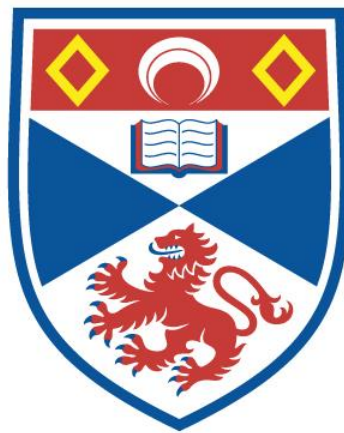


A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE THEOLOGY OF CAMILO TORRES IN THE LIGHT OF LATIN AMERICAN THEOLOGY: A THEOLOGICAL PARADIGM FOR PEACE WITH JUSTICE FOR COLOMBIA

Milton Núñez-Coba

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
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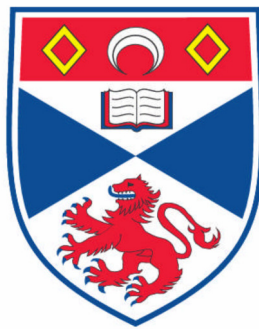
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A Critical Assessment of the Theology of Camilo Torres in the Light of Latin American Theology: A Theological Paradigm for Peace with Justice for Colombia

Milton Núñez-Coba



Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of St. Mary's College of

The University of St. Andrews

For the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

November 2014

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to provide a critical assessment of Camilo Torres' concept of efficacious love in the light of a hermeneutics and ethics of liberation, to contribute theoretically to theological reflection upon the mission of the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches in Colombia, and generally in Latin America. It proposes the thesis that the theology of Camilo Torres, viewed from the perspective of a hermeneutics and an ethics of liberation, can be foundational for seeking, constructing, and sustaining peace with justice in a context of oppression and violence.

Based on the theological analysis, the academic and spiritual motivation should respond to two fundamental questions in our academic inquiry: what foundation exists in Camilo Torres' theology for the construction of a just, peaceful, liberative society and to enable proximity to the excluded, victimized, and poor population in Colombia to be achieved? And how can we as Christians respond to the grace of God in living efficaciously the values of the Kingdom of God, in order to bring structural changes in Colombia? The implications of the answers to those questions would result in the possibility to execute an integrating theological proposal for peace with justice for the church in Colombia.

In an interpretative mode, we consider critically the multidisciplinary interaction of some of the theological foundations of liberation theology. Our task consists in clarifying and constructing theological presuppositions for a dialectical examination of the historical and current situation in Colombia, viewed in the light of the internal problems and realities. Thus, it is our intention in order to attempt a significant interdisciplinary juncture, to examine and interpret such relevant concepts as efficacious love, faith with works, kenosis, hypostatic union, hermeneutics and ethics of liberation, social justice, personal and collective socio-political conversion, and a praxis of faith as the church's mission in response to the Colombian context of poverty and violence.

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INTRODUCTION

The oppression, conflict, and victimization in Colombia can be overcome through efficacious love rooted in principles of justice as is explicitly argued by the premises of liberation theology throughout this project. The concept of efficacious love is supported by the hermeneutics and ethics of liberation which as constitutive foundations confer the efficacy of love. It is our contention that Colombia, a country of long internal conflict, can achieve a stable and permanent peace if social structures are radically changed in order to bring justice for all, especially the victimised and the poor.

Thus, this research project aims to contribute to a better understanding of the theology of the Colombian priest Camilo Torres, particularly his ideas of justice and efficacious love. In doing so it is helpful to understand Hans-Georg Gadamer's idea of the *Dasein*, an idea related to a historical consciousness of the person/subject in the world, as the propaedeutic transition to a Latin American hermeneutics. This propaedeutic transition leads to the use of the hermeneutics of the Brazilian theologian Clodovis Boff, which includes an awakening of social consciousness in order to interpret reality through a dialectical encounter with the Scriptures. Thus, a pivotal idea is to understand that such an interpretation of reality is not detached from a peripheral context; rather, it is done for and among the oppressed. This critique of reality as an ethical project requires a further examination of the ethics of the Argentinean Enrique Dussel which claims the absolute priority of, and a commitment to, the poor and the victimised. It is within such theoretical discussions and in the Latin American context that Camilo Torres' efficacious love contributes to a larger discussion on the hermeneutics of praxis and the ethics of liberation within liberation theology. After all, these hermeneutics point to the construction of peace through justice in a context of constant violence and on-going oppression. I would argue that the Latin American liberation theology perspective, rooted in the praxis of social transformation and human liberation, is central to

the development of fundamental principles that can respond to the contemporary Colombian context of poverty, violence, exclusion and injustice.

The concept of theology we are referring to in this project is that of liberation theology. We follow the definition provided by G. Gutierrez, as he presents it: “theology as critical reflection on historical praxis is a liberating theology, a theology of the liberating transformation of the history of [humankind] and also therefore that part of [humankind] – gathered into ecclesia – which openly confesses Christ”.¹ Thus, from this perspective “theology is, of course, “political” in a very broad sense, including also dynamics of sexuality, gender, and culture”.² For this broad reason theology ought to relate to ethics, and seek to expand the vision of human relationships in a more inclusive way. An ‘ethics of liberation’ has a point of departure, or as Dussel suggests, “human life is a “mode of reality”; it is the concrete life of each human being from which reality is faced, constituting it from an ontological horizon (human life is the preontological point of departure of ontology) where the real is actualized as practical truth”.³ Hence, Dussel arrives at an important understanding of ethics of liberation “ethics is “critical” from the perspective of the victims, from the perspective of alterity. It is the “ethical” as such, or the face-to-face as encounter of practical subjects”.⁴ Ethics, then, is nurtured by the notion of truth as fundamental to human action in a community. Therefore concerning the nature of a theology of liberation, it should be noted “that the first moment is the *praxis* of liberation that grows out of ethical indignation in the face of situations in which human beings are reduced to a subhuman condition”.⁵ Then, according to Dussel “Praxis is both act and relationship ... [it] is the actual, here-and-now

¹ G. Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, trans. ed. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1973), 15.

² Rebecca S. Chopp, *Reconstructing Christian Theology*, Ed. Rebecca S. Taylor, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 14.

³ Enrique Dussel, *Ethics of Liberation: In the Age of Globalization and Exclusion*, trans. Eduardo Mendieta, et. al. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 434.

⁴ Ibid. 435.

⁵ Jung Mo Sung, *The Subject, Capitalism, and Religion: Horizons of Hope in Complex Societies*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 30.

manner of our being in our world before another person. It is the real presence of one person to another”.⁶ The relationship between theology, ethics and praxis based on a hermeneutics of liberation with regard to a liberating project, ought to include an intersubjective relationship. Hence, “the hermeneutical horizon constitutes the clue to all theology and tries to liberate the religious discourse from theology, as a mere exegesis of texts to a theology hermeneutically in search of sense”.⁷ Thus the task of hermeneutics will assist us to conciliate an interdisciplinary dialogue and the vital relationship between different disciplines. This is because in the dynamics of such relationships, exists the trust that sustains the foundation of a theology that deals profoundly with all kind of violence and victimization, especially of the most vulnerable people in society.

Camilo Torres: His Historical Context

In the midst of a chaotic situation, Camilo Torres irrupted in Colombian society. He was a sociologist and priest, who articulated his theological-political thoughts as the result of his intensive struggle against injustice, framed by a vision of a liberative praxis that was informed by his understanding of and firm conviction regarding the Christian faith. He started abruptly, irrupting into the closed circle, the space reserved for a few privileged people. Following religious and sociological lines, Camilo Torres emerged to propose new alternatives that would recover the historical memory of the country that had been profligately covered up. He irrupted, intending to build a new socio-political consciousness of such reality, which would be influenced by his Christian belief and sociological background, by proposing a very solid socio-economic and political structure for the entire country that would provide equity for the poor and inclusion of the marginalized. Camilo Torres saw that the economic oppression was the basis of the problems in Colombia. However, since his day

⁶ Enrique Dussel, *Ethics and Community*, trans. Robert R. Barr, (New York: Orbis Books, 1988), 8.

⁷ Juan José Tamayo Acosta, “A Theology for Another Possible World is Possible” in *Another Possible World*, Marcella Althaus-Reid et al. (London: SCM Press, 2007), 186.

(1960s) up to the present day, violence, internal conflict and social injustice and human rights violations have become worse.

Camilo Torres founded the 'Frente Unido' (United Front), a political movement which rapidly gained acceptance among university students, and poor peasant and unionized groups that were discontent with the way government conducted the affairs of all social dimensions of Colombia. The emerging Frente Unido party was seen as a threat to the personal and political interests of the rich families and those upholding political power. But in Camilo Torres' time and at present, "like many of its neighbours, the Colombian army tended to equate legitimate social protest with subversion".⁸ Thus, Camilo Torres and the Frente Unido became a political target, persecuted by those defending the status quo, who did not permit legitimate opposition or honest critique of the government. Camilo openly denounced the reality of the oppression to which the country was subjected and for which the rich oligarchy and corrupt politicians were responsible. Hence, Camilo Torres moved outside the traditional political structures because they were closed to any significant structural changes in favour of the oppressed population, and because he was being persecuted by the Colombian oligarchy. He also moved outside the church in Colombia because it was a closed, conservative church on the side of the oligarchy. German Guzman Campos⁹ explained that the Cardinal Archbishop of Bogota, Luis Concha Cordova, said on 18 June, 1965 that

Father Camilo Torres has consciously separated himself from the doctrines and directives of the church ... The activities of Father Camilo Torres are incompatible with his priestly character and with the very ecclesiastical habit he wears. It can happen that these two circumstances induce some Catholics to follow the erroneous and pernicious doctrines which Father Camilo Torres proposes in his programs.¹⁰

⁸ Jenny Pearce, *Colombia Inside the Labyrinth* (London: Latin American Bureau, 1990), 202.

⁹ German Guzmán Campos was born in Chaparral, Colombia. He studied philosophy and theology and after the death of Camilo Torres, Guzmán Campos edited *Frente Unido*, the revolutionary periodical founded by C. Torres.

¹⁰ German Guzmán Campos, *Camilo Torres*, trans. John D. Ring (New York: Sheed and Ward, Inc., 1969), 130-132.

Thus, the structure of the Roman Catholic Church in Colombia in Camilo Torres' time was indifferent to the causes that produced poverty and marginalization. This reality precipitated his departure from the church, and he courageously assumed total responsibility and its consequences for his life's mission, and political convictions in favour of the poor.

Camilo Torres: His Life

Camilo Torres has been an influential person in the contemporary history of Colombia. "Camilo Torres was born (in Bogota, on February 3, 1929) and was neither poor nor humble".¹¹ The following important biographical information about Camilo Torres' life came from his mother as is narrated by G. Guzman Campos:

He was born into the home of Calixto Torres Umaña, a doctor of medicine, and Isabel Restrepo Gaviria, both of the upper urban class. As a young person he entered the National University to study law, but he was only there one semester. He became friendly with the family of Dr. Jose Antonio Montalvo, whose daughter became his girlfriend for a time. They introduced him to the Dominican Fathers, and Camilo resolved to become a member of that order. In the train station itself, I stopped him when he was going off to the monastery of Chiquinquirá, and I almost have to use force to make him return. In the seminary he was a brilliant student and was singled out for his education to such a point that Cardinal Luque advanced his ordination so that he might go to Louvain to study sociology. On his return to Colombia he was appointed chaplain of the National University, where he endeared himself to all the students. He built a chapel there and was one of the founders of the Department of Sociology.¹²

As Gerassi observes, "Camilo threw himself into the struggle of his countrymen for liberation – first as a sociologist, then as a politician, finally as a revolutionary, and always, in his own eyes at least, as a priest."¹³

Scholars view Camilo Torres as one of the precursors of liberation theology in Latin America. He was a Christian man, who incarnated the message of the gospel in the desperate struggle for the liberation of the poor in Colombia. His ideas regarding justice and equality are still relevant to the current situation of injustice and oppression in Colombia. This is one

¹¹ Camilo Torres, *Revolutionary Priest: The Complete Writing and Messages of Camilo Torres*, ed. John Gerassi (London: Jonathan Cape, 1971), 14.

¹² G. Guzmán Campos, *Camilo Torres*, 3-5.

¹³ *Ibid.* 20.

reason a proper study of his thoughts as attempted in this thesis is essential to the understanding of the modern dilemma. He communicated his ideas both by employing written messages and engaging in oral discourses. The life of Camilo Torres was a cooperative combination that integrated a life of faith in the *praxis* of a real struggle for social and economic justice for the Colombian people. Even after his death (1966), his life continues to be a great example of commitment to and courage for, the construction of fair and just society. As a Catholic priest and as a sociologist, he knew how to fuse the two horizons of social theory and Christian *praxis*. Camilo Torres developed a Christian character that both opposed injustice and knew how to discern the signs of his time and context, always with the objective of seeking concrete transformation and change of the unjust social structures.

Though he had similarities with Ché Guevara in many respects, those horizons make him especially appropriate for Christian circles and academia to study his life and writings. Camilo Torres, experiencing and witnessing the reality of the poor in Colombia, struggled with how to be an effective Christian, because of his most poignant concern in making the gospel relevant and efficacious to the understanding of the mind, heart and life of poor people. His concern could be expressed today in the words of G. Gutierrez in the following way: “On our own continent we pose for ourselves a lacerating question: How to say to the poor person, to the oppressed person, to the insignificant person, God loves you?”¹⁴

Camilo Torres entire life was a constant and genuine effort to respond to that type of question. Camilo Torres emphatically and convincingly affirmed “I opted for Christianity, considering that in it I would find the most pure form to serve others.”¹⁵ The purity of Christianity for Camilo Torres relied on Jesus’s preaching the good news of salvation, which

¹⁴ Gustavo Gutierrez, *The Density of the Present: Selecting Writings* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999), 139.

¹⁵ German Guzmán Campos, *El Padre Camilo Torres*, (México, Siglo Veintiuno Editores, octava edición, 1977), 10.

included liberation for all, especially to the poor, as is expressed in the gospel of Luke.¹⁶ Even though Torres came from a rich family, he chose to live a simple and modest life in solidarity with the poor and oppressed.

Camilo Torres was realistic in evaluating the context of the *domination* that was implemented openly by a calculated and systematic *repression* of any type of popular organization that pointed out the injustice, corruption and the hardship experienced by the population. Camilo been aware of such conditions and expressed his thoughts tacitly, saying

those who think are punished. [The oligarchy's] reaction begins to travel for all over our continent as the majorities wouldn't exist. For how long! ... The [oligarchy] reaction moves one of its powerful fingers and paralyzes us! We can't continue without organization and equal armament, at least.¹⁷

This way ahead is clear: in such a context, impotency and persecution calls not necessarily for violence but for self-defence from tyrannical violence.

Thus, Camilo Torres rooted, in the word of Paul: "For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of love and self-control"¹⁸ joined the ELN, Ejército de Liberación Nacional (national army of liberation) a guerrilla movement "on 19th October, 1965."¹⁹ Camilo opted to join ELN²⁰: since he was not able any longer to openly exercise the freedom to speak and to challenge peacefully the status quo. On "The 15th February, 1996 (Patio Cemento: Santander)

¹⁶ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Luke 4:18-21 (New Revised Standard Version)

¹⁷ Camilo Torres, *Cristianismo y revolución*, prologo, selección y notas de Oscar Maldonado, Guitemie Olivieri y German Zabala. (México: Ediciones Era, 1972), 36. The original text in Spanish is rendered as follow: "Los que piensan son castigados. La reacción se comienza a pasear por todo nuestro continente como si las mayorías no existieran. ¡Hasta cuando! ... ¡Pero la reacción mueve un de sus poderosos dedos y nos paraliza! No podemos seguir sin organización y sin armas iguales, por lo menos".

¹⁸ 2Tim. 1:7 9, The (Kingdom New Testament)

¹⁹ Eduardo Umaña Luna, *Camilo Vive* (Editorial Don Bosco, Barranquilla, 1996), 65.

²⁰ "The guerrilla group of Cuban orientation, the National Liberation Army (ELN) is born the 4th of July , 1964, and appears publically with overcoming of the Simacota's population (Santander) the 7th of January, 1965. Camilo considers of great importance to connect with this insurgent group and it achieves his objective through its urban network" Dario Martinez Morales, "Camilo Torres Restrepo, cristianismo y violencia," *Theologica Xaveriana*, vol. 61 No. 171, (2011): 137.; "El grupo guerrillero de orientación cubana, el Ejército de Liberación Nacional, ELN, nace el 4 de Julio de 1964, y aparece públicamente con la toma a la población de Simacota (Santander) el 7 de enero de 1965. Camilo considera de suma importancia conectarse con este grupo insurgente y lo logra por medio de sus redes urbanas." Ibid, 137.

in combat between the ELN and an Army patrol, fell mortally wounded the inexperienced combatant ... at 37 years of age.”²¹ F. Hylton explains that “Camilo Torres Restrepo, ... was promptly sent to his death in combat in early 1966. This provided liberation theology with its first martyr,”²² as after his death many priests, and Christian and non-Christian leaders have followed in his steps as revolutionaries in the whole of Latin America.

Colombian Context

Karl Marx²³ affirms that “men make their own history. But they do not simply make it to their own liking; they do not make it in circumstances chosen by them, but rather in circumstances which exist already and have been passed down to them from the past.”²⁴ Colombia as a country has not yet been able to make its own history, a history that will reflect the diversity of culture, race, gender, and freedom of style of life. The only real history we have been able to make involves those inexorable events of irruption and disruption as the resistance and negation of another history strange to the concept of human liberty; the history of inequalities, patriarchal prejudices, and socio-economic inequalities that have been not necessarily passed on to us, but rather imposed upon us.

The only true foundation of authentic history is the irruption that emerges from seeing a reality of despair and the disruption of a subjugated consciousness that refuses to accept that ignominious history. The undesired legacy made by unjust and egoistic false protagonists of the history of subjugation is the heritage of plunder we have obtained from the past. This condition still exists at the present time: the repression of the State against human rights activists, guerrilla attacks on vulnerable populations who have deflected their

²¹ Eduardo Umaña Luna, *Camilo Vive*, 65.

²² Forrest Hylton, *Evil Hour in Colombia* (London: Verso, 2006), 57-58.

²³ Karl Marx was a German philosopher, 1818 – 1883.

²⁴ Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Sobre la Religión*, ed. Hugo Assmann, Reyes Mate (Salamanca: Ediciones Sígueme, 1979), 221. The quote is taken from the Spanish “Los hombres hacen su propia historia, pero no la hacen en su libre arbitrio, bajo circunstancias elegidas por ellos mismos, sino bajo aquellas circunstancias con que se encuentran directamente, que existen y les han sido legadas por el pasado.” 221.

ideological political principles and compromised them by becoming allies of drug-traffics barons, the extra-judicial killing and displacement executed by the brutal paramilitary groups, who have killed thousands of Colombians in the past twenty years, the terrorist acts of the drug-traffic mafia organizations, and socially delinquent groups that vandalize neighbourhoods: all these sad situations exist in Colombian reality today. Also, Colombia is one of the five most violent countries in the world, one of the five leaders in the export of illicit drugs, one of the worst countries in regard to human rights violation, and the second country after Sudan with the most displaced people, displaced not by natural disasters but by the disaster of human cruelty, all contributing to a country with many people living in poverty and misery.

Nevertheless, hope is not totally lost, because people have become aware of how to question why and what are the real causes of poverty, violence and exclusion.

The Colombian Church in Camilo Torres' Time.

In a critical hour, Camilo Torres came to disrupt the complacent interpretation of the scriptures and the mission of both Protestant and Roman Catholic churches. The same political dominance and social injustices that pervaded Colombia were also emerging in other Latin American countries. For example, in 1956 on the island of Cuba, “the lawyer Fidel Castro began a political campaign against the dictator [Fulgencio Batista] with the Sierra Maestra.”²⁵ Eventually, after a hard and intensive fight, Castro overthrew the government of president Fulgencio Batista with an armed and aggressive revolution. “Mrg. Perez Serrantes, Archbishop of Santiago de Cuba, raised the voice of the Roman Catholic Church emphatically. On his deathbed, referring to the triumphant revolution led by Castro, he exclaimed: ‘All that is happening to us is providential. We believe more in our institutions

²⁵ Enrique Dussel, *The Church in Latin America 1492-1992* (Kent, Burns & Oates, NY: Orbis, 1992), 17.

than in Jesus Christ’.”²⁶ Those words of Mrg. Perez Serrantes announced the secular political faith of the population, which had been induced to believe in false constituents rather than in their confessed God. The revolutionary event in Cuba became politically paradigmatic for the whole of Latin America, which was in search of completely new socio-economic structures in order to provide necessary solutions for the problems of pervasive poverty. One must keep in mind that the chronology of events in the Castro Revolution went as follows: “Castro had entered Santiago on 2 January 1959 and on the eighth of January he was welcomed in triumph in Havana. In that same year—1959, Pope John XXIII announced the calling of a Council.”²⁷

Vatican II: A Preparation for a New Way of Doing Theology

From an ecclesiological perspective, the socio-theological significance of Vatican II²⁸ was an awakening of Christians to work for justice and peace. Generally speaking, in Cuba and other countries in Latin America, especially in Colombia, the Protestant churches and “the Catholic Church were an unjustifiable bastion of capitalist conservatism.”²⁹ The Christian Church, both Protestant and Roman Catholic in general, with few exceptions, was ignoring the reality of the poor and legitimating the status quo. However, shortly after Castro’s victory, an important event occurred in Rome. “John XXIII issued the encyclicals *Mater et Magistra* (1961) and *Pacem in Terris* (1963), which lent wings to the process of renewed political commitment in Latin America. The Pope himself had spoken of a ‘Church of the poor’.”³⁰ Indeed, these encyclicals reinforced the religious concepts of Camilo Torres.

²⁶ Ibid 17.

²⁷ Ibid. 17.

²⁸ “The Second Vatican Council began on October 11, 1962, and finally came to a close more than three years later on December 7, 1965.” Alfred T. Hennelly, *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History* (New York: Orbis, 1990), 39.

²⁹ E. Dussel, *The Church in Latin America*, 18.

³⁰ Ibid. 153.

Accordingly, a few years later, the events of the Cuban revolution, the reality of oppression in Colombia and Latin America, the papal encyclicals and Vatican II

prepared the ground for the central event in the Latin American Church in the twentieth century: the Second General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate [CELAM] in Medellin, on the theme of ‘The Church in the Present-day Transformation of Latin America [in Light of the Council]’.³¹

Also, concerning the gathering in Medellin, it is important to note that “a key actor in facilitating this influence was the dynamic Manuel Larrain, bishop of Talca, Chile, at whose suggestion the Latin American bishops decided to hold a meeting concerning the council at Medellin, Colombia, from August 26 to September 2, 1968.”³²

Thus, Pope John XXIII’s pronouncement, Vatican II, the Protestant movement ISAL³³, the Medellin event and other precursors including Christian revolutionary priests like Camilo Torres and Nestor Paez Zamora and secular revolutionaries like Fidel Castro and Che Guevara helped to shape an effervescent momentum that anticipated an advent that finally came, the arrival of liberation theology in Latin America.³⁴ Then, first the Medellin gathering, and subsequently Puebla opened the eyes of the Christian tradition to a new way and a new spirit of doing theology, and also a new way of being a Christian. The newness consisted in creating a different identity for the church, a theological reflection that would

³¹ Ibid, 154.

³² A. Hennesly, *Liberation Theology*. 39.

³³ ISAL was a Protestant movement in Latin America that promoted liberation theology.

³⁴ Liberation theology is well defined by G. Gutierrez: “Theology as critical reflection on historical praxis is a liberating theology, a theology of the liberating transformation of the history of mankind and also therefore that part of mankind – gathered into *ecclesia* – which openly confesses Christ... It is a theology which is open – in the protest against trampled human dignity, in the struggle against the plunder of the vast majority of people, in liberating love, and in the building of a new, just, and fraternal society – to the gift of the Kingdom of God.” In *A Theology of Liberation*, 15.

The following analysis is important to keep in mind if we want to understand the reality of the Church in Latin America, especially in Camilo Torres’ time. As Dussel reminds us: “there are three areas that can be classified as the main challenges facing the Church during this period. The first is that of the *people* of Latin America, seen as the historical subject of the evolution of society in history, as the social *bloc* whose ‘memory’ goes back beyond the arrival of the Spaniards and Portuguese in Latin America. The second was the challenge of whether to opt for reform alone, or also for revolution. The Cuban revolution of 1959 had shown the use of arms to be politically and ethically possible. The ‘socialist option’ was seriously discussed for the first time, with ‘Christians for Socialism’ in Chile. The third concerned the ‘model’ of the Church itself, or the way the Church sees its function in political and civil society. This was a matter, in CELAM’s thinking from 1963 to 1972, of spreading Christian witness *directly* to the people, to *the poor*.” See, E. Dussel, *The Church in Latin America*, 154-155.

turn eyes toward the poor with persevering love. Thus, according to Dussel, “the ‘theology of liberation’—the reflection of a whole generation of Latin American theologians..., formulated this historic ‘option of the poor,’ transforming the Church into the ‘Church of the poor’.”³⁵ This has challenged and will continue to challenge the other face of the church that had projected an image of high religiosity and defended a rigid conservative theology detached from the vulnerable population in Latin America and in other parts of the world.³⁶

Methodology and Structure

Our methodology will intentionally seek to build across the project a theological locus that will help us to elaborate basic ideas which contribute to a relevant understanding of current theological discussion about social justice and peace. Each of the first four chapters analyses in an interpretative manner a main topic in order to create a foundation for integrative ideas that are conducive to conclusions drawn in the final chapter. The whole project is a dynamic dialogue where concepts though sometimes defined, serve as guiding parameters, but are not a final product. We intend constantly to maintain a circularity in processing and interpreting main ideas, which for us helps to keep these ideas open to interpretation, rather than treating them in a final rationalizing manner. It’s important to note that in our thesis, we refer to the work of first and second generation liberation theologians.

Chapter 1 begins with a brief historical explanation of the Spanish *Conquista*, the event that gave rise to the exploitation of Latin America. Then a case study of Colombia is presented, focusing especially on the origin and development of internal conflict. We intend to explain how the assassination of the popular leader Jorge Eliecer Gaitan played a

³⁵ Ibid. 155.

³⁶ Another way of describing the church in time of Camilo Torres is well expressed by priest German Guzmán Campos as this: “Of big detraction – and undeniable – proceeds three historical aspects, diligently preached, defended and carefully kept. a) Predominance of a feudal clerical structure. b) Untouchable condition of privilege. c) Ingratiate with temporal structures, oligarchic, minorities, and omnipotent.” In *El Padre Camilo Torres*, 19. (my translation) All other translations from Spanish hereafter are mine, unless otherwise noted.

fundamental role in the socio-economic injustice, deterioration and disruption of internal peace in Colombia.

Chapter 2 aims to understand the dialectical tension between social injustice and the socio-theological positions of efficacious love in Camilo Torres' theology, that calls for the construction of a just social-economical order in the country.

Chapter 3 discusses two hermeneutical views. The hermeneutical perspectives are important because they help us to interpret the Scriptures in the light of the reality of exclusion and victimization. The first is a brief examination of Gadamer's concept of *Dasein*, with especial attention being given to the philosophical implication of that concept for an ethics of liberation that affirms the total personhood of the poor. Then, in a more elaborated fashion we analyse C. Boff's hermeneutics of liberation, seeking the theoretical foundation to interpret the Scriptures from the perspective of the poor.

Chapter 4 seeks primarily to discuss the basis of the Christian ethics of liberation in the task of building a moral commitment as essential imperative that promotes a loving approach to the "other," our neighbour.

Chapter 5 will attempt to integrate history, hermeneutics, ethics, and theology as discussed in the previous chapters with a mission of the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches that must promote not only personal, but socio-political conversion of the task of building peace with justice and in transforming the reality of exclusion, oppression and violence.³⁷

³⁷ As a Colombian I have been touched by the current situation of poverty, suffering and violent death in my country. Since I am part of this reality, and as a Christian impelled by the gospel of Christ, I would like to respond theologically to this sad reality, not only as an immediate academic requirement for the fulfilment of a doctoral program but ultimately as a personal ethical-moral commitment to promote social changes for the building of social justice in Colombia. As a researcher I am aware that my theological position is sometimes not necessarily objective but rather interpretative.

CHAPTER I: HISTORY OF CONFLICT IN COLOMBIA

Four or five years ago we worked with a new television channel that was covering the first large displacement from El Salado. The interviews – about how people were assassinated, how they used chain saws, how the children were rape – had a great impact. When the people called for help, the church did not know what to do. Missionaries taught about the relationship between God and the people, but not between people.³⁸

La Conquista

The purpose of this chapter is two-fold. First, it explores the historical impact that the so-called *La Conquista* imposed upon the social fabric of Colombia and Latin America. Second, it presents a case study of the development of violence and hostilities in Colombia. It describes the causes of the anguish and desperation of those who suffered and still suffer in Colombia, this oppressed condition having been produced by violence imposed by the political and economic elite.

The problems in Colombia have achieved a status of the total negation of ethics, where the human relationships necessary for peaceful living in communities have been changed by the imposition of intolerance, terror and disrespect for human life, even to the most grotesque and brutal manners of assassinations. Today, it is a relevant challenge to the Church, to walk alongside and to participate in the struggle of the victims.

Currently in Latin America, there is excessive social injustice, political coercion, and rampant poverty amongst the people; and in particular, these problems are pervasive and unimpeded in Colombia. In order to understand the development and causes of these social disorders, we need to analyse both the past and current history in Colombia.³⁹ We need,

³⁸ M. J. Roldan, “Cambios de Armas” in Virginia M. Bouvier, ed. *Colombia: Building Peace in a Time of War* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2009), 302.

³⁹ From a historical perspective, Gustavo Gutierrez comments: “The most recent years of Latin American history have been characterized by the discovery of the real-life world of the ‘other,’ of the poor and exploited

therefore, to examine critically the historical factors that caused such devastating and painful reality. The first historical event that played a crucial role in the destiny of Latin America took place in what Dussel describes as “*proto-history*.”⁴⁰ *Proto-history* distinguishes the social structure and indigenous world of the native Indian inhabitants before the arrival of the Spanish Conquerors.⁴¹ This world was a concrete and well-established civilization comprising millions of inhabitants with a totally defined culture.

The first historical event relevant to this study is the decisive episode called ‘Conquista,’⁴² which started in 1492.⁴³ For some historians, the encounter between the Spanish and Portuguese and the native Indians,⁴⁴ the people inhabiting the continent that we now call Latin America, was neither an encounter nor a discovery.⁴⁵

The Spanish came with the intention to colonize and to establish a geopolitical and economic project of expansion. It was not a diplomatic encounter between nations, but an

and their compelling needs.” See Gustavo Gutierrez, “Liberating Praxis and Christian Faith” in *Frontiers of Theology in Latin America*, ed. Rosino Gibellini (London, SCM Press LTD, 1979), 1; According to Gutierrez, history is a gift from God, framed by God’s grateful promises temporally and eschatologically, and for that reason, he clarifies that, “there are not two histories, one profane and one sacred, ‘juxtaposed’ or ‘closely linked.’ Rather there is only one human destiny, irreversibly assumed by Christ, the Lord of history...The historical destiny of humanity must be placed definitively in the salvific horizon.” in Gustavo Gutierrez, *Essential Writings*, ed. James B. Nickoloff (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 3rd printing, 2002), 79.

⁴⁰ Enrique Dussel, *Para una historia de la iglesia en América Latina*, (Barcelona: Editorial Nova Terra, 1975), 27. For an important historical description of the origin of Latin America and the components of its proto-history see *Ibid.*, 24-29.

⁴¹ For example on Aztec cosmology see: José Luis Rojas, *Los Aztecas: entre el dios de la lluvia y de la guerra*, ed. German Sánchez Ruiperez (Madrid: Ediciones Anaya, 1988); on Mayan see: Máximo Soto Hall, *Cultura maya: carácter y creaciones de esta gran civilización precolombina* (Buenos Aires: Atlántida, 1941); On Incan see: Waldemar Espinoza Soriano, *Los incas: economía, sociedad y estado en la era del Tahuantinsuyo* (La Victoria, Perú: Amaru Editores, 1987); A different world is found in the Amazonia, for Colombia, see: Ana Pizarro, *Amazonia: el río tiene voces* (Santiago de Chile: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2009).

⁴² For some of those historical moments, see Will Fowler, “Colonial Latin America,” in *The Cambridge History of Latin America, Volume 1, Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). Also see, Massimo Live Bacci, *Conquest: The destruction of the American Indians*, trans. Carl Ipsen (Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA, USA: Polity Press, 2008).

⁴³ Other commentators such as Gutiérrez have argued that it was not a conquest but an encounter between equal civilizations; see Gutiérrez, *En busca de los pobres de Jesucristo: el pensamiento de Bartolome de las Casas* (Lima, Perú: Instituto Bartolomé de las Casas-Rimac, 1992).

⁴⁴ Later the Indians were called “indigenous populations”; and in Spanish they are known as ‘pueblos originarios.’

⁴⁵ The term America was a linguistic creation by the 20th Century United States of America that assumes a position of exclusion.

invasion of unexpected violence that resulted in mass destruction and death.⁴⁶ Although historians still debate the number of native Indians before that unequal encounter, Gustavo Gutierrez indicates that “whatever the calculus of the original population of America, the fall of demography in the 70 or 80 years following shall not be considered less than a true collapse.”⁴⁷ Then he points out that

to this we add the devastation and subjection of cultures that for one reason or another could not resist the power and force of the invaders, the forced labour and the oppression by which the autochthonous nations were subdued, as well as the violent imposition of different ways of life imposed upon them.”⁴⁸

At this point, it is necessary to decode a history that has been perceived and interpreted through the epistemological lens of the oppressors. In this regard, Dussel tell us that there

exist two ways or attitudes to face the past: one is the *ingenuous* attitude; the other the *critical* one. The ingenuous attitude is the one which objectifies in the past the present meaning of the events. The critical attitude is the one that intends to recreate the conditions that made possible a historic event of the past.⁴⁹

Accordingly, the epistemic discourse that has pervasively dominated the true interpretation of the historical events that destroyed the Amerindian world has subtly covered up the genocide of the Amerindian population or the *novum mundum*, as it was called by Americo Vespucio.⁵⁰ Because Amerindia was not part of the historiography of the world in

⁴⁶ The number of deaths after the arrival of the Spaniards has been a subject of debate. According to Gutierrez, the approximate population “before the arrivals of the European was 57,300.000 people... thus, exist a consensus that by 1570, the Indian population of the America did not reach more than 8,907.150”. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Dios o el oro en las Indias: Siglo XVI* (Lima: Instituto Bartolome de las Casas CEP 95, 1989), 10.; The historian Indalecio Lievano Aguirre also points out that “the conquest and colonization of America will be an object of endless controversies as long as writers persist in describing it as a homogenous and rectilinear process rather than a dynamic conflict...” of destruction and annihilation. In *Los grandes conflictos sociales y económicos de nuestra historia Vol. I*. (Bogotá: Intermedio Editores, 2002), 21.

⁴⁷ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Dios o el oro en las Indias*, 10. “Sea cual fuere el cálculo que se acepte de la población original de América, la caída demográfica en los 70 u 80 años siguientes no puede dejar de ser considerada como un verdadero colapso”. Also is important to clarify that Gutierrez uses the designation “America” to the whole continent from Alaska to Patagonia, the southern part of the hemisphere. Nowadays it is distinguished as North, Central and South America. Euphemistically is wrong to call the United States, “America”.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 10.

⁴⁹ Enrique Dussel, “Hay dos maneras o actitudes de encarar lo pasado: una es la actitud ingenua; otra la crítica. La actitud ingenua es la que objetiva en el pasado el sentido presente de los acontecimientos. La actitud crítica es la que intenta recrear las condiciones que hicieron posible un acontecer histórico pasado.” In *Para una historia de la iglesia en América Latina*, 25-26.

⁵⁰ Italian sailor, who travelled at least twice to the new world. The term America was given to honour his name.

1492, that exclusion conferred a wrong geopolitical acknowledgement of its territorial existence. Regarding this observation, Rivera Pagan⁵¹ affirms: “To talk about the discovery, in an absolute and transcendental sense, would suppose the previous inexistence of human and cultural history in the founded lands, something absurd that will reveal a rooting and anachronic ethnocentrism.”⁵²

The mentality of the Spanish conquerors upon “discovering a new world” was justified theologically and accompanied with immoderate economic desires framed by a colonizing expansionist project. The theological rationale for their expansionism was attributed to a divine authority, as according to them, God was in support of their enterprise. Their economic ambitions were to obtain land for the King and Queen of Spain, along with an excessive desire to find gold. According to this mentality, “this immense territory recently found was a neglected world for many centuries and subjected to the amnesia of the demonic powers.”⁵³ However, what is at stake is the historical identity and sovereignty of America because it was not included in world history, but rather considered a new-world – land discovered by the Spaniards and Portuguese. According to this line of thought,

Columbus seems to have remained immersed in the medieval conception of the triad character of the earthly orb, the *orbis terrarum*. This notion is, truly, more of a theological character than cosmographic. It belongs to the large list of reflexes and images of the divine trinity, which occupied many medieval theologians.⁵⁴

Regarding the conception that Latin America was a new discovery for Europe, Rivera Pagan stresses that “this was the first time that the New World became identified as a fourth

⁵¹ Luis Rivera Pagan is a Puerto Rican scholar, author, and Emeritus Professor at Princeton Theological Seminary.

⁵² Luis N. Rivera Pagan, “Hablar de descubrimiento, en sentido absoluto y transcendental, supondría la existencia previa de historia humana y cultura en las tierras encontradas; algo absurdo que revelaría un arraigado y anacrónico etnocentrismo.” in *Evangelización y Violencia: La Conquista de América* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Semi, 1991), 9.

⁵³ Jorge Ruedas de la Serna, “Las tierras recién encontradas eran un mundo abandonado por espacio de varios siglos al demonio.” La representación americana como problema de identidad, in *Identidad Cultural Latinoamericana: Enfoques filosóficos literarios*, Colectivo de autores, Selección: Enrique Ubieta Gómez (La Habana: Editorial Academia, 1994), 28.

⁵⁴ Rivera Pagan, *Evangelización y Violencia*, 11.

continent, very distinct to the three already widely known”.⁵⁵ Thus of sufficient historiographical importance to be included in global mapping, the whole concept of *conquista* implies the moral authority to expropriate the new land, out of the ownership of the demons. This has a significant anthropological repercussion, because it implies that the Indian people did not have souls. Hence, to mercilessly rape the women, commit murder, submit the people to hard labour, and ultimately destroy their culture were justified by the theological premise of the Indian people not having a soul. The colonial pillage and triumphalism rooted its ambition in a situation of flagrant contradictions, thus “it would flow into the strange condition of celebrating a colossal incoherence between event and consciousness, reality and interpretation”.⁵⁶ Thus, the whole concept of *conquista* was based upon a pretentious and false hermeneutics.

Christianity in Colombia has been lived and performed in a dualistic fashion. This is the inevitable result of the influence of the general understanding inherited from the anthropological doubt of the *Conquistadores*. They proposed the absurd question: is the Indian a person? Hence, this had repercussions up on establishing the sharp definition that the soul has only to do with supernatural experiences with a God who is far away and above human reality. This interpretation, though totally ominous, became epistemologically constitutive for a solid ground upon which to create a distinction between persons, class division and ultimately a justification of oppression. Class division was also established and juxtaposed onto a scale of merit, from those without a soul (the Indians) to the other end and those of pure soul (the Spaniards). This way the body of the Indian became a secular object for exploitation, the bodies of women easy targets for all kinds of abuse, the African descendant as an object of slavery. This background permeated a culture that viewed as normal the idea of inferior and superior people. This false worldview generated a foundation

⁵⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 9.

for violence and oppression in Colombia: thus, Colombia is a country that doesn't have peace, and has instead a disordered state of mind and attitude.

However, the Indian people were not only the ones oppressed. The human trade in Africans who were brought as slaves was another act of inhuman calamity. The Indian-people had found religious and political advocacy in Fray Bartolome de Las Casas. According to Gutierrez, the relevance of questioning the condition of the oppressed of Latin America today found a historical echo in the missionary work of Las Casas: "those questions were the ones being asked, in one or other fashion, back in the sixteenth century by Bartolome de Las Casas and many others once they had come into contact with the native Americans".⁵⁷ Gutierrez furthermore states that "at the very beginning of the evangelization of Latin America Bartolome de Las Casas preached a God who is alive amid the situation of death that was evident even then".⁵⁸ Gutierrez, who lifted up the work and life of Las Casas, comments that "Las Casas had the deep intuition to see in the Indian person, the other of the western world, the poor according to the Gospel, whose condition acquires an unusual and profound exigency".⁵⁹ However when referring to the work and advocacy of Las Casas regarding the Indian people, it should be remembered that Las Casas neglected the condition of the African people brought by the Spaniards, who were subjected as slaves to hard labour and cruelty. An important analysis made by Luis N. Rivera Pagan, who discusses the already existing allegations that Las Casas contributed to the slave trade into Latin America and the Caribbean, is worthy of consideration. Rivera Pagan comments "during the sixteenth century there existed plenty theological, juridical and philosophical defences of the freedom of the

⁵⁷ G. Gutierrez, *The Truth Shall Make Free: Confrontations*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990), 7.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 116.

⁵⁹ G. Gutiérrez, *Dios o el oro*, 175. "Las Casas tuvo la penetrante intuición de ver en el indio, en ese otro del mundo occidental, al pobre según el Evangelio, cuya condición adquiere así una inusitada y profunda exigencia".

Indian people, but none about the black slave. The disparity is overwhelming”.⁶⁰ Also he explains that “the attitude of Bartolome de Las Casas regarding the black slavery constitutes one of the more controversial elements for his historians, impartial individuals, apologists and detractors”.⁶¹ The main accusation is that Las Casas supported the slavery of Africans to lessen the labour of the Indians. A critical assertion summing up the allegations about the apparent indifference of Las Casas regarding the African slaves was made by Deive, and cited by Rivera Pagan thus:

certainly, Las Casas in pursuit of advocacy for the slavery of the black person, confesses his culpability for considering that this is as unjust as that of the Indian person, but no indication exists that permits one to assume that the most fervent defender of the Indian person condemned publically the subjection of the African person.⁶²

Rivera Pagan also cites the opinion advanced by José Martí:

because is true that Las Casas, through his love for the Indians, advised in the beginning of the conquest [*conquista*] that it should continue to bring black slaves, who resist better the hot temperature; but after he saw them suffering, he made a confession: ‘with my blood I would like to pay the sin of that advice that I gave for the love of the Indians!’⁶³

The strong critique that “If on other occasions the church committed itself to defend some interests of the Indians, that did not occur with the blacks. In other terms: it was not the official policy of the church to defend the blacks”.⁶⁴ This assessment keeps the debate continuing, because Las Casas is perceived as partially in favour of the Indian people only.

⁶⁰ Luis N. Rivera Pagan *Evangelización y violencia*, 310.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 310.

⁶² *Ibid.* 319. “Ciertamente, Las Casas tras abogar por la esclavitud del negro, se confiesa culpable de ello por considerar que esta es tan injusta como la del indio, pero no existe indicación de ninguna clase que permita suponer que el más ferviente defensor del indio condenó públicamente la sujeción del africano”.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 326. “porque es verdad que Las Casas, por el amor de los indios, aconsejo al principio de la conquista que se siguiese trayendo esclavos negros, que resistían mejor el calor; pero luego que los vio padecer, se golpeaba el pecho, y decía: ‘con mi sangre quisiera pagar el pecado de aquel consejo que di por mi amor a los indios!’”.

⁶⁴ Fernando Mires, *La colonización de las almas: Misión y conquista en Hispanoamérica* (San José, Costa Rica, Departamento Ecueménico de Investigaciones (DEI) 1987), 219. “Si en algunas ocasiones la iglesia se comprometió en la defensa de algunos intereses de los indios, ello no ocurrió en el caso de los negros. En otros términos: no fue política oficial de la iglesia la defensa de los negros”.

Nevertheless, Las Casas is considered by some historians as a liberator and a person that devoted his life to fighting injustice.

A Preliminary Historical Background Description of the Socio-Political Situation of Colombia

After centuries of domination by Spain of Colombia and all Latin America, people wanted to liberate themselves from tyranny and oppression, thus “between 1809 and 1825 the hemisphere was engulfed in a wave of revolution that destroyed the Spanish empire in the Indies. Colony after colony rebelled, disowning peninsular rule and establishing independent governments.”⁶⁵

Then, after Colombia obtained independence from the oppressive Spanish regime through revolution on 20th July, 1810, the Spanish descendants born in Colombia and some Mestizos (a mixed race of Spaniards and Indians) took control of the country. They rapaciously expropriated the wealth of the land, as they extracted gold, usurped the minerals, and took other natural resources, through subjecting the poor to hard labour for their own purposes. According to Robert Dix, “The overwhelming majority of Colombians are of course neither of the upper class nor of the middle sectors. Approximately 75 to 80 per cent constitute what are euphemistically called the ‘popular’ classes.”⁶⁶ This has been the situation for many decades up to the present time. The popular classes are basically the poor; those people who live below the minimum line of poverty. Thus, since the beginning of the country and after its independence, the oligarchy had purposely established different social strata where the majority were the poor. Since then, many generations were born poor and lived in poverty, and consequently, many died in misery or were brutally killed.

⁶⁵ Rebecca A. Earle, *Spain and the Independence of Colombia 1810-1825* (Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 2000), 2.

⁶⁶ Robert H. Dix, *Colombia: The Political Dimensions of Change* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967), 63.

The Colombian author Eduardo Pizarro Leongómez mentions that “some authors have affirmed that Colombia is a typical example of a ‘State on its way to failure.’”⁶⁷ The Colombian oligarchy and the political economic system have been corrupt and oppressive to the common people. The outcome is the inevitable reality of poverty, injustice, internal conflicts, and oppression. Colombia’s oligarchy has maintained that exact situation for approximately two centuries. The social environment had become worse during the last 50 years (1960 - to the present); hence, the poor are the ones that suffer the most. The deplorable internal reality of marginalization and exclusion is neither an accident nor part of any destiny; rather, it is the direct result of the social and economic injustice perpetuated by rich families and corrupt politicians.

The oligarchic system in Colombia has always operated with an impulsive wish to subjugate the people. In order to stay in power, the ruling class in Colombia utilized the ‘*compra de votos*’ (purchase of votes) to get elected. This has been a practice that began to intensify in 1950, and has prevailed until today. Politicians take advantage of people who are illiterate, and therefore, are unfortunately ignorant of the political situation. They also mislead people who are desperately seeking jobs or need help to rectify urgent needs. The politicians offer money to the most disadvantaged people in society and make diverse kinds of promises to the middle class people with economic difficulties. The priest, Camilo Torres, denounced this illegality by observing that “The electoral apparatus is in the hands of the oligarchy. Therefore, those who count the votes are the electors, the ones who determine the victor. The elections are decided more in the offices of the oligarchic government than in the voting booths.”⁶⁸ After the leaders are elected, they do not fulfil their promises; but even worse, they take the opportunity to rob the public funds, taking money from public contracts,

⁶⁷ Eduardo Pizarro Leongómez, *Una democracia asediada: balance y perspectivas del conflicto armado en Colombia* (Bogotá: Editorial Norma, 2004), 206.

⁶⁸ Alvarez Garcia and Restrepo Calle, *Camilo Torres: Priest and Revolutionary: Political Programme and Messages to the Colombian People*, trans. Virginia M. O’Grady (London: Lowe & Brydone, 1968), 70.

and expending funds in an indiscriminate manner on luxurious expenditures, unnecessary trips, and the abuse of governmental resources and commodities.

We should keep in mind that Colombia has more than 3.7 million people displaced violently from their own communities, and this phenomenon has dislocated and affected other presumably stable communities.⁶⁹ Also, Colombia is experiencing an armed conflict that has become an internal war and that has caused many horrific deaths.

A General Introduction to the Context of Armed Conflicts and Violence

The contemporary genesis of the violent conflict in its first stage began with approximately 19 years of permanent confrontation: “an era of violence between Liberal and Conservative Partisans that took the lives of some 180,000 Colombians from about 1946 to 1965 and is considered the beginning of the current conflict.”⁷⁰ The internal conflict⁷¹ is viewed as pervasive and old. “Colombia is currently constituted as one of the few cases in the world of what has been denominated “prolonged armed conflict.”⁷² The current situation of violence in Colombia, as we have emphasized above, has persisted over at least the last fifty years. The present situation of violence has taken a sharp turn from partisan disagreement and political passion to an acute violent conflict of extermination due to human greed and corrupt desire for money and power. We call this the epistemological turn to violence in Colombia.⁷³

⁶⁹ See e.g. Diego Otero Prada, *Las cifras del conflicto colombiano* (Bogotá: INDEPAZ, 2007); Eduardo Posada Carbo, *La violencia y sus causas objetivas* (Mimeo, Fundación Ideas para la Paz, 2002); Gonzalo Sánchez, *Guerras, memoria e historia* (Medellín: Editorial La Carreta Histórica 2006).

⁷⁰ Virginia M. Bouvier, *Colombia: Building Peace in a Time of War* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2009), 9.

⁷¹ Ibid. 3. Bouvier describes the sentiment of people she encountered during her academic lectures and research about Colombia, as a country submerged in a culture and a society of “war, violence, drugs, kidnapping, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) – Colombia’s largest guerrilla group – arms, paramilitaries, child soldiers, corruption, sexual exploitation, and trafficking in women.”

⁷² Eduardo Pizarro Leongómez, *Una Democracia Asediada*, 29. “Colombia constituye en la actualidad uno de los pocos casos que restan en el mundo de lo que se ha denominado “conflictos armados prolongados.”

⁷³ The result of this epistemological turn has caused more than “17% per cent of unemployment, an informal economy of 58% per cent, and an absolute poverty of a population of six millions of poor that are dying with less than one dollar daily.” Alberto Parra, *Violencia Total y paz real* (Bogotá: Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, 2010), 22. The following is the original text in Spanish “En ese mismo lapso, los índices de desempleo en el país no descendieron del 17%, los de informalidad no bajaron del 58% ni los de la pobreza absoluta dejaron de cobijar a seis millones de pobres que “mueren” en la nación con menos de un dólar diario.”

The judicial apparatus does not have the capacity to guarantee the absence of all kinds of pernicious violence in society for the whole population.

Political Influences of the Origin of the Colombian Conflict

Conflicts and violence have unfortunately been part of the entire Colombian identity. That reality has a long history: “civil war and poverty appear to have been the two most important variables in the internal dynamics of nineteenth-century Colombian society”.⁷⁴ Thus, the twentieth century inherited these social effects, giving rise to even more complex and profound social conflicts. The authors G. Sanchez⁷⁵ and D. Meertens⁷⁶ rightly affirm that “each one of the innumerable civil wars left a paradoxical continuity in the structures of domination and a clear delimitation of certain basic identities of the two traditional political groups: the Liberal and Conservative Parties”.⁷⁷ Those two political parties have continued to hold power until the recent years of Colombian political history. As noted by Pecaut “those nineteenth-century wars appear to have been caused by a disturbing irrationality that characterized these two large political forces as subcultures of daily life more than as parties”.⁷⁸ Such irrationality of the two parties had set the foundation for the beginning and escalation of violence, social injustice, economic disparities and poverty for the twentieth century in Colombia. According to F. Safford⁷⁹ and M. Palacios⁸⁰ “this history begins with the Violencia, capitalized to indicate a specific period. Thus written, the term refers to a

⁷⁴ Gonzalo Sánchez and Donny Meertens, *Bandits, Peasants, and Politics: The Case of “La Violencia” in Colombia* trans. Alan Hynds (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 9.

⁷⁵ Gonzalo Sanchez is a Colombian Professor of History at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia.

⁷⁶ Donny Meertens is Professor of Gender and Development Studies at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 9.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 9.

⁷⁹ Frank Safford is professor of Economic History at Northwestern University, US.

⁸⁰ Marco Palacios is Professor of Latin American history in the Centro de Estudios Históricos at El Colegio de México.

series of regional and local processes in the period from 1946 to 1964, although its greatest destructive force was released between 1948 and 1953”.⁸¹ The same authors comment that

seen as a national political process, the Violencia resulted from two interwoven causes: first, from an aggressive confrontation of elites of opposing parties seeking to impose through the national state a model of modernization, conforming to conservative or, contrarily, liberal norms; and, second, from a local partisanship that affected people of all groups, classes, and large regions of the country.⁸²

Further, from an external source “the Cold war exacerbated the Liberal-Conservative division from the top to the bottom of society.”⁸³ Thus it seems clear that the “violence” after 1946 was the result of political violence as an instrument of oppression and domination by the Colombian oligarchy. A historical account that summarizes the violence in Colombia is described by Safford and Palacios in four chronological phases, as follows:

First Phase.

This is the phase of violence of political partisanship that began in the electoral campaigns of 1945-1946 and ended in 1953, with the amnesty and programs of pacification offered by the military government of General Rojas Pinilla. This was a germinal period, covering much of the national territory, which sowed the field with myths, representations, and modes of behaviour that would be harvested in later phases.

Second Phase.

From 1954 to 1964, the violence occurred through partisan and factional networks. But it operated by interfering with the supply of labor on coffee farms and with coffee and land markets. Since this was a means of redistribution and social ascent, we may call it “mafia violence,” following the interpretive suggestions of Eric Hobsbawm. This “mafia phase” was largely limited to the coffee slopes of the Central and Western Cordilleras, principally the northern part of the Cauca Valley and the greater Caldas region. But in this phase there also occurred armed struggles of an agrarian and Communist sort in southern Tolima and in the Sumapaz massif, some of which may be considered direct antecedents of the *guerrillero* period.

Third Phase.

A period whose signature is the guerrilla of the left, this phase started at the beginning of the 1960s, under the impact of the Cuban Revolution, and lasted until the end of the 1980s, when the Soviet system collapsed. Although the period is framed in these dates of the Cold War and the guerrillas identified themselves with Leninist, Guevarist, or Maoist postulates, the explanatory factors are really internal. One of the most important factors was the dynamism of the colonization process on eight frontiers. But the violent deaths that occurred in this process had an insignificant impact on the total number of homicides in the country.

⁸¹ Frank Safford and Marco Palacios Colombia: *Fragmented Land, Divided Society* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 345.

⁸² *Ibid.* 345.

⁸³ *Ibid.* 345.

Fourth Phase.

The fourth phase begins toward the end of the 1980s and still continues. It is characterized by a fluid combination of theaters of insurrectional war of low intensity and mafia wars. In this picture converge, variously in time and place, drug-traffickers, guerrillas, and paramilitaries. These are intermixed, in alliance or in conflict, with clientelistic politicians, cattle-owners, the military, and the police.⁸⁴

These accounts four phases explain how the conflict has developed and the repercussions on the long conflict and violence in Colombia in the twenty-first century.

Most academic scholars, journalists and historians agree upon common factors that precipitated violence and internal conflicts in Colombia, especially the ambiguous and counterproductive rivalry between the Liberals and Conservatives parties. Thus, M. Chernick⁸⁵ affirms, political rivalry is a fundamental factor, and he also affirms that “alongside five decades, the violence continuously stopped and started. More than 200,000 Colombians died in the first phase of the violence –*La Violencia*–, between 1948 and 1958, historically considered a partisanship civil war between liberals and conservatives”.⁸⁶ Also from Chernick’s perspective “the violence expanded because a confluence of structural, institutional and social conditions, that inflamed the social hostilities, accentuated the inequalities and stimulated bloodshed with no commitment to change or reform”.⁸⁷ Another perspective is offered by Orlando Fals Borda in the introduction of the important book *La Violencia en Colombia*, where he makes a conceptual socio-political analysis of the violence in Colombia, stressing that

Among the thesis, hypothesis and credible constructs available concerning the Colombian violence it is found: the *structural cracking*; ... the *regional claims*, as counter violence with regard to national or external powers that do not recognise them; the *objective or structural causes*, like poverty and generalized exploitation

⁸⁴ Ibid. 346-347.

⁸⁵ Marc Chernick, is associate professor and researcher in Georgetown University in Washington D.C.

⁸⁶ Marc Chernick “La negociación de una paz entre múltiples formas de violencia” in *Los laberintos de la guerra: Utopías e incertidumbres sobre la paz*. Ed. Francisco Leal Buitrago (Santafé de Bogotá Tercer Mundo S.A., 1999), 8. The text is from a Spanish version “A lo largo de cinco décadas, la violencia ha ido y venido. Más de 200.000 colombianos perecieron en la primera fase de la violencia - La Violencia - entre 1948 y 1958, que históricamente se considera una guerra civil partidista entre liberales y conservadores”.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 9. The original text says “la violencia se difundió debido a una confluencia de condiciones estructurales, institucionales y sociales que inflamaron las hostilidades sociales, acentuaron las inequidades y estimularon el derramamiento de sangre y no el compromiso o la reforma.”

and wealth without social consciousness that are conducive to just wars; the *subjective factors* related to an ideology and the rational and revolutionary choice of armed actors, like guerrillas; the *frustration of expectations*, like the peasants and marginal tenant farmer; the *total and partial crisis of the State*, or the weak State, and the lack of legitimacy in the monopoly of force; the progressive *multidimensional character* of the *spiral of violence*; the existence of a *culture and a genetic disposition of violence*, applicable according to regions; the *imbalance* between the political-ideological guidance and the popular military leadership; the *inexistence of public or institutional spaces for conflict resolutions*; the *moral crisis* and the *generational rupture*, as a result of the impact of external forces that ends in a *pathological violence* with mafias, genocides and hired assassins; the *relation between the capitalist expansion and the armed conflict*, with the resulting arms race and the arms forces as a self-interest; and so on and so forth.⁸⁸

A full description of the context that precipitated the conflict and violence in

Colombia is given by Bernardo Tovar Zambrano⁸⁹ and he affirms

At the first glance, it would seem that the intervention of the state in those social contexts would be highly significant, and that it would have corresponded both to the quality as well as the magnitude of the social needs. Nevertheless, the situation of the popular classes at the end of 1940 demonstrates the opposite: that the fulfilments of the State, despite what they imply as progress, were very far from alleviating at least the distressing life conditions of the popular classes. The conditions even tended to worsen with the capitalist development, with the population growth, with the migrations and the urban agglomeration, and with the inflation and the high cost of living of those years.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ German Guzmán Campos, Orlando Fals Borda, Eduardo Umaña Luna *La violencia en Colombia*, Tomo II (Bogotá, Taurus, 2005), 13. The citation is from the original in Spanish “Entre las tesis, hipótesis y constructos verosímiles disponibles sobre la violencia colombiana se encuentran: la del *agrietamiento estructural* ... la de las *reivindicaciones regionales*, como contraviolencia ante poderes nacionales o externos que no las reconocen; la de *causas objetivas o estructurales*, como la pobreza y explotación generalizadas y la riqueza sin conciencia social que llevan a guerras justas; la de *factores subjetivos* relacionados con la ideología y la elección racional y revolucionaria de actores armados, como las guerrillas; la de la *frustración de expectativas*, como las de los campesinos y colonos marginales; la de la *crisis total y parcial del estado*, o del Estado débil, y la falta de legitimidad en el monopolio de la fuerza; la del progresivo *carácter multidimensional* de la *espiral de la violencia*; la de la existencia de una *cultura y de una genética de la violencia*, aplicable según regiones; la del *desfase* entre la dirección político-ideológica y la conducción militar popular; la de la *inexistencia de espacios públicos o institucionales de resolución de conflictos*; la de la *crisis moral* y la *ruptura generacional*, por impacto de fuerzas extrañas que llevan a una *violencia patológica* con mafias, genocidios y sicarios; la de la *relación entre la expansión capitalista y el conflicto armado*, con el consiguiente armamentismo y los ejércitos como interés. creado; etcétera, etcétera”.

⁸⁹ Tovar Zambrano is a historian and author, professor of the History Department of the Universidad Nacional in Bogota, Colombia.

⁹⁰ Bernardo Tovar Zambrano “Modernización y desarrollo desigual de la inversión estatal 1914-1946” in *Pasado y presente de la violencia en Colombia*, Gonzalo Sánchez y Ricardo peñaranda, Compiladores (Medellín: La Carreta Histórica, 2009), 194. “A primera vista, parecía que la intervención del Estado en aquellos ámbitos sociales presentase una alta significación, y que hubiese correspondido tanto a la calidad como a la magnitud de las necesidades sociales. Empero, la situación de las clases populares a fines de los años cuarenta, demuestra todo lo contrario: que las realizaciones del Estado, pese a lo que ellas implican de avance, estaban muy lejos de aliviar siquiera las penosas condiciones de vida de las clases populares, condiciones que inclusive tendían a agravarse con el mismo desarrollo capitalista, con el crecimiento de la población, con las migraciones y la aglomeración urbana, con la inflación y el alto costo de la vida de esos años”.

The author Daniel Pécaut⁹¹ introduces the idea of a political dualism “*amigo-enemigo*”: that in our view, at the final analysis, the conceptualization betrayed the political sentiment of the common class and favoured the oligarchy. He argues that “the struggle for power between the two traditional parties constitutes the bottom line plot, from which it establishes one division *friend-enemy*, which goes through almost all society”.⁹² Nevertheless Pécaut points out the negative weight of the conservative ideology, and he remarks

The role of the conservative government on the unleashing of the conflict is considerable, and therefore, this is nurtured from the top [leaders] and it is partially centralised, but it exacerbates at the same time as it is decentralised and is assumed for the antagonisms that come from [classes of the] bottom .⁹³

For this reason we conclude that the origin of the violence in Colombia in the twentieth century was precipitated by the two political parties, to safeguard the economic interests of the Colombian oligarchy and to keep the majority of the population oppressed.

