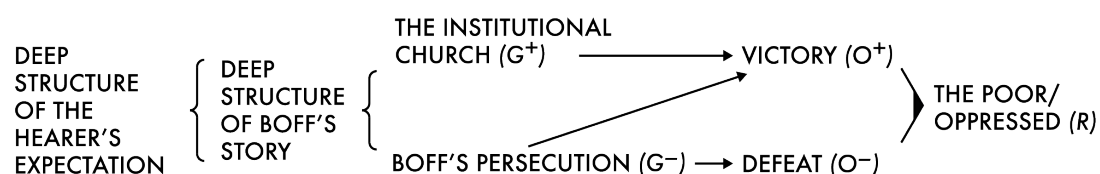
IV. Boff's Praxis as Parables

Analysing Boff's experiences from his 'silencing' until the present as parables can be done in numerous ways. Identifying the function of the actants within these experiences will depend on how 'far' one would be willing to go with regard to depicting the institutional Church as an antagonist within the narrative. Therefore, I approach this parabolic analysis in two ways. The first involves taking the institutional Church as a 'fellow worker' in the kingdom of God (as was seen in the Solentiname community's analysis of the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard in Matthew 20.1-13[14-15]), involving a 'single reversal'. A second and more radical approach involves taking the institutional Church as a temporal or passing actant (like the Pharisees in the Gospels or the oppressive political regimes in the examples of pre-revolutionary Nicaragua and El Salvador), an antagonist that is or *is to be* overcome, which involves a 'double reversal'.

Before analysing these two examples, it is important to ask some questions to clarify the breadth of this analysis. If the 'institutional Church' is one of the actants in this model, what is meant by this? Is the institutional Church the Roman Catholic

Church? Is it embodied in Joseph Ratzinger? Or is the institutional Church representative of the ‘spirit’ of the institution’s hierarchy? Depending on how forcibly one wishes to make the point, the ‘institutional Church’ can be identified as any one of these players. In keeping with the ‘antagonist’ as presented in Boff’s own writings, the ‘institutional Church’ can be identified most appropriately as the hierarchy, though the other options remain relevant. Another concern involves what is meant by the actualisation of the kingdom of God as an actant within any appropriate parabolic analysis of Boff’s praxis. Is the kingdom of God a certainty or a possibility? Could Boff’s praxis be considered parabolic even if he did not continue in the work of professional sphere of liberation theology after his ‘silence’?¹²² Did Boff succeed in reinventing the church? Or even, will this task of reinvention ever *cease*? Here, we find contextual and eschatological concerns which are explored more fully in the following chapter. For now, the identities of the actants are explored depending on how they function within the specific actantial models below.

The first example of how Boff’s experiences might be interpreted as a parable, modelled with Crossan’s actantial structure is as follows:

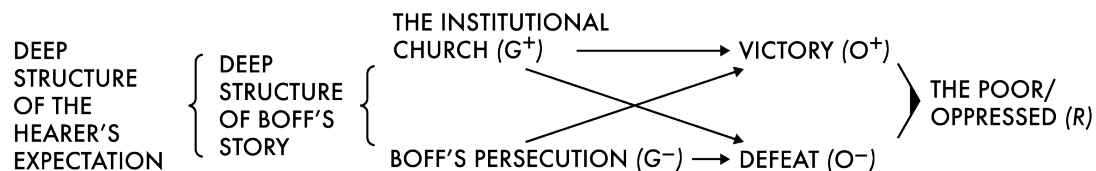


As mentioned above, this first model focuses on a single reversal. In this model, Boff’s teaching is not defeated by the imposition of his silence (G-) by the institutional Church (G+), which is, in this case, taken as the Roman Catholic Church. While many

¹²² This leads to other questions pertaining to the realisation of the kingdom of God after the Nicaraguan or Salvadoran revolutions. Has the kingdom of God been realised in Solentiname and El Salvador? These questions are explored in the next chapter.

expected this event to spell defeat for a certain aspect of liberation theology (O-), Boff's continued exploration of the implications of this new expression of faith lead to the utopian expectation and intimate communion shared between the institutional Church and the CEBs.¹²³ Ultimately, with this reinvigoration, both the CEBs and the institutional Church might function alongside the poor and oppressed (R) to bring liberation.

A second and more radical version of Boff's praxis as a parable features a greater eschatological sense and utilises Boff's analysis of the future of the Christian faith in a global society:



This model is more contentious by way of its use of the double reversal. The institutional Church (G+) represents the hierarchical structures of the Church and Boff's persecution (G-) is seen not only through the lens of his personal experiences, but also as an archetype of the whole endeavour of faith within the CEBs. With Boff's assertion that 'Faith Can be Universalized, the Christian Religion Can Not'¹²⁴ in mind, this hierarchical structure will cease (O-) and the new model of faith will be the Christianity of the globalised future (O+). It is only when the whole Church can embrace this non-hierarchical model that liberation will be achieved alongside the poor and oppressed (from whom and for whom the Church exists).

As mentioned before, these two models are merely tentative examples of possible parabolic interpretations of Boff's praxis. As with the Gospel parables, these

¹²³ Boff, *Church*, 126

¹²⁴ Ibid, *Global Civilization*, 40.

parables only carry weight in their presentation of something *new*, not merely the conveyance or reorganisation of other sets of data. Additionally, when presented and analysed in this actantial form, these parables are necessarily subversive in their undermining of the expectation of the status quo. What is perhaps most important to convey here is that as the praxis of the poor and oppressed carries authoritative weight, so too does the praxis of those who inhabit the professional sphere of liberation theology. It is in their intimate relationship to and dependence on the praxis and critical reflections of the margins that professional liberation theologians might also embody that degree of authority. For his part, Boff faced persecution and forced silence for proposing that the model of Church developed in the organic context of CEBs is prescriptive for the whole Church. His continued concern for the praxis of the poor and marginalised finds expression within his writings into the present.

Conclusion

‘So what sort of church can have a future?’, asks Boff. Among a litany of specifics concerning ideologies of openness and inclusion—which Boff links directly to the generosity and hospitality of the person Jesus of Nazareth—he also includes the hallmarks of liberation theology:

... a church that is prepared to learn from all humanity’s accumulated wisdom; a church that renounces all power and will not make a spectacle of the faith so that it becomes a mere façade of a nonexistent vitality; a church that presents itself as an advocate and defender of the oppressed in any class, and is prepared to suffer persecution and martyrdom like its founder; a church in which the pope has the courage to renounce the claim to legal power over all and becomes a sign of unity and focus for the Christian project with its pastoral mission to strengthen all in faith, hope, and love.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Leonardo Boff, *Francis of Rome and Francis of Assisi: A New Spring in the Church*, trans. Dinah Livingstone (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2014), 32.

For Boff, this is no mere utopian ideal, but a real possibility. Even after his conflict with the institution, even after he left the priesthood, even after he retired following more than three decades of professional academic liberation theology, he sees promise within the institution. He sees how the praxis of the poor and marginalised must function as the reinvigorating source of the transformation and survival of the Church.

In this chapter, I have attempted to demonstrate how the teaching and praxis of a figure within the professional sphere of liberation theology might, as in the popular and pastoral spheres, function parabolically and authoritatively. In order to accomplish this task, I first explored Boff's early life and theology, with a particular focus on his ecclesiology and use of Gospel parables in *Jesus Christ Liberator* (1972) and *Ecclesiogenesis* (1977). The inverted ecclesiology which he advocated in his earlier works, one in which the authority of the Church is derived from the lived realities and critical reflections of the *base*, finds its most pointed expression in *Church: Charism and Power* (1981). The publication of *Church: Charism and Power* began a decade-long conflict with the institutional Church. Ultimately, Boff felt the need to continue his work as a lay theologian, leaving the priestly ministry in 1992.

The final task of this chapter was to demonstrate a model of how Boff's own praxis might be interpreted through parabolic analysis. I argue that the best example of Boff's praxis for this analysis, one in which his lived reality embodies the ideals of liberation theology, is that of his conflict with the institutional Church. Boff's alignment with the poor and oppressed in developing his theology departs from the theoretical sphere of academia, landing him in direct conflict with the institutional authorities. For those in power, Boff's inverted model of authority within the Church undermines the weight of a Magisterium conceived of as originating from the upper echelons of the

Church hierarchy. Despite this lengthy conflict, I argue that Boff demonstrates a subversion of the expectation of the status quo with his resultant departure from formal Church ministry and subsequent theological endeavours.

C O N C L U S I O N

Within the broad theological sphere known as liberation theology, it is understood that the lived realities of the margins provide an essential insight into the betterment of the function of the Christian Church, its structures, its life and its ministry. In a letter written in 1977, Óscar Romero comments, 'For many years we in the church have been responsible for people seeing the church as allied with the wealthy and politically powerful, thus contributing to the injustices of the society in which we live.' He continues, 'God speaks to us through events and persons. God spoke to us through Father Rutilio, through Father Navarro, through the farm workers, and so on. And God speaks to us through the peace and hope that we experience even in the midst of such tribulation.'¹ Throughout this thesis I have argued for the development and employment of a fresh way of reading liberation theology. This has consisted of understanding the praxis at the heart of liberation theology within the scheme of the biblical genre of parable. I have defined this genre as the literary form consistent with the biblical parables found within the Synoptic Gospels. These are the sections of Jesus of Nazareth's narrative teachings which approach the reality of the Christian life and the kingdom of God in an indirect manner to bring about a deeper understanding in the minds of the hearers. Throughout this thesis, I have argued that reading praxis in this manner gives greater authoritative weight to liberation theology's methodologies and conclusions and can also provide additional insights and implications for its use to transform and reinvigorate the Christian Church.

