The Cry of the Poor: Anthropology of Suffering and Justice in Health Care From a Latin American Liberation Approach

Alexandre Andrade Martins  
*Marquette University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://epublications.marquette.edu/dissertations_mu](https://epublications.marquette.edu/dissertations_mu)

Part of the [Community Health Commons](https://epublications.marquette.edu/dissertations_mu), [Inequality and Stratification Commons](https://epublications.marquette.edu/dissertations_mu), and the [Latina/o Studies Commons](https://epublications.marquette.edu/dissertations_mu)

**Recommended Citation**

[https://epublications.marquette.edu/dissertations_mu/714](https://epublications.marquette.edu/dissertations_mu/714)
THE CRY OF THE POOR:

ANTHROPOLOGY OF SUFFERING AND JUSTICE IN HEALTH CARE
FROM A LATIN AMERICAN LIBERATION APPROACH

By

Alexandre Andrade Martins, MI

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School,
Marquette University,
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

May 2017
This dissertation examines the connection between poverty and health inequalities from a liberation theological ethics perspective. It uses Simone Weil’s and Latin American liberation theology’s approaches to suffering and social justice as theoretical sources to address health inequalities and the suffering of the poor because of social injustice, vulnerability to diseases, and lack of healthcare assistance. First of all, these approaches are examined from how they shape an anthropology of suffering that enable us to understand the suffering of the poor and, at the same time, to recognize them as agents of their own liberation and struggle for justice in health care. In a second movement, this anthropology of suffering grounds a liberation ethics able to respond to the challenge of poverty and health inequalities. Then, the anthropology of suffering and liberation ethics provides foundations to examine health care as a human right necessary for human flourishing. It develops a human rights framework that addresses health inequalities and health of populations from the perspective of the poor.

Therefore, this dissertation argues that the poor are crying out for justice and life. Taking this into account, the anthropology of suffering grounds the needed human rights framework in health care toward justice that can only be achieved through a liberation approach in the companionship of the poor for a historical praxis of liberation. The poor are the main interlocutors of this examination of poverty and health inequalities. Thus, this issue, as well as all theoretical foundations, including Weil’s thought and Latin American liberation theology, are addressed from a hermeneutic perspective provided by the suffering of the poor and their voices. The key element of this hermeneutic is the preferential option for the poor that leads us to be in the company of the poor which gives us a hermeneutic locus of doing theology and appropriating texts.

The dissertation is divided into three parts. Part I develops an anthropology of suffering with material taken from Weil’s and liberation theology’s approaches to suffering and poverty. Part II presents a liberation ethics for justice in health care from the perspective of the poor. Beginning with a presentation of Catholic social teaching and in order to shape this liberation ethics, the hermeneutic locus challenges this teaching to go beyond Catholic social ethics to integrate the voice of the poor and their experience into the health justice discourse. Part III is the argument for health care as a human right from the perspective of the poor and a community-based method of delivery of health care. This argument and praxis are sustained by two foundations: anthropological and ethical.
Resumo

O CLAMOR DOS POBRES:
ANTROPOLOGIA DO SOFRIMENTO E JUSTIÇA NA SAÚDE A PARTIR DA
PERSPECTIVA LIBERTADORA LATINO-AMERICANA

Alexandre Andrade Martins, MI
Marquette University, 2017

Esta tese analisa a relação entre pobreza e desigualdades na saúde a partir da perspectiva ética-teológica-libertadora. A filosofia de Simone Weil e a teologia da libertação, nas suas maneiras de analisar o sofrimento e a justiça social, são as fontes teóricas utilizadas nesta tese para estudar as desigualdades na saúde e o sofrimento dos pobres decorrentes da injustiça social, da vulnerabilidade às doenças e da falta de assistência à saúde. Primeiramente, essas fontes são estudadas em vista da elaboração de uma antropologia do sofrimento capaz de compreender o sofrimento dos pobres e, ao mesmo tempo, reconhecê-los como sujeitos da sua própria libertação e da luta por justiça na saúde. Em um segundo movimento, a antropologia do sofrimento alicerça uma ética da libertação capaz de responder ao desafio da pobreza e das desigualdades na saúde. Dessa forma, a antropologia do sofrimento e a ética da libertação apresentam fundamentos para propor a assistência à saúde como um direito humano necessário para o florescimento humano. Isso leva ao desenvolvimento de um método de ações orientadas para responder aos desafios das desigualdades na saúde e para a promoção da vida com base nos direitos humanos e a partir da perspectiva dos pobres.

Essa tese argumenta, então, que os pobres clamam por justiça e vida. Levando isso em consideração, a antropologia do sofrimento fundamenta a necessidade de uma base de ação para a justiça na saúde alicerçada nos direitos humanos, que apenas pode ser alcançada por meio de um método libertador em parceira com os pobres pela práxis histórico-libertadora. Os pobres são os principais interlocutores dessa análise da pobreza e das desigualdades na saúde. Deste modo, essa questão, assim como as fontes teóricas, incluindo a reflexão de Weil e da teologia da libertação, são estudadas de uma perspectiva hermenêutica propiciada pelo sofrimento dos pobres e suas vozes. O elemento central dessa hermenêutica é a opção preferencial pelos pobres que leva a estar na companhia deles, o 'locus' hermenêutico de fazer teologia e da apropriação de textos.

A tese está dividida em três partes. Parte I: desenvolve a antropologia do sofrimento com o material proveniente da reflexão sobre o sofrimento e a pobreza de Weil e da teologia da libertação. Parte II: apresenta uma ética libertadora para a justiça na saúde a partir da perspectiva dos pobres. Começando com uma apresentação do ensino social católico e em vista de explicitar essa ética libertadora, o 'locus' hermenêutico desafia esse ensino a ir além da ética social católica para poder integrar a voz dos pobres e sua experiência no debate sobre justiça na saúde. Parte III: é o argumento em defesa da assistência à saúde como um direito humano a partir da perspectiva dos pobres e o método de base comunitária de assistência à saúde. Esse argumento e práxis são sustentados por dois fundamentos: o antropológico e o ético.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I must begin acknowledging the role of an important partner in my life. She has been an immanent and a transcendent presence in my existential journey, witnessing the celebration of flowers and the hardness of thorns, helping me when I miss the flower and supporting me to resist the thorns. She lives afar, but this makes her so close. I can meet her anywhere in this world. We have a strange relationship, as strange as when people see me talking to her during nights of clean sky and existential honesty. She is the Moon whom I must thank for witnessing my journey and for every month speaking with me, listening to my cries, and helping me to develop ideas writing with courage and passion, even in the midst of suffering, but always with hope. Perhaps, the Moon is a natural sign of the presence of the supernatural in my life. Regardless of what it is, I thank the Uno for being a Female Triuno guider of my existence.

I could never finish this work without the help and support of so many people, who across geographic barriers, have proved the universality of the experience of companionship. The first companions of this dissertation are the poor whom I have met on my way. Without their faith, solidarity, hope, and stories, I would not have arrived here. I can remember all the suffering faces I encountered since I began this work. These faces are a commitment. Blessed by the Moon, we are together in this existential struggle for justice.

My humble parents, José and Nalda, have an important role in all this achievement. They never even attended high school, but they always believed in the power of education and humility. Thank you for having taught me the most precious things of life, teaching me to love the letters and the poor, to have faith and hope, and to believe in honesty and justice. Thanks also to my brother, Leandro, who, as a companion knowing the flower and thorns, walked to the same school with me.

Now it is my debts to institutions. Although critical of institutional violence, I recognize the values of institutional actions to the development of individuals’ capabilities. First of all, thanks the Catholic Church for being an open house to hear my voice. Thanks also to the Order of Saint Camillus, especially the Brazilian Province, for believing in my academic skills and investing in their growth. My immense appreciation for the Theology Department at Marquette University is fulfilled by my gratitude for all the opportunities this department and its faculty have offered me. I am also grateful for the financial provision that I was awarded throughout my studies from different grants, especially for the 2016-2017 Arthur J. Schmitt Leadership Fellowship.

There are many people to whom I would like to express my gratitude by mentioning their names and telling a little about why they have been very important in my life. I
do not have space to do that. They know why I am grateful for them. So I will only mention their names in chronological order of our first encounter: Ênio Brito, Camila Fernandes, José Maria dos Santos, José Carlos Dias, Geraldo Bogoni, Erika Carneiro, Felipe Pondé, Ronaldo Zacharias, Silvia Gonçalves Dias, Maurício Magalhães de Souza, Milena Medeiros e Marques, Raphael Rodrigues, Leo Pessini, Maria Clara Bingemer, James Keenan, Claudenir Modulo, Margaret Guider, Andrea Vicini, Larry Sullivan, Jojo Orosa, Joe Bisoffi, Paul Farmer, Bryan Massingale, Joe Mueller, David Kiger, Patrick O’Kernick, Kris Szatmary, Daniel Glass, Susan Wood, John Thiede, Deirdre Dempsey, Robert Masson, Tom Hughson, and Florencia Dibarboure.