Also Pécaut is right when he affirms that “the elites of the two political parties find themselves most of the time on the same side, from the very moment in which the social mobilization threatens to escape from them”.⁹⁴ Therefore, the *amigo* side came to the surface in favour of the two parties, whereas the *enemigo* consequences affect the poor social classes. The result of this double-standard political game was historically evident, for instance as Pécaut points out, “this occurred because of the vast populist movement led by Gaitán and in relation to the urban riots that followed his assassination in 1948”.⁹⁵ Also, the Colombian oligarchy manipulated the larger political context, as explained by Pécaut: “On

⁹¹ Daniel Pécaut is a French’ sociology scholar, have taught at the Universidad Nacional in Colombia.

⁹² Daniel Pécaut, *La experiencia de la violencia: Los desafíos del relato y la memoria* (Medellín: La Carreta Histórica 2013), 148. The text from the Spanish says “La lucha por el poder entre los dos partidos tradicionales constituye la trama de fondo a partir de la cual se instaura una división *amigo-enemigo*, que atraviesa casi toda la sociedad”.

⁹³ Ibid. 148. “El rol del gobierno conservador en el desencadenamiento del conflicto es considerable y, por consiguiente, éste se alimenta desde lo alto y se encuentra parcialmente parcializado, pero se exagera a medida que se descentraliza y es asumido por los antagonismos que provienen de abajo”.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 149. “Las élites de los dos partidos se encuentran la mayor parte del tiempo del mismo lado, desde el momento en que la movilización social amenaza con escapárseles”.

⁹⁵ Ibid. 149. “Así ocurrió frente al auge del vasto movimiento populista dirigido por Gaitán y frente a los levantamientos urbanos que siguieron a su asesinato en 1948.”

the atmosphere of the cold war, those same elites supported each other when confronted by the communist threat to dismantle systematically the trade unions and other popular organizations”.⁹⁶

A Pivotal Cause of the Conflict in Colombia

Thus, the year of 1948 marks an important event in the present history of the country. The poor social working classes had begun to express their concern about the hardship of their condition, and the big gap between the small minority of rich and the great majority of poor people and the “irrationality of the two parties”, and this was followed by the emergence of a popular leader. Hence, “Jorge Eliecer Gaitán, a Liberal and radical politician with socialist ideas, took up the standard of popular discontent implicit in the recognition of that gap”.⁹⁷ Thus

the critical question was what role the subordinate classes would play in the subsequent socio-political process. Following the one-year interim presidency of Alberto Lleras Camargo, Mariano Ospina Perez’s “National Union” government, under the slogan “Revolution of Order,” thrust itself on the national stage, openly calling on dominant classes to regroup, regardless of party affiliation. Any attempt to independently organize a popular movement, especially among the working class, was proscribed through various repressive measures, such as banning urban protests, ordering massive layoffs, and dismantling the most combative labor unions. Gaitán for his part, called for “the people” to unite against both the Liberal and the Conservative oligarchy, and with his defiant and characteristic cry of “Change!” he triggered social and political unrest unparalleled in the nation’s history⁹⁸.

Hence, Gaitán became a recognised popular leader who was determined to struggle for, and in favour of, the oppressed majority and to change the structures of economic injustice. Hence,

the system began to shake, apparently, with the populist challenge of Jorge Eliecer Gaitán in 1944 – 1948, intertwined with the partisan violence that accompanied the fall of the Liberal Republic in the presidential election of 1946. In this election there were two Liberal candidates, Gabriel Turbay, the official party nominee, and the

⁹⁶ Ibid. 149. “En el ambiente de la Guerra fría, estas mismas élites se apoyaron muy pronto en la amenaza comunista para desmantelar sistemáticamente los sindicatos y otras organizaciones populares”.

⁹⁷ G. Sánchez, D. Meertens, *Bandits, Peasants, and Politics*, 11.

⁹⁸ Ibid. 12.

dissident Gaitán. A divided Liberal vote permitted the Conservative candidate, Mariano Ospina Perez, to win with only 41.4 percent of the vote.⁹⁹

Gaitán continued his opposition to the Colombian oligarchy,

Gaitán's populist movement had its foundation in the urban growth and inflation of the 1940s, which provided conditions propitious for mass mobilizations and popular demands. Gaitán exploited the effects of inflation, condemned those who had become wealthy by hoarding food in time of scarcity, and attacked the ostentation of the rich. Gaitán's effectiveness in rallying mass support intimidated Conservatives and the upper classes in general.¹⁰⁰

Thus, "the development of a populist movement under Gaitán was cut off by his assassination in 1948".¹⁰¹ The consequences of his assassination, brought chaos, destruction, and many deaths, and the inauguration and the ideological turn of the period that have been called *La Violencia*, which lasted for more than fifty years.¹⁰² However, the question still remains today, why was Gaitán killed and who was responsible? The seminal book *La Violencia* suggested the following four possible theses:

First: It was a crime committed by the oligarchy.

Second: The communists planned the assassination and the riot.

Third: It was a political crime. The order came from a high political dignitary.

Fourth: Behind the scenes there was great economic self-interest on the part of the powerful oil companies.¹⁰³

Another point of view suggests that

many have suspected that Gaitán was the victim of a plot – variously attributed to Conservatives, orthodox Liberals, or Communists ... But the multitudes who had placed their faith in Gaitán certainly believed there had been a plot from the moment

⁹⁹ F. Safford, *Colombia: Fragmented Land*, 316.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 317.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 317.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* "The mass reaction produced one of the most destructive, massive, and bloody riots in Latin American history. Hundreds of government and religious buildings and private homes were demolished by mobs; hundreds of stores were sacked; the rioters burned the trolleys and automobiles that they found in their way. But they could not take the presidential palace. The next morning, when President Mariano Ospina Perez announced to the country that he had reached an accord with the Liberals to form a bipartisan government, hundreds of cadavers already were piled in the capital's Central Cemetery. Most went into a common grave. Such rioting was replicated in many cities and towns. Those episodes of April 9 mark a point of departure in Colombian politics and in the course of the *Violencia*". 348.

¹⁰³ German Guzmán Campos, *La Violencia*, 420. This is the text in Spanish "Primera: Fue un crimen de las oligarquías. Segunda: El comunismo urdió el asesinato y planeo la asonada. Tercera: Fue un crimen político. La orden vino de los altos jefes políticos. Cuarta: Entre bastidores se mueven grandes intereses de poderosas compañías petroleras.

they heard the news of his death. “They killed Gaitán:” They, the oligarchs; they, the Conservative government.¹⁰⁴

A direct affirmation was made by Jaime Bateman Cayón, the leader and one of the principal founders of the M 19 revolutionary guerrilla movement, when he said “Gaitán was assassinated by the oligarchy because he wanted to establish democracy”.¹⁰⁵

The answers have a hermeneutical character that rules out any ideological and political speculation, thus interpreting the historical context and the history of systematic oppression determines the answer to who and why Gaitán was killed.

Development of the Conflict during the Past Fifty Years: Different Actors in the Conflict

According to Chernick three periods of violence have existed in Colombia, which differs slightly from the four phases posed by Safford and Palacios above. He categorizes it this way: “Period 1 La Violencia, (1946-1957). Period 2 Conflict of low intensity, (1964-1984). Period 3 Multipolar violence intensified, (1985-)”.¹⁰⁶ The development of the Colombian conflict over the last fifty years had a socio-political context: the hegemony of the two political parties, liberal and conservative, keeping the lower classes in poverty and without hope of a better and dignified life. In this context the guerrilla movements emerged.¹⁰⁷ Thus, regarding the new period, it is considered that

¹⁰⁴ F. Safford, *Colombia: Fragmented Land*, 348.

¹⁰⁵ Patricia Lara, *Siembra vientos y recogerás tempestades*, 79. “A Gaitán lo asesinó la oligarquía. Y lo mató porque él quería instaurar la democracia”.

¹⁰⁶ Marc Chernick *Acuerdo posible: Solución negociada al conflicto armado colombiano* (Bogotá Ediciones Aurora, 2008), 156-157.

¹⁰⁷ E. Zuleta offers a description of the ideological emergence of the most prominent guerrillas groups of Colombia, as follows: “Since the middle of the sixties some guerrilla groups were created in the country that have different ideological emphasis, but whose common denominator is the struggle against the system, different from the guerrillas of the fifty decade, that fought against the government. The Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) was organized in 1964 under the strong influence of the pre-Soviet traditional party, taking as its foundation the peasant communities derived from the violence of the fifties, which were harassed by the national army in the period of the National Front. This is, among the Colombian guerrilla movements, the one with a major component of peasants between its leaders and its militants and with a major tradition in their zones of influence. It is also the one that has most persevered on the peace accords, the most organizationally cohesive and within which it is easy to achieve accords, taking as warranty measures of agrarian reform.

the evolution of the *Violencia* that we had pointed out in the initial years of the National Front precluded the character of the conflicts that are going to re-emerge few years later, and such evolution evidences profound differences: it is the need to distinguish the foundational moment of the emerging of the new guerrilla movements, still under the National Front, from the expansive period in the beginning of the eighties decade, its military strengthening at the end of the eighties and beginning of the nineties and its evolution since them until the present time, that is the case with the FARC.¹⁰⁸

Causes of the Conflict in the Present

Now is very important to note that since the end of the cold war, violence in Colombia has taken a different turn and dynamics. According to Pécaut

with an extension of more than 30 years, the violence's phenomenon has suffered transformations more or less pronounced. But these transformations rotate around of some major plots, at the same time heterogeneous plots that interfere between themselves.¹⁰⁹

These four plots, according to Pécaut, could be summarized as follow: In the first plot the guerrilla groups achieved important objectives, but with the modernization of the Colombian armed forces and the strengthening of the illegal paramilitary organizations and through the financial aid of the United States under the program called Plan Colombia and

The Ejercito de Liberacion Naciona (ELN) it was formed in 1965, taking as an organizing, ideological and strategic model, the Cuban revolution. Most of its members came from the middle classes of the university students, and curiously, the organization seems to have specialized in the recruitment of priests. Here fought and died the priest Camilo Torres, the priest Domingo Lain, and, led by a priest, Manuel Perez.

The Ejercito Popular de Liberacion (EPL) was formed as the armed arm of the Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) Mao line, but in 1980 broke up with the Maoism, convinced that more important than the guerrilla warfare was the creation of a political movement among the urban masses. They signed a peace accord and his leader, William Calvo, protected by an amnesty, was assassinated in a street in Bogota on 20 November, 1985.

The Movimiento 19 de Abril (M-19) emerged as a protest against the supposed or real fraud (this is not proven with certainty) that disregarded the electoral victory of General Rojas Pinilla. This populist origin seems to have marked profoundly the ideological tendencies, the form of activities and the political project of M-19." In Estanislao Zuleta *Colombia: Violencia, democracia y derechos humanos*, Sexta edición (Medellín: Hombre Nuevo Editores, 2009), 128-129.

¹⁰⁸ Fernán González "Una historia violenta? Continuidades y ruptura de la violencia política en las guerras civiles del siglo XIX y la violencia del siglo XX" in *Historia de las ideas políticas en Colombia: De la independencia hasta nuestros días*, José Fernando Ocampo T. ed. (Bogotá: Taurus, 2008), 329-330. "La evolución de la Violencia que hemos señalado en los años iniciales del Frente Nacional prelude ya el carácter de los conflictos que van a resurgir pocos años después, cuya evolución evidencia profundas diferencias: hay que distinguir el momento fundacional del surgimiento de los nuevos movimientos guerrilleros, todavía bajo el Frente Nacional, se su periodo expansivo a comienzos de la década de los ochenta, su periodo de fortalecimiento militar a fines de los ochenta y comienzos de los noventa y de su evolución desde entonces hasta el momento actual, en el caso de las FARC".

¹⁰⁹ D. Pécaut, *La experiencia de la violencia*, 150. "Con una extensión de más de 30 años, los fenómenos de violencia han sufrido transformaciones más o menos pronunciadas. Pero estas transformaciones giran alrededor de algunas tramas mayores, tramas a la vez heterogéneas y que interfieren entre sí".

implementation of the so called *Seguridad Democratica* (Democratic Security) the armed conflict took a different turn, debilitating the guerrilla groups. However, they have had the organizational strength to keep fighting until the present time. The second plot concerns the drug trafficking organizations that inaugurated a new period of terror, and assassinations. In addition, they had the economic power to penetrate the government and to corrupt politicians. A third plot points out that the extreme right-wing groups, composed by members of the public forces, political class, drug trafficker's cartels and paramilitary groups, especially in 1988 began a new trend of violence against left-wing and progressive people. Such was the persecution of the political organization called *Union Patriotica*, when more than 400 leaders including a presidential candidate were assassinated. This period reached its highest level of violence under the governance of former president Alvaro Uribe Velez. The final plot addresses the social dimension of the conflict. The guerrillas groups, since the 1990s, have systematically lost their impact in society, especially with regard to the persecution of the State, the negative ideological impact resulting from the annihilation of the *Union Patriotica*, the weakening support from the left-wing groups, the contra-insurgency onset of the paramilitary groups and the lack of positive impact in rural areas. Also at the end of 1990s the drug trafficker-paramilitary groups intensified their terrorism against rural populations, displacing many communities in order to establish themselves in strategic geographic locations to repress the guerrilla groups, and in return gaining illegally extended areas of land and an exorbitant amount of wealth.¹¹⁰ A determining event that marked a significant impact upon the conflict in Colombia in 1964 was the State persecution of self-defence groups. "This new military campaign of the State received great support from the United States and directly placed the Colombian conflict inside of the context of the Cold War".¹¹¹ The paradoxical result of the Cold War was that it precipitated negative results for the principal objectives that

¹¹⁰ D. Pécaut, *La experiencia de la violencia*, 150-154.

¹¹¹ M. Chernick, *Acuerdo posible*, 158. "Esta nueva campaña militar estatal recibió todo el apoyo de Estados Unidos y colocó directamente al conflicto colombiano dentro del contexto de la Guerra Fría".

the process was trying to achieve: to combat communism. Thus, the end of the Cold War in Colombia brought more violence and chaos.

Thus, explained Chernick:

between the years of 1980 and 2000 the violence triplicated. At this point, the internal war was already fully-developed toward an atomized and multipolar conflict. None of the parts was able to defeat the other; none of the parts would gain enough advantage to impose conditions of peace.¹¹²

The result and fateful consequences of the violence and oppression that have occurred during the last twenty years after the end of the Cold War is very well described by S. Franco¹¹³ as follow:

Multiples indicators permit one to deduce that the Colombian conflict is going through a phase of intense and progressive degradation: the generalization and banality of kidnapping individuals and groups; the collective's assassinations of the defenceless, known as massacres; the indiscriminating destruction of the infrastructure not only of the confronted group but of large communities; the forceful displacement of towns, whose intensity and magnitude has taken the profile of a humanitarian tragedy; the systematic inclusion, even to the extent of risking their lives, of the population not implicated directly in the confrontation, especially children and the elderly of both sexes and the almost systematic violations, showing the lowest possible ethical and humanitarian considerations, in particular to the medical mission. All of those and many other acts which had involved the different actors of the armed internal conflict that the country is experiencing, sustain the unquestionable fact of its progressive degradation.¹¹⁴

We witnessed the administration of ex-president Alvaro Uribe Velez whose main political objective was to end the internal conflict by imposing more violence, a totalitarian form of government that induced the population to accept 'security' not as a responsibility of

¹¹² Ibid. 159. "Ente los años 1980 y 2000 la violencia se triplico. A estas alturas, la guerra interna ya había evolucionado hacia un conflicto atomizado y multipolar. Ninguna de las partes era capaz de derrotar a la otra; ninguna de las partes ganaba suficiente ventaja para imponer condiciones de paz".

¹¹³ Saúl Franco is a Colombian Medical Doctor and Associate Professor and researcher at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia.

¹¹⁴ Saúl Franco, "Momento y contexto de la violencia en Colombia" in *Pasado y presente de la violencia en Colombia*, 387. "Múltiples indicadores permiten deducir que el conflicto colombiano está viviendo una fase de intensa y progresiva degradación: la generalización y banalización del secuestro de individuos y grupos; los asesinatos colectivos en indefensión, conocidos como masacres; la destrucción indiscriminada de infraestructura ya no solo del grupo enfrentado sino de poblaciones enteras; el desplazamiento forzoso de poblaciones, cuya intensidad y magnitud ha tomado el perfil de una tragedia humanitaria; la inclusión sistemática, aun a riesgo de sus vidas, de la población no implicada directamente en la confrontación, en especial niños y ancianos de ambos sexos y las violaciones casi sistemáticas a los mínimos éticos y humanitarios, en particular a la misión médica. Todos estos y muchos otros hechos en los cuales han incurrido los diferentes actores del conflicto armado interno que vive el país, sustentan el hecho incuestionable de su progresiva degradación".

the State to its people, but as if the government was doing a favour in establishing a peaceful climate. At the meantime, the guerrilla movements and the proliferation of the paramilitary groups, sometimes called self-defence groups, found fertile ground after the end of the Cold War, hence,

with the time and the collapse of Communism, the dynamic of the Self-Defense groups, as with the guerrillas, became less an ideological project and more a pragmatic one involving struggles for territory and resources. Most of their military operations today are retaliations against kidnapping, extortion, and cattle rustling.¹¹⁵

Nevertheless after the end of the Cold War in 1989, the sentiment of the Cold War was resuscitated by the paramilitary groups by persecuting in this case not ‘communist,’ but rather progressive, people who demanded social justice for the impoverished masses. Thus, the cause of the conflict in Colombia at this present time is the economic oppression that the oligarchy has imposed upon the majority of the Colombian people, a big cause that has been mystified and covered up by the State and owners of capital. In this context it is clearly understood as rightly affirm Roddy Brett and Lina Malagon,¹¹⁶ that “the guerrilla essentially emerged in response to Colombia’s historically unjust system of land distribution and tenure, widespread extreme poverty and the lack of access to formal political channels”.¹¹⁷

In the next section we will try to articulate the Colombian history of conflict and its relationship with Camilo Torres.

Why did Camilo Torres Became a Guerrilla Fighter?

A message directed to the oligarchy of Colombia in 1965 was pronounced by Camilo Torres. In this message we find explicitly stated the socio-political reason as to why he joined

¹¹⁵ Gonzalo Sánchez G “Problems of Violence, Prospects of Peace” in *Violence in Colombia: Waging War and Negotiating Peace*, Eds. Charles Berquist, Ricardo Peñaranda and Gonzalo Sánchez G. (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc. 2001), 21.

¹¹⁶ Roddy Brett is a Professor in the School of International Relations, University of Saint Andrews, Scotland. Lina Malagon a Colombian Attorney of the Colombia Trade Union Confederation and Colombian Workers’ Confederation, and also, a member of the Comisión Colombiana de Juristas.

¹¹⁷ Roddy Brett, Lina Malagon “Overcoming the original Sin of the ‘Original Condition:’ How Reparations May Contribute to Emancipatory Peacebuilding” *Human Rights Rev* (2013) 14: 257-271, 261.

the revolutionary group called Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional (ELN). We will extract some very important points, as presented by Camilo Torres himself:

To direct a message to those who neither want it nor can hear it is very hard. Nevertheless, it is a duty, and a historical duty, at the moment when the Colombian oligarchy is trying to culminate its iniquity against the country and against all Colombians. For more than a hundred and fifty years, this economic caste, the few families which own almost all of Colombia's riches, has usurped political power for its own benefit. It has used all the tricks and gimmicks to keep this power and fool the people. These families invented the division between Liberals and Conservatives. This division, which the people did not understand, was used to foment hatred among the different sectors of the people... The oligarchs, who were guilty for the miserable condition of the poor, happily watched the bullfights from the sidelines, earning money and governing the country. The only thing that divided the Liberal oligarchs from the Conservative oligarchs was how to split up the budget and public offices... Meanwhile, the people began to realize that their fight for the Liberal or Conservative party engulfed them steadily in more misery. The rich did not realize that the people were getting sick of them. When Jorge Eliecer Gaitán appeared unfurling the flag of the moral restoration of the Republic, he did so as much against the Liberal oligarchy as against the Conservative. That is why both oligarchies were anti-Gaitán. The Liberal oligarchy decided to become pro-Gaitán only after the Conservative oligarchy killed him in the street of Bogota... When the aggression, the hatred, and the rancour of the poor spilled over into a general war for necessities, the oligarchy got scared and fostered a military coup. But the military government did not sufficiently serve the interest of the oligarchy. Thus, the chief of the Liberal oligarchy, Dr Alberto Lleras Camargo, and the chief of the Conservative oligarchy, Dr. Lauriano Gomez, got together to examine their consciences and said, " Because of our fighting over the budget and the spoils of bureaucracy, we almost lost power. Let us stop fighting for this and make a deal, dividing the country like one divides a ranch, in the middle, between the two oligarchies. Parity and alternation will allow us to share equally, and we can form a new party, the party of the oligarchy." And so the National Front was born, the first class party, the party of the Colombian oligarchy... You must realize that the fight is to the finish... But unfortunately, you isolated, blind, and vain oligarchs appear not to realize that the revolution of Colombia's popular masses will not stop until the people seize power.¹¹⁸

Thus Camilo Torres was convinced that the only possible way to change the oppressive socio-political and economic structure in Colombia was through armed revolution, hence he joined the ELN guerrilla group on 18 October, 1965. In Chapter Two we will examine in more depth this radical choice he made, as we will argue it under the title: the firm stance of Christian character in a context of oppression.

¹¹⁸ Camilo Torres *Revolutionary Priest*, 421-424.

Summary

The causes of the conflict, oppression, and violence in Colombia have been created by the government and the economic elite. They have always physically eliminated the workers' opposition, the unions, peasants, and social groups that claimed better treatment of labourers and just wages. Behind the violence, is found the expropriation of land, implementation of agro-industrial projects, and unequal distribution of wealth and resources, for the benefit of those owners of the financial powers. The state did not operate an open and democratic mechanism to permit the political participation and social expression of the majority of poor workers and the marginalized.

What we see from the government is a simulation of democracy, participation and justice, but this has not been true, and the facts demonstrate the opposite. What we see is the implantation of an economic model imposed through military force, what could be called: the terrorism of the state.

CHAPTER II: THE IRRUPTION AND DISRUPTION OF CAMILO TORRES

When you succeed in changing all your abstract nouns for a few concrete ones whose meaning can be felt, perhaps it will make sense again for you to talk to us of Christ and God. When it is seen to be true, in a way can be genuinely proclaimed, that justice has ‘pitched its tent in our midst’, and that love has ‘dwelt amongst us’, then perhaps what your Bible calls the ‘name of God’ can make itself known.¹¹⁹

The purpose of this chapter is two-fold. First, this chapter analyses and interprets more extensively the theological construct of the concept of ‘efficacious love’ as delineated by Camilo Torres, in direct relation to a context of violence and oppression.

Second, perhaps, the words above of H. Assman should perturb the complacency of the Church in Colombia and Latin America, because it coexists with the detached indifference of the Colombian state that has had the opportunity to offer and secure a dignified life for all Colombians. Instead the Colombian government has permitted a great number of its population to grow up in a society with unequal, unsatisfactory, and unprotected status.

It is our proposal that, in a context of human suffering, due to prolonged violence and subjugation, a praxis of Christian faith must engage in socio-political action for liberation. A biblical praxis toward liberation would be validated by the oppressed, and it would become emancipatory, if committed Christians ruled out the abstraction of a domesticated theology that neglects the efficacy of love.

Preliminary Theological Premises on Christian Love

In this section, we will assess Camilo Torres’ theology and particularly his interpretation of love. The Roman Catholic perspectives during the Second Vatican Council

¹¹⁹ Hugo Assmann, *Theology for a Nomad Church*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1975), 25.

reinforced progressive ideas in Camilo Torres. Nonetheless, “in the first stage he was influenced by Leclerq, Moeller, Ladriere, and Francois Houtart, just to cite a few who held professors’ chairs at the University of Louvain”.¹²⁰ These Marxists shaped Camilo Torres’ thoughts when he was a sociology student at that prestigious academic institution.

Secondly, he came into contact in the National University of Bogota with the anti-conformist intellectual sector, and he discussed the human problems of the country at numerous round tables, complementing theoretical information with direct observation thanks to numerous trips to the various districts of Colombia.¹²¹

In this way, with his progressive sociological background and the theological knowledge he acquired at the Seminary, and Pope John XXIII’s “encyclicals, especially *Mater et Magistra* (published in May, 1961) and *Pacem in Terris* (presented in April, 1963) that gave a strong emphasis regarding respect for human dignity and alertness regarding social problems”;¹²² Camilo Torres had sufficient basis to develop the concept of ‘efficacious love’. His theology of love made an important and decisive impact upon the way that he understood the Christian faith, and as a result, it played a vital role in the way he assumed his radical political stances. Also, because of his poignant views behind his concept of love—such as ‘efficacious’ love—there are additional riches yet to be excavated that can be invested in Christian work in Colombia. However, before we examine the concept of ‘efficacious’ love from the perspective of Camilo Torres, we should first grasp the general understanding of ‘love’ as interpreted by Christian theology. We want to point out that in our thesis, we are using Protestant as well as Roman Catholic theology because we want to be inclusive of both traditions in Colombia.

To accomplish a general understanding of Christian love, we turn to the following arguments that are helpful to affirm our theological understanding of the Scriptural teachings of divine love; but in our case, with recurrent strict application to a context of oppression.

¹²⁰ German Guzmán, *Camilo Torres*, 28.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 28.

¹²² Gustavo Morello, “Camilo y Argentina” in *Camilo Torres: Sacristán de la guerrilla*, ed. Hernán Brienza, (Buenos Aires: Capital Intelectual, 2007), 20.

This is essential because, as K. Sakenfeld remarks following A. Heschel, “the ‘divine pathos,’ which takes shape in love or in anger, is evoked by behaviour of the covenant community. Thus, humanity is ‘relevant to God’ in the prophetic perspective; God is not impassible but is affected by what goes on in the world.”¹²³

In the light of this, the eternal love of God becomes impatient, uneasy; the notion of eternity appeared too vast, the horizon too ample swallowing up the infinite. Thus, God founded a social context: the creation became the milieu of God, the vicinity for a communitarian relationship with all that was created in the universe. This divine pathos that had shaken the very passions of God turned his/her attention and creative powers towards the earthly activities. This genuine interest is manifested in and fostered by divine love. The Scriptures affirm in principle that God exercises love eternally, stating: “I have loved you with everlasting love and so I still maintain my faithful love for you;”¹²⁴ and such love has a permanent foundation, “Give thanks to Yahweh for he is good; his faithful love lasts for ever.”¹²⁵

In addition, but from a different angle and related to the activities of God, in the Lord’s Prayer Jesus tells us that it is the ‘relational necessity’ that the will of God is to be manifested in the world as a divine reflection of heavenly existence: “your will be done, on earth as is in heaven.”¹²⁶ This love is an exercise of God’s own freedom. In exercising love through his/her divine freedom, God can accomplish God’s own will in heaven and on earth. God as Creator had imposed upon him/herself, an ontological commitment to nurture the whole of creation, including humankind, with God’s immeasurable love. The will of God set up the ethical directrix to the creation of love, and as Brunner affirms “the *free* love of God

¹²³ Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *Faithfulness in Action: Loyalty in Biblical Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 116.

¹²⁴ Jeremiah 31:3 (The New Jerusalem Bible)

¹²⁵ Psalm 107:1 (The New Jerusalem Bible)

¹²⁶ Matthew 6:10 (The New Jerusalem Bible)

requires us to remain *free*, that we may be freely at his disposal.”¹²⁷ Accordingly, those who truly believe, provide in a reciprocal response, a deep desire to live ethically by responding to and loving the will of God. Brunner’s statement operates theologically as an axiomatic concept that links the attribute of the love of God with the symmetries and commands of the ethical infrastructure of the gospel of Christ in the imperative to love others in a concrete way, an ethical imperative for believers and the church.

However, we cannot be naïve about the truth we find in the gospel, which has a historical logic. As L. Boff affirms, “the world must be altered globally and structurally if it is to become the truly human and divine human homeland.”¹²⁸ Hence, we affirm that since the love of God is not detached from the reality of human existence, it follows that the love of God has an emancipatory logic in all human affairs. T.F. Torrance rightly suggests that, “by ‘the logic of God’ we can only mean Jesus Christ, for He and no other is the eternal *Logos* of God become flesh.”¹²⁹ Christ’s incarnation expresses the power of a loving God who came to disrupt the pernicious mentality of humans oppressing others and destroying the nature of human existence. The logic of love, then, is best understood as it is incarnated in history in the life and work with their liberating purpose of Jesus of Nazareth.

Thus as a final remark, we affirm that love is the logical relational possibility and the quintessential attribute of God that motivated him/her to create humans in the Creation. While accepting that, justice is the attribute of God that operates as the ethical measurement of social and moral love between humans, and humans with God, faith and love overlap in the understanding that all things were created because of Christ. Consequently such love is ultimately fulfilled by being expressed through a radical mediation in the material space of

¹²⁷ Emil Brunner, *Love and Marriage: Selections from ‘The Divine Imperative’* introduced by Vernon Sproston (London: Fontana, 1970), 40.

¹²⁸ Leonardo Boff, “Christ’s Liberation Via Oppression” in *Frontiers of Theology in Latin America*, 100-132, 127.

¹²⁹ Thomas F. Torrance, *Theological Science* (London, NY, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1969), 205-6.

human existence, that link, characterized as a ‘mediated irruption’ which was bridged by the incarnation of God in Christ, as Jesus of Nazareth.¹³⁰ Such love arrived from the eternal realm to enter the temporal realm of humans, beginning with the act of God that created our planet earth, as is explained in the two biblical accounts in the book of Genesis. After creation, Christ binds the will of God in heaven with God’s will on earth through the expression of divine love. Christ fulfilled the will of God in both heaven and earth by inaugurating the kingdom of God on earth based in an eternal love. The relevancy of human affairs and actions is validated by the proximity of God in Christ made manifest in concrete love. The eternal love became relevant because Christ became involved in a mission of compassion for a suffering humanity and he calls followers to a discipleship working toward the realization and fulfilment of the Kingdom of God on earth and for one and all.

The Prophets and the Preamble of Love

The prophets delivered a discourse that is important to us, from two perspectives: announcing hope and liberation, and denouncing injustices. They were encouraged by love and moved by indignation to proclaim their message, in a particular moment in history, especially in times of social crisis and political upheaval. Indeed, “All prophecy and prophetic theology speaks of, and speaks to, a particular time in a particular place about a particular situation.”¹³¹ The contextualization of the message reflects the preoccupation of an attitude based in love and impelled by an eschatological hope for oppressed people, hardship, exile or situation of poverty. The prophet’s struggle in denouncing oppression is different from other kinds of noble actions that seek only to alleviate symptoms, but disregard the causes that produce poverty and oppression. In this regard, T. Gorringer affirms that

¹³⁰ We propose ‘mediated irruption’ as the free intervention to seek the justice in a given time of history, or a particular situation. For instance the ample intervention of Christ, and the particular intervention of Camilo Torres in the Colombian context.

¹³¹ Albert Nolan, “Theology in a Prophetic Mode” in *The Future of Liberation Theology*, ed. Marc H. Ellis and Otto Maduro (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989), 433.

“Prophecy, on the other hand, is action based on perception into the meaning of current events, relationships, and forms in their connection to the imminent kingdom of God.”¹³²

People compelled by the force of love engage themselves with promoting and constructing a different and more just fabric of society. Thus, “The gift of the prophet is the ability to recognize such events, such critical times, and to spell them out as moments of truth, as challenges, as opportunities, as times for decision and action.”¹³³ This function of prophetic *kerygma* is understood in the light of being more focused on directly denouncing what was producing injustice in order to infuse expectation and hope into the people that were oppressed. The mission of the prophet was motivated by love for humanity, but his/her primary concern was to challenge the structures that restricted the manifestation of love in just and concrete ways.

From another perspective, we notice again the anguish of God as interpolated in the work of the prophets, as Abraham Heschel argues, “Prophecy is the voice that God has lent to the silent agony, a voice to the plundered poor...God is raging in the prophet’s work.”¹³⁴ God’s love is voiced as a roar against injustice and oppression. This is the result of committed lives lived in a hard and long process of capturing the will of God in action among and with those outcasts. It’s a journey of giving up our own agenda to enter the adventurous plan of God. For this reason “we must have the disciplined love of the prophets and commit our love to a future that we may never see.”¹³⁵ The plan of God in the words of the prophet Micah are summed up by “Loving Justice.” It is a commitment to this kind of love that had consumed the young priest, Camilo Torres.

Christ as the Quintessential Form of Love

¹³² Timothy J. Gorrige, *Karl Barth Against Hegemony* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 259.

¹³³ Albert Nolan, “Theology in a Prophetic Mode” 435.

¹³⁴ Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets: An Introduction* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 5.

¹³⁵ L. Boff “Christ’s Liberation Via Oppression”, 130.

The Scriptures tell us that God now speaks to us through his/her Son. For example, “At many moments in the past and by many means, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets; but in our time, the final days, he has spoken to us in the person of his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom he made the ages”¹³⁶ Our Christological understanding will illuminate our theological reflection “of all things” pertaining especially to the suffering of people. Thus, the hermeneutics of liberation help us to approach the Scriptures from the perspective of the poor and to identify the causes of unjust social conditions to seek solutions and to transform structures of oppression, with Christological inspiration. Evil and injustice exist in the world, and the incarnation of Christ is the committed response of God to promote justice against egoism through the radicalism of love. The love of God, Christ himself, irrupted into history as *kairos*: the binding of eternal and temporal time, to challenge the pervasive force of oppression. Now, in a more refined pattern than shown by the prophets, we find in Christ the ultimate proposal to eradicate injustice (at least eschatologically). This expression of love will become the essential mission of Christian faith throughout the historical contexts, in the temporal world of human drama. Like the prophets, but with a difference and the affirmation that the kingdom has arrived with Jesus, it is proclaimed that *now*: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is close at hand.”¹³⁷ Then, not yet (but in the future): “Your kingdom come.”¹³⁸ For this reason, Christ’s mission amplified the work of the prophets and made it more relevant. Christ took up from where the prophets left off and fused hope and love to form the eschatological criterion of the kingdom of God to be definitely established upon earth. The love of God in Christ challenged the hate-egotism manifested in its worst form as injustice, that is poverty and exclusion.

Egotism is materialized in wrong doing against others; and Satan, the creator of evil, introduced a raw motivation for it. However, humans fully exercised acts of evil-doing in the

¹³⁶ Hebrews 1:1-2. (The New Jerusalem Bible)

¹³⁷ Marc 1:15. (The New Jerusalem Bible)

¹³⁸ Mathew 6:10 (The New Jerusalem Bible)

form of egotism, through political structures of power, affluence, and injustice. Egotism is manifested in class division, expropriation, accumulation, private property, colonialism, and all kind of imposed phobias generated through all manner of social abuses. Because God witnessed the institutionalization of evil in the simplest or most sophisticated forms in history, and because of his/her eternal anguish of love for the poor, this was sufficient reason to provoke the *kairos* of efficacious love in the incarnation of Christ. As we recognise the ample attribute of the love of God as being eternal, the concretization of the particular event of the incarnation of the efficacious love of God is *kairotical*. Such love irrupted in the corrupted soil of history, and disrupted the evil consciousness of humanity, emerging in the temporal with the advent of Christ in history. God's love for the world was the exercise of God's absolute preference, contextualizing the efficacy of love as a historical providential criterion that could implement justice in the evil world. On the other side, it is the same to say that oppression and evil-doing is the negative reality that uprovoked the need of the liberative nature of efficacious love. Also, in a world dominated by evil-doing in the minds and hearts of people embedded in unjust social structures, the efficacious love demonstrated by Christ by his *praxis*, has the operative function of dismantling alienation. Therefore if efficacious love is rooted in history, love according to the ideas and political commitment of Camilo Torres is the result of attaining social consciousness sensitive to people under oppression, which will guide the church to participate in the construction of social justice for the poor.

Social consciousness will never reach a final stage, but it is constantly renewed by *praxis* and faith producing a new efficacious love for the afflicted. The love of God interjects axiomatically in history to build a new and fresh faith in Christ, after the *kerygma* of the prophets, to compel believers to break through the separation between the mode of production and social classes struggle. This separation and negative divisiveness will be

termed the '*hypostatic social dissonance*',¹³⁹ which ought to be transformed by the socio-theological emancipation of efficacious love. With this construct we approach the problem of the intricate nature of efficacious love as first introduced by Jesus of Nazareth. It is not the scope of this chapter to discuss other kinds of love, merely to explore efficacious love, because this is relevant to the mission of Camilo Torres.

What Makes Christian Love Efficacious?

The theological construct of the process of love becoming efficacious in a context of oppression is first understood in a doctrinal concept, the *hypostatic union*, secondly in the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, and third in the exercise of Christian faith that is obedient to the command to do 'works.'¹⁴⁰ In this section we will mainly focus on the concept of *hypostatic union*. We will mention throughout the thesis the sacrifice of Christ and the concept of 'work', but framed in a hermeneutical and ethical perspective. We suggest that the efficacy of love primarily has to be comprehended on the relational plane, the intrinsic relational dynamics of love being primarily based on the union of the two natures of Christ made flesh and incarnated. T. F. Torrance rightly stresses that "It is this relationship within the person of Christ between His divine and human natures (called the *hypostatic union*) that provides the normative relationship for every theological statement where the relationship between God and human is involved."¹⁴¹ It is of determinative importance in our Latin American context of oppression to fully grasp and continue pressing this theological assertion, because this *hypostatic union* confers an ethical authority on Christ to make commands imperative. It is also the epistemological infrastructure upon which he based the statement "I'm giving you a new commandment, and it's this: love one another! Just as I

¹³⁹ Hypostatic social dissonance is our own construct in this thesis where we imply that the division of classes and social inequalities are the product of not recognizing and accepting the other, not loving our neighbor efficaciously, rather rejecting his/her own being, or nature.

¹⁴⁰ James 2:17-26

¹⁴¹ T.F. Torrance, *Theological Science*, 207.

have loved you, so you must love one another.”¹⁴² Viewed from that angle the act of loving is *hypostatic* in character because it has the objective to unify us with the other, our neighbour and with God. This *hypostasy* is relational and intrinsically liberative, “for love is the interpersonal mode of relation. This is not love as emotion but love as the form of personal union.”¹⁴³ Christ confronted the dilemma of having a new nature, the human one, and he decided to adopt it. Centuries later, in 1965, Camilo Torres confronted a personal dilemma “When I was faced with the dilemma, forced to choose whether I would follow the discipline of the clergy or continue in the revolutionary struggle, I could not hesitate. Otherwise I would have betrayed the revolution by betraying you [the Colombian people].”¹⁴⁴ The condition for this love to be fertilized, is having an awareness of the suffering of other fellow humans, who are our neighbours, a word used in the gospels. That relationship must seek to achieve a true and free interchange but be determined by communality and interest in all the spheres of a particular society.

Christ did not reject the possibility of adopting another nature, a new one: a human nature. The two natures were bound together in true love; and because of love, they were working conjointly and salvifically to liberate humanity, which had been enslaved by its own tyranny of evil-doing. The efficacy of Christ’s love resides in having an option of adopting or not a new nature. He opted to obtain a new human nature. This option consequently led him through the sacrificial metamorphosis of binding his divine nature, with human nature with the logical possibility that the new nature implied suffering and the losing of his life. Knowing that efficacious love implies a costly process, it is logical that relating to others with such love requires an *acceptance* of what is foreign and estranged from our own comfort, convenience, and nature, because it is the acceptance of others and of ourselves. Self-esteem (loving ourselves) becomes efficacious in the political sphere as we accept our neighbour not

¹⁴² John 13:34 (The Kingdom New Testament)

¹⁴³ Ibid, 208.

¹⁴⁴ Camilo Torres, *Revolutionary Priest*, 344-5.

as inferior, but with the equal freedom that is categorized neither by a division of classes nor by a scale of social-economic values. In this way, we can acknowledge that “to be human is to engage in relationships with others and with the world.”¹⁴⁵ The efficacy of love consists in being actively connected in solidarity with others and with reality, but with the intention to liberate reality and transform it into something meaningful.

The Firm Stance of Christian Character in a Context of Oppression

Camilo Torres understood that the situation of Colombia and “the history of Latin America is *not* God’s great silence.”¹⁴⁶ Subsequently, following that line of thought, Gutierrez suggests that the “theology being done in Latin America (and in other areas of the poor world) has a different point of departure. It is a reflection arising from the ‘underside of history.’”¹⁴⁷ The context of oppression cried for denunciation and exigencies, demanding new possibilities that could be carried on by the Christian community with love and courage. It would demand that Christians raise their voices against the overwhelming injustices as an expression of God’s interest in caring about the human condition. God is apparently silent for those who do not want to hear the cry of the oppressed. Such an attitude is rooted in egotism, as we have seen through the many horrific events in the history of humankind, especially in Latin America. Nevertheless, the other possibility is the fact that the ‘world is relevant’ to God; and specially the poor, just as V. Araya affirms: “To deny this possibility is to deny that the Spirit continues to act efficaciously in history.”¹⁴⁸ This possibility means more than having the potential to observe a situation of despair; rather it is a commitment to act in favour of justice, knowing that the Spirit also acts in justice.

¹⁴⁵ Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, trans. and ed. Myra Bergman Ramos (London, New York: Continuum, 1974, reprinted 2005, 2006), 3.

¹⁴⁶ Victorio Araya, *God of the Poor: The Mystery of God in Latin American Liberation Theology*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987), 146.

¹⁴⁷ Gustavo Gutierrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, 114.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 146.

The situation of Colombia in the 1960s was very chaotic, and as Camilo Torres addressed specifically the Colombian Christians, he observed that “The convulsions caused by the political, religious, and social events of recent times may have sown a great deal of confusion among Colombian Christians.”¹⁴⁹ Regarding that confusion, it appears that our world today remains confused and convulsed with oppression, including that perpetrated by the Church. Camilo Torres’s preoccupation with such confusion was based on the fact that the population of the Christian poor could not reconcile the message of love preached by religious leaders with their situation. Thus, the reality of oppression witnessed and held in silence by the Christians leaders, created an irreconcilable disparity between the content of the message and its efficacy in bringing solutions to their context of poverty. The confusion, therefore, generated much religious doubt that needed to be addressed. The apparent socio-religious dissonance in Colombian society produced confusion in peoples’ minds, and lack of food on the table of the poor. The religious confusion was ideologized by the Colombian oligarchy which took advantage for its own benefit. Also, the repression by the establishment kept people intimidated and suffering in silence. This prompted Camilo Torres to seek a new alternative to change the confusing alienation among Christians. With great determination and Christian conviction, Camilo Torres emphatically suggested, “At this decisive moment in our history, we Christians must take a firm stand on the essential bases of our religion.”¹⁵⁰ The firm stand from Camilo Torres’ perspective was more than mere assistance or philanthropic aid to help the poor. Many public, private and non-governmental organizations gave donations to alleviate poverty, but this was not nearly enough to eradicate it. Some of those organizations even invested in part of their portfolio in multinational corporations that were oppressing native people in the poor countries, and thereby contributing to damaging the ecosystem.

¹⁴⁹ Camilo Torres, *Revolutionary Priest*, 367.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 367.

The *firm stance* Camilo Torres was looking for was active participation in the struggle to construct new possibilities of better lives for the oppressed masses. The *firm stance* is *kenotic*, in the same sense that the *kenosis* of Christ created a new dialectic of relationship between God and humans. As Christ presents himself as an example, positioning himself *firmly* within human history by giving his life in love for his neighbour, so Christians should emulate this *kenotic* example. This human *kenosis* implies that Christians would have the potential to observe and serve, especially to act salvifically in a context of oppression and brokenness. It follows then, that with the understanding of the action of the Spirit, Christ's *kenosis*, and human involvement in history, Christianity is confronted with an ultimate choice: "This dialectic is expressed in terms of a radical *confrontation*."¹⁵¹ This confrontation is not accidental or capricious, but first of all a response to the direct result of the exigencies of the context of oppression; and second, a response to the ideological distortion of social consciousness and blindness before the reality of the poor on the part of the ruling class. In this regard Camilo Torres affirms that "It is only too true that the ruling classes have a chronic tendency to elaborate ideologies that are to their own advantages."¹⁵² Thus, to love the neighbour and to confront the oligarchy ultimately comprise the 'firm stand' that Camilo Torres is claiming that Christians should consider and absorb.¹⁵³ In other instances, Christians who lack an immovable faith ignore oppression. However, although Christians ignore the reality of oppressive authorities, God, throughout the Scriptures, acknowledges it and calls people to respond in justice. For instance, upon seeing the needs in the land, God asked Isaiah the prophet: "who will go for us?" This invitation and calling intrinsically has an

¹⁵¹ V. Araya, *God of the poor*, 149.

¹⁵² René Coste. *Marxist Analysis and Christian Faith*. trans. Roger A. Couture, and John C. Cort (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985), 2.

¹⁵³ According to J. Miguez-Bonino "Love is one of the words that have suffered most from word-hyperinflation. The meanings of the corresponding words in biblical language are not simply taken up adequately in either *charity* or *love*. Some biblical scholars have suggested "loyalty," "faithful solidarity," or "covenanted loyalty" as better equivalents." In "Love and Social Transformation in Liberation Theology" in *The Future of Liberation Theology*, 127.

element of awakening the consciousness of people and individuals to leave behind passivity or indifference, and see as God leave the reality of oppression. For Camilo Torres, such a divine invitation and calling from God still exists; the question is, of course, who will hear, respond, and raise their voice to denounce and confront injustice? The greater question is how will this be accomplished? Camilo Torres understood that God in history seeks men and women to work devotedly in the construction of a more just and equal society.

Accordingly, Christian leaders must avoid any excuses by spiritualizing the Christian calling and claiming the responsibility of proclaiming the ‘good news to the poor’, is the responsibility solely of God. Christian leaders must address not only the alleviation of the obvious symptoms of poverty and oppression. The Gospel must provide tangible results for the common people, who hope for justice in their lives. In this regard, V. Araya warns us by saying “The greatest peril of this pessimistic anthropological vision is in the ‘ideological function’ that lurks within it, in that it promotes a religious practice of separation and historical escapism.”¹⁵⁴ To stand firm and remain focused on the mission in such a context of oppression does become an ideological option that renders obedience as a response to a significant theological mandate from the exigencies of Christian discipleship, especially in such a context of political and social oppression.

From here, we move to the understanding of Camilo Torres’ concept of *efficacious love*. His concept is the transverse axis of his theological convictions and even his socio-political views and *praxis*. This concept, embedded in his heart, was the motivation for him to confront a system where the only way to respond was with violence, not with peaceful negotiation through dialogue. The main objective in this chapter is to understand the impact of this socio-theological construct as one of the precursory conceptualizations that

¹⁵⁴ V. Araya, *God of the Poor*, 149.

contributed to setting up the theme of ‘liberation’ before the Medellin conference, which officially inaugurated the theology in Latin America known as *liberation theology*.¹⁵⁵

Faith: Believing in an Efficacious Love that Transforms Social Structures

A determining essential concept for understanding social justice is the biblical notion of ‘love’ (*agape*), which is used here for efficacious love. From our perspective, efficacious love 1) challenges unjust systems, as the alternative that opposes greed; 2) has the capability to transform enthusiastically the societal roots that produce social oppression and 3) enables justice to pursue peace in a context of violent conflicts. The first generation of liberation theologians, including G. Gutierrez, J. Miguez-Bonino, J.L. Segundo, Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, Ruben Alves, J. Severino Croatto, has taken and developed further the concept of the efficacy of love, which was partly inspired by the thoughts and life of Camilo Torres. His hermeneutical understanding of the gospel vis-à-vis the Colombian social reality, led Camilo Torres to develop in theological-political fashion the term ‘efficacious’ that is very important to the epistemology of liberation theology, which affirmed in 1965, “For this love to be genuine, it must seek to be efficacious.”¹⁵⁶

Latin American theologians such as Gutierrez talk about the ‘gratuitousness of efficacious love’ and Miguez-Bonino talks about ‘an efficacious faith.’ Moreover, Gutierrez wrote that “This efficacy will be sought with ever increasing fervour in the measure that it reveals to us the gratuitous love of God: God’s preference for the poor”.¹⁵⁷ Tracing back in this way the theological construction of the concept of this prominent phrase: ‘God’s preferential option for the poor’ it is found in part to have been influenced by Camilo Torres’s political and theological episteme. In order to be efficacious, Camilo Torres

¹⁵⁵The title of the conference was: The Church and current transformation of Latin America in light of the Council.

¹⁵⁶ Camilo Torres, *El Sueño de Camilo: selección de textos*, presentación François Houtart, Estudio Introductorio Jaime Caicedo (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Luxemburg, 2010), 93.

¹⁵⁷ Gustavo Gutierrez, *We Drink from our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984), 113.

believed, Christian love must be rooted in a history that is on the side of the poor. On the other side of the analysis, we are convinced that Camilo Torres understood it, from a dialectical locus, as belonging to social struggle, considering the influence of Marxist theory in Camilo Torres's sociological background studies. In addition, "for this love to be efficacious we must know very well the society and the social problems in which that concrete human being is immersed."¹⁵⁸ Efficacious love needs to be claimed by the poor and those on the side of the poor, in order to be transformed into true solidarity that has as its final objective: the transformation of unjust social structures.

Efficacious love invites the Christian to be actively involved in promoting an equivalent and balanced distribution of wealth and not to be passive spectators of the drama of suffering. G. Gutierrez rightly affirms "...passivity or indifference is not permissible when the issue is justice. Passivity or indifference would be neither ethical nor Christian".¹⁵⁹ From a hermeneutical perspective, Camilo Torres also interpreted love in the context of learning how to abandon the framework of oppression imposed by a minority against the majority, and advocated exercising it by creating a socio-political model mechanism as the foundation upon which to forge a different socio-economic system. Towards that end, he proposes that "We must seek efficacious means to achieve the wellbeing of these majorities."¹⁶⁰ This statement suggests that Camilo Torres was aware that love must have a progression to avoid the term from becoming immobilized in a form of social paralysis. In this way, we ought to understand that love is not an abstract concept deprived of relevant meaning, but rather that it is rooted in a praxis of Christian faith, as is clearly implied in the New Testament usage of the term *agape*.

¹⁵⁸ "Ahora bien, para que ese amor sea eficaz hay que conocer de la mejor forma la sociedad o la problemática en la que vive inmerso ese ser humano concreto." Darío Martínez Morales *Theologica Xaveriana* Vol. 61 No. 171. Enero-Junio 2011, Bogotá, Colombia, 140.

¹⁵⁹ Gustavo Gutierrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, 75.

¹⁶⁰ Camilo Torres. *El Sueño de Camilo*, 93.

The efficacy of love, then, from our perspective on Camilo Torres's thoughts, has an intrinsic connection with the struggle to work for the creation of new social paradigms, in which faith plays an important role. This faith is authentic if the result of living that faith leads people to love their neighbour. Thus, love can become the reality and the result of what faith leads us to hope for. Faith, then, rooted in the historical process of liberation, has a utopian projection and responsibility to construct the kingdom of God in each social context, and in the world. Thus, from a Christian perspective it takes courage to pray: 'your kingdom come, your will be done', because this prayer constrains Christians to love efficaciously. This kind of love is the beginning of Christian ethics, because from here faith has the potential to help us perceive the certainty of a social utopia, or the eschatological hope of the new earth, which the New Testament so firmly points out.¹⁶¹ Accordingly, Hinkelammert comments: "The new earth is not anticipated individually but in community with all humankind."¹⁶² The author of the letter to the Hebrews reminds us of the nature of faith, here interpreted with a utopian character: "What then is faith? It is what gives assurance to our hopes; it is what gives us conviction about things we can't see."¹⁶³ The question we need to raise in the context of oppression is what things could people hope for? Or, to say it differently, what ethical connotation has "the conviction of things not seen"?

In responding to this question, we propose the beginning of the construction of a theory of 'efficacious love'. First, the intrinsic value of faith is anticipation—the things hoped for—of a better future for the oppressed masses, through Christian love. We see 'anticipation' as a 'social construct' of the collective working toward a desired utopia, the better world for all and not just for the few. Camilo Torres understood that love could become a collective force (working through what he calls the 'majority') that could make a

¹⁶¹ "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth: Revelation 21:1

¹⁶² Franz J. Hinkelammert *The Ideological Weapons of Death. A theological Critique of Capitalism*, trans. Phillip Berryman (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986), 136.

¹⁶³ Hebrews 11:1. (The Kingdom New Testament).

substantial social impact. Without anticipation love becomes weak and loses the potential to read properly the signs of the time, becoming a self-centred love that disregards the neighbour. Hinkelammert makes an important observation as he affirms “The center of this anticipation, according to Paul, is love for neighbour, which is the nucleus of ethics and the decisive point for working out morality.”¹⁶⁴

Faith in its essential character has two sides: hope and love, which in turn have the duty to create utopian possibilities, when a context of poverty demands concrete solutions. Hope and love know how to create *ex-nihilo*, when in a particular moment of decadency and despair nothing apparently exists. Creation *ex-nihilo* is a foundational principle of the knowledge of God used to sustain a predisposition for justice and is also a principle of God’s power applied to move the world in action toward peace. Hope in some ways dreams of utopia, and efficacious love makes manifest the authenticity of historical faith. The circularity which begins with hope and love, strengthens Christian faith, and in that way this circularity assures us that we will always have something to ‘hope for’. Efficacious love is not the end of faith, but its extension, and love only can be efficacious by going back to faith for its inspiration to create new possibilities for peace with justice.

Second, the dialectic of faith and love is the fulfilment of ‘things not seen’. If we embark with faith manifested in love toward the construction of a new reality for a new earth, we still have to find what comprises the nucleus of love. Love does not have the luxury of escaping from the responsibility of challenging the *status quo*. In our view, Camilo Torres understood this, and for this reason we think that he was convinced that the only alternative to ‘things not seen’ which was freedom from oppression, in his view was achieved through a democratic movement of the poor majorities.

¹⁶⁴ F. Hinkelammert, *The Ideological Weapons of Death*, 136.

Third, there is a dualistic character to love. On the one hand, love is intrinsically creative, on the other hand it demands that we take sides. The ethics of Jesus of Nazareth led him to affirm a strong maxim: “If you’re not with me, you’re against me.”¹⁶⁵ The political attitude of the ruling oppressor in Colombia, in a negative manner, appropriates Jesus’s ethics inversely, saying that if you, the majority, do not surrender to the way the socio-economic structure has been set up, ‘you are against us’. In the opposite manner, the dualism established by Jesus has a liberative socio-theological implication for loving our neighbour, and this is the subversive aspect of love. We are to challenge oppression, not necessarily with violence, but in direct opposition to evil structures. The dualism established by Jesus thus fosters a strong possibility of class struggle, to build social justice. The struggle is better understood as a social pacifistic revolution rooted in love for our neighbour, which will take us to the next point.

The Transfiguration of Love as a Preamble to the Political Faith of the Church

Camilo Torres understood the nature of the church in relation to its having a direct responsibility in society, because “for Camilo, the social action of a Christian has its origin in the love that an encounter with Jesus Christ generates.”¹⁶⁶ Being aware of the un-eficacious mission of the church, in the face of the Colombian situation of hunger and inequalities, where the church was a bastion on the side of the oligarchy, he nevertheless retained hope that the church would become an agent of God working faithfully in its earthly mission. With a sense of irony, he said, “the temporal defects of the church must not scandalize us. The Church is human. The important thing is to believe that it is also divine and that if we Christians fulfil our obligation to love our neighbour, we are therefore strengthening the

¹⁶⁵ Luke 11:23. (The Kingdom New Testament)

¹⁶⁶ “Para Camilo, la acción social del cristiano tiene su origen en el amor que el encuentro con Jesucristo suscita” Darío Martínez Morales, *Theologica Xaveriana*, vol. 61, No. 171, 141.

church.”¹⁶⁷ From the ecclesiological perspective, love is to be differentiated from the functionality of faith, though they go hand-in-hand. Faith is a gift, which necessarily has to depend on the revelation of God in the Scriptures through proper proclamation in order to become a credible faith; and on the other hand, efficacious love is a surplus obtained from loving God and exercising such love toward our neighbour, that it will end in a socio-historical production of praxis. Hence, as faith has to be understood hermeneutically (as we will argue in Chapter Three), love is to be explained with the ethical means at our disposal. (This idea will be further considered in Chapter Four).

Love has at its maximum scope the ability to direct and redirect human acts and affection in favour of changing what is unjust. To accomplish this, love spreads concentrically from its nucleus (historical reality), alternating with justice, into diachronic time (the historical projection), with the help of feet on the ground, to provoke hope for the utopian and eschatological realization of the kingdom of God in history. Accordingly, we view Christian life as the concentric circles which begin with love alternating with justice, and expanding toward the tangible lines of objectified faith, so believers can rightly claim, that “the just shall live by faith.”¹⁶⁸ Thus, “Once faith is understood in these terms, it confers a special theological significance on the reality that we call the historical process.”¹⁶⁹ It follows then, that the good intention to live the Christian faith is realized by exercising efficacious love. The socio-political dimension of faith in the praxis of love, serves as the radical motive to compel believers to engage in a process of liberation from oppression and tyranny.

For that reason, we assess Camilo Torres’ conception of efficacious love as an integral understanding of the mission of the church as a fundamental part of society, and that

¹⁶⁷ Camilo Torres: *Mensajes Visionarios*, ed. Bernardo Arias Figueroa (Bogotá, D.C.: Proyecto Memoria Histórica, 2011), 34.

¹⁶⁸ Romans 1:16 (The Kingdom New Testament)

¹⁶⁹ Raul Vidales “Methodological Issues in Liberation Theology” in *Frontiers of Theology*, 56.

in order to become an efficacious church, it has to be involved in social affairs pertaining to social justice. What Camilo Torres had in mind about taking a firm stand, and the position of the church that faced and saw tangible oppression, finds echo in Bishop Oscar Romero's words: "when the church inserts itself into the socio-political world it does so in order to work with it so that from such cooperation life may be given to the poor."¹⁷⁰ The transmutation of love as it impinges on political faith will depend on what we call 'the passionate availability' which is required in offering our lives in service of others. Sometimes such love will entail risk, fear, suffering and danger. As A. Hennesly says "The greatest sign of faith in a God of life is the witness of those who are ready to give up their own life."¹⁷¹ Efficacious love as passionate availability is a stage when love and faith have merged and become a life style, and as such is stronger than life itself. This way we can arrive at calling such a person (a martyr) 'just.' A 'just' Christian is one who lives his/her faith authentically. The passionate availability of the 'just' person intensifies as that person becomes 'available' and involved in the struggle for justice, as the brothers Leonardo and Clodovis Boff observed: "sometimes love for the poor can become so intense that individuals give up their own station in life to share in the suffering of the poor, even to the point of sharing their premature death."¹⁷² Jesus of Nazareth, a 'just' person, intensified His life and rightly stated "No one has a love greater than this, to lay down your life for your friends."¹⁷³ Camilo Torres and Oscar Romero became martyrs of God, because they unselfishly gave their lives in love, because they were really 'just' persons. The love of God becomes efficacious, as the Church faithfully lives its faith in mission toward the poor.

Efficacious Love as the Beginning of Ethics

¹⁷⁰ Alfred T. Hennesly, *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History*. 301.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.* 301.

¹⁷² Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing liberation theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 23rd Printing, 2010), 49.

¹⁷³ John 15:13 (The Kingdom New Testament)

According to Jesus' following statement about love we understand that love has to go through the ideological filter of ethics in order to make it normative to Christianity: "You must love the Lord your God, replied Jesus, with all your heart, with all your life, and with all your mind. This is the first commandment, and it's the one that really matters. The second is similar, and it's this: you must love your neighbour as yourself. The entire law hangs on these two commandments – and that goes for the Prophets, too¹⁷⁴." The purpose of filtration is to give normativity its proper authority not as an imposition, rather in a spontaneous manner to move between the tension of acting in freedom but with a sense of responsibility. "The ability to love (*homo amans*) defines human beings more profoundly than either rationality (*homo sapiens*) or the ability to make and create (*homo faber*)."¹⁷⁵

The first aspect of this filtration exists in the prayer of Jesus: "Thy will be done". As He committed Himself to God, then He asks His followers to commit to Him. Secondly, Jesus' ministry was carried out by exercising efficacious love through helping, serving and embracing the neighbour who had been shunned by society. In this way, Jesus had a firm foundation and was able to promulgate it in a prophetic construct, which became an urgent imperative to love our neighbour. In this way, urgency becomes ethically oriented as it is directed to liberate people from bondage; therefore, efficacious love becomes an axiomatic principle in the history of Christianity. Hence, to love efficaciously is a fundamental principle of Christian faith and not an option. Camilo was adamant that when Christians faced injustice, they must demonstrate efficacious love. R. H. Lugo Rodriguez clarifies the importance of this love: "It emphasizes two points: a) love is the only measure of authentic Christianity; b) love is either effective, or doesn't deserve to be called love."¹⁷⁶ As we will see in Clodovis Boff's concept of "hermeneutical mediation" the reality of seeing the

¹⁷⁴ Mathew 22:37-40 (Kingdom New Testament)

¹⁷⁵ Timothy J. Gorrige, *Capital and the Kingdom: Theological Ethics and Economic Order* (NY, London: Orbis/SPCK, 1994), 9.