¹ Óscar Romero, *The Church Cannot Remain Silent: Unpublished Letters and Other Writings*, trans. Gene Palumbo and Dinah Livingstone (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2016), 5.

I. Review of the Thesis Structure and Argument

I have argued my case over the course of six chapters. In the first chapter, I explored the background and fundamentals of liberation theology within the first wave, beginning with the ecclesial developments within the post-conciliar Catholic Church with a special emphasis of the implications of the conclusions of the Second Vatican Council as interpreted in the Latin American context. From the 1968 CELAM conference at Medellín through the early writings of Gustavo Gutiérrez, Leonardo Boff and Juan Luis Segundo, established liberation theology as an academic discipline. These writings, alongside those of James Cone and J. Severino Croatto, represent the broad field of the first wave which argues for a new methodology of enacting the task of Christian theology, bringing together the praxis of poor and oppressed communities with sociological analysis.

Within both the written texts explored and a brief look at the lived text of Romero's life and ministry, I explored the theological assumptions of the God of history and the God of the poor, providing a foundation for the movement from the first wave to the second wave of liberation theology, as well as the task of exploring how the praxis of individuals and groups of individuals might be interpreted in a parabolic manner. I have argued that through this foundation, liberation theology has been free to flourish so as to maintain its critical reflection on praxis that is liberating in character, demonstrating a preference for the oppressed and calls forth social revolution. I have also argued that this freedom led naturally to the second wave, which was explored in chapter two.

Building upon the 'openness' of liberation theology from chapter one, in the second chapter I argue that within the imaginative possibilities of this method for doing

theology, at least five significant movements characterise the second wave, each answering the question concerning the Gospel of Matthew's 'least of these'. In doing so, it is my claim that the second wave is marked by universality. This is first explored within the field of the systematisation of liberation theology demonstrated by the 1990 publication of *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, edited by Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino as well as the 1992 publication of *In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ* by Gustavo Gutiérrez. While these two volumes cover a significant amount of theological ground through the lens of liberation theology, I have argued that further exploration of the other four movements within the first wave are found elsewhere.

These additional significant movements within the second wave of liberation theology consist of liberation theologies of ethnicity, gender, sexuality and lastly, ecology (which is expressed through the eco-feminism first developed in the 1970s and many of the works of Leonardo Boff from the early 1990s onward). I have argued that these theologies are united with aims of the first wave in that they emerge from critical reflection on praxis and present a theology that is resultantly liberating in character. I have also argued that the necessary call for social revolution and transformation from the first wave are reiterated in the second wave. While the two waves are similar in this way, their scope has changed due to the expanding of the concept of the 'preferential option for the poor' into a preferential option for all those who are marginalised.

I concluded this chapter with a brief presentation of the danger of 'exclusivistic fragmentation' within any liberation theology (what Ivan Petrella labels 'monochromatism'). Such a fragmentation necessitated the emergence of Womanist

theology from Black theology, and of queer theology and ecofeminism from feminist theology. It is my argument that any future liberation theology would be best served to acknowledge the possibility of this sort of exclusivity so that such a theological approach would avoid becoming a monolith, immovable institution and instead remain open and free to be transformed by continued critical reflection on praxis.

Chapter three is a shift from a survey and collation of implications arising from the doing to liberation theology to a focus on rationale and methodology in order to employ a fresh reading of the praxis at the heart of this theological method. As the primary argument of this thesis has to do with rereading praxis through the lens of parable, I first turned to the work of Karl Barth, especially within §69 of the Doctrine of Reconciliation from his *Church Dogmatics*. In contrast to the caricature of Barth as an antagonist toward anything beyond a very narrow view of divine revelation, I argued that a broad assessment of his theology makes a positive theological case for discovering ‘true parables of the kingdom of God’ beyond the sphere of the Bible and the tradition of the Church. I acknowledged that while Friedrich Schleiermacher’s concepts of religious experience and revelation might lend themselves to a great sense of openness in terms of the application of divine authority, both Barth’s influence within liberation theology as well as his powerful case for these ‘true parables’ provide a significant theological foundation for parabolic exploration of praxis.

Following this brief exploration of Barth’s theology, I explored various hermeneutical approaches to the parables of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels with a particular focus on their nature and function. I argued that on the most basic level, parables function as a form of indirect communication, an ‘extended analogy’, and that in—and only in—this form might parables deliver their full weight, that of eliciting

transformation in the hearer. I highlighted the way that Dan Otto Via and John Dominic Crossan make use of Algirdas Julien Greimas' actantial structure. Within this model, the subversive element of the parables (in particular, the narrative parables) is preserved inextricably as the various actants are identified and organised in terms of their function within this scheme of subversion. Due to the systematic way that Crossan in particular presents the actantial structure in relation to the biblical parables, I argued that this model was especially useful in reading the praxis at the heart of liberation theology as parable.

In order to examine praxis with the actantial structure, I also made a case to read lived realities as text, and therefore, as 'parables of the kingdom of God' and potential subjects of similar hermeneutical analyses. For this I depended heavily on the argument made by Paul Ricœur in 'The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as Text' (1971). Here, Ricœur explores how how 'the human sciences' can be interpreted as texts under the conditions that the object of the human sciences possesses 'textual' characteristics, and that the methodology of the human sciences might yield procedures akin to text interpretation. These conditions are satisfied if a 'meaningful action' is understood as discourse, being necessarily temporal, detached from the subject in its effect (having effects beyond the persons within a particular 'meaningful action') and relevance, and is open to grow beyond its immediate context. I argue that each of these criteria fit within the essence and aims of liberation theology and that, therefore, the praxis of liberation theology can be read and interpreted as text.

In order to enact the actantial methodology proposed in chapter three, the second half of this thesis explores three different subjects organised by the basic

structure of the three levels of liberation theology put forward by Brazilian Clodovis and Leonardo Boff in 1986's *Introducing Liberation Theology*: the Solentiname community in Nicaragua (representing the popular sphere), the life, ministry and death of Óscar Romero of El Salvador (representing the pastoral sphere) and the life and teaching of Leonardo Boff of Brazil (representing the professional sphere). One thing to note here is how these three subjects stretch my proposed methodology in increasing order.

What is found within the first subject, the Solentiname community, is the collection of a CEB's critical reflections on the Gospels within a revolutionary context. These reflections are apprehended relatively readily given the fact that specific parables are explored and the Solentiname community sees their praxis as congruent with these parables. There is lesser difficulty in identifying specific actants and I was free to emphasise certain parables which had been explored by Crossan elsewhere (such as 'The Good Samaritan', 'The Wedding Feast' and 'The Workers in the Vineyard'). Additionally, each of these reflections within *The Gospel in Solentiname* are recorded in *textual* form. This is not to say that the parabolic examples above are in any way disconnected from the praxis of the Solentiname community, but that the process of actantial analysis is complicated further when considering both reflections on non-parabolic biblical material as well as 'non-textual' forms of praxis and narrative. One example of non-parabolic biblical material is analysed as parable is that of the Solentiname community's discussion concerning 'The Expulsion of the Merchants from the Temple' event from the Gospel of Matthew. Here, the Solentiname community demonstrates their uninhibited ability to read this Gospel event through the lens of

their praxis, identifying figures within the actantial scheme through their inevitably subversive and revolutionary worldview.

For the last example of the praxis of Solentiname as parable explored in chapter four, I considered the climactic events and actions which preceded the destruction of the commune in October 1977 and the roles that members of the Solentiname played in the 1979 Nicaraguan Revolution. At this stage, I acknowledged that the bounds of any 'parable' is very much contingent upon the hearer/reader. When considering the example of Solentiname above, the narrative may be taken as two separate 'parables' or as one longer parabolic narrative. I argue that this does not speak to the unsuitability for analysing meaningful action as text, 'but that the text itself is so rich with meaning that it produces a myriad of possible parabolic formulations.' With this considered, the story of the Solentiname commune's destruction and the eventual Nicaraguan Revolution demonstrate the universality of the praxis of the poor as parable in that '*unlike* the parabolic models taken from re-readings of Gospel texts, the reality of the lived situation is identical to the deep structure of the community's story.'

Similar procedures to those employed in chapter four are also enacted in chapter five, which focusses on Óscar Romero. This chapter explored Romero's biography and how various events and Romero's framing of parables within his sermons can be analysed in terms of the actantial model. In terms of his biography, Romero's transformation from one who acted in accord with the status quo to one who would speak out forcefully against oppression functions as a parable in at least its subversion of expectation. Elsewhere, in his sermons during his time as Archbishop of San Salvador, Romero treads familiar territory, reading the parables of the Gospels through the lens of the praxis of the poor in a similar manner to the readings produced

in Solentiname. I also highlight one way in which Romero's reading can be distinguished from many other liberationist readings of parables is found in his reading of 'The Rich Man and Lazarus' in which *even* the wealthy are invited into salvation, albeit with the demand that they repent and become 'like the poor'.

In a similar manner to that of Solentiname's non-textual parable of the destruction of the commune and of the Nicaraguan Revolution, the non-textual parabolic analysis of Romero in chapter five focusses on his ultimate martyrdom and the impact of his life, ministry and death on the social and political climate of El Salvador. I argued that while Romero was not the sole cause of the Salvadoran Civil War and while the outcome of the war did not result in the elimination of poverty and oppression in El Salvador, the parable of Romero's life and death is but one of innumerable parables upon which the praxis of the poor and oppressed might be interpreted in an authoritative and subversive manner.