Although their names have appeared already, I am pleased to repeat my thanks to them for their wonderful work as members of the dissertation committee – Bryan Massingale and Susan Wood (co-directors who by their mentorships have gone beyond the walls of the university), James Keenan (who has been the mentor of my international academic adventures since I left Brazil), and John Thiede (whom I also served as a TA and from whom I learned to teach American students for the first time).

Finally, I really want to thank an angel whose Triuno has gifted my life. Thanks to Mary Yanny for everything she, in her unbelievable dynamism of 85 years, has done for me. Her generosity to help a Brazilian student improve his English in the midst of a cold land, touched my heart since the first day I met her. Then her humility, tenderness, and vigor of a special human being have made her my best friend, my support and perhaps the natural personification of the supernatural present of the Moon in my existential journey.

Que o Deus libertador dos pobres abençoe todos vocês, amém, axé, saravá, awerê...!!!
# Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ................................................................................................................................. i  

ABBREVIATIONS ........................................................................................................................................ vii  

INTRODUCTION .............................................................................................................................................. 1  
   A Thesis: Health Justice in the Company of the Poor ................................................................. 2  
   A Problem: Poverty and Health Inequalities ............................................................................... 6  
   Method and Interdependent Connections .......................................................................... 10  

PROLEGOMENON OF A PROJECT: HERMENEUTICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL LINES ......................................................................................................................................................... 15  
   1. An Option, A Subject, and A Method ...................................................................................... 17  
   2. Which Anthropology: Act of Spirit ......................................................................................... 19  
   3. Which Hermeneutics: Appropriation of Texts and Stories ............................................ 31  
   4. Which Ethics: Liberation Ethics ............................................................................................ 39  

Part I HUMAN CONTINGENCY: ANTHROPOLOGY OF SUFFERING ........................................ 44  

Chapter 1  
THE UNFORTUNATE BEING IN SIMONE WEIL ...................................................................................... 49  
   1.1 Beginning From The Real .............................................................................................................. 52  
   1.2 Human Misery: Force and Its Revelation ............................................................................... 62  

Chapter 2  
ROOTEDNESS, SUFFERING, AND COMPASSION: MALHEUR AND INCARNATION ....... 71
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Human Condition: From Uprootedness to Rootedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Malheur and the Social: Suffering, Compassion, and Incarnation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3</td>
<td>THE LIBERATION APPROACH TO SUFFERING: SIMONE WEIL AND LIBERATION THEOLOGY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>The Liberation Aspect of Compassion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Social Suffering and the Irruption of the Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4</td>
<td>THE PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR AS AN EXISTENTIAL COMMITMENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Previous Stories: Social Crisis, Community, Bible, and Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>“Academic Confusions”: The Preferential Option for the Poor from Above – Epistemological Boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Bereshit: The Locus of Liberation Theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Option for the Poor: Being with the Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5</td>
<td>EMPTYING AND THE PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR: MYSTICISM AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Emptying as a Mystical Answer to Suffering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>The Option for the Poor: Liberating Way of Emptying and Social Implications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION PART I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part II SUFFERING AND INEQUALITIES IN HEALTH</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6</td>
<td>LIBERATION ETHICS: INCLUSION FROM BELOW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Different Approaches: Catholic Social Teaching and Liberation Theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>The Catholic Social Teaching Approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>The Liberation Theology Approach</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 7

THE SUFFERING OF THE POOR AND THEIR VULNERABILITY: VOICES FROM BELOW
.............................................................................................................................................................. 218

7.1 The Voice of the Poor: The Voices of Bolivia’s Pueblos................................................. 223

7.2 Listening to the Poor and Population Health: Experience with Bolivia’s
Pueblos .......................................................................................................................................................... 242

Chapter 8

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE BEYOND NUMBERS: LEARNING FROM THE
HERMENETICAL LENS OF THE POOR ................................................................................... 248

8.1 Learning from the Victims and Health Inequalities: Knowledge from Below..... 253

8.2 Santa Cruz de la Sierra’s Voices ......................................................................................... 258

8.3 The Village of Gutiérrez: The Guarany Mind................................................................. 270

Chapter 9

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE AND SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH: THE
VULNERABILITY OF THE POOR ................................................................................................ 279

9.1 Social Panorama of Latin America..................................................................................... 287

9.2 Social Determinants of Health in Brazil ............................................................................ 292

9.3 Equity in the Social Context of Health Care .................................................................... 302

9.4 Equity and the Preferential Option for the Poor.............................................................. 313

CONCLUSION PART II....................................................................................................................... 321

Part III ANTHROPOLOGY OF SUFFERING AND LIBERATION ETHICS: BASES FOR
HEALTH CARE AS A HUMAN RIGHT......................................................................................... 325

Chapter 10

GLOBAL HEALTH AND HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK FROM BELOW: THEOLOGICAL
AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ............................................................................... 336

10.1 Global Health: Poverty, Ill Health, and Population Health......................................... 341

10.2 Health/Health Care As A Social Good and A Human Right........................................ 348
10.3 Justice in Health Care in the Key of Liberation ................................................................. 358

Chapter 11

POPULAR EDUCATION AND PUBLIC HEALTH: A COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH FOR HEALTH CARE ADVOCACY .............................................................................................................. 364

11.1 Brazilian Experience: Public Health System, Popular Participation, And *Pastoral da Saúde* ....................................................................................................................................................... 376

11.2 Freire’s Popular Education and Dialogue for Critical Thinking ..................................... 391

11.3 A Framework of Popular Health Education: A Community-Based Approach For Public Health Care Activism ................................................................................................................. 409

CONCLUSION PART III .................................................................................................................. 421

FINAL CONCLUSION: SUFFERING – HEALTH – HOPE .............................................................. 426

BIBLIOGRAPHY .......................................................................................................................... 437
ABBREVIATIONS
(Alphabetic Order)

Works by Simone Weil

AD  Attente de Dieu (Paris: La Colombe, 1950)
OC I  Primiers Écrits Philosophiques (Paris: Gallimard, 1988)
OC IV 1  Écrits de Marseille 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 2008)
OC IV 2  Écrits de Marseille 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 2009)
OC V 1  Questions Politiques et Religieuses. (Gallimard: Paris, 2000)
OC VI 1  Cahiers 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1994)
OC VI 2  Cahiers 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1997)
OC VI 3  Cahiers 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 2002)
OC VI 4  La Connaissance Surnaturelle (Paris: Gallimard, 2006)
OEuvres  Selections of Simone Weil’s Writings (Paris: Gallimard, 1999)
PG  La Pesanteur et la Grâce (Paris: Plon, 2007)
SC  La Source Grecque (Paris: Gallimard, 1953)

Documents of the Catholic Church

Aparecida  Conferência Episcopal Latino Americana – CELAM,
Documento de Aparecida (São Paulo; Brasilia: Paulus; Edições CNBB, 2007).
CA  Centesimus Annus
CV  Caritas in Veritate
DH  Dignitatis Humanae
EG  Evangelii Gaudium
EN  Evangelii Nuntiandi
ES  Ecclesiam Suam
GS  Guadium et Spes
LE  Loborem Exercens
LS  Laudato Sí
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MM</td>
<td>Mater et Magistra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OA</td>
<td>Octogesima Adveniens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PT</td>
<td>Pacem in Terris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PP</td>
<td>Populorum Progressio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QA</td>
<td>Quadragesimo Anno</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RN</td>
<td>Rerum Novarum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRS</td>
<td>Sillicitudo Rei Socialis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

A commitment leads this study in its existential and methodological aspects: the preferential option for the poor. This commitment begins with an experience of companionship with the poor and their struggles, that is, as a friend of the poor who walks with them, sees their faces, listens to their voices, realizes the strength of their legs which must walk in a journey of suffering, faith, and hope. Among the poor, and experiencing their reality of scarcity and oppression, we find everything we do not want to believe: that such things exist. We know the existence of these things. They are ugly. We know that because we have heard. But they are apart from us. They are a distant, ugly reality without a face or a name. What can I do? Poverty has always existed and will continue to exist. I cannot change the world, can I? No, you cannot change the world alone, but you can contemplate the faces of the poor and realize that they have names, voices, and something to teach you. Nobody can change the world alone. But everybody can walk with the poor, the first and fundamental step of impacting this ugly reality of poverty and suffering.