¹⁷⁶ Raúl H. Lugo Rodríguez, "El amor eficaz, único criterio," *Ribla* No. 17 (1994): 107.

condition of poverty and despair helps the believer to deeply form in his/her heart, life and mind the efficacious love to extend toward others, the other being our neighbour. Then, “Only this love of neighbour, which in the Latin-American hermeneutic is identified with love of the poor, can save us from current tendencies which try to reduce Christian life to a matter of intellect or of religious sentiment” and self-conformism, especially by limiting the Christian life solely to the experience of liturgical celebration in worship services.¹⁷⁷ It is fundamental for Latin American theology to make clear that the believer is a person who has been embraced by the grace of God through Jesus Christ, in a true and gracious conversion to the Lord of history to serve others. Camilo set up a paradigmatic legacy as an example of a true believer who committed himself to follow Christ even to the last consequences to serve the people and the oppressed. Concerning this point, Julio Lois suggests that “at the experiential level, the breach/conversion required by the following of Jesus made concrete in the option-and-praxis of the entry of solidarity into the world of the *others*, who are the poor.”¹⁷⁸

Loving our Neighbour as the Conditioning Character of Human Destiny

The passage of Matthew 25: 31-46 has become the ethical framework for determining the ‘time’ of all humans. The authenticity of the believer is at stake, or is in probation, because it is not fully complete unless it complies with the exigencies of the gospel. If we are seeking certainty, the assurance of salvation is intrinsically bound to our Christian obedience to follow Christ’s teaching authentically on earth. If the *hypostatic union* in Christ’s two natures binds the eternal with the temporal, the divine with the human, the ethics of Jesus has the potential repercussion of dis-unifying temporal existence from eternal love. Correlatively, as is implied in the passage, faith in Christ will flow into loving the neighbour as the process

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. 107.

¹⁷⁸ Julio Lois, “Christology in the Theology of Liberation” in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, ed. Ignacio Ellacuria and Jon Sobrino (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 172.

of salvation-liberation started with the eternal love of God being confirmed on earth in the application of obedience to Christ's commands. From this perspective, we agree with Boff's assertion: "But faith also has to be true, the faith necessary for salvation. In the biblical tradition it is not enough for faith to be true in the terms in which it is expressed (*orthodoxy*); it is verified, made true, when it is informed by love, solidarity, hunger and thirst for justice."¹⁷⁹ Such an ethics implies that we should live our lives exercising the efficacious love of God, according to the above Scriptural passage, which determines the possibility of eternal life and participating in the kingdom of God in its full realization in the end-time of history.

The ontological representation of an efficacious love was best conceived in the redemptive-liberative work of Christ, to move towards a paradigmatic structural model on which human love must be based. Thus, the logic of Christ became evident in His liberationist project to emancipate the oppressed and in that consequential line of argument, logically the followers of Christ will continue in that missiological directive, expressing the love of God to our neighbour. Human disobedience to the exigencies portrayed in the above Scriptural passage is the illogical decision to disregard a determinative requirement of the Christian faith, which among other concepts is the imperative to love others. Such disobedience will cause structural damage to a proper understanding of the Christian faith, and consequently will lead to egotism, selfishness, and ultimately to an asymmetric insensitive consciousness that disregards God and the neighbour. Such non-compliance will give birth to a false consciousness, since in the last instance this is to say we do not need or have to love our neighbour, or to claim by a false conception of Christian faith and falsely conclude that we have anyhow, been elected (predestined) from eternity. In this regard, Barth rightly stated "Indeed, what God in His love wills from us to His glory is that our

¹⁷⁹ Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 49-50.

existence in the determination which we ourselves give to it should be a sign of the fact that we stand under His predetermination.”¹⁸⁰ This statement is true as long as Barth is affirming that loving our neighbour it is a precondition of claiming to be a Christian since Christ was the one who pronounced the judgement in Mathew 25:31-46. If that is not what Barth is saying then we have to purge his statement by saying that it is ambiguous. But we could redirect the statement to infer that what Barth was saying is that God’s predetermination is fulfilled by Christ’s response to questions asked in the passage: ‘when you did it to one of the least significant of my brothers and sisters here, you did it to me’ (verse 40); - or – ‘when you didn’t do it for one of the least significant of my brothers and sisters here, you didn’t do it for me.’¹⁸¹ And it is here that Christ predestines us to one of the only two possibilities: heaven or hell, which are entirely dependent on what we have done for the poor.

Works as the Destiny of Christian Obedient Love

From Matthew 25: 31-46, we make a connection in our line of thought and recognize that James had to listen to Jesus *mismisima verba*, in the passage in question, to be prompted to say that “faith, all by itself and without works, is dead.”¹⁸² This is precisely because the demonstration of works is to carry them out in love as the socio-political dimension of an authentic faith, and the only thing which confers faith upon us is believing in Christ. He is the one who judges us. It follows then, that we have defined what a ‘just’ person is. Also we have considered the trajectory of faith. Now we have arrived at ‘living’ the Christian life. We ought to confer ‘life’ on faith, which is achieved through ‘works.’ Works make tangible the lines in the concentric circularity of faith which equip the believer, the ‘just’, to show that to believe in Christ is to live the Christian faith loving the neighbour. Loving the neighbour is the stamp and the assurance of eternal life on the advent of the kingdom of God, precisely

¹⁸⁰ K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God*, Vol. I, 2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956), 401.

¹⁸¹ Matthew 25:40, 45. (The Kingdom New Testament)

¹⁸² James 2:17 (Ibid)

because God loved us first. The concern is not with judgement, but with loving others. Thus, we corroborate our concept by agreeing with the Boff brothers as they affirm: “therefore, orthodoxy has to be accompanied by orthopraxis. Living and true faith enables us to hear the voice of the eschatological Judge in the cry of the oppressed”¹⁸³ Obviously Leonardo and Clodovis Boff based their argument on Matthew 25:31-46 as the definitive criterion of the longing to pray ‘your kingdom come’. The judgement of God, in retributive applicability in Christ, whether it is complied with or not, with a dead faith or a living faith, validates the reciprocal ethical-decision of God to judge humans and to further decide on which path one should be sent, or possibly one should take. The ethical fulfilment of the imperative to ‘love God and your neighbour as yourself’ should be our own fundamental decision acknowledging that true faith has a social dimension that cannot be ignored. J.L. Segundo hermeneutically stresses that “the gospel does tell us that efficacious love is the only criterion of divine judgment.” “The revelation that God is love is meant to open up new vistas of efficaciousness”.¹⁸⁴ The reciprocity of the judgement is to our own advantage in direct correlation that God loved us first, that God gave faith as gift and that Christ had shown the way to love our neighbour efficaciously. The authority of God is by no means arbitrary but retributive. Retributive by showing obedience or disobedience, in loving others or not, and living the faith that is manifested in either authentic works or dead faith. With reference to this idea, Jon Sobrino affirms that “*Eu-aggelion* stresses that the good and the positive break into time, they happen as something real in human lives, and are clearly announced, so that equivalency is broken between two possibilities: that God might be either salvation or condemnation for human beings.”¹⁸⁵

Nevertheless, the conditionality of the words of Christ, “those who are not with me are against me” is directly related to the question posed by Christ in Matthew 25: 31-46,

¹⁸³ Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 50.

¹⁸⁴ J.L. Segundo, *Evolution and Guilt*, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1974), 120.

¹⁸⁵ Jon Sobrino “Jesus, Theology, and Good News” in *The Future of liberation theology*, 189-190.

which implies that you are either with the poor or you are against them. Love is configured in preventive fashion, ‘with me’, since it provides that the equivalency cannot be broken by opting to love the poor; in this way, the destination of hell will be ruled out. If Christ had said ‘you are against me, therefore you are not with me’, then *equivalency* would remain fragile as Sobrino rightly points out above. But, since the Gospel is not a pseudo-curative medicine but is more preventative, simple as this may seem, then we can illustrate the point in the words of Dostoevsky: “I ask myself: what is hell? and I answer thus: The suffering of being no longer able to love.”¹⁸⁶ If we invert this phrase into a related paraphrase, it would read like this: hell is a permanent trauma of regretting that *I was able* to love the poor and I ignored them by living a life submerged in my own selfishness. Thus, we could deduce that the antonym of love is not hate but the distraction of loving one’s self too much—which is the narcissistic attitude of capitalism—and forgetting to love others. Or in different words, the condemnation may be both: it is letting go and ignoring the gracious possibility of including others in our love. Based on the probing question, as we paraphrase it: Lord when did we see people in difficult situations, or confronting adverse realities at the individual or collective level? (Matthew. 25: 37), it seems the *evangelical* calling is that Christians are admonished to break the silence of indifference and blindness. Any deliberate or inadvertent blindness before injustice becomes ideologically disobedient behaviour.

Nevertheless, when we acquire a critical consciousness¹⁸⁷ by observing the reality of oppression, that radical act of ‘seeing critically,’ is the beginning of the rupture of the

¹⁸⁶ In Stephen R. Holmes and Russell Rook, *Walk this Way: on the Road with Jesus* (Milton Keynes, Colorado Springs: Paternoster, Hyderabad, 2009), 75.

¹⁸⁷ E. Dussel explains the meaning of the critical conscience as this “In a prophetic convergence, from the socio-economic, cultural, ethnic, religious and pastoral angles, Latin America is putting in motion the dynamics of its historical vocation. It is not coincidence that one of the most Latin-American expressions today is “to raise consciousness,” to raise and to influence the raising of consciousness.” The text in Spanish “En una convergencia profética, desde los ángulos socio-económicos, cultural, étnico, religioso y pastoral, América Latina está poniendo en movimiento el dinamismo de su original vocación histórica. No por casualidad una de las expresiones más “latinoamericanas” hoy es “concientizar”, tomar y hacer tomar conciencia.” In *América Latina y conciencia Cristiana* (Quito, Ecuador: Departamento de Pastoral CELAM, 1970), 5. A very important

ideological silence that paralyzes our perceptual capacity to love our neighbour. The overcoming of paralysis is to let love flow freely. The oppressor does not like to see what is happening in the reality of oppression, or if they do see they remain indifferent. The poor see and begin loving others, but they do not talk. For the poor however, silence, which is a mechanism of defence in a context of repression, is turned around by the mysterious force of love that courageously, without cowardice, proclaims good news openly for the poor, despite consequences. In this way 'seeing' critically becomes an essential part of the content of proclaiming good news. Hence, the dialectic of the love of Christ is that he gave his life for humanity. His death and resurrection are an affirmation for a decent life, enough food, adequate clothing, appropriate shelter, inclusiveness and freedom in community, "so that they may have life and have it to the full"¹⁸⁸ Consequently, "efficacious love means day in and day out, in our continent, to struggle hard to eliminate the causes that produce the death of the poor."¹⁸⁹

The Surplus Value of Efficacious Love

Camilo Torres, facing the chronic system that was totally closed to making humanizing changes in favour of the majority, affirmed emphatically that "it is necessary then, to take the power from the privileged minorities and give it to the poor majorities. If this is done rapidly, it is the essential element of a revolution."¹⁹⁰ In such a context, power was more inclined not to safeguard the sovereignty and resources of the country as it was to defend the rich families and the owners of economic capital in Colombia. As stated by Paul, "The love of money is the root of all evils."¹⁹¹ From our perspective, the biblical author suggested that love can reach out of a stage of neutrality as viewed from an economic angle,

study on critical consciousness is given by David Martínez Mendizabal, *Los Pobres, la Pobreza y la Formación de la Conciencia Social* (León, México: Universidad Iberoamericana Plantel León, 1997)

¹⁸⁸ John 10:10 (The New Jerusalem Bible)

¹⁸⁹ Raúl Lugo Rodríguez, *Ribla* 17, 120.

¹⁹⁰ Camilo Torres, *Mensajes Visionarios*, 33.

¹⁹¹ 1 Timothy 6:10 (The New Jerusalem Bible)

when it is a result of the human desire to accumulate wealth, disregarding the poor, which is a social evil. In the context of oppression we read that statement as the ethical contradiction of any unjust system, which claims to have love, but it is deformed, functioning as a political caricature.

In a Christian context, as in Colombia, having faith without love, money is exposed to becoming a product of greed and the accumulation of wealth. The hermeneutic range of the term 'love' as suggested by the above passage implies that love could be vulnerable and fragile, even distorted by the hands of the exploiters. The dark side of love is when it lacks the reflection of light, by lurking in the shadows of dishonesty, corruption and usury, as it was in the time of Camilo Torres. This darkness of love also exists in our present day. The caricature-love is a vehicle used to deprive our neighbour of the power to acquire of a basic livelihood and humane existence.

Semantically, the term 'love' exercised by an unjust economic system will produce a perverse distortion of social life. The semantization of love operates in its neutrality, and love will always become neutral when it is ideologically in the hand of the oppressors. Neutrality in this context signifies the human capacity to remain impartial when circumstances demand that people should take the side of the excluded and victimized. Nevertheless, love becomes whole and life affirming, ruling out its neutrality when it operates hand-in-hand with fairness and justice. James clarifies this theological construct as we emphasize again that "In the same way, faith, all by itself and without works, is dead."¹⁹² Love in its neutral stage can be a weapon of denial and death. Thus, authentic Christian love is made authentic by a true commitment to the majorities that are oppressed. Since love in its neutral stage has produced pain and poverty and all kinds of calamities, emancipatory love seeks restitution and reparation for the oppressed majority. This characteristic restitution and reparation of

¹⁹² James 2:17 (The Kingdom New Testament)

Christian love is understood through a process that is called 'revolution'. Revolution is the negation of the neutrality of the love of money, or in positive terms, revolution is the surplus of efficacious love. It is this surplus of efficacious love that is needed to break the bonds of social oppression in Colombia. One other thing which diminishes love, is greed that in some other way affects the poor. Love becomes efficacious when the majority hope for a better day, and that spontaneity is inevitably conducive to seeking a process of liberation.

Based on what has been argued, we can agree with the following statement: "The logic of justice may seem impersonal, yet the concern for justice is an act of love."¹⁹³ In addition to this, McIntyre warns us, while acknowledging that "previous generations had better historical understanding of the meaning of the word 'love'", that "On the contrary we are admitting that for us the word 'love' is an enigma, a problem."¹⁹⁴ Though we agree with him in this respect, we suggest a different approach, which is to consider that love is not an enigma but rather an 'equivocal dilemma' of Christian faith; it is possessing the imperative to love the neighbour at all costs, as well as the consequences, as did Jesus Christ.

It is the spiritual contribution of the poor, the subversive possibility, that unbalances the episteme of the economic system of accumulation of wealth, which is another way to de-ideologize the infrastructural foundation of a system based on prioritizing profit over the human and environmental conditions. Furthermore, the relational attitude of the poor is intrinsically vulnerable, as it is their own perpetual poverty. The approach to help others is not made from a superior standpoint; rather, it is immersed in a true reciprocity mediated by committed love and vulnerable efficacy, the dialectic of going beyond one's own capabilities. This reciprocal approach is what makes the help emancipatory and not paternalistic, horizontal and not vertical, not top down, not an imposition but fragile, because this way the reciprocity is safeguarded in the equality of the relational mode. That is the only way, in a

¹⁹³ Heschel, *The Prophets*, 201.

¹⁹⁴ John McIntyre, *On the Love of God* (London: Collins, 1962), 34.

context of oppression and in a culture of marginalization (race, gender, life styles), that we could understand the words of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel: 'blessed are the poor in spirit', which seems a longer transcendental version of the paradoxical immanence of 'blessed are the poor' of Luke's account. This way to express the concern for others is the way the poor communicate efficacious love. The radical spirituality and the mature consciousness of the poor is their treasure, because its content is love that is neither subordinated to nor conforms to the reality of oppression but rather challenges it. Thus this "Critical consciousness represents 'things and facts as they exist empirically, in their causal and circumstantial correlations...Critical consciousness is integrated with reality.'"¹⁹⁵

Love is experienced efficaciously when we reach in our conscience the awareness of the moral dilemma of either opting to be concerned or to be indifferent to social oppression, and by choosing to radically engage in working for justice. In the struggle to build a just society, communication and the relationship with others will be a decisive factor. "When the two 'poles' of the dialogue are thus linked by love, hope, and mutual trust, they can join in a critical search for something real. Only dialogue truly communicates."¹⁹⁶ In this profound encounter, which is the communicative interaction mediated by efficacious love, the new re-creative possibilities of achieving a different economic system and a more authentic human relationship will begin to emerge which will transform 'dilemmas' into a tangible acts of Christian solidarity. Efficacious love leads us to respond, in moving forward to say 'yes' to living our lives committed to faith that will result in deeds and acts of love.

The dilemma begins by observing the disparities of a reality immersed in inequalities, corruption and the fetish of consumerism, and making the decision to go against it. In our present time, it is important to recover the meaning of love as understood in the life and work of Camilo Torres.

¹⁹⁵ P. Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, 39.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 40.

For Camilo Torres, love needed to be efficacious in the task and responsibility of being committed to work for justice. In that regard K. Barth tells us that “Love is the essence of Christian living.”¹⁹⁷ He further states that “It [love] is also its *condition sine qua non*, in every conceivable connexion.”¹⁹⁸ Those assertions, if taken seriously, would continue long to have ethical relevance for the survival of Christianity in the 21st century, especially knowing we live in a world where rampant socio-economic inequalities continue to challenge the dignity of the poor.

Convictions Rooted in Efficacious Love Resolve Human Dilemmas

Camilo Torres faced the predicament in a *kairos* time of his life and decided to go along the route of loving efficaciously his fellow neighbour. When facing the dilemma of doing or not doing the will of God, being obedient to Christ’s command to love God and neighbour, is the ethical criterion of authentic Christian living. The challenge that we face is embracing the radical option of loving our neighbour in an efficacious mode, which in turn will confer integrity to our Christian faith. Camilo Torres’s theology is lived out as the result of a faith lived in a concrete dimension of the struggle to correct an unjust system.

However, as we will see later on, Camilo Torres ultimately opted for violent revolution as a ‘proper means’, as a solution for overcoming injustice perpetuated by the minority. But we must understand how the context of injustice in Colombia in Camilo Torres’s time did not permit pacifistic opposition that allowed advocacy in favour of the poor. Cruel repression, persecution, torture, disappearance and death, followed any pacifistic protest against the injustice that had produced poverty. Also, it is important to observe that, in that context of the 1960s, all of Latin America was fostering an atmosphere of social revolution. Also, guerrilla groups were already fighting clandestinely in the Colombian mountains against the establishment.

¹⁹⁷ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God*, Vol. 1, 2, 372.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 372.

The force of Camilo Torres's political and theological convictions and level of social consciousness, his own personal life, his academic background, and aspirations motivated him to go forward in a revolutionary engagement to achieve what for him was his mission: to work for a better and more just Colombia, as Paulo Freire describes

It so happens that to every understanding, sooner or later an action corresponds. Once man perceives a challenge, understands it, and recognizes the possibilities of response, he acts. The nature of that action corresponds to the nature of his understanding. Critical understanding leads to critical action.¹⁹⁹

And so, Camilo Torres responded with action, devoting his life fully to a praxis of liberation for the poor. With great faith and hope, Camilo Torres pronounced that "After the revolution we Colombians will be aware that we are establishing a system oriented toward the love of our neighbour. The struggle is long; let us begin now".²⁰⁰ "The protracted and bitter nature of the power struggle eventually denied him the realization of his revolutionary hopes."²⁰¹ The struggle continues, however, and who will follow Camilo Torres's hermeneutics and his vision for an efficacious love in Colombia?

Summary

This chapter has presented an interpretative analysis of the construction of an 'efficacious love' based upon Camilo Torres's political hermeneutics and his ethics of liberation. Camilo Torres's theological views embody the radical necessity to value and practice Christian faith that believes in a better future for the oppressed masses, effected through Christian love. As such, Camilo Torres understood that love could become a collective force that could make a significant social impact to the point of changing social and political structures that produce oppression. The potential of love, as we have examined it, is the 'anticipation' and 'hope' that human destiny is not left in the hands of an abstract dream of an unattainable 'eschatology'. Instead, it is empowered by a faith that builds a

¹⁹⁹ P. Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, 39-40.

²⁰⁰ Camilo Torres, *Revolutionary Priest*, 369.

²⁰¹ Paul Lehmann, *The Transfiguration of Politics* (New York: SCM Press Ltd. 1975), 153.

social reality in daily *praxis* for the collective majority, working toward a desired utopia: a better world for all and not just for a few.

In considering the theological foundation, we have analysed that God's love for the world was the exercise of God's absolute preference and freedom, which contextualizes the efficacy of love as a historical providential *criterion* to eradicate injustice. Moreover, in a world dominated by evil-doing embedded in human hearts and in the unjust social structures, the efficaciousness of love demonstrated by the faith and *praxis* of Jesus of Nazareth, has a transformative impact that will dismantle socio-political alienation.

Finally, we have argued that Camilo Torres's political theology overcomes the conservative interpretation of the Scriptures in favour of the oppressors, and rather introduces the dialectic of efficacious love and justice. The dynamic of faith in such dialectical encounter of these divine virtues is the foundational principle of the knowledge of God needed to sustain a predisposition for all new things, and it fosters openness, which in turn confronts the ambivalence of narrow ideas that produce decadency.

Therefore, the above discussion has established the theoretical background and a politico-theological construct such that the church will have the competence to approach the Scriptures with an open mind, in light of the reality of desperation and exclusion. It is theologically misleading to consider the potential of the efficacy of love, if the church neglects the practicality of a hermeneutics of liberation that will foster a message that requires a change in the socio-economic structures that sustain and foster oppression. This dynamic of a proper hermeneutic is the subject we turn to now.

CHAPTER III. APPROACHES TO A HERMENEUTICS OF SOCIO-THEOLOGICAL DISRUPTION IN A CONTEXT OF OPPRESSION

“While deeper in shadow, from
the leisurely lapse of oblivion,
the flower of your solitude, tumid in earth
like a lengthening winter, grows ample”.²⁰²

“Flower, you turn blood into fertilizer!
you are stronger than the hand which cuts you,
more enduring than the idea which defines you,
brighter than the pain which portrays your face.
The world is growing afraid of you,
defenceless flower!”²⁰³

The aim of Chapter 3 will be to delineate two hermeneutical views. The first is a brief examination of Gadamer’s hermeneutical phenomenology, in particular as explicated in his influential book *Truth and Method*, with especial attention being paid to the concept of “being-in-the-world” as determinative in ruling out historical alienation. The task of hermeneutics is approached from different angles; one of them is the viewpoint of philosophy. Since philosophical hermeneutics has played an important role in the production of theory and theology, it will be fundamental to interact with this perspective in order to consider different voices dealing with the concepts of hermeneutics. Hermeneutics will be one of the transversal axes in this thesis, particularly in the interaction with the ethics of liberation in order to elucidate and expand the concept of justice within the framework of political theology and within a context of poverty and oppression, as we have studied in the concept of the efficacious love of Camilo Torres.

Recent and past philosophical studies have demonstrated interest in the subject we are to discuss in the first part of this chapter, but we cannot exhaust the vast production of this discipline in this project. Briefly, we will discuss Gadamer’s phenomenological

²⁰² Pablo Neruda “Fantasma Fantom” in *Selected poems of Pablo Neruda*, trans. Ben Belitt (New York: Grove Press, Inc. 1963), 49.

²⁰³ Carlos Mesters, *Defenceless Flower: A New Reading of the Bible*, Trans. Francis McDonagh (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 55.

hermeneutics. The reason for our interest in the phenomenological approach is due to the emphasis in hermeneutical consciousness on language and the role played by any community in a historical participation in the task of interpreting Scripture.

Then, in a more exhaustive manner, we analyse interpretatively Clodovis Boff's hermeneutics of liberation, seeking solid insights concerning his three theoretical foundations: socio-analytic, hermeneutic, dialectic of theory and praxis. Those in turn will be framed on and into an exegetical and hermeneutical suspicion to interpret the Scriptures from the perspective of the oppressed and marginalized. It is important to note that Camilo Torres practiced these hermeneutical methods before they were articulated by Gadamer and C. Boff.

The point of departure is in dialectical fashion, an analysis of the current historical situation in the light of an interpretation of the Scriptures that will actively respond to the reality of the poor. A hermeneutics of liberation will demonstrate that its trust lies in mediating the social conditions that will facilitate the poor to become protagonists in their own history, own cosmo-vision, life-style and preferences, and their socio-economic destiny. These were constant concerns in Camilo Torres' understanding and interpretation of what it means to live the Christian faith.

Hermeneutics: A Fundamental Consideration

To read the Scriptures is an option, but in Colombia it is an urgent necessity that cannot be postponed. Both the Protestant churches and Roman Catholic churches are promoting the reading of the Scriptures.²⁰⁴ The Scriptures is the book to save the anguish of millions of people who await a better day. But in the landscape of reality and history, the

²⁰⁴ Regarding the importance of the Scriptures in Latin America, Sharon E. Heany explains "it was established that biblical renewal within post-conciliar Catholicism led to a fresh approach to the Scriptures. This notable change in attitude was influential in the early development of liberation thought... the emphasis on the authority of Scripture is a definitive principle of evangelicalism in general, and Latin American evangelicals specifically. It was also acknowledged that the new openness to the Scriptures within Latin American Catholicism motivated Latin American evangelicals to study the Scriptures in a contextually appropriate manner." In *Contextual theology for Latin America: Liberation themes in Evangelical Perspective* (Milton Keynes, Colorado Springs: Paternoster Hyderabad, 2008), 93.

flower has been exposed to the contingencies of modernity. The Scriptures have to pass throughout the inclemency of reason. Now reason has become old, and the defenceless flower is blooming again, but now in freedom. The ‘defenceless flower’ of Mesters is the ‘good news of the gospel for the poor’. From a poetic perspective, Pablo Neruda refers to the flower that grows in ‘solitude’, or in history in oblivion of the poor after the cruel colonization. With this in mind, we will approach the hermeneutics of liberation.

Preliminary Conceptualization of a Hermeneutics of Liberation

An important task of the methodology of liberation theology is to challenge and to correct to the production of conservative theological presuppositions that have interpreted the Scriptures in favour of the oppressor. Therefore its task is to formulate new epistemological paradigms more in accord with a context of oppression. Traditional theology has utilised talk about God and the Christian faith using the Bible as its spring board, and has done so in different ways and by using different methods to understand and articulate its discourse: literally, conceptually, interpretatively, philosophically, and speculatively. In a different fashion liberation theology arises from and moves toward a distinctive approach to the Scriptures, and has been accompanied by science in particular, especially critical and social theory, and hermeneutics.

“Thus Scripture is once again becoming the vital and formal principle and wellspring of theology; and the interpretation of Scripture is being oriented around the missionary task in its concrete historical context.”²⁰⁵ The fundamental elements that are distinctive in liberation theology’s hermeneutical premises of scriptural interpretation have emerged as result of a profoundly committed interaction with a historical context of oppression; this is a new way of reflecting upon the Scriptures with the help of the sciences which provides compatible tools appropriate to such a situation. Interpreting of the Bible in a context of oppression produces a

²⁰⁵ Raul Vidales, *Frontiers of Theology*, 37.

historical commitment and a faith experience that situates the believer in a praxis which is in solidarity with the oppressed in Latin America. The reading of the Scriptures in the hermeneutics of liberation takes a definitive stance to recover the historical processes of the class struggle in Latin America. From that perspective, the Scriptural text responds realistically and with authentic relevance to a society seeking change. The Scriptures were written to guide people in any historical context to pursue fraternity, justice and truth among humans, creation and the Creator. “The theology of liberation is the product of the use the poor make of the Bible in their communities. That use of the Bible is the source of their freedom in the face of the abuses of power.”²⁰⁶ Putting hermeneutics in that perspective, Mesters makes suggestive connections between the Scriptures and the present reality of the poor, when he says “...in interpreting the word of God we need to take account of three factors: the *pre-text* of life, the *context* of the community’s faith, and the *text* of the Bible. Each of those factors has its own demands.”²⁰⁷ Obviously what we are observing in the analysis of Mesters is the requirement for sensitivity to history and the important and definitive role the Scriptures plays in this. For this reason in this chapter we are focusing upon important theoretical and hermeneutical concepts of liberation theology. We need to set up a solid epistemological foundation to build up the bases of theological presuppositions that will help us to elaborate a theological discourse for peace with social justice.

Disrupted History Searching for Liberating Praxis.

This emphasis brings a fresh manner in which to reflect on our faith within a different method of doing and practising, not only a contextual theology, but of doing and practising theology within a disrupted history that has produced terrible consequences (e.g., the colonization that began in 1492 in Latin America, and the current situation of oppression in Colombia.) For this reason a method rooted in a disrupted history has to be critical of causes

²⁰⁶ Carlos Mesters *Defenseless Flower*, viii

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 21.

producing poverty and oppression. This new critical way of doing theology is radically different from classical systematic theology which has customarily focused on the interpretation of the Bible for the production of dogmas. In a critical observation of that theological tradition, R. Vidales point outs: “If theology wishes to remain true to the dimension of history, then it cannot be wholly preoccupied with maintaining the purity of its doctrine within the narrow confines of its own private domain of truth – apart from the conflicts and vicissitudes of history in the world at large.”²⁰⁸ In this way, praxis determines the methods used to interpret the Scriptures and determines the actions proper for re-directing history so that it will sustain liberation. The method, in order to be understood and acted upon in a context formed by historical oppression, needs to be mediated by a social theory²⁰⁹ that scientifically analyses the socio-political structures that have produced injustices and poverty. Thus, “The basic contribution of the human sciences is to provide theology with a more clear-eyed view of history, a more critical approach, and a set of analytical instruments.”²¹⁰ Vidales clarifies things by saying that “This means that methodological activity itself has an intrinsic dialectical relationship with the scientific discipline in which one is engaged. That being the case, method cannot be neutral.”²¹¹ The methodology of liberation theology proposes the construction of a discourse that will move proactively not only to understand a specific reality but to change unjust structures in order to transform society. Then “Every methodology presupposes some theoretical framework and some ideological option.”²¹² From another angle, Gustavo Gutierrez enhances this view, affirming that:

Our purpose is not to elaborate an ideology to justify postures already taken, nor to undertake a feverish search for security in the face of the radical challenges which

²⁰⁸ Vidales, *Frontiers of Theology*, 37.

²⁰⁹ A good contribution to this important subject can be found in John R. Pottenger *The Political Theory of Liberation Theology: Toward a Reconvergence of Social Values and Social Science* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press: 1989), 159-189., Hugo Assmann *Teología desde la Praxis de la Liberación* (Salamanca: Ediciones Sígueme, 1973), 47-52.

²¹⁰ Vidales, *Frontiers of Theology*, 41.

²¹¹ *Ibid.* 42.

²¹² *Ibid.* 42.

confront the faith, nor to fashion a theology from which political action is deduced. It is rather to let ourselves be judged by the Word of the Lord, to think through our faith, to strengthen our love, and to give reason for our hope from within a commitment which seeks to become more radical, total, and efficacious.²¹³

The Interdisciplinary Character of Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics as a discipline has developed in different fashions since the formation of the Christian canon and the production of doctrines in Christian history. By the time of the Reformation, the hermeneutical work had intensified on the interpretation of the Scriptures, reaching a decisive point in the way Scripture and its meaning is approached. Now, in this postmodern era, as Jasper says, “Hermeneutics is not a word we use in everyday English, but it is a useful technical term to describe our understanding of the nature of texts and how we interpret and use them, especially with respect to the Bible, a collection of ancient texts with distinctive and abiding authority.”²¹⁴ Although our treatment of hermeneutics in this project is limited, we will consider some important thinkers in the area of hermeneutical theory, as well as important proponents of the hermeneutics of liberation. We are aware of the intricate characteristics of hermeneutics in the realm of ideas and line of thoughts; nevertheless we want to embark on the analysis of hermeneutical concepts that will enrich our understanding of the liberation theology perspectives on hermeneutics, most of all regarding social justice that will build peace with justice.

Gadamer and the Hermeneutical Consciousness: A Basis to Transcend Alienation

As a point of reference Schmidt suggests that “phenomenological research means carefully to describe our experience without making judgements about what the experience implies.”²¹⁵ This, though a compromising assertion, is a vital concept that Gadamer

²¹³ Gustavo Gutierrez, *Theology of Liberation*, ix.

²¹⁴ David Jasper, *A Short introduction to Hermeneutics* (Louisville, London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 1-2.

²¹⁵ Lawrence K. Schmidt. *Understanding Hermeneutics* (Stockfield: Acumen Publishing Limited, 2006),

elaborated in a distinctive way, which is of interest because our task here has to do with understanding the construction of theological ideas, approaches to the interpretation of the Scriptures, and its hermeneutical implication for social analysis in a context of poverty and oppression in light of faith as praxis for liberation. Thus, our focus of study of Gadamer's phenomenological ideas will be concretely on the coherence and the formation of presuppositions for obtaining 'hermeneutical consciousness', and how this will play a determining factor in the interpretation and understanding of Scripture. We will pay attention to Gadamer's hermeneutical consciousness, historical consciousness, and the idea of language, all those being fundamental parts in the construction of the term "being-in-the-world." In this regard, Oliver Davis makes a pertinent observation: "In an important essay published in 1966 on 'The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem', Gadamer argued against Schleiermacher's view that hermeneutics is about clarifying communication, proposing instead that 'being' is conterminous with 'world' and both are reducible to language..."²¹⁶ In Gadamer's critical view, "Language is the fundamental mode of operation of our being-in-the-world and the all-embracing form of the constitution of the world".²¹⁷ This pivotal statement will guide hermeneutics on unimaginable paths toward interpretation and understanding, and Gadamer argues that the hermeneutical task will basically consist in learning how to interact dialectically with the text and the rich knowledge and experience that the people have as readers.

Alienation and Its Effects on Historical Consciousness

Nevertheless, if we desire language to transcend alienation in a context of oppression, we expect Gadamer to expand on his ideas by presenting arguments of the relevance of

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²¹⁶ Oliver Davis, "Hermeneutics" in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, John B. Webster et. al., John Webster (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 505.

²¹⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. trans. and ed. David E. Linge (Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, Berkeley 1976), 3.

hermeneutics in an age shaped and influenced by postmodernism and the plurality of truth. To begin, Gadamer identifies “two experiences of alienation that we encounter in our concrete existence: the experience of alienation of aesthetic consciousness and the experience of alienation of historical consciousness”.²¹⁸ Here, we are only focusing our attention on the latter: the experience of alienation of historical consciousness since it is on this plane where the emergence of a hermeneutics of suspicion becomes relevant for the development of a historical project toward liberation. The problem we face in hermeneutics is the fact that language has to be accompanied by historical memory in order to interpret the Scriptures and simultaneously analyse historical factors that diachronically have shaped and affected the historical consciousness of people with a disrupted history, as is the case in Latin America. As a consequence, “The second mode of the experience of alienation is the historical consciousness – the noble and slowly perfected art of holding our selves at a critical distance in dealing with witnesses to past life.”²¹⁹ At this juncture, we are able to appreciate Gadamer’s affirmation:

We can contrast the hermeneutical consciousness with these examples of alienation as a more comprehensive possibility that we must develop. But, in the case of this hermeneutical consciousness also, our initial task must be to overcome the epistemological truncation by which the traditional ‘science of hermeneutics’ has been absorbed into the idea of modern science.²²⁰

This view of philosophical hermeneutics also implies an ethical affirmation made by Gadamer, since he challenges how sciences (nowadays digital technology the communications) are taking control of human affairs to the point of shaping social values and even cultural idiosyncrasies. This implies distortion of the potentiality for developing hermeneutical consciousness on the solid ground of critical distance. Interestingly, Gianni Vattimo perceived ethical formation in the ideas of Gadamer by pointing out that “what is already clear in *Truth and Method*, and what becomes even clearer later on, is that the

²¹⁸ Ibid. 4.

²¹⁹ Ibid. 5.

²²⁰ Ibid. 7.

expanded role assigned to language is accompanied by – or rather, has its true origin in – the ethical concerns that governs Gadamer’s hermeneutics.”²²¹ The ethical implication, then, is a fundamental principle in communication that is horizontal, the eye-to-eye point of departure of equal relationship mediated by language. That hermeneutic concern of Gadamer will be expanded by the face-to-face nature of Dussel’s ethics of liberation. Thus, in Camilo Torres’s terms, we dare to imply that ethically, efficacious love is a mechanism that facilitates ‘interpreting’ each other on a horizontal plane, with an interpretative relationship in love, without a sense of superiority, which conveys the irrevocable accent of a language that emancipates the oppressed. On the other hand, the oppressor lacks such communicative ethics, and rather approaches the poor as inferior beings, which distort the interpretation.

Moving on from that point of departure, Gadamer now takes us to a kind of implementation of the theory, the ability to question as an important element in the task of interpretation, which reflects the rhetorical methodology of Gadamer’s thought. In the realm of knowledge, only a critical mind will develop the discipline to question the way ideas are constructed: hence, his analysis points out that “we have to trace the way hermeneutics has expanded from a specialized and occasional field of application to the vast field of philosophic questioning.”²²² Gadamer emphasises this principle through asking different questions, and he admires how “Greek thinkers ... dared to put questions like, Why is it? and, What is it? And, out of what does anything emerge into being?”²²³ This mental attitude will form an analytical mind capable of the understanding and interpretation of a text and ultimately of all reality. It follows, then, that “The real power of hermeneutical consciousness is our ability to see what is questionable.”²²⁴ This is a powerful statement because it sustains

²²¹ Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Post-modern culture*, trans. and with an Introduction by Jon R. Snyder (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), 132.

²²² Hans-Georg Gadamer. *Reason in the Age of Science*. trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1981), 88.

²²³ Ibid. 102.

²²⁴ Gadamer, *Philosophical hermeneutics*, 13.

the capacity of suspicion which is intrinsic to the task of critical hermeneutics, especially as applied to social analysis. Nevertheless, a critical hermeneutics to obtain its validity must to arrive at a hermeneutical ethics.²²⁵ Simultaneously, the act of questioning builds what Paulo Freire²²⁶ calls “conscientization” a critical pre-condition for interpretation of a text and reality. At this point, we realise how Gadamer has taken us to the idea that hermeneutical consciousness is the means to transcend historical alienation, an obstacle to proper interpretation.²²⁷

Temporality as Critical Distance

The “critical distance” or what we call “the subjective temporality” between the text and the reader is an important element in the ontological perception of being-in-the-world. It is fundamental for Gadamer, since he questioned the epistemic foundation of modernity that gave birth to a univocal interpretation perpetuated by modern science. The situation of the reader in a *critical* mode-of-being will determine the formation of ‘suspicion’ to help grasp historical consciousness that consequently will form an attitude of hermeneutical consciousness to enable the reader to encounter dialectically the text of the past.

Gadamer argues that “time is no longer primarily a gulf to be bridged, because it separates, but it is actually the supportive ground of process in which the present is rooted.”²²⁸ In this way, historical distance is not a problematic historical gap, according to Gadamer, and we could consider time as the vehicle that connects the past and present

²²⁵ E. Dussel made an important definition of ethical conscience, which we will re-take and develop in the third chapter; he stressed this as “I designate *ethical* conscience the capacity one has to listen to the other’s voice, the transontological word that breaks in from beyond the present system. The just protest of the other may question the moral principles of the system. Only the one who has an ethical conscience can accept this questioning from the standpoint of the absolute criterion: the other as other in justice” in *Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. Aquilina Martinez and Christine Morkovsky (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2003), 59.

²²⁶ “Paulo Freire was born in Recife in the desperately poor northeast section of Brazil. He became a lawyer, and took a position as counsel for local labor unions... he took part in numerous adult education seminars for workers, and this finally led him to his lifetime vocation as an educator, especially in the area of literacy programs for adults.” Alfred T. Hennelly, *Liberation Theology*, 5.

²²⁷ Alienation in Marxist term refers to the absence of historical materialism and a social dialectics in hermeneutical analysis, see *Ibid*, 49-58.

²²⁸ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 264.

horizons in a dialogical encounter, but not as a fusion, because praxis has not occurred as the final impact made by the text and beyond. Fusion will happen after alienation has been transcended and application has been made. Gadamer insists that for this reason “temporal distance is not something that must be overcome.”²²⁹ Rather he stresses the benefit of it, especially against the illusion of the claim made by objectivism. Then he expands this idea by arguing that “In fact the important thing is to recognise the distance in time as a positive and productive possibility of understanding.” In addition, we recognise the influence of Gadamer in this regard on the thought of Ricoeur, as he affirms that “The purpose of all interpretation is to conquer a remoteness, a distance between past cultural epoch to which the text belongs and the interpreter himself.”²³⁰ The distance immersed in this remoteness has not been a waste of time evaporated in history; rather, it is a more concrete and ontological difference that reveals with other sparkles of clarity the experiences of a world unknown for the reader. In other words, Ricoeur profoundly asserts “distanciation...it is a dialectical trait, the principle of a struggle between the otherness that transforms all spatial and temporal distance into cultural estrangement and the ownness by which all understanding aims at the extension of self-understanding.”²³¹ From Gadamer, we glean the idea that temporal distance facilitates the potentiality for a more comprehensive understanding.

Critical Distance and the Ontological Horizon of Understanding

The phenomenological approach of Gadamer could be considered a dynamic one, and in permanent movement, for the simple reason that culture, idiosyncrasies and social contests keep changing, but in a relational reciprocity with the past. This is like walking forward, with a retrospective awareness of history. He presents this view, which is paramount to him for the

²²⁹ Ibid. 264.

²³⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 16.

²³¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Forth Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 43.

disclosure of meaning, in this fashion: “A horizon is not a rigid frontier, but something that moves with one and invites one to advance further.”²³² That horizon comprises the totality of human experiences that help humans to shape their understanding of reality in a specific time in history. Trying to expand the concept of horizon, Gadamer says that “Husserl calls this phenomenological concept of the world ‘life-world’, ie the world in which we are immersed in the natural attitude that never becomes for us an object as such, but that constitutes the pre-given basis for all experience.”²³³ For Gadamer, the result of advancing our understanding is that the ontological horizon has formed the intentionality of consciousness, which will be able to transcend the “epistemological truncation”.

Pre-Judging as Condition for the Concept of Situation

An important factor is the concept of “prejudice” which is indispensable in the phenomenology of Gadamer and the process of interpretation. The pre-judging of the text waiting to be interpreted and subsequently to be understood has been influenced by experience in the world in reciprocity with history and tradition. This is to say that the accumulation of experiences has contributed to the formation of cognitive and empirical knowledge in all humans, and therefore helps us to create criteria for judgements when we are facing reality or are facing the interpretation of a particular text. Gadamer then affirms that “this recognition that all understanding inevitably involves some prejudice gives the hermeneutical problem its real thrust.”²³⁴ His definition of prejudice is distinguished from the understanding given by the Enlightenment, “Actually ‘prejudice’ means a judgment that is given before all the elements that determine a situation have been finally examined.”²³⁵ Gadamer viewed “prejudices” as something positive for the task of “shaping the historical consciousness,” always in accordance within his own definition of prejudice, and as a good

²³² Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 217.

²³³ Ibid. 218.

²³⁴ Ibid. 239

²³⁵ Ibid. 240

point of departure in beginning new interpretations. Gadamer obviously shows his discontent with the Cartesian ideas of dislocating the experience of life and history, fundamental to the task of human understanding. In this regard Schmidt makes an important observation: “Gadamer’s critique is that if the historian is embedded in history and this means within the hermeneutical circle of understanding, she cannot escape this circle to attain a standpoint of reflection that would permit methodologically justified knowledge.”²³⁶ Similarly, Gadamer sharply attests that “It is the general tendency of the Enlightenment not to accept any authority and to decide everything before the judgment seat of reason.”²³⁷ Hence, “The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life.”²³⁸ For this particular reason, hermeneutics will have the difficult task of opening these circuits between the text we aim to interpret within our historical consciousness situated in a critical distance, which constantly is conditioned by our own present-reality. The re-construction of the distance between text and present is basically a hermeneutical challenge, as Gadamer says “The true home of hermeneutics is in this intermediate area.”²³⁹ The logic of Gadamer climbs to reach a turning point since the *Dasein*²⁴⁰ has been conditioned by history and by present reality, “it follows from this intermediate position in which hermeneutics operates that its work is not to develop a procedure of understanding, but to clarify the conditions in which understanding takes place.”²⁴¹ These conditions are elements of a broader situation or of a horizon; where ultimately understanding will take place. Thus, since we do not have two or more histories, but only one, “It is, in fact, a single horizon that embraces everything contained in historical

²³⁶ Lawrence K. Schmidt, *Understanding Hermeneutics*, 98

²³⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 241

²³⁸ *Ibid.* 245

²³⁹ *Ibid.* 262-63.

²⁴⁰ The definition argued by Gadamer is “being-in-the-world”. *Truth and Method*, 257-264.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.* 263.

consciousness.”²⁴² Being-in-the-world, is not a case of detaching ourselves from the influence and development of history, so we, as readers, are not permitted to present ourselves empty of knowledge. “Rather, we must always already have a horizon in order to be able to place ourselves within a situation.”²⁴³

Situation and Hermeneutical Awareness

The idea of temporal distance is understood in the light of two concepts, ‘situation’ and ‘horizon’. Gadamer affirms that “we define the concept of ‘situation’ by saying that it represents a standpoint that limits the possibility of vision.”²⁴⁴ Gadamer acknowledges the limited scope of a “situation” as expressed by his own definition of it; then he immediately clarifies that “Hence an essential part of the concept of situation is the concept of ‘horizon’.”²⁴⁵ Gadamer uses these terms in chronological order, where the situation is the intermediate stage, not some ‘limbo,’ but the starting ground that permits the reader to begin the process of interpreting the text. Then says Gadamer: “We think we understand when we see the past from a historical standpoint, i.e. place ourselves in the historical situation and seek to reconstruct the historical horizon.”²⁴⁶ Placing ourselves in a situation, according to Gadamer, is conditioned by obtaining a horizon, and not vice versa: “Rather, we must always already have a horizon in order to be able to place ourselves within a situation.”²⁴⁷ Then it follows that what gives validity to *language* is the “critical situation” of the reader. The concept of ‘situation’ will be expanded below, but from the perspective of the ‘social situation’ of poverty and oppression; the relation of hermeneutical theory to a situation in the process of interpretation rightly is a pre-condition that will guide the reader to identify the

²⁴² Ibid. 271.

²⁴³ Ibid. 271.

²⁴⁴ Ibid, 269.

²⁴⁵ Ibid. 269.

²⁴⁶ Ibid. 270.

²⁴⁷ Ibid. 271.

cardinal point from where he/she will approach the text. But we bear in mind the distinction made by Paul Ricoeur that

“if I begin by giving due consideration to Heidegger’s philosophy, it is because I do not hold it to be a contrary solution; that is to say, his *Analytic of Dasein* is not an alternative which would force us to choose between an ontology of understanding and an epistemology of interpretation.”²⁴⁸

This clarification will prevent the reader from believing that a ‘neutral’ situation will be possible in facing the text, and the reader will need to understand that interpretation is not an accidental positioning in a particular ‘situation’ but a serious and responsible act informed by historical consciousness. Gadamer even restricts the starting point, saying “It is true that interpretation has to start somewhere, but it does not start just anywhere.”²⁴⁹ The arbitrariness of ignoring the condition of the ‘situation’ will end in a weak interpretation, because of the lack of contextual awareness. Hence, Gadamer affirms “This is not a regrettable distortion that affects the purity of understanding, but the condition of its possibility, which we have characterised as the hermeneutical situation.”²⁵⁰

Application

Gadamer suggests that “the inner fusion of understanding and interpretation led to the third element in the hermeneutical problem, application, becoming wholly cut off from any connection with hermeneutics.”²⁵¹ The dual concepts of application and situation are key elements in the task of hermeneutics, since both concepts build the infrastructural approximation between the reader and the text in a dynamic manner. The encounter of the two horizons will manifest the realization of hermeneutical consciousness as the proper attitude to achieve the transition to interpretation. Thus, the simple point of hermeneutics is the fact that interpretation is not a *tabula rasa* approach from the reader toward the text, and

²⁴⁸ P. Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretation*, 6.

²⁴⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 429.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 429.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.* 274.

“At the same time, one is made forcefully aware, through the discovery of other perspectives, of one’s own subjectivity, which emerges, for the first time, as a distinct point of view on the world.”²⁵²

Consequently the inquiring into truth has a fundamental objective which is the formation of a hermeneutical consciousness that claims for a participatory disclosure of the *Dasein*, the ability to make the connection from interpretation to action in the world. It then follows that “Our thesis is that historical hermeneutics also has a task of application to perform, because it too serves the validity of meaning, in that it explicitly and consciously bridges the gap in time that separates the interpreter from the text and overcomes the alienation of meaning that the text has undergone.”²⁵³ This way, the application of meaning will take place in the situation of the reader, as he/she is confronted with the values and cosmo-visions of the past, vis-à-vis his/her own present situation, as a result of the dialectic nature of interpretation. In this way, the event of application is a contextualization of the meaning of the text in the concrete situation of the interpreter. We are assuming then that contextualization takes the place of the surrounding reality of the reader as actualization already has taken the place of the meaning of the text. And we shall clarify that it is not merely an acknowledgement of leisurely reading; rather, the reader is compelled via an ethical decision to make, or to take, the text to question his/her reality. It is not an option to withhold a response, thus the reader cannot remain a passive spectator of what the text or the Scripture is proposing to be applied in a context or situation. The text has provoked the reader, despite the “distance” to participate, as explained by Gadamer, in a new mode of being in-the-world. In this way, speaking hermeneutically, the act of interpretation is a “becoming interpreting being in action”, a new world is opening and developing new horizons of “understanding-in-the world” to be contextualized and applied.

²⁵² Susan Bordo, *The Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and Culture* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987), 45.

²⁵³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 278.

Thus, human comprehension is not univocal, only based on the interpreter's location in the present or one of the behaviour modes of the subject, but the mode of being in-the-world that will guide the reader to a more ample interpretation of the text. As such, Gadamer is able to affirm "Understanding, rather, is always the fusion of those horizons which we imagine to exist by themselves."²⁵⁴ The interest of Gadamer is that the understanding – interpreting with a historical character – is a reciprocal interaction, mediated by language. Consequently the task of hermeneutics will be inclusive and credible, dialectically questioning both past and present to enrich the act of interpretation. In this regard, he rightly asserts that "This is why it is part of the hermeneutic approach to project an historical horizon that is different from the horizon of the present."²⁵⁵ The interweaving of Gadamer's phenomenological ideas opens the circuits that were closed by historical alienation and false consciousness, into an open horizon of hermeneutical possibilities that will transform the conditions for being-in-in-the-world. After his philosophical phenomenology, Gadamer arrives at a decisive hermeneutical conclusion, a position defined later in his philosophical production. He says "Thus the hermeneutical problem is not one of the correct mastery of language, but of the proper understanding of that which takes place through the medium of language."²⁵⁶ This is the answer that Gadamer was building toward in his discourse of hermeneutical consciousness within the fusion of horizons, that understanding occurs not as a mode of knowledge (the epistemological approach) but that understanding is the mode of being, the mode of being in-the-world that exists when we understand and historical alienation has been transcended through a hermeneutical consciousness.

As we have seen, the "projection of historical horizon" in the intention of the text implied by Gadamer, finds an echo in Discenso's viewpoint about Gadamer's concept of language vis-a-vis application. He comments: "Language frees itself from the mind of the

²⁵⁴ Ibid. 273

²⁵⁵ Ibid. 273.

²⁵⁶ Ibid. 346-47

author, extending beyond his or her intentions through its capacity to speak freshly to historically changing loci of appropriation.”²⁵⁷ We see that Discenso uses ‘appropriation’ as does Paul Ricoeur, and not ‘application’ like Gadamer, and although in this hermeneutical context in developed countries the two words may have the same connotation, with only a small syntactical variation, this is not the case in third-world countries. However, Gadamer points out the potential connotation that has to be avoided with the word ‘appropriation’ by clarifying that is not “...an appropriation as a ‘taking possession of’, but rather a subordination to the text’s claim to dominate our minds.”²⁵⁸ Ricoeur develops the idea of ‘appropriation’ taken from the “translation of the German term *Aneignung*. *Aneignen* means ‘to make one’s own what was initially ‘alien’.”²⁵⁹ Therefore, we recognise the importance of Gadamer’s philosophical phenomenology to the field of hermeneutics as it applies to our purpose in this project.

Analysis of Gadamer’s Phenomenology

David Jasper has said that “Gadamer returns us to the question of the hermeneutics of faith and the hermeneutics of suspicion, and he suggests that, ultimately, in our reading we have to decide between one and the other.”²⁶⁰ This remark is as provocative as it is debatable. We argue that Gadamer has implied both, but by constructing first the presupposition of suspicion and then moving to the possibility of being confronted by the text or the Scriptures so that the reader in the stage of ‘application’ encounters truth that will nurture faith toward action in the world. Also Gadamer asserts that the interpreter’s pre-judgement is formed by the totality of experience – social, religious, political, and cultural – and contains both elements of faith and suspicion, which will not permit the separation or the option of

²⁵⁷ James Discenso, *Hermeneutics and the Disclosure of Truth. A study in the work of Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1990), 120.

²⁵⁸ Gadamer, *Truth & Method*, 278.

²⁵⁹ Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and Human Sciences*, 185.

²⁶⁰ David Jasper, *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics*, 106.

choosing only one approach. From another angle, the author Gianni Vattimo confers a sharp distinction in the following observation “Gadamer returns to, and elaborates, Heidegger’s ‘connection’ or ‘identification’ between Being and Language in a direction that stresses ever more emphatically the pole of language rather than of Being.”²⁶¹ We do not see it this way either, since Gadamer’s concept of hermeneutical consciousness is rooted in the ontological horizon of being-in-the-world that is mediated by language. Only stressing one pole will diminish the character of the fusion of horizons that is based on an ontological principle. In this regard, Agamben clarifies that “The principal difficulty inherent in philosophical presentation concerns this very order of problems. Philosophy considers not merely what is revealed through language, but also the revelation of language itself.”²⁶² But we need to bear in mind that language is not an *absolute* entity that rules from a platform of infallibility, but rather is subordinated to and safeguarded against the exigencies of reality and experience of being in-the-world.

Finally, the importance of the Scriptures in the culture of Latin America as a sacred text maintains a privileged place for it in the mind of the population, especially among the poor. Gadamer’s concept of ‘situation’ in particular, will be seriously considered and expanded in the light of liberation presuppositions, both from a hermeneutical and an ethical perspective throughout this project. Gadamer’s phenomenological and hermeneutical concepts will help us to move into a praxis of liberation as we construct the conceptualization of social justice in the Colombian context. In retrospect the interpretation of the Scripture in Latin America always has been at stake, because the dominant institutions of society have interpreted it in a univocal mode to justify the dominance of the status quo over the majority of the poor population. In other words, the language and methods have ignored the history, the tales, the hermeneutical consciousness, and the condition of the poor, to the point of

²⁶¹ Gianni Vattimo. *The End of Modernity*, 130.

²⁶² Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, Calif.:Stanford University Press, 1999), 43.

subordinating the poor to the interpretation of the Scriptures that benefits the interests of the rich and the *status quo*. The church has interpreted the Scriptures, without considering the voice of the poor and marginalized, because they were considered unworthy to offer a meaningful contribution to proper understanding and interpretation. Gadamer's ideas of the hermeneutical consciousness raise awareness of being suspicious of history, a history that was distorted to alienate the majority of the population in Colombia. For this reason, we cannot take for granted the participation of the poor in the task of hermeneutics, precisely because their interpretation, understanding and meaning have been suppressed in Colombia. Now we will explore the socio-political conceptualization of the method of liberation theology in the work of Brazilian theologian Clodovis Boff.²⁶³

The Method of Clodovis Boff: The Problem in Question

In order to comprehend the theoretical foundations for social justice and an ethics of liberation, it is worthwhile to analyse Clodovis Boff, who presents a socio-theoretical approach. He writes: "The theologian need only take account, in the element of theory, of the solutions already in process in the element of practice."²⁶⁴ This point of view is obviously seen from a hermeneutical angle, but with social implications that will foster social justice. This would motivate us to ask: of what relevance is social theory for Christians seeking to be involved politically to challenge an oppressive system that allows violent displacement and brutal dislocation of especially poor communities? C. Boff makes it clear that "There is one overarching characteristic of the oppressed in the Third World: they are poor in socio-economic terms. They are the dispossessed masses on the peripheries of cities and in rural areas."²⁶⁵ The result of this complex situation is that just by the simple fact of 'seeing'

²⁶³ Clodovis Boff is a Roman Catholic priest and theologian from Brazil, who has written several books and articles from the perspective of liberation.

²⁶⁴ Clodovis Boff. *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Mary Knoll, NY: Orbis, 1987), 151.

²⁶⁵ Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff. *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 25.

thousands and thousands of impoverished people, it is easy to conclude that this situation has been produced by a socio-economic structure. This structure has been safeguarded by the repressive apparatus of the *status quo*. In this way the situation of poverty and oppression is seen not to be an accident or a divine mandate, rather it has concrete roots.

Now, we come to the realization of how theological contextualization is a product of the ‘fusion’ (using Gadamer’s concept) of theory and practice throughout social mediation. Along this line, C. Boff points out that “The interfacing of theology with praxis through the medium of socio analytic mediation has as its objective the safeguarding of theology from the empty ‘theorism’ that, in certain circumstances, is a trait of *academic cynicism* that ignores the crying scandal of the starving and suffering multitudes of our world.”²⁶⁶ The dialectical interchange of physical presence and involvement in a poor community with the academic discipline will determine the relevance of the theological production that will change oppressive social structures. Regarding the theological task, Hugo Assmann says that it

“springs from reality, it is not a pure, intellectual exercise, but an act of commitment; it has to be basically critical and basically prophetic – to let itself be questioned by reality; no one can be a theologian without being in touch with reality, without suffering in a certain way and so on.”²⁶⁷

C. Boff suggests “three forms of commitment to the poor”:

- “The first level might be called *more or less restricted*, either sporadic, in the form of visits to base communities, meetings, and the like, or more regular, through pastoral work on weekends, acting as advisor to communities or popular movements, and so forth.
- The second would be *alternating* periods of scholarly work – research, teaching, writing – with periods of practical work – pastoral or theological work in a particular church.
- The third level is that of those who live *permanently* with the people, making their home among the people, living and working alongside the people.”²⁶⁸

Several liberation theologians have put their lives on the front line by their genuine Christian commitment to working among the poor and denouncing the injustices that have

²⁶⁶ C. Boff, *Theology and Praxis*, 7.

²⁶⁷ Hugo Assmann, *Practical Theology of Liberation*. trans. Paul Burns (London: Search Press, 1975), 58-59.

²⁶⁸ Leonardo Boff, Clodovis Boff. *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 23.

produced situations of oppression. This commitment has led to some of them being tortured and killed. C. Boff concludes in this regard that “therefore, to know the real world of the oppressed is a (material) part of the overall theological process. Though not the whole process in itself, it is an indispensable stage or mediation in the development of further and deeper understanding, the knowledge of faith itself.”²⁶⁹ We are now ready to approach in more detail the configuration of the method of liberation theology, having in mind the following outline, as mentioned by R. Gibellini, “This passage brings out very clearly the four elements which structure discussion in the theology of liberation: first an option and then the three mediations. By mediation is meant the complex of means (the instruments) which theology uses to achieve its goal.”²⁷⁰ In this chapter we will deal with the three mediations, as presented by C. Boff, then in the third chapter, we will single out in more depth the ‘ethical option’ of liberation theology. This option is described by R. Gibellini thus: “First of all the theology of liberation presupposes a *prior political and ethical option in the light of the gospel*, for the poor: liberation theology has chosen the option of evaluating social reality from the viewpoint of the poor, of reflecting theologically from the cause of the poor and acting for the liberation of the poor.”²⁷¹ These four elements are very distinct in the elaboration of theology, rightly called a ‘new way of doing theology.’ In this respect, the option causes a rupture with traditional ways of doing theology that had operated without a ‘dialectical commitment’ to the poor. The dialectic way, as defined below by C. Boff, is in our view a more suitable alternative for a context of poverty. Thus, as Gibellini explains regarding such an option, “This is a political option because the theologian has a place in a specific social context, alongside the oppressed; it is ethical, because it arises out of an indignation, an ethical indignation at the scandal of poverty; and it is in the light of the gospel because it finds its most profound motivation in the gospel (Matt. 25.35-46), according to

²⁶⁹ Ibid. 25.

²⁷⁰ Rosino Gibellini. *The Liberation Theology Debate*. trans. John Bowden (SCM Press Ltd., 1987), 8-9.

²⁷¹ Ibid. 9.

which the poor are the eschatological criterion of salvation or damnation.”²⁷² This brings us to the study of the three mediations.

The Mediations of Clodovis Boff

We should now examine the important methodological considerations of Boff’s three principal mediations which are of determining character in proving the necessity of a praxis of liberation. Boff argues that: “The *socio-analytic* mediation contemplates the world of the oppressed. It seeks to understand why the oppressed are oppressed. The *hermeneutic* mediation contemplates the word of God. It attempts to see what the divine plan is with regard to the poor. Finally, the *practical* mediation contemplates the aspect of activity and seeks to discover the appropriate lines of operation for overcoming oppression in conformity with God’s plan.”²⁷³ Liberation theology suggests viewing reality with some suspicion, and that suspicion may be social or theological, preferring to reconcile faith and social awareness for an active commitment to the poor as is attested in the Scriptures by the prophets and in the gospels.