The final chapter of this thesis explored how praxis can function as parable within the professional sphere of liberation theology, namely through the example of Leonardo Boff. I argued that as an academic, Boff, as with Romero in the pastoral sphere, retains the intimate connection with and dependence upon the popular sphere. This connection gives Boff's 'professional' work a special degree of authority inasmuch as it pertains to the critical reflection on the praxis and the poor and marginalised. Additionally, as a result of this connection, Boff's own praxis, and the praxis of others within the professional sphere, can function as parables of the kingdom of God. Unlike the examples of the Solentiname community and Óscar Romero, I have argued that Boff's writings offer little in terms of systematic rereading

of biblical parables through the lens of the praxis of the poor. One of the few examples within Boff's writings is a rereading of 'The Wedding Feast'.

When applying the actantial analysis to 'The Wedding Feast', Boff's reading differs from that of the Solentiname community in that while the latter read the 'Receiver' actants as the wealthy (R+) and the poor (R-), Boff sees a difference between an 'old situation' and a 'new situation'. These situations are embodied in the institutional Church (R+) and the CEBs (R-). I argue that this ecclesiology—one in which the authority of the Church is manifested in the poor and oppressed—permeates Boff's writings and eventually lands him into a series of increasingly detrimental confrontations with the institutional Church. This chapter culminates with my utilisation of Boff's experiences—including his formal silencing, his leaving of the priesthood and his continued professional work in liberation theology—as his own parabolic praxis, one in which I argue that Boff remains 'victorious' in his work of concern for and alliance with the poor and marginalised despite the persecution he has received from the institutional Church.

II. Constraints of this Method

Throughout this thesis, I have acknowledged certain constraints, emerging both from the form of a thesis itself—with particular length limitations, for instance—as well as from the tentative and subjective nature of certain aspects of the methodology and its execution, which I explore in brief here.

A. Identification of Parables and Actants

One limit of this thesis has to do with its methodology. Analysing praxis as parable with Crossan's model of actantial structure functions as *starting point*. While I argue that this model of actantial analysis is useful for exploring praxis as parable, this method is applied exclusively to the narrative form of parable. As mentioned in chapter three, within the outline of parabolic categories in the Gospels, narrative parables are only one type of parable. It is possible that other parabolic analyses based upon other parabolic categories. I must also acknowledge that Crossan's model, while helpful in the analysis the praxis of liberation theology with identifiable actants, is not the only valid method by which even narrative parables can be interpreted.

Additionally, I acknowledge that my actantial analysis is not the only way of employing the very method that I have proposed. I have shown that is possible that delineation of various actants—the Opponent, the Object, the Helper, the Giver and the Receiver—can be applied to various other players within a given narrative. My analysis is also constrained by the particular narrative perspective and details that I have used, especially when using secondary sources such as histories and biographies. Even when utilising a text like Cardenal's *The Gospel in Solentiname*, editorial decisions will include and omit various elements of the narrative. Therefore, I do not present my proposals and interpretations in this thesis as 'once and for all' answers to the question of how praxis might function in a parabolic manner.

With all of this expressed, I argue that the most basic kernel of parabolic form is one of subversion. In whichever way parables are interpreted, their basic structure is designed to be a challenge to common sensibilities, to the status quo. A proper interpretation of any parable is dependent on the understanding that these

expressions are not what they might seem at first glance. Parables require the hearer to disentangle Kierkegaard's dialectical knot, producing a transformation in understanding. Within the scheme which I have presented, I argue that in order to consider any such interpretation a 'true parable of the kingdom of God', it must conform to the basic fundamentals of liberation theology, that the Christian God is the God of history and the God of the margins. It is only within this perspective that the authoritative weight of an interpretation of praxis as parable might be apprehended.

B. The Context of Praxis

A second limitation of this thesis has to do with the context of the examples I have chosen. I have focused on the first wave of liberation theology in Latin America in the analysis of praxis as parable for the sake of some degree of uniform criteria (so to see the spread of the popular, pastoral and professional spheres within a self-consciously limited context). While I believe that the argument of this thesis is not invalidated by such limitations, other corollary limitations have also been included in my sample set. Given that the first wave of liberation theology was developed most fully in the *Catholic Church* in Latin America, many of the examples explored also consist of (or are presented by) male voices, whether that be Cardenal, Romero or Boff.

As with the necessary corrective provided by the second wave of liberation theology, a fuller exploration of the power of the praxis of the margins being interpreted as parables of the kingdom of God necessitates the inclusion of many contexts and voices beyond the scope of this thesis. If the praxis at the heart of Latin American Catholic liberation theology can be read as parables, so too can the praxis at the heart

of Latin American Protestant liberation theology. If the praxis at the heart of liberation theology in the Americas can be read as parables, so too can the praxis at the heart of African, Asian and European liberation theologies. These same principles apply to all liberation theologies, whether those emphasise ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ecology, or indeed, religion and non-belief, or any future and potentially unknown sphere in which people are oppressed and are in need of liberation.

III. Implications for Future Research and Praxis

Given the constraints outlined above, there is a great deal of scope for further research into the analysis of praxis as parables beyond this thesis. Each of the subjects I have chosen to analyse with the actantial structure can be examined in greater detail to reveal further material for parabolic application. For example, it is likely that the praxis of the Solentiname community can be explored from other perspectives, including recollections from members of the community who can shed greater light on their experiences before and after the community's destruction by the National Guard. Additionally, there will no doubt be other Nicaraguans who can attest to the impact of the Solentiname community's praxis on their own experiences. Similar remembrances of the impact of Romero's ministry will exist within El Salvador, both among his colleagues as well as other spheres of the population. In Brazil (and elsewhere), Leonardo Boff's work as a priest and later, as a lay theologian will yield more implications than I have been able to explore here. What might these other voices be able to contribute to a fuller picture of the parabolic implications for the transformation of the Christian Church?

There are also a great many possibilities beyond the limited number of examples I have explored in this thesis. A detailed examination of any number of examples of praxis can be employed to analyse the way that communities and individuals from the second wave of liberation theology might function as parables of the kingdom of God. Perhaps most promising are the ongoing experiences of marginalised communities which can yield a rich harvest of parabolic implications for the Christian Church. Using this thesis as a starting point, representatives of each of the three spheres of liberation theology (popular, pastoral and professional) can reflect on their praxis in new and creative ways. Christian communities can look at their own praxis and the praxis of the margins in their locality and weigh out these parabolic possibilities. Christian leaders—priests, ministers, pastors and all others who exercise pastoral service within the Church—also have the opportunity to gather details of the praxis in their communities and to live out their own vocations in parabolic ways which demand liberation of the oppressed.

In terms of the professional sphere, the more systematic and articulate expression of liberation theology, this thesis yields many academic implications. In addition to living out the praxis-inspired academic life like Leonardo Boff, academics might see fit to expand or adjust the methodology employed in this thesis based upon their knowledge and experiences. More work can be done to refine Crossan's actantial structure as I have used it and there are countless possibilities in approaching the praxis of the margins as parables of the kingdom of God with other parabolic approaches.

Due to the theological assumptions of this thesis, namely that it is based upon a broadly Christian theology, less weight might well be given to employing a parabolic

analysis beyond the Christian sphere. Even if this is the case, parabolic analyses of the praxis beyond the Christian sphere can prove fruitful from a universalistic Christian and interfaith perspective. Members of other faiths and those from non-religious perspectives may also be able to find some use in this methodology, and with their own traditions and experiences, add weight to its analytical methods to illuminate the exploration of praxis as parables for the flourishing of all people.

Conclusion

Having expressed these constraints and implications for future research, it is nevertheless valuable to recognise the distinctive contributions this thesis presents. Bringing together a broad analysis of liberation theology with a rationale for engagement at a parabolic level, I have presented a method for reading the praxis of the poor and marginalised as parables. These parables are given weight beyond mere suggestions for the Christian Church; they are imperatives which possess the authority to speak into the theology, practices and structures of the Church. These imperatives are for the Gospel in the 'here and now', an ever-changing reality, one in which the kingdom of God continues to move forcefully throughout all levels of human society. I have employed this method through readings from each of liberation theology's three spheres, their living, their preaching and their writing. Given what I have presented as constraints and areas for future research, this thesis can contribute to each of these three spheres, the first of which is that of the professional or academic level. Within the professional level, academic liberation theologians can make use of this method to draw out more parabolic analyses from a wider range of subjects, employing critical

rigor. This method can be applied to any number of liberation theologies that I have not been able to explore within this thesis.

As each of the three levels of liberation theology relate to one another in a fluid manner, the pastoral sphere—that is, those with pastoral and leadership roles within Christian communities and institutions—can take the method of this thesis and apply it both to their own praxis as well as the praxis of the people within their communities. As is one of the stated aims of liberation theology, the method presented within this thesis can be an additional tool to bring about reform and transformation within Christian communities, that their focus and organisation may be influenced by the imperatives derived from critical reflection on praxis.

Lastly, this thesis is intended to contribute to the religious life of those on the margins, the popular sphere of liberation theology. The analyses that I have undertaken might serve as useful tools for communities, to take these implications on board and, more importantly, to employ this method to reflect critically on their own praxis, reading their lived experiences as special revelations of the nature of the kingdom of God, as individual parables for their own contexts. In this way, communities of faith at the margins of society might be emboldened to comprehend their own essential value in the life and structures of their institutions and their societies as a whole.