The reality of the poor is ugly not only because of their poverty and suffering, but also because of their vulnerability to fall into actions that harm their own community. As you will see in the last chapter of this work, the poor also need liberation from the mentality of the oppressor. Walking with the poor also means that there is no moral purity that protects their actions. Being with them is not a choice for their morality, but rather an existential commitment to be a humble companion of and advocate for the poor against their poverty. It is to open our eyes
and ears to understand their suffering, feel their hope, and learn their faith. Consequently, it is to establish a dialogical process of mutual learning between them and us in a way that this dichotomy (them and us) is overcome in a *community of we*: companions who are together in a historical movement of compassion, learning, and liberation.

**A Thesis: Health Justice in the Company of the Poor**

Committed to this *community of we* and to a dialogical process of mutual learning, I address, from a liberation theological ethics approach, issues of justice in health care from the perspective of the poor. Given Catholic social teaching and integrating the voice of the poor, this work shapes, in an interdisciplinary dialogue, a liberation ethics in which the perspective of the poor is the hermeneutical locus that challenges us to integrate their voices and experiences into the health justice discourse. Population health¹ and healthcare assistance to restore health and quality of life are essential for human flourishing. Without appropriate health conditions and health care, a person is not able to develop and to live in a way he/she can enjoy a life with dignity and opportunities to pursue happiness according to his/her personal, cultural, and religious values. Therefore, population health and health care

---

¹ Population health is a well-known technical term used in the public health field. It refers to health status and health indicators of specific populations and groups, or countries and even at the global level. It is also a standard to check the effectiveness of public health systems, healthcare delivery by governments and organizations, and the impact of social determinants of health. See: Norman Daniel, "Equity and Population Health: Toward a Broader Bioethics Agenda," *Hastings Center Report* 36, no. 4 (July 2006): 22-35.
require social development grounded in justice and able to create social conditions to affect life positively.

Poverty is an undeniable reality that prevents billions of people from enjoying social conditions that promote health. In addition, the suffering resulting from poverty prevents people’s flourishing and causes many premature deaths. The poor are the most vulnerable to illnesses and are suffering the fate of lack of healthcare assistance. Without good health conditions, a person’s ability to flourish is damaged. Health conditions deteriorate as a result of social injustice and poverty. Health inequalities prevent people from flourishing, and are consequences of social injustice that creates poverty through structures of violence against the poor, such as the lobby for health care as a commodity in the free market.

From a liberating perspective, in order to promote population health and justice in health care, it is necessary to struggle for social justice in a way that the poor can participate in the process of social transformation. Based on theological – anthropological foundations and from the perspective of the poor (those who are the most vulnerable to sickness and are crying out for justice and liberation), I address justice in health care in a liberation approach that engages with the poor, listens to them, learns from them, and begins a dialogical process of empowering the poor.\(^2\) This dialogical process is from the experience of the poor’s suffering that

\(^2\) This will be based on the perspective that the poor have something to say and to teach us and society as a whole. In theology, this perspective was emphasized by Latin American bishops gathered in the Conferences of Medellín and Puebla, and developed by liberation theologians. See: Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Como Fazer Teologia da Libertação*, 8th ed. (Petrópolis: Vozes, 2001). Pope Francis also has stressed this perspective; see: *Evangelii Gaudium* nos. 198, 199 and *Laudado Sì*, nos. 149; 179. It also has philosophical roots that began with Antonio Gramsci, the first modern philosopher to affirm that the popular culture has knowledge; see: A. Gramsci, “Problems of History and Cultures,” in *Selections From the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* edited and
shows an experience of companionship in a historical praxis for liberation. The Gospel of Jesus Christ guides this experience of companionship by teaching us that the poor are the privileged recipients of the good-news (Lk 4:18).

In the company of the poor and following Catholic social tradition, especially its liberation version from Latin America, I examine health care as a human right necessary for human flourishing. I develop a human rights framework that can address health inequalities and promote population health, especially among the poor. For that, I found it necessary to develop an anthropology that supports this framework and criticizes the instrumentalization of health care by the free market. The starting point for the anthropological foundation is the reality of the poor where we can crudely see the human contingency through the suffering of the poor. Suffering is part of the human condition no matter the socio-economic level, but it is part of the daily life of the poor. Through the human condition of contingency, I present an anthropology of suffering that unites all humans in the same existential fate. But, for the poor, it is a daily social reality since social injustice and oppression force the poor to carry the burden of a life which lacks basic needs to flourish with dignity. This human condition supports delivering health care as a human right in a framework of mutual learning and historical praxis.

translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey N. Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 3-43. Simone Weil also develops this topic by affirming that the poor have a sensitivity for knowledge that comes from suffering that other social classes do not have; see: Simone Weil, “L’Enracinement,” in Simone Weill Oeuvres, ed. Florence de Lussy (Paris: Quarto Gallimard, 1999), 1141.

3 The distinction between suffering as part of human existence and the suffering of the poor is both philosophical and sociological. First, suffering as part of human existence is presented in a philosophical existentialist tradition that sees the human being in its anguish as a finite being who yearns for the infinite and sees his/her existence deteriorate in his/her own fragility, limitation, and mortality. (See, for example, the masters of existentialism, Soren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, and Jean Paul Sartre). This existential condition connects all human beings, including the poor.
In dialogue with the poor, this dissertation is grounded on two theological-philosophical perspectives to shape an anthropology of suffering and to address health inequalities through a liberating approach. The first is the thought of Simone Weil and her reflection on suffering; the second is that of Latin American liberation theology and its reflection on social justice from the preferential option for the poor.

This anthropology of suffering, having these two theological-philosophical perspectives as theoretical points of reference, is developed from the hermeneutic lens of the poor, having the preferential option for the poor and their voices as the axis that connects these two perspectives. Thus, this is the foundation used to present a framework of health care as a human right that is not only based on theories of justice, but also that integrates the voices of the poor, their worldview, and their suffering in a concrete process of mutual learning. Finally, the main thesis of this dissertation is: The poor are crying out for justice and life. Listening to them, the anthropology of suffering grounds the needed human rights framework in health care.

Consequently, all experience some level of suffering in their lives. The intensity of their experience will be in accord with the individual’s consciousness of his/her own contingency. Some Christian philosophers and theologians also share this tradition, e.g. Edith Stein, Gabriel Marcel, Karl Rahner and Simone Weil. (Some argue that previous Christian thinkers already thought that previously, e.g. Augustine and Meister Eckhart.) But they present the possibility of satisfaction of human desire for the infinite through the experience of grace. Second, the suffering of the poor is a visible pain because it is not only part of their existential condition, but it is also an external social factor which affects the life of the poor. In other words, the poor also suffer as a result of socioeconomic conditions that prevent them from accessing goods necessary for them to flourish. Lack of these goods deteriorates their living conditions, makes them vulnerable to illness and even to premature death. For the general discussion on the philosophical anthology of the philosophers mentioned above, see: Henrique C. de Lima Vaz, Antropologia Filosófica I (São Paulo: Loyola, 1992).

The human rights framework of health care will be developed from the perspective of the poor. It will affirm the poor’s version of justice in health care. This study will apply the method of the Latin American historical school which has developed an ambitious project: to recount Latin American history from the version of the losers, that is, from the perspective of those who have been oppressed, exploited, marginalized, and killed throughout Latin American history since the 16th century European invasion. See: Eduardo Galeano, Las Venas Abiertas de América Latina, 2nd ed. (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2015).
care toward justice. This can only be achieved through a liberation approach in companionship with and advocacy on behalf of the poor for a historical praxis of liberation.

A Problem: Poverty and Health Inequalities

Without appropriate healthcare assistance and social structures that can promote population health, a healthy human flourishing is not possible. The poor are those who have these conditions denied because of their vulnerability of living in poverty and inability to find necessary goods for flourishing with dignity according to their values. In a few words, poverty, injustice, and health inequalities are responsible for preventing poor people from a healthy human flourishing. This is a fact that is proven by many studies. For example, the WHO Commission on Macroeconomic and Health (CMH) shows the connection between poverty and population health and their correlative interface with health care and macroeconomic issues. This commission stresses that poverty and health conditions prevent developing countries from social and economic development. CMH calls for global actions that address healthcare issues and population health. These actions, first of all, must target those whose health is at risk and who are vulnerable, that is, the poor, especially the poor in developing countries.