Socio-analytic Mediation

The socio-analytic mediation, the first principle considered by Boff for the construction of a method of liberation, finds its strength in the fact that “It calls for a positive, contextual, and concrete knowledge of society.”²⁷⁴ This principle is vital because it guarantees a pertinent dialogue with the ‘situation’ the theologian is facing while producing a relevant theology that will be trusted in communities suffering oppression. This knowledge will demand a real involvement within the particular community and a commitment to walk alongside the people who are struggling to live a dignified life. This new way of living with

²⁷² Ibid. 9.

²⁷³ Clodovis Boff, “Methodology of Theology of Liberation” in *Systematic Theology: Perspectives from Liberation Theology*. Jon Sobrino and Ignacio Ellacuría ed. 2nd printing (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998), 11.

²⁷⁴ C Boff, *Theology and Praxis*, xxi.

and among the poor will make a huge difference in the production of theological reflection. C. Boff rightly emphasizes that “The mediation of social analyses, then, appears as a demand of the praxis of faith, to the extent that this faith seeks to be incarnate.”²⁷⁵ This incarnation as an option of ‘living with and among’ the poor finds a direct echo in the incarnation of Christ among humans, e. g. John 1:14. Socio-analytic mediation is a sort of a principle based on a theology of incarnation, as the paradigmatic example of Christ’s *kenosis*, who came among other reasons, to ‘see’ what was happening in the world. The author Paul Lehmann asserts that “A theology of the incarnation affirms that the presence of Jesus of Nazareth in the human story opens up a way of perceiving the world of time and space and things that gives primacy and priority to the human sense and significance of what is going on.”²⁷⁶ It is precisely in the “what is going on” that socio-analytic mediation demands that we are to experience that particular context (‘being in the world’: Gadamer) so that involvement with people will help us to attain knowledge, and help us to shape our understanding of reality. C. Boff warns us not to plunge into blind activism without seeking appropriate ‘means’ to make the transition from analysis to praxis, saying that “There is no such thing, then, as a theology that would have its origin and finality in praxis and not have socio-analytic mediation.”²⁷⁷ Also, says C. Boff, reaffirming the importance of a credible component in the elaboration of a ‘method’ that takes reality seriously, the social science will necessarily be the instrument that will mediate the distance between theory and praxis, thus, “For a theology orientated toward praxis, consequently, the sciences of the social perform a necessary function of theoretical mediation, which I call ‘socio-analytic mediation’.”²⁷⁸ We have to bear in mind that the finality is not the mediation per se, it is only an instrument, although very important. The concern of C. Boff, however, is that “‘Praxis,’ has a fundamentally political connotation for

²⁷⁵ Ibid. xxi

²⁷⁶ Lehmann, *The Transfiguration of Politics*, 230.

²⁷⁷ Clodovis Boff, *Theology and Praxis*, 5.

²⁷⁸ Ibid. 6.

me inasmuch as it is through the intermediary of the political that one can bring an influence to bear on social structures.”²⁷⁹ The direct ‘application’ (Gadamer’s term) of praxis of the political, in a context of oppression, is a determining factor that will play a confrontational role of socio-political involvement in denunciation of unjust social structures in any context, and that is the reason why it is so important in the method of liberation theology.

Historical Materialism at the Juncture of Faith and Social Struggle.

C. Boff is aware of the importance of social theory in favour of dismantling oppressive structures. Thus, in principle he agrees with Marxist theory, because such theory reveals the condition of poverty of the majority of the population. Thus, C. Boff did in fact analysed Marxist theory in his work, then, such theory when critically applied, consequently will question the modes of production, production itself, and the laws of distribution in an unjust economic system. One of the objectives of Marxist theory is to contrast the reality of poverty and misery with the immoral accumulation of wealth of the few. After such reality is exposed, then the objective will be to correct or change the economic structures. Although Boff does not agree with Marxist ideas of religion per se, he says “Still, we must give Marx credit for enabling us to see that a theology (or, antecedently, even a faith) that fails objectively to recognize a given real historical situation and do it justice, necessarily spins out a vacuous discourse bereft of any credibility – a ‘mystifying’ discourse.”²⁸⁰ If we understand correctly what Boff argues, we can affirm that at the juncture of faith and social-class struggle, Marxist theory does not determine the capability and potentiality of exercising a genuine Christian faith, rather it reminds us of the dialectical love of God for those who suffer all kinds of oppression. This allows us to say, theologically speaking, that exercising the love of God is the surplus of faith. Boff makes a challenging claim for the production of theology in a context of poverty, saying “After all, theology must bend its efforts to

²⁷⁹ Ibid. 6.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.13.

assimilate the theories that most satisfactorily explain the situations to which it is particularly sensitive in virtue of the faith.”²⁸¹ This important claim by Boff has direct implications for theological method in that the ‘bending of theology’ is the awakening of the historical consciousness that equips Christians to respond with faith and social determinism to transform and change such conditions of socio-economic inequality. Here again, although Boff has been influenced by the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur, ironically we find more compatibility with Gadamer, at least in this concept. The ‘bending effort’ is articulated by C. Rowland in this manner, “The basic method of liberation theology has its analogy with Marxist epistemology. The fundamental Marxist insight that consciousness is determined by one’s historical context and activity in that context has its echo in liberation theology’s method.”²⁸²

The Socio-Economic Conditions: Exigency of a Pertinent Theory

For this reason, doing theology from and in a context of poverty and injustice impels us to come out with an urgent response that at least brings concrete solutions to the poignant social problems of people. In this regard “We are faced with the challenge of being able to talk about God, not to a world come of age but a world of diminished and belittled human beings, not to nonbelievers but to people rendered less than human.”²⁸³ The point of departure of the method of liberation theology is from praxis, interacting with the Scriptures and forging a theological reflection with radical orientation toward liberation in a condition of oppression. In this respect “It is important to see liberation theology as a parallel development to Marxism rather than as a deliberate attempt to insert Marxism into Christian theology. At most, Marxism provided a language for the experience of solidarity with the

²⁸¹ Ibid. 57.

²⁸² Christopher Rowland, *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, 642.

²⁸³ R. Vidales, *Frontiers of Theology*, 34.

poor.”²⁸⁴ Given the imminent case that capitalism as an economic structure has not been able to resolve the problems of poverty and oppression in the so-called third-world countries, we as Christians must ask ourselves what system could be constructed that would be more in accord with a context that interacts with the Scriptures to change such reality? Theological reflection in those contexts needs to pursue another possible economic system as the convenient option to eradicate poverty, and subsequently, oppression. The hermeneutical focus on economic matters that springs from a theology of liberation guides the biblical interpreter to theologically analyse any system that produces economic inequalities. Consequently, the theological implication as suggested by Ruben Alves, is that “We are here confronted with the terrifying possibility of a futureless world in which man’s [and women’s] futurity is domesticated by the power of the dominating systems.”²⁸⁵ Thus a hermeneutics rooted in concrete history ought to find adequate help and interaction with dialectical materialism to guide us to reflect and act upon pro-activity through taking sides with the poor and working to change the economic structures that oppress people. For this reason “At this point it is not surprising that Christian activists turn to Marxist theory, which has historically been the only major theory to do precisely that.”²⁸⁶ To take seriously the critique of the capitalist system, as called for by Marxist theory, is an important tool used by a hermeneutics of liberation. That is to say, in seeking concrete economic equality we opt to converge with Marxist social analysis which insists that the ultimate task is not to interpret the world, but rather to change it. Such a hermeneutics, which is attentive to the challenges of bringing about change in contexts of inequality and open to the insights of Marxist theory, will be considered fundamental for Christian faith. In the light of this Segundo says, “...a general theory about our perception of reality is called upon to be incorporated into theological

²⁸⁴ Rowland, *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, 642.

²⁸⁵ Rubem A. Alves, *A Theology of Human Hope* (Washington/Cleveland: Corpus Books, 1969), 86.

²⁸⁶ Anselm Kyongsuk Min, *Dialectic of Salvation: Issues in Theology of Liberation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 21.

methodology. For insofar as it discovers a deeper or rich layer of reality, it enriches theology with new questions and obliges it to undertake a new interpretation of its own sources.”²⁸⁷ Although Marx considered religion to be opium for the proletariat, his ideological analysis helps theology to serve the impoverished masses and to liberate them from oppression. Furthermore, “even if it did just that and nothing else, any general theory capable of providing a methodology for ideological analysis would deserve to be called liberative; for in doing that, it would keep biblical interpretation moving back and forth between its sources and present-day reality.”²⁸⁸

The Justification of the Social Sciences

We affirm faith as an important factor in human experience; however, our real concern is to understand how faith could be efficacious²⁸⁹ in the contemporary Colombian context. In so doing it should be noted, that faith always must be critical of an oppressive economic structure. Our purpose is to construct presuppositions that will create spaces of dialogue within the church and other ecumenical settings, in order to reflect on how the Scriptures help us to interact with a condition of oppression in a dialectical fashion. The possibility exists that secular theoreticians will arrive at the same conclusion as did Marx; however, Boff identifies that “Marx’s principal complaint with respect to theology, which he [Marx] likened to Hegelian speculative philosophy, is that it offers a spiritual, ideal solution for material, real problems”.²⁹⁰

Nevertheless, from a theological perspective we ought to correct Marx’s inability to understand that faith also has the potentiality to sustain a discourse of liberating praxis. The narratives in the book of Exodus and the proclamation of the prophets and the ministry of

²⁸⁷ Jual Luis Segundo *The Liberation of Theology*, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985), 18-19.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 19.

²⁸⁹ We are using the term ‘efficacious faith’ taken from the suggestive title of the book of José Míguez Bonino entitled in Spanish: *La fe en busca de eficacia.*, that translate ‘faith seeking efficacy’. Salamanca: Ediciones Sígueme, 1977).

²⁹⁰ C. Boff, *Theology and Praxis*, 12.

Christ have proven the efficacy of faith in dealing with real human problems and possible solutions. Our interest, however, is in using Marxist theory filtered through our Christian faith. Following from this, a justification for the use of social sciences may be found, given that theology is produced in a context of multiple disciplines including the social sciences. C. Boff argues that "...if theology seeks to articulate praxis – first that of Christians, then that of human beings in general – it will have to be mediated by sciences of the social."²⁹¹ However, C. Boff clarifies, "But in its capacity as a discourse of the *human being* on God, theology must be mediated. It was mediated in the past by philosophy. Now it is invited to be mediated by the social sciences when it treats of the social. This is the price of its fertility and validity."²⁹² As faith needs to seek its efficacy, so also theology has to find its relevance in order to interact in the language intelligible to other disciplines. This language is not *angelicus* but of human character of the kind the apostle Paul reminds us a theology that can be understood and make its voice heard. Now, let us return to the justification of the use of social sciences. Boff asks a pertinent question, which we will take *a fortiori*, since we have agreed that Marxist theory is of great use in elucidating the 'real problems' of Colombian society, from the firm ground of Christian faith. C. Boff asks: "How, or in what terms, is the relationship between theology and socio-analytic mediation to be founded?"²⁹³ In answer to this question, J. Míguez Bonino sharply affirms that "There is no direct route from divine revelation to theology; the mediation of some praxis is inevitable."²⁹⁴ This perspective can be understood as using the 'situation' as the point of departure into a sacred text - divine revelation relationship, as Gadamer explained (see above); the result is that after the analysis, historical praxis becomes the final mediation and the real foundation of such mediation. This takes us now to the next point.

²⁹¹ Ibid. 20.

²⁹² Ibid. 25.

²⁹³ Ibid. 20.

²⁹⁴ José Míguez Bonino. "Historical Praxis and Christian identity" in *Frontiers of Theology*, 262.

The Relationship between the Social Sciences and Theology

C. Boff critically singled out the locus of any social condition by making the observation, “Meanwhile, as we say, the facts do not ‘speak for themselves.’ Facts are mute. Before they can speak, they have to be questioned.”²⁹⁵ In his concern to determine how it is possible to question facts, C. Boff proposes finding out exactly what relationship exists between social theory and theology. He focuses his attention on the compatibility of those disciplines, if any compatibility does exist, which he clarifies as referring “to the distinction between a *relationship of application* and a *relationship of constitution*.”²⁹⁶ Boff defines these relationships as follows:

A relationship of application obtains between any tool and anything. It is an instrumental, technical, mechanical relationship. It supposes the autonomous duality of the elements that enter into reciprocal contact. This relationship consists in an ‘adjustment,’ a fitting together, extrinsic in nature – a simple juxtaposition. The relationship is extrinsic, a relationship of exteriority.²⁹⁷

Whereas, “A relationship of constitution, by contrast, consists in an organic interchange in which each of the terms of the relationship shares in a vital way in the whole of which it is a part. In this type of relationship, the subject forms a real part of the object. It enters into its internal constitution. Here, then, we are in the presence of an intrinsic relationship, a relationship of interiority.”²⁹⁸

As it is one of Boff’s main objectives to elucidate the theology of the political, it is the second type of relationship, ‘of constitution’ that is the most appropriate for making links in forming an alliance between the social sciences and political theology, so that can be said that “The sciences of the social enter into the theology of the political as a *constitutive part*.”²⁹⁹ That encounter is what makes liberation theology a new way of doing theology, the product of which is contextual and transformative. For example, speaking the language of the poor

²⁹⁵ C. Boff, *Theology and Praxis*, 21.

²⁹⁶ Ibid. 30.

²⁹⁷ Ibid. 30.

²⁹⁸ Ibid. 30.

²⁹⁹ Ibid. 31.

can be understood as a proactive step along the road toward liberation. If a real metamorphosis has occurred and the process continues, then the work of the social theory has achieved its goal, and this phase will shed light on the whole process. Now, let us move on to the next step.

Relationship between Politics and Economics

These two concepts are strictly related, both are part of a totality. Political decisions will influence economics and vice versa. The relationship of politics and economics is important because “the contradiction between death and life is a basic historical contrariety in Latin America”.³⁰⁰ Though, we must be aware that in the context of globalization

the basic mechanisms of justice are becoming more and more economic rather than political, in the sense that economic power is the most basic power. Political power is derived from it to such a degree that a just political order is not possible without the reconstruction of the economic order.³⁰¹

This is the case in Colombia, where the political apparatus serving the interest of those who own the capital manipulates the historic-ethical consciousness of the majority of the population. The reason is to distract them from the real and true social needs causing them to overlook the urgent necessity to make economic structural changes in favour of the victims and the poor. Unfortunately, “the current economic system excluded people in favour of money and found this to be acceptable”.³⁰²

Also it is important to note that in “Latin America, when we speak of basic needs, or essential bodily needs, we are not as yet making a distinction between infra- or superstructural realities. All are total realities of life or death”.³⁰³

³⁰⁰ Pablo Richard “Theology in the Theology of Liberation” in *Mysterium Liberationis* 163.

³⁰¹ Reihold Niebuhr “The Law of Love in Politics and Economics” in *From Christ to the World: Introductory Readings in Christian Ethics*, Wayne G. Boulton et. al. (Grand Rapid, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1994), 466.

³⁰² Thia Cooper, *Controversies in Political Theology: Development or Liberation?* (London: SCM Press, 2007), 100.

³⁰³ P. Richard, *Mysterium Liberationis*, 163.

We highlight the term “politics and economics” to point out that the rich in Colombia control and oppress the poor, those on the periphery and fringes of society. The Colombian financial corporations take advantage of the fragile condition of low social status.

By contrast, theologically speaking, God is not a predator who places Godself in ambush: rather God is revealed in history through Christ the liberator to bring life in its fullness for all.

Options

In Colombia, the government is not interested in presenting another economic alternative to change the reality of poverty that the country is presently confronting. Thus, from a theological perspective, we ought to seek a just option, as C. Boff affirms “Before being a confession or, a fortiori, a theoretical affirmation, the transcendence of faith is linked to a life option, implying corresponding practices. Faith is first and foremost, although not exclusively, *orthopraxis*”.³⁰⁴ It seems that there are two very distinct options in Colombia: to continue the socio-economic structure supported by the government, or to speak out in opposition to that kind of establishment. The present socio-economic structure has produced poverty.³⁰⁵ We are, of course, prompted to question this social outcome. Once again, C. Boff asks another question, “Among existing theories, which method of concrete analysis, or which ‘social theory’ is the ‘political theologian’ to select for socio-analytic mediation?”³⁰⁶ In questioning the causes of what C. Boff calls the “phenomenon of oppression” he suggests three alternatives models of explanation:

³⁰⁴ Ibid. 37.

³⁰⁵ A comparison between the administration of the former president Alvaro Uribe and other previous presidents, the sociologist Orlando Fals-Borda affirms that “we are repeating the doses of mediatic manipulation, persecution, authoritarianism and messianism that we thought had been overcome since the fateful fascist/corporatist government of Lauriano Gomez and the ‘funny dictatorship’ of Turbay Ayala and Camacho Leyva.” In *La violencia en Colombia: Tomo II* et al., German Guzmán Campos (Bogotá: Taurus, 2005), 14. Please note the original Spanish citation: “estamos repitiendo la dosis de manipulación mediática, persecución, autoritarismo, y mesianismo que creíamos superados desde el nefasto gobierno facistoide/corporativista de Laureano Gómez y la ‘dictablanda’ de Turbay Ayala y Camacho Leyva.”

³⁰⁶ C Boff, *Theology and Praxis*, 57.

The *empiricist* explanation: *Poverty is a vice*. Thus poverty is ‘explained’ in a simplistic, superficial way. Empiricism assigns the causality of poverty to indolence, ignorance, or simply human malice. It fails to see the collective or the structural aspect of poverty, that the poor are entire masses, and those masses are swelling by the day. The empirical is the vulgar conception of social destitution, and the one most widespread in society. The logical solution in this view of the question of poverty is assistance ranging from almsgiving to the most diversified campaigns of aid to help the poor. The poor are regarded as ‘unfortunates’.³⁰⁷

The *functionalist* explanation: *Poverty is backwardness*. This is the liberal or bourgeois interpretation of the phenomenon of social poverty. Poverty is attributed to simple economic and social lag. With time, thanks simply to the process of development fostered in the Third World by foreign loans and technology, ‘progress’ must come and hunger disappear. So think the functionalist. The social and political solution urged as a way out of this situation is reform, understood as the gradual improvement of the prevailing system. Here the poor appear as ‘objects’ of an activity that descends from the top of the pyramid. There is a positive element in this conception: it sees poverty as a *collective* phenomenon. But it fails to recognize its *conflictive* character.³⁰⁸

The *dialectical* explanation: *Poverty is oppression*. This explanation understands poverty as the fruit of the actual economic organization of society, which exploits some (workers) and excludes others (the underemployed, the unemployed, and the whole mass of the marginalized) from the system of production. ... The solution is an *alternative* social system. In other words, the way out of this situation is *revolution*, understood as the transformation of the bases of the economic and social system. Here the poor emerge as the ‘subject’ or agent of the corrective.³⁰⁹

At this point, consciously, this chapter will consider the third alternative as the fundamental socio-theoretical alternative for the construction of structural change, and an ethics of liberation for the Colombian context. This ethics is based on the reality of being face-to-face with our neighbour in community, as the third chapter will consider specifically, and across the breadth of this project. The first two alternatives are not realistic options, and are not worthy of consideration given the critical deterioration of the social fabric of the country. It would be improper to use those two alternatives as foundational social theoretical principles, since those orientations serve to reinforce the situation of domination across all spheres of Colombian society, and could consequently be a dangerous weapon in the hands of

³⁰⁷ C Boff, “Epistemology and Method of the Theology of Liberation” in *Mysterium Liberationis*, 75.

³⁰⁸ Ibid. 75-76.

³⁰⁹ Ibid. 76.

a demagogic ruling class. In addition, they may be used to alienate people with false political expectations. That being said, they could work quite well in other contexts where oppression has been already transcended, or in a positive case, to alleviate the suffering due to human or natural disasters, but not to eradicate the root of the problem of oppression.

Stating a preference for the dialectical orientation is not arbitrary. Rather, this explanation facilitates an attentiveness to the necessity and priority to shape, transform, and change ideologies of domination that have perpetuated injustice in Colombia. Using the dialectical orientation as a point of departure and to inform analysis is not a theorization of how to become a more industrialized country to end poverty -- which is the logical result of following the functionalist tendency -- but a powerful manifesto exploring how to overcome poverty and injustice. Nevertheless, it should be noted that it could be legitimate after a process of liberation, to become a developed country -- if this development is based on an ethics of equality, fairness, gender equality, and environmental sensitivity.

Hermeneutical Preconditions in Juan Luis Segundo

Before we continue with Clodovis Boff's theses, it will serve this argument to give consideration to some relevant concepts from J. L. Segundo that may assist us in grasping what Boff is suggesting more clearly. On another level of analysis, while Boff's mediations offer important foundational principles, they benefit from being filtered by some methodological preconditions. We intend briefly to take into account the conceptual preconditions presented by J. L. Segundo in order to construct the proper theological presuppositions that such mediations demand. Segundo writes: "The first precondition is that the questions rising out of the present be rich enough, general enough, and basic enough to force us to change our customary conceptions of life, death, knowledge, society, politics and

the world in general.”³¹⁰ Obviously this is an overwhelming task, but it is a necessary and indispensable task for shaping and changing the political ideologies that are causing oppression, and serves as a methodology for being critical of any social theory that interprets oppressive realities, at least in Colombia, and presumably in some other poor countries too. Segundo continues by arguing that: “The second precondition is intimately bound up with the first. If theology somehow assumes that it can respond to the new questions without changing its customary interpretation of the Scriptures that immediately terminates the hermeneutic circle.”³¹¹ He continues: “Moreover, if our interpretation of Scripture does not change along with the problems, then the later will go unanswered; or worse, they will receive old, conservative, unserviceable answers.”³¹² The criteria that Segundo enumerates are radically relevant because he invites us to read and to interpret the Scriptures with different eyes, from the perspective of the oppressed and marginalized. The relevance of the theological discourse and proper understanding of Christian faith in a context of poverty and oppression is vital in order to be able to approach such situations with new hermeneutical insights, just as when theology in general, or specifically Christian theology, is being confronted with new challenges and social problems. In light of these preconditions we can understand better why Boff has suggested the above three mediations, because the reality of oppression dictates how we interpret and apply the message found in the Scriptures.

The Interrelation of Faith and Politics: *transcodage*

C. Boff’s construction of a discourse of a theology of the political takes the task of hermeneutic mediation as a second concern behind the socio-analytic mediation. The

³¹⁰ Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology*, 8.

³¹¹ Hermeneutic circle as defined by Segundo: “it is the continuing change in our interpretation of the Bible which is dictated by the continuing changes in our present-day reality, both individual and Societal” Ibid. 8.

³¹² Ibid. 9.

hermeneutic step is seen in the light of the relationship between theology (of the political) and the Scriptures. He says emphatically

the theology of liberation pleads for a reading of scripture in continual mindfulness of and orientation to concrete challenges and problems ... It accentuates the political dimension of salvific events, especially the exodus and the death (by murder) of Jesus, as well as the 'subversive' nature of the biblical message, particularly in the protest raised by the prophets and Jesus vis-à-vis social injustices. It underscores the fact that salvation is actualized in history, and that there is but one salvation history, embracing the totality of human beings.³¹³

C. Boff's hermeneutical approach is based upon a logical continuation of the result of the socio-analytic mediation. The result of the socio-analytic – which Boff calls the 'material theoretical object' or 'raw material' – must be considered in the light of political theology in order to refine and elaborate it for the purposes of the construction of theology, through the mediating lens of hermeneutics.

C. Boff clarifies the status of the terms of faith in relation to politics, by saying "I shall begin, then, with four formal models, which translate four ways in which faith and politics can be interrelated".³¹⁴ These four ways are:

1. Relationship of *juxtaposition* between faith and politics, as between two equal quantities or two homogeneous 'substances' as in the 'liberal' conceptualization of religion.
2. Relationship of *opposition* or exclusion, as in the Marxian conceptualization of religion.
3. Relationship of *identity*, as in the model of secularism or horizontalism.
4. Relationship of dialectical *reciprocity* between different terms, as in the model of 'political theology'.³¹⁵

Since C. Boff has already demonstrated the importance of socio-analytic mediation to theology, not only to facilitate construction of a theology of political discourse, but also to set the foundation that such theology must be relevant in the world of the poor. The immediate relevance will depend on the relationship of faith and politics. An understanding of this relationship provides the pertinent language for the articulation of the real problems faced by

³¹³ C. Boff, *Theology and Praxis*, xxi.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.* 128.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.* 129.

the poor. When faith and politics function reciprocally they guarantee that our approach to the Scriptures (through hermeneutics) will not be made from an abstract or speculative stand. Boff explains that “an articulation between faith and politics becomes possible only on condition that one avoid a mixture of pertinencies and effectuate a genuine conversion of one term into the other, according to a logic that is defined (or to be defined): according to a ‘transcodage,’ then”.³¹⁶ In this real fusion no dichotomy exists, nor is the fusion a manipulative construction that forces the cohabitation of the two terms; basically he uses the word *transcodage*, the real co-penetration that by virtue of the locus of the situation (situation of oppression) the terms become equivalent with an ontological value – a result of being-in-the world. It is appropriate to quote Jose Miguez Bonino in this respect, where he affirms “Socio-political struggle, human maturity, reconciliation with God, do not belong to different realms but to a single saving reality. God’s grace and man’s [woman’s] task are therefore also united.”³¹⁷ In this case history amalgamates the supernatural character of faith and the natural condition of politics, making them as one theological entity. Here we witness the birth of the *language* of the theology of the political. The *transcodage* as such is understood as the ‘subversion’ of language that is not entrapped by the conservative discourse that sees ‘faith’ as totally ‘apolitical’. C. Boff argues that “The analogical nature of all theological discourse is to be taken seriously, then, even in the case of the discourse of a theology of the political. Theological concepts are asymptotic.”³¹⁸ Hence, those concepts “...in virtue of socio-analytic mediation, finally suffer a kind of refraction – inevitably, in function of their semantic ‘transvaluation’. But such is the price of any metamorphosis”.³¹⁹

³¹⁶ Ibid. 129.

³¹⁷ José Míguez Bonino. *Doing Theology in a revolutionary situation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 70.

³¹⁸ Boff, *Theology and Praxis*, 131. Symptotic as defined by C. Boff: “My term for the theoretical symbols of theology. Although these fail to apprehend their object (hence, asymptotic), at all events they apprehend the right path to their discovery (hence their conceptuality).” 292.

³¹⁹ Ibid. 131. ‘Transvaluation’ is term that C. Boff borrows from Jean Ladriere, he says that “Ladriere speaks of the capacity of theology to ‘metaphoricize’ existential language”. Ibid, 293.

Clodovis Boff: Hermeneutic Mediation

C. Boff affirms that “thus from one side, thanks to socio-analytical mediation, political theology receives a theoretical object, or a reading text.”³²⁰ Then, he proceeds to argue about the *hermeneutic mediation*, which will begin in the intercession of history and the Scriptures. Without hesitation Boff states that “in its capacity as a hermeneutics, theology seeks to discover God’s ‘truth’ (God’s revelation) in and concerning history and society.”³²¹ In an interview, Boff articulated “Liberation theology is an expression of this encounter between faith and poverty. Faith + poverty = liberating faith; theology + sociology = theology of liberation.”³²² The idea of trying to ‘discover God’s truth’ is presented as the preliminary step in undertaking hermeneutics, and it must also involve a genuine desire to interact with the Scriptures seriously and with honesty. In this way the Scriptures are the ‘distinctive’ Book, indispensable to any attempt at the task of hermeneutics. C. Boff discusses the definition of hermeneutics as follows:

1. Hermeneutics may be understood as a set of *canons of exegetical interpretation*. Here we have the etymological sense of the term *hermeneutike techne*.
2. Hermeneutics may be understood as *interpretation as such*: exegesis itself, as the operation of decoding, along with its result. Here we may speak of a *hermeneia*, in contradistinction to *hermeneutike techne*.
3. Finally, hermeneutics can be simply considered as synonymous with *theology*, inasmuch theology has the task of understanding an original sense today and for today. In this maximal acceptance, theological hermeneutics would correspond to what I have called ‘theological theory’.³²³

Boff’s explanation of hermeneutics is quite general and descriptive and could even be considered classic, but differences occur in the way that they can be applied to the reading and interpretation of the Scriptures and the context in which they are situated. Points 1 and 2 will be reflected more sharply in light of Boff’s hermeneutic mediation. He defines the second mediation in this way “By ‘hermeneutic mediation’ I mean the necessary relationship

³²⁰ Ibid. xxiv.

³²¹ Ibid. 9.

³²² Rosino Gibellini, *The Liberation of Theology Debate*, 89.

³²³ C. Boff, *Theology and Praxis*, 133.

of a theology of the political with its proper identity. In this perspective, the Christian scriptures constitute an *obligatory and constitutive theoretical resource of any theological process.*³²⁴ We find ourselves now at a decisive moment as the reading and interpreting of the sacred text, as the revelation of God, converge with human aspirations, and the message of Scriptures speaks with urgency to the present time. It is this critical moment that makes a difference between social theory per se and a Christian response in the acceptance of the Scriptures as the ‘Word of God.’ In light of the two mediations we have so far considered, C. Boff points out the task of each one respectively “Thus, in the expression ‘theology of the political,’ socio-analytic mediation takes charge of the ‘political’ side, and hermeneutic mediation takes charge of the ‘theology’ side, with the ‘of’ indicating the articulation between the mediations.”³²⁵ On the theological side, the Scriptures are the fountain with which we are concerned in this second form of mediation. Pablo Richard, a liberation theologian says:

It is classic doctrine to distinguish three meanings in the Bible: the textual sense, the historical sense, and the spiritual sense. The *textual sense* is the meaning of the text as text – as independent, organized literary structure. The *historical sense* is the meaning the text acquires in light of the history in which it arose and in which the text became history. The *spiritual sense* is the meaning the text acquires when it is read in order to discern and communicate the world of God in our current reality.³²⁶

From the perspective of the poor, and recalling how they received the Scriptures in the past, from the days of colonization (15th Century) until our present time, the Scriptures have been interpreted ignoring the reality of the poor. In this regard P. Richard denounces it as a problem, saying that:

The Bible as it has reached us is a book *without a text* – a dismembered book, shattered into a thousand pieces, without structure, without internal cohesion. Further, it is a book *without history* – cut off from the history in which it was born and in which its text became history. Finally is a text *without spirit* – without the capacity to discern and express the living word of God in our current reality. This ‘textless,

³²⁴ Ibid. 133.

³²⁵ Ibid. 133-134

³²⁶ Pablo Richard, “Theology in the theology of liberation” in *Mysterium Liberationis*, 165.

historyless, and spiritless' Bible is a dead Bible – dismembered, abstract, alien, cut off from the community and from history.³²⁷

The problem of the poor is that they have many battles to fight, on many different fronts, extending even to receiving a proclamation of the word of God that has been distorted, to their own detriment. Instead of being the 'good news', the proclaimed word of God has been alienating news. It has been bad news considering their condition: a dichotomized message that sublimated their suffering, and a domesticating announcement of the love of God that have deprived them from having a present and eschatological hope.

The hermeneutic mediation is a serious attempt to build a foundation to be used to read and interpret the Scriptures from the side of the oppressed. P. Richard argues as much: "Thus destroyed, the Bible can now be reconstructed in *another* text, in *another* history, and with *another* spirit."³²⁸ This does not mean that we should settle upon another 'canonical text' to replace the existing Bible, but rather to replace old ways of doing 'hermeneutics' that were irrelevant to the poor. Finally, in relation to this point, P. Richard suggests "Accordingly, a 'hermeneutics breach' (a break in interpretation) is needed, one that will permit us, to recover the spiritual, critical, living, and effective force of the text for the discernment of the word of God today in the world of the poor."³²⁹ From this point of awareness, we can begin to seek the concrete procedures that will unveil 'the theological' from the message of the Scriptures. So also, we can turn now to an important aspect of the task of hermeneutics, namely the hermeneutic circle.

The Hermeneutic Circle

Juan Luis Segundo and the Hermeneutical Circle of Liberation

³²⁷ Ibid. 166.

³²⁸ Ibid. 166.

³²⁹ Ibid. 166.

When we talk about a hermeneutical circle, we cannot ignore the great contribution of the liberation theologian Juan Luis Segundo. We will thus briefly consider a remarkable conceptualization of this method, as it enhances the hermeneutic mediation proposed by C. Boff. Following the theological theme we are seeking Scriptural meaning for the situation of poverty. Segundo elaborates four crucial factors for the “hermeneutical circle of a theology of liberation.” He argues:

Firstly there is our way of experiencing reality, which leads us to ideological suspicion. *Secondly* there is the application of our ideological suspicion to the whole ideological superstructure in general and to theology in particular. *Thirdly* there comes a new way of experiencing theological reality that leads us to exegetical suspicion, that is, to the suspicion that the prevailing interpretation of the Bible has not taken important pieces of data into account. *Fourthly* we have our new hermeneutic, that is, our new way of interpreting the fountainhead of our faith (i.e., Scripture) with the new elements at our disposal.³³⁰

From this viewpoint, two concerns are being based in an ideological ‘suspicion’, and the application of the ideological ‘suspicion’, which jointly constitute in C. Boff the ‘socio-analytic mediation’; hence, hermeneutics play a role, in a way that Marxist’s social theory could not have anticipated that liberation and critical theology would be able to utilise. The third point of Segundo’s circle is intrinsically connected with hermeneutic mediation per se, and the fourth point will be referred to by C. Boff as the application of the third mediation: the practical mediation, as efficacious completion of a hermeneutics of liberation. It is in this fashion, that the hermeneutical circle then leads the theological reflection toward a strong and credible epistemology consistent with the exigencies that history has presented, in our case a history of oppression. This ability of liberation theology to delineate the fundamental presuppositions toward concrete changes in all spheres in society as seen in the first precondition of Segundo’s premises, dynamically challenges the way theology has been done in Latin America. In this regard classical theology in Latin America was generally carried out from the perspective of religious experience of the transcendental, to the extent of creating a

³³⁰ J. L. Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology*, 9.

dualism between the material (reality) and the spiritual (faith) and also had been indifferent to social structures which promoted all kinds of injustice.

C. Boff and the Hermeneutic Circle

Boff explains that, “There are many forms in which the hermeneutic circle can appear”³³¹ and he suggests “the following pairs of terms:

Word of God – Scripture:
Creation of meaning – acceptance of meaning:
Structure – meaning:
Present – past:
Technique – interpretation.”³³²

The movement and dynamic interchange of different elements are considered as indispensable linkages that will form a cohesive circularity for the production of meaning, understanding and interpretation. In Boff’s view, the building of a dialectical synchronization in the task of hermeneutics occurs by establishing a pair of words diachronically that will permit such hermeneutic circularity: the achievement of the product – the meaning of the text, as we will observe below in the explanation of each component.

Word of God – Scripture

We view the authority of the Scriptures, such as in the writings of the Prophets and the Gospels, and especially in the teaching of Christ, as having an intrinsic decolonizing message. The Scriptures declare a liberating project against any oppression, injustice, victimization, and death as one of the decisive foundations that confers divine authority. As Migliore has pointed out:

Since the beginning of the Church, every Christian theology has implicitly or explicitly acknowledged the authority of Scripture. The serious question has never been whether Scripture is a primary authority for Christian faith and life, but what sort of authority it is.³³³

³³¹ C. Boff, *Theology and Praxis*, 135.

³³² *Ibid.* 135.

³³³ Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 44.

To acknowledge that Scripture is the Word of God and has such authority is to assert that the majority of the liberating contents/texts challenge social injustice and oppression, because they are an expression of God's love for the poor and those historically marginalized. This is in accord with what Joerg Rieger³³⁴ sharply clarifies:

The plurality of voices in the Bible and the Christian traditions reminds us that a truly global vision does not mean the kind of unity where everyone says exactly the same thing. Nevertheless, this plurality does not mean that all things are relative and that anything goes. Broader perspectives and truly global visions emerge when all these different voices – the many different books of the Bible written by different communities and authors over long periods of time, and the many voices of the Christian tradition, especially the ones that are easily forgotten today – come together and inform one another in light of the common pain and the struggles of life.³³⁵

Despite the patriarchal or exclusive messages of some texts, which we cannot delete from the whole corpus of the Scriptures, these texts must be confronted, to the extent that the contextual powers that produced them will be overcome by the hermeneutical force of a history. A solidarity and resistance that is embedded in the values of justice, inclusion, and fairness is deployed across the whole of Scripture. A problem exists in that nowadays, and with just reason, that the victims and marginalized people are wrestling with some of the excluding texts. Our approach is to handle this important issue by viewing it from the perspective that the authority of the Scriptures is fundamentally based upon a Christological perspective. As N. T. Wright argues, “we recognize that it can have a Christian meaning only if we are referring to scripture’s authority *in a delegated or mediated sense* from that which God himself possesses and that which Jesus possesses as the risen Lord and Son of God, the Immanuel”.³³⁶

The kind of authority that the Scriptures hold is that the overall message against injustice applies to any time in history. Eschatologically speaking, in Christ’s “victory the whole of creation is being brought back into its intended harmony, rescued from evil and

³³⁴ Joerg Rieger is Professor of Constructive Theology at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas.

³³⁵ Joerg Rieger, *Globalization and Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 58-59.

³³⁶ N. T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2011), 23.

death.”³³⁷ In this way, since God is a Creator who acts in history and not in a vacuum, and since God as Creator is the protagonist of history, creation opens the horizon for history to develop. In this *kairos*, Jesus Christ as the Word made flesh irrupted into history with liberating acts of love for humanity.

The patriarchal and androcentric passages are denounced by the same scriptural content. The primacy of such authority is based on an interpretation of texts of liberation, texts of hope, texts of inclusion, texts of life, texts of resurrection, and texts for a new day. These kinds of texts in the Scriptures provide support and hope; they liberate and emancipate all those who have been oppressed and marginalized: women, Indians, Africans, people with different preferences and styles of life, the poor and the victimised of society. An interpretative, liberating and inclusive approach to those texts will safeguard Scriptures from its own tyrannical texts. Thus, Christ is the liberating text that overshadowed the excluding texts of rejection and death. Hermeneutically, his resurrection is an act of denouncing those Scriptural texts that oppress human freedom, and is an invitation to enjoy the “whole of creation”, the great feast of salvation, and liberation for all the excluded.

In this way, the Scripture is not timid in dealing with itself, within the broader context, because the whole content is in constant interaction, making self-corrections. Such interaction is a critical, dynamic and dialectical movement that awakens our suspicion and affirms our human rights. Although the text is in written form, it is not passive and epistemologically closed. Rather, it is open to the contingencies of time, space, culture, socio-economic conditions, alternatives, and historical projects; and it is exposed to judgement by other scriptural texts that had constructed a maturity of truth and inclusivity. Thus, the focus is justice for the excluded and the urgent needs of the community, not the prejudice of exclusive and oppressive texts. Accordingly, the Scriptures judge their own differences for

³³⁷ Ibid. 27.

the sake of justice and inclusion. But the Scriptures resist being dogmatised by coercive ideologies that end in the justification of violence and total exclusion of the ‘Other’, my neighbour.

Metaphorically speaking, the immune system in a human body internally fights its own bodily infections. In the same way, the ‘texts of liberation’ overcome the violence imposed by the filtration of texts of violence and the prejudicial perception of the distorted mind of an author. God’s message of liberation and hope is not a prisoner of the patriarchal, racist, exclusive texts, because they are part of the whole revelation of God. Historical and contextual hermeneutics have proven that patriarchal texts cannot prevail and hide any more in the shadow of dogmas and the justifications of conservative interpreters. The *Logos*, the resurrected text, has brought light over the darkness. Thus, “it is time to honour our name as liberation theologians and liberate people and also God, from the centuries of oppression, injustice and abuse towards those who do not partake of patriarchal, heterosexual ideologies”.³³⁸ Liberation theologians need to undo the interpretations of a tyrannical God and to show God’s true character and nature.

Subsequently, “it is enormously important that we see the role of scripture not simply as being to provide *true information about*, or even an accurate running commentary upon, the work of God in salvation and new creation, but as taking an active part *within* that ongoing purpose”.³³⁹ From this perspective, the authority of the Word of God becomes an inspiration to struggle for social justice. For this reason, it is in faith “in the God of the gospel attested in Scripture, that Christian faith finds the authority of liberating love that creates new community rather than an authority that works by coercive power.”³⁴⁰ In our

³³⁸ Marcella Althaus-Reid, “Class, Sex and the Theologian: Reflections on the Liberationist Movement in Latin America” in *Another Possible World*, 38.

³³⁹ N. T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 28.

³⁴⁰ M. Althaus-Reid., 47.

task to interpret the Scriptures as the Word of God from a context of historical disruption,³⁴¹ and from the current situation of oppression, we opt to find an appropriate hermeneutical method. This method not only determines the epistemological conclusions, but also helps us see what has been covered up by a social system that intentionally oppresses people.

It is also vital to observe that the “Scripture must be interpreted contextually; however the context of our interpretation must not be confined to our personal history or to that of our immediate locality.”³⁴² This idea helps us to understand the importance of interdisciplinary dialogue and global interaction with other historical contexts of oppression, violence and exclusion. In this way, we are forging a new hermeneutic of decolonization and freedom. We agree with John de Gruchy, writing from his experience in South Africa during *apartheid*. He points out that “Hermeneutics... is not simply an individualistic or academic enterprise. It is central to the life of the church; it has to do with the church understanding and confessing its faith in Jesus Christ in relation to the discernment of changing reality.”³⁴³ This hermeneutical approach is neither static nor neutral by nature, operating in a speculative abstraction; but it interacts with the context of historical oppression, calling and guiding the church to action toward liberation. C. Boff affirms: “Let us be perfectly clear: At the root of the method of the theology of liberation is the nexus with concrete praxis. It is within this major dialectic of theory (of faith) and practice (of charity) that liberation theology operates”.³⁴⁴ We seek to find a hermeneutical method that uncovers social lies perpetuated for decades, a hermeneutic that will take us to a critical analysis of reality. In a distinctive way, Raul Vidales points out that:

Insofar as we Latin Americans are concerned specifically, we need a hermeneutic that is open and sensitive to the history of our people, the geography of hunger, the culture

³⁴¹ In this chapter historical disruption is understood as the Spaniard violent conquest in Latin America, from 1492 until the 19th century.

³⁴² Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 61.

³⁴³ John de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology: A South African Contribution to an Ecumenical Debate*. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1991), 86.

³⁴⁴ Clodovis Boff, in *Mysterium Liberationis*, 73.

of violence, the language of the voiceless masses, the world of oppression, and the structures of an unjust social order that is badly in need of God's message of freedom.³⁴⁵

With this in mind we look to the Scriptures' content as the critical and radical paradigm that is open and sensitive to social conditions of exclusion, poverty and oppression, demonstrating the urgency to opt for the praxis that transforms such reality.

Creation of Meaning – Acceptance of Meaning

In our analysis we see the priority of the dialectical character of the hermeneutic circle, which makes an innovative turn to break apart from abstract and decontextualized methods of interpretation and speculative arguments that ignore real life. This according to Boff will avoid both “*hermeneutic improvisation*” and “*semantic positivism*”,³⁴⁶ due to the fact that both methodological instances “... creates a ‘meaning metaphysics,’ or semantic dogmatism, that freezes any living meaning in its tracks. The images that spontaneously arise in association with semantic positivism are those of the refrigerator, the museum, and the cemetery.”³⁴⁷ Rather Boff suggests for the creation of meaning making use of the pedagogical dialectic in a form of rhetoric, arguing “My own position is that meaning can arise only from a sustained relationship between reader and text, between questions and answers.”³⁴⁸ This also implies that praxis creates meaning and opens new ways of understanding.

Structure – Meaning

“Meaning needs structure for support. Structure serves meaning as its vehicle of communication, thus imposing upon it the confinement of its own determination.”³⁴⁹ In order to grasp the implication of the ‘structure – meaning’ relationship, we turn to Lonergan, since

³⁴⁵ R. Vidales, in *Frontiers of Theology*, 48.

³⁴⁶ C. Boff, *Theology and Praxis*, 136.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 136.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 136

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 137.

he explicitly differentiates four functions of the progression of meaning, which adds an important idea to the discussion:

A first function of meaning is cognitive. It takes us out of the infant's world of immediacy, and places us in the adult's world, which is a world mediated by meaning. A second function of meaning is efficient. Men work. But their work is not mindless. What we make, we first intend. We image, we plan, we investigate possibilities, we weigh pro and cons, we enter into contracts, we have countless orders given and executed. A third function of meaning is constitutive. Just as language is constituted by articulate sound and meaning, so social institutions and human cultures have meanings as intrinsic components. A fourth function of meaning is communicative. What one man means is communicated to another intersubjectively, artistically, symbolically, linguistically, incarnately.³⁵⁰

C. Boff finds an echo in Lonergan in that meaning is not static and monolithic but in dialectic interweaving with the totality of human affairs. This way he understand meaning as being based in a structure, not in a method, and for this reason he asserts "In this case at hand, dialectic proceeds in such a way that explanation becomes a preliminary moment, whereupon the work of 'comprehensive reading,' a reading with understanding, supervenes."³⁵¹

C. Boff, from his pastoral experience as a priest and as a theologian, but in this case when carrying out pastoral work among poor communities in the jungle of his native Brazil, from where he later obtained the title of another important book (*Feet-on-the-ground theology*), says "I note how the children of the jungle find it convincing when you argue from the scriptures. To say 'That's the word of God' is to present a proof that is plainly apodictic, irrefutable".³⁵² We then could argue about that meaning in this context, jungle or slum, or urban ghettos, poor rural areas, and the like; in the written biblical text, as it is spoken or verbally proclaimed, informally in group discussion or formally in a church service, intersubjectivity prevails. The meaning is valued in direct relationship with the current experience of life. What is heard is simultaneously double, two voices, one the Word of God and on the

³⁵⁰ Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *The method of theology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd Limited. 2nd ed., 1973), 76-78.

³⁵¹ C. Boff, *Theology and Praxis*, 137.

³⁵² Clodovis Boff, *Feet-on-the-Ground Theology: a Brazilian journey*, trans. Phillip Berryman (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987), 50.

other hand the voice of their own reality in a single existential moment that is moving, and hearing is a process of digesting dialectically the given explanation, or the reading of the sacred text. What follows is that the conveyed meaning will be understood later, understanding will take place over a long range, their experience being intersected by the scriptural message, and this will provoke uneasiness and agitation. The conveyance of meaning and understanding do not occur immediately, they will take time to be processed, not because of some deficiency in the Word of God, but because meaning/understanding need to hover (*encubarse*) in the community, take shape, and new meaning/understanding will come into to existence. In such a context, the conveyance of meaning does not happen instantaneously. However, we cannot re-construct the ‘intention of the author’ as Schleiermacher proposed, precisely because “the revelation is a historic phenomenon (objective aspect) captivated by the prophets (subjective aspect) and that is precisely the historic come about – the ontological support of the word (prophetic word) and its object of interpretation”.³⁵³ A Christian community can reconstruct the meaning once and several times in their context as members seek appropriate responses to their real problems and spiritual needs.

Present – Past

Since C. Boff has gone through the process of the first, socio-analytical mediation, he sees an ample horizon of comprehension from the present retrospectively into the past, constitutive of Gadamer’s and Heideger’s phenomenological ideas, ‘to comprehend is implicit in our mode being-in-the-world’ to be exposed to the events of history and to the experience of the context where the reader is situated in the present. With this in mind, C. Boff firmly stresses “At bottom, the ultimate reference of the Bible is to the present, to the reader’s current history. The biblical sense regards precisely this. It is the reader, then, who

³⁵³ Rafael Avila, “Revelación y profecía” in *La Hermenéutica Bíblica desde una óptica liberadora*, Victor Araya G. ed. (Costa Rica: Editorial Sebila, 1979), 40.

occupies the center attention of the text”.³⁵⁴ C. Boff does not mean to ignore the sacred text, or to use it as a simple point of departure, as he explained above. He points out with respect to his journey within Christian poor communities that “On the other hand, theology has always recognized the argument from the scripture as the most basic one and the one on which theology, all theology, is based. This vigor of the word of God is being rediscovered in pastoral work with the people today”.³⁵⁵

Technique – Interpretation

According to C. Boff, the hermeneutic circle is a process that cannot be reduced to a ‘technique’ that applies an easy step to reach out in a mechanical fashion an absolute fixed truth and interpretation, as did ‘hermeneutical positivism’. Rather, he says “In principle, hermeneutic technique has the capacity to fix the spatial limits of the appearance of meaning or sense”.³⁵⁶ Nevertheless, there always exists the temptation to think that meaning can achieve an absolute status (as with ‘dogmas’) and C. Boff warns that that is not the purpose of such circularity. For him “Thus the hermeneutic circle functions subject to the following restriction: (1) meaning cannot be fixed once and for all; but (2) neither can meaning be random”.³⁵⁷ Obviously this is a determinative foundation of the way he has constructed the above components that make up the structure of the hermeneutical circle.

To conclude this discussion of the hermeneutical construct of C. Boff, we may say that his hermeneutical mediation is not necessarily, only, the ‘via longa’ knowing he has been influenced by P. Ricoeur, but also the “via mediatica’ (mediatic way) influenced by Jean Ladriere, especially in the theological analysis from the faith stance. This, we argue, is reflected in his affirmation that “Scripture evoke an appeal, an invitation, a provocation, an interrogation. Its text is persuasive. It persuades acceptance, openness, availability. But there

³⁵⁴ C. Boff, *Theology and Praxis*, 137.

³⁵⁵ C. Boff, *Feet-on-the-Ground*, 50.

³⁵⁶ C Boff, *Theology and Praxis*, 138.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 138.

remains the task of the one invited – personal response”.³⁵⁸ His view of interpretation can also be traced back to Gadamer and Heidegger, precisely in the applicability function of hermeneutics with regard to the task of ‘responding’. Remarkably, then, he affirms “Further: it is only in concrete life that meaning unfolds, and ‘comes to itself.’ And here hermeneutics flowers into ethics”.³⁵⁹

Rafael Avila: A Different View of Circularity

Pertinent to the discussion of the ‘hermeneutics circle’ is R. Avila’s argumentation about the conceptual implication of the term ‘circularity’ in hermeneutics as presented by J.L. Segundo and C. Boff. Avila, a liberation theologian, begins by asking: “does the revelation continue in our days and progress... (evolution *quad se*)? Or is it rather something concluded in which content of meaning we progress... (evolution *quad nos*)?”.³⁶⁰ From these two questions Avila points out that the customary tendency is toward the second question, and the task of the reader will be to “disembowel from that ‘deposit’ its potential, virtual or implicitly revealed by means of the *logical* tool of syllogism in which the two premises would be explicitly formulated in the Scripture and the conclusion would be implicit”.³⁶¹ Avila is arguing that the explanation to sustain such argument is based in the fact of a double negation idea that “God could not; not being aware of the implications of his explicit speech, and that consequently his implicit speech is also his word”.³⁶² Avila, referring to the prophets, explains that in their proclamations “The prophet did not say this way spoke the Lord rather this way speaks the Lord”.³⁶³ God’s speech, according to Avila, was taken by the prophets to be couched in the present continuous and not in the past tense, and for him this is where we

³⁵⁸ Ibid. 138.

³⁵⁹ Ibid. 138.

³⁶⁰ R. Avila, *La Hermenéutica Bíblica*, 44.

³⁶¹ Ibid. 44.

³⁶² Ibid. 44.

³⁶³ Ibid. 44.

have a problem in the church in Latino America: two divided hermeneutical approaches of the Scriptures determined by the 'tense of a verb'. Obviously Avila is building his case by not only pointing out the use of the tense of a verb, but a theological premise, which in his view was also a problem in the early Christian community, especially between Jews and Christians. That tension pushed the author of the letter to the Hebrews, according to Avila, to make the theological clarification as is attested in Hebrews 1:1-2. For Avila, the progress of revelation is a critical point for the reader since in order to have a meaningful grasp of the past, one must engage in a committed interpretation of history, because the revelation continues to be unveiled in such history.

Avila arrives at the poignant assertion that "The progress of revelation (and not merely the knowledge of revelation) seems to us incompatible with the so called thesis of the hermeneutical circularity sustained by the generality of theologians".³⁶⁴ Avila then differentiates two approaches, the first evoking the past as the paradigm to be replicated, and the second one, which is his view, that of a history still evolving, hence, "The first is static, the second dynamic. The first presupposes that the word simply reproduces or reflects the system, the second one implies that the word dialectizes the system and it questions it".³⁶⁵ Avila opposes the first idea, because for him, the process of circularity implies the necessity of a returning to the past as a point of departure, and that eventually becomes a vicious circle. He obviously does not imply that to interact with the past is inappropriate, especially when reading the Scriptures. Avila says

"for this reason, it seems to us more appropriate to talk about *dialectical hermeneutics* and not circularity... this is for us the failure of hermeneutical circularity: to obligate us to analyse reality with the interpretative tools of the Scripture, assuming either a Christian analysis of reality or confining beforehand our analyses inside the limits of the given".³⁶⁶

³⁶⁴ Ibid. 44.

³⁶⁵ Ibid. 45.

³⁶⁶ Ibid. 45.

We observe that Avila associates the idea of ‘circularity’ with that of a positivist interpretation of the Scriptures, hence, his interpretation is more a semantic one. We see his view as being very much in line with the premises of the hermeneutic circle. Nevertheless, Avila raises an important question, which is fundamental to the task of forming a hermeneutics of liberation, “Does God talk today and here in Latin America?”.³⁶⁷ The answer to this question will be analysed through the third mediation proposed by C. Boff.

The Movement of Revelation Infusing Political Theology

In some ways we find answers to Avila’s hermeneutical concern, from a hermeneutic circle viewpoint that includes the theme of canonization of the Scriptures as the vital foundation, in the Christian tradition that recognizes the Scriptures as the Word of God. C. Boff argues that “Revelation, of course, is never closed. But it is *canonized* – fixed as an exemplar, model, or code. *Revelation is closed only and solely in order to render possible a multiplicity of readings in later historical moments*”.³⁶⁸ This concept implies also, that the openness of the Scriptures toward the future is determined by the present. The present is the realization of its dual force that God had spoken in the past and God speaks today and here, though in this dialectic the Scriptures always has a relevant message in the present history. For C. Boff, then, “The word of God continues being what it is – a reality developing throughout history. Otherwise, a theology of the political would simply be impossible.”³⁶⁹ C. Boff’s hermeneutics is as dialectical as Avila has proposed, especially in that history is a determining factor in the construct of cohesive circularity, otherwise such circularity would play an abstract role within the situations in history. The socio-analytic mediation, the dialectic of C. Boff is perceived as being in motion and not static, because of the influence of

³⁶⁷ Ibid. 45.

³⁶⁸ C. Boff, *Theology and Praxis*, 140.

³⁶⁹ Ibid, 141.

Marxist theory, as is well observed by Marcuse,³⁷⁰ who affirms that “in a celebrated passage at the end of the afterword to the second edition of *Capital*, Marx notes that the dialectic captures ‘every historically development form in the process of movement’”.³⁷¹ In C. Boff’s dialectic, faith – and the transcendental is not excluded as in a Marxist dialectic. This influence will take C. Boff to the realization of the need for structural change and even revolution, as Marcuse points out “For in looking at the totality of human Dasein, not only the fundamentals of existence are important. One must also look at the concrete situation – the situation in which the dialectic finds its application as revolutionary praxis”.³⁷² The dialectical construct of C. Boff leads him to suggest what he calls the ‘correspondence of relationships model’ and this model is fundamentally based on the canonization of the Scriptures in its development, shaped by what he calls the “hermeneutic practice of the primitive or apostolic church”.³⁷³ For C. Boff it is the community of faith that has worked out the final redaction of text through a process which was determined by the exigencies of those communities in their own “*Sitz im Leben* of these texts”.³⁷⁴ Then, the dynamic interaction between the faith communities experiencing the ‘deeds of Jesus’ took the ‘primitive church’ into a hermeneutical process, which for Boff meant “That the very text of the gospel constitutes the product of a tradition...therefore – with respect to the value of tradition, the authenticity of the church, the role of the Apostles, and so on – this fact has a very special hermeneutic scope all its own”.³⁷⁵ This is the foundation of C. Boff’s understanding that leads him to suggest a ‘correspondence of relationship’ model, as follows:³⁷⁶

³⁷⁰ Herbert Marcuse was a German philosopher associated with the Frankfurt School.

³⁷¹ Herbert Marcuse, *Heideggerian Marxism* ed. Richard Wolin and John Abromeit (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 17.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 18.

³⁷³ C Boff, *Theology and Praxis*, 146.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 147.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 147.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 147.

The Correspondence of Relationship Model: C. Boff

$$\frac{\text{Jesus of Nazareth}}{\text{his context}} = \frac{\text{Christ + the church}}{\text{context of the church}} = \frac{\text{church tradition}}{\text{historical context}} = \frac{\text{ourselves (a theology of the political)}}{\text{our context}}$$

$$\text{reduced:} \quad \frac{\text{scripture}}{\text{its context}} = \frac{\text{ourselves (a theology of the political)}}{\text{our context}}$$

As we observe, the diagram which C. Boff introduced has a liberation-political hermeneutical perspective. The basic structure of the hermeneutic circle, with one part fully elaborated and the other having a ‘reduced’ form as he calls it, which is a summary of the first. This entire diagram, his ‘correspondence of relationships model’, reflects the New Testament as the example he uses to illustrate its hermeneutical formation, but it could be applied also to the Old Testament. Thus, the model contains four ‘ratios’. In our understanding, those ratios depend upon and interlink themselves not in a linear way, so to speak, or metaphorically speaking not in concentric fashion, but counter-clock wise and in translated movement like the movement of wind in a hurricane. The ‘correspondence of relationships model’ would provoke the consciousness to interrogate critically, as here, where C. Boff points out the reason of the dialectical character of hermeneutics of liberation, responding to his own question,

who are the poor today and why? The poor constitute a social phenomenon that has been produced; that phenomenon does not come about naturally. They have been reduced to poverty (im-poverishment) or held in poverty by the forces of a system of domination. In this sense the poor are the dominated classes.³⁷⁷

The most poignant manifestation of poverty is experienced in the economic sphere, where they are deprived of the most basic elements of human subsistence and dignity. In this regard C. Boff says “The poor are poor because they are exploited or rejected by a perverse

³⁷⁷ Jorge Pixley and Clodovis Boff. *The Bible, the Church, and the Poor*. trans. Paul Burns (Tundbridge Wells, Kent: Burs & Oates, 1989), 3.

economic system: in the case of Latin America, capitalism. This is an exploitative and excluding system, which means the poor suffer and are oppressed, means the system keeps them under it or outside of it”.³⁷⁸

For C. Boff the hermeneutical circle begins with an event per se, in this case the activities or ministry of Jesus of Nazareth as the point of departure, which includes performance and oral proclamations, as the first event; second then, the interpretation of the primitive church regarding those events and discourses, when obviously, each interpretation was made done in its own historical context and within its concrete needs; in this stage, the Scriptures reached the point of canonization. Third, it follows, was the historical formation of doctrine (and even dogmas) that constitutes the elaboration of theology within historical tradition, and fourth, the elaboration of political theology in our context today. This is the long process (*via longa*) which is then ‘reduced’ (*via brevis*) in the fusion of the past and present, but mediated always by the living experience of faith in history.

Hermeneutical Implication of the Model for Today

C. Boff’s intention in providing this model is that we should base the hermeneutical option based on a radical obedience to approach the sacred text. He calls for us “to adopt, with respect to scripture, an attitude analogous to that of the first community with respect to the words and behaviour of Jesus of Nazareth. Their attitude was one of creative fidelity.”³⁷⁹ Thus, Boff sees the first two ratios of the diagram as a useful model to articulate the use of the Scripture and sees the articulation repeated between the second and third ratios, but without solving his own equation of the diagram. C. Boff’s first attempt to reconcile the historical distance between the text and our present situation is made in an analogous way (*via similis*). Our present situation corresponds socially, economically, politically, culturally and religiously in structure and context, but is not identical in nature to the past; that is, not to

³⁷⁸ Ibid. 3.

³⁷⁹ C. Boff, *Theology and Praxis*, 147.

the primitive church, because the idea is not to ‘clone’ the original context in which the events of the Scripture were enacted. We are not to duplicate the past nor to graft the past context into ours: what we are to do is to keep inquiring today in light of new exigencies. What is important it is how “Christian communities seek to ‘apply’ the gospel to their particular situation as the primitive church sought to do.”³⁸⁰ The application is susceptible to the nature of the text and especially the situation, and for this reason, C. Boff argues that situations “are taken *in their respective autonomy*.”³⁸¹ According to C. Boff, the application of the text to the concrete situation is not an easy matter, but as stated above, the “creative fidelity”³⁸² of the community of faith plays a determining factor in “the ‘transposing of sense’ from text to life in spontaneous fashion.”³⁸³ Along these lines, this overall application of the meaning of the text into a particular situation is the work of the “spirit of the gospel.”³⁸⁴

Following the same line of thought, the movement of the Spirit through history accounts for more intensive meaning and relevance as the Word of God is infused by the strong wind of the Spirit into the communities of faith in vivid interaction with the political, social, cultural, ecological and spiritual commitment of each community in their own contexts. As J. Comblin says “Latin American Christians recognize the God of liberation and feel the presence of such a God in their very midst, acting in their own actions and commitments. This *Dios liberador* is the Holy Spirit.”³⁸⁵ This movement of God among communities is the counter-clockwise movement of the force of the poor in history, but it is from ‘the other side of history’ as described by Gustavo Gutierrez and in the way that C. Boff experienced in the jungle of Brazil, “when faith communities today read the Scriptures as the

³⁸⁰ Ibid. 148.