APPENDIX ONE

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PROTO-LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Introduction

Upon his arrival in what is now known as the Bahamas, armed and accompanied by the captains of the *Pinta* (Martín Alonso Pinzón) and the *Niña* (Vincente Yáñez), Christopher Columbus (sixteenth-century Genoese: *Cristoffa Corombo*) unfurled the royal banner of Spain, said a prayer of thanksgiving and ‘made all the necessary declarations’ to the native inhabitants.¹ It was announced that this island would henceforth be a possession of the Spanish crown and it was given a new name, *San Salvador*. And with this being the first encounter between the two peoples, these ‘necessary declarations’ would have been incomprehensible to the natives. But such was the assumed divine right of the European explorers – the understanding of the natives was inconsequential. What was of the utmost importance is that Columbus had discovered new lands for the crown, seemingly rich with ‘gold and exotic treasures’, as well as human capital.² In order for further expansion and collection to follow, the Spanish crown received permission from Pope Alexander VI to possess ‘formal authority over the Americas through the bull *Inter caetera*.’³ From there, the Christian faith would accompany the colonists and *conquistadores*, providing further religious justification for the actions of the Spanish Empire. This found expression in the institution of the *encomienda*, an ancient system of local governance which had

¹ Christopher Columbus, *The Log of Christopher Columbus*, trans. Robert H. Fuson (Camden, Maine: International Marine Publishing, 1992), 76.

² Ondina E. González and Justo L. González, *Christianity in Latin America: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 28.

³ *Ibid.*

been brought to the New World from Spain. Within this institution, the Spanish crown granted the *encomenderos*, the holders of the *encomiendas*, specific lands over which to rule. Natives were then divided among the *encomiendas* and 'tributary labor (such as working the mines)' was extracted from them.⁴ This was justified as a means of converting the native peoples to the Christian faith.

I. Protest in the New World

Among these early missionary theologians who challenged the colonial oppression of the natives the New World, perhaps the most notable is Las Casas. But it was the teaching of Dominican priests in Hispaniola, especially Montesinos, that played the most significant role in Las Casas' transition from an *encomendero* to a profound voice on behalf of these very inhabitants. The first of these public proclamations of protest came in a sermon delivered by Montesinos on the Fourth Sunday of Advent in 1511. The sermon, as reported by Las Casas, stated:

In order to make your sins known to you I have mounted this pulpit, I who am the voice of Christ crying in the wilderness of this island; and therefore it behoves you to listen to me, not with indifference but with all your heart and senses; for this voice will be the strangest, harshest and hardest, the most terrifying that you have ever heard or expected to hear... This voice... declares that you are in mortal sin, and live and die therein by reason of the cruelty and tyranny that you practice on these innocent people.⁵

Montesinos went on to argue that these indigenous peoples are humans and that in their humanity, they 'have rational souls'. Therefore, he called the Spanish settlers to 'love them as you love yourselves'.⁶ Las Casas comments, 'Thus he delivered the

⁴ Lawrence A. Clayton. *Bartolomé de las Casas and the Conquest of the Americas* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 27.

⁵ H. McKennie Goodpasture, ed., *Cross and Sword: An Eyewitness History of Christianity in Latin America* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1989), 11-12.

⁶ *Ibid*, 12.

message he had promised, leaving his hearers astounded. Many were stunned, others appeared more callous than before, and a few were somewhat moved; but not one, from what I could later learn, was converted.⁷

Whether or not any of Montesinos' listeners were converted on that Sunday morning, his ministry and the ministry of his fellow Dominicans on Hispaniola began to cause unrest on the island. For them, the matter of the care and wellbeing of the native peoples, who suffered greatly under the colonial system⁸, was a matter of preaching and living out '*the gospel truth* necessary for the salvation of all the Spaniards of this island, as well as of the Indians'.⁹ The growing unrest came to the attention of King Ferdinand, who, on 20 March 1512, demanded that the Governor of the Indies, Diego Columbus, reprove Montesinos and his fellow Dominicans on Hispaniola. Should the offending priests refuse to abandon their erroneous ways, Columbus was ordered to send them to Spain for punishment from their Superior immediately.¹⁰ Three days later, the severity of Ferdinand's order was reinforced when Alonso de Loaysa, Montesinos' Superior, issued an official condemnation of the Dominicans' scandalous preaching on Hispaniola, mentioning Montesinos by name.¹¹

Despite the harsh orders both from Ferdinand and their Superior, the Dominicans on Hispaniola showed no signs of letting up. In order to face the matter

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Las Casas details some of the atrocities committed against the natives of Cuba as well as their results, in particular: '[m]en and women hanged themselves and even strung up their own children [in order to escape the horrors of enslavement to the encomenderos]. As a direct result of the barbarity of one Spaniard... more than two hundred locals committed suicide, countless thousands in all dying in this way.' From Las Casas' *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, ed. and trans. Nigel Griffin (London: Penguin Group, 1992): xix-xx, as quoted in González and González, 31.

⁹ From Las Casas' *Obras escogidas*, ed. J. Pérez de Tudela, 5 vols. (Madrid: BAE, 1957-58), 2:177b, as quoted in Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1993), 32.

¹⁰ Lewis Hanke, *The Spanish Struggle for Justice in the Conquest of America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1965), 18.

¹¹ Ibid.

head-on, the colonists and clergy on the island sent an envoy to Spain, with the Dominicans electing Montesinos to plead the case for the rights of the natives. During his audience with Ferdinand, Montesinos presented a list of grievances with the treatment of the natives in the New World. So troubled was Ferdinand by what he had heard that he 'ordered a group of theologians and officials to deliberate at once and draw up proper laws' to provide some degree of protection for the natives and to pacify the radical teaching of the Dominicans.¹² This resulted in the promulgation of the Laws of Burgos at the end of 1512. While these laws recognised some of the natives' rights, they also conclude that the natives 'must be subject to coercion and be kept close to the Spaniards in order that their conversion be effected.'¹³ Additionally, the laws stopped short of abolishing the institution of the *encomienda*, and instead, determined it to be 'in view of the Apostolic Grace and Donation and in agreement with divine and human law.'¹⁴

For the Dominicans on Hispaniola, any theoretical improvements brought to the lives of the natives by the Laws of Burgos – 'theoretical' in the sense that few *encomenderos* put the laws into practice¹⁵ – did not go far enough. In 1513, with the pleading of Pedro de Córdoba, the Dominican Provincial of Hispaniola, to Ferdinand in Spain, the laws were expanded upon.¹⁶ But, as the mistreatment of the natives continued, so too did the resolve of the Dominicans on the island. At this time, Las

¹² Ibid, 23.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid, 24.

¹⁵ González and González argue that 'efforts by the crown to guarantee a minimum standard of treatment for the laborers and to control the worst abuses of the encomenderos were largely ineffective. The colonists applied the age-old tradition of *obedezco pero no cumplo* (I obey but I do not comply), which basically meant that they disregarded any provisions within the Laws of Burgos that did not suit them, and they continued to use Indian labor as they saw fit.' 31.

¹⁶ Hanke, 24-5.

Casas was continuing in the life he had set up for himself on Hispaniola when he arrived as an *encomendero* in 1502. Although he was ordained as a priest in 1507 and 'always described himself as a gentler, kinder encomendero who did not follow the practices of his fellow colonists', his effectiveness as an operative within the oppressive institution on Hispaniola was rewarded with a second *encomienda* in 1511, this time in Cuba.¹⁷ All the while, the body of laws and declarations from the Spanish crown, asserting the empire's divine right to the lands and resources of the New World (including the native peoples), continued to grow, with the invading conquerors '[brandishing] bulls and theological texts, a whole rubbish heap of documents, by way of justifying their invasions.'¹⁸

II. Bartolomé de Las Casas

In 1514, Las Casas came to a troubling realisation while preparing to preach at Pentecost.¹⁹ He recalls reading from the Book of Ecclesiasticus at this time:

If one sacrifices ill-gotten goods, the offering is blemished;
the gifts of the lawless are not acceptable.
The Most High is not pleased with the offerings of the ungodly,
nor for a multitude of sacrifices does he forgive sins.
Like one who kills a son before his father's eyes
is the person who offers a sacrifice from the poverty of the poor.
The bread of the needy is the life of the poor;
whoever deprives them of it is a murderer.
To take away a neighbour's living is to commit murder;
to deprive an employee of wages is to shed blood.²⁰

The words of the Scripture plagued Las Casas' conscience and he determined to renounce his life as an *encomendero*. On 15 August, he handed his *encomienda*

¹⁷ González and González, 31.

¹⁸ Charles Petrie and Louis Bertrand, *The History of Spain* (New York: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1934), 265.

¹⁹ Gutiérrez, *Las Casas*, 47.

²⁰ Sirach 34.21-27.

charges over to the local governor.²¹ After seeking to promote the wellbeing of the natives while remaining on Hispaniola, Las Casas became convinced that he needed to bring his case to a higher political authority in order to effect change.

In October 1515, Las Casas arrived in Spain to find Ferdinand incapacitated and near the end of his life. Finding the royal court indifferent to his cause, he sought to visit Prince Charles (who would become King Charles I of Spain the following year) in Flanders.²² En route, Las Casas had the opportunity to bring his concerns to the attention of Archbishop (and later, Cardinal) Jiménez de Cisneros in Madrid.²³ Las Casas presented Cisneros with his *Memorial de remedios para las Indias* (English: *Plan for the Reformation of the Indies*). According to Gutiérrez, in this *Memorial*, Las Casas ‘coins a thesis to which he will remain faithful throughout his life’, that in the New World, ‘the principal end for which all that has been ordained, or might be ordained, is accomplished, and for this we are to strive and aim, is the salvation of the Indians, to be effected through the Christian doctrine that His Highness commands to be imparted to them’.²⁴ And with that salvation, for Las Casas, comes their rights to life and freedom.²⁵ So taken was Cisneros with the *Memorial*, he named Las Casas ‘priest procurator of the Indians’, and in late 1516, accompanied by a number of Hieronymite priests, the former *encomendero* returned to the Americas in order to enact his mission.²⁶

²¹ Enrique Dussel, *A History of the Church in Latin America: Colonialism to Liberation (1492-1979)*, trans. Alan Neely (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1981), 48.