---


6 Ibid., 9-14.
Current studies affirm the undeniable connection between poverty and ill health.\(^7\) The poor and vulnerable groups are most affected by social inequalities and have their health harmed. Poverty prevents people from accessing primary goods which all must have to develop their lives. The poor are more vulnerable to illness and, absent good health, they do not have the necessary conditions to improve their lives, since good health is a condition of development. In other words, poverty causes ill health that makes people poorer, and thus produces a lower health status. There is a structural cycle of violence and injustice against those who have never had the opportunity to change their lives.\(^8\)

In theology, there are also studies that address social issues and relate them to justice in health care.\(^9\) Some theologians, for instance, have addressed HIV/AIDS issues from a social justice perspective. They have shown how social injustice is the


\(^8\) Structural violence is a term that has been used in health care and its relation to poverty by Paul Farmer. He has been inspired by the preferential option for the poor to develop his research and medical work on global health. Farmer applies insights from liberation theology to health care and issues of social justice. See: Paul Farmer, *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), especially attention for chapter 5 and 6.

main cause of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the Sub-Saharan Africa and other poor areas in the world.\textsuperscript{10} Moreover, they stress that theological ethics, through its social justice tradition of reflection and practice in the public arena, have the resources to contribute to health justice debate and social justice actions. In addition, Catholic social teaching has a long tradition of addressing social justice issues and has defended health care as a good that must be delivered as a human right.\textsuperscript{11} This teaching also affirms that having health care needs met is essential for human flourishing.\textsuperscript{12}

Liberation theology has also contributed to this debate on poverty, social justice, and health inequalities.\textsuperscript{13} Perhaps the most significant contribution of liberation theology has been providing a reflection that has embodied the historical praxis of communities in their struggles for justice. Thus, it has led theologians and others to join the poor and to make the preferential option for the poor a guideline


\textsuperscript{11} John XXIII, \textit{Pacem in Terris}, no. 11.


principle of action. Among the poor, the goal is to empower them and to engage
them in a political debate on social justice. It is the poor being agents of their own
history. Additionally, liberation theologians have called attention to mechanisms of
institutionalized violence that have made the poor victims of neoliberal markets and
prevented them from accessing essential goods needed to flourish. This theology
has inspired liberating approaches in health care. Liberation theology suggests ways
to address this issue from below, that is, in ways that the poor become agents of
their own liberation. It is liberation theology’s principles applied in the healthcare
context.

Although there are many studies showing the relation between poverty and
health inequalities, some supporting health care as a human right, and others using
a theological approach, there is a lack of studies that listen to the poor and present
their voices as an important resource to address justice in health care. Furthermore,
no studies do this in an inclusive and interdisciplinary way, shaping a liberation
ethics framework from the perspective of the poor. This dissertation intends to
redress this omission by means of developing an inclusive dialogue with the poor in
their reality and suffering. So it presents the human condition from the worldview of
the poor that is in dialogue with philosophical and theological anthropology in order

---

14 Leonardo Boff has shown how this institutionalized violence, grounded in a mechanistic
paradigm of unlimited exploration and development, has damaged the environment and the life of
the poor. See: Leonardo Boff, Cry of the Earth and Cry of Poor (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997) and Saber
Gutiérrez, in his early work, developing Medellín’s statement of institutionalized violence against the
poor, also examined this mechanism of oppression. See: Gustavo Gutiérrez, Teologia da Libertação,
to present a liberation ethics framework for justice in health care, based upon a community-based practice of mutual learning.

**Method and Interdependent Connections**

I begin this study with a prolegomenon that develops and justifies the method of my analysis of poverty and health inequalities from the perspective of the poor. This prolegomenon is dense and ambitious, but it was necessary for the limits, the path, and the goals of my work in its courageous task of bringing the voices of the poor to the academic debate. The reading of the prolegomenon is indispensable, but I introduce some of its ideas now. Methodologically, this dissertation has a subject of research that extends to two technical objects. The subject is the connection between poverty and health inequalities. This subject is methodologically addressed with two objective tools that are also both objects from inside the subject and mediations in response to the reality of the subject. These technical objects are: *material object* and *formal object.*\(^\text{15}\) The *material object* is the suffering of the poor in their context marked by poverty and social injustice, which is the main cause of health inequalities and suffering. The *formal object* is the foundations that are chosen to address the material object, namely, Simone Weil’s and liberation theology’s approaches to suffering and social injustice. These approaches are examined in the way they shape an anthropology of suffering able to

\(^{15}\) On material object and formal object of a creative and original development of an academic/scientific research, see: João Batista Libanio, *Introdução à Vida Intelectual*, (São Paulo: Loyola, 2001) and Umberto Eco, *How to Write a Thesis* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015).
understand the suffering of the poor and, at the same time, to recognize them as agents of their own liberation and struggle for justice in health care.

The entirety of this endeavor is the subject of research, which forms a harmonic symphony with one plot: a movement of construction of an anthropology of suffering that grounds a liberation ethics able to respond to the challenge of poverty and health inequalities. Yet as with any symphony that creates a great opera, musical notes and instruments are not sufficient; it also needs a plot and a melody. The plot of this research is the reality of the poor and their suffering as victims of structural violence. And the melody is their voices and cries for justice in health care. Put a different way, the subject of research is addressed from a hermeneutic perspective provided by the suffering of the poor and their voices. The key element of this hermeneutic is the preferential option for the poor that leads us to be in the company of the poor as the hermeneutic locus of doing theology and appropriating of texts. As a result, I end this work by suggesting a concrete framework or method for a community-based approach of delivering health care through a dialogical process of mutual learning among the poor led by their historical praxis.

---


17 I will examine theological and philosophical texts, as well as narratives from poor’s experience with health care, grounded on Paul Ricoeur’s and Joaquim Severino Croatto’s hermeneutic that affirms the freedom of written and oral texts when they become public, as consequence of their reserve of meaning and its interaction with particular contexts. See: Paul Ricoeur, *Escritos e Conferências 2: Hermenêutica* (São Paulo: Loyola, 2011); Joaquim Severino Croatto, “La Contribución de la Hermeneutica Bíblica a la Teología de la Liberacion,” *Cuadernos de Teología* 6, no. 4 (1985): 45-69.
Beginning with the prolegomenon, I develop an epistemological clarification and delimitation in order to define the epistemological options that were chosen to frame my construction of knowledge, from the empirical experience to the creation of knowledge and its transmission through language. Then, a good metaphor to understand the procedure and the organization of this dissertation and its chapters is the metaphor of building a house.

The entire work, that is, the dissertation (the house), is divided into three parts and each part has several chapters. Parts one and two are the foundations of this house, and part three is its roof. Each chapter is the material that constitutes the house’s foundations and roof. The foundations cannot exist without the material and the roof cannot sustain itself without its foundations.

Part I (foundation I) is the construction of an anthropology of suffering with material originated from Simone Weil’s and Latin American liberation theology’s approaches of suffering (formal object) and the experience of suffering of the poor (material object). Grounded on these bases, this part presents an anthropology of suffering shaped by the hermeneutic lens of the poor that I use to appropriate and re-read philosophical and theological texts. This foundation is essential later to sustain health care as a human right (Part III), the roof of this house. The human condition and its finite fragility – that are explicitly expressed in the lives of the poor who reveal to us our own contingency – is the foundation to affirm the right to access health care as a socio-economic right.

Part II (foundation II) is the movement to construct a liberation ethics for justice in health care from the perspective of the poor. Its material object is the
social suffering of the poor and health inequalities. Its formal object is the
hermeneutic lens of the poor that shapes a liberation ethics. The reality of the poor,
in their vulnerability and struggle for health care, is the hermeneutic locus that
demands attention to the voice of the poor. Beginning with a presentation of
Catholic social teaching and its difference from liberation theology, and in order to
shape this liberation ethics, the hermeneutic locus challenges us to go beyond
Catholic social ethics to integrate the voices and experiences of the poor into health
justice discourse. Here, the poor literally speak. Discourses of individuals from my
experience of companionship and research among the poor in Latin American
countries, namely Bolivia and Brazil, are presented and examined as a dialogue of
mutual learning. This part is also essential to sustain the roof because it cannot
exist, as a framework to promote justice in health care, if the poor do not participate
in the health justice debate.