³⁸¹ Ibid. 148.

³⁸² Ibid. 147

³⁸³ Ibid.148.

³⁸⁴ Ibid. 148.

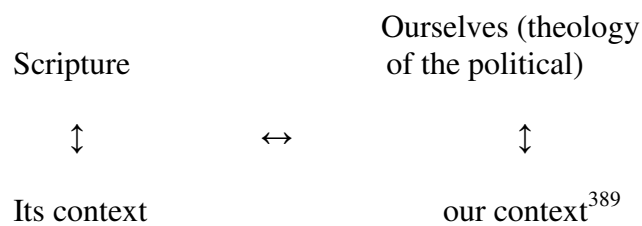
³⁸⁵ José Comblin. “The Holy Spirit” in *Misterium Liberationis*. 464.

font of living water, the poor do not hesitate to call such application the “word of God,’ or ‘message of salvation.”³⁸⁶

A second way C. Boff seeks to solve the equation above is with a

basic identity of significations... It is this identity that I represent by the equal sign (=). The sign does not designate an equality between *terms* of the hermeneutical equation, but precisely between the respective *relationships* between pairs of terms... *a relationship of relationships.*³⁸⁷

This form of relationship is more rational in character than logical, as A.M. Isasi-Diaz explains “I prefer to use ‘rational’ to ‘logical’ because logic has often been reduced to a syllogistic way of thinking, which is solely intent on exactitude and not on the social and historical conditionings of all truths.”³⁸⁸ The rational structure of Boff’s hermeneutical political theology is then illustrated in the following graph:



Each Christian generation has the responsibility to encounter and to apply the meaning of Scriptures to their real context and in particular to the causes of any community problem. The real sense of the Scriptures is their relevance that speaks directly to each generation, thus according to C. Boff it is in “the *relationship* between context and message on each side... it is this homological relationship”³⁹⁰ where we can reach the hermeneutical high point through a conciliation of socio analytic mediation and the hermeneutical mediation where we find meaning. Boff bases this conclusion on the juncture of the two horizons that

³⁸⁶ C Boff, *Theology and Praxis*, 148.

³⁸⁷ Ibid. 148.

³⁸⁸ Ada María Isasi-Díaz. “A Mujerista Hermeneutics of Justice and Human Flourishing” in *The Bible and the hermeneutics of liberation: Worldwide trends and prospects*, ed. A. F. Botta and P. R. Andinach (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 183.

³⁸⁹ C. Boff, *Theology and Praxis*, 149.

³⁹⁰ Ibid. 149.

have the capacity to produce a contextualized meaning, in other words a relationship of horizons. Boff also attributes the achievement of meaning to the guidance of the Scriptures, not to duplicate its events literally in our present time, but when necessary, having "...the capacity to judge – on our own initiative, in our own right – ‘according to the mind of Christ,’ or ‘according to the Spirit,’...The Christian writings offer us not a *what*, but a *how* – a manner, a style, a spirit.”³⁹¹ In this way, C. Boff does justice to his own hermeneutical presuppositions, and the relational model and hermeneutical loci find an echo in the affirmation of R. Vidales, who asserts that “This same perspective obliges the theologian to re-read the Bible from the context of the other ‘Bible’ known as a human history. It is one dialectical activity, not two separate, parallel tasks.”³⁹² Consequently Boff completes the hermeneutical mediation, which in the strict sense of the word is a dialectical interpretation.

Practical Mediation: *Desde la Praxis*

Now, we will analyse the third hermeneutical mediation of C. Boff, which is constructed from the socio-theological analysis of a context of oppression and poverty, using a dialectical hermeneutics. This mediation functions as the historical reference in practice or in “the matrix of a new theological reflection,”³⁹³ in which the womb gestates a critical understanding of such contexts in the light of the Scriptures. Hence, this kind of theology is rooted in the fusion of human reality in that oppressed condition and faith as a gift from God. Thus, “To avoid the theology of liberation being conceptually mistaken for a ‘theology of...’, H. Assmann also avoids the grammar of the expression ‘theology of liberation’ and speaks of ‘*teologia desde la praxis de la liberacion*’.”³⁹⁴ As another liberation theologian, Pablo Richard, defines it: “Liberation theology is a critical, systematic reflection on the *experience*

³⁹¹ Ibid. 149.

³⁹² R. Vidales. *Frontiers of theology*, 40.

³⁹³ Hugo Assmann, *Practical Theology of Liberation*, 11.

³⁹⁴ Rosino Gibellini, *The liberation theology debate*. He points out that “To clarify what H. Assman is trying to convey is that theology ‘*from*’ the praxis of liberation, making emphasis on the term ‘*from*’ (*desde*) is what make the conceptual difference, rather than theology “*of*” liberation.” 4.

of God as that experience is lived, professed, and celebrated in a liberation practice.”³⁹⁵ In addition, Luis del Valle affirms: “Theology both derives from and leads to conversion. Conversion is here understood as a real commitment to, and involvement in, society.”³⁹⁶ The novelty of liberation theology and its epistemological power depend precisely on the fact that “it is a theology *from* and *on*, which begins *from* praxis and reflects *on* the praxis of committed Christian communities.”³⁹⁷ Gustavo Gutierrez stresses that, “The theology of liberation is an attempt to understand the faith from within the concrete historical, liberating, and subversive praxis of the poor of this world – the exploited classes, despised ethnic groups, and marginalized cultures.”³⁹⁸ From this perspective then, the first two mediations flow into the third mediation as the completion of the hermeneutical circle: socio-analytic, hermeneutic and practical mediations. Without the third mediation, liberation theology would not be worthy of its suggestive title: ‘liberation’. Thus, C. Boff emphatically asserts, “And so, yes: liberation theology leads to action: action for justice, the work of love, conversion, renewal of the church, transformation of society.”³⁹⁹

Political Practice of Hermeneutics of Liberation

We now will attempt to explain the pertinence of theological reflection that is viewed from and situated in a context of oppression and social alienation, as well as its mandate for Christian political action. The starting point is framed in some questions posed by C. Boff, who asks:

To my mind, the real political problem for a (theological) theory is not that of ‘engagement’ as such, but that of an analytically predicated engagement: *What type* of engagement is to be undertaken? *What* social position must the theologian take? ... *which* locus should a given theological discourse occupy?⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁵ Pablo Richard, *Mysterium Liberationis*, 152.

³⁹⁶ Luis G. del Valle, “Toward a Theological Outlook Starting from Concrete Events” in *Frontiers of Theology*, 83.

³⁹⁷ R. Gibellini, *The liberation theology debate*, 5.

³⁹⁸ Gustavo Gutierrez. *The Power of the Poor in History. Manuscript*, ed. William E. Jerman (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983), 37.

³⁹⁹ Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 39.

⁴⁰⁰ C. Boff, *Theology and Praxis*, 161.

These questions are novel and peculiar to liberation theology, as we will observe below. Also, these questions are the epistemological foundation from which to respond in order to ‘takes side with’ and to ‘opt for’ those who suffer poverty and all kinds of marginalization and exclusion. We are talking about a political practice inspired by the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Messiah of all of humankind. This type of commitment, according to the challenging suggestion of H. Assmann, also includes the option to dedicate our lives to marginalized communities, since he affirms that, “The practice of liberation must lead one to become poor with the poor.”⁴⁰¹ This is what the Son of God did at his incarnation (2 Corinthians 8:9). This presents a more difficult option for theologians and their respective Christian communities, suggesting there is more to be done than writing about the poor and the need for their liberation.

Along these lines, C. Boff is acutely aware that “the process of acting is extremely complex.”⁴⁰² The practice and action of Christians in the context of oppression is planned and guided by the community of faith and the local church; and the pastors and leaders are the first to show the way through their own committed lives and examples, as the ‘hermeneutical example’ demonstrates. But the practice that leads toward transformation and ultimately to social change could not be done as mere activism. The church as a social entity in such a context possesses a unifying message, or more precisely, a ‘historical project’, or a ‘historical mission’. In this regard, “Each particular hermeneutic is accountable to the general discourse of the church... to the church as a community of women and men of all races, cultures, ages, ideologies, nations, and so on who gather around Scripture to receive guidance for their lives and hopes.”⁴⁰³ Our own emphasis here is in the “Church universal” as the Body of Christ, not a particular tradition or denomination per se. It is within the

⁴⁰¹ H. Assmann, *Practical Theology*, 11.

⁴⁰² Leonardo and C. Boff. *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 40.

⁴⁰³ Pablo Richard, in *The Bible and Hermeneutic of Liberation*, 8.

church where we become recipients of the proclamation of the Scriptures, which in a pedagogical fashion guides, equips, and calls us to action, but in a disciplined and organized manner. We must, therefore, ultimately elaborate the hermeneutics within the church and lead the church to social action, so that the meaning of the Scriptures will not be lost in our own, personal subjectivity as individual members or professional theologians. Viewed from this angle, hermeneutics also constructs the purpose and it is instrumental in creating the criteria for the mission of Christian practice (we will expand this in the last chapter), especially in calling for a political commitment framed by immersion in an impoverished context and working for its transformation (in dialectical sense) with the poor. This commitment would be better assimilated as an engagement. In this way, an “Engagement” is a type of practice – not analysis. It calls for action, not for inquiry. It appeals for action, not understanding.”⁴⁰⁴

C. Boff suggests that “practical mediation embraces certain distinct discursive levels.”⁴⁰⁵ The following five levels proposed by C. Boff explained according to our own understanding and its implications, keeping in mind the other two mediations already delineated.

1. Level of [*juncture*] *analysis*: basically an evaluation of possibilities on the part of civil society and the church, with the understanding that opposition is a logical element in processes of resistance.
2. Level of *projects and programs*: concrete, realistic goals that will transcend utopias determined and conditioned by proper timing.
3. Level of *strategy and tactics*: the instrumentality force factor of working with different groups, where wisdom is required.
4. *Ethical and evangelical* level: the mediation of a will to know how to participate in open and peaceful dialogue based on ethical principles.
5. *Performative* level: from ideas, organization, plans, and clear understanding into the committed leap toward real action (praxis).⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁴ C Boff, *Theology and Praxis* 161

⁴⁰⁵ C. Boff, *Mysterium Liberationis*, 84.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 84.

The levels are configured in a congenial fashion and in direct relation to the praxis of faith. This is a Christian option and attitude of a conscious alertness as the sub-product of seeing and feeling deeply social inequities and economic discrepancies, while having been confronted with the exigencies and ethics of the gospel. What we call “historical conscious alertness”, C. Boff calls “political vigilance”, as he ardently states that

This spirit is expressed in the attitude that I call ‘political vigilance,’ understood as due attention to the political and social implications generally of theoretical practice and its products, in such wise that these may be controlled as much as possible.⁴⁰⁷

Control is related to level three: ‘strategy and tactics’, while political vigilance is more determined by level number one: ‘juncture analysis’. The other levels interplay logistically in maintaining the circular dynamic of context.

A Fundamental Connection between Boff and Gadamer

Boff uses the term ‘application’ more from Gadamer’s perspective, not meaning ‘appropriation’ as Ricoeur uses it. This is understandable, since the word ‘appropriation’ in the context of Latin America conveys the ideological notion of ‘taking from’, even ‘to despoil’. The *Conquistadores* appropriated the land and wealth of the indigenous inhabitants of Latin America. This is a word insensitive to the historical context of spoliation. In an implicit manner, Boff has been influenced by the term ‘*Dasein*’ and “being-in-the-world” as the recognition of the proper historical context, which avoids the speculation of subjective interpretations of modernism. As we have seen in our case, the poor have an important locus in history, not a peripheral one. Boff’s understanding of the term “application” can be viewed as follows: application connotes a pedagogical implication of adaptability of the horizons that are in dialectical tension, especially in being sensitive to historical distance between text and reader.

⁴⁰⁷ C. Boff, *Theology and Praxis*, 193-194.

Application plays an instrumental role in applying a ‘presupposition’ to obtain a result, and facilitates the interchange of theory and praxis. Application connotes urgency, a message that should not be read within the luxury of availability, but needs to be heard here and now. Application cannot wait, it is a prophetic *kerygma* of enthusiasm and indignation combined to confront injustice, emphasizing that a radical transformation has to take place until, in the words of the Psalmist, “saving justice and peace embrace.”⁴⁰⁸

Applicability in the context of the task of liberation is a project like a pilgrimage that calls for perseverance, punctuality and frequency, something that has to be corrected and fixed. The task of John the Baptist could be considered to have been a “prophetic application,” as the demand to lift up a “voice” against a social and moral structure that was crooked.

Another similarity between C. Boff and Gadamer, more specifically in the context of socio-hermeneutical analysis, is the emphasis on raising historical consciousness “in-the-world”. The method of C. Boff is more in accord with the Latin American situation and is viewed as re-claiming the idea that the location of the reader or interpreter sharply determines the epistemological locus from which the text is read and reality is appraised. This reading opens the eyes of the poor. In that sense we could say that the influence of Paulo Freire is present in the hermeneutical method of C. Boff, particularly in that a hermeneutic of liberation ‘awoke a critical consciousness’, a pedagogical and political emphasis also made by Freire.

Complementary Difference between Boff and Gadamer

The hermeneutics of Gadamer gives a foundation for the important task of making an interpretation that helps history to be understood as a first step for the reader of the Scriptures. Boff begins from where Gadamer has left, beginning with the analytic mediation,

⁴⁰⁸ Psalm 85:10 (The New Jerusalem Bible)

which talks about the poor in a socio-economic perspective, a hermeneutics that reveals the root of the problem of poverty. C. Boff's hermeneutical method combines and reconciles faith with a theory that articulates the condition of the poor, while in Gadamer, the idea of faith rooted in a praxis of liberation is basically missing. For our purposes, however, it is important that C. Boff's theory and praxis has taken into consideration the context of the church as a social entity immersed in society and with a liberating mission to accomplish. C. Boff has been both theorising and immersed among poor communities in Brazil. He acknowledges the fundamental engagement between the Spirit of God and people. The last point is that Boff operates from the periphery, from the 'South' and from a continent undergoing development, while Gadamer works from another reality, which could be called the 'centre'.

Critical Analysis on Hermeneutics

With this in mind, the hermeneutics of liberation seeks within its epistemological locus to shake the foundations of theology in order to be critical and to call the church to participate in changing those adverse realities and ideologies of oppression. Consequently, as corroborated by C. Boff,

There is a hermeneutic circle, then, or 'unceasing interplay' between the poor and the word of God. The primacy in this dialectic, however, belongs undeniably to the sovereign word of God – the primacy of value, at any rate, if not necessarily methodological priority.⁴⁰⁹

This vital commitment of liberation theology to the Scriptures shows a serious and critical hermeneutical method that lays a solid foundation for a Christian ethics which is on the side of the poor and oppressed.

Liberation theology has a serious commitment to the construction of a hermeneutical method to interpret the Scriptures, the revealed sacred texts, in favour of the oppressed. This

⁴⁰⁹ Clodovis Boff, "Methodology of the theology of liberation" in *Systematic Theology: Perspectives in Liberation Theology* (NY: Orbis, second printing, 1998), 16.

theology, from a Christian perspective, is aware of the necessity of prolific interaction between reality-history *vis-à-vis* the Scriptures. As Christian theology, it takes a proactive stand because “Once having understood the concrete situation of the oppressed, the theologian must proceed to ask: What does the word of God say about this situation?”⁴¹⁰ From this perspective, such a hermeneutical method asks of Scriptures an urgent and relevant message that is suitable and full of hope for their present reality of despair and anguish. We acknowledge the irresponsible tendency of any methodological interpretation to force the biblical text and to appropriate its meaning and application for a particular situation without proper examination and serious study. Nevertheless, the rigorous hermeneutical method of liberation theology is opposed to that methodological practice: “... but only according to the injunctions of an axiomatic: praxis exerts pressure on theory (thesis); theory, reacting, modifies praxis (antithesis); theory and praxis are transcended, and sublimated in a synthesis; and so on in that order.”⁴¹¹ We must keep in mind that the order is not about a method, but a conjunctual condition. The order communicates the fact that we are dealing with a situation that is rooted in pervasive historical oppression. Any attempt to alter this chronology would take the risk of mistakenly ignoring real facts that created the true essence of the history of Latin America. The dialectics of hermeneutics is precisely to find and deal with causes, not symptoms, as did Camilo Torres.

We are going back to square one, the arrival of colonizers in 1492, because it is the fundamental historical criterion responsible for the beginning of the oppression in Latin America, and analogically the *Conquista* (conquest) was the matrix of the apocalyptic beast that gave birth to such historical macro-structural sin. Those oppressive conditions, after independence was gained from the colonizers, were perpetuated by the new governments in Latin America. The autonomy of Latin America was violated by the so called “Conquista”,

⁴¹⁰ Ibid. 15.

⁴¹¹ C. Boff, *Theology and Praxis*, 232.

an act of barbarism that distorted the natural development of history. History was redirected for Latin America, but it was a forced redirection of fatalism and destruction. The intention of liberation theology is to deal critically with the situation of injustice and oppression in our continent.

The new matrix which engendered the injustice and inequalities in Colombia is only to be challenged by the church, from our Christian perspective, having a solid ground in the hermeneutics of liberation. The hermeneutics of liberation not only will establish the foundation from which to uncover and denounce injustice, but will determine and inform the theological and pastoral mission of the church so that it is able to construct a Christian faith that ought to commit to building social justice and peace. The Christian church in Colombia has an imperative to offer a theological response to the present situation of injustice and political violence that has intensified, and bloodied and devastated the country during the past 60 years. Such hermeneutics will inform the reading and the interpretation of the Scriptures, and thus promote a move toward a relevant faith, an efficacious love, an ethics of liberation, and a church for the poor.

Summary

This chapter has provided a delineation of hermeneutical views used to approach the Scriptures in light of human reality in the world. The first view briefly examined Gadamer's hermeneutical phenomenology, especially in his emphasis of "being-in-the-world" as the foundation on which to base the need of humans to achieve their ontological consciousness. By doing that, Gadamer is sustaining the idea that hermeneutical consciousness is the means to transcend historical alienation, which can be a great impediment to a proper understanding and accurate interpretation.

Then, more extensively, we analysed interpretatively the concepts of C. Boff's hermeneutics of liberation. We learned that it is fundamental in a context of subjugation and

exclusion to approach the Scriptures in direct relation with reality as the point of departure. That can be properly done by keeping in mind the three theoretical mediations: socio-analytic, hermeneutic, and the dialectic of theory and praxis. As a result of the mediations, praxis will determine the methods used to interpret the Scriptures and the actions that are significant for re-directing history toward justice. The pivotal element, unique and distinctive to a hermeneutics of liberation, is the idea that Scriptural interpretation must be made in profound interaction with a historical context of poverty and exclusion toward liberation and emancipation, as was the hermeneutical practice articulated by Camilo Torres, made concrete in his socio-political “*Plataforma*” (platform).⁴¹²

Based on these hermeneutical concepts of this present chapter, we will link and enhance them with the socio-theological ideas of priest and sociologist Camilo Torres in direct relation with Enrique Dussel’s ethics of liberation in our next chapter.

⁴¹² Please refer to page number 201, where we discuss Camilo Torres’ platform.

CHAPTER IV. CAMILO TORRES' CHRISTIAN IMPERATIVE IN THE LIGHT OF ENRIQUE DUSSEL'S ETHICS OF LIBERATION

In Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe, and among growing minorities in capitalist "central" countries, the political order loses legitimacy when the misery of many becomes intolerable, unsustainable.⁴¹³

In this chapter we make a transition, changing tracks from hermeneutics to an ethics of liberation. A theological reflection upon the global South, has first to articulate hermeneutically the important question about the reality of oppression, and seek what God has to say about it. For that particular reason, the work of Gadamer and Clodovis Boff is important since their analyses have offered an aid to understanding the value of human life in the world especially in the context of poverty and exclusion.

Having understood and analysed the context of oppression, in this chapter we move to investigate how Christians are involved ethically, knowing that it is the case in Colombia that many humans life are on the brink of losing their lives through hunger, repression and all kinds of historical prejudice and oppression.

This chapter first of all will discuss the ethics of Enrique Dussel; secondly, we will bring into the discussion the relevance of the liberating ethics that gives meaning to the practicality of love in community. Therefore, we re-examine Camilo Torres' socio-theological criteria in the light of the ethics of liberation. Hence, the main thrust of this chapter is to discover an ethical discourse of liberation that interprets and applies Scripture from the perspective of the economically oppressed, and those who are excluded.

This chapter aims to explore the significance and the liberating socio-economic implications of a Christian ethics in a context of poverty and injustice. It claims an epistemological approach precisely because we ought to discern what is ethical and just in a

⁴¹³ Enrique Dussel, *Ethics of Liberation: In the Age of Globalization and Exclusion*, 405.

context of social⁴¹⁴ oppression and exploitation. Christian ethics operates in history, and seeks to play a transformative role because the goal is to change structures of oppression to make another history, the history of liberation. But ethics also looks retrospectively into the past, to discern the beginning of the historical context of Colombia's oppression. Our ethical analysis from a Christian perspective, in this chapter, seeks to construct a foundation for social consciousness towards peace which will emerge from social justice. This is to say that the Christian consciousness must achieve the praxical clarity to distinguish what is "legitimacy"⁴¹⁵ and what is falsehood in order to open the way for the efficacy of love.

Ethics and its Relationship with Praxis

When we think of a political ethics as fundamental component of a theology of liberation in favour of the poor and victimised in society, we have to put "an emphasis on praxis as the necessary presupposition of any significant Christian social ethics".⁴¹⁶ This is manifested in the necessity to understand the role of power in seeking radical changes. Thus in a dialectical relationship, ethics and praxis call "for a radical shift in power, a mobilizing vision (ideology), a total commitment (praxis), and a concrete historical focus (contextuality)".⁴¹⁷ Elaborating this idea, C. Boff suggests that "the function of political theologians is to determine *what ethical quality* a political practice ought to assume, as well as to evaluate the *concrete political action* put forward as responding to this ethical quality"⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁴ We are using social oppression as the generic sociological term that covers all other characteristic mediations of society, i.e. political, economic, ecological, cultural, religious, and ethnic.

⁴¹⁵ "Legitimacy should thus be defined – in a basic and primary sense – as the *communitarian self-validation* granted to a political order (or to other practical system), starting with the empirical capacity of such an order for (a) the reproduction and development of the life of the subjects (the material), and (b) the symmetrical intersubjective participation in decision making by those affected (the formal); all of which should be possible (c) with efficient instrumental mediations (the feasible), thus creating a *fundamental consensus* of acceptance of the mentioned political order (or others)." In E. Dussel, *Ethics of Liberation: In the Age of Globalization and Exclusion*, 405-406.

⁴¹⁶ Jose Miguez Bonino, *Toward a Christian Political Ethics*, 31.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid. 31.

⁴¹⁸ C. Boff, *Theology and Praxis*, 202.

Our analysis of the praxis of Camilo Torres and the ethics of liberation has indicated that a common objective exists, due to the fact that “in *any* system of domination, of sin, there are those who are, by definition, dominated – the poor. The discovery of those poor here and now, in the concrete, belongs to the ethical conscience, to an ethical awareness”.⁴¹⁹ The basic criterion for ethics and its point of departure and objective is that “the ethics of liberation is a possible ethics regarding any action of everyday life. What is specific about such ethics, however, its privileged referent, is the victim or community of victims that will operate as “subject/s” in the last instance”.⁴²⁰

The Necessity of an Ethical Approach

An interest in ethics⁴²¹ is necessary on one hand because we have understood that in “the most recent years of Latin America history have been characterized by the discovery of the real-life world of “the other,” of the poor and exploited and their compelling needs.”⁴²² And, on the other hand, because “when community disintegrates life becomes literally impossible.”⁴²³ Though we are not talking about a natural disaster here, we have to deal in similar fashion with the socio-economic structures that cause annihilation of communities. Such disintegration is viewed here as a class struggle, of those (the majority) who day-by-day fight for survival against an authoritarian and tyrannical regime. The State has become the moral ‘authority’ that is disgracefully based on an economic system that creates qualitative division. Thus ethics has a double task, to unmask false ideologies by denouncing the moral double standards, especially pertaining to the State’s corrupt *modus operandi*, and secondly,

⁴¹⁹ E. Dussel, *Ethics and Community*, 56.

⁴²⁰ E. Dussel, *Ethics of Liberation: In the Age of Globalization and Exclusion*, 373-374.

⁴²¹ The idea of ‘ethics’ vary in its definition depending on the hermeneutical approach given to the Scriptures and the locality of the definer. For Esther Reed the authority of God the Creator will determine the fundamental constitutive point of departure for the ethical discourse, as she comments “A Christian understanding of ethics is integral to confession of the divine power to initiate, establish and nurture life, and, therefore, its task will involve the identification of values and patterns of relationship that reflect the authoring-authority of God.” 57. In *The Genesis of Ethics: On the authority of God as the origin of Christian ethics* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2000), ff 1-57.

⁴²² Gustavo Gutierrez “Liberation praxis and Christian faith” in *Frontiers of theology*, 1.

⁴²³ Timothy J. Gorringer, *Capital and the Kingdom* (NY: Orbis, London: SPCK, 1994), 9.

pointing out the way of common good, especially that which will achieve fair wealth distribution. Ethics confronts the State, which expropriated the socio-economic epistemologies, in order to claim the authoritarian privilege that it wields the power to decide the way and by what means and wage the majority of the population has to earn its living. The State uses all kinds of ‘means’, to justify its actions and to alienate people. Hence, the State acquires a sovereign privilege which determines human destiny. Thus, economic laws are always applied not openly but in ambush, such is the distortion of ‘legitimacy’ and the exorbitant desire for accumulation of wealth.

History as a Witness for an Ethics of Liberation

Of singular importance for this project is the history and work in ethics of Enrique Dussel.⁴²⁴ As Mario I. Aguilar illustrates,

Dussel used history in order to set up the context for a liberating project that included the liberation from economic structures ad intra as well as the liberation from a Christian situation of empire symbolized by the historical development of Christianity from a persecuted religion as well as the liberation to a colonizing system of Christendom.⁴²⁵

Christian ethics as a point of departure depends organically on both history and Scriptures. That history is an ocular witness of God’s protagonistic and liberating acts, and also witnesses human activities, and in that true history we see poverty and injustice. That obscure side of history and of our present reality is the result of the activities of humans and institutions that are afflicting oppression on others. That affliction is immoral, unethical, and offensive to God’s ethics. The ethics of God is a project of life, not of death and suffering, a project toward the common good for all, not for a few who have selfishly appropriated the goodness of God’s creation.

The theological view of the Argentinian theologian Enrique Dussel is important in this analysis, that the Scriptures define evil-doing as sin, and also talk about the Evil One as

⁴²⁴ Enrique Dussel is a prolific Argentinean theologian and philosopher of liberation: he lives in exile in Mexico.

⁴²⁵ Mario Aguilar, *The History and Politics of Latin American Theology* (London: SCM Press.Vol. 1., 2007), 44-45.

the promoter of sin and all kind of infamies and injustices in the world.⁴²⁶ We would like to analyse a Christian ethics of liberation in order to establish an analytical instrument to critically seek new alternatives for building a more community-based society in Colombia. E. Dussel uses the Greek words *oikos* and *kosmos* to elaborate a theological method with which to build up a Christian ethics of liberation. He says:

“The term ‘ecumene’ comes from the Greek word *oikoumene*, which is derived from *oikos*, meaning house ... I am in charge in my own home because I am in the center and I have always been there... ‘World’ in the gospel is *kosmos*, and Jesus speaks of the “prince of this world; this prince is completely at home.”⁴²⁷

Having defined *oikos* and the implicit meaning of *kosmos* as centre, Dussel argues that the “ecumene is the same as ‘totality’. ‘Totality’ obviously comes from total.”⁴²⁸ He continues: “My world is a totality of meaning; therefore whoever understands the meaning of all that takes place there has to be someone in the center of the world.”⁴²⁹ Dussel arrives at the conclusion that the European [Spanish] conquest, coming from the centre, into the Amerindian soil, the periphery, is an evil act; furthermore he ascribes the title Evil One to any colonizing enterprise in Latin America, as carried out by the Spaniards for almost 500 years.

Dussel’s objective, based on a hermeneutical method derived from the Latin American context of oppression, is to make a liberating Christian ethics using a method that is very distinctive of such theology, which is to see, to judge and to act. He starts by

⁴²⁶ Regarding the concept of sin, Gonzalez Faus says that “ One of the most characteristic contributions of Latin American theology to the theme of sin has been the notion of structural sin or structures of sin.” “Sin” in *Mysterium Liberationis*,, 532. This is different from the particular notion that only emphasizes moral sin. Another definition of structural sin was given by the former Archbishop Oscar Romero as follows: “The Church has denounced sin for centuries. It has certainly denounced the sin of the individual, and it has also denounced the sin which perverts relationships between human beings, particularly at the family level. But now it has again reminded us of what has been fundamental from its beginning: of social sin, that is to say, the crystallization of individual egoisms in permanent structures which maintain this sin and exert its power over the great majorities.” In “Sin” *Mysterium Liberationis*, 537. Adding another element to the concept of sin, J. Sobrino affirms that “ Liberation theology is a prophetic theology, which takes account of sin – and historical sin – as central to its concern, something that must be exposed and denounced.” In “Central position of the reign of God in liberation Theology” *Mysterium Liberationis*, 353.

⁴²⁷ Enrique Dussel, *Ethics and the Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1978), 4.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.* 4.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.* 4.

describing the reality of oppression (seeing), then he uses the Scriptures as the second methodological moment (judging) seeking the inputs of faith, and then he moves to the third step, the application of his theology, which should transform that seen reality in the light of the Christian faith (acting). The word *oikoumene* is translated by Walter Bauer as “the inhabited earth, the world” ... “world in the sense of its inhabitants, humankind... of Satan, Rev. 12: 9”... “the Roman Empire (which, in the exaggerated language commonly used in reference to the emperors, was equal to the whole world” and “the whole world (so far as living beings inhabit it, therefore the realm of spirits as well).”⁴³⁰ Bauer translates the word *oikoumene* in a literal way but also applies this word to the Roman Empire. Hence, both Dussel and Bauer circumscribe *oikoumene* to mean a social structure that has some kind of political power. Bauer also calls to our attention the fact that in Rev 12: 9 the word *oikoumene* is used explicitly to describe Satan’s activities.

On the other hand, we see that the Greek word *oikoumene* in the New Testament is a neutral word that does not imply goodness or badness. For instance, in Romans 10: 18 *oikoumene* translates as “the inhabited earth,” which leads us to understand it as communal term that indicates a “human society.” Also, *oikoumene* denotes an integrating meaning that could be applied to different realities either in Latin America or on other continents. In a constructive way, *oikoumene* is used to define an ecclesiastical effort that organizes different churches around the world for common causes. It is clear that Dussel only interprets *oikoumene* from the angle of power, but he is aware of its integrating meaning, and what this word implies when applied to other contexts outside Latin America. Also, Dussel uses the word *kosmos* in a geopolitical manner to sustain his argument that Europe is a closed and exclusive “world,” which was a critical perspective of colonialism. By doing that Dussel’s interpretation must be understood analogically. We notice the implications that *kosmos*

⁴³⁰ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago and London: the University of Chicago Press, from Walter Bauer’s 5th edition, 1958, 1979), 561.

encompasses, as it is also used in other New Testament passages with an open and inclusive meaning. However, Dussel's ethics takes the argument beyond the etymological meaning of words to focus on a specific situation where oppression occurred historically as the result of the colonization and annihilation of the Amerindian world (*kosmos*) and culture.

Any theological ethics should be a critical reflection on the communal values and human conduct in society. Thus, here our main interest lies in focusing on the application of the radical principles of an ethics of liberation in the Colombian situation of oppression. In order to propose a new way to implement an ethical project of liberation it is necessary to start from our particular situation, a situation in our case of desperation and poverty. Colombia is considered to belong to the so-called third world or underdeveloped countries, but how is this reality understood, and why should it be approached from an ethical point of view, or more specifically, from an ethics of liberation? An explanation exists as to why it is not necessarily a situation of simple backwardness, but is a phenomenon arising from socio-economic domination. This domination is manifested in the divisions of social strata; and in the hegemonic imposition of rich countries against poor countries in a globalized economy. A non-Latin American theologian, Gareth Jones, writes from a different geopolitical context and yet recognizes methodologically, as Dussel does, the task of ethics in relation to the poor when he says "Christianity's historic appeal to the poor has always had much to do with its message of hope to the disenfranchised; something that is as true today in Latin America as it was in first-century Palestine."⁴³¹ The Colombian situation has been judged as negative, inhumane, unjust, oppressed, exploited and marginalized.⁴³² We recognize implicitly or explicitly that such reality is unethical.

⁴³¹ Gareth Jones "The Authority of scripture and Christian ethics" in the *Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics*, ed. Robin Gill (Cambridge: University Press, 2001), 20.

⁴³² The situation in Colombia, as in Camilo's time, L. Sarmiento Anzola says it "was not difficult to predict the repressive attitude of the Colombian plutocracy that traditionally had existed in Latin America by unfastening the most genocidal and inhumane violence against the people at the moment to defend their selfish interests." "1966-2011: Hegemonía Sistémica, Crisis del sujeto", in *Camilo Mensajes Visionarios*, 192. Also an important

The Babylon Principle

In his theological construct, Dussel makes a distinction between morality and ethics. “He writes: “The term morality ... will denote any ‘practical’ (from praxis) system of the prevailing, established order, the order now in place”.⁴³³ Dussel goes on to argue: “Thus a praxis can be ‘good’ in the eyes of the prevailing morality and ‘evil’ an ethics of liberation.”⁴³⁴ In Colombia, the Protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church have emphasized the salvation of the soul, and the teaching and preaching was based in a theology that appealed only to a spiritual experience that would secure, after death, eternal life in heaven. Liturgical music and rites were impregnated with a content that aimed at obtaining real joy by wishing to abandon this material world. Life on earth was ephemeral and not important, only a vague transitory journey towards eternal life.⁴³⁵ Theology was designed to favour those in power, and the elite social classes. The emphasis was not on the community but on a personal and individualistic faith, totally indifferent to the social reality of oppression, suffering and death. From such a theological perspective, people who showed unconformity and indignation with the establishment, were considered troublemakers and called ‘communists’. In an oppressive system good moral persons are those who comply with the way things are organized and established, without the liberty and freedom to point out the injustices, but rather who opt for an attitude of total indifference. This kind of human conduct has been used in different stages of human history; “Jesus was a blasphemer, a disturber of the social order, one who deserved to die, and so – in other words, ‘evil.’”⁴³⁶ Historically, the

treatment of this subject from a ‘bio-political’ perspective can be seen in Andrea Fumagalli, *Bioeconomía y capitalismo cognitivo. Hacia un nuevo paradigma de acumulación* (Madrid: Ediciones Traficantes de Sueños, 2010).

⁴³³ Enrique Dussel, *Ethics in Community*, 28.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.* 29.

⁴³⁵ From an ethical perspective the theologian Juan Stam presents an adequate critic to conservative Christians, criticizing “the fundamentalism and its tendency to absolutism.” In “La Ética del discurso teológico” *Teología y cultura*, año 2, vol. 3, Agosto (2005): 1-14; Emilio A. Núñez and William Taylor, *Crisis in Latin America: An Evangelical perspective* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989); Orlando E. Costas, *El protestantismo en América Latina hoy: ensayos del camino* (1972-1974) (San José, Costa Rica: Publicaciones INDEF, 1975).

⁴³⁶ Dussel, *Ethics in Community*, 29.

majority of the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches in Colombia have been on the side of the rich and those in power, and have neglected the social needs of the poor. For example, according to Pearce, the distinguished archbishop “Cardinal Luis Concha Cordova argued that Vatican II’s teaching obliged the Colombian church to make liturgical, not social, changes.”⁴³⁷ Also, “the hierarchy rejected the working document presented to the Latin American Bishops’ Conference in Medellin⁴³⁸ in 1968 on the ground that it had been drawn up by the ‘left wing’ of the Latin American church and did not represent Colombian reality.”⁴³⁹ The theologian Rowan Williams makes an important assertion about making moral decisions, for instance in order to propose an ethics that sustains the good for all in community, pointing out: “We have, I believe, to turn away from the temptation to seek the purity and assurance of a community speaking with only one voice and embrace the reality of living in a communion that is fallible and divided.”⁴⁴⁰ And echoing the concept of being face-to-face with a different perspective and geopolitical reality, he says: “To remain in communion is to remain in solidarity with those who I believe are wounded as well as wounding the church, in the trust that in the Body of Christ the confronting of wounds is part of opening ourselves to healing.”⁴⁴¹ A critical point of ethics is to ‘see’ reality as it is: a reality with all kinds of socio-economic contradictions, on the one hand a lot of wealth and extravagance, on the other hand, suffering and misery.

That is another voice in the construction of an ethics of liberation. This truth confronts the other voice that argues that everything is fine in Colombia or part of a destiny or accident where nobody is accountable. It is interesting that we find a theologian from a developed country who sees what religious leaders in Colombia do not see regarding the situation of poverty and injustice.

⁴³⁷ Jenny Pearce, *Colombia: Inside the labyrinth*, 200.

⁴³⁸ Medellin is a city in Colombia where Liberation Theology begun officially in 1968.

⁴³⁹ Pearce, *Colombia: Inside the labyrinth*, 200.

⁴⁴⁰ Rowan Williams “Making Moral decisions” in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian ethics*. 11.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.* 11.

The Jerusalem Principle:

The eschatological biblical narrative of Revelation 21:1-4 for Dussel is an ethical paradigm of a just community, where God and humans live together in harmony, freedom and peace. According to Dussel, the Jerusalem Principle focuses on community, the opposite of the Babylon principle which defines a society of domination. This sharp distinction shall be examined critically below. Dussel points out: “In the theology of the prophets of Israel, as also in Jesus’ theology and that of his disciples (and the New Testament authors), we encounter a striking dialectic between the ‘before’ of the old world - as being the world of sin, domination - and the ‘after’ of the future, of the ‘new,’ of a world to be created by goodness, justice, community.”⁴⁴² Dussel summarises the Jerusalem Principle by stating that “under this ethics, the poor are evangelized. They receive the ‘good news’ of their hope: they are transformed into the new ‘subject’ of the active construction of the reign of God.”⁴⁴³ Dussel accordingly suggests “the need for creative, historical, concrete, committed, asystematic, prophetic, anguished thought.”⁴⁴⁴ Therefore, as Latin-Americans we are confronted with some major challenges. M. Aguilar rightly remarks: “Anguished thought arises out of situation in which people do not know where they are going and the task of Christians is to show the way forward, not to the left or to the right but forward through the centre, not through a centrist position towards life but through a position forward.”⁴⁴⁵ Thus Christian ethics as explained above is a construct with relevant direction for the construction of a new society. It is an ethics that challenges the present order of oppression in Latin America, presenting a solid foundation from which to change the reality of poverty, injustice and inequality on our continent. Other voices from a conservative tradition make more general statements from an ethical point of view about poverty and injustice but without

⁴⁴² Dussel, *Ethics and Community* 47.

⁴⁴³ Ibid. 57.

⁴⁴⁴ Dussel, *Ethics and the Theology of Liberation*, 141.

⁴⁴⁵ M. Aguilar, *The History and Politics of Latin American Theology* Vol. 1, 49.

proposing a clear resistance to the economic structures.⁴⁴⁶ This approach is limited to attacking only the symptoms, as the following affirmation of Robin W. Lovin reveals: “Ministry to human need now includes social and political strategies to prevent suffering as well as charitable responses to relieve it where it already exists.”⁴⁴⁷ Social and political strategies of this kind have good intentions in alleviating some of the suffering but not in eradicating the causes of poverty and injustice. Something that is always true in ethics is its intrinsic inspiration in ‘projecting forward’ to a clear sustainability of hoping for the concrete. This hope for the concrete illuminates the mission of the church, acts as a driving force to work towards changing unjust economic structures, to create a new one, a better today and a better tomorrow in an unjust concrete situation. Thus, ethics always exposes epistemologically a process of thoughts in motion, a dynamic way of not only observing what is happening (social analysis) but also reflecting on reality to confront it and to change it. Ethics is spatial and temporal; for that reason we have to revise it constantly because the social dynamics change constantly. As Paul Lehmann says “Ethics is a matter not of logic but of life, a certain kind of reality of the concrete.”⁴⁴⁸ We can claim, therefore, that the goal of Christian ethics always shall be life and freedom, the life and freedom that we find in Jesus, who gave himself for the redemption and liberation of humankind and preferentially for the oppressed.

⁴⁴⁶ Also we find widespread theological affirmations among conservative churches and theological institutions convincingly affirming that the most important thing is to change the person through the ‘new born conversion’, but ignoring that unjust structures must be changed. On the contrary, explains Mercedes Lopes “Despite innumerable difficulties thrown up by conservative currents and dominant elites, the poor are still organizing themselves, women are awakening and empowering each other in the complicity of solidarity, the indigenous peoples and those of African descent are discovering their historic power, men are seeking new ways to live their masculinity, and so on. They are new historical subjects, who are active in the transformation of society, and their ranks produce new agents of Bible interpretation.” in “Seed of Hope: Grassroots Bible Reading in the Communities of Latin America” *Concilium: The Bible as the Word of God*, ed. Dennis Gira, Diego Irarrazaval, and Marie- Theres Wacker, SCM Press, London, 2010/2, 71-81. A challenging article from a different angle is that by Alistair Kee, regarding liberation theology, entitled “The Conservatism of Liberation Theology: Four Questions for Jon Sobrino.” *Political Theology*, No. 3 Sheffield Academic Press Limited, November 2000, 30-43. Also in this same journal, of poignant criticism is the article of Marcella Maria Althaus-Reid, entitled “¿Bien Sonados? The Future of Mystical Connections in Liberation Theology” *Ibid.* 44-63.

⁴⁴⁷ Robin W. Lovin, *Christian Ethics: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingnon Press, 2000), 111.

⁴⁴⁸ Paul Lehmann, *Ethics in a Christian Context* (London: SCM Press LTD., 1963), 152.

Face-to-Face as the Theological Locus for Life in Community

Dussel elaborates his ethics in more detail in his book *Ethics and Community*, presenting in more depth a foundation for an ethics of liberation. He begins by interpreting the text Acts 2:42, dealing with the text in a singular manner, and making the following assertion: “This text recalls for us that the essence of the Christian life is community: being together with others. This is also the reign of God: to be together with God, face-to-face with God in community.”⁴⁴⁹ In addition, the “the person-to-person or face-to-face between two persons is an abstraction.”⁴⁵⁰ Furthermore, for Dussel the biblical concept of the “Reign of God as the absolute Face-to-Face”⁴⁵¹ was inaugurated by Jesus and is to be lived in community with our neighbours. Therefore, for Dussel “the radical principle of Christian ethics is the face-to-face of the person-to-person relationship in the concrete, real, satisfied, happy, community, in the gladness of being one with God.”⁴⁵²

We take critically and seriously the ethical concept of the “face-to-face” not as an abstraction but as a theological construct which provides through the dialectical encounter between the biblical text and the social reality of a poor community a strong credible metaphor for social ethics. Given the religious composition in Colombia, the term face-to-face associated with God as a supreme, transcendental being could imply an abstraction, evoking only a religious experience and a concept detached from reality. It ceases to be an abstraction, however, after the Christian community becomes committed and involved in the construction of a more just, equal and peaceful society. The ethical purpose is to form a socio-political subject capable of understanding the process toward a just democracy. Only in that way will the face-to-face operate as the driving force that promotes peace and sustains justice in the violent reality as found for more than five decades in Colombia.

⁴⁴⁹ Enrique Dussel, *Ethics and Community*, 7-8.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 10-11.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.* 12.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.* 16.

The Face-to-face: An Ethics that Shapes Moral Perceptions

When talking of Christian ethics we talk of the relationship within a community, in which “the other person as he [she] comes before me in a face to face encounter is not an alter ego, another self with different properties and accidents but in all essential respects like me.”⁴⁵³ The option of having an ethical conscience in a context of oppression is intrinsically determined by solidarity and the recognition of the “other,” and that other is my neighbour according to the gospel. Tim Gorringer, interpreting Dussel, explains the morality of a particular oppressive system and ethics, saying that “The moral law can tell me if something is wrong according to the principles of the system, but not whether the totality is wrong.”⁴⁵⁴ The moral totality of the establishment in Colombia has sustained oppression and violence for many years, and the closed totality has become fundamentally unethical because the ‘other’ has been suppressed in his/her capability to be a human and to enjoy an open totality. Gorringer, quoting Dussel, points out: “Ethics, on the other hand, begins with the capacity to hear the voice of the other, which is the moment of conversion. Ethical conscience, as opposed to moral conscience, consists in knowing how to open up to the other.”⁴⁵⁵ This conceptualization is opposed to the morality of a closed system that eliminates and annihilates the “other” or “the neighbour” through an economic inequality, persecution and disappearance that negate the ontological right of the existence of the other. To maintain a morality that justifies all the ‘ends’ in a system of oppression, the system consequently persecutes and kills the other, without remorse. The closed system that becomes an elite class and a closed ontological society is indifferent to the reality of the poverty of ‘others;’ rather, it is always alert to attack or to defend, reducing itself to an attitude of belligerence, and ultimately to cruel repression. The construction of a concrete face-to-face in community

⁴⁵³ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: an essay on exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 13.

⁴⁵⁴ Tim Gorringer, “Liberation Ethics” in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics*, 127.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 127.

embraces the good of the other as a fundamental principle for Christian ethics in any sphere of society, as Levinas said:

The face of the other is inviolable; those eyes without protection are the most naked part of the human body, but they offer, however, the most absolute resistance to protection, resistance in which lay the temptation of the assassin: the temptation of the absolute negation. The other is the only being which can be tempted to murder...to see the face is already to listen: Do not kill, and to listen: Do not kill is to listen: social justice.⁴⁵⁶

The ethics of liberation projects itself toward the potentiality of the being of the other, in his/her ontological human project, and is a new way to be human by loving and including the other in our open totality. The ontological horizon of one gospel parable reflects the ethics of seeking to encounter the poor in a face-to-face inclusive, loving relationship: “When you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. God will bless you, because they have no way to repay you! You will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”⁴⁵⁷

We consider that evil is the negation of the other, and by contrast good is an affirmation of the other, and in this regard it opens the historical discourse to new possibilities, because it breaks the subjugating and exclusivist nature of the totality.⁴⁵⁸ Camilo Torres witnessed the negation of the poor classes in Colombia: the struggle of the workers. He points out that “Colombian unionism, both rural and urban, has a tradition of struggle,”⁴⁵⁹ and historically they tried to organize themselves against economic exploitation. Camilo Torres also denounced the hardship of peasants, saying:

The Liberal oligarchy paid the Liberal peasants, and Conservative oligarchy paid the Conservative peasants, for the peasants to kill their own people. The oligarchy came out with a scratch. And when the oligarchy no longer needed them, they declared them bandits, had them hunted down like wild beasts, and then published the photographs of their bodies on the front page of the newspaper, boasting of their triumph in the name of peace, justice, and legality.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficil Libertad* (Paris: Albin Michael, 1963), 20-21.

⁴⁵⁷ Luke 14:13-14 (The Kingdom New Testament)

⁴⁵⁸ A relevant article on the topic of ‘evil’ is offered by Luis Carlos Susin entitled “Evils and devils that de-humanize Latin America,” *Concilium* I (2009): 16-19. Also in this same journal this topic is treated as it applies to other part of the world.

⁴⁵⁹ Camilo Torres, *Revolutionary Priest*, 386.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 392.

The moral law of the State did not protect the poor and victims. Here ethics and morality clash between themselves, because the other is beyond the ontological truth of the totality. If evil is aversion to the other, to be merciful and to love the other - the oppressed, the marginalized, the hidden by society as different and excluded by the totality - is ethically an epistemological opposition in all daily contours of culture, society and institutions. The one who ethically includes the other and denounces injustice is considered an enemy of the system of values, of the pre-established order and consequently should be excluded. Here the need exists to recover a more radical ethics of life in community, based on the social analysis of the context of poverty, marginalization, the violation of human rights and cruel repression as was found in Colombia in the past decades of its bloody history. The disintegration of life in community as a negation of the other is part of the evil project of a political and economic system that never takes drastic changes to eradicate poverty and oppression. The conceptual framework of an ethics of liberation that begins with praxis as the epistemological foundation is aligned toward freedom, liberation and goodness for all in community. Nevertheless, this ethical construction from the standpoint of liberation in the context of an underdeveloped country such as Colombia is not simple to undertake. Reflecting on the ethics of liberation being used to advance the face-to-face in community confronts new global claims, precisely because the concept of community as life for all has been destroyed in Colombia by an unjust system influenced by drug trafficking, corruption, and by extreme right-wing paramilitarism. John R. Pottenger offers a point of view that liberation theology needs to consider seriously in its epistemology of ethics:

Following the basic questions to be answered by political theory, there are three concerns that any philosophical movement that claims to be concerned with social issues, including liberation theology, must take into account: the normative underpinnings that give meaning and value to human existence; the explanations that

describe extant social conditions; and the moral restrictions that delineate and define acceptable political behaviour.⁴⁶¹

This important strategic political warning from Pottenger could rather be approached from the theological social theory point of view, if we are going to find a coherent application of political theory in the effort of integrating and constructing a new and healthy community, and even, a new way of being a community. The three concerns mentioned above will be theoretically compatible with a social analysis of the reality of oppression, but need to be pushed further, with the perspicacity that is explicit within the ethics of face-to-face proposed by Dussel, especially in our view of resistance against the system and in the solidarity with the ‘other,’ my neighbour, from the face-to-face ethical construction. In what follows we will attempt to explain why it is imperative to construct an ethics of liberation in Colombia.

The Gracious Paradoxical Force of Love

Any economic system that is malfunctioning will always produce economic poverty. Camilo Torres’ claim made to the government of Colombia was that the malfunctioning system had to be changed. The malfunctioning could be the result of bad distribution of wealth, an obsolete economic structure, or corruption. On the other hand, proper economic systems ensure the wellbeing of the population and correct and eradicate poverty, if it exists; not by alleviating the symptoms in a chronically paternalistic almsgiving fashion, but ensuring that society is structurally designed to not have poverty. Christ knowing that vicious economic mode of malfunctioning economics said emphatically “You always have the poor with you”⁴⁶². It was a challenging parabolic way to infer that as long as you have the wrong economic system, you always will produce poverty. But Jesus was saying that with concrete indignation against economic inequality, using political sarcasm to draw the attention of the architect of an unjust and misbalanced economy.

⁴⁶¹ John R. Pottenger, *The Political Theory of Liberation Theology*, 23.

⁴⁶² John 12:8 (The Kingdom New Testament)

The grace of God and the awareness of economic needs shape the social consciousness of the believers, as in the paradigmatic example given by the churches in Macedonia. Paul expresses a theological and materialistic interpretation of the churches of Macedonia.⁴⁶³ The level of maturity of the latter is well captured by Camilo Torres' conception of what a church should be like in a context of poverty. Though Camilo Torres does not use this passage in his theological reflexion, we deduce logically that its meaning, in a very personal way, touched his life. First, Camilo Torres came from a very rich family, and the example of Christ 'who was rich and then became poor' was something he experienced as a result of his faith conversion. Second, the churches of Macedonia knew how to resolve the contradiction of class division, and the paradox of giving beyond their own capabilities. This is interpreted as a structure suggestive of a rudimentary communitarian and democratic economy, not seen in the mode of production of neo-liberal economic systems, since this, is disregarding the causes of poverty by permitting the division of social stratus. Rather the churches of Macedonia knew that the grace of God that is exercised in efficacious love has the intrinsic force of changing the adverse reality of material poverty, a way of thinking and experiencing God in a paradoxical solidarity as Camilo Torres did. Third, pertaining to the elucidation of a love that becomes efficacious, rests in the fact of the faith-materialistic conversion of Christ in becoming poor as the poor, motivated according to the passage by the irresistible grace of God, which was the obedient option that Camilo Torres chose as his vocation among and for the poor.

We do not want to lose sight of the fact that Christ had such a conversion because as the Son of God he came to do God's will of announcing the good news to the poor. In his baptism, his anointment, which was a public acknowledgement of the implication of his incarnation: the *via dolorosa* and the cross, he showed the way to God, by his exemplary life

⁴⁶³ 2 Corinthians 8:1-9

of efficacious love for the oppressed and marginalized. By his resurrection as a free exercise of affirmation of 'life' for those who, because of their socially oppressed condition cannot enjoy a dignified 'life,' he opposes death, and showed that ultimately the purpose of death is the negation of God's will. Camilo Torres, having cleared that theological premise, then confronted the church of his time by pointing to Christ, who could and would inspire a relevant and true mission of the church. The mission of the church is not to convert itself within the structure of its own dogmas, but to convert itself into the world of the poor. That understanding of Camilo Torres' mission of the church led him to his radical decision of 'leaving the obsolete structure of power' and taking the struggle of the poor as the true church without walls to exercise freely his efficacious love of God by saying "I have given up the privileges and responsibilities of the clergy, but I have not ceased to be a priest."⁴⁶⁴

Referring back to the passage in question, the love of the Macedonian churches arose spontaneously as an expression of love and solidarity which gave them the strength despite their profound poverty. It is as if they affirmed, in a nutshell, the *credo* that: "Now we know that our poverty can enrich others, and that in our weakness there is shown the force of God as salvation for every person who dares to become dissociated from these powers of death, to live on our hope."⁴⁶⁵ The apparent weakness of the oppressed that is mediated in the limitation of poverty and the loving encounter with our neighbour, is really their strength. The paradoxical transcendence of going beyond 'their ability' is the radical juncture between a liberated ideology and the acknowledgement that an inefficacious economic system cannot prevent people from being in solidarity and on the side of the poor. The economic grace of God is manifested paradoxically in an unselfish conviction that "Love meets the need of the neighbour, without carefully weighing and comparing his needs with those of the self."⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶⁴ F. Houtart, *El sueño de camilo*, 94.

⁴⁶⁵ J. Jimenez Limon, "Meditation on the God of the poor" in *The Idols of Death and the God of Life*, Pablo Richard, et al. trans. Barbara E. Cambell and Bonnie Shepard (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983), 156.

⁴⁶⁶ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral men and immoral society* (NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), 57.

The grace of God, and human gratitude, as the passage in question points out, are catalytic to the efficacy of love. These are the spiritual elements that surround Christian actions. As Gutierrez rightly says “This alternative perspective does not represent an abandonment of efficacy but rather seeks to locate efficacy in a comprehensive and fully human context that is in accord with the gospel.”⁴⁶⁷ On the other hand, in the same context, the system failed the poor, and the poor have countered the failings of the system with love in solidarity with the other poor. For this reason, such love being beyond economic comprehension, we can call it the ‘paradoxical prerogative’ of the poor. In Colombia, as Camilo Torres pointed out, lack of food is not a symptom of laziness, or of shortage of land and natural resources, but of a chain of instances of unjust political negligence and corruption. In such a case, the need exists for just agrarian reform that will permit the poor to have land to grow their own food. L. Boff appropriately affirms that “the real cause [of oppression] lies in a system of power and ownership that prevents millions of people from gaining access to decent work and participating in the life of their society.”⁴⁶⁸ One important way of understanding belonging to a community of faith is by transforming the suffering in love in solidarity with the poor. This is a way in which the poor are doing theology. Therefore as Camilo Torres very well pointed out “there is no supernatural life in persons who have the faculty of reason if good works in helping our neighbour are lacking.”⁴⁶⁹ Thus, the way that the poor negate selfishness is by embracing a participatory connection with the reality of others: “... and their hope is nurtured on small achievements solidarity, and organization.”⁴⁷⁰ Their understanding of solidarity is expressed in two ways: love for the neighbour and helping others, as a way of resisting alienation by their own poor condition. But in all the paradoxical action and reality of the poor is their conviction “That context is the space of freely bestowed encounter with the

⁴⁶⁷ G. Gutierrez, *We drink from our own wells*, 109.

⁴⁶⁸ Leonardo Boff, in *Frontiers of Latin Theology*, 129.

⁴⁶⁹ Camilo Torres, *Revolutionary Priest*, 263.

⁴⁷⁰ J. Jimenez Limon, in *The Idols of Death and the God of Life*, 157.

Lord.”⁴⁷¹ When the poor help the poor it is a courageous affirmation that the economic system has failed. The radicalism of their paradoxical prerogative becomes their subversive voice of love against injustice. Going beyond their ‘abilities’ is also a denunciation, the major force that the poor have at their disposal, meaning that the poor construct justice through solidarity with other poor, and this is more subversive than violent riot. In the encounter with the Lord of history and our neighbour, such efficacious love “is not consoling love that brings only personalistic affection, but rather a creative love that brings justice and transformation.”⁴⁷² It is natural then for the poor to grasp and reflect that image of God in showing loving care for others, and in doing that they become protagonists of the construction of a more just society.

A Hermeneutical Dilemma Viewed from an Ethical Perspective of Liberation.

One reason for analysing Camilo Torres’ thoughts through the lenses of a Christian ethics of liberation is because he had witnessed a history of political corruption and social dislocation of fellow-neighbours in his country, Colombia. This comprised a past and a present that was framed in all kinds of inequalities and injustice, with a lack of hope for the future for the majority. But some social circumstances produce dilemmas that become resolved in history, hence “To think dialectically is to decree the obsolescence of cherished concepts which explain even one’s recent past.”⁴⁷³ In Camilo Torres’ dialectical thinking, one characteristic of the incumbencies of searching and struggling for justice and against hegemony⁴⁷⁴ is summed up thus: “One of the marks of a true dialectician however, is the ability to ‘move beyond’ the past without repudiating it in the name of new levels of critical

⁴⁷¹ G. Gutierrez, *We drink from our own wells*, 109.

⁴⁷² J. Jimenez Limon, *The Idols of Death and the God of Life*, 154.

⁴⁷³ Paulo Freire, *Education for critical consciousness*, vii.

⁴⁷⁴ “Hegemony refers to the ways in which: A certain way of life and thought is dominant, in which one concept of reality is diffused throughout society in all its institutional and private manifestations, informing with its spirit all taste, morality, customs, religious and political principles, and all social relations, particularly in their intellectual and moral connotation, in Martha Augoustinos et al., *Social Cognition: An Integrated Introduction*. 2nd edition (Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC: SAGE Reprinted 2012), 285.

consciousness presently enjoyed.”⁴⁷⁵ As a new prophet, Camilo Torres’ experiences led him to confront a crucial decision, which was of having to face and respond to a dilemma, which eventually shaped his Christian character and political option, as we have implied in the previous chapter. We agree in this regard with P. Lehmann when he suggests that “The interpretation of conscience in Christian ethics is involved in a dilemma occasioned by the ambiguity and diversity of ethical experience.”⁴⁷⁶ The experiencing of poverty and oppression transfigures the Christian consciousness in a commitment to an efficacious love which in turn determines the human solidarities and actions with and for the poor. In this case, Camilo Torres’ theological foundation and biblical reflection was the result of a fluent critical interaction with the Scriptures in the light of witnessing the condition of the poor and the injustice of the oligarchy. This gave him a solid ground upon which to build his liberative ethics. F. Herzog affirms that “Solidarity with the oppressed involves a different starting point for work with the Bible.”⁴⁷⁷ That experience in Latin American methodological thinking is fundamentally in the mediated reciprocity of Christian ethics and the Scriptures, and in that encounter the Christian believer and theological thinker confront acute questions that are impossible to ignore or to escape from unanswered. F. Herzog stresses that “either the theologian decides (1) to change the present socio-political order through the liberation of the oppressed or (2) to maintain the present order essentially as it is.”⁴⁷⁸ The core of the Christian ethics of liberation is to decide for the former as deciphering the hermeneutical dilemma and how to engage in a praxis informed by Christian faith. That is relevant especially in countries experiencing injustice. Hence, Camilo Torres rendered an account of

⁴⁷⁵ P. Freire, *Education for critical consciousness*, vii.

⁴⁷⁶ Paul Lehmann, *Ethics in a Christian context* (London,: SCM PRESS LTD, 1963), 15.

⁴⁷⁷ Frederick Herzog, *Justice Church: The New Function of the Church in North American Christianity* (NY: Orbis, 2nd printing, 1981), 89.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 89.

the hermeneutical dilemma, and in doing that he entered into the phase of an ethical option of the political.⁴⁷⁹

Rescuing the Non-Person from Alterity: The Other with a Face and a Name.

James explicates the solidarity of love “Supposing, however, you keep the royal law, as it is written, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself”; if you do this, you will do well.”⁴⁸⁰ Solidarity implies going and rescuing those people in need as we have learned in the parable of the Good Samaritan. We leave our comfortable paths and enter into the paths of the other, those who day in and day out transit the long trajectory of social anguish, experiencing and knowing that they are poor and excluded for most of, or their entire life.

Hopes have not only been frustrated, but in the situation of oppression, the poor have been deprived of the expectation of living a life with hope. It follows, then, that solidarity with the poor has to do with concrete steps of constructing and recovering their vanished hopes alongside them. Jesus created parables to infuse hope into his followers and to encourage them to go and do the same with the majority. Rescuing others means changing my ways to the path of the poor, not only turning but walking on another road, which leads us to social conversion. When Jesus used the term ‘follow me’ this was an invitation to be immersed in a long struggle, a path or journey of solidarity in rescuing the poor. In the difficult unpalatable dilemma we are confronted with in our Christian ethics, we elect to live our lives knowing that to fully grasp the implication of what the phrase ‘preferential option for the poor’ really means is to have a social conversion, which is: to give up our privileged

⁴⁷⁹ We agree with Karen Lubacz as she affirms that “...it helps to understand what the options are. All ethical decisions are made within the context of certain options. “Ought” implies “can” – there can be no obligation to do something that is not possible to do. Understanding the structural realities and limits helps to determine what the options are.” In *Professional Ethics: Power and paradox* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 148.