²² Ibid, 48.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Gutiérrez, *Las Casas*, 69.

²⁵ Clayton, 59.

²⁶ Dussel, 48.

By all accounts, all we know about Las Casas' early missions is that they were failures, but he remained undeterred in his ultimate mission to bring justice to the native people. He returned to Spain in 1517 in order to '[begin] serious studies of the juridical questions regard the indies.'²⁷ In order to present something that seemed reasonable to the Spanish crown, with its colonial interests in mind, 'Las Casas developed a plan whereby he would be allowed to attempt a peaceful colonization of the Indies without the use of any arms and accompanied only by peasants.'²⁸ Eventually, in December 1519, Las Casas would get his audience with [the now] King Charles. This resulted in Charles granting Las Casas the opportunity to enact his new plan. Ultimately, this first project, which took place in Cumaná, Venezuela, would result in disaster and Las Casas was forced to withdraw in early 1522.²⁹

Defeated yet again, it was at this time that Las Casas experienced his 'second conversion' – becoming a Dominican friar.³⁰ He spent nearly a decade in a monastery in Spain, 'apart from the affairs of this world.'³¹ After this time, Las Casas would emerge more mature and bolder than before, and the period for which he is best known and heralded, began.

Over the remaining 35 years of his life, Las Casas continued in his mission to change the way that the Spanish Empire treated natives in the Americas. In 1537, he was invited to enact the theory set forth in his *De único modo* (English: *The Only Way*). On the invitation of Bishop Marroquín of Guatemala, Las Casas travelled to the Americas with the intention of '[winning] people to the true faith' by way of 'the power

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Gutiérrez, *Las Casas*, 55.

³¹ Hanke, 54.

of the gospel' and not by 'force of arms'.³² The natives of those lands had long been feared by the Spanish, but by the time Las Casas had finished his mission, the 'territory became known as "Vera Paz," that is, the land of true peace.'³³

Las Casas travelled frequently between the Americas and Spain, 'always arguing for more protective laws and better treatment of the Indians.'³⁴ The New Laws were approved by Charles, with the encouragement of Las Casas, in 1542. These 'Laws and ordinances newly made by His Majesty for the government of the Indies and good treatment and preservation of the Indians' had wide-ranging implications.³⁵ Natives were no longer to be enslaved, and any 'who until now have been enslaved against all reason and right' were to be freed.³⁶ Much greater limitations were also placed on the work that could be demanded of the natives. What follows would prove to be the most troubling piece of the legislation for the *encomenderos*:

Those who held Indians without proper title were to lose them; those who held unreasonable numbers of Indians in Mexico—and these persons were listed by name—were to have some taken away, and those who had ill-treated their Indians were to be deprived of them... The climax was reached, for the *encomenderos*, by the laws taking Indians away from all royal officials and prelates, and prohibiting all future grants of Indians. As it was stipulated in Law No. 35, 'Henceforth no *encomienda* is to be granted to anyone, and when the present holders of *encomiendas* die, their Indians will revert to the crown.'³⁷

As might have been expected, the *encomenderos* resisted the New Laws. So staunch was their rejection that Law No. 35, the most cutting of the legislation, was repealed by Charles only three years later.³⁸ By this time, Las Casas had been made Bishop of

³² Dussel, 51.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ González and González, 44.

³⁵ Hanke, 91.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid, 92.

³⁸ Hanke, 100-1.

Chiapas in Mexico. Upon the repeal of Law No. 35, riots broke against him.³⁹ Three months later, Las Casas left Chiapas for the last time and, coming to the realisation that he would never win the fight against the *encomenderos*, he resigned from his post in 1550.⁴⁰

Despite his defeat in Mexico, Las Casas remained as passionate as ever for the cause of justice for the native people of the Americas. That same year, in Valladolid, he engaged in the famous debate with Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda. The *junta* was called by Charles, who remained 'troubled over whether the conquest and colonization of the Americas was just.'⁴¹ Odina E. González and Justo L. González comment:

Even though each side claimed victory, in the end the encounter between Sepúlveda and Las Casas brought no real change in Spain's actions in the New World. What is important... is that the two sides in this debate portray the two faces of the church's presence in the Indies: Sepúlveda, the cross and the sword inextricably intertwined, each serving the purpose of the other; and Las Casas, the church's role as protector of the weak, bringing 'true' conversion by example, standing against prevailing culture.⁴²

During these last years of his life, Las Casas wrote prolifically and continued to promote the rights of the natives in the Americas to the attention of the Spanish crown, petitioning for reform, all in accordance with 'the principal end for which all that has been ordained, or might be ordained, is accomplished, and for this we are to strive and aim, is the salvation of the Indians, to be effected through the Christian doctrine that His Highness commands to be imparted to them'. Bartolomé de Las Casas, Protector of the Indians, died in Spain in 1566.

³⁹ Juan Friede and Benjamin Keen, eds., *Bartolomé de las Casas in History: Toward an Understanding of the Man and his Work* (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1971), 103.

⁴⁰ Dussel, 52.

⁴¹ González and González, 45.

⁴² Ibid, 46.

For all of his strengths, Las Casas was most certainly not without fault. Alongside his fellow missionaries in the New World, Las Casas did not hesitate to disrupt the social structures upheld by the natives. Even the establishing of peaceful villages of native peoples was a form of forcible relocation.⁴³ And who would build those villages but the natives themselves, under the supervision of the missionaries. Contrary to some of the most central principles in the first wave of liberation theology, 'as a pious friar and royal go-between, Las Casas rarely had personal contact with the natives he supported, and his outlook towards them can be fairly described as paternalistic.'⁴⁴ But perhaps the most damning blot on Las Casas' legacy can be found in his narrow focus on the wellbeing of the natives, so narrow, in fact, that he committed a significant amount of energy, from as early as 1517 until 1543, to encouraging the use of African slaves instead of natives from the Americas.⁴⁵ While Las Casas repented of this view in his later life, even he was unsure as to whether or not 'his ignorance and his good intentions would excuse him before the judgement seat of God.'⁴⁶

What these proto-liberation theologians had in common was their belief that it is a gospel imperative to defend the rights of the oppressed against their oppressors. The continuing legacy of theologians like Montesinos, Las Casas and many others in Latin American culture is attested to in the 2010 Icíar Bollaín film *También la lluvia* (English: *Even the Rain*). In the film, fictional filmmakers, Spanish executive producer Costa (Luis Tosar) and Mexican director Sebastián (Gael García Bernal) travel to

⁴³ Ibid, 48.

⁴⁴ Paula Kane, 'The Mythologies of Las Casas and Black Elk,' *U.S. Catholic Historian* 20, no. 3 (Summer 2011), 93.

⁴⁵ Clayton, 142. Some historians, such as Benjamin Keen, argue that Las Casas' petitioning had little to no effect on the importation of African slaves into the Americas. Friede and Keen, 39.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Cochabamba, Bolivia. They aim to make an historical film about the conflict that arose from the colonisation of Latin America initiated by Columbus (Colón) on behalf of the crown of Spain and the resistance of the people, led by Taíno native chief Hatuey and supported by missionary theologians Montesinos and Las Casas. The events that take place during making of the film-within-a-film, which is being made in Bolivia so as to take advantage of lower production costs, reflect the historical oppression of the poor by the powerful as they depict the 'Cochabamba Water War' of 1999 and 2000. During this contemporary real-life conflict, residents made a series of protests against the privatisation of the city's water supply by the Portuguese company Semapa.

También la lluvia itself can be seen as a critique of the continued exploitative ambitions of the powerful (in this case, the film industry, the local government and Semapa) in Latin America. The film depicts many powerful images, but one of the more poignant is seen during the opening scene (and is featured on the film's theatrical poster). As many locals queue up in the impoverished city in order to be given a chance at being an extra in the film, a helicopter flies overhead, bearing a massive wooden cross, demonstrating the excess of an industry determined to send the majority of these relatively destitute people away while pressing into their land and exploiting their human and natural resources under a false promise of prosperity (salvation).

APPENDIX TWO

THE SECOND WAVE OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY

I. Black Theology

Several definitions of 'Black theology' (which is also often referred to as 'Black liberation theology') have been articulated throughout the first and second waves of liberation theology. The National Conference of Black Churchmen included the following definition in a statement released in June 1969:

Black Theology is a theology of liberation. It seeks to plumb the black condition in the light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, so that the black community can see that the gospel is commensurate with the achievement of black humanity. Black Theology is a theology of 'blackness'. It is the affirmation of black humanity that emancipates black people from white racism, thus providing authentic freedom for both white and black people. It affirms the humanity of white people in that it says No to the encroachment of white oppression.⁴⁷

Elsewhere, preeminent Black theologian, James Cone (whose *A Black Theology of Liberation* was explored in the first chapter) and fellow American Black theologian and historian Gayraud S. Wilmore define Black theology as 'aris[ing] out of the need to articulate the religious significance of [the] Black presence in a hostile White world.' They continue, writing, 'It is Black people reflecting on the Black experience under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, attempting to redefine the relevance of the Christian gospel for their lives.'⁴⁸ As mentioned in chapter two of this thesis, these definitions, which resemble 'very closely the critical reflection on praxis at the heart of the first wave of liberation theology, highlight what may be seen as a major oversight on the part of the

⁴⁷ From 'Black Theology: A Statement by the National Association of Black Churchmen, June 13, 1969', as quoted by Edward Antonio in Christopher Rowland, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 81.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 81.

theologians associated with that stage of the movement as Black theology (as well as the other liberation theologies discussed in subsequent sections of this chapter) finds no significant place in the first wave of liberation theology.'