Part III (the roof) is the argument for health care as a human right and,
subsequently, a dialogical method of community-based action for healthcare
delivery and social justice. These, the argument and the method, are sustained by
the two foundations: anthropological and ethical. They are the bases that show, on
the one hand, the human condition *per se* and the unjust suffering of the poor as
victims of structural violence. On the other hand, they integrate the voices of the
poor into the health justice debate through a historical praxis. With this basis, Part
III develops a critique of the limits and insufficiency of theories of justice and some
healthcare arguments created only from abstract rationalization, especially those
advanced by supporters of health care as a commodity, and those who see the poor
only as passive receptors of interventions. Thus Part III argues for justice in health care that begins from the human condition in dialogue with those who care the burden of healthcare inequalities, namely, the poor.

At the end of this dissertation, the house is built: a human rights framework and a community-based approach for justice in health care sustained by an anthropology of suffering and liberation ethics. Continuing with the house metaphor, I must say that this dissertation is not constructed to have parts that can make sense separately. A wall can exist separate from the house, but it is only a wall, not a house. One can read it, but it does not fulfill its goal unless it is part of a completed house. Each piece – words, concepts, stories, and arguments – are chosen to have an important function, that cannot be dismissed, to sustain the house. It is a continuous interdisciplinary movement in which what comes before is essential to understand what will come. And what comes after will answer open questions from previous arguments. Therefore, as a dialogue between the reader and the author, begin to read this work open to learning from stories and to being in a house to enjoy a full symphony. Paraphrasing the prophet Isaiah, I would say: Temple of the Lord, house of the poor.
I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to little children. Jesus (Matt 11:25)

I want a Church which is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the sensus fidei, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them. Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium, no. 198

The little children of God have a knowledge that many of us do not have. The poor Church and the Church for the poor is the Church that assumes continuity in history, the mission of Jesus who, in the synagogue of Nazareth, proclaimed that he is the anointed one who is to announce the good news to the poor (Lk 4: 18). All human beings are God’s children who are loved and empowered by His grace. No matter who you are, God’s grace is a gift offered to you. However, there are different ways to experience this grace, which is always mediated through history and the human condition. As Aquinas affirmed: “Grace builds on nature.”1 The little children of God, regardless of any interpretation one can provide, are always those who remain marginalized and suffering. The little children are those whom Jesus chose

1 Summa Theologie, I-II, Q. 109, 1. See also: Summa Contra Gentiles, Part II, Chapters 148, 3 and 150, 7.
as the privileged recipients of the good news: the poor. Spiritual interpretations can be made and one can affirm that the little children also include those who are not materially poor and suffering or marginalized by other factors. These interpretations are not wrong and should not be dismissed. The kingdom of God is a universal kingdom. Nevertheless, even those who offer these spiritual interpretations cannot deny the privileged of the poor to be the first recipients of the good news.\(^2\) They are the little children of God who know something to teach us.

“They (the poor) have much to teach us.” In his pastoral sensitivity, Pope Francis knows, from his experience among the poor in his homeland, Argentina, that the poor have much to say and to teach us. One cannot realize this if he/she is not among the poor having an incarnated experience of their reality, struggle, suffering, faith, and hope. Among the poor, Jesus’ words of thanksgiving make sense. The poor have an experience of God’s grace, mediated by their historical and human reality of suffering and hope, that is, a unique experience of God’s revelation. This experience is not only something psychological or religious in the sense of a force that strengthens them in their reality. It is also an experience of meaning that generates a consciousness. This consciousness is a noetic knowledge\(^3\) that, mediated by history, shapes a worldview, that is, a perspective of perceiving, understanding, and acting in the world. This perspective is the hermeneutic lens of this dissertation that

\(^2\) An example of a spiritual interpretation can be found in: Francisco Catão, *Falar de Deus* (São Paulo: Paulinas, 2001), 103-107.

\(^3\) *Noetic Knowledge* is a concept originated from Plato’s philosophy to refer to the experience of contact with the transcendental reality. This is an experience that generates knowledge because it is a contact with truth. It goes beyond a psychological experience, but rather it is an experience of the human spirit. In the Christian tradition, a *noetic experience* is also identified as a mystical experience in which the mystical person encounters with God, the truth. This encounter generates knowledge.
will examine the connection between poverty and health inequalities in order to present a liberation ethics for justice in health care from the perspective of the poor.

1. An Option, A Subject, and A Method

The option of this work is the preferential option for the poor, a Christological option from the heart of the Gospel.\(^4\) This option is mandatory, because it comes from the Gospel and the recognition of knowledge/wisdom of the poor. It is mandatory because it is first an act of faith by a person who believes in a God who became human among the poor to announce the good news of liberation and salvation. Second, because this person – a disciple who follows the footsteps of his master, Jesus – arises from his experience among the poor, as a poor person himself, and serving them. This experience has been much more a life of learning from them than anything else. Hence, I take the risk of writing this dissertation in the first person singular because all the issues that will be addressed here will be through the lens of the poor grounded on one option: the preferential option for the poor. I am the agent who organized this exercise of academic production as a dissertation. But the poor are the agents who provide the hermeneutic lens to complete this exercise. Although I am responsible for the writing, they are my partners in this journey.

The journey is existential and cannot be totally understood and written. It must be limited and assumed choices that allow me to present an aspect of this journey. Therefore, there is a subject and a method to make it possible to navigate

\(^4\) Aparecida, no. 392; EG, no. 198.
the small portion of waters that make up this immense ocean. Methodologically, this
dissertation has a subject of research that extends to two technical objects. The
subject is the connection between poverty and health inequalities. This subject will
be methodologically addressed with two objective tools that are also both objects
from inside the subject and mediations to respond to the reality of the subject.
These technical objects are: material object and formal object. The material object
is the suffering of the poor in their context marked by poverty and social injustice, the
main cause of health inequalities and suffering. The formal object is the foundation
that is chosen to address the material object; this foundation is made up of Simone
Weil’s and liberation theology's approaches to suffering and social injustice. These
approaches will be examined in the way they shape an anthropology of suffering
able to understand the suffering of the poor and, at the same time, to recognize them
as agents of their own liberation and struggle for justice in health care.

The entirety of this endeavor is the subject of research, a harmonic symphony
with one plot: a movement to construct an anthropology of suffering that grounds a
liberation ethics able to respond to the challenge of poverty and health inequalities.
Just as any symphony that creates a great opera, musical notes and instruments are
not sufficient, but also need a plot and a melody. The plot of this research is the
reality of the poor and their suffering as victims of structural violence. And the
melody is their voices and cry for justice in health care. Put in a different way, the
subject of research will be addressed from a hermeneutic perspective provided by

---

5 On material object and formal object of a creative and original development of an
academic/scientific research, see: João Batista Libanio, Introdução à Vida Intelectual (São Paulo:
the suffering of the poor and their voices. The key element of this hermeneutic is the preferential option for the poor that leads us to be in the company of the poor as the hermeneutic locus\(^6\) of doing theology and the appropriation of texts.\(^7\)

To be clear, I am not developing a sociological-anthropological study about the connection between poverty and health inequalities. Although I will use some sociological studies, especially epidemiological and population health research and statistics, to provide empirical evidence of the impact of social injustice and poverty on population health, my dissertation is in the area of ethics. Therefore, my effort is to present the human condition from the worldview of the poor in dialogue with philosophical and theological anthropology in order to offer a liberation ethics framework for justice in health care. Now, it is necessary to situate which anthropology, hermeneutic, and ethics I am about to address.

2. **Which Anthropology: Act of Spirit**

Shortly before being killed, Socrates reveals to his disciples, sad because of his passive acceptance of death, that the great virtue of the human being is the inner life. Plato, who tells us the last teaching of his master Socrates, uses the word

---


\(^7\) I will examine theological and philosophical texts, as well as narratives from poor’s experiences with health care, grounded on Paul Ricoeur’s and Joaquim Severino Croatto’s hermeneutic that affirms the freedom of written and oral texts when they become public, as consequence of their reserve of meaning and its interaction with particular contexts. See: Paul Ricoeur, *Escrítos e Conferências 2: Hermenéutica* (São Paulo: Loyola, 2011); Joaquim Severino Croatto, “La Contribuición de la Hermeneutica Bíblica a la Teologia de la Liberacion,” *Cuadernos de Teología* 6, no. 4 (1985): 45-69.
psyché to define this inner faculty of the human being. Socrates affirms: "Psyché manifests itself in the act of rationalization, that is, the reality of a [human] being." He also characterizes psyché as the owner of a deep desire, that is, the authentic desire of all humans: the truth. In all acts of rationalization, the human being wants to achieve the truth. Of course, many factors and circumstances can prevent an individual from being moved by its desire to achieve the truth, such as bodily passions (pathos), where psyché has its residence in the earthly life. Shortly before being killed, Socrates encourages his disciples to be faithful to psyché and its search for the truth, but he alerts them that we will never fully have sufficiently the authentic object of our desire: the truth.10

The Christian tradition understood psyché as the animus of the human being, an inner principle that animates the human body and connects it to a transcendent reality. It is an inner life given by God’s breath, the ruah. Shortly before being killed, Jesus does not respond to his prosecutor, who asks, “what is truth?” (Jn 18:38). However, he revealed for those who saw the human incarnation of the transcendent reality in him, that he is “the way, the truth, and the life”... and “whoever believes in him will never die” (Jn 14:6; 11:25-26). The authentic search of human existence is for the truth. This search is possible because of the inner life of all individuals.