⁴⁸⁰ James 2:8 (The Kingdom New Testament); A clarification in light of the doctrine of justification, which will help us to broaden the socio-theological conception of conversion, Elsa Tamez rightly affirms “For some, justification by faith meant having faith without a commitment to others, without works. James, then, is trying to correct this idea by introducing works as an important element in justification... Throughout his letter he refers to the good works continually spoken of in the Gospels as the liberating deeds of Jesus; they are deeds that effect justice.” *The Scandalous Message of James: Faith without Works is Dead* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2002), 53.

class status (my own path) for the class (condition) of the poor as an act of solidarity. This was well manifested by Jesus' encounter with the rich young man, in the context of observing the commandments: "There's just one thing you're short of. Sell everything you own, and distribute it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me"⁴⁸¹. To follow Jesus means walking away from the old path of selfishness to create a new path that will rescue our neighbour.

Camilo Torres' entire life was devoted to thinking of God in a way such that not walking alongside the poor in solidarity with their suffering, as an obedient response to Jesus' call: 'follow me', was to miss the core value of the gospel, and would have a determining and negative impact on loving with efficacy. The courage to rescue others begins with the decision to leave things behind in obedience to following Jesus. Thus, an important concept of Camilo Torres's socio-theological concern was to be in solidarity with 'the majority' our own poor people, in the place and land where God has situated us. To rescue others is to question and to obtain concrete answers that will bring concrete changes to transform the adverse reality of oppression. Camilo Torres' proposal dreamt about a society without economic disparities, the same (equal) Colombia for all and not for the minority only. Camilo Torres' courage did not count risks to his own life, because love for him contained, as stressed by Leonardo Boff, "its own peculiar efficacy, which is not readily noticeable or discernible. It is the courage which prompts one to lay down one's life out of love."⁴⁸² At the same time we should be aware that rescuing love as solidarity is not a paternalistic top-down attitude, as J.L. Segundo warned: "it would be unrealistic and certainly un-Christian to invoke gratuitous love when only a certain 'class egotism' or 'race egotism' can serve as the springboard toward new and greater solidarity."⁴⁸³

⁴⁸¹ Luke 18:22 (The Kingdom New Testament)

⁴⁸² L. Boff, *Frontiers of Theology in Latin America*, 120.

⁴⁸³ Juan Luis Segundo, *Evolution and guilt*, 112.

Real efficacious love has as its scope and objective the construction of attitudes that will lead to public involvement and advocacy as concrete steps to go to the rescue of the poor, excluded and oppressed. Justice attacks the root and causes of oppression and poverty. Solidarity and justice are intrinsically inseparable. Nevertheless, in conditions of extreme poverty, solidarity also plays the role of ‘problem solving,’ to attend to the immediate and urgent needs that the poor face in everyday life, which in many cases will make the difference between life and death. Solidarity is not to be an excuse to work for justice; neither can it be seen as a palliative paternalistic distraction that will derail us from working for the transformation of structures that have produced oppression. Solidarity is not to be confused with philanthropy, nor do donations detract from walking alongside with poor. Solidarity with the poor is not philanthropic but liberating. The best way to advocate for others is to rescue them from the hands of misery and exclusion.

The Christian Option of Rescuing the Oppressed: An Ethical Imperative

We propose that adopting *the face-to-face* option takes us to two communal focused activities: resistance against the system and solidarity with the poor and marginalized. Colombian society where few are rich, more than half of the population lives in extreme poverty, another part of the population is in total misery, and a long-lasting violent conflict has displaced around 3.5 million people, has caused pain and many deaths which resulted from impunity. This pain is experienced in a superlative way; it is not a common pain, due to natural causes, but a planned, systematized and institutionalized suffering inflicted by those who have control of wealth and power. The quantitative mismanagement and abuse of power of the Colombian oligarchy that have produced decay and death for many have socially enhanced the benefits for the minority, disregarding the quality of a dignified life for the majority of the Colombian people. Resistance against this unethical conduct that causes submission and fear will connect people, civil organizations, Christian groups, and other faith

organizations to bind together to help them resist the trampling and abuse of the socially dominant class. Resistance finds echoes in the Old Testament prophets and in Jesus, who throughout their proclamations resisted the acceptance of injustices and violence⁴⁸⁴ in society. Resistance avoids violent methods and stands firm in a proactive way to denounce social eruptions that dislocate the very fabric of life in community. The Argentinian theologian Míguez-Bonino states: “In the effort to bring about such a society Jesus rejects the use of violence or political wisdom and chooses instead the way of ‘defenceless resistance.’”⁴⁸⁵ This defenceless resistance is based on Christian love that rules out the temptation to face oppression by resisting such oppression with violent methods. On the other hand, the Brazilian theologian Hugo Assmann affirms: “The fundamental option of a Christian does not consist in renouncing violence, rather in comprehending with historical realism the fundamental intention of love as to overcome violence”.⁴⁸⁶ Hugo Assmann implies a rhetorical affirmation of peace as the result of love operating in the field of violence, though he understands that resistance in the context of social struggles may inevitably lead to a violent revolution, not as an end, but as the uncontrollable effect of historical forces for change, not as the ultimate option but a transitory phase. Then, describing in the best way the

⁴⁸⁴ An informative historical account pertaining to institutionalised violence is found in Alfred T. Hennelly, *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History*, “No one should be surprised if we forcefully reaffirm our faith in the productiveness of peace. This is our Christian ideal” and highlighting Pope Paul VI’s statement: “Violence is neither Christian nor evangelical. Christians are peaceful and not ashamed of it. They are not simply pacifists, for they can fight, but they prefer peace to war. They know that ‘violent changes in structures would be fallacious, ineffectual in themselves, and not conforming to human dignity, which demands that the necessary changes take place from within – that is to say, through a fitting awakening of conscience, adequate preparation and effective participation of all, which the ignorance and often inhuman conditions of life make it impossible to assure at this time.” 110. A firm articulation of such violence stresses that “This structural injustice is in fact violence, whether it be open or disguised” ... “Those who have exploited the weak for centuries, and who wish to keep doing this, use de facto violence against them. This violence is often veiled under the guise of a fallacious order and fallacious legality, but it is violence and injustice nonetheless. It is not human, and hence, it is not Christian” Ibid, 148. Another pronouncement in the Puebla Final Document, ‘Evangelization, Liberation, and Human Promotion’ affirms that “Recent years have seen a growing deterioration in the socio-political life of our countries. They are experiencing the heavy burden of economic and institutional crises, and clear symptoms of corruption and violence. The violence is generated by two factors: (1) what can be called institutionalized injustice in various social, political, and economic systems; and (2) ideologies that use violence as a means to win power.” Ibid. 239.

⁴⁸⁵ Jose Miguez Bonino *Toward a Christian Political Ethics* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2nd printing, 1988), 34.

⁴⁸⁶ Hugo Assman *Teología desde la praxis de la liberación*, 204.

revolutionary commitment of people like Camilo Torres and Ché Guevara, Assmann suggests “in this respect, the revolutionaries that do not exclude a priori the use of violence, are many times more committed to overcome violence in a very concrete and serious way than those who pretend not to be violent and remain passive before this drama.”⁴⁸⁷

Both ideas of Miguez-Bonino and Assmann are about keeping the balance of thinking peace in a real drama of oppression. The internal drama of oppression sustained by an oppressive system imposes upon the oppressed population hard and unjust social and economic situations and political mechanisms that keep them subjugated. In Colombia, any attempt to resist peacefully may be considered an act of insubordination against the ruling system, and is therefore an illegal act. The repression imposed by the government is so hard that in many cases it becomes a violation of human rights. Under this kind of repeated and systematised forms of repression, people that have developed a social consciousness regarding injustice find it hard not to organize and protest with energetic indignation. We see the dialectical tension between resistance and violence, and to resist in the Colombian context implies self defence against the institutionalized violence of the establishment. The *face-to-face* becomes a Christian progressive alternative manifestation of love in favour of those who are excluded and marginalized; they are, then, our sisters and our brothers.

Juan Luis Segundo explores another view of resistance as it may be understood in a context where revolution is an option to overthrow the oppressive establishment. He argues that “the dynamic of love, however, tends in the direction of reducing the quantum of violence required for efficacy to lowest possible level.”⁴⁸⁸ The inclusion of love is more associated with resistance than with violence; Juan Luis Segundo presents an affirmation based on an ethics of character: “only idealistic oversimplification of Jesus’s real attitudes can paint a picture of him as a human being dedicated to limitless love without a trace of

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid. 206.

⁴⁸⁸ Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology*, 162.

resistance or violence.”⁴⁸⁹ Then Segundo clarifies the ethics of resistance by saying: “That he came to point of taking a whip in hand to drive the merchants from the temple is of minor importance (Mark 11:15 ff; John 2: 13 ff).”⁴⁹⁰ Thus, we must be aware that conflicts in history emerge spontaneously to correct oppression and to interrupt the apparently peaceful situation of the absence of physical violence. Nevertheless any insurrection when facing subtle institutionalized violence of the establishment, will respond with an uncontrollable collective violent force that yearns for justice. Thus, Segundo continues, suggesting: “To put it another way, all the remarks we find in the Bible about violence and nonviolence are ideologies – necessary, of course, since we will always be confronted with the task of filling the void between faith and concrete historical realities.”⁴⁹¹ If the tacit use of institutionalized violence in Colombia and Latin America has been a systemic political method of the repressive establishments, like the Pinochet regime in Chile, such systems operate with an *a priori* intention to repress true liberation. From that perspective it becomes unethical, because it represses the right of the majority to sustain a popularly elected government, and in other contexts, the right of people to dissent from the governmental socio-political affairs. In this way, Torres explains the connotation of violence⁴⁹² in a system that resists giving up power that oppresses people, or that resists changing the structures in order to bring liberation via a just democratic process.

Love in the Juncture of Faith and Ideology, to Balance the Efficacy of Love

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid. 165.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid. 165.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid. 166.

⁴⁹² “The economic, military, ecclesiastical, and political powers will wage war with the people in the face of revolution which is approaching, a revolution which consists of a change of structures. This change implies violence for those who retain power. But violence is not excluded from the Christian ethic, because if Christianity is concerned with eliminating the serious evils which we suffer and with saving us from the continuous violence in which we live without possible solution, the ethic is to be violent once and for all in order to destroy the violence which the economic minorities exercise against the people” in Camilo Torres, *Revolutionary Priest* 27.

To better understand the theological and political ideas of Camilo Torres we have to briefly reconsider the term ‘ideological⁴⁹³ suspicion’ but seen from a Latin American hermeneutics perspective, as is well elaborated by J.L. Segundo. We are re-taking the concept ‘ideological suspicion’ from our second chapter. Camilo Torres’ methodological approach to the Scriptures is based on his critical sociological reflection on reality. We suggest candidly that his idea of ‘efficacious love’ is the direct result of a solid sociological and hermeneutical method of reconciling faith and political action. That has been a definitive reason in this thesis for analysing the hermeneutics of liberation.

At least in a context of oppression, in order for love to be efficacious it needs to be accompanied by ‘ideological suspicion,’ which is obtained after having the experience of living in such a context and by applying sociological analysis to the situation. After such analysis, abnormal things are seen to flourish, and especially causes that are the reason for poverty and oppression become evident. Here the ‘questioning’ begins, the ‘why’ are things causing and producing poverty. That questioning reflects the ‘suspicion,’ and results in the red flag that indicates that the majority of the population is in real danger. This sociological process in turn challenges the faith of the believer by indicating that love must acquire a character of compassionate awareness of the condition of the others - our neighbours. In this awareness love begins to emerge as a genuine Christian response as it faces the disturbing reality. This is the result of any social analysis, of critical theological and political reflection on oppression. Thus, properly put in that perspective in the logical sequence of events, the imperative of loving the neighbour becomes ideological. For this reason Segundo affirms

⁴⁹³ An interesting remark about ideology affirms that “Marx viewed ideology as concealing the ‘real relations’ of dominance and inequalities that exist in capitalist societies.” “Central to an analysis of the ways in which ideologies produce system-justifying effects is the Marxist notion of ‘false consciousness.’ When people in general come to view the existing social and power relations as natural and inevitable, when stereotypes mystify and obfuscate the ‘real’ relations of dominance and exploitation within a society, then we have what Marx referred to as false consciousness. False consciousness is often represented as a cognitive or psychological state of mind. Such psychological accounts of false consciousness locate distortions, false beliefs, biases, etc. within the perceptual and cognitive domain of the individual subject. The individual is seen as failing to perceive reality accurately and thus to recognize his or her true self and group-based interest.” in *Social Cognition: An Integrated Introduction*. 277.

“First of all, [liberation theology] it incorporates into its own methodology the task of ideological analysis that is situated on the boundary line between sociology and politics”⁴⁹⁴ It is in this intersection that efficacious love acquires its political thrust to balance all possibilities of the merging of theological reflection and political action, something that Camilo Torres knew how to do well, due to his theological education and his background in sociology. Thus, it is appropriate to agree that “*faith and ideology* are inextricably intermingled.”⁴⁹⁵

Looking at the broad picture, we should keep in mind that the term ideology had acquired an ambiguous connotation, hence it is important to realize the slant taken by Marx, which added a dialectical component to it: “According to Marx, ideology functions to conceal social conflicts by embodying ideas, values and language which justify existing social and economic inequalities.”⁴⁹⁶ Another viewpoint intended to correct Marx is this: “Rather, ideology refers to any beliefs representations, discourses and practices which serve to legitimate and sustain existing social and power relations, irrespective of their truth status.”⁴⁹⁷ The different slant is stresses the ‘irrespective truth status’ which will be applied to any socio-economic structure regardless of the distortion of reality that will create a false consciousness in interpreting any given reality. From another angle we encounter the term ‘ideology’⁴⁹⁸ as it was defined classically by Mannheim, with some similarities to that of Marx, which in our view resembles implicitly the idea of efficacious love which is reflected clearly in the theological thought and the political platform built by Camilo Torres. In Chapter Four we will disclose Camilo Torres’s political platform.

⁴⁹⁴ J.L. Segundo, *The liberation of theology*, 75.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid. 105.

⁴⁹⁶ Martha Augoustinos, *Social Cognition*, 277.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid. 277.

⁴⁹⁸ The term is viewed by Karl Mannheim thus: “The concept ‘ideology’ reflects the one discovery which emerged from political conflict, namely, that ruling groups can in their thinking become so intensively interest-bound to a situation that they are simply no longer able to see certain facts which would undermine their sense of domination.” Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, trans. Louis Wirth and Edward Shils (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1936), 40.

Thus, love in the juncture of faith and ideology will have the complex task of unmasking and laying wide open and crystal clear the structural domination that blinds the oppressor to seeing and to recognizing his responsibility for the condition of the poor. Also, on the other hand, it has the task of setting the foundation for raising the consciousness of the majority to seek and work for socio-economic structural changes. In that juncture love can achieve a balanced efficacy. The ideological state of mind of the oppressor, we argue, resembles what Gadamer calls 'prejudgment' (see Chapter Three) but as an upside-down socio-negation or denial of reality. Ideology, from the perspective of the oppressor, will see and understand the term 'efficacious' empty of its historical value, specifically because such distorted ideology, does not permits to reach the socio-ethical aspiration of a love that seeks to transform adverse realities, and a love that will oppose historical processes of liberation.

Camilo Torres, clearly as was his aim, embarked on the task of opposing the governmental project that was impeding the realization of a new just reality for the Colombian people. Hence, Camilo Torres proposed that the poor were in need of creating a different ideology, their own ideology. The task of the liberating process goes in three directions ideologically speaking: first is that efficacious love operates as a form of resistance in confronting face-to-face an oppressive ideology, with the objective that the oppressors finally will open their eyes. This is to say that the poor and victimised help the oppressors to become aware of their evil acts, or de-ideologize their oppressive consciousness. Secondly, efficacious love needs to build solidarity with the poor. Thirdly, in a liberative process, efficacious love gives a different significance to the term 'ideology.' This ideology involves a connotation of the suspicion that awakes consciousness, to see reality as it really is: with all kinds of instruments of domination by the superstructure of the status quo, and the condition of hardship of the oppressed people. This perspective of ideology and faith defines a more liberative perspective in accordance with the Latin American context. In this regard, J.L.

Segundo, adds the pre-condition of such a process, affirming “By ‘ideology’ here I am simply referring to the system of goals and means that serves as the necessary backdrop for any human option or line of action.”⁴⁹⁹ The term ideology, viewed by Camilo Torres, acquired a hermeneutical dimension as we observed in Chapter Three. It is from that ideological framework, as Segundo has suggested, that we can understand why in Camilo Torres’ faith ‘efficacious love’ acquires a socio-political dimension for the transformation of reality. That efficacious love from a theological background becomes a socio-political ‘option’ in favour of the oppressed majority, which generates a line of action that will contribute in developing the process of emancipation.

Solidarity and its Implication to Love Efficaciously toward Peace with Justice

We are proposing that love, according to what we have studied previously, is determined by an attitude that has reached a social conscience sensitive to the poor. Without such sensibility, the human heart will never even consider having a “preferential option for the poor”,⁵⁰⁰ because it is that sensibility which enables Christian love to be efficacious in destroying any kind of hate. Only efficacious love has the power to construct a “worldwide

⁴⁹⁹ J.L. Segundo, *The liberation of theology*, 102.

⁵⁰⁰ A complete theological explanation of the “option for the poor” is given by Gustavo Gutierrez. He clarifies that “our days bear the mark of a vast historical event: the *irruption of the poor*. We refer to the new presence of those who had actually been absent in our society and in the church. By *absent* we mean of little or no significance, as well as being without the opportunity to manifest their sufferings, solidarities, projects, and hopes... When all is said and done, the option for the poor means an option for the God of the Reign as proclaimed to us by Jesus. The whole Bible, from the story of Cain and Abel onward, is marked by God’s love and predilection for the weak and abused of human history... The option for the poor, with all of the pastoral and theological consequences of that option, is one of the most important contributions to the life of the church universal to have emerged from the theology of liberation and the church on our continent.” “Transcendence and Historical Liberation” in *Mysterium Liberationis*, 235-240. In the words of Enrique Dussel, concerning the church making a significant impact upon a world that has not eradicated poverty, he says “The dialectical relationship between the Kingdom of God and the poor is one of the central themes of Christian faith and praxis today, and therefore of theological thinking and of church policy decisions... The Church, God’s remnant among the peoples of earth, has evangelism for its calling. To evangelize is to bring good news to the poor, to turn the many into a people and to make that people aware of the destiny that God has prepared for them: the Kingdom. Not just aware, but active, now that there is a real possibility of conquering sin, of restoring their wealth to the poor and building a new order in which there will be neither rich nor poor, neither oppressors nor oppressed, neither nations of the centre nor nations of the periphery, neither ruling classes nor those that suffer the rule of others.” Enrique Dussel, *Beyond Philosophy: Ethics, History, Marxism, and Liberation Theology*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 85, 101.

vision” for a state or condition of peace with justice, which can be in favour of the majority. If such love does not seek to transform structures and attitudes which are producing and sustaining injustice, economic inequality, gender oppression, exclusion, homophobia, racism, xenophobic behaviour, and ecological insensibility, then such love is not efficacious for building a society that will sustain a stable peace with justice. The Christian characteristic of loving the *other*, our neighbour, is not given in a vacuum, isolated from mutual reciprocity with them, rather it emerges and solidifies in our daily encounter with the *other* and in our walking alongside them in their struggles. Thus, in such a situation, love has priority, because another option to become efficacious does not exist in a context of oppression. Another kind of love without the adjective “efficacious,” is an irrelevant love, does not harm anybody, but neither constructs real peace for all. Such love for the *other*, oppressed and excluded, then, emerges from a conscience with the intrinsic desire to carry out a radical purpose of seeking transformation and sustainable changes for life in community: the “worldwide vision” which is radically open to include and live tolerantly with all. Such an inclusive spirit, will not merely construct a community, but it will construct a communitarian society of equality and mutual respect.

As we learn that the unselfish way Camilo Torres’ understood solidarity was a direct result of his conviction that the neighbour ought to be loved efficaciously, and that love must inform the political actions needed to change the structure of injustice in Colombia, we move to ask ourselves “from what perspective can solidarity be defined and what scope does it aim to attain?” One definition of solidarity we think is in order here is that given by T.L. Schubeck: “we might think of it as cohesiveness among persons and within a group, a social glue that helps people stick together and work together for the good of the community.”⁵⁰¹ That is precisely what solidarity meant to Camilo Torres, which indicates that he thought of

⁵⁰¹ Thomas L. Schubeck, *Love That Does Justice* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2007), 180.

God in the context of oppression and poverty in solidarity with his compatriots. The idea of solidarity was expressed by Camilo Torres as follows: “for our part, nothing will stop us from our struggle to organize the people and join them in seizing power, no matter what the cost”⁵⁰²

As we consider the efficacy of love in concrete ways exemplified in Camilo Torres’ life, it is important to highlight the impact on his thought of his knowledge of God; that for him, God was known in solidarity with the poor. Subsequently, Schubeck has argued more specifically about the nature of liberative Christian solidarity as this:

One of the attributes of solidarity is love expressed by genuine affection and caring for one another. A second attribute is social justice, which works for the good of the whole and for the active participation of its members. A third attribute is its cognitive or intellectual dimension, which means that members reach a shared understanding of their goal and the means to work together to attain the goal.⁵⁰³

Thinking of God from that perspective is actually seeing suffering and not remaining passive but being involved and committed to change the causes that produce such reality. That loving action we could summarize by the term solidarity. Camilo Torres thought and dreamed of a different Colombia, where the majority one day would enjoy complete liberation from oppression. Such solidarity is the result of an efficacious love as expressed by Boff, “it is love that liberates human beings, establishes fellowship between them, and opens them up to the authentic process of liberation.”⁵⁰⁴ Christian efficacious love demands that we have new eyes to see the hidden factors of injustice, and a reality and history being distorted by human egotism. Solidarity in the *face-to-face with our neighbour* brings us near others, those who are far from us because of the division of classes and all kind of exclusions. Solidarity is to be there with them, to walk together in dreaming of a destruction of the walls of separation. Solidarity becomes then a utopia, which encourages us to challenge any and all kinds of exclusions that hinder people from enjoying life fully in freedom. Solidarity is a

⁵⁰² Camilo Torres, *Revolutionary Priest*, 420.

⁵⁰³ T. Schubeck, *Love That Does Justice*, 181.

⁵⁰⁴ Leonardo Boff, in *Frontiers of Theology in Latin America*, 120.

permanent call to be human alongside others from the standpoint that we are equals. But at the same time such solidarity demands that we live and work among the poor so that solidarity can be authenticated as true and real and so that liberation can begin to appear on the horizon. The solidarity of liberation implies that it is not possible to show solidarity at a distance. In some instances it is possible only temporarily, but the culmination of solidarity is to go and reach those who are distanced and marginalised, acknowledging in love their humanity, with true acceptance.

Solidarity not only has an affective dimension, but also a political one. Solidarity does not correct, invites others to walk on the road towards adopting the proper strategies for concrete action. Thus, we put ourselves in the ‘condition’ of the *other* as if that condition is ours, belonging and pertaining to us. Solidarity claims to see oppression as each of us having responsibility for it, either as an oppressor or as one that is called to denounce it. The ethics of solidarity is also moral; not approaching others, those who are at a distance because of all kind of barriers, is immoral. In this way all laws in society must be not only just, but also moral, though there will always be the necessity for ethics to determine what is moral. Ethics with a component of solidarity will give primacy to human concerns before any law. The judicial and moral laws that are constructed bearing in mind the poor and excluded of society, because of their emancipatory character, can become ethical. If we do not construct laws of solidarity, we are living complacently with immorality. Thus, we exercise liberating faith in God, who sustains our hope and utopias: a world without oppression and exclusions. Such faith in principle “calls into existence what does not yet exist.”⁵⁰⁵ Hence if state does not legislate to remove all division, then we have stripped solidarity of its meaning. The indifference to social class division is one of the perverse sins of any state in the post-modern age. To transform society we have to begin moralizing the legislative structure, based on an

⁵⁰⁵ Romans 4:17 (The New Jerusalem Bible)

appropriate understanding of solidarity. The spirit of the law has to be ground first in the mill of efficacious love, so that these laws are not only vague inscriptions which ignore the plight of the oppressed.⁵⁰⁶

The Vision of and Mission for Integrating Peace for the Church in Colombia

What this programmatic endeavour seeks for the church in Colombia is to become an integrative theological option based on the three main ideas explained above: efficacious love, critical hermeneutics, and an ethics of liberation, as have been proposed in this thesis. These three ideas are carried out having in mind the biblical and theological imperative to proclaim the kingdom of God in which the fundamental character of the gospel teaching becomes the mission of the church in the world. The mission of the church is the work of women and men who commit to becoming true disciples of Christ.⁵⁰⁷ The result of our construct will be a suggestive example and renovated vision for the mission of the church as it confronts new and old challenges. The members of the communities of faith must engage in living and practicing the historical option for the poor and excluded.⁵⁰⁸ In the present condition of violent conflicts and oppression that have caused all kinds of socially and individual long-lasting, and in some cases, irreversible damage to Colombian society, we are to consider the theme of peace an essential axis of the mission which any community of faith

⁵⁰⁶ Romans 13: 8,10: “The only thing you should owe to anyone is love for one another, for to love the other person is to fulfil the law... Love can cause no harm to your neighbour, and so love is the fulfilment of the law.” (The New Jerusalem Bible)

⁵⁰⁷ The point of departure for a historical mission that will make a significant impact in society is rooted in “a theology that begins with historical acts and seeks to lead to historical acts, and therefore it is not satisfied with being a purely interpretative reflection; it is nourished by faithful belief in the presence of God within history, an operative presence that, although it must be grasped in grateful faith, remains an historical action. There is no room here for faith without works; rather, that faith draws the believers into the very force of God that operates in history, so that we are converted into new historical forms of that operative and salvific presence of God in humanity” Ignacio Ellacuría, “Church of the Poor, Sacrament of Liberation” in *Mysterium Liberationis*, 543.

⁵⁰⁸ The characteristic of a church that is involved with all sectors of society and especially with the marginalized is well summarized by I. Ellacuría when he mentions some fundamental aspects such as this “1. *The Christian faith must mean something real and palpable in the life of the poor.* 2. *For that reason the Christian faith, far from becoming an opiate – and not only a social opiate – should establish itself as what it is: a principle of liberation.* 3. *Thus the church of the poor does not permit us to make a sharp separation between faith and religion, at least in specific social contexts and in the early stages of a conscientizing process.* 4. *Therefore, this church of the poor must not become another form of elitism.*” in *Mysterium Liberationis*, 559-561.

ought to accept in radical obedience to the God of life. In this never-to-be postponed task, we propose that the following four points should be taught, proclaimed and put to practice by the church, if it is to be obedient to the call of the God of peace and justice, in order to transform society for a better world.

1. Peace with Justice: The Need to Re-evaluate the Socio-ecclesiological Understanding of the Knowledge of God

Without doubt, the mission of the church today is in urgent need of realizing that “to know God is to do justice.”⁵⁰⁹ If the church is to be a relevant social entity that contributes to the transformation of a better and more inclusive society, it must seek and keep “emphasizing the bond between the knowledge of God and interhuman justice”.⁵¹⁰ To know God also implies learning how to interrogate the revelation of God in direct relation to our present reality in order to identify what social patterns are to be strengthened and to discern how to create new ones that will facilitate human relationships and better understanding of how to live together in peace.

The church (Catholic and Protestant) throughout different Councils in the Christian tradition, has had the dexterity to elaborate doctrines, but most of the time has neglected to seek wisdom in how to construct epistemological patterns for the present and future, especially socio-political ones, with the utopian idea of eradicating oppression and violence. In that perspective we agree with the affirmation that: “Calvin always held that knowledge of God can, in principle, be achieved by nourishing one’s subjective awareness of deity and its will, with reflection of the structure of the objective world.”⁵¹¹ Thus following that line of thought, in building liberating patterns from our point of view, drastic historical irruptions that had sought the path of truth in the Christian tradition emerge and are forged as a result of

⁵⁰⁹ G. Gutierrez *A Theology of Liberation*, 194.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.* 196.

⁵¹¹ Donald M. Borchert, ed., *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2nd edition, Vol. 2 (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale/Macmillan, 2006), 9. “Calvin, John: Knowledge of God and self,” by Nicholas Wolterstorff.

the interpretation and understanding of the Scriptural concept of the knowledge of God. We suggest that this theological affirmation, viewed from the perspective of having the challenge and task of facing situations that are perceived as irredeemable, but viewing them instead as those which can be transformed and changed, could be of interest to the church in Colombia and Latin America. Furthermore, “the subjective awareness of divinity and of its will can be supplemented, Calvin taught, by reflecting on the structure of the external world and the pattern of history.”⁵¹²

Is the creation or elaboration of historical patterns based on the knowledge of God, a fundamental task of the mission of the church? Yes! Because as long as the church wants to maintain a pertinent voice and relevant proclamation against false and oppressive ideologies, as a social entity immersed in history, it has the imperative to carry out such tasks, and to expose itself to thinking of God from a critical stance.⁵¹³ Thus, at the historical juncture, the intervention of God in Christ in human affairs as the paradigmatic irruption *par excellence* was a radical episode that challenged the socio-political and economic episteme of the

⁵¹² Ibid. 9.

⁵¹³ The knowledge of God leads us to think critically in order to interpret reality in the light of the Scriptures, and to enhance our human knowledge and mental patterns in order to be inclusive. Such inclusivity is the means by which love is expanded in our actions, so that those actions can become efficaciously embracive and tolerant. Such examination of God as *The Other*, who seeks good for all, is a determinative factor in any attempt to build a sustainable peace. In order to avoid prejudices, our knowledge of God has to lead us to an introspection of how we think and how we apply our knowledge in a context of injustice. In this regard, Otto A. Maduro gives a sociological exhortation as to how we should expand our thinking in front of a given reality. He said: “And what I have tried to suggest is that there can be occasions in which *critical reflexion* helps us to exit deep miry places, both individual and communal. And here, in this part of the book, I propose just a few modes of exercising and developing our capacity to know *critically*: to interrogate ourselves regarding the way in which we have been relating to realities that we want to know; to explore the histories of such realities and the different ways in which they were seen formerly; to explore in the past, or in different societies, other possible ways in which to conceive of and relate to similar realities; to examine deeply different perspectives and controversies that are present today in such realities; and to reflect self-critically on how our own interests and values can obfuscate our aptitude to grasp that which we want to know.” “Y lo que he querido sugerir es que puede haber ocasiones en que la *reflexión crítica* nos ayude a salir de muchos atolladeros, tanto individuales como comunitarios. Y aquí, en esta parte del libro, propuse apenas unos pocos modos de ejercitar y desarrollar nuestra capacidad de conocer *críticamente*: interrogarnos acerca de la manera como nos hemos venido relacionando con las realidades que queremos conocer; sondear la historia de esas mismas realidades y las diferentes maneras como han sido vistas a través de su historia; explorar en el pasado o en sociedades diferentes otras maneras posibles de concebir y relacionarse con realidades semejantes; examinar a fondo diferentes perspectivas y controversias que se dan hoy sobre tales realidades; y reflexionar autocríticamente en torno a cómo nuestros propios intereses y valoraciones pueden ofuscar nuestra aptitud de captar lo que realmente nos interesa conocer.” In *Mapas para la Fiesta: Reflexiones latinoamericanas sobre la crisis y el conocimiento* (Rio de Janeiro-Nueva York: Centro Nueva Tierra, 1992), 66.

Roman Empire in the first century. Also, the knowledge that is explicit in God's revelation has inspired thinkers (the Reformers), ecclesial councils (Vatican II), Latin American theologians (beginning with Medellin, 1968), relevant movements seeking vindication (feminist, homosexual, Afro-descent, Indian, ecologist and others), and communities of faith (Christian-based communities) to engage in a profound commitment to seek different and significant historical patterns for freedom and dignity.

In Latin America, in order to construct peace with justice, the church ought to reconsider such a concept, and undergo a process of reinterpreting the knowledge of God; that process could shed light in thinking about new methods and operations that would foster the welcoming of the poor and those with different life-styles. From this perspective, a refreshing understanding of the knowledge of God becomes a powerful missiological matrix, encouraging our society towards an involvement in the promotion of peace with justice for all. Therefore, this understanding becomes not obligatory in nature, but normative in its applicability and operation. Those radical episodes inform the church that mission must be carried out with boldness, but also with flexibility and tolerance.

2. Constructing a New Person: An Anthropological View

We must ask: what kind of person does Colombia need to end the internal conflict of violence and oppression? And reciprocally, viewed from the perspective of new challenges that have arisen as a result of globalization, an extension of the first query would be another question that continues to emerge, though the world has changed since R. Heilbroner asked it about 40 years ago, when he affirmed: "there is a question in the air, more sensed than seen, like the invisible approach of a distant storm, a question that I would hesitate to ask aloud did I not believe it existed unvoiced in the minds of many: 'Is there hope for man?'"⁵¹⁴ Hence, the mission of the church in Colombia, from a Christian perspective, is a call to respond to

⁵¹⁴ Robert L. Heilbroner, *An Inquiry into the Human Prospect: Updated and Reconsidered for the 1980s* (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1980), 11.

God's invitation and challenge, to old and new questions, to participate actively in the present for a new, just and peaceful future for Colombia.

Subsequently, we suggest the answer to those questions can be found in the Christian Scriptures. The Old Testament talks about repenting and turning from wrong ways (2 Chronicles 7:14, Isaiah 55:7). Also in the New Testament the great example in the person of Jesus Christ, his teaching, and also important precepts of the apostle Paul, call upon humanity to change attitudes that are detrimental to human dignity. We must be confident that our labour is not in vain, and that "God reigns to the extent that justice and true peace are restored."⁵¹⁵

The Christian message explicitly talks of a 'new person,' woman and man, based on the person of Christ. Christ made human being the prototype of a new person. Gutierrez rightly recommends that "It is important to keep in mind that beyond – or rather, through – the struggle against misery, injustice, and exploitation the goal is the *creation of a new man*."⁵¹⁶ The new person, according to the Scriptures, is a person that has been justified by the risen Christ, and as a result of such justification, experiences a process of conversion and salvation, with the purpose of living in harmony with fellow humans and nature, in community. In this way we are in need of renewal, keeping in mind the "*anthropocentric turn*,"⁵¹⁷ which entails the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus. Hence, expanding the concept of *kenosis* as explained above (Chapter Two) means the *kenosis* of Jesus is God

⁵¹⁵ José Comblin, "Grace" *Mysterium Liberationis*, 524.

⁵¹⁶ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 146.

⁵¹⁷ Gabriel A. Suarez Medina sharply explains that "In theology it fulfils the so called anthropocentric turn. It is understood that, without ceasing being a theology, to talk about God the starting point ought to be the humanity of Jesus, which necessarily relates to human reality and experience." "El método de la teología de la liberación" in *Los métodos en Teología*, ed. Gustavo Baena Bustamante, 157-185 (Bogotá: Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Reimpresión 2009), 166. "En la teología se realiza el llamado giro antropocéntrico. Se comprende que, sin dejar de ser teología, para hablar de Dios debe partir de la humanidad de Jesús, que necesariamente remite a la realidad y a la experiencia humana." Also Miguez-Bonino clarifies how Christians ought to reflect on the decision-making process that has the goal of transforming a given reality, suggesting that "human participation in the dynamics of the theological enterprise is not the product of some intellectual operation or equation. It is a risk undertaken in the encounter of love, sensitivity, and knowledge, and – in the case of our Christian faith – is finally vindicated only on "that day." in *Toward a Christian Political Ethics*, 109-110.

changing the divine paradigm as God's own conversion: God changes from having a transcendent nature (the divine nature) not to substitute it, but to include another immanent aspect, human nature. Because God has experienced such conversion, God is endowed with the authority to confer the support that a person needs to live peacefully in community as a participant of God's grace.

God's grace takes shape in community, because it is in community where we learn to be a person. J. Comblin rightly affirms that "God's grace is directed toward every person within his or her community, which is precisely what enables a person to become a person."⁵¹⁸ Adding on the social dynamics of life in community will foster the right building together of community through participation, thus "power is not a fixed quantum that is distributed unevenly among human individuals. Power is created through participation."⁵¹⁹ Thus, the new person that has to be constructed in Colombia has to experience a historic-social conversion within community through participation, taking as the exemplary methodological paradigm the New Testament concept of *metanoia*. "This aspiration to create a new man is the deepest motivation in the struggle which many have undertaken in Latin America."⁵²⁰ The radical involvement, in opting to struggle for peace with justice, of the prophets and of Jesus in history has demonstrated that such conversion process is possible and attainable. Those truly converted persons have participated in and contributed to building life in community. Thus, the new person (man and woman) needs to be-recreated by peace with justice in order to live out the praxis of liberation.

3. Social Conversion as the Logic for Peace

The biblical concept of mercy helps us make a transition from hermeneutics to ethics in order to understand how love can be applied or appropriated to generate the infrastructure

⁵¹⁸ José Comblin, "Grace" *Mysterium Liberationis*, 525.

⁵¹⁹ Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 210.

⁵²⁰ G. Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 146.

for socio-political *conversion*, as we will explain below. Social conversion is the ethical prerequisite for inheriting an abundant and meaningful life on earth within a community. That prerequisite is the exigency of the grace of God, viewed as an irresistible opportunity that God confers upon Christians. Each religion proposes a kind of conversion, and even secular and atheist societies make an attempt to induce in people the normative lawful parameters needed to ensure that people live together in harmony and respect, which has an implication in the end to direct all thinking and behaviour to that covenantal collective agreement. Thus, in a homogeneous or heterogeneous culture with pluralistic human aspirations, this type of conversion is necessary precisely because the compromise of living together necessarily requires a cultural and socio-political and economic conversion.

The socio-economic situation of scarcity, poverty, social exclusion and social conflict that ends in violence, all demand inevitably social conversion, determined by the force of social factors that maintain coherence of living in peace as community. A true community is very well defined by our conversion, by giving up our aspirations and transforming them through interactive compromise with each other; such compromise is taking another path, that of sacrifice for the wellbeing of all. Thus, conversion viewed from a community perspective is the task of working together for consensus. If it is consensual, any law becomes only symbolic protection because it has been transcended by the expanding consciousness of the community. Nevertheless we are to be aware of grace as the free gift of God to humanity, as being human implies carrying out an imperative which responds efficaciously to the grace of God, “but grace evokes responsibility – a resolve to act so as to preserve and enhance the gift.”⁵²¹

Hence, the collective in a violent society that does not consider true conversion is destined to perish through its own fallacies and its arrogant trust in social contracts, moral

⁵²¹ Roger L. Shinn, *Forced Options: Social decisions for the 21st Century*, 2nd edition (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1982, 1985), 240.

norms and sets of laws; though these parameters are necessary for communal social order, they are not sufficient to keep peace. Social norms and laws cannot prevent injustice and violence; those norms and laws are not able to handle the derailing of the human soul that has a tendency toward evil-doing against others. What we are seeking is “a dynamic and historical conception of the person, oriented definitively toward her/his future, which signifies that action in the present is [seen as the] function of a new day, [he/she] always thinking not in an individual manner, rather collectively.”⁵²²

Taking account of all kinds of atrocities in history, “the Babylonian Principle” of Dussel also demonstrates how humans are cruel, disrespectful and oppressive to *the other* and to nature. Professor Migliori asserts with clarity that “we human beings are a mystery to ourselves. We are rational and irrational, civilized and savage, capable of deep friendship and murderous hostility, free and in bondage, the pinnacle of creation and its greatest danger.”⁵²³ He also affirms that “to a far greater extent than other animals, human beings exist ‘exocentrically’ that is, they are drawn outside themselves by the objects of their experience and especially by their relations with other human beings.”⁵²⁴ And Heilbroner asserts that “domination is an inescapable tendency in history because man is a dominating animal by his nature”.⁵²⁵ Taking account of those citations about human conduct, and in resonance with the question “is there any hope for humanity?”, the answer is “no,” as long as humans remain the most dangerous threat capable of activating all kind of devices of personal or mass destruction against the *others*. The only hope is to turn and to be grasped by “God’s grace,” in the sense of God’s intention for liberation. Thus, conversion exists and it is necessary because considering human nature’s “tendency to domination” we are called to take a

⁵²² Gabriel A. Suarez Medina, “una concepción dinámica e histórica de la persona, orientada definitivamente hacia su futuro, lo que quiere decir que actúa en el presente en función de un mañana, siempre pensando no en forma individual sino solidaria y colectiva.” in *El método de la teología de la liberación*, 167.

⁵²³ Daniel Migliori, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 139.

⁵²⁴ Ibid. 143.

⁵²⁵ R. Heilbroner, *Human Prospect*, 145.

journey, which implies a process of ethical transfiguration to resist oppression. Such transfiguration, the reconstruction of the new person, is a fundamental element of conversion because it conducts human impulses and energies towards emancipation.

4. Conversion toward Building Peace with Justice

Conversion as motivated by God who loves peace and justice, will never occur for personal purposes; neither is it to be experienced in isolation or detachment from our neighbour and our own community. Rather conversion is relational, as Boff suggests: “the personal and the social aspects of human life are locked in a reciprocal dialectic.”⁵²⁶ Communities are safeguarded by personal and collective conversions that work together to maintain social order and peaceful coexistence. In the context of apartheid in South Africa, de Gruchy stressed that “conversion is not something that takes place in the abstract or only in the hidden recesses of the heart. It also involves our social relations.”⁵²⁷ And in the context of oppression in Latin America, Gutierrez affirms that “the change called for is not simply an interior one but one that involves the entire person as a corporeal being.”⁵²⁸

Gutierrez cites Archbishop Romero who stated regarding Christians in Salvador and in all Latin America, “Nowadays an authentic Christian conversion must lead to an unmasking of the social mechanism that turns the worker and the peasant into marginalized persons.”⁵²⁹ Archbishop Romero also exhorted people to be in solidarity with the poor, affirming,

In our preaching to rich and poor, it is not that we pander to the sins of the poor and ignore the virtues of the rich. Both have sins and both need conversion. But the poor, in their condition of need, are disposed to conversion. They are more conscious of their need of God. All of us, if we really want to know the meaning of conversion and of faith and confidence in another, must become poor, or at least make the cause of the poor our own inner motivation. That is when one begins to exercise faith and

⁵²⁶ Leonardo Boff, *Faith on the Edge: Religion and Marginalized Existence*, trans. Robert R. Barr (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1989), 138.

⁵²⁷ John W. de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, 184.

⁵²⁸ *Ibid*, 98.

⁵²⁹ G. Gutierrez, *We drink from our own wells*, 98.

conversion: when one has the heart of the poor, when one knows that financial capital, political influence, and power are worthless, and that without God we are nothing. To feel that need of God is faith and conversion.⁵³⁰

In a critical fashion, the feminist Latin-American theologian Elsa Tamez points out “...that Latin America has not experienced a genuine *conversion*.”⁵³¹ An important explanation of the New Testament word *metanoia*⁵³² is given by Tamez who stresses the implication that Christian conversion ultimately implies loving the neighbour, and especially the poor and the oppressed. Taking into consideration Tamez’ interpretation and treatment of the concept of *metanoia*, we would build on the idea of constructing a sustainable peace for Colombia. To this end, then, we propose that the New Testament term has to be fully considered. ‘Conversion’ must occur within the different aspects of society. If the concept of conversion retains only its religious meaning, it loses its capacity and scope, and in a secularized society, what value it would have? We are thinking here especially about atheists, and those who do not confess any religious belief. It is important that the scope of the term *conversion* go beyond the religious limitation. This is precisely what is needed for the whole of society to ‘make a turn’, take a path toward peace having in mind forgiveness and reparation; “it presupposes also, and above all, that one decides to set out on a new path.”⁵³³

The conversion must be economic, cultural, social, educational, and religious, so that the whole of society shall convert. The Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff suggests that conversion “is also, and mainly, a change of attitude – a change bearing directly on

⁵³⁰ Oscar Romero, *The Violence of Love*, trans. James R. Brockman, (New York: Orbis, 1988), 121.

⁵³¹ Elsa Tamez, *Bible of the Oppressed*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006), 75.

⁵³² The following is a relevant explanation of Elsa Tamez: “For many years we have been taught that conversion consists simply in believing in Jesus Christ. But an analysis of the biblical data on conversion shows it to be an experience that far transcends an act of belief... The koine Greek word *metanoia* has been translated in various versions of the Bible as conversion, repentance, correction, change of attitude, and so on. But none of those words really puts a finger on what the term *metanoia* properly means. In fact, it is rather difficult to express the full meaning of the term in a single English word. Conversion (*metanoia*) means a radical change of outlook that must show itself in concrete acts of justice. It means a total transformation of the person; a rebirth accompanied by an “unlimited willingness” to change in action... It is not enough to feel remorse of conscience for what has been done or omitted, and to confess one’s sin in order to gain forgiveness. The important thing is a sincere conversion, or turning to God, and this implies all that we have just heard the prophet Isaiah [58:5-11] calling for in God’s name. Conversion, therefore, must include a repentance that leads to a new manner of life and to just actions.” Ibid, 75-77.

⁵³³ Gustavo Gutierrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, 95.

practice.”⁵³⁴ The concept of conversion carries relevance in any context since the world has been dominated by economic powers, like multinational corporations. The church is to highlight and defend the necessity of conversion in thinking and constructing the possibility, the new path, the utopia embedded in the gospel, for a better world for all. Boff rightly says “Considered positively, conversion is the radical modification of relationships in all aspects of personal and social reality, resulting in concrete liberation and thereby anticipating the Reign of God.”⁵³⁵

Summary

We juxtaposed the reality of despair and community disintegration with the ethics of liberation in order to resist a system that has produced victims.

We agree with the radical option of Enrique Dussel’s ethics of the “Reign of God as the absolute face-to-face”⁵³⁶ with our neighbours lived in community. This principle is not only vital but imperative for the construction of a more just and humane society in Colombia. This principle of Dussel’s ethics challenges the church in Colombia to walk alongside the oppressed and marginalized as did Jesus Christ.

Also we want to emphasize that the ethics of the face-to-face confronts political corruption in Colombia. The immoral politics of the Colombian state has destroyed the very fabric of society: thus, this immorality has sustained a socio-economic structure of oppression in favour of the elite few and the owners of capital. The dismantling of this socio-political structure is not going to be achieved by the election of dishonest politicians that falsely promise a better future for the poor. The face-to-face ethics goes more deeply to the real need for Colombia, that is, to put in place a new socio-economic structure that will abolish the evil system of social classes. Hence, in a new system, the radical disposition of a face-to-face

⁵³⁴ Boff, *Faith on the edge*, 138.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.* 138.

⁵³⁶ E. Dussel, *Ethics and Community*, 13.

ethics would be the determining factor that would inspire voters to demand accountability of the popularly elected politicians. We should say unequivocally that the Colombian solution to its problem has to begin with the ethics of the face-to-face with our neighbours. Thus, Christian ethics calls the church in Colombia to the socio-political option to support and be part of a pedagogical and socio-political movement that is willing to change the present reality of desolation and decay. There has to be a call for dependence on and work inspired by the Spirit of life, denouncing those whose main motivation is greed and the accumulation of wealth. Our task is to restore hope, life and peace in Colombia as the liberating mandate of the gospel, face-to-face with our neighbours in community.

The face-to-face moves the Christian to a different level, that of solidarity with the poor and oppressed. In an individualistic society permeated by consumerism and personal greed, we are self-entertained, and more likely to forget about those who are poor and disadvantaged, hence the term solidarity has been obscured by our selfishness, which intrinsically can be another manifestation of violence. The very root of oppression is precisely the indifference to the suffering of the “other” or “my neighbour,” the term used by Jesus. The extermination of the Indians in Latin America, or the annihilation of Jews by the Nazi regime, or South African apartheid, are some prime examples of a lack of solidarity with the other, the ontological negation of the face-to-face. We affirm that a Christian ethics of liberation presupposes a commitment to solidarity with those who suffer all kinds of humiliation and poverty. But this solidarity is made by working and living with and among the poor, not from a distance. “Concrete liberation theology supposes a practical relation with practice, and not merely theoretical (thematic) relation. It implies a living contact with the straggle of the poor.”⁵³⁷ Jesus evokes rhetorically the human potential for solidarity with “one

⁵³⁷ Clodovis Boff, *Systematic Theology*, 6.

of the least significant of my brothers and sisters”⁵³⁸ and also challenges the human potential for indifference to the “least significant”. From this we suggest that a “least significant” is not exhausted in his/her history, but is somebody that demands justice, a person who has rights, independently of any totalitarian regime or economic system, thus

A key component that makes ethics political is the acceptance and adoption by the community of a particular ethical standard. Political ethical thought is not individual but social. There must necessarily be a fusion of horizons between the individual and the communal ethos.⁵³⁹

The ethics of the face-to-face emancipates human solidarity within and for the community. Solidarity in a context of oppression becomes authentic when we start from the concept of the equality of all before life, and from that equality seeks to help the ‘little ones’ to recover human dignity.

⁵³⁸ Mathew 25:40 (The Kingdom New Testament)

⁵³⁹ Te-Li Lau, *The Politics of Peace: Ephesians, Dio Chrysostom, and the Confucian Four Books*, NovTSup 133, executive ed. M.M. Mitchell and D.P. Moessner, Brill (Boston Leiden, 2010), 112.

CHAPTER V. PEACE WITH JUSTICE FOR COLOMBIA

Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that the church represents a philosophy rather than a political or economic system. It represents a way to live. The love of men [women] for each other takes different shapes... depending on the technology of our time, the historical crossroads we face, and the society in which we live.⁵⁴⁰

The Nature and Sphere of Action of our Proposal:

Our objective in this final chapter can be viewed as a complementary construct in relation to the different ideas and concepts studied in the previous chapters.

We will attempt to assess the theological concept of efficacious love of Camilo Torres in direct relation to a hermeneutics and an ethics of liberation as forming a relevant foundation for keeping discussion alive, and inspiring readers to construct new ideas that might enrich the theology and mission of the church. The learning of lessons from previous chapters will help us to propose the theoretical foundation for a programmatic outline for peace with justice with regard to the task of constructing a new and better future for those suffering the most: the poor and the victims of violence. The methodology will be elaborated in two parts: the first process involves an interactive synthesis of various interdisciplinary concepts that have been discussed throughout our project, and will be called: Foundations. The second part will outline the implications of the synthesis and the challenges posed by the theological ideas of efficacious love of Camilo Torres, in the light of the hermeneutics and the ethics of liberation: it will be called: Conclusions, and will basically suggest an integrative proposal for achieving peace with social justice.

⁵⁴⁰ Camilo Torres, *Revolutionary Priest*, 333-334.

In this thesis the objective has been to analyse conceptually and interpretatively the ideas of Father Camilo Torres in the light of a hermeneutics and ethics of liberation, with the purpose of building a missiological foundation for *peace with justice* in Colombia.

We characterized the contribution of Camilo Torres as pertinent to addressing the different issues in Colombia and the ominous wall of oppression that stands before the church wishing to work on behalf of and with the poor. In understanding a Christian faith that is rooted in the service of our neighbour, the biblical concept of love, treated hermeneutically with the intention of keeping in mind an “option for the poor,” constitutes the radical motive that generates consciousness to participate in a task that can be called a project toward liberation and emancipation. Therefore, following the discussion presented in the five chapters, in this thesis we propose the following final remarks that summarize and reaffirm the theoretical construction toward which we aimed.

In the First Chapter we provided a brief description of the Colombian context of oppression and violence, for which a need for structural change has been urgently expressed. Through a case study of Colombia, we demonstrated the relationship between this context and the historical conditions that precipitated armed rebellion and unarmed resistance to the state and political system.

In the Second Chapter, we showed that in socio-historical conditions of hopelessness, uprising and irrupting against obsolete ecclesiastical and socio-political structures is necessary in order to instigate changes that will bring hope and peace for the poor and for the whole of society. Also in our analysis, we constructed a trajectory showing how a biblical concept can take root and develop as a force that is capable of transforming different dimensions of society. This analysis shows that Christian life is perceived as a vocation in fulfilling the radical commitment of true discipleship in the struggle to build a new way of living together in love. Implicitly, the concept of efficacious love, having been embraced by a

Christian community, becomes a preventive force oriented towards a dialogical encounter of negotiation in times of socio-political differences and even in moments of violent conflict.

The authentic revolutionary spirit of Camilo Torres indicates that Christian faith nurtures a genuine obedience for the followers of Christ to take sides and to opt for devoting their life in favour of a more just world for those marginalised. Thus, that option cannot be ignored. Those objectors who totally reject Camilo Torres because he opted for a revolutionary struggle to overthrow the Colombian government by force, disregard the complexity of the demand of his historical moment. In this time, he would have opted to continue the struggle for liberation with a movement of radical peace.

In the Third Chapter, from a theological point of view, we saw as fundamental to the task of interpretation a threefold dialectical interaction, first between the situation: context of poverty/oppression; second, a dialectical hermeneutical awareness: the Scriptures/history; third, a Christian commitment: praxis of liberation for the construction of a more just and peaceful world.

Some philosophical views are more traditional and others are more critical, which opens up the analysis of social problems. We have learned that the objective of hermeneutics in a complex world and in context of long violent conflicts is to seek in creative and effective ways new methodological approaches to understanding change in a pluralistic society. In the context of Colombia, demanding new paradigms will construct new ways of understanding and interpreting the Scriptures in the light of a context of oppression and poverty, having as a frame of reference the three mediations proposed by Clodovis Boff and reflections made by other Latin American theologians. These are the socio-analytical, the hermeneutical, and the practical mediation.

What we have learned in our hermeneutical analysis is that as such, the church must be open to creating a space for tolerance and inclusiveness instead of rejection. Constructing

new ideas requires an acknowledgement that a hermeneutics that aims to create a foundation for achieving peace with justice must be critical. Taking this road in a context like Colombia and Latin America, the hermeneutics will have to be critical of social causes that have produced injustice and exclusiveness; no objective justification could be found, either intentional or non-intentional.

In such a case, the Scriptures arise as a fundamental religious historical text that will play a determining role in the confrontation with our way of knowing the reality before our eyes. Obviously, this implies the possibility of interpreting with an open mind and acknowledging that new unimaginable directions will emerge. For this reason, an effective hermeneutics that constructs bridges for understanding and interpretation must be interdisciplinary and be constructed to support and uphold an ethics of liberation.

Colombia has faced a problem of knowledge, the inheritance of ideas *made in* another context, especially in contexts that promoted colonialism and economic expansion. That pedagogy was basically imposed by the government through academic, private, and religious institutions, and used to justify the division of classes and the domestication of consciousness. A foreign method of applying knowledge permeated the fundamental concepts of hermeneutics in the interpretation and understanding of Scriptures in Colombia. The extrapolation of ideas was strange in the new context and did not work, rather it invaded and forced the pluralistic cultural *modus operandi* of the recipient community into an unknown way of perceiving and interpreting their own reality, such that their natural perception was totally distorted. For this reason, we should keep constructing new paradigms and also recovering the historical memory of the past (from the Conquista). Then, there will always be the necessity to elaborate a critical hermeneutics against hegemony and the imposition of foreign ways of rationalization, which are based on tyranny. Historical geopolitical evidence shows that most of the tyrannical regimes subdue through the power of

economic sanctions, military invasion, and technological, philosophical, and cultural imposition upon poor or small nations to subjugate them to their oppressors' imperial expansionist aims and desire for wealth.

Thus, the theology of liberation has to seek new points of departure, new irruptions, because it needs to constantly renew itself to include those people that have been neglected and prevented from participating in the interpretative dialogue, so that they can become active protagonists of their history. The dominant philosophical ideas, which were accompanied by an economic system of social classes, permitted a missiological enterprise that established a hermeneutical *modus operandi* which ignored the dialogical will of the recipient nations to interact in the understanding and interpretation of the Scriptures. Now the task is to continue to construct our own Latin American hermeneutics, which will begin with a recovery of its historical cultural memory, and continue by means of a methodology that has the task of contextualizing the concept of efficacious love. Thus, we need to revisit the clear vision, and efforts and also to critically analyse the ideas of Camilo Torres, in order to keep building a contextual, pluralistic, multicultural and inclusive theology.

In Chapter Four we analysed the theoretical benefit of the previous chapter, in the sense that praxis in the hermeneutics of liberation facilitates the ethical projection and consciousness awareness of a reality that finds historic parallels in the biblical narratives, such as for instance, in Exodus, the prophets and in the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Hence, proper praxis produces an ethics that endorses Christian faith and social involvement.⁵⁴¹ The pre-eminence of praxis as the methodological foundation for an ethics of liberation, will clear the way to a better understanding of the biblical values that call us to transform a world plagued by all kind of injustices. The implication of our analysis in this chapter is that all mediations should be applied ethically in the radical conviction that the efficacy of love must

⁵⁴¹ For further reading see Sobrino and Ellacuria, *Mysterium Liberationis*, cf. However, in 1993 Orbis Books published a shorter version called Systematic Theology – this was an unwanted proposition which tried to change a praxis theology into a Western philosophical presupposition of 'truth'.

be shown in opting for concrete actions that seek what is good and just for others. Moreover, such conviction involves deciding to leave our comfort in order to take a place alongside the poor, a praxis that needs to find footing in analogous biblical narratives.

Similarly, this chapter also suggested that a true encounter between praxis and the Scriptures will lead to the realization of the ethical commitment to work for those things that others have neglected or ignored. Rather, an ethics of liberation takes the political side with the most vulnerable. In this regard, Gutierrez emphasises, that the “other” we have found in our study is objectively the basis of any historical praxis, and provides the instigating motive toward liberation. This instigation is not arbitrary, but urgent, since the condition of the “other” is in real jeopardy, due to the fact that they are starving, they are in pain, and they live in subhuman conditions. An important implication of our ethical option is the need to seek what is good for the poor without losing sight of the objective of working to provoke structural change in the socio-economic situation that produces poverty and the socio-cultural prejudices that produce exclusion and violent death.

The Fifth and final Chapter proposes two significant elements: (1) the foundation for peace, and (2) the implications of including educational lessons for the mission of the church based on the study carried out in the previous chapters. Our findings lead us to conclude that what Colombia needs is not only peace, but “peace with justice”. Those concepts cannot be separated because this would deprive the context of its historical background and impede the keeping alive of the utopian motivation for the construction of a better society in the present and near future. In addition, this chapter aims, on the one hand, to construct the theological presupposition that peace with justice is intrinsically rooted in a subversive hermeneutics that questions the causes of real problems, in a peaceful mode. On the other hand, it proposes that to obtain a stable and permanent peace, it must be inspired by an ethics of liberation that

firmly proposes that peace is the logical result of justice. Thus, having summarised the chapters, we present the final conclusive remarks.

Theological Foundations for Peace with Justice

For this last chapter, no other citation could be more challenging than the one offered above by Camilo Torres. Its relevance induces us to develop a theological ethos that confronts any conservative understanding and action of the mission of the church, as well as the indifference of Colombia state to the reality of social injustice, violence and inequality. Camilo Torres' ideas connote that we are to think theologically, especially when love has been destroyed, and shattered by violence not of the poetic and courageous voice of the prophets but by those whose ideologies do not consider "love" as a fundamental element of the human constitution and spirit.

The mission of the church, when confronted with the challenge of internal conflicts and violence, demands that such tasks provide clear decisions with profound sensitivity. Such tasks mean that we encourage the Christian spirit to take risks and to move freely into loving our neighbour – *the other*, and to be critical toward a structure that is socio-politically and economically obsolete, as well as oppressive to the majority of its population. The present socio-economic structure of Colombia's political apparatus does not permit any freedom for churches, individuals or organizations to transform such structures for the sake of the entire population. This limitation happens because "a society based on the logic of exclusion creates, and, at the same time, is fed by, a culture of insensitivity."⁵⁴² For this reason, "what has been done with peace is what remains today. An empty word, without meaning, a contradictory situation and a common preferred place of invocation of those who negotiate

⁵⁴² Jung Mo Sung, "Hunger for God, Hunger for Bread, Hunger for Humanity: A Southern Perspective" in *Hope and Justice for All in the Americas, Discerning God's Mission*, ed. Oscar L. Bolioli (New York: Friendship Press, 1998), 35-42, 38.

with weapons and other people's life."⁵⁴³ Love has been destroyed by the "insensitivity" of a state whose main achievement has been to take away the internal peace of its population by exercising oppressive actions that have resulted in collective fear and many deaths. Hence, in Colombia and in other similar violent contexts, the church has a great task. First, it must carry out the task of proclaiming a liberating message that will free the human spirit from the captivity of fear and disillusionment; and secondly, it must nurture believers to engage actively with the political dimension of faith. This engagement could be translated into ecclesiological language, meaning that we Christians, living in a context of inequality and violence, are called to proclaim *good news for all* as the high values of the kingdom of God. We already have understood the need for such a task based on what we analysed in Camilo Torres' idea of 'efficacious love' in Chapter Two, leading us categorically to agree with the assertion that "God's kingdom is the re-conquest of humanity. It is a struggle against alienation, corruption, and death."⁵⁴⁴

Making the decision, and the sensitivity required, both carry a risk; this is a worthy end, because it aims to sustain and exercise efficacious love with the objective of achieving peace with justice, and to be in solidarity with *the other*. The gospel that calls us to build peace and proclaim justice in all levels of society (because of the problem of class division) nurtures all our decisions to opt for a better world despite threatening opposition. As viewed from a genuine Judeo-Christian perspective, the spirit of courage was exemplified by the prophets and Jesus. Since "the least any human being can claim is the right to voice what is perceptible from one's own standpoint, a point of view that is always both personal and

⁵⁴³ Luis Alberto Torres, et al., *Pacicultura: pedagogía y conocimientos para construir paz como cultura*. (Bogotá: Observatorio para la paz, 2004), 108. "de la paz se ha hecho lo que hoy nos queda. Una palabra vacía, sin sentido, una situación contradictoria y un lugar común de invocación predilecta de quienes negocian con armas y vidas ajenas."