In order to do Black theology several approaches can be taken. Writing in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, Zimbabwean-born theologian and social theorist Edward Antonio presents three different potential approaches. The first is that of viewing Black theology 'in terms of its history, that is, of its origins in the Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s.'⁴⁹ A second approach finds its starting point in the 'different ways that African-American slaves appropriated and reworked Christian faith in the context of their experience of slavery.'⁵⁰ The third approach that Antonio proposes is that of analysing Black theology through the lens of its main themes, the line which he follows in his chapter in order to 'maintain a certain distance from the productions of black theologians.' According to Antonio, 'Such a critical distance is long overdue because, with a few exceptions, the bulk of what makes up the literature of Black theology remains largely uncritical of itself.'⁵¹ In order to help us better understand Black theology as it is manifested in the second wave of liberation theology here, we will begin by borrowing from the first approach presented by Antonio above so as to track the parallel trajectory of the movement, with an emphasis on the early work of Cone, alongside the first wave of liberation theology in Latin America.

⁴⁹ Rowland, 79.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 79. For an in-depth analysis of the history of Black theology before 1970, see Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1998).

⁵¹ Rowland, 80.

II. Feminist Theology

As mentioned in chapter two, José Comblin considers feminist theology to be a distinct discipline from liberation theology as '[the] starting point of feminist theology is a question of almost the entire history of humankind, within which Christianity is seen as one phenomenon.'⁵² Comblin's position is not shared by American feminist theologian Letty Russell (1929-2007), who, writing more than two decades before Comblin made these claims, argues that the Christian tradition offers feminist liberation theology 'a *usable past*'.⁵³ This is not to suggest that an outright message of *feminist* liberation is present in that past necessarily, but that 'whatever the past may be, it becomes a *usable past* through reflection on its meaning and mistakes in such a way that human beings build a common sense of direction toward the future.'⁵⁴

From Feminism to Feminist Theology

Feminist theology proves to be another essential tool in making liberation theology liberating for all. In defining feminism, eminent American Catholic feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether offers the following: 'Feminism is a critical stance that challenges the patriarchal gender paradigm that associates males with human characteristics defined as superior and dominant (rationality, power) and females with those defined as inferior and auxiliary (intuition, passivity).'⁵⁵ While some feminists 'reverse' the paradigm and view women as 'morally superior and males prone to evil', Ruether views the 'egalitarian impulse' as the norm. Feminist theology

⁵² Comblin, 215.

⁵³ Letty M. Russell, *Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective – A Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 72.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 72.

⁵⁵ Susan Frank Parsons, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 3.

arises from the importation of the 'feminist critique and reconstruction of gender paradigms into the theological realm.'⁵⁶ Seen in this way, Comblin's assessment, that '[the] starting point of feminist theology is a questioning of almost the entire history of humankind' is cogent, though this does not mean that the liberating principles of Christianity have nothing to say to feminism and *vice versa*. Like Black theology, which emerged from the ongoing Black Power movement, feminist theology emerged from the ongoing feminist movement and has something essential to contribute to the liberation theology conversation.

It is valuable to note the prominence of Catholic feminist theologians like Mary Daly, Rosemary Ruether, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, as well as Margaret Farley, Mary Jo Weaver, Elizabeth Johnson and Susan Ross in the early development of feminist theology.⁵⁷ Ruether argues that this sizable Catholic presence in the feminist theological discourse arose out of a number of shifts in the Catholic Church throughout the 1960s inspired by the Second Vatican Council.⁵⁸ Among the aims of these early Catholic feminist theologians was the call for the ordination of women priests. This demand would shift in the early 1980s, as some 'were becoming disenchanted with the prospects of being ordained in such a clerical system.'⁵⁹ As the Catholic Church was dominated by a patriarchal institution, theologians like Ruether and Mary Hunt developed ecclesiastical models (the 'women-church movement') as 'free liturgical communities for the nurture of feminist spirituality, worship, and social service.'⁶⁰ In

⁵⁶ Ibid, 3.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 7.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 7-8.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 8.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 8.

this way, feminist theology parallels the liturgical practices of the Latin American CEBs that came before.

As these liberating feminist voices emerged, both Latin American liberation theology and Black theology remained dominated by male voices. In the late 1970s, a new feminist theology emerged from Black theology: Womanist theology. Such a distinction is made necessary by 'the tension between how African American women defined women's experience and how they thought white feminists wanted black women's experience defined.'⁶¹ According to founding Womanist theologian Delores Williams, 'Some black women had reservations about white feminist definitions of patriarchy as the primary cause of *all* the oppression *all* women experience. They doubted that this description had "enough material in it" to define adequately the kind of *systematic* oppression black women experience in the USA.'⁶² In adopting Womanist theology, black women are given their own theological voice which affirms 'different cultural foundations for identical assertions made by both feminist and black women who later became womanists.'⁶³

The methodology of Womanist theology put forward by Williams both expands and critiques the methodology of Black theology. The first challenge is put forward against the use of the Bible. For example, Womanist theology asserts that '[the] Hagar-Sarah texts in Genesis and Galatians... demonstrate that the oppressed and abused do not always experience God's liberating power.'⁶⁴ Williams sees this as raising serious questions regarding Cone's interpretation of the biblical witness as portraying

⁶¹ Hopkins and Antonio, 61.

⁶² Ibid, 61.

⁶³ Ibid, 61.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 65.

a God that 'is a God of liberation'.⁶⁵ Womanist theology also challenges the concept of black experience, which is considered androcentric. For Womanists, the theological task must '[start] with the black community and then [move] to the academy.'⁶⁶

The movement of Womanist theology was mirrored among Hispanic women in Latin America and the United States. English theologian David Tombs comments, 'Although women were often the most affected by poverty—and faced multiple other problems in Latin America—male liberation theologians rarely did more than lip-service to this as a serious theological concern.'⁶⁷ While Ruether and other feminist theologians participated in the 1975 Theology in the Americas Conference, 'male Latin American liberation theologians... showed minimal evidence of feminist concerns.'⁶⁸ Uruguayan-born Colombian Catholic historian Ana María Bidegain observes that in the first wave of liberation theology, '[only] one liberation theologian, Leonardo Boff, dealt with the subject [of women] directly, in his *The Maternal Face of God* (1979).'⁶⁹ As was the case with Womanist theology, '[it] was Latin American women, rather than men, who struggled to put gender issues and sexism on the theological agenda in the 1980s.'⁷⁰ The challenges to institutional oppression do not come from the oppressors, but from the oppressed.

At the 1979 CELAM held in Puebla, Mexico, a Mexican women's group, *Mujeres para el Dialogo* (English: Women for Dialogue) 'offered meetings and

⁶⁵ Ibid, 65.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 70.

⁶⁷ David Tombs, *Latin American Liberation Theology* (Boston: Brill Academic, 2002), 256.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 257-8.

⁶⁹ Marc H. Ellis and Otto Maduro, eds., *The Future of Liberation Theology: Essays in Honor of Gustavo Gutiérrez* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1989), 114. It is noteworthy to acknowledge, as we observed in the first chapter, that Boff also explores the possibility of women priests in *Ecclesiogenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1986), 88-97.

⁷⁰ Tombs, 256.

conferences to the CELAM delegates but the impact these could make was limited.⁷¹ Despite this, the work of *Mujeres para el Dialogo* caught the attention of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT). The following year, the group was invited to take part in the International Congress of Theology at São Paulo. In preparation for this conference, *Mujeres para el Dialogo* held a meeting entitled, 'The Latin American Woman: The Praxis and Theology of Liberation', considered the origin of the feminist challenge to Latin American liberation theology.⁷² By 1981, the voices of Latin American women began to gain greater attention. Mexican-born, Costa Rica-based Methodist feminist theologian Elsa Támez and Brazilian Catholic feminist theologian Ivone Gebara were invited to the EATWOT conference held at New Delhi. Their impact was characterised as the 'irruption within the irruption'.⁷³

The aforementioned German Catholic feminist theologian Schüssler Fiorenza acknowledges the problematic nature of the term 'feminist' 'since it is... often construed in essentialist white feminine terms rather than understood historically.'⁷⁴ This has led to the proliferation of self-designations, including Womanist and *Mujerista* theology. Schüssler Fiorenza suggests that, 'rather than reify "feminist/feminism" as a white supremacist definition', feminists should 'rhetorically destabilize and

⁷¹ Ibid, 259.

⁷² Ibid, 259.

⁷³ From Ghanaian Methodist feminist theologian Mercy Amba Oduyoye, as quoted in Tombs, 259-60. Among Hispanic feminists in the United States, this response has been manifested in *Mujerista* (English: 'Womanist') theology, first articulated in 1988 and led by Cuban-American feminist theologian Ada María Isasi-Díaz (1943-2012). For a more in-depth exploration of *Mujerista* theology, see Isasi-Díaz and Yolando Tarango, *Hispanic Women: Prophetic Voice in the Church* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988) and for further discussion on the history of female voices in Latin American liberation theology, see Tombs, 256-70; Ana María Bidegain, 'Women and the Theology of Liberation' in Ellis and Maduro, 105-20.

⁷⁴ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ed., *The Power of Naming: A Concilium Reader in Feminist Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1996), xix.

problematize the meanings of the term'.⁷⁵ In doing so, feminists 'of all colors' might 'avoid the debilitating impact of academic and religious fragmentation'.⁷⁶ Whether or not specific theologies such as Womanist and *Mujerista* theology are best united under the category of a broader concept of 'feminist theology' (that would seem to me to be for the respective Womanist and *Mujerista* communities to decide), the place of these different streams of feminist theology all flow into the realm of the second wave of liberation theology.