Simone Weil, a philosopher deeply influenced by Plato and a Christian convert who

---

8 I am spelling psyché in its transliteration of the Greek word πσυχέ in order to differentiate from the English word psyche. Although the spelling differences are minimal, I emphasize that they are not equivalents. Psyché does not mean psyche, as this word is characterized by modern psychology.


10 Ibid., 29.
found in the Crucified Jesus the authentic historical manifestation of the truth as justice and fragility that the world did not recognize, affirms that those who honestly search for the truth in their lives are on the way to the true God and will find Jesus.\textsuperscript{11} This statement has the potential to create much controversy, especially if it is present in the face of a non-Christian tradition. Although there is a controversial aspect, Weil’s statement has a universal character that opens for all who seek the truth. This search defines the anthropological nature of human existence in justice and fragility, as it has been embodied by the mystery of the incarnation.

Socrates was right when he affirmed that we will never sufficiently achieve the truth. Even the Christian tradition agrees with this. Accessing the truth is a revelation in which God allows himself to be known by us. God, the transcendent reality that connects to our psyché, offers an experience of encounter with him which allows us to partially touch the truth, but never possess it. This encounter generates a knowledge that affects our psyché, that is, our act of rationalization. It is a noetic knowledge; although it is beyond our rationalization, it is rational in the sense that it comes through our psyché. It provides existential meaning and generates practice: an ethical life. This revelation of the truth becomes visible and palpable with God’s incarnation in history, an act of His freedom and love for the world. He assumes human life and its condition of fragility and suffering, manifesting His justice on the cross. All this is a noetic knowledge because its origin

\textsuperscript{11} AD, 77.
is in the encounter with the truth, with an anthropological face, because showing who the human being is, without denying its fragility and corporeity.

Although Socrates was right about human inner life and its desire for the truth, he was not able to move forward to see that the act of rationalization, proper to psyché, is not a privilege of philosophers only. The search for satisfying the desire for the truth is not only a philosophical exercise of the analytic reason in an ascending movement. It is also a descending movement of revelation of the truth, as happened in the Jewish-Christian tradition where God, the infinite being, has revealed himself as the truth to the finite being. The human language has limits that prevent this experience from being expressed in categorical concepts, so it becomes narratives and symbols that shape religions traditions. In both cases, there is an experience of transcendence (the literal meaning of this Latin origin word is: trans – ascendere, rising [up] beyond) in which the human being “transgresses the limits of his ‘situation’ in the World and in History, and moves himself toward a supposedly trans-earthly and trans-historic reality that will gain expression of a symbolic system whereby societies express their raison d’être.”

Throughout Western history, we have realized an experience of transcendence founded on two traditions: ancient Israel and classical Greece. Later, they were refigured in the union promoted by Christian synthesis. As Lima Vaz explains:

---

The experience of transcendence – as an experience of the “being” and inside an area of ontological gravity – results in a ‘noetic’ experience of the truth, in an ‘ethical’ experience of the good, and in a ‘metaphysical’ experience of the Uno and the Absolute. These big experiences, inaugural of the civilizing circle that we have named Western, will be interpreted according to deep and original form in the biblical tradition of ‘transcendence’ as Word of God and in the Greek tradition of ‘transcendence’ as Idea.¹³

The encounter of these two traditions is present in the philosophical-theological corpus of Christianity that creates a synthesis of these traditions with Jesus Christ, the incarnated logos. Christianity is the continuity, in an original form, of the Revealed Word of God who became flesh, and its deep reinterpretation of the Word as mediation and, at the same time, mediator as a guide to the Transcendent Being, the Truth. Through grace, the human being is part of this truth because the Transcendent Being is a relational truth as Trinity.

Moreover, the incarnation of logos broke the exclusivity of acts of rationalization to achieve the truth presented by Plato, as a movement of psyché reserved only for those who dedicate themselves to the exercise of analytic reason (philosophy). The little children of God, namely the poor, the marginalized, and the oppressed now have access to the truth and achieve a knowledge that even the learned and clever cannot access by their rational ascending exercise only. Jesus inverts this logic – one still prevalent today – which makes knowledge the preserve of the elite and thus excludes the poor from participation in decision-making processes. The poor have a sensitivity to realize the truth in the midst of their

¹³ Ibid., 454.
suffering as a crucified people who identify themselves with the incarnation of the truth as a crucified God.

What is this anthropology? It is an anthropology of the psyché searching for the truth, as a transcendental spirit in the midst of limits of human fragility and history. The Brazilian philosopher Henrique C. de Lima Vaz, SJ\(^{14}\) develops a systematization of this anthropology, some aspects of which I will highlight. This systematization permits us to situate ourselves in a specific anthropological field, the kind I am developing in order to support the human rights framework for justice in health from the perspective of the poor.

Four Kantian questions have followed the history of humanity: Who is humankind? What can I know? What should I do? What may I hope?\(^{15}\) These questions are the issues of anthropology, epistemology, ethics and religion. Of course, they are not independent from each other. They have clear distinctions, but also have close connections. For example, an attempt to answer any question is an epistemological exercise because how can one affirm something about humankind if not through epistemological resources according to the limits of reason? This is exactly what I will do here: attempt to respond to the question about humankind from within a limited epistemological movement. However, unlike Kant, it is

---

14 Henrique C. de Lima Vaz (1921 - 2002) was a Jesuit Priest from Brazil. He is probably recognized as one the most important philosophers of Brazil. He received his Ph.D. from Gregorian University with a dissertation on *O Problema da Beatitude em Aristóteles e Santo Tomás*. He was one the founders of the most prestigious Brazilian philosophical journal, *Síntese*, and professor in different institutions, being the last two, Universidade Federal do Minas Gerais and Faculdade Jesuíta de Filosofia e Teologia, where he had served for most time until his death. His work is very vast and tense, and it has been subjected of increasing academic studies. The Society of Jesus in Brazil created the *Memorial Padre Vaz* that can be accessed online at: http://www.padrevaz.com.br/index.php (accessed June 20, 2016).

possible to go beyond to the limits of theoretical reason through the experience of *psyché* with the truth revealed by God. This encounter provides a noetic or supernatural knowledge that affects history and ethical action. Although limits still exist, because human beings can never exhaust the reality of truth (a transcendent reality) – not even, according to the phenomenologists, the *noumenon* of empirical phenomenological experiences can be accessed, they are not barriers to humans rising to touch the truth in an experience of meaning that affects all historical reality and social relations. We cannot have the truth, but we can touch it. This contact reveals who is human.

Following this transcendental perspective, Lima Vaz presents anthropology in three movements from *pre-comprehension* to *transcendental comprehension*. It is an anthropology of a transcendental movement of spirit (concept understood as inner life of the rational being, *psyché*) that is the subject and the object of comprehension of the human being between metaphysics and ethics. Lima Vaz says:

Fundamentally this idea of human (developed throughout history) integrates features of Antiquity-Classical tradition and of Biblical-Christian tradition. It expresses man through two essential prerogatives: as holding a universal reason and as gifted with liberty for choosing.\(^\text{16}\)

From these two prerogatives originate two high forms of human knowledge, metaphysics and ethics. The philosophical anthropology must be situated at the intersection between these two forms of knowledge: theoretical reason and practical reason. The flourishing of modern sciences places this traditional way of

understanding the humankind in crisis. According to Simone Weil, modern science, already in Descartes, separated theoretical reason, understood as contemplation, from practical reason, as manual labor that became mechanical practice. Consequently, in the industrial society, a class of people, e.g. workers, peasants, and the poor, became a vulnerable mass to be exploited by a small elite.17

In the development of modern science, many epistemological models sought to understand humankind globally. Lima Vaz classifies them in five models according to their method: empiric-formal, the model of natural sciences; dialectical, the model of historical sciences; phenomenological, the model of sciences of the psyche; hermeneutical, the model of culture; and ontological, the method of classical anthropology.18 I will use the last one to elaborate a philosophical discourse by focusing on the epistemological pole of nature – agent – form. Therefore, philosophical anthropology considers three levels of human knowledge: (1) The level of pre-comprehension, that is, the historical-cultural context in which individuals have their first experience of a being with a body, in the world, in social relations, and open to a religious experience; (2) The level of explicative comprehension, that is, the scientific explanations of human interactions and its world; and (3) The level of philosophical (or transcendental) comprehension (where is placed the anthropology that will be developed later).