⁵⁴⁴ José Comblin, "Grace," in *Mysterium Liberationis*, 524.

collective,”⁵⁴⁵ it can be claimed that the church, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, has been inspired by the certainty of the truth and hope found in the Scriptures. God’s liberating Word, which emerged from history, ought to continuously seek and construct a genuine conviction that guarantees a faithful participation in and for a liberating mission toward concrete peace with justice in Colombia.

Dissident Hermeneutics as Sociological Finesse

Ruling out a hermeneutics that is totally irrelevant to a context of oppression and constructing another one, is a disruption to the institutionalized false equilibrium of theological conformity. Such a hermeneutics of domination has been built in a morality of domestication and alienation, which does not allow a critical examination of what Scripture says about the unethical causes of suffering and poverty. The hermeneutical-ethical construction of Camilo Torres “...tried to assess the need for a social, economic and political instrument of analysis capable of reflecting on faith as the historical embodiment of love.”⁵⁴⁶ Thus, since we as human beings need institutional and personal relations, breaking abruptly with decadent and obsolete structures of theoretical knowledge, requires one to engage with or to create new forms of theoretical framework. Nevertheless such disruption with old paradigms in a context of repression is not easy, but rather risky. The abandonment of a body of knowledge renounces belonging and association with an oppressive epistemology. Then constructing a discourse that flows into a direct challenge to the church and the establishment together, not separately will take us to dissidence. This is what we are calling ‘dissident hermeneutics.’ Dissident hermeneutics is slightly different to liberation hermeneutics in that the construction is made in revolutionary tension and the constructor ends up engaging in subversive revolutionary activity, not necessarily violent. Dissidence implies also, detaching

⁵⁴⁵ Otto Maduro, “Globalization, Social Policy, and Christianity at the Dawn of a New Millennium: Some Reflections from a Latin American Emigrant Perspective” in *Religion and Social Policy*, ed. Paula D. Nesbitt (Walnut Creek, Lanham, New York, Oxford: Altamira Press, 2001), 3-14. 3.

⁵⁴⁶ H. Assmann, *Practical Theology of Liberation*, 111.

from the 'institutions of power', governmental or ecclesiastical. This is a total disassociation from the institutionalized centres of power. One of the challenges facing liberation hermeneutics has been the lack of resolution to break with those centres, which have not only bureaucratized theology but have stereotyped other ways of doing theology, considering them as second-hand peripheral methods. Decisive liberating movements in history also begin with one person or small group, because the majority preferred to be faithful or loyal to the establishment. Thus, such is the demand of dialectical history, to perceive it as not being limited to belonging to, but to break through to give space to the risky unknown, a new process, that implies beginning from scratch.

This 'dissident hermeneutics' is a utopia that is fulfilled in a moment of history, that then disappears in time to give opportunity in another *kairos* that will recover the historical memories, which will confer relevance for new hermeneutical insurrections. Camilo Torres' level of theological density was of that nature, a radical disjunction with the specific elements that were directly producing sociological theoretical injustices. In that dissidence he found the true freedom of conscience to create a new historical meaning and understanding of his specific interpretation of the historical situation. Hence, 'dissident hermeneutics' is not a method but a historical *specific momentum* determined by the fusion of the awareness of a condition of oppression and decadency, and the anguished mind of his prophetic vocation. It is a reflection made in the very moment of protest, to elevate courageously the discourse that aims for justice, a very brief hermeneutical situation that produces a public contusion to be ethically digested afterwards.

In some cases the dissident hermeneutics is the pedagogical infrastructure of a political riot and collective discontent. Obviously the outcome is unpredictable. We find this pedagogical infrastructure in several messages that Camilo Torres pronounced. Camilo Torres proclaimed approximately 12 brief messages to: Christians, communists, the military,

the non-aligned, trade unions, peasants, women, students, the unemployed, the United Front of the people, political prisoners, and the oligarchy.⁵⁴⁷ He overlaid them with an overtone of urgency “...to be used critically, with an approach rooted in ethical and political considerations, themselves based ultimately on radically new humanist thought.”⁵⁴⁸

The Hermeneutical Distance in Camilo Torres’ Theology

We are not trying to construct a chronology of the epistemological development of Camilo Torres’ thinking, rather making a diachronic analysis of the radicalization of the sociological causes of the oppressive reality and his hermeneutical application of the Scripture that led him to construct a socio-theological discourse that challenged the church of his time and the *status quo*. In our understanding, the use of dialectical language helped him, using Gadamer’s term, to “overcome the hermeneutical truncation” of the past history of Colombia in order to impart to the Colombian population a new ethical paradigm for justice. Simultaneously, the ‘overcoming’ would convey the intention of constructing a new social consciousness in order to remove alienation. The language he uses is tactically chosen; because of its dialectical character, it conveys a critical tone. Hence the use of the term ‘majority’ referring to an oppressed population, will retain a praxical meaning. His language plays an important role in understanding and interpreting reality, precisely for its heavy sociological pitch which is embedded in its quantitative connotation, and also in its hermeneutical applicability in how Camilo Torres directs the term. This term acquires an ethical configuration, because it is placed in a strict relationship with all his theological and political premises. The hermeneutical force reveals that the majority of an entire population has been victimized by the counterpart ‘minority’. Thus, we suggest that the term majority as viewed by Camilo Torres equates with the hermeneutical locus, or as Dussel suggests, “The

⁵⁴⁷ Camilo Torres, *Cristianismo y revolución*. Prólogo, selección de notas de Oscar Maldonado, et al. (Ediciones Era, 1972), 525-581.

⁵⁴⁸ H. Assmann, *Practical theology of liberation*, 112.

poor is the hermeneutical locus *par excellence* of Christian history”⁵⁴⁹ This way the social condition is sharply contrasted in crystal-clear fashion against the term ‘minority’. In this case language break through the linguistic epistemology of the oppressor, and facilitates the term ‘majority’ to unveil in more graphic way, the factual social reality. Camilo Torres’ term ‘majority’ is semantically contextualized in his objective to point out and to denounce the unethical distribution of resources in contrast with the situation of the few – the minority. Thus, Camilo Torres’ quantitative analysis carries a theological thrust in the sense of being a qualitative imperative for seeking a solution for the whole population. Camilo Torres’ hermeneutics is praxical because it not only aims to understand and interpret a situation but to transform it, as Gorringer affirms: “reflection, in this case the discourse of ethics, follows action and action reflection in an endless hermeneutic spiral.”⁵⁵⁰ For this reason the result of the hermeneutical communicative applicability, will instrumentally confer upon Camilo Torres’ project of emancipation, a new hermeneutical and theological locus, the ethical one.

Dissident Hermeneutics Merging with Sociological Objectivity

Camilo Torres, from a sociological point of view, suggested that “the new orientation implies a scientific projection of our own circumstances. Positive science cannot be isolated from the concrete local milieu.”⁵⁵¹ The dissidential characteristic of subversion should imply disrupting the negligent confinement of false cultural patterns and ideologies, irrupting into the ever-new critical disconformity with social studies that disregard injustice. Thus Camilo Torres tries to avoid ‘nominalism’, as for him “nominalism is the use of words not strictly related to the personal observations of the one who employs them. Nominalism places more emphasis on terminology than on observation of reality.”⁵⁵² This is a new interpellation of the sociological deviation of ideological streams that sustain class inequalities and all kind of

⁵⁴⁹ E. Dussel *Historia General de la iglesia en América*, 85.

⁵⁵⁰ Timothy J. Gorringer, *Capital and the Kingdom*: 3.

⁵⁵¹ Camilo Torres, *Revolutionary Priest*, 102.

⁵⁵² *Ibid*, 102.

prejudices, a kind of *ad hoc* hermeneutics on the run. The only constitutive memory to imitate is the tempestuous character and the exacerbation of the revolutionary spirit that comprises its ethical integrity. That way refuses to be seated in a chair to be judged and evaluated by pure reason or vague ideologies, because it has divested itself of all commitment to institutionalized powers. Thus, Camilo Torres from a sociological perspective of profound analysis of reality says “Our society is a cauldron of urgent problems of every kind with which we involve our own sensibilities, our own intelligence, our entire selves.”⁵⁵³ Thus, dissident hermeneutics passes the torch to the sociological task. In such a transition, it will interact with reality, not in solitude; it has to hear all voices and cries, it “is the need to experience the problems of one’s own time and one’s own concrete society.”⁵⁵⁴ We may have to suggest that this is another point to add to the hermeneutical circle, not in organic circumstances but rather in complicity with a momentum, not mechanically but spontaneously. Dissident hermeneutics, although our own construct, was retrospectively inspired by the valiant actions of Camilo Torres. It was lived simultaneously with his intensive commitment to the poor, who knew how to avoid the “...danger of being swallowed up by the ecclesiastical machine”⁵⁵⁵ of institutionalized religion. Hence, dissident hermeneutics conveys that horizontal communicative force, the oral euphoric proclamation impelled by brave love, which in the brief oral discourse ‘drives out any fear,’ “There is no fear in love; complete love drives out fear. Fear has to do with punishment, and anyone who is afraid has not been completed in love.”⁵⁵⁶ This brave love proclaims that the truth has been distorted, and a reality has been destroyed in favour of a minority and in detriment to the majority. Dissident hermeneutics is not clandestine, though it can be done in reclusion; rather it speaks openly, knows how to disturb the mind of the oppressor, interweaving with the

⁵⁵³ C. Torres, *Revolutionary Priest*, 104.

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 105.

⁵⁵⁵ H. Assmann, *Practical theology of liberation*, 111.

⁵⁵⁶ 1 John 4:18 (The Kingdom New Testament)

annunciation of a message of hope for the oppressed, reaching in such a way, the *praxic - kerygmatic* dimension of liberative ethics. It also knows how to interact and to maintain a dialogue with social sciences like sociology, and without fear delineates its urgent task: “such subjects as social revolution, social change, sociological effects of land reform, community development, and imperialism must be on the agenda of Latin American sociological problems.”⁵⁵⁷ It intends the formation of a new epistemology because it has as its ultimate aim to configure “...a community of ideas with all men [and women]”⁵⁵⁸, which cannot be systematized by a method but grasped by recovering its historical memory.

Infrastructure of an Ethical Discernment: Questioning as Nonconformity

Our interpretation based on what we have examined so far about Camilo Torres’ ideas, implies that he would have been aware of the probability that “there is a surplus-of-meaning in life and in all human praxis that is especially concentrated in the foundational and archetypical events that sustain a group’s way of being.”⁵⁵⁹ This facilitated his entering, in a more concrete way, into the realm of Christian ethics, trying to understand and to interpret more objectively the socio-political reality of his time. Thus, he began asking socio-theological questions, their concrete suspicion based in questioning primarily how that reality got to that specific level of crisis and the direct effects against the poor. Camilo Torres asks “In a pluralistic society, with economic and social problems, should a Christian simply go on waiting, or should he begin to act if he finds himself overwhelmed by perplexity?”⁵⁶⁰ And with the assumption of professing believers, “Can a Christian, possessing supernatural life and grace, exploit his fellow workers at the natural level?”⁵⁶¹ And at the political level he

⁵⁵⁷ C. Torres, *Revolutionary Priest*, 105.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 246

⁵⁵⁹ J. Severino Croatto, *Exodus: A hermeneutics of freedom*, trans. Salvator Attanasio (NY: Orbis, 1981), 3.

⁵⁶⁰ C. Torres, *Revolutionary Priest*, 245

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.* 245.

asks “Can he condone dishonest political intervention?”⁵⁶² In this dialectical approach of contrasting (critical observation) the de-composition of reality, he then frames his ethical interrogation. Using the three questions, we can fashion them in pairs of words as follows: waiting or acting, grace or exploitation, truth or dishonesty. Hence, this was the manner in which Camilo Torres constructed the foundation for his ethics of liberation. Therefore his theological presuppositions are constitutive of his vision of what is to become a new person, that woman and man who live under the rule of an unethical and corrupted establishment. His ethical cosmo-vision, pluralistic in nature, is dominated by an understanding that the new person (the subject) is to be actively involved in a realistic awareness of his/her own reality. This in turn should discard perplexity, on the part of the protagonist, in creating a firm stand for his/her own place in history. Therefore, a new pair of terms will emerge in such a dialectic, like the ethical equivalence of a prophetic anguish: pessimism or hope, selfishness or love, decay or praxis. This ‘or’ becomes an ethical injunction challenging our way of thinking, pushes us to be suspicious “but above all it is to emerge from a crisis.”⁵⁶³ In this way in the tension of critical introspection of our faith and the dialectic of interrogating reality, ethical discernment is born. This discernment is not yet a revolutionary conscience, but the condition *sine qua non* toward it, a state of unconformity.⁵⁶⁴

Ethical discernment is organically obtained after hermeneutical suspicion is exercised, but it is differentiated from hermeneutics on the basis that it is more an application of ethical-political convictions to create or participate in organized groups that remain tangentially detached from those traditional parties that belong to the oligarchic machinery. Also, its

⁵⁶² Ibid. 245.

⁵⁶³ E. Dussel, *Ethics and the theology of liberation*, 123.

⁵⁶⁴ In this respect, G. Guzman-Campos offers a good explanation as he affirms “nonconformity is a state prior to rebelliousness. The nonconformist person begins to disagree with things that contradict his/her intelligence or will, at the point of not finding them rational. He/she will request arguments, demand answers and inquire into solutions because he/she perceives the possibility of a solution. The nonconformist person is more rational than emotional, more discursive than pragmatic, pressing more for action than distorting through [inappropriate] action. He/she moves toward radical decisions, if he/she does not find any echo to his/her inquiry into-issues.” in *El Padre Camilo Torres*, 63.

logistic mode of operation is less ambiguous; “Thus it is necessary to get away from ordinary day-to-day comprehension in order to see things ‘from outside.’”⁵⁶⁵ From the external temporal distance that is bound to threads of concrete historical facts, which although outside, does not lose sight of or speculate about reality.⁵⁶⁶ Rather that distance is used to posit ourselves “outside the obvious, the taken-for granted, the traditional.”⁵⁶⁷ Thus, in that critical distance, to be ‘outside’ facilitates a dialectical pause, connected with reality and detached from alienation, but positioning in an angle with a panoramic view of reality. From ‘outside,’ which is the other face of critical ethical observation, it then will comprehend how the political spectrum is moving and affecting the social affairs of society. Afterwards it will be able to discern what political option is more in consonance with the oppressed majority. Consequently, as Camilo Torres did, “present-day prophets, involved in a liberating mission, must have the light to discern the signs of the times.”⁵⁶⁸ Hence ethical discernment becomes an intensive process of interaction, ‘in-and-out’ reflection, having the integrity to question with open eyes the reality, and rhetorically listening to the answers that a historical project is positing in the present.

From Works and Sacraments into a Pluralist Society

Camilo Torres’ theology was profoundly rooted in Christology and complemented by his interpretation of the biblical terms for ‘love’ which he sometimes used synonymously with the term ‘charity’ embedded in the Johannine literature. Use of James letter was also

⁵⁶⁵ E. Dussel, *Ethics and the theology of liberation*, 123.

⁵⁶⁶ In this regard it is pertinent to identify some prognostic conditions of Latin American reality vis-à-vis the entire world, as are posed by Miguez-Bonino thus: “Violence seems to be erupting everywhere. In so many respects human kind exhibits an apparent inability, unwillingness, or impotence: to organize life on our earth on human terms; to use the resources of our world intelligently for the common good; to harness science in the service of a richer and fuller life; to subordinate bigness (more things, more power, greater wealth) to quality; to make of our diverse philosophical, political, and religious viewpoints an occasion for mutual encounter and enrichment; to structure an economy of solidarity rather than of destruction; to devise political structures able to cope with the problems and give viability to the hopes of our time.” in *Toward a Christian political ethics* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1983), 16. Also we see this analysis made as a poignant critic to the neo-liberal paradigm and globalization.

⁵⁶⁷ E. Dussel, *Ethics and the theology of liberation*, 124.

⁵⁶⁸ J. S. Croatto, *Exodus*, 47.

important for him, giving priority and new theological-political emphasis to the term ‘works.’ In a conference paper,⁵⁶⁹ delivered in France, he explained the ethical imperative of the Christian mission, which for him was not confined within an ecclesiastical structure but existed in the civil responsibility for participating actively to change the socio-political affairs of the country. For Camilo Torres such participation had to be nurtured by both the sacraments and works as distinctive elements of efficacious love, which for him is an authentic faith. Thus, the mission for Christians was formulated as an “apostolate”. For Camilo Torres “Christ is the apostle par excellence.”⁵⁷⁰ And according to Camilo Torres, “the Christian apostolate is an activity whose purpose is to establish and extend the kingdom of God.”⁵⁷¹ The understanding of such extension of the kingdom⁵⁷² in Camilo Torres’ theology has to be sustained and based on ‘life and justice’ and in that equation, for him “Apostolic work consists of everything that leads others to possess supernatural life.”⁵⁷³ Thus, for Camilo Torres, “Charity [love] is essentially supernatural life ... God’s judgement on men is fundamentally based on the efficacy of our charity.”⁵⁷⁴ This love (charity) is manifested by ‘works’, without which the supernatural life does not exist at all. Consequently, for Camilo Torres apostolic action is developed in a mutual relationship of ‘works’ and ‘sacraments.’ For him “A good pastoral method with the sacraments as its starting point should culminate in works of charity, and a good pastoral method which begins with works of charity should

⁵⁶⁹ This conference entitled in the original French as “Programmation Economique et Exigences Apostoliques.” C. Torres, *Revolutionary Priest*, 261.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid. 261

⁵⁷¹ Ibid. 261.

⁵⁷² Jon Sobrino emphasizes the ecclesial force of the concept of the Reign of God, in consonance with what Camilo Torres understood of the importance of the Sacraments, by stressing that “The Reign of God requires of the church that its mission, like that of Jesus, be Good News to the poor, evangelization and denunciation, proclamation of the word and historical realization of liberation. In this manner the church today can be a “sacrament of salvation.” 386, “Central position of the Reign of God in liberation theology” in *Mysterium Liberationis*, 350-388; G. Gutierrez affirms “The kingdom is a gift, a *grace* of God, but also a *demand* made upon us...Accepting the kingdom of God means refusing to accept a world that promotes or tolerates the premature and unjust deaths of the poor.” In *Essential Writings*, ed. James B. Nickoloff (NY: Orbis, 3rd printing, 2002), 173-174. From a distinctive economic perspective, on the sacrament of Eucharist, see the relevant article of Enrique Dussel entitled “The Economy and the Eucharist” *Concilium*, 5 (2011): 32-43.

⁵⁷³ C. Torres, *Revolutionary Priest*, 262.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid. 263.

culminate in the sacraments.”⁵⁷⁵ But he gives primacy to ‘works’ affirming “Both ways are legitimate. However, insistence on good works seems more effective than insistence on the sacraments... what we are trying to clarify is the priority and the emphasis which everyone engaged in apostolic action should give to good works”.⁵⁷⁶ From that theological explanation he is prepared to launch the apostolic work within the efficacy of supernatural life into another level, which is in concomitant reciprocity in and with efficacious love. Hence, he affirms “This priority becomes more clearly apparent when considered in the light of two historical circumstances of our time: the social problem and pluralism.”⁵⁷⁷ For Camilo Torres the social problem is among other factors summarized as “material poverty” clarifying that “as a general policy, the apostolate should give priority to material works to help our fellow men; it is thus centered in a perspective of charity here and now.”⁵⁷⁸ For Camilo Torres “pluralism is both ideological and institutional,”⁵⁷⁹ And consists of ideas and actions that should interact with other systems in society, so that in turn “it becomes a challenge to the consciences of all those who are seeking the good of humanity.”⁵⁸⁰ Referring to the ideological content of Camilo Torres’ ‘pluralism,’ according to Fals-Borda it was “a political apparatus that he denominated ‘pluralist.’ In that way he succeeded to ensemble a new utopia for the country.”⁵⁸¹ Camilo Torres’ socio-theological construction of ‘pluralism’ (understood not philosophically, but for its multifaceted character) for us, is more an ‘analectic’⁵⁸²

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid. 264.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid. 264-265.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid. 265.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid. 265. It’s important to point out the term ‘here and now’ which will play an important role in Latin American theology, as the need to contextualize the pastoral action in a state of mind of concrete urgency and geopolitical-social awareness.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid. 265.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid. 265-266.

⁵⁸¹ Orlando Fals-Borda, Documento de la Ponencia en el conversatorio “Camilo Vive”. *Folleto*, Bogotá, Universidad Nacional, (15 de Febrero del 2006): 1. Also affirms Fals-Borda “This utopia had special ingredients, such as those derivate from religious convictions, from the analysis of the national [Colombian] reality, and from the contemporary Latino American revolutions, specially the Cuban one. But in substance was a reiteration of known socialist ideas, as a response to the impulse of the secular-instrumental change of the people and the epoch. Ibid. 1.

⁵⁸² The concept ‘analectic’ is properly defined by E. Dussel from the ethical perspective of “The principle ‘Liberate the poor and the oppressed!’ ... In this concept, the ‘poor’ or oppressed include: (a) a totality in the

configuration based on Christian ethics that will project itself into an emancipation for the spiritual, social, economic and political dimensions of poor and oppressed communities. This was made by him in a concrete proposal to change the system. The force of his political *plataforma*⁵⁸³ (platform) was not only raising acute questions, but simultaneously offering concrete answers that reflected thoroughly serious social research, made carefully and rigorously in poor communities, both in cities and rural areas. Thus, the hermeneutical framework of Camilo Torres' platform is eminently ethical, "It is ethical because it is trans-moral, trans-systemic, based in the exteriority of the Other, the poor, the oppressed."⁵⁸⁴ Thus in its 'analectic' mode, this platform attempted to go beyond the political possibilities of the oppressive socio-economic and political order of his time. That is the principal reason why it is of great importance to look at it with new eyes. We propose that the basic principle of Camilo Torres' platform can be re-visited, since the 'motives' remain relevant for building a contextualized platform in the light of the new socio-economic challenges we are facing in Colombia. Also, we do not want to lose sight of the C. Boff mediations studied above, since those shed light on a re-formulation or redesign of a fresh programme of action, especially taking into consideration the five "distinct discursive levels' suggested by Boff above (see

form of an existing moral system; (b) an oppressor who is the subject of wrong actions; (c) a just man – at least in relation to the oppressor – unjustly treated. 'Liberate' includes: (d) taking account of the mechanisms of the established moral totality; (e) the ethical duty to take those mechanism apart; (f) the need to build the way out of the system and the further duty of building a new system (still unsituated: Utopian) in which the oppressed of yesterday will be the citizen in the just morality of today" E. Dussel "One Ethic and Many Moralities?" in, *Concilium* 150 (1981): 58., For a more ample treatment of this concept, see E. Dussel, "An Ethics of Liberation: fundamental hypotheses" in *The Ethics of Liberation – The Liberation of Ethics*, *Concilium* 172 (2/1984);; E. Dussel, *Ethics and the Theology of Liberation*, 173-177.; E. Dussel "analectic", "Pensee analectique en philosophie de la liberation" in *Analogie et Dialectique* (Geneva 1982), 93-120.

⁵⁸³ For Camilo Torres the platform is based on eight motives, which can be best summarized as this: "The political decisions are made by a minority, who hold the economic power, and will never make decisions counter to its own interest. This condition makes it imperative to change the structure of political power. But the majority lacks a political apparatus to take power. The majority needs to organize a pluralistic apparatus from the grassroots organizations based on principles of action rather than that around the demagoguery of a leader." See the strong tone of the eight motives in the original Spanish of Camilo Torres, *Cristianismo y Revolucion*, 515-525. The platform per se contains several objectives, as follows: "Agrarian reform, business reform, cooperativism, communal action, planning, tax policy, monetary policy, nationalizations, international relations, public security and public health, family policy, social crimes, the armed forces, rights of women." See C. Torres, *Revolutionary Priest*, 296-310.

⁵⁸⁴ E. Dussel, "One Ethic and many Moralities? In Christian ethics: uniformity, universality, pluralism, *Concilium*, 1981. 58.

Chapter 3). A new action plan would involve positing them anew and in dynamic interaction with E. Dussel's ethics of liberation, with close attention to the analectic moment.

Camilo Torres' Epistemological Inclusiveness

The amplitude of Camilo Torres's theological foundation was inclusive and embracing. He recognized the existence of a patriarchal epistemology in the Church and the state. His preoccupation was manifested very clearly when he affirmed that "Colombian women, like the women of all underdeveloped countries, have always been in an inferior position to men and society."⁵⁸⁵ The women in both rural and urban contexts suffer from the inequality imposed by a patriarchal mentality in all spheres of Colombian society. Though the hardship is experienced in different circumstances in the cities and rural areas, the women in rural contexts suffer the greatest burden. The analysis of Camilo Torres regarding the condition of women in all social strata is that they are treated as second-class people. In a strong assertion Camilo Torres points out that "the oligarchy, like an octopus, is beginning to extend its tentacles to the Colombian women... giving them the right to vote in order to continue using them as instruments."⁵⁸⁶ The observation Camilo Torres is making is that women in all situations are being exploited and used to maintain an unjust structure: such is the political extension of the corrupted and oppressive patriarchal mind of the oligarchy. In Colombian history until 1957, women were not allowed to exercise the liberty and right to vote or participate in a process to elect their political leaders. Nevertheless, Camilo Torres acknowledged that though the oppression of women was elevated to a political dimension purposely by men, for him the ultimate liberation of women would be fought in the political plane. With that perception in mind he declared that "they know very well that the vote is the new form of exploitation which the oligarchy has invented."⁵⁸⁷ Hence, he was aware that

⁵⁸⁵ Camilo Torres, *Revolutionary Priest*, 397.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 398.

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 398.

women were the only protagonists of their own liberation, affirming that “The Colombian woman is readying herself for the revolution. She has to be the heart of revolution”⁵⁸⁸ In this way Camilo Torres anticipated that there would not be real liberation without the free, authentic, self-determination of women in constructing their own history, participating equally, and becoming visible in society. Thus, and this is applicable to any institution, secular or religious, we have been warned by Marcella Althaus-Reid when she rightly pointed out “The only way out towards hope in Liberation Theology and in Christianity in general, is to recognize and work with an epistemology from the poor as it is presented in feminist epistemology, non-dualistic, non-hierarchical and relational.”⁵⁸⁹ From that epistemology that transcends gender domination, and patriarchal political tyranny, women in poor countries recover their subversive nature of creativity. Thus, disregarding their lifestyle, their human matrix is revolutionary by nature, active and subversive, as the negation of the impotent status of men who are empty of the capability to produce new life or affection, except for borrowing from women through an analogical filtration. Thus “In this kind of visibility, women come forward as subjects – as responsible, capable, and participating persons.”⁵⁹⁰ That is the view that Camilo Torres perceived.

Peace as Efficacious Love: The Church Ought to Reconsider the Political

Because of a limited knowledge of God and poor discernment about how to know a reality that by all evidences needs to be changed in order to be more just, without losing sight of our above analysis, let us keep in mind that in Latin America the prevailing conservative position of the church to teach and to proclaim the Scriptures remained in the ditch of “purely interpretative reflection.” This position of keeping its distance from the political made the

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid. 398-399.

⁵⁸⁹ Marcella Althaus-Reid “¿Bien Sonados? The Future of Mystical Connections in Liberation Theology” *Political Theology: The Journal of Christian Socialism*, 3 (2000): 44-63. (63)

⁵⁹⁰ Ana Maria Tepedino, Margarida L. Ribeiro Brandao “Women and the Theology of Liberation, in *Mysterium Liberationis*, 223.

church into a social entity detached from its own social-political reality in the continent. Obviously, this stance is not something new or pertaining only to Latin America. N.T. Wright, analysing the results of the Enlightenment, makes a historical criticism about how the church approaches the Scriptures, ignoring socio-political realities, affirming that such attitudes “have left the church disabled...when it comes to serious, responsible contemporary rereadings that will address the urgent political issues of our day.”⁵⁹¹ Hence, the task of the mission of the church, is to intentionally address the work of constructing peace with justice, and to prepare itself to confront conservative resistance from different fronts of society and even persecution by the state that is rooted in the attitude of the politics of death.

Our world’s current political reality, which is hegemonic, is globalized by super-economic and military powers and maimed by economies based on consumerism. We, the church, must be politically aware of such realities, otherwise we will repeat the ecclesiological mistakes of the past, or as N.T. Wright correctly says: “We cannot imagine we are living in a world without redemption; so we cannot argue that the evil of which all are aware is omnipresent and all powerful within the present world and that nothing can be done about it.”⁵⁹²

More specifically in our Latin American context, Ronaldo Munoz, referring to the church in Latin America before the 1960s, criticizes it by stressing “It became clear that the church had not only lost its central focus on the poor and labouring classes, but also tended to serve as an opiate in the face of social injustice.”⁵⁹³ Along that line of thought, G. Gutierrez alludes to Christianity and the church in Latin America, pointing out that “it was a world with

⁵⁹¹ N. T. Right, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 9.

⁵⁹² *Ibid.* 124.

⁵⁹³ Ronaldo Muñoz “The Historical Vocation of the Church” in *Frontiers of the Theology in Latin America*, 155.

its own self-sufficient norms, behaviour patterns, and cultic rituals. Outside that world, beneath it to be more precise, lay the realm of the profane, and of politics if you will.”⁵⁹⁴

For this reason the church in Colombia and Latin America has to resist the current economic order of injustice. The church has to convert itself in a new church, reforming its vision and always using its prophetic voice alongside with other civil organizations. Thus, in Latin America in this day, the affirmation of R. Muñoz remains true; he observed that “among large segments of the faithful, therefore, one could see a great gap between faith and religious practice on the one hand and socio-political responsibilities on the other.”⁵⁹⁵ The unavoidable turn that must emerge urgently is to break with old doctrinal paradigms that resulted from a conservative interpretation and which have paralyzed the church and its members, resulting in an inefficacious church because it has neglected relevant and contextual educational formation of Christians for involvement in the socio-political realm. As a prophetic call to attention regarding character, J.B. Libanio expresses his opinion as this: “faith does not exempt us from risk or from responsibility. It does offer us help in making our decisions.”⁵⁹⁶

Love and Politics

We will talk about the epistemological character of the theological concept of love in a conclusive manner from a political point of view, as H. Assman suggestively asserts, from “the historico-political dimension of Christian commitment.”⁵⁹⁷ We adopt this position because the task of hermeneutics, in a context of violent internal conflicts, must necessitate Christian discernment through ethics to achieve a liberating praxis that has as its task intentionally seeking peace with justice. Thus, as Libanio argues “the structure of

⁵⁹⁴ Gustavo Gutiérrez, “Liberation Praxis and Christian Faith” in *Frontiers of Theology*, 3.

⁵⁹⁵ R. Muñoz, *Frontiers of Theology*, 155.

⁵⁹⁶ Joao Batista Libanio, *Spiritual Discernment and Politics: Guidelines for Religious Communities* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003), 4.

⁵⁹⁷ Hugo Assmann, *Theology for a Nomad Church*, 29.

discernment consists in seeking a concrete mediation that will give life to the ‘general intention’ of seeking the will of God in everything, of being faithful to the ‘Christian universal’ of love of God and of all humankind.”⁵⁹⁸ Such discernment will shed light so that we can evaluate from the stance of faith those political actions that the church is to undertake, so that the proclamation made by the church will reach the status of Good News and bring hope for the poor and the victims of violence.⁵⁹⁹ Therefore, in ontological terms “political action is an effective acceptance of the historical character of human existence.”⁶⁰⁰ This is because as we analyse oppression, poverty and marginalization do not entail only the endurance of hardship and suffering, but, in a more acute way, we are confronted with the problem of death by assassination. In Colombia many of the civil population have been killed in a systematic manner by organized groups, and many are on the brink of dying due to internal conflicts or are threatened with death by forced displacement. Those groups perpetuating all kinds of atrocities can be categorized as belonging to either the right or left wing.

Keeping that in mind, the church, in order to situate itself in a position to offer a significant contribution to a peaceful solution, has to discern and to rediscover the “political” dimension of Christian faith. For this reason we are to retrieve constantly the data that result from the circularity of the three mediations explained in Chapter Three. It is helpful to inform ourselves of a description of the different levels of the political realm. J. Libanio suggests that “there are, therefore, four levels at which the political dimension is understood.”⁶⁰¹ The treatment that Libanio gives the political realm is pacifistic in tone, but firm in its clarity and

⁵⁹⁸ J.B. Libanio, *Spiritual Discernment and Politics*, 31.

⁵⁹⁹ Regarding political actions we agree with the sharp definition presented by H. Assmann in *Theology for a Nomad Church* as he affirms “political action means acting in accordance with the responsibilities revealed by political consciousness, which takes account of the particular implications of the essential political dimension of all human acts.” 32.

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 32-33.

⁶⁰¹ J.B. Libanio, *Spiritual Discernment and Politics*, 46.

in conveying the urgent necessity that politics has to play in order to achieve concrete solutions to concrete problems. He outlines the requirements in this fashion:

(1) party activities, directly oriented to gaining and keeping power; (2) nonpartisan activities with a very direct relationship to the political or which, within a predetermined context, take on a clear-cut political significance – for example, strikes, defence of human rights, defence of the right of assembly, and so forth; (3) an overall philosophy of social life (ideology); (4) the total social reality. At this fourth level, everything is political; every action has its political dimension.⁶⁰²

We ascribe to the “political” as it is defined by M. Taylor, because his position on the “political” corroborates our understanding of the necessity of mediations that will set the basis for the individual socio-political *conversion*.⁶⁰³ Thus, adding further clarification and significance to the discussion, in the tight relationship between the theological and the political, H. Assmann argues that “a theology of the historico-political development of man is only possible (and basically necessary) in so far as it accepts political action as means of transforming society.”⁶⁰⁴ In this case Assmann has resolved the paradox of love as the overcoming of violence, an efficacious love that transforms a reality that has produced hatred, spoliation and death. In the meantime, we can appreciate the decisive role of an ethics of liberation in the sense that the Christian journey of discipleship is constantly and consciously developing the ethical commitment of loving others as the continuing on-going process of conversion: the person converted, always converting. Regarding this political introspection of the options and choices at our disposal, and informed by the dynamic of a conversion that is in motion, “there is an enormous difference between a purely descriptive

⁶⁰² Ibid. 46.

⁶⁰³ “As to its scope, the political is much more than what is usually referred to as politics. It refers to a certain mode of organizing the human practices that structure social interaction and the dynamics of collective action in history, but also, by extension, the interest, beliefs, and ideologies of individual actors. The social practices of the political are not to be identified with governmental policies or state and party functions, typical understanding of ‘politics,’ but more importantly with our very ontological condition in all spheres of human living... The sufferer’s acute pain and struggle is a culmination of a struggle borne by the whole, even if agents of domination have their singularities and responsibility. All this is the weight of the world, and it is the distinctive future of the political, the agonistic political... But the agonism of the political is first and foremost that which is at work in the more general dissemination of practices and powers that mark our very ontological condition.” Mark Lewis Taylor, *The Theological and the Political: On the Weight of the World* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2011), 5-9.

⁶⁰⁴ H. Assmann, *The Nomad Church*, 33.

analysis... and a dialectical-structural analysis, which refers to the causes underlying the mechanism of domination: the choice of analytical instrument itself implies an ethical and political stance.”⁶⁰⁵

This choice, “the political option,” adds another dimension to the discussion which is important to us because it implicitly touches upon the consequences and implication of economic and military hegemonies that, because of “politics” leaning on the geopolitical concept of “national security,” oppress and annihilate people. It also damages the ecology of Third World countries by interfering in internal economic and socio-political affairs through natural resources exploitation, political subordination and military intimidation and invasion. With this in mind, we move to an ethical discussion of a foundational element in the construction of peace with justice, the concept of “mercy”.

The Role of Mercy: Ethical Awareness of the Option for the Victims

The radical impact of the biblical concept of *mercy* helps eliminate the abstraction of the conservative interpretation of love, by concretizing the historical role in the context of internal conflicts through the political application and exercising of the values founded on God’s Word. Destructive patterns that victimize people are to be rejected and changed. Simultaneously we have the responsibility for fostering emancipatory patterns that must be embraced as vital values that would shape our vision and responsibilities as humans, especially in view of the calamities that the world is facing. Thus, the church shall turn to the Scriptures with new eyes on the “political” for direction in this regard. The sentiment of abandonment and the hopelessness of communities and countries living in constant distress, poverty and violence, due to human wrongdoing and even cruelty, manifested in sinful social structures, is something that must be called to our attention. The New Testament offers an ethical value which could be considered as an exemplary practical motive to accompany the

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid. 38-39.

poor of our world; that practical motive is found in the biblical concept of the mercy of God.⁶⁰⁶ This is also of great significance to us because we think that the church is responsible for helping to solidify society, and that can be done through a mission that shapes the very fabric of society, by building structural patterns that hold the living firmly together in compassion within community. J. Sobrino's definition of *eleos* clearly identifies that mercy is an intrinsic fundamental element of love:

By the principle of mercy, we understand here a specific love, which, while standing at the origin of a process, also remains present and active throughout the process, endowing it with a particular direction and shaping the various elements that compose it. We hold that this principle of mercy is the basic principle of the activity of God and Jesus, and therefore ought to be that of the activity of the church.⁶⁰⁷

Thus, in accordance with what we have discussed in Chapter Two, mercy is qualitatively a measurement of a love that in a context of suffering becomes not only an ordinary love, but also an efficacious love. If the church exercises the mercy of God, and if the church evaluates its own relevancy of mission in direct relation to its efficacy in a context of suffering and violence, society will not remain the same structurally, because "mercy is a basic attitude toward the suffering of another."⁶⁰⁸

On the other hand, we are aware that all processes conducted with the intention of constructing a more peaceful and just world will always entails repression. This is unavoidable because of the selfish human impulse not to give up control and to continue benefiting themselves by holding power. But contrarily, "mercy, then, is precisely the mercy that materializes in spite of, and in opposition to, anti-mercy,"⁶⁰⁹ and anti-democratic social structures. Thus in the context of long-suffering and violence, as in the Colombian situation, it becomes more evident that "the stronger the conflict, the more the rich texture of the social

⁶⁰⁶ The Greek word *eleos* in the New Testament implies according to Walter Bauer "mercy, compassion, pity, clemency" in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 250.

⁶⁰⁷ Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (New York: Orbis, 1994), 16.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid. 19.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid. 19.

world disappears and the stark exclusionary polarity emerges around which all thought and practice aligns itself.”⁶¹⁰ Consequently, in order not to respond with counter violence and in retaliation for the oppressors’ damage against the majority of the population, “especially when that suffering is massive, cruel, and unjust,”⁶¹¹ the exercise of mercy ought to be appropriate and to propose in mutual agreement the power of reconciliation to “overcome the polarity of “either us or them.”⁶¹² This is fundamental in all levels of society, as all become aware that to engage in peace building, reconciliation will avoid more violence and bloodshed. Therefore, mercy as a pattern of love plays a decisive role in resolving the socio-political disjunctive of: “either us or them”. Hence, we can affirm that hermeneutics in a Latin American context, in order to be in the service of and for an ethics of liberation, must be committed to guiding the church’s interpretation of the scriptures in order to disentangle the forceful mystery of love “with its existential ineluctability”⁶¹³ and to generate mercy in contexts of prolonged internal conflicts, violence and massive numbers of deaths.

Willingness for Change: As the Efficacy of Knowledge

When peace with justice is vehemently sought, dialogue and interaction are part of looking for agreements that may possibly end in consensus, or in a total rupture of any kind of relationship. On the positive side, if such agreement is attained, it should end in a sealed socio-political covenant. But dialogue is not sufficient if there does not exist *a will* to seek urgent structural changes and inclusion for objectors of conscience. The pragmatic momentum of having a dialogue is to be refined by a *willingness* to transcend the mere act of negotiating. Political negotiation ought to start by achieving a *just end*, and not to politicize for self-interest the means of negotiations. If the church is seriously committed to

⁶¹⁰ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdom Press, 1996), 99.

⁶¹¹ J. Sobrino 21.

⁶¹² M. Volf, 100.

⁶¹³ J. Sobrino, 24.

participating in a significant process for change in favour of the oppressed, it has to keep in mind that its mission requires concrete steps towards the goal that must be achieved.⁶¹⁴ Acknowledgement of the need to make structural changes, is a determinative factor in redirecting the human *will* towards knowledge that exercises compassion with the ‘heart’ in longing for a different condition that distances itself from the belligerence that fosters conflict, in allowing reconciliation to enter the realm of living together harmoniously with *others*.

Faith and Ideology: Consolidating an Economy towards Peace with Fairness

Colombia has exhausted the efforts and limitations of violence/defence without any possible results for stable peace because many of the attempts at peace negotiation have neglected fairness. Christian faith in a context of conflict, war, and inequalities, as is the case in Colombia and other countries in Latin America, has an imperative to begin with, and be sustained through praxis. Such a point of departure, in turn, will determine an ideology that consequently would end in social awareness. Hence, in that dialectic of mutual reciprocity between faith and ideology (ideology as has been explained above by J.L. Segundo), action would be inspired that progressively fosters a solid historical reality that would enable socio-theological mediations in the construction of peace with economic fairness. Thus, faith rooted in truth would provoke ideas which would promote new emerging principles of liberating

⁶¹⁴ An important theory, which can serve as an instrument to evaluate the right direction of a mission engaged in peace with justice and that takes into account a reality that needs transformation is briefly summarized as this: “(1) It purports to give a rational, verifiable, and coherent account of the causes, dynamics, and direction of the process and (2) it offers a corresponding rational, calculated, organized, and verifiable strategy for overcoming the present situation.” José Míguez-Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, 113. Also of great importance is the fact that the church has not only to communicate a message, homilies or theological doctrines in the form of historical Confessions in a language that does not make a social impact, but should use a critical language. In this regard Orlando Fals-Borda gives us an example of the Spanish word “*Vivencia*.” It may be translated roughly as “inner life-experience” or “happening,” but the concept implies a more ample meaning by which a person finds fulfilment for his/her being, not only in the working of the inner self but in the osmotic otherness of nature and the wider society, and by learning not with the brain alone but also with the heart... Vivencias expressed with ‘the Other’ incarnated in the poor are not far from the ‘alterity’ philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas (1974) and Tzvetan Todorov (1982) recently diffused among PAR and intellectual circles in the Third World.” *In Action and Knowledge: Breaking the Monopoly with Participatory Action-Research [PAR]*, ed. Orlando Fals-Borda and Muhammad Anisur Rahman (New York: The Apex Press, 1991), 11.

ethics rooted in communitarian ground, which in turn would have a profound concern for fairness and freedom in all dimensions of human existence. As we briefly mentioned above, and are trying to corroborate in this chapter, faith and ideology, the social - analysis with liberating ethics, and the hermeneutical mediation are seeking to lay a foundation for a Christian action toward peace. A human spirit that has been converted will be the transforming force that will be able to make decisive changes that will promote more just and fair conditions for all, and not only for a minority.

Camilo Torres viewed the economic system as a determining factor for the deplorable condition of the poor in Colombia. The establishment had failed by ignoring the *condition* manifested by the poor masses. From his ideological perspective, Camilo Torres viewed the economic disparity in Colombia which had to be corrected in order to maintain national sovereignty against foreign economic intervention and domination. Thus, in this regard, Camilo Torres, being aware of the beginning of economic globalization says, “For example, employment could be increased by investing the capital now leaving Colombia in dollars in the creation of new job opportunities here in the country”.⁶¹⁵ Like any ‘prophet’ who knows how to read the signs of time, Camilo Torres had the perspicacity and vision to perceive the neo-liberal winds blowing with damaging impetus toward Latin American soil. He also saw that the escape of wealth (resources) and capital which had been produced by the hard labour of the majority, instead of favouring the poor, had intensified poverty by producing unemployment.

This economic situation became an ideological awareness of the external influence of rich countries’ economic impositions upon undeveloped countries. Camilo Torres’ preoccupation was to draw attention to the reality that if it were not appropriately attended to, it would destabilize the sovereignty of an undeveloped country, by submitting it

⁶¹⁵ Camilo Torres, *Revolutionary Priest*, 367.

economically to chronic dependency and exploitation, in other words, the re-emergence of colonialism. Then, in Colombia, with our ideological awareness and in a context of domination by minority and of external subjugation, we Christians must understand that “We can only have an authentic faith, in other words, when we have committed ourselves to an authentic struggle that opens our eyes to the new possibilities and meanings of God’s word.”⁶¹⁶ Therefore, as Camilo Torres suggested, from this perspective we see faith and ideology as playing an important role in our theological praxis both in his time and for us in our present situation.

Hence, if we see our brothers and sisters unemployed, Christian faith should sustain our love in an efficacious way such that we will challenge unjust ideologies (those ideologies which are propaganda of the unfair economic system) that ignore the reality of the poor. Faith also, paradoxically, alludes to embracing fair and just ideologies, a knowledge of reality that has a reason to be, which is to know the truth, given the fact that “without ideologies faith is as dead as a doornail”⁶¹⁷ Then, because the unjust economic system may blind our eyes (knowledge of reality) to the misery and hardships of our neighbours, the reading of the gospel should open our eyes. Thus “Christians cannot evade the necessity of inserting something to fill the void between their faith and their options in history. In short, they cannot avoid the risk of ideologies.”⁶¹⁸

The ideology from Segundo’s perspective is carrying on by ‘means’ as Camilo Torres already suggested. Nevertheless, since Camilo Torres’ life was very short (37 years old when he was killed), Segundo had the opportunity to develop further those compatible ideological understandings of social reality. Thus, Segundo warns us to be vigilant in our faith and ideologies, and thus keep them as living potentialities, because the possibility exists that they will grow weaker if we do not constantly renew them. “Our potential responses are limited by

⁶¹⁶ J.L. Segundo, *The liberation of Theology*, 97.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid. 121

⁶¹⁸ Ibid. 109.

our situation and our historical potentialities, so they will always be partial in one way or another.”⁶¹⁹ Thus the work of maintaining the healthy connection of love in the juncture of faith and ideology in an unjust economy is always done by persevering in refreshing new political alternatives and socio-theological options. Paraphrasing James, we can affirm that Christian’s ‘faith without a fair economic option is dead’, since the gospel calls us, in obedience, to possibilities of choosing the true road of love and rejecting the false road of ideological blindness. Again, in times of dark crisis and economic disparities we have to go back to the gospel, which reminds us to love our neighbour. Theologically speaking, the light of Christ is semantically ideological, because it helps us to see clearly the best alternative and option in a context of oppression. The language and semantic range of the teaching of Jesus speak to the poor and oppressed, who were the focus of his own mission. We must remain with our “eyes fixed in Christ the author of faith”. This way, our faith will always equip the church to make a distinction between present alternatives and options at our disposal to manifest liberative indignation when we confront disparities in our current economic world. We agree that “The theology of liberation is strong because it has known how to hear the word of God in the cry of the oppressed.”⁶²⁰ The interpretation of the Scriptures, with its awareness of the suffering of the poor, ties with a strong knot our faith with an ideology that seeks liberating alternatives in favour of the oppressed.

Ethical Implications for a Public Pedagogy for Peace: To Seek Justice is to Opt for the Victims

On the first hand, an important question will situate us in the ethical implication of opting for the poor as victims: why does it follow that we will oppress others without God? The answer is quite clear: “that recognition of the innocence of the victims and of the sacrificial character of the system that victimizes them leads us to assume together the

⁶¹⁹ Ibid. 125.

⁶²⁰ Pablo Richard, *Mysterium Liberationis*, 153.

commitment of solidarity toward the victims who are around us and throughout the world,”⁶²¹ even if the entire world is atheistic.

Sung also affirms that,

those hermeneutical principles that orient my reflection – the critic of idolatry, the hope that injustice cannot be the last world, and the defence of the innocence of the victim, which leads us to solidarity – are “reasonable” principles that do not need to be founded and justified by theology and do not demand the support of a religious confession.⁶²²

In a very sharp warning J. M. Sung boldly states that

“this is what often happens when we forget that the sacraments, religious rituals and the Church are never pure and full manifestations of God, when we forget that the Church or our social project for the poor are not the Kingdom of God, and therefore cannot be absolutized, but rather always criticized and ‘reformed’”.⁶²³

On the second hand, from a religious perspective, if our new economic order and globalization motivates society to behave as if God has died, such sentiment is the annihilation of liberating ethical patterns and its importance of living with equality and fairness. Hence, “the experience of idolatry, especially in situations of oppression, appears as a great historical obstacle to the revelation of God and faith in him”.⁶²⁴ This way, idolatry⁶²⁵ proposes the absence of the God of life, and of the historical force of a living God that sustains and defends communitarian values such as hope, love, peace, and justice. If that is

⁶²¹ Jung Mo Sung, *The Subject, Capitalism, and Religion: Horizons of Hope in Complex Societies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 7.

⁶²² Ibid. 7.

⁶²³ Jung Mo Sung, *Desire, Market and Religion* (London: SCM Press, 2007), 96.

⁶²⁴ Pablo Richard, “Introduction” in *The Idols of Death and the God of Life*, 24.

⁶²⁵ Important to note in this regard of idolatry the great analysis made by F. Hinkelammert, “The Economic Roots of Idolatry” as he affirms “except in the view of entrepreneurial metaphysics itself, it is quite clear that such metaphysics is idolatry, in the very sense in which this term is used in biblical tradition. Marx calls it fetishism. It is the subjugation of the human being and of human life to a product of human labor, with the consequent destruction of the human being per se through the relationship that is established with an idol. Every idol is, in this respect, a Moloch that devours the human being. The idol is a “god” associated with oppression... The idol of entrepreneurial metaphysics is invisible, distinguishing it from the biblical idol, which is made of elements of concrete nature, and is therefore visible. It is a concrete image. In its form as an unintentional product of human interaction, the entrepreneurial idol is a fetish.... This fetish must be opposed by the biblical criticism of idolatry and the discernment of gods. In the biblical tradition, the true God is the one whose will is that the concrete human being, with concrete needs, be the center of society and of history. In competing with the human being into a depraved being, whose misery is the foil of God’s grandeur. The biblical God, on the other hand, lives where society and history revolve around the concrete human being and the fulfillment of human needs”. Ibid, 191-192.

the case, there will not be any moral and ethical authority for accountability. Humans become god. That is the case with the concept of ‘empire’.

“Empire is a particular configuration of power and certain political, military, and civil organizations, as well as government structures. Those powers that were destined to control one another, to sustain themselves in tension, and to limit their reach through oppositions and confrontations, are now co-opted by the same project or understanding of power”.⁶²⁶

Then, in this ideology, human power and knowledge take over, replacing God and making use of scientific advancement as the authoritarian standard to decide upon structural social systems maintaining an economy that will result in guaranteeing the perpetuation of poverty and suffering without remorse. Thus the “globalization as expansion of top-down power, erasure of difference, and the elimination of alternatives is ultimately about empire – that is, about the ever-greater control of the world and of our lives”.⁶²⁷

A state with an economy and hegemonic attitudes, and tendencies to oppress others, based on an economy that is sustained by the profit from arms and weaponry production, won’t care for the consequences: the recurring production of victims. If God has died, this will pave the way for anybody to assume that it is acceptable for humans to die violently, arguing wrongly with the logic that weaponry is created to be used against humans. For this reason

in its unwelcome presence, in its impossible disguise, in the deaths and crosses painted on the wall of shame, the spirit of the empire is revealed, and in the face of this spirit of death, from the reserve of anti-hegemonic feeling of the people, the spirit of life is expressed.⁶²⁸

The logic of the ‘spirit of life’ opposes the imperial market and the sale of weapons. Thus, the ethical values of liberation affirm that violence and death shall not be an option for resolving human problems.

⁶²⁶ Nestor Miguez et. al., *Beyond the Spirit of Empire: Theology and Politics in a New Key* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 5.

⁶²⁷ Joerg Rieger, *Globalization and Theology*, 58.

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.* 22.

An ethics of liberation as an integral part of the mission of the church in the promotion of a stable peaceful condition has to keep in perspective the effect of social disintegration. This is due to the long psychological recovery of a communitarian trust that a society has to undertake because of post-traumatic episodes of violent conflict; “Of particular concern is genocide, or massive category killing, across the fault-lines in human society: nature (between humans and their environment), gender, generation, race, class, exclusion, nation, state.”⁶²⁹ Ethics will help to maintain a social equilibrium, and simultaneously should make corrections and point out to the state its “historical insufficiency in the treatment of violent conflicts and suggest a new approach to the problem of conflict-violence-peace.”⁶³⁰ Also, the ethical commitment to strengthen the political dimension of faith as praxis of liberation, shall call for new ways of doing relevant mission especially when the inefficacious theology of the church has resulted in neglecting the Christian teaching about peace with justice. The church has to become theologically informed about how to be a church in a context of conflict. Thus “in our pedagogy of peace, to the daily and structural violence we seek ethical, historical and socioeconomics’ answers according to its [historical] causes.”⁶³¹

The new approach to peace building⁶³² ought to integrate, in a fresh manner, a proclamation that will reflect an intentional language of “reconciliatory emancipation.”⁶³³

⁶²⁹ Johan Galtung, xi.

⁶³⁰ Luis Alberto Torres, “Construcción de Conocimiento” in *Pacicultura*, 108. “una insuficiencia histórica en el tratamiento de los conflictos violentos y sugieren un abordaje nuevo de la problemática conflicto-violencia-paz.”

⁶³¹ Ibid. 109. “en nuestra pedagogía de paz, a la violencia estructural y cotidiana le buscamos respuestas éticas, históricas y socioeconómicas, acordes con sus causas.”

⁶³² This concept is well defined by John Paul Lederach as he affirms that “peace building is understood as a comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates, and sustains the fully array of processes, approaches, and stages needed to transform conflict toward more sustainable, peaceful relationships.” In *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington, D.C. United States Institute of Peace Press, Sixth printing 2004), 20. For other important analyses of “peace building” in the context of Colombia see the work of Angelika Rettberg “Construcción de paz en Colombia: context y balance,” 3-50. In *Construcción de Paz en Colombia*; Natalia Springer, *Negociar la paz o hacer justicia?* (Bogotá: Aguilar, 2010), 13-73; Virginia M. Bouvier, ed. *Colombia: Building Peace in a Time of War* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2009).

⁶³³ Mark Lewis Taylor, *Religion, Politics, and the Christian Right: Post-9/11 Powers and American Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 160. Our view is that the church must open its doors to generate the formation of civil society groups to hold public discussion with the idea of supporting major political groups

This for us is the dynamic equivalent of loving our neighbour with efficacy and loving the enemy with restrictive suspicion. Thus, the emancipatory language will rule out the false sentiment of not applying judicial law to perpetrators of human rights violations, and the old habit of covering up injustice in the shadows of oblivion and impunity. Also the church has to adopt a teaching attitude of reconciliation. Thus, any praxis toward liberation will be a firm step ahead of any promulgation or State's legislation, and hence the church's involvement won't be to abrogate any judicial law but instead will illuminate the path for the application of justice. This way, we avoid the temptation of falling into a state of innocent impunity, given the fact that "Christians have often used their pleas for love and reconciliation to subvert demands for justice and liberation."⁶³⁴

Reconciliation as a Paradigm for Mission in Context of Violent Conflicts

The Scriptures lead the church to have a vision for people, especially with respect to living together in community, thus "Christian life, considered as the construction of the Reign of God, is not passive conformism, rather active transformation of society in order to reduce its violence."⁶³⁵ A pertinent and relevant mission leads us to respond to the questions above by turning to the Christian paradigm of reconciliation as the radical option of God in "reconciling the world in Christ." The church ought to be aware that its mission does not take the form of forcing axiomatic obligations upon society, that its answer is a fixed edict that will fit all situations of violent conflicts. Rather the church diligently seeks to foster

that work unconditionally in the promotion and sustainability of justice and equality to achieve emancipation. In this regard, Professor Taylor explains that "with this phrase, the gospel is first and foremost one of emancipation, or liberation, in the sense of announcing and enacting freedom-making movement... By 'emancipation' I mean a practical effort and participation in movements of liberation *from* every kind of oppressive dynamic and also *to*, or *into*, structured communities that sustain, criticize, reformulate, and develop practices and theories of liberation. Liberation, in this sense, is especially marked by its capacity and willingness to challenge imperial rule, because that kind of rule entails a comprehensive attempt to subordinate and oppress. The liberating work can take the form of artistic imagery, public demonstration and organizing, as well as intellectual critique." Ibid. 161.

⁶³⁴ Mark Lewis Taylor, *Religion*, 163.

⁶³⁵ Mario Roberto Solarte Rodríguez, "Guerra justa y Resistencia noviolenta: elementos para una narrativa teológica de la violencia y la noviolencia" *Theologica Xaveriana* – Vol. 59 No. 167 (2009): 221. "La vida cristiana, considerada como construcción del Reinado de Dios, no es conformismo pasivo, sino transformación activa de la sociedad en orden a reducir su violencia" 221.

dialogical encounter with other groups in society to learn and build concrete steps together towards non-violent movements. A great contribution of the church is to show the world the emancipatory force of reconciliation, especially when violence has been an easy option of human beings when trying to resolve conflict and differences. Thus, concerning peace building, Solarte Rodriguez suggests “from that perspective, the central political issue of Christian life is not if violence is acceptable or justifiable, or in what conditions, rather how to live faithfully the Gospel of peace in a violent world.”⁶³⁶ Faithfulness is the paradoxical possibility that we must renounce the antagonistic forces of hatred and violence by proposing that reconciliation is a conviction that the condition of “having an enemy” can be eliminated by converting to love others. One possible way to acknowledge our propensities to reject, exclude, and oppress others is to grasp that “reconciliation as a locus creates a space for encounter by the parties, a place where the diverse but connected energies and concerns driving the conflict can meet, including the paradoxes of truth and mercy, justice and peace.”⁶³⁷

Part of reconciliation is learning to walk alongside the victims of different communities, to elaborate a process which would include: recording narratives of recovering dignity and rendering an account from truth by the historical memory of the victims. This is vital in order to achieve the capacity to love the enemy, because to love the enemy is not an overnight process of mental suppression or autosuggestion. For that reason, it is difficult to understand forgiveness, due to the fact that the act of reconciliation is not a sign of cowardliness or weakness, rather a brave step to radically transcending the past with the radical objective of achieving social transformation.

⁶³⁶ Ibid. 221. “De este modo, la cuestión política central de la vida cristiana no es si la violencia es aceptable o justificable, o en qué condiciones, sino como vivir fieles al Evangelio de la paz en un mundo violento.”

⁶³⁷ John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace*, 35. “Reconciliation as a concept and a praxis endeavours to reframe the conflict so that the parties are no longer preoccupied with focusing on the issues in a direct, cognitive manner. Its primary goal and key contribution is to seek innovative ways to create a time and place, within various levels of the affected population, to address, integrate, and embrace the painful past and the necessary shared future as a means of dealing with the present.” Ibid, 35.

Summary

In the current situation of generalised oppression which has created internal conflicts in Colombia “to work for peace is to work against violence”⁶³⁸, especially the violence that has been institutionalized by the Colombian state and the owners of the means of production. This great task and enormous challenge calls the church to redefine the epistemologies of hermeneutics which will establish the ground for theological pronouncements in a time of deep crisis. In addition it calls the church to a new configuration of its structures that should be radically inclusive, so this reconfiguration may forcefully rupture the conservative tradition rooted in a malfunctioning legal system in which impunity has become a permanent habit.⁶³⁹ Unfortunately, the church in Latin America has been directly or indirectly an instrument of violence, which was manifested in its support of oppressive regimes. The evaluation and implementation of its mission ought to seek a reconversion that will be reflected best in a new way of being an efficacious church for this postmodern era. Both the Roman and the Protestant churches must consider their fundamental activities post-rupture of the old paradigms, in order to be relevant in this time of history.⁶⁴⁰

Inspired by the force of efficacious love, and framed by the human impulse for survival in response to the pressing and vicious circularity of permanent conflict and the anguish that results from living in that tension, humans should be moved to seek peace and to

⁶³⁸ Johan Galtung, *Searching for Peace: The Road to Transcend* (London, Sterling, Virginia: Pluto Press, 2002), xi.

⁶³⁹ In accordance with our own analysis we agree with the affirmation that “The Colombian history is a squanderer in accepting the abstraction of material justice, which in part explains the long trajectories of impunity that have reigned in our Republican life and has not been conducive to peace, rather creating a circle of injustice, vengeance and impunity, that is to say with coldness and touching the barbaric reality, forgiveness and oblivion.” “La Historia Colombiana es derrochadora en aceptar la abstracción de la justicia material, lo que puede explicar en partes las largas trayectorias de impunidad que ha reinado en nuestra vida Republicana y no ha conducido a la paz, sino en convertirse en círculo de injusticia, venganza e impunidad, o por decirlos fríamente y tocando la realidad barbarie, perdón, y olvido.” Emiro Vieda Silva, “Perdón y Olvido, o Justicia y Paz” in *Pacicultura*, 171.