As mentioned in chapter two,

'[a] unified concept of feminist theology is expressed by English Catholic feminist theologian Mary Grey. For Grey, '[feminist] theology is a global theology, or rather, a family of contextual theologies committed to the struggle for justice for woman and the transformation of society.'⁷⁷

Grey makes sure to acknowledge the diversity of the movement, with each subgroup responding to their respective contextual challenges, but all seeking the same aims of justice and transformation. She writes, 'If there is a commonality of purpose in all this diversity, it is the liberation of humankind together with all sentient life.'⁷⁸ Grey divides this broad feminist theology into four categories: a new awareness, a new [academic] discipline, a new ethic and culture and a new spiritual quest.

When Grey writes of 'a new ethic and a new culture' found in feminist theology, she means an ethic and culture that 'resists the logic of domination/submission of patriarchy.'⁷⁹ Feminist theology rejects this patriarchal model which 'contribute[s] to the oppression of women – in particular, the many forms of violence against women'.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Ibid, xx.

⁷⁶ Ibid, xx.

⁷⁷ Rowland, 105.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 105.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 114.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 114.

In order to do this, feminist theology seeks to transform 'the culture of violence into a culture which affirms and celebrates life.'⁸¹ With this comes a rejection of the dualism that undergirds patriarchy, emphasising the holistic nature of women and humanity. This is expressed in the final statement of an EATWOT meeting between Third World and First World feminist theologians, which took place in December 1994 in Costa Rica:

Resisting violence is a deeply spiritual work interwoven with the struggle for life. We must deconstruct theologies of the spirit that devalue physical life, especially life as symbolised in the bodies, and particularly in the sexuality, of women. Spirit/body dualism must be reconstructed toward a whole life energy of resisting, renewing, sustaining healing and growing. Such a spirituality of and for life is continually being renewed not only through our experiences of work and struggle, but also through those of prayer, contemplation, and communion in worship and action.⁸²

As is observed in the statement above, alongside this new ethic is also found a new focus on spirituality within feminist theology. Further discussion of feminist spirituality is found in the exploration of ecology later, but at this stage, the theology of sexuality will be addressed.

III. Theology of Sexuality

In the earliest days of this broad movement we find a focus on 'gay' liberation which emerged from the realities 'of many men and women who rejoice in having or who are happy to seek emotional and physical relationships with those of the same sex.'⁸³ Alongside the growing Black Power and feminist movements, gay rights became a new challenge for Christians to address in the 1960s and 1970s. English

⁸¹ Ibid, 114.

⁸² As quoted in Rowland, 114.

⁸³ Macourt, 1.

theologian Malcolm Macourt observes a shift in ‘the context of Christian sexual ethics’ by the middle of the 1970s. He writes, ‘First, whether we like it or not, there is a new generation of mature adults for whom heterosexual intercourse is separate from the act of procreation.’⁸⁴ This is reflected in the historic proliferation of contraceptive methods and a shift in the concern of many in which ‘the possibility of contracting a venereal infection is more important than the hazard of an unwanted child.’⁸⁵

The second major shift in the context of Christian sexual ethics is marked by the very existence of the gay rights movement. Macourt writes, ‘The “problem” of homosexuality is no longer the “problem” of those who have or seek same-sex relationships; it is the problem of those who cannot, or will not, understand that reality.’⁸⁶ This can be seen as parallel to other liberating movements. That a group of people is poor, black or female is not the ‘problem’ of the groups in question. The ‘problem’ is found in a society dominated by oppressive structures which exercise discrimination against these groups of people and these oppressive structures exercise their influence at every level of society, including within the Church.

An early example at an attempt to develop a ‘gay theology of liberation’ is found in the September 1975 supplement to the Student Christian Movement (SCM) magazine *Movement*. This supplement, entitled ‘Towards a Theology of Gay Liberation’, was followed by a conference in 1976. Some of the productions of the supplement and conference were published in the 1977 book, *Towards a Theology of Gay Liberation*, edited by Macourt.⁸⁷ English Quaker academic David Blamires locates

⁸⁴ Ibid, 2.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 2.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 2.

⁸⁷ Macourt acknowledges, with regret, that no material in *Towards a Theology of Gay Liberation* was written by women. ‘He also recognises that [the volume] does not purport to discuss the male-oriented nature of Western Christianity.’ Macourt, viii.

‘[the] beginning of the church’s attempts to come to terms with the facts of contemporary homosexual experience’ in the 1955 publication of *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* by Anglican priest Derrick Sherwin Bailey (1910-1984).⁸⁸ Blamires characterises subsequent dealings with the Church’s attitudes to human sexuality in the 1960s and 1970s as concerned primarily with ‘male homosexuality and dealing with female homosexuality (lesbianism) only peripherally, if at all.’⁸⁹ In these early attempts, Blamires observes great diversity, both in sources—including Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists, Quakers and Unitarians—as well as outlook, ‘ranging from reiteration of the traditional blanket condemnation of homosexuality to expressions of variously qualified acceptance.’⁹⁰

As with Black and feminist theology, gay liberation theology continues the work of liberation theology in opposition to the status quo. Within *Towards a Theology of Gay Liberation* English Dominican priest Giles Hibbert (1923-2013) explores the challenge that gay liberation brings to Christian theology. Without referencing specific liberation theologies, Hibbert argues that gay liberation is ‘a living and dynamic, authentically human, force within the context of the understanding of Christian liberation, and at the same time an appreciation of it as precisely a challenge to that understanding.’⁹¹

Queer Theology

While Macourt and others were exploring gay liberation theology, new questions began to face the gay and feminist communities. While a binary model of

⁸⁸ Ibid, 9.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 9.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 9.

⁹¹ Macourt quoting Hibbert, 92.

‘straight’ and ‘gay’ formed the context of the debate throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, another voice, that of the transgender community, began to gain prominence. It is important to note that some within the feminist community have rejected this deviation from a binary model.⁹² While a portion of the feminist community adopted transphobic notions, the transgender community (as well as the bisexual community, who had been characterised as gays who could not admit to the fullness of their sexuality) was able to gain greater acceptance with the gay community by the late 1980s.

By 1988, the term ‘LGBT’ (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) appeared in the United States. This term has been variously reworked to accommodate other related aspects of sexuality, such as intersexuality. Additionally, in 1991, Italian philosopher Teresa de Lauretis coined the phrase ‘queer theory’.⁹³ American Episcopal priest and theologian Patrick Cheng defines queer theory as,

a critical approach to sexuality and gender that challenges what is ‘normal’ or ‘natural’. Specifically, queer theory contends that identities—including identities relating to sexuality and gender—are socially constructed across different times and places, and thus are fluid and not fixed. Furthermore, queer theory recognizes that such identities are constructed through the deployment of social power, including the power of discourse and naming.⁹⁴

Cheng observes that queer theory has been used among theologians ‘since at least 1993’. Among them, Argentinian theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid (1952-2009) has

⁹² In 1979, American lesbian feminist Janice Raymond published *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male*, considered ‘what might be the most famously transphobic text’. *The Transsexual Empire* is based on Raymond’s PhD dissertation under the supervision of American Catholic feminist theologian Mary Daly (1928-2010), who shared transphobic views. In 1973, Daly published *Beyond God the Father*, in which she argues that ‘turning from the concept of god to goddess was insufficient and a mere surface reconstruction of the phallocracy.’ See Max Strassfeld, ‘Roundtable: Toward a Transfeminist Religious Studies,’ *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 34, no. 1 (2018), 45-6.

⁹³ Thatcher, 153.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 153.

proven to be one of the most prominent voices in the field of sexuality in the second wave of liberation theology.

Althaus-Reid was born in Rosario, Argentina and trained for the ministry at the *Instituto Superior Evangélico de Estudios Teológicos* (English: Higher Evangelical Institute of Theological Studies, or 'ISEDET'). While studying at ISEDET, Althaus-Reid was taught by Argentinian liberation theologians José Severino Croatto and José Míguez Bonino (1924-2012).⁹⁵ During her studies, Althaus-Reid worked among the poorest of Buenos Aires, before continuing her studies in Norway and then in Scotland.

Of Althaus-Reid, American theologian and pastor Robert Shore-Goss writes, 'I characterize Marcella Althaus-Reid as a nomadic theologian who grew up among the poor in Argentina, and she wrote as a feminist and queer theologian in diaspora. She wrote as a theologian in exile, as an outsider in Scotland and an outsider from Argentina.'⁹⁶ It is perhaps due in part to her Argentine nationality and her education under Croatto and Bonino at ISEDET that Althaus-Reid engages with and challenges the first wave of liberation theology more than any others we have explored within the second wave thus far.

Following the conclusion of her PhD studies, Althaus-Reid's first major work came in 2000 with the publication of *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics*. In the introduction, Althaus-Reid makes her intentions clear: 'My purpose in this book is not to demolish Liberation Theology *a la Europea* (in a European academic fashion), but to explore the contextual hermeneutical circle of suspicion in depth by questioning the traditional liberationist context of doing theology.'

⁹⁵ 'Marcella Althaus-Reid: A Tribute', *Studies in World Christianity* 15, no. 3 (2009), iii.

⁹⁶ Lisa Isherwood and Mark D. Jordan, eds., *Dancing Theology in Fetish Boots: Essays in Honour of Marcella Althaus-Reid* (London: SCM, 2010), 2.