This anthropology has a problematic issue that belongs to its nature. While in explicative comprehension the distinction between agent and object is clear, in


18 Lima Vaz, Antropologia Filosófica I, 150.
philosophical comprehension agent and object intercross themselves epistemologically. For example, sociology is an anthropological science that applies a method to understand a determined cultural behavior (pre-comprehension) of a human group. The object of this study is clear: a determined human group and some aspect of its culture. The agent of this study is a sociologist who can be distant from his object in order to analyze it objectively and to get concrete results. In philosophical anthropology, when addressing the question of who humankind is, the agent is the object of himself. So philosophical anthropology is not knowledge about an object, but rather it is knowledge from the object. "The act of philosophical knowledge is, in philosophical anthropology, the realization of a knowledge of the self, a giving of reason for the self."19 It is a self-constitution as agent by an exercise of the transcendental spirit.

Therefore, humankind becomes an object of himself situated in a space that divides his experience into three dimensions: nature, society, and self. These dimensions open to the transcendent reality that manifests a presence-absence in concepts and in a discourse unable to describe all the transcendentality of human existence. However, the discourse is the result of the passage from data to expression, from the nature to form mediated by the agent, humankind, also the object of this passage. It is a dialectical movement, nature – agent – form, that appears as constitutive of the human being. In other words, it is a dialectical structure constitutive of the ontological agent who expresses the logic of his being. Lima Vaz affirms:

19 Lima Vaz, Antropologia Filosófica I, 146.
The problem of agent (the self) in pre-comprehension, in the science of man, and in philosophical anthropology, is the elucidation of this 'mediation of the agent' that permits the man affirms himself as agent, that is, as a dialectical movement of passage from Nature to Form... The philosophical anthropology examines the forms of this mediation in a transcendental level and organizes them in a discourse which attempts to respond to the interrogation about the being of the man.¹

This mediation occurs in a unique ontological movement of a dialectical operation leading the passage from data to an understanding of its significance. It is a unique movement in three distinct levels of mediation: empirical, abstract, and transcendental. In empirical mediation, nature is the world where we have experiences and the form is the way to express the self which manifests itself through language. Abstract mediation, the explicative comprehension of nature, occurs from data originating in experimentations and methodical observations. This is expressed as form by the scientific discourse. Transcendental mediation, the philosophical comprehension of nature, occurs in the philosophical experience of objectification of the agent. Its form is concepts and categories that intellectually express this experience and develop a discourse through the articulation of these concepts. This is, for example, the process of articulation of the Cartesian cogito: *Cogito, ego sum* (I think, therefore I am).

Using concepts, the philosophical discourse elaborates a comprehension of humankind as a being able to give reason to its own existence and experiences. According to Lima Vaz, to achieve this discourse about humankind, there are two steps: first, it is the *aporetic moment* subdivided into two aporias: historical and

---

¹ Ibid., 148.
critical. The aporetic moment begins with the perplexity of the pre-comprehension of humankind’s experiences. This leads us to return to history and tradition to see explanations on humankind and their relevance to the present time. Questioning is the action of the critical aporia, which considers concepts and discourses about humankind through an eidetic moment. It then moves beyond, in a thetic moment, that is, questions from the agent in his/her transcendental mediation which searches for self-signification of his/her being.

Second, it is the elaboration of a category that must express a determined form of mediations, such as category of body in which the agent affirms an essential form of his/her being. Therefore, the person says: “I am my body.” Here there is an eidetic limitation by a categorization of an experience. This leads to the next step in achieving the philosophical discourse of humankind through a dialectical operation.21

Third, it is the dialectical operation of a discourse through categories and concepts. This dialectic operates on three principles: A. Principle of eidetic limitation that provides concepts and limits a specific aspect of the object. B. Principle of thetic limitlessness responsible for making the agent move beyond the concept because of the inexhaustible nature of the being, its transcendentality and experiences. It raises an opposition. C. Principle of totalization that is the equality between agent and object through the organization of categories in a philosophical anthropological discourse.22

---

21 Ibid., 150.
22 Ibid., 152.
Therefore, Lima Vaz concludes that the human knowledge is an accumulation of the exercise of the transcendental spirit in order to understand and to organize human knowledge about itself. As a result, Lima Vaz says:

The fundamental lines of philosophical anthropology define a conceptual space in which the human being inserts itself. Thus, as coordinates of this space, we can distinguish:

A. Concepts of Structure:
   - Body – somatic structure
   - Psychism – psychic structure
   - Spirit – spiritual structure

B. Concepts of Relations:
   - Objectivity - relation with the world
   - Inter-subjectivity – relation with the other
   - Transcendence - relation with the Absolute

C. Concepts of Unity:
   - Realization – unity as unification
   - Essence - unity as being-uno.23

The anthropology of suffering will be developed in this philosophical exercise of transcendental comprehension that will have pre-comprehension placed in the experience of the suffering of the poor in their historical reality of oppression and structural violence against them. The interpretation of concepts and categories will be from the perspective of the poor and their existential experience of being a suffering body in the world. Perhaps I will move beyond Lima Vaz in this sense. I will recognize the knowledge of the poor as an essential part of the critical aporia. The poor will be agents of the dialectical operation to shape a discourse on humankind. This perspective provides a hermeneutical way to address our subject, whether empirical experience, oral narratives, studies, or texts.

23 Ibid., 153.
3. Which Hermeneutics: Appropriation of Texts and Stories

Although he does not talk about the knowledge of the poor but rather focuses only on the history of philosophy, Lima Vaz affirms that there are different epistemological references that draw distinct models of understanding humankind. There are materialist models that are based on epistemological references from sciences, and there are spiritualist models that originate from the transcendental spirit and its movement of comprehension of the world. Teilhard de Chardin is an example of the spiritualist model while Levi Strauss of the materialist. In addition, Lima Vaz presents the hermeneutics as a spiritualist model inspired in materialist references, having Paul Ricoeur as one of the main representatives.24

Hermeneutics is a hard word to define. Originally, it comes from the Greek word *hermeneuin* and allows us to connect it to Hermes, a god of Greek mythology. Hermes is a god who transits quickly between both worlds: human and divine. This makes him a god who crosses boundaries, transmits messages, and helps understand events.25 Hermes has inspired hermeneutics that is a modern expression to refer to connections of realities, messages, texts and those who experience these in order to interpret, develop, and ground actions. Far from semantic consensus, hermeneutics is also a way of seeing and understanding the world where the central problem is interpretation.26 In this sense, one can affirm the

---


26 Paul Ricoeur affirms interpretation as the central problem of hermeneutics in two determinate ways: “The first one has to do with its field of application, the second its epistemological specificity.” See: Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics* (Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013), 45.
hermeneutical lens of the poor. This lens reveals the problem of interpretation. One can cast doubt on the value of this interpretation, but nobody can deny its existence and creative dynamism. Although the poor do not develop a systematic and dense anthropological philosophy, according to the process described by Lima Vaz, they have a perspective for addressing the world. The worldview of the poor is as important as any philosophy. Moreover, it is a perspective that provides a hermeneutics to address any philosophical discourse offering new interpretations, subsequent new thoughts, and a practical reason through a dialectical movement of appropriation of the discourse in confrontation with the worldview of the poor, inside their concrete reality and experiences.

The hermeneutical lens of the poor is the approach of this endeavor of developing a human rights framework for justice in health care from the perspective of the poor. This has led me to approach a hermeneutical method capable of philosophically grounding my project. Hence, the mediation of the agent and the reality (where he/she is) are fundamental supports of interaction with a text, a narrative, and a historical experience. All of them have a reserve of meaning that comes up when interacting with the agent. The agent can be a person, a group, or a people and their appropriation of historical experiences, expressed by facts, principles, narratives, and texts.