⁶⁴⁰ If we argue that the task of seeking and building peace is a liberating force that has to achieve justice, then we can concur with the idea that “to work for peace is to build liberation, wellness in a world with peace with nature, between genders, generations and races, where the excluded are included but not by force, and where classes, nations and states serve neither direct, structural nor cultural violence.” Galtung, *Seeking Peace*, xi.

stop the hostilities, by creating an organic environment for reconciliation. We humans were not designed to live constantly in violent conflict with others, but life was intended to be lived in peace in community. Life in permanent conflict and restlessness will lose the other dimension of genuine communal encounter and joy in the act of living together harmoniously. Thus, having a utopic expectation, as such, will confer upon the new theological message the *efficacy* of the qualification of a Christian praxis for peace building. The church then will expose itself to new ventures, “so the qualifier ‘reconciliatory’ holds the liberating politics of the gospel open to a multiplicity of different sites of awareness and action: aesthetic, psychological, personal/individual, social, mystical/meditative.”⁶⁴¹ Regarding the millions of people displaced by violence and all kind of disasters in Colombia and in other parts of the world, we still hear the echo of the psalmist that questioned the reality about whether it would be possible to “sing a song of Yahweh on alien soil?”⁶⁴² This is the land of the enemy, because to sing with a wounded and fragile memory is the equivalent of loving the enemy in a dialectic tension that questions why reconciliation needs to be an option and not a retaliatory reaction.

For this reason, when constructing peace with justice in a poor and violent country, we argue that peace is not a final action, but an intermediate stage.⁶⁴³ After attaining that intermediate stage of peace, which at that point will be the cessation of internal conflict and violence, it is necessary to keep working to execute structural transformation until the goal of peace with *justice* is achieved. Because we must understand that “the construction of peace is a multifaceted effort and of long range that requires the coherent commitment of diverse actors, and that integrates activities such as political, humanitarian, of security and

⁶⁴¹ Mark Lewis Taylor, *Religion*, 162.

⁶⁴² Psalm 137:4 (The New Jerusalem Bible)

⁶⁴³ By intermediate stage we suggest a fundamental part of a process that will have as a final objective not only peace with justice that will allow people to obtain and to enjoy freedom. Peace with justice then, is the liberative act that is going to always be sustained by a socio-economic system that guarantees the absence of historical patterns of oppression and exclusion.

development.”⁶⁴⁴ It follows then, that the church will remain constantly vigilant through public advocacy as an external activity, a movement that generates energy, being aware that “external practices serve as a means of attaining love, and they should in turn be motivated by love.”⁶⁴⁵ In that way the church will remain relevant and actively participating in democratic processes, always faithful to keeping alive its prophetic voice in denouncing the perpetuation of authoritarian powers, and renewing itself by announcing the preferential option for the poor.

⁶⁴⁴ Judy Cheng-Hopkins, “prologo” in *Construcción de paz en Colombia*. Angelika Rettberg, Copiladora (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, Ediciones Uniandes, 2012), xxiii. from the original in Spanish: “la construcción de paz es un esfuerzo multifacético y de largo plazo que requiere el compromiso coherente de diversos actores y que integra actividades políticas, humanitarias, de seguridad y de desarrollo.”

⁶⁴⁵ Camilo Torres, *Revolutionary Priest*, 248.

CONCLUSIONS

Implications of Camilo Torres' ideas for a New Colombia: Liberating Process of what Nature?

Option for Efficacious Love: The Ethical Model for a Just Society Post-Conflict

The world has witnessed different kinds of processes used to change an unjust system in history. Some of those processes have involved pacifistic or violent revolutions. Not all revolutions have to be violent, but a revolution has to contain a genuine understanding of a concrete process of true liberation in favour of the oppressed. Camilo Torres suggested a courageous proposal to the Colombian oligarchy, saying “the revolution can be peaceful if the minorities do not make a violent resistance.”⁶⁴⁶ Historically oppressive systems (for instance under Pharaoh) create violent resistance. Camilo Torres' idea in proposing a prerequisite was based on a pacifistic approach to negotiation without any kind of violent confrontation. This was a socio-hermeneutical declaration that offered an opportunity to those in charge of the government to democratize power. Such a condition is eminent and emerges from the need of the oppressed to challenge the oppressor, who has a *false consciousness*. The courage of conditioning is the power of an awakened consciousness. But the conditioning is obviously dualistic in character. We see Jesus' conditioning words, “If you're not with me, you're against me.”⁶⁴⁷ Time gives a mediating transitional opportunity for the conversion of the oppressor to enable participation in the transformation of unjust structures by not violently resisting. When Jesus included in the beatitudes, “blessed are the peacemakers” he was talking from the perspective of the last efforts of that sensitive stage of time of negotiation. H. Assmann proposes that a true revolution will legitimately emerge “from within this ‘Christian’ conditioning, of a positive dialectics of the faith that, in biblical

⁶⁴⁶ F. Houtart, *El sueño de Camilo*, 93.

⁶⁴⁷ Luke 11:23 (The Kingdom New Testament)

terms, is real only when it finds materialization in acts of love and shimmerings of hope.”⁶⁴⁸ Also Ché Guevara, a revolutionary icon in Latin America, once suggested “let me tell you, taking the risk of being ridiculous, that the true revolutionary has been guided by great sentiments of love.”⁶⁴⁹ From a Christian perspective we propose the argument that a process of liberation can be achieved after obtaining communitarian consciousness as result of faith, through love, bearing in mind the condition of the poor and their social struggle. For this reason “we have to remember Camilo Torres as a Christian and modern prophet. It has been said, that Camilo changed the cross for the rifle. That is false. The heritage of Camilo Torres is not the rifle, but the cross, instrument and symbol of the love of Jesus until death.”⁶⁵⁰

Then, it follows since we are proposing a process of liberation as the awakening of consciousness (seeing critically) that the denunciation of injustice is a faithful proclamation of the good news of the gospel. Hence, from this perspective, as H. Assmann argues, “It will be necessary to assess the epistemological strength of all infrastructural practices in which love and hope become effective for human beings, in the activation of religious resources of a believing people.”⁶⁵¹ The belief of committed Christians, in a context of injustice, will always prompt the question of what kind of process (or revolution) has to be carried out to change the social conditions of poverty, and how the Spirit of God would sustain that socio-political mission of the church. What follows is “That intrinsically revolutionary impulse stems from the political essence of the practice of struggle for liberation that has materialized through such religious self-expression.”⁶⁵² And the best self-expression of religious belief is love which is lived and experienced pacifically in all spheres of oppressed society. That is what John had in mind when he suggests that we love our brothers and sisters whom we have seen,

⁶⁴⁸ Hugo Assmann, “The Faith of the Poor in Their Struggle with Idols” in *The Idols of Death and the God of Life: a theology*, 199.

⁶⁴⁹ Camilo Torres, *El amor eficaz*, et al. Claudia Korol, (Buenos Aires: América Libre, 2010), 13.

⁶⁵⁰ Camilo Torres, *Mensajes visionarios*, 45.

⁶⁵¹ Hugo Assmann, *The Idols of Death and the God of Life*, 200.

⁶⁵² *Ibid.* 200.

and then we go and love God. Love has the precondition of seeing the current reality of oppression, and faith desires things not yet seen because those things are possible in the near future, and are perceived as utopian promises of God, the 'things hoped for'. Camilo Torres put it like this "The revolution, therefore, is the way of achieving a government that gives food to the hungry, that clothes the naked, that teaches those who are illiterate, that carry out charity, of love for our neighbour, not for only few but for the majority of our neighbours".⁶⁵³ The quantitative self-expression of love is for the majority, the masses, that when they are the object of love respond with expectation that something new has to happen for them to participate in the construction of their own history and destiny. Here love has penetrated consciousness as the conversion from believing to acting. Conversion at this stage can be defined as making a new and different turn of consciousness, which then can be called the revolutionary surplus of love.

Nevertheless what do we do when the minorities do not want change and liberation? Does pacifism have a limit, or patience, while the oppressed are suffering, starving and dying? H. Assmann affirms that "What there is, and will continue to be, is a preoccupation with theoretical reflections of the fact of revolution in practice for liberating Christian faith".⁶⁵⁴ Love seeks truth, and for this reason we cannot suppress the social consciousness in loving freely and with a sense of urgency. Ideally the believer would achieve the mind of Christ, who loves unconditionally, but because humans cannot love unconditionally, they can aspire to love committedly, which would be the highest level of social consciousness. The next step at this level is the giving of one's life for the sake of others. That is the revolutionary mind. This way was understood by Camilo Torres because he arrived at the following statement "For this reason revolution is not only permissible but obligatory for

⁶⁵³ Camilo Torres, *Cruz de luz*, (Bogotá: Fica, colección el pez en la red. 2006), 174-175.

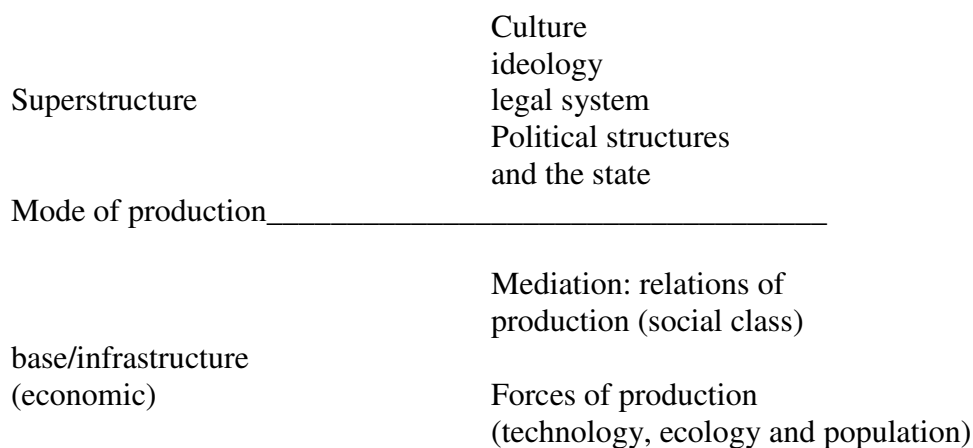
⁶⁵⁴ Hugo Assmann, *Nomad Church*, 90.

Christians that see it as the only efficacious and ample way to accomplish love for all.”⁶⁵⁵

What has changed from the 20th century to the present is not the level of consciousness, but the type of revolution. We ask ourselves of what kind of revolution will be efficacious nowadays in a context of oppression and poverty? And in what way do we approach our obligation as Christians? Does the church have any authority to determine what is socially obligatory?

Revolution has two determining factors: (1) The acknowledgement of time running out for an economic structure that needs to be changed and (2) political consciousness as the primary power that the oppressed possess. Without it, no kind of revolution will ever occur in a given oppressive reality.

Roland Boer suggests the following diagram to illustrate reality⁶⁵⁶:



The above questions, keeping in mind the diagram, will take us to the next point.

Efficacious Means

In responding to the above questions we are not seeking to imitate Camilo Torres' actions of opting for a violent revolution, as violence has not resolved the problems, chaos and deterioration of the country. Rather we ought to be inspired by his sociological and hermeneutical thinking. Also, we want to grasp something deeper and radical as the

⁶⁵⁵ Camilo Torres, *El amor eficaz*, 46.

⁶⁵⁶ Roland Boer “Deutero-Isaiah: historical materialism and biblical theology” 6, 2 *Biblical Interpretation: a journal of contemporary approaches*. (1998): 186.

subversion of an efficacious love, which properly conducted as a process in a pacific mode, can guide society to at least a utopia for liberation. One of our aims is to understand the level of consciousness that took Camilo Torres to love his/her neighbour such that he committed his life first in academic settings, promoting social justice, as a social activist and ultimately by risking his own life for the sake and justice of all. His social consciousness was determined by both: seeing oppression and grasping the message of the gospel with reference to loving the neighbour efficaciously. Then, the question seems to be true: “Could it be that God will not define divine love in ways that suit us, in words and actions that appeal to our native instinct?”⁶⁵⁷ This question can help us to move from achieving social consciousness to the realm of praxis, especially when a Christian in a context of oppression does not see any other ways possible to change an oppressive system.

In Camilo Torres’ time, the 1960s, the only way a great number of people, especially the young, could perceive the ultimate instance of love was to take up arms to overthrow the establishment. In this way that kind of political instinct is the answer to the above question. We are making it clear that Latin American theology proposes a concrete process toward liberation where revolution has a contextual place and justification. But it is not the ultimate goal; neither do all situations have to be resolved through violent revolution. Recently, we have witnessed the cases of Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador, where democratic process was achieved through popular change. “So the answer to the question of whether the theology of liberation is part of the theology of revolution really depends on how the latter is understood”.⁶⁵⁸ To which Assmann himself responds against any abstract theorization of the theme thus: “but if as a broader and at the same time more definite concern with the revolutionary process, then undoubtedly it is”.⁶⁵⁹ Love for our neighbour is the major

⁶⁵⁷ Charles L. Bartow, “The Love God Does” *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, Volume XIV, Number 2, (1993): 166. 165-169.

⁶⁵⁸ Hugo Assmann, *Theology for a Nomad Church*, 91.

⁶⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 91.

realization of Christian consciousness. From our perspective we encourage a pacifistic, not violent, revolution that can be carried out by the transformative articulation of a prophetic voice through the church as a social institution. Obviously, we support the concept of the political mission of the church in society. “In other words, the theology of liberation seeks to be critical reflection on revolutionary action in both its overall aspects and its detailed circumstances, but is not interested in discussing revolution as an abstract entity”.⁶⁶⁰ In our interpretation of Camilo Torres’ social analysis, he already had perceived that the rich in Colombia did not want to distribute the wealth of the country in more equal ways. His interpretation of love called for mediation, (using Clodovis Boff’s term which comes from the expression ‘means’) and that mediation was achievable through ‘efficacious means’. Camilo Torres argued “Those means will be not sought by the privileged minorities who hold power, because such efficacious means generally force the minorities to sacrifice their privileges”.⁶⁶¹ The exercise of Camilo Torres’s hermeneutics and ethics within the political realm made him see that the biblical concept of love intrinsically has an element of confronting injustice. Precisely in this respect we agree with K. Lebacqz as she affirms that “because justice emerges out of protest against injustice, justice is not so much a state of being as a struggle and constant process.”⁶⁶² This process will not necessarily have to end with violent revolution, but with an on-going struggle nurtured by efficacious means in favour of the oppressed.

Camilo Torres dedicated with great intensity, more than 10 years to his political struggle to seek justice, and only four months fighting as a member of the ELN guerrilla group. In our understanding, Camilo Torres realized the socio-economic disparity of the establishment in two ways: 1) the negation of the reality of the poor from the viewpoint of the rich and 2) the false justification of the division of labour and unfair wealth distribution by

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid. 92.

⁶⁶¹ C. Torres, *Camilo: Mensajes visionarios*, 33.

⁶⁶² Karen Lebacqz, “Implications for a Theory of Justice” in *From Christ to the World*, 255.

the rich minorities. This obviously is the core of injustice. For this reason, the efficacious means is the political process working towards achieving justice for the majority, and in this regard the affirmation of Lebacqz in which she says “It is the process of correcting what is unjust”⁶⁶³ is politically appropriate. Nevertheless her affirmation that “it is the process of providing new beginnings, not an ideal state of distribution”⁶⁶⁴ though is incomplete. If we negate the utopian ideal state of distribution we become short of energy to love efficaciously and negate the power of promoting the end of social-class division and economic inequality, very fundamental in a process moving toward justice and ultimately toward obtaining liberation and freedom. Apparently Lebacqz corrects herself by affirming “I assume that injustices feed each other, and that “jubilee” requires both political emancipation and economic liberation”.⁶⁶⁵ Lebacqz’s concept of justice is programmatic, based in the concept of ‘jubilee’; for her “the jubilee is a vision of new beginnings, but it is a cyclical vision implying the need for a new jubilee.”⁶⁶⁶ And then she broadens the concept after affirming that ‘justice is restorative’ by emphasizing “what is restored is new socio political beginning (jubilee), new attitudes of community (jubilation), and new life (the logic is that the people may live).”⁶⁶⁷ We consider Lebacqz’s view of justice as having relevance for nowadays, and that in principle it has similarities to Camilo’s political tactic of stripping off the unjust system and denouncing both the hypocrisy of the church and the injustice of the government, before proposing a programmatic ‘*plataforma*’ (platform) to correct such injustice.

It is for this reason, that it is in the formulation of Camilo Torres ‘efficacious means’ that the Christian political attitude resides to become involved in the process toward liberation. We realize that adopting ‘efficacious means’ is a process that by nature is revelatory of all kinds of injustice, and in pointing out wrong-doing, it is not a smooth

⁶⁶³ Ibid. 255.

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid. 255.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid. 258.

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid. 256.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid. 256.

process. Rather it is psychologically intensive, spiritually draining, and physically risky and costly. Hence, while we like to keep in mind that denouncing a whole system is swimming all the time against the tide, love must be the strength. In all this, J.L. Segundo affirms “For oppression usually does not reveal itself in barefaced fashion; it hides and hallows itself behind ideologies that obscure what is really happening in concrete human reality”.⁶⁶⁸ The irruption of Camilo Torres, in a political upheaval, was not welcomed by the Colombian oligarchy; theologically speaking his appearance became a disruptive epiphany for both of them, the church and the establishment.

Epiphany is Sacrificial

Efficacious love demands true means or, more precisely, just means that will transform what is ethically Christian into a praxis that demands accountability and fairness. Also the politicization of the term ‘love’ by Camilo Torres is paradoxically theologized by him using the term ‘sacrifice’. It is important to note that the term sacrifice is well rediscovered by Camilo Torres from the perspective of exercising subversion to change the context of oppression. Making a sacrifice can mean working hard against evil people that ignore the plunder of the poor, that repress and even kill to maintain their interests. The term sacrifice had a crucial theological and political impact in Camilo Torres’ life, and is a term that is rooted in his Christian beliefs. This is another aspect of what we would call the sacrificial juncture of love, rather than terrorist retaliation. In achieving Christ’s mind, committed Christians sacrifice their lives for true change and justice, while those who ignore the mind of Christ do not sacrifice their privileges. Sacrificial love becomes a kind of political love, since sociologically understood it has a strong ideological configuration. It becomes a utopian projection more on the side of the eschatological realization of the

⁶⁶⁸ Juan Luis Segundo. *The liberation of theology*, 27.

kingdom of God, but analogically rooted in the ‘sacrifice’ of Christ on the cross, killed by the oppressive Roman Empire.

The level of social consciousness in Christ is paradigmatic in essence, thus worthy of imitation. This for us seems to be the epistemic vertebra of Camilo Torres’ theological structure that led him to promote social justice and action. Further, he understood, based on his Christian conviction, that “the formal principle of justice is therefore not to give to each what is due but to correct injustices.”⁶⁶⁹

Is Efficacious Love Socio-Politically Compatible with Communitarian Reconciliation?

A theological-political content and signification of efficacious love was given by Camilo Torres, and a socio-political motive of human love was expressed in secular terms by Ché Guevara.⁶⁷⁰ Both were revolutionaries in an effervescent time in Latin America. They approached, and turned human sentiment towards the poor and the oppressed with sincere, compassionate hearts and souls, not accepting an unequal historical reality, and committed to transforming it. When Camilo Torres developed the theological-political concept of “efficacious love” he thought about it from the Christian perspective of giving our lives through revolution, as the ultimate call of a committed Christian regarding the poor majorities; He said “I believe that I have given myself to the revolution for my neighbour.”⁶⁷¹

The answer to our question is determined by different socio-political factors and historical changes of reality. Camilo Torres opted for revolution because his own historical

⁶⁶⁹ Karen Lebacqz, “Implications” 254.

⁶⁷⁰ In a rhetorical question influenced by his historical time of profound conviction of the necessity for liberation by means of armed revolution, Ché Guevara said: “Why is a guerrilla combative? The guerrilla man [woman] is a social reformer. He [she] takes up arms in raging protest against the social system that holds its disarmed brothers [sisters] in ignominy and misery. He [she] attacks the particular conditions of the established order in a given moment and dedicates him[herself] to break the molds of that order with all the vigor that circumstances permits. Cited by Luis Carlos Muñoz Sarmiento “Camilo Torres, Sacerdote Revolucionario” in *Camilo Torres: Cruz de Luz*, 29. The quotation in Spanish: “Por qué combate el guerrillero? El guerrillero es un reformador social. El guerrillero toma las armas en furiosa protesta contra el sistema social que mantiene a sus hermanos desarmados en el oprobio y la miseria. Ataca las condiciones especiales del orden establecido en un momento dado y se dedica a romper los moldes de ese orden con todo el vigor que permiten las circunstancias.”

⁶⁷¹ Camilo Torres “Mensaje a los Cristianos” in *Camilo Torres: Cruz de Luz*, 176. The Spanish quotation “Creo que me he entregado a la revolución por amor al prójimo.”

reality defined efficacious love as violently confronting the oppressor to take from them the power of modes of production and to implement an equitable distribution of land and wealth. For him efficacious love did not imply considering undergoing a process of *reconciliation*, since the proper conditions for negotiation did not exist, due to the time of revolutionary inclination for radical changes. On the other hand, the state was nurtured by historical forces comprising a human spirit inclined to reject reconciliation. At this moment in Colombia, 48 years after Camilo Torres' death, history has dictated a call for peace, but with the same motivation that Camilo Torres had for justice and liberation; in his case it was as the final end of revolution, for us the result of liberating reconciliation. Times have changed also in the fact that since the time of Camilo Torres to this present time, the country has grown tired of suffering all kinds of violent conflicts and bloodshed and the disintegration of the very fabric of society.

Thus, is very important for the church to understand how realistic the reconciliation between victims and the perpetrators of wrong-doing could be in a context of long conflict and violence. For this reason the church needs to answer whether a new theological approach could emerge as a solid platform which would help the church avoid abstract exegetical rhetoric on the task of the construction of peace with justice. The answer to that question is complex, but not contradictory to the spirit of the gospel. Hence, the church could respond in a positive way to the interrogation by affirming that the power of efficacious love is the true motive that inspires and ignites an organized civil movement that goes beyond the limits of political negotiations. But other questions arise and need to be contemplated: how the church could articulate a message of Good News that is palatable for the victims of oppression, and furthermore, how to tell them, the victims, to love the enemy as Jesus has commanded. Obviously, we intersect this discussion by keeping in mind that G. Gutiérrez, as we have pointed out previously, was questioning "how to tell the poor that God loves them." In our

case, four decades later after Gutiérrez' question was posed, we to try to comprehend on another current level, what we are impelled to ask: how to tell the poor who are 'living in poverty with a long violent conflict,' that God is present in their struggles? To answer this question implies another dynamic of theorization and praxical response. Thus, it takes us to another category of questioning: is loving the enemy logically possible? Does the human mind and spirit have the capability to grasp consciously such a command, even against their own will and desire to respond with retaliation? And how can the poor perform a simultaneous act of loving the enemy while they still mourn the assassination of their loved ones?

What is happening in Colombia Today 48 years after Camilo Torres' Death?

A Country Immersed in Oppression and Violence

In the first chapter we described the situation of Colombia in the time of Camilo Torres: a situation of profound socio-economic inequalities, extreme poverty, unequal distribution of land and resources by the few rich families and owners of capital, and domination by two political parties, the Conservative and the Liberal party. Also, repression, corruption, persecution and assassination of activists, union leaders and those who opposed the injustice of the establishment. That has been the modern reality of Colombia since 1948. Nowadays, Henao Gaviria, summarizing the current situation of Colombia, 48 years after Camilo Torres assassination, rightly affirms that:

The complexity of the conflict stems not only from the multiplicity of armed actors but also from the existence of factors such as drug trafficking, the many different types of conflicts that surround the armed conflict, and, above all, the inequality and social exclusion that lie at the root of the problem.⁶⁷²

Thus, in analysing the current situation of violence "Contemporary conflict in Colombia mirrors the past, with major transfer of property and territory to the wealthy and

⁶⁷² Hector Fabio Henao Gaviria "The Colombian Church and Peacebuilding" in *Building Peace in a Time of War*, 175.

powerful, as well as another round of official amnesia regarding war crimes legislated in the name of ‘peace’ and ‘national reconciliation’.”⁶⁷³ Ideologically, that reality has been purposely kept domesticated and repressed by the government and owners of capital, through control of the means of production, the manipulation of wealth and resources, and control of the laws of distribution. This has been an institutionalized socio-economic violence against the majority of the population. Moreover, social amnesia has been ideologized; it has also been a tool of convenience and of political manipulation in the hands of the state apparatus. For example, the North American author F. Hylton, quoting Jacques Gilard, states the following: “Forgetting is a key element of the system, as it is of Colombian history. It is a factor of power.”⁶⁷⁴ It is precisely the irruption and disruption of Camilo Torres that came to challenge this amnesia in the contemporary history of the country. Hylton further tell us, “One effect of the long-term use of political terror in Colombia and elsewhere has been to erase the memory of the political alternatives to which terror responded.”⁶⁷⁵ This is evidenced in new situations, like the arrival of the *Paramilitaries* who have perpetuated terror against civil society, especially the millions of displaced people, and violent massacres. The government has been responsible for the so-called ‘false positives’ and other atrocities. The situation of Colombia has worsened since Camilo Torres’ time. The following are the most notable consequences that the country has inherited: Colombia is a country of inequalities and poverty, human rights violations, displaced people, victims, violent internal conflicts, drug trafficking, informal delinquency, and organized mafia. In the middle of this chaotic reality, a new initiative has emerged, which aims to find concrete solutions for peace and to resolve the internal conflict between the government and the subversive group called FARC.

A Country Seeking Peace

⁶⁷³ Forrest Hylton, *Evil hour in Colombia*, 7.

⁶⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 7

⁶⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 7.

When a nation does not sustain internal peace and social justice, and the majority of population lives in poverty and suffers all kind of ignominies, and when the entire population is immersed in permanent conflicts and fear for a long period of time, the only cause of such conditions is the failure of the establishment. The Colombian state has failed the population. But though the state has a great responsibility, individuals also bear part of the responsibility. Hence, to seek peace is a task of the entire population, and of all public and private entities and organizations, including the Church. Therefore, the general sentiment of Colombia as stressed by F. Galan is that “We have a kind of repulsive tolerance to violence, and more consciousness for peace; war is not the aspiration of nations, peace is the destiny of humanity.”⁶⁷⁶ Colombia is longing for the end of war and the day of a new beginning, of a stable destiny, and of peaceful living in community.

The government in 2012 began a dialogue negotiation with FARC, the insurgent group. The dialogue was initiated in Oslo, Norway, and has continued in La Habana, Cuba. This is considered by most of the entire population and organizations as a positive step forwards reaching a peaceful agreement and political reconciliation. Thus, a historical act was signed between the delegates of the Government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC). The result of the preliminary conversations was a “General Agreement for the Termination of the Conflict and the Establishment of a Stable and Lasting Peace.”⁶⁷⁷ The agenda of this peace negotiation includes the following points for discussion: “1. Integral agricultural development policy. 2. Political participation. 3. End of the conflict. 4. Solution to the problem of illicit drugs. 5. Victims. 6. Implementation and

⁶⁷⁶ Francisco Galán “De la teoría de la guerra a la teoría de la paz: Praxis para una solución” *Primer Seminario Nacional: Perspectivas de paz y reconciliación*. (Medellín, mayo – julio de 2008), 1. “Tenemos cierta tolerancia repulsiva a la violencia, y cada vez más conciencia de la necesidad de la paz; la Guerra no es la aspiración de los pueblos, la paz es el destino de la humanidad”. F. Galán is Colombian, former spokesperson of the National Liberation Army of Colombia; Director of the House of Peace, Medellin.

⁶⁷⁷ www.cpcml.ca/Tmld2012/D42127.htm Downloaded Wednesday, 4th December, 2013.

countersignature.”⁶⁷⁸ While each person in Colombia waits with great expectation for the achievement of a peaceful ‘agreement’, the task of civil society will be to manifest its opinion concerning the importance and need for justice. Thus, “the dreamer is not imagining an outside reality. Instead, through a liberating praxis, through actions that speak of liberation here and now, the dreamer prepares a community for the realities to come.”⁶⁷⁹ This way will ensure that, post-conflict, there is a new opportunity to construct the dreamed-of Colombia. The post-conflict era has to be safeguard by an ethics of peace, that has as the ultimate goal to close the gap between rich and poor until exclusion, discrimination, and poverty are eradicated. The ‘agenda’ and its content as an instrument for negotiation, must guide a

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid. "1. *Integral agricultural development policy*. Integral agricultural development is crucial to boost the integration of the regions and the equitable social and economic development of the country: 1. Access and use of land. Wastelands. Formalization of property. Agricultural border and protection of reserve zones. 2. Development programs with territorial focus. 3. Infrastructure and land improvement. 4. Social development: health care, education, housing, eradication of poverty. 5. Stimulation of agricultural production and the economy of solidarity and cooperation. Technical assistance. Subsidies. Credit. Generation of income. Marketing. Labor formalization. 6. Food security system. 2. *Political participation*: 1. Rights and guarantees for exercising political opposition in general and in particular for the new movements that arise after the signing of the Final Agreement. Access to the media. 2. Democratic mechanisms for citizen participation, including those of direct participation, on different levels and diverse themes. 3. Effective measures to promote greater participation in the national, regional and local policy of all sectors, including the most vulnerable population, in equal conditions and with guarantees of security. 3. *End of the conflict*: A integral and simultaneous process which implies: 1. Bilateral and definitive cease of fire and hostilities. 2. Abandonment of arms. Reincorporation of the FARC-EP into civil life -- economically, socially and politically -- in accordance with their interests. 3. The National Government, will coordinate the revision of the situation of individuals, charged or convicted, for belonging to or collaborating with the FARC-EP. 4. In parallel form the National Government will intensify the fight to put an end to criminal organizations and their support networks, including the fight against corruption and impunity, in particular against any organization responsible for homicides and massacres or which undermines defenders of human rights, social movements or political movements. 5. The National Government will revise and make the reforms and institutional adjustments necessary to address the challenges of the establishment of peace. 6. Guarantees of security. 7. Under the provisions of Point 5 (Victims) of this agreement the phenomenon of paramilitarism, among others, will be clarified. The signing of the Final Agreement initiates this process, which must develop in a reasonable time agreed upon by the parties. 4. *Solution to the problem of illicit drugs*: 1. Illicit crop substitution programs. Integral development plans with participation of the communities in the design, execution and evaluation of the programs of substitution and environmental recovery of the areas affected by illicit crops. 2. Prevention of consumption and public health programs. 3. Solution to the phenomenon of production, consumption and public health. 5. *Victims*: Compensation for the victims is at the centre of the National Government--FARC-EP agreement. In this sense they will treat: 1. Victims' human rights. 2. Truth. 6. *Implementation, verification and countersignature*: The signing of the Final Agreement begins the implementation of all of the agreed points. 1. Mechanisms of implementation and verification: a. System of implementation, giving special importance to the regions. b. Tracking and verification commissions c. Mechanisms for resolution of differences. These mechanisms will have the capacity and power of execution, and will be confirmed by representatives of the parts of society, case by case. 2. International accompaniment: 3. Schedule. 4. Budget. 5. Dissemination and communication tools. 6. Countersignature mechanism of the agreements.”

⁶⁷⁹ Mario I. Aguilar. “The Hermeneutics of Bones” in *The Reemergence of Liberation Theologies: Models for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Thia Cooper (NY, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 35.

process that will “construct the social and structural foundation for peace.”⁶⁸⁰ The ‘agenda’ from our point of view will be successful if a pedagogy of reconciliation will guide the process toward the reparation of victims and the establishment of stable social justice, and not only a period of peace.

Current Peace-building Efforts in Colombia and the Role of the Catholic and Protestant Churches

Before the year 2000, the involvement of the church in Colombia in contributing to the construction of peace with justice has been of little impact, because the theological foundation of the church’s proclamation has lacked emancipatory actions. The only element that has proven to be positive in the negotiation of peace agreements has been circumstantial, and that was taking advantage of its socio-religious privilege in a country that has been historically and traditionally religious. Nevertheless in the past ten years the situation has changed. The involvement of the Catholic and Protestant churches and interfaith groups is more visible and intentional regarding the denunciation of violence and participating in projects to help victims of the internal conflict. About the missional involvement with the idea of peacebuilding we learn that,

“in its work to promote citizen participation and pedagogies for peace, the church recognizes that there are at least three closely related scenarios for peacebuilding. There is the scenario of a negotiated settlement over the armed conflict, in which government sectors, organizations outside the law, other institutions, and facilitators participate. Another scenario involves organizing, strengthening and building the capacity of civil society. A third scenario involves building structures at the community level that guarantee social justice and peaceful coexistence. People involved in ministry also face the daily challenge of establishing dialogue to transform the way the deepest aspects of relationships of coexistence are expressed and symbolized”.⁶⁸¹

Those three scenarios are the infrastructure of thinking and building the process of peace that will permit the church to prosecute emancipatory actions, toward a real liberation

⁶⁸⁰ F Galán. De la teoría de la Guerra a la teoría de la paz, 2.

⁶⁸¹ Hector F. Henao Gaviria, “The Colombian Church and Peacebuilding” in *Building Peace in a Time of War*, 176. Dr. Henao Gaviria is a Colombian priest and has been director of the Colombian Episcopal Conference’s National Social Ministry Secretariat/Caritas.

of the exploited classes in Colombia. More specifically about the task carried out by Catholic and Protestant, and other groups that are making a significant impact on peacebuilding and conflict resolution, an important account is offered by V. Bouvier:

The churches have set up numerous mechanisms for peace and development work. Some are part of the infrastructures of their churches, as in the case of the Colombian Conciliation Commission and the National Pastoral Social Ministry of the Colombian Catholic Bishops Conference. On the Evangelical Protestant side, the same goes for the Commission of Restoration, Life, and Peace of the Council of Evangelical and Protestant Churches of Colombia (CEDECOL).

Catholic and Evangelical Protestant women also are becoming an identifiable force within Colombia's broader peace movement.

Transnational religious partnerships for peace also have developed. Christian Peacemaker Teams, Jesuit Refugee Services, Witness for Peace, Pax Christi International, Lutheran World Relief, and Caritas International are just a few of the faith-based organizations that act on principles of engaging and working together in mutual support and solidarity. The same goes for ecumenical and Presbyterian Peace Fellowship programs based on such a model of "accompaniment." As an example, a recent television program, *Café con Fe*, starred a visiting U.S. church delegation to Colombia.

For more than six years now, Protestant and Catholic churches in Colombia and the United States also have engaged in what have become known as Days of Prayer and Action. This year's actions included initiatives designed to raise awareness of the peace agenda in Colombia as well as advocacy with national leaders of both countries, such as coordinated letters to top officials.

A letter to President Santos and peace negotiators in Cuba called on the government and the FARC rebels to "stay at the negotiating table until you reach an agreement that would reduce the violence, the humanitarian crisis that the armed conflict is generating, and allow all citizens to participate in the construction of peace."

In the United States, more than 100 leaders of Catholic and Protestant communities and organizations sent a similar letter to U.S. President Barak Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry. They urged support for Colombia's peace process and a recognition of the crucial role of faith communities in aiding Colombia's victims.⁶⁸²

Important work in accompanying these organizations that are seeking and recovering the historical memory has also been done by the church:

⁶⁸² "Colombian Churches, Faith Groups Engage to Urge Peace", Tuesday, July 2, 2013, by: Virginia M. Bouvier <http://www.usip.org/olivebranch/colombian-churches-faith-groups-engage-urge-peace>. Downloaded 18 August, 2014.

the church works side by side with those who suffer because of the conflict. One component of this accompaniment is research, including the development of databases on forced displacement (RUT) and the recovery of historical memory (Testimonio, Verdad, y Reconciliación, or TEVERE). TEVERE seeks to document and interpret the human rights situation in the country in order to contribute to national reconciliation based on clarification of the truth, recovery of dignity and the capacity to speak out, acknowledgement of victims, and reconstruction of historical memory.⁶⁸³

It is very encouraging to know that churches in Colombia are taking this great initiative of being a church that is opting for the marginalized. “The church’s work in assisting victims is the result of a preferential option for aiding the most vulnerable sectors and those who have suffered from armed actions”.⁶⁸⁴

Remarkable work is being done by women showing their important protagonist capability to change the historical oppression they have suffered, by becoming agents of liberation and peacebuilding, showing true resilience that makes the difference in a country plagued by conflicts, patriarchal mentality and exclusion of vulnerable people:

in November 2008, USIP supported a joint-initiative of the *Conferencia de Religiosos y Religiosas de Colombia*, the organizing body of Catholic men’s and women’s religious orders, and *Justapaz*, a Mennonite organization, to convene a four-day workshop outside of Bogota for Catholic and Protestant women peacemakers. This workshop provided an opportunity for women doing peace work on the ground through their churches to share best practices, network, and conceive future joint-initiatives... Catholic women and the minority Protestant communities have also been operating in the midst of some of the most conflict-ridden parts of the country in order to bring humanitarian assistance and empowerment to the displaced and victims of conflict. These women, working through local churches, their religious orders, or faith-based organizations, often have a sophisticated understanding of conflict dynamics and have been able to create effective local programs to build pockets of peace and justice. Despite their impressive work, Catholic and Protestant women peacemakers continue to face long-standing tensions between their communities that make effective partnership difficult.⁶⁸⁵

Even though after the Cold War we have experienced changes in the causes and nature of the conflict in Colombia, the contribution of the church in general and of efficacious love in particular, remain relevant for peace building as we have explained above. Liberation

⁶⁸³ H. F. Henao Gaviria, 179.

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid. 180.

⁶⁸⁵ “Colombian Women’s Ecumenical Peacemaking” <http://www.usip.org/programs/projects/colombian-womens-ecumenical-peacemaking>, Downloaded Tuesday, 19 August, 2014.

theology has also changed, bringing new ideas and enhancing other inclusive perspectives of liberation that were not there in the genesis of such theological reflection and its original construction. Thus, in regard to new changes “it is not only to propose the “option for the poor” rather to reconfigure the ecclesial thought and praxis from the perspective and solidarity with the diverse faces of the excluded and marginalized”.⁶⁸⁶ Thus, the concept of efficacious love more than ever reaffirms its relevant discourse towards liberation and emancipation. Though the Catholic and Protestant churches and other inter-faith groups in Colombia confront difficulties, they have an important prophetic voice that has to be heard; and the concept of efficacious love continues to foster new attitudes for structural and just changes in Colombia. That relevance of the mission of the church and the pertinence of efficacious love is framed on the incisive words of Rivera Pagan as he affirms,

Certainly I have emphasized more the challenges than the hopes. Maybe because the challenges are more concrete and tangible than the utopic and scatological hopes. The former carve deep and indelible scars in our bodies and souls; the latter, nevertheless, are the ones which nurture our most intimate vocation: to conceive and evoke a world still unknown, where divine grace would be the transcendental matrix of solidarity and reconciliation between human beings.⁶⁸⁷

From the horizon have irrupted the voices and crying for true liberation, the utopias which had been marginalised by the dark corrupted history of the oppressors are gestating in people’s minds and hearts. Nevertheless, those evil forces have not been able to defeat love and justice. In this way we keep hope alive, which no human force or power can ever take

⁶⁸⁶ Luis N. Rivera Pagan, “La voz profética: justicia, paz y reconciliación” Downloaded 21/8/2014. <http://www.lupaprotestante.com/blog/la-voz-profetica-justicia-paz-y-reconciliacion/> “No se trata sólo de preconizar la “opción por los pobres, sino de reconfigurar el pensamiento y la praxis eclesial desde la perspectiva de y la solidaridad con los diversos rostros de los excluidos y marginados”.

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid. “ciertamente he recalado más los desafíos que las esperanzas. Quizá porque los desafíos son más concretos y tangibles que las utópicas y escatológicas esperanzas. Los primeros labran cicatrices hondas e indelebles en nuestros cuerpos y almas; las segundas, sin embargo, son las que nutren nuestra más íntima vocación: concebir y evocar un mundo aún inédito, donde la gracia divina sea la matriz trascendental de la solidaridad y la reconciliación entre los seres humanos.”

from those who struggle for constructing a better day.⁶⁸⁸ It is the freedom of our soul and is the pain of our frustrated hopes, our creative hands, and the efficacious love that will construct the history that Colombia deserves. Thus, the church is still making a significant contribution although the conflict has now become so radically transformed. In the following section we analyse how civil society plays an important role in peace building, including the church as part of civil society.

The Role of Civil Society in Colombia

The concept of civil society has acquired an important status in areas of violent conflicts, as is the case in Colombia. The author F. Houtart⁶⁸⁹ presents a vital explanation of the ‘civil society’ that emerges from below, from the grassroots of society, when he says,

The grassroots conception of civil society is an analytical one, which means that it reads civil society in terms of social relations, which is in itself a political act. The term "analytical" implies understanding and assuming that civil society is the arena in which social inequalities are constructed, and within it are institutions and organizations that represent very divergent class interests. And that if this is true, it won't be enough to change hearts to automatically transform societies. Although it is still important to change hearts, other power relations also need to be created.⁶⁹⁰

This idea of civil society is more compatible with the nature and mission of the church as it aims to be relevant and participate significantly in peacebuilding. We ascribe to this type of conceptualization of civil society because it transcends social factors not only to perceive peacebuilding as an end, but as a mediating plane towards economic structural changes that will reveal the causes of violence. What we try to avoid is to be trampled on by the conception of ‘Liberal Peace’⁶⁹¹ that could distract the task of civil society in not seeking

⁶⁸⁸ “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it” John 1: 5. (The Kingdom New Testament).

⁶⁸⁹ François Houtart is a Belgian priest and sociologist, living in Ecuador; he was a good friend of Camilo Torres.

⁶⁹⁰ François Houtart “Globalized Civil Society: From Below or from Above?” Envio digital, Numero 238, Mayo 2001. <http://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/1504> Downloaded Tuesday 19 August, 2014, 1-9. 4.

⁶⁹¹ Liberal peace is defined by MacGinty as “the dominant form of peacemaking as promoted by leading states, international organizations, and international financial institutions through their peace-support interventions”.

the major objective for real transformation. This way, civil society would always maintain its vocation beyond the idea of ‘advocacy’ but pursue its socially organized communitarian force and the political capacity to demand social and economic justice. According to MacGinty⁶⁹² “the five aspects or pillars of the liberal peace are security, economics, statebuilding, governance, and civil society”.⁶⁹³ We are dealing only with civil society and its incumbency in the internal armed conflict in Colombia, even though we recognize the other factors as playing a role in the Colombian context. Thus it is important to note that Houtart calls attention to the possibility of the manipulation of an economic capitalist structure designed to favour the owner of the means of production and capital, to the disadvantage of the civil society that become controlled by such an economic system. He rightly denounces it thus,

the market imposes relations of inequality on civil society. The dominant groups act globally, using states not for redistributing wealth or protecting the weakest, but rather for controlling populations (migrations, social movements and popular civil society) and serving the market. The mechanisms are diverse and often progressive, running from monetary policies to free trade treaties, from judicial reforms to educational reforms, from the privatization of social security to privatization of health services, from the reduction of research subsidies to the reduction of support for grassroots organizations, from the suppression of publicity for the left wing press to the control of telephonic communications, from the weakening of the progressive sectors of religious institutions to the subjecting of NGOs. They seek to order and domesticate the state and the UN organizations and control civil society, which they allow to encourage dynamism and plurality as long as it does not effectively question the capitalist social relation.⁶⁹⁴

What Houtart denounces is the top-down nature of the major actors, which is very much what ‘liberal peace’ does related to peacebuilding and conflict resolution, especially when they are basically imposed on developing countries, as explained by MacGinty:

Roger MacGinty, *International Peacebuilding and Local Resistance: Hybrid Forms of Peace* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 22.

⁶⁹² Roger MacGinty is Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies at the Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute, and the Department of Politics in the University of Manchester. His research has been on peace processes, political violence, and local responses to international peace-support interventions.

⁶⁹³ Ibid. 12.

⁶⁹⁴ F. Houtart, *Globalized Civil Society*, 5.

the principal agents of the liberal peace are leading states from the global north, leading international organizations, and the international financial institutions. Those actors rarely operate alone; instead, the liberal peace produces a complex chain of delegation and co-option so that the principal actors are assisted by numerous accomplices.⁶⁹⁵

This hegemonic imposition of peacebuilding fosters an external paternalism that in the moment of conflict is wrongly perceived as making a positive impact on peacebuilding, but what realistically it is doing is to perpetuate the subjugation of the rich countries against the poor countries. Thus the conflict is not eradicated, but rather numbed, and ultimately it will erupt with further devastating consequences which include creating more victims, the acquisition of more external debts, and weakening the potential of the civil society of the recipient country to exercise its own mechanism to deal with peacebuilding. In this regard MacGinty rightly points out that,

“a common criticism of this civil society engineering by governments from the global north is that these actors promote a version of civil society. At the same time, indigenous expressions of civil society may be overlooked, or acknowledged but ignored, as being ‘non-liberal’”.⁶⁹⁶

To all these effects we have to add the political efforts that brought the new international dynamics and changes, after 1980, to the internal conflict in Colombia, thus:

the strategies derived from a Cold War ideology to solve the armed confrontation, whether by omission or commission, have turned the civilian population into the main target and, within this, the individual and collective agents who can – or could have – pushed a greater, and indispensable, democratic change in Colombia.⁶⁹⁷

In all of this we also have to take into account and remember the political context, especially the “relative absence of the State, or better expressed, the precarious presence, has been a characteristic of the Colombian history”.⁶⁹⁸ For all those reason, civil society has a

⁶⁹⁵ R. MacGinty, *International Peacebuilding*, 32.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid. 16.

⁶⁹⁷ Mauricio Romero “Reform and Reaction: Paramilitary Groups in Contemporary Colombia” in *Irregular Armed Forces and Their Role in Politics and State Formation*, Ed. Diane E. Davis and Anthony W. Pereira, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 204-205. M. Romero is a Colombian author and professor of the faculty of Political Sciences and International Relations at the Universidad Javeriana in Bogota.

⁶⁹⁸ Mauricio Archila Neira “Los movimientos sociales (1958-2006) in *Historia de las ideas políticas en Colombia: De la independencia hasta nuestros días*, Ed. José Fernando Ocampo T. Bogotá: Taurus, 2008, 368.

difficult task to deal with, as unfortunately “that is the kind of State which the social movements in the country relate with”.⁶⁹⁹ Nevertheless, the role of civil society in Colombia can play a determining factor in the peace-building process that will help to achieve peace with social justice. In this regard we agree with MacGinty when he suggests that, “comprised of non-governmental groups such as churches, trades unions and the media, civil society organizations can play crucial roles in deeply divided societies or those societies attempting to manage violent conflict”,⁷⁰⁰ as is the case in Colombia, especially in this time of conflict negotiation at Havana, Cuba. Thus the contribution of civil society can be important in achieving an agreement that, after the implementation of all the accords, the internal armed conflict should end once and for all. Most important, as Bejarano⁷⁰¹ argues, is “the relation between civil society and political accords.”⁷⁰² This way the negotiating table, will acquire the voice of the people through the representation of civil society, and not only of one guerrilla group and the government. Bejarano warns emphatically that it “is therefore evident that the outcome of the political organization cannot come from an exclusive accord between the government and the guerrilla without mediating a process of consent with the civil society about those accords”.⁷⁰³ In addition to the fundamental participation of civil society in the conflict negotiations, “civil society may provide a space for centreground political actors to interact, attempt to safeguard the rights of minorities or vulnerable groups, or resist government attempts to maximise its power”.⁷⁰⁴ Thus, in Colombia civil society faces great challenges but also has a great opportunity to be a vital protagonist, contributing to the end of the internal armed conflict.

“La relativa ausencia del Estado, o mejor, de presencia diferenciada, ha sido un rasgo de la historia colombiana”. M. Archila Neira is a Colombian autor.

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid, 368. “Ese es el tipo de Estado con el que se relacionan los movimientos sociales en el país”.

⁷⁰⁰ R. MacGinty, *No War, No Peace: The Rejuvenation of Stalled Peace Process and Peace Accords*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, 52.

⁷⁰¹ Jesus Antonio Bejarano is a Colombian economist, emeritus professor of the Faculty of Economic Sciences of the Universidad Nacional in Bogota, Colombia.

⁷⁰² J. A. Bejarano, “El papel de la sociedad civil en el proceso de paz” in *Los laberintos de la Guerra*, 303.

⁷⁰³ Ibid. 303.

⁷⁰⁴ MacGinty, 52.

Vision for Colombia: A Peace Model

A Relevant Theology for the Victims and Excluded

The detractors of liberation theology have suggested that such theology is dead. However, we agree with T. Cooper,⁷⁰⁵ who has observed to the contrary that “Liberation theology was not dead, as some have argued ... Liberation theology dealing with racism, sexism, heterosexism and other ‘isms’ have emerged”.⁷⁰⁶ Helpful criticism of Liberation theology stated by I. Petrella should be noted, because such criticism contributes to the expansion of liberation theology in Colombia, and also, in all of Latin America, especially due to the economic effects of globalization. He firmly suggests that,

The focus on civil society (and its emphasis on culture, gender and ecology) needs to be complemented by a focus on the reconstruction of the market and the state. The critique of idolatry can also be strengthened through the construction of historical projects. In this case, the best way to combat the idolatrous nature of capitalism is to develop alternatives that reveal the idol as idol. Liberation theology thus must approach both democracy and capitalism as partial, fragmented, haphazard entities opening up space for political and economic possibility. Only then can the development of new historical projects take place.⁷⁰⁷

From the ethical perspective, the new contribution of E. Dussel is pertinent, because it demonstrates the advancement of liberation theology to meet the challenges offered by a totally new world in places where many expressions are being articulated. Thus, in relation to the majority of the world affected by the capitalist system, Dussel affirms:

their expressions include the new social, political, economic, racial, environmental, gender-based, and ethnic movements that emerged during the last quarter of the twentieth century. Those are struggles for the recognition of victims who transform the character of previous liberation movements, which this ethics seeks to legitimize and to provide with a philosophical grounding.⁷⁰⁸

⁷⁰⁵ Thia Cooper is a professor in Religion and Latin American, Latino/a, and Caribbean Studies, at Gustavus Adolphus College, USA.

⁷⁰⁶ Thia Cooper, *Controversies in Political Theology*, 113.

⁷⁰⁷ Ivan Petrella, *The Future of Liberation Theology: An Argument and Manifesto* (London, SCM Press, 2006), 124.

⁷⁰⁸ E. Dussel, *Ethics of Liberation: In the Age of Globalization and Exclusion*, xviii.

Though the development of critical consciousness is not new, nonetheless it is taking a new turn because of the important role that civil society is exercising at this historical moment. Thus the epistemology of liberation theology is being enhanced, which as Dussel emphasizes, “is especially important in collective learning processes where critical consciousness can be developed as part of the political, economic, and social organizing efforts of new emerging social movements in civil society”.⁷⁰⁹

We are witnessing that liberation theology is expanding and addressing other forms of oppression today, such as those pertaining to: race, sex, gender, life-style, environmental awareness, ethnic and cultural expressions, and more. The important voices speaking up for the poor and marginalized are indispensable today in helping and informing liberation theology about how to construct transformative paradigms for a more just world; because, without those voices, liberation theology loses its credibility and efficacy.

Concerning economic fairness and equal possibilities for Colombia and Latin America today, it is important to note the bold claim that,

if liberation theology is then to continue with broad based universal credibility to stake its claim to being premised on an unequivocal preferential option for the poor, then the challenge to ensure its own epistemological and pedagogical biases are in culturally authentic order is surely unavoidable.⁷¹⁰

Thia Cooper makes an important remark when she presents an encouraging list of the broad arena and new challenges for liberation theology to address today in the world. She states that:

liberation theologies have matured since their beginnings of fighting economic and political repression. We see that the field encompasses aspects as diverse as empire, nature, class, capitalism, genocide, political repression, violence, marginalization, religion oppression, race, migration, feminism, human rights, revolution, community, theological education, education in general, the arts, the drug trade, indigeneity, sex, sexuality, gender, just to name a few.⁷¹¹

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid. xix.

⁷¹⁰ Jenny Plane TE Paa, “What Does Liberation Theology Mean in and for the Twenty-First Century?” in *The Reemergence of Liberation Theologies: Models for the Twenty-First Century*, 143.

⁷¹¹ Thia Cooper, “Conclusion” *The Reemergence of Liberation Theologies*, 189.

Thus, as Petrella suggests, that “I also believe that liberation theology is a spiritual exercise, a call to both social and personal conversion, as well as a hope for ultimate redemption.”⁷¹² Therefore, the role of liberation theology is still relevant to the Colombian situation today, because it has the capacity and capability to expand and to address other forms of current oppression and victimization, not only in theory, but also in concrete praxis.

Reconciliation with Justice

The only way to gain inspiration to love our enemy is to embrace, in an orthopraxis commitment, the words of Christ on the cross: “forgive them! They don’t know what they’re doing!”⁷¹³ Those words were pronounced as an *ad hoc* denunciation of violence, as an existential option in a moment of suffering the physical torture, certainly with a political motive, perpetrated by the Roman Empire. Those words have a socio-political connotation because they were given in a state of tension between physical anguish and the possibility of vengeance in facing state repression, because with Jesus’ words and actions, he denounced the Roman Empire’s injustice. With forgiveness as the epistemological foundation of reconciliation, a nation that seeks peace has to proactively turn the desire for revenge and the continuation of violence into reconstructing consciousness in order to achieve a new predisposition for peace. The way to embark on such a process is to reach a radical collective decision. In a remarkable way Miguel De La Torre affirms that “Communal forgiveness is the decision of the whole not to seek revenge, a decision that leads toward, and is also the product of reconciliation.”⁷¹⁴ From that perspective we understand that to be reconciled with those who have perpetuated atrocities and victimised the poor is a corollary of cognitive conversion.

⁷¹² I. Petrella, *The Future of Liberation*, 137.

⁷¹³ Luke 23:34 (The Kingdom New Testament)

⁷¹⁴ Miguel A. De La Torre, *Liberating Jonah: Forming an Ethics of Reconciliation* (NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 119.

Thus, reconciliation seeks to be willing to transcend the ignorance and false consciousness that produce evil, and that ignorance and falsehood are reconciled by the possibility of political grace. Thus, in acquitting the wrong-doing of the offender, who by his/her own acts had become an enemy, if they make the new conciliating *turn*, he/she can be reached and justified by the force of an attitude permeated by efficacious love. Therefore in this way, “only the victims can produce the reconciliation.”⁷¹⁵ Thus, while Christian loving is a result of obedient orthopraxis which complies with the exigencies and demands of Christian discipleship, reconciliation is a willing act of the human conscience motivated by the sharp turn produced by *conversion*, and conversion is assured, when we can achieve the status of loving efficaciously. Being endowed with that efficacy, people will turn from dissimilar coordinates that produce violence, making a sharp turn towards uprooting our human inclinations to respond with anger and the desire for vengeance that will continue adding more violent acts.

Nevertheless we ought to ask if a *tabula rasa* reconciliation is possible? Is there reconciliation without justice, without truth, without reparation? Our approach based on the concept of liberation informs us that the radical answer is ‘no’. Efficacious love in the context of violent conflict is perceived as avoiding the interpretation that forgiveness and reconciliation is a result of an obligation that is imposed on us, rather “communal forgiveness can occur only within a relationship based on justice and equality.”⁷¹⁶ Hence, the cognitive turn of abandoning violence, evil and injustice, and opting for a new way to relate to and treat fellow human beings, is the true conversion in line with the socio-ethical dimension of faith: “And this is what I’m praying: that your love may overflow still more and more, in knowledge and in all astute wisdom. Then you will be able to tell the difference between

⁷¹⁵ Roberto Solarte Rodriguez, “Teología de la Reconciliación desde la no-violencia” in *Vidas, voces, reflexiones y esperanzas: memorias del segundo seminario internacional de no-violencia* (Bogotá: Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, 2010), 55. From the Spanish “Solo las victimas pueden producir la reconciliación.”

⁷¹⁶ M. De la Torre, *Liberating Jonah*, 120.

good and evil.⁷¹⁷ Those words of Paul are imminently politically liberating; in seeking concrete reconciliation between the parties involved, one has to take into account “the difference between good and evil” in order to give room for justice to be served. To be served, moreover, especially in favour of the victims.

It is important to clarify that reconciliation is not a process of transcending impunity and suffering as result of human evil, cruelty and oppression. Rather it is a socio-political turn: a historical conversion of opting for a new reality where peace will be accompanied with social justice.

The reconciliation has to be manifested in concrete ways, which try to eradicate the causes of poverty, which tolerate and protect human lifestyle preferences, and promote gender equality, education and health provision for the majority. Reconciliation is not an abstract word; it is a concept that implies a process of liberation, promoting a sustainable life for all. In a context of violence, true reconciliation has to go hand-in-hand with economic reparation, land distribution, sensibility to natural resources and the environment, and national control of resources against the intromission and exploitation by multinational corporations. Hence, the term ‘reconciliation’ recovers a rich and profound socio-political implication for the 21st century in Colombia and elsewhere. Reconciliation has the great propensity of being a ‘subversive’ term because it implies having courage to start a new day, putting the destructive past aside and dreaming a different reality.

The Role of God’s will as a reference for Peace with Justice for Colombia

The German theologian H. Heppel elaborates deeply his explanation of God’s will, in which the *will* is fundamentally the nature of God with a definitive purpose.⁷¹⁸ In this case,

⁷¹⁷ Philippians 1:9-11 (The Kingdom New Testament)

⁷¹⁸ Heinrich Heppel, citing Polan, agrees with him saying “God’s will is that attribute of God” ... “by which He wills good as an end and everything for good, from all eternity, of His own self and independently and by one constant act.” Also Heppel cites Maastricht, who affirms “God’s will is His most wise propension towards Himself as the supreme end and towards the creatures as means for His own sake”. And then he concludes

we must stress the pre-disposition of God to achieve “good as an end”. This understanding concurs with our ideas, because as we emphasized in Chapter Three, we have *mediations*, and in Chapter Four we called for a commitment to the *other*. Hence, having that core value at our disposal, the church ought to obediently respond to God’s will for what is just. If we have said that evil and injustice are part of reality because human beings, through oppressive structures, exercise evil by oppressing others and practice the ideologies of exclusion, then we can sustain that God’s will is by nature subversive. Thus, God’s will opposes all kinds of evil-doing because it goes against God’s own nature and God’s own creation. In the context of conflict and pervasive violence of all kinds, then, God’s will is a genuine desire to achieve peace. The subversion from our perspective is in the motivation that God does not tolerate evil-doing, as God’s own will does not permit it. God knows that God has to interfere in history using human beings to carry on the process of liberation. The subversion of God’s will is intrinsically committed to object to evil.

Nevertheless, the subversion of God’s will is not the end of God’s means because *good with justice* is the final objective, not subversion. God’s will, so to speak, avoids being contaminated with opium, which is the same way of saying that in accumulation and the totality of historical alienation, God does not remain perplexed before evil, but is actively involved in exterminating it using human as agents of liberation. Because for God, the only option ethically is that something “has to be done about it”. The subversive political option of God in history, manifested extraordinarily by the *kenosis* of Christ in history, stands as resistance in solidarity with humans against evil, but with salvific and emancipatory propensity. Therefore, this argument moves us to claim that the will of God is an attitude against violence and impunity. This way, God’s will is informed by the principle of satisfying God’s needs for justice as a fundamental attribute of God’s nature. This idea in turn, will rule

emphatically that “the divine will is thus the being of God Himself, so far as it is active actuality in relation to Himself and to everything outside Himself.” *Reformed Dogmatic: Set Out and Illustrated from the Sources* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1978), 81.

out that God ever will be alienated in history by injustice and wrongdoing. Consequently, because God's perception of reality is not neutral, God has already demonstrated in the Scriptures, and in God's revelation in Christ, that God sees reality with eyes of subversion and liberative redemption. Conversion is hence the symmetry of seeking the radical will of God in the transformation of a reality which has been sustained by adverse and violent structures. This is because social structures are imbedded in reality, and not vice versa. The counterpart of justice as the will of God is against "the impulse to impose our will through violence"⁷¹⁹

The subversive coherence of God's actions are necessary to counter the naiveté that all human beings will be converted; then, in a context of violence, if peace is not achieved, God's retributive justice will agitate for new peaceful ways or social resistance, a human option sustained by the subverting and utopian sovereignty of God. Thus, the church is immersed in the utopian model of God that says: "Then he will judge between the nations and arbitrate between many peoples. They will hammer their swords into ploughshares and their spears into sickles. Nation will not lift sword against nation, no longer will they learn how to make war."⁷²⁰

As Camilo Torres saw in his time, the overwhelming social problems, especially the economic oppression as the real cause of the present situation of profound conflict in Colombia, the closed political structure and the indifference of one side of the Catholic and Protestant churches, "should not prevent us from continuing to envision a different world where suffering is reduced and life-and-death struggles are less common than they are now."⁷²¹ Therefore, the task of the church in a context of violence is to perceive that "God is

⁷¹⁹ Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 318.

⁷²⁰ Isaiah 2:4 (The New Jerusalem Bible)

⁷²¹ Joerg Rieger, "Context is What Hurts: Rethinking Contextual Theology in Light of Empire and Economics" in *The Reemergence of Liberation Theologies*, 27.

a victim with the victims,”⁷²² and must always seek how *God* is standing alongside the victim, nurtures our faith for concrete praxis that propels action toward emancipatory peace with social justice.

⁷²² Thia Cooper, “Conclusion” in *The Reemergence of Liberation Theologies*, 190.

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