She continues, 'In this way the project of Indecent Theology represents both a continuation of Liberation Theology and a disruption of it.'⁹⁷ Althaus-Reid also challenges the binary concepts of feminist theology, declaring that 'Indecent Theology' is 'intended as a critical continuation of Feminist Liberation Theology using a multidisciplinary approach'.⁹⁸

In Althaus-Reid's view, Christianity has been 'decentised', creating a heteronormative and masculine framework resulting in, among other things, a Jesus who has been reduced to 'a celibate batman, batteries included to supply his head with that halo of light.'⁹⁹ Such a theology requires a corrective 'indecenting'. In doing so, Althaus-Reid brings 'the instability of bisexuality into the construction of Christology'.¹⁰⁰ As such, 'Bi/Christology walks like a nomad in lands of opposition and exclusive identities, and does not pitch its tent forever in the same place.' Continuing with this illustration of a tent, Althaus-Reid appeals to the introduction to Gospel of John, referring to the Word of God that "'dwelt among us" as a tabernacle (a tent) or "put his tent amongst us". For Althaus-Reid, this image of a Bi/Christ as a tent illustrates the advantage of this nomadic theology: 'Tents change shape in strong winds, and their adaptability rather than their stubbornness is one of their greatest assets.'¹⁰¹ The incarnational aspect of Christianity itself forms the basis of an 'indecent theology'.

This approach is continued in Althaus-Reid's second major work, 2003's *The Queer God*. Here, Althaus-Reid calls for the 'queering' of theology, a move that

⁹⁷ Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000), 5.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 7.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 114.

¹⁰⁰ Isherwood and Jordan, 4.

¹⁰¹ Althaus-Reid, 119-20.

enables the 're-discovery of God outside the heterosexual ideology which has been prevalent in the history of Christianity and theology.'¹⁰² In order to accomplish this queering, the theologian must adopt the posture of an 'Indecent Theologian... who has learned to survive with several passports.' This is 'because she is a theologian in diaspora, that is, a theologian who explores at the crossroads of Christianity issues of self-identity and the identity of her community, which are related to sexuality, race, culture and poverty.'¹⁰³ This diaspora finds its start in solidarity with those who have been excluded from heteronormative and colonial Christianity.

In adopting what Althaus-Reid calls 'the libertine body', that which resists heteronormative and colonial concepts of 'decency' which have infiltrated dogmatic theology (what Althaus-Reid calls 'T-Theology'). In doing so, we 'recover the memory of the scandal in theology, and with a vengeance.'¹⁰⁴ This recovery of scandal is different from the scandal called for by Ellacuría. For Althaus-Reid, this scandal is characterised as:

God amongst the Queer, and the Queer God present in Godself; God, as found in the complexity of the unruly sexualities and relationships of people; God, as present in the *via rupta* of previously unrecognised paths of praxis, that is, paths carved with machetes in jungles, as the paths of experience (and of people at the margins) usually are. The theological scandal is that bodies speak, and God speaks through them.¹⁰⁵

Althaus-Reid reiterates the scandal of bodies later on, emphasising the importance of '[identifying] personal bodies by their names and stories and special characteristics of dissidence and adaptation in our contemporary history.'¹⁰⁶ She observes the poor as being the first wave's 'existential locus of the theological discourse and its habitat. In

¹⁰² Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God* (London: Routledge, 2003), 2.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 7.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 33.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 33-4.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 114.

Queer Theology the grounding of the theological reflection lies in human relationships for... it is in scenes of intimacy and the epistemology provided by those excluded from the political heterosexual project in theology that unveilings of God may occur.¹⁰⁷ Queer theology is therefore a liberation theology that continues to speak from the broadest margins of society.

What is made clear throughout Althaus-Reid's work is that her method is informed by her experiences among the poor, particularly poor women and sexual dissidents. This is reiterated in her introduction to the 2006 book *Liberation Theology and Sexuality*. Here, Althaus-Reid observes that although Latin American liberation theology is, 'by definition, a dynamic theology representing an orthopraxis, that is, a Church and a dogma in movement, the fact is that over time Latin American Liberation Theology also developed its own orthodoxy.'¹⁰⁸ Despite this, Althaus-Reid does not see fit to lay the blame on Latin American liberation theologians, at least not exclusively. Among other things, she puts this reduction of orthopraxis to orthodoxy down to 'the tendency among North Atlantic Christian scholars to fix the theological agenda according to a colonial perspective, which included the nativization of sexual and racial stereotypes.'¹⁰⁹ Contrary to this tendency, Althaus-Reid argues that the field of liberation theology and sexuality is very much rooted in praxis: 'it comes from the people, excluded from Church discourses for centuries in Latin America.'¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 114.

¹⁰⁸ Marcella Althaus-Reid, ed., *Liberation Theology and Sexuality* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2006), 1.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 2.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 2.

IV. Ecofeminism & Ecological Liberation Theology

Ecology lies at the heart of much of feminist theology. English theologian Celia Deane-Drummond observes that '[reflection] on the relationship between humans and the natural world is an issue of acute concern for most feminists, not just feminist theologians.'¹¹¹ 'Ecofeminism' emerged in the 1970s, drawing a parallel 'between the structural oppression of both women and nature through the project of modernity' and calling for their shared liberation.¹¹² The dualism between 'humanity' and 'nature' is rejected, just as the dualism between 'mind' and 'body' is rejected. Feminist thinkers like Susan Griffin and Carol Christ reinforce this connection between women and nature and argue 'that reconstruction of an adequate relationship with the natural world must follow deconstruction of existing patterns of thinking.'¹¹³ In proposing this 'reconstruction', ecofeminism is able to accomplish the transformative task as put forward by the first wave of liberation theology.

Over time, some feminists advocated for the embracing of Eastern and Native American spiritualities 'as a way of entering into a deeper union with the cosmos.'¹¹⁴ From this emerged Goddess spirituality, which 'rejects the idea that transcendence is the "sky God" of patriarchy'. Instead, Goddess spirituality accepts the 'sacred whole', the interconnectedness of all things in the universe.¹¹⁵ Deane-Drummond argues that adopting a Goddess system does not guarantee removal of the patriarchy. She points out how, in the outworking of Buddhism in various contexts, for instance, the two things are not mutually exclusive: 'Anthropological studies have shown that not all Buddhism

¹¹¹ Parsons, 190.

¹¹² Ibid, 190.

¹¹³ Ibid, 193.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 194.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 194.

embraces a feminine goddess; for example, in Burma, where historically women have a high status, there is not goddess at all. Chinese Buddhism, on the other hand, does have a female deity, but China is still a strongly patriarchal society.¹¹⁶

Alternatives to Goddess spirituality also emerge within feminist theology. For instance, in *Gaia and God* (1992), Ruether builds on her previous ecofeminist theological work in *New Woman: New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* (1975) and *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (1983) to expose further aspects of the parallel oppression of both women and nature beyond the 'cultural-symbolic ecofeminism' of goddess spirituality.¹¹⁷ In her work, economic and social structures must also be taken into account in order to combat oppression. But the conversation between liberation theology and ecology is not confined to the feminist discourse in the second wave. As is explored in chapters two and six, the later work of Leonardo Boff, among others, continued the second wave of liberation theology's emphasis on ecology.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 194.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 195.

APPENDIX THREE

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A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF APPROACHES TO THE INTERPRETATION OF BIBLICAL PARABLES

In the earliest interpretations of the parables of Jesus, they were treated predominantly as allegories, which ‘for centuries concealed the meaning of the parables under a thick layer of dust’.¹¹⁸ With this allegorisation, the parables were interpreted through the lens of the theology of the Church, having ‘little to do with Jesus’ intent’.¹¹⁹ Into the nineteenth century, allegorisation remained the dominant (though not exclusive) method by which the Church read the parables. Notable resistance to this strict allegorical interpretation of the parables can be found in the work of Chrysostom, Aquinas and Calvin.

In the late nineteenth century, Adolf Jülicher sought to free parables from the allegorical approach. In *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu* (1888), he argues that the parables ‘were designed for immediate effect, products of the moment, and deeply rooted in the particularity of the moment’.¹²⁰ In this argument, ‘Jesus’ stories were *simple* comparisons which were self-evident and *did not need interpretation*.’ Christian Bugge published a sweeping criticism of Jülicher in 1903, arguing that in his method (consisting of Aristotelian rhetoric) ‘destroys the parable element in the Synoptic Gospels’.¹²¹ Instead of this Greek methodology, Bugge insists that the parables are

¹¹⁸ Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, trans. S.H. Hooke (London: SCM, 1963), 13

¹¹⁹ Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2008), 4

¹²⁰ Geraint Vaughan Jones’ translation of *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu* in *The Art and Truth of the Parables: A Study in their Literary Form and Modern Interpretation* (London: SPCK, 1964), 17

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 21

best understood when read through Jewish rhetoric which presents both allegory and parable as a *mashal* (מָשָׁל), the ‘boundaries [of which] are interdeterminate’ and that ‘mixed parables are not unique’.¹²² Paul Fiebig criticises Jülicher on similar grounds. He argues that the Gospels make regular use of ‘standard metaphors’ used also by rabbis so often that ‘Jesus’ audiences almost certainly would have interpreted them in fairly conventional ways’.¹²³

C.H. Dodd’s *The Parables of the Kingdom* (1935), utilises Schweitzer’s work on Jewish apocalypticism and argues that ‘not only the parables which explicitly referred to the Kingdom of God, but many others do in fact bear upon this idea, and that a study of them throws important light upon its meaning’.¹²⁴ Dodd emphasises the immanence of an apocalyptic crisis within the parables, though the insistence that this crisis can be read into every parable is debatable. Joachim Jeremias is sympathetic toward Dodd’s conclusions, while also acknowledging the inevitable limitations put on interpretation when employing Dodd’s ‘one-sided... conception of the Kingdom’.¹²⁵

¹²² G.V. Jones’ translation of Bugge from *Die Haupt-Parabeln Jesu* in *The Art and Truth of Parables*, 21

¹²³ Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1990), 37

¹²⁴ C.H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (London: Nisbet & Co., 1935), 28

¹²⁵ Jeremias, 21.

APPENDIX FOUR – MAPS

El Salvador



Solentiname within Nicaragua



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