Hermeneutics examines texts in a dynamic effort of interpretation, but goes beyond it. Therefore, hermeneutics and interpretation are not the same thing.²⁷

---
Hermeneutics is a production of meanings from a text that results from a praxis of dialectical relationship between text and the historical reality of those who are reading the text.\textsuperscript{28} Ricoeur names it “theory of action” which is a “semantic of action and ascription.” He says: “Ascription consists precisely in the agent’s reappropriation of his or her own deliberation and preferences.”\textsuperscript{29} The reappropriation motivates the agent to act as owner of his/her actions. This, according to Ricoeur, justifies the questions: “Why did A do X? What led A to do X?”\textsuperscript{30} Unlike his predecessors in hermeneutics such as Heidegger and Gadamer, Ricoeur does not only look at what lies behind a text but also what is in front of it.

The appropriation and/or reappropriation of an event that has been transmitted through language in written and oral form are the heart of hermeneutics. Ricoeur affirms that texts have their own world, and it is dynamic and much larger than the world around a text when it was written. This is especially true in literature texts and narratives. The text has an autonomous existence and “the productions of a new meaning is bound to synthetic operations that create new forms of discourse.”\textsuperscript{31} Following this path, Jean-Luc Marion says: “Admittedly, a text does not speak to us as a ‘you’. It is always to ‘us’, who understand, and of us, to make it talk.”\textsuperscript{32} Making the text talk, a new meaning rises as the result of the

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 25.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 25-26.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{32} Jean-Luc Marion, \textit{Givenness & Hermeneutics} (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2013), 45.
dialectic between the text and the reader mediated by the new world where the text is read.

The Argentinian biblical scholar, Joaquim Severino Croatto, brings hermeneutics to the context of the biblical reading of the Christian communities in a reality marked by oppression. As a liberation theologian, he applies hermeneutics to the context of the poor and their reading of the biblical text. Croatto affirms that he goes “beyond the limitation imposed by Paul Ricoeur, for example, when he defines hermeneutics as ‘the theory of the functions of understanding in their relationship to the interpretation of texts.’ From the hermeneutic viewpoint, text and event or praxis are mutually conditioned.”

Ricoeur understands hermeneutics as a philosophical theory to comprehend the human thought expressed through language. According to Lima Vaz, Ricoeur does a synthesis between the spiritualist model of understanding humankind and its spirit and the materialist model of the philosophy of language. In addition, Ricoeur makes a distinction between philosophical hermeneutics and biblical hermeneutics. Although Croatto recognizes a distinction between styles, he refutes this rigid separation by saying that “there is one general hermeneutics, with many regional expressions.”

Hermeneutics is a fecund and dynamic interpretation of texts and events contextualized in the history of the reader.

---

33 Croatto, Biblical Hermeneutics, 1-2.
34 Vaz, Antropologia Filosófica I, 145.
36 Croatto, Biblical Hermeneutics, 3.
Croatto’s hermeneutics is a liberating method of reading the Bible and it contributes to liberation theology. He affirms: “All theology has a starting point. Based on the fact that theology is not a ‘depositum’ but rather a production in an ongoing process, it has motivations, starting points, and centers of legitimization. In fact, the praxis of theologian or praxis of his context as well as the sources of revelation converge in theological acts.” Croatto brings hermeneutics to theology and, more specifically, to liberation theology and the reading of the Bible by impoverished communities. Following Ricoeur, Croatto presents that the hermeneutical process begins with the three central elements of a text: an author (the one who speaks), a listener (the one who reads), and a context (where author and listener are inserted). In addition, all texts in the Bible begin with an event, and the central event in the Old Testament is the experience of the Exodus (also basis for Christian interpretation of paschal experience in the New Testament), that lies “behind” the text, one of the foundational elements of the text in phenomenology. The reading of this event becomes a text, and the re-reading of a text produces new texts. Consequently, these texts become the Word of God, that is a historical word. A community in its historical experience realizes the presence of God in the midst of its context and struggles. It is a dynamic process of communal

---


38 Ibid., 47-48. Ricoeur develops this idea as elements of a discourse: a speaker, a saying (meaning), a world (referent), rules (phonological lexical, and syntactical), and an allocution. See Ricoeur, Hermeneutics, 12.
construction that will lead to a canon, that is, the Scriptures. This is the hermeneutical process.\(^{39}\)

However, this hermeneutical process does not stop with a canon. Other communities access texts and create their own re-readings of this biblical text. They do it from a particular context. Now, the author disappears, the reader (or listener) is other, and he/she is in another context. The physical absence of the author is a semantic richness. The closing of the text becomes an openness: “From the finitude of the author to the infinitude of the text.”\(^{40}\) The new reader does not have the meaning of the text with the author’s mind. Thus the text has its own meaning and the reader appropriates it opening up many meanings.\(^{41}\) The text has its own life because it provides different meanings. Therefore, the text has *reserve-of-meanings* (*reserva-de-significados*). These meanings will arise from a dialectical relationship between the new reader (in a new context) and the text with its reserve-of-meanings. Narratives are *polysemic*, that is, they have excess of meanings. Hence, all readings of a biblical text are not a repetition, but rather a process of construction of meaning.\(^{42}\)

Severino Croatto says liberation theology is a perspective in which those who are reading a biblical text are doing so from a context of poverty and oppression. They are the poor who read the Bible in a hermeneutical process.


\(^{40}\) Croatto, “La Contribución de la Hermeneutica Bíblica a la Teología de la Liberación,” 49. This is one of Ricoeur’s contributions to phenomenology. In his hermeneutics, the text is open by its semantic autonomy and its own history that exceeds the history of the author. He also calls that “configuration” and “refiguration.” See: Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics*, 12-18.


\(^{42}\) Croatto, “La Contribución de la Hermeneutica Bíblica a la Teología de la Liberación,” 50.
The first project of liberation in new situations of oppression or captivity, whether they are inexhaustible in their inspirations and in their meaning, shows all readings that had been made by the Hebrew people, then by the Christian community, and today by our theology of liberation.\textsuperscript{43}

In this sense, texts have more than a relevant message that can be applied today: they also acquire a liberating aspect from the experience of oppression, as a result of autonomous texts with reserve-of-meanings and their interactions with a community in its historical situation. Thus, when the poor in Latin America read biblical texts, they re-create the message. Consequently, they achieve a meaning that provides a new biblical ethics. It is a liberation ethics that was in the text, but it is new and points to a context of historical praxis of the poor.

A Latin American liberation reading of biblical literature goes beyond classical interpretation of texts because their reality and experience provides a hermeneutical perspective. Exegesis is an important tool, but it is not enough to understand the new message of the text in and for a new reality. In a hermeneutical process, the poor themselves read a text from their reality of oppression and historical praxis. As a result, the text provides a new meaning in which they recognize the presence of God among them, and the process of liberation. The poor are the authority for reading (and re-reading), and for creating (and re-recreating) the meaning of a biblical text. This authority comes from the Bible itself as a book.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 55.
that shows a people of slaves in a historical process of liberation with its Liberator God.\textsuperscript{44}

Croatto’s hermeneutics has the merit of bringing hermeneutics, especially the one developed by Ricoeur, to the context of oppression in Latin America and its liberation theology. However, he focuses on appropriation and interpretation of texts by particular contexts. Although Croatto and Ricoeur recognize the importance of interpretation of facts and events, they remain on those events that became written narratives, especially biblical narratives and philosophical productions. They provide us with foundations for what I am calling a hermeneutical lens of the poor as the perspective to address texts, narratives, and historical events. However, I will move one step forward: the hermeneutical lens of the poor is not only a perspective to address texts in their interactions with the poor through appropriation and productions of meaning, but it is also a perspective to read facts, events, oral narratives, and the experience of the poor in their reality and praxis. One can say that it is their version of history and principles of justice in health care.

Moreover, this hermeneutical lens recognizes that the poor have a knowledge that comes from their experience of suffering, historical praxis, and contact with truth. Phenomenologists affirm that the truth of a thing, that is, the

\textsuperscript{44} Carlos Mesters, a Brazilian biblical scholar, has brought this hermeneutic process closer to the poor in his \textit{popular reading of the Bible} (\textit{leitura popular da biblia}. Note that “popular” in Portuguese refers to all things that come from the poor). Three words and a New Testament text summarize this method of popular reading: \textit{text – community – reality}, and the disciples of Emmaus’ journey (Lk 24:13-35). First, in a community, the poor present their dramas and social struggles. Second, they read a biblical text and confront their reality with the text. Third, they celebrate their lives. They share food, suffering, and hope. All these things lead them to a historical praxis for their liberation. Reading the prophetic literature in this way among the poor is to build a prophetic ethic from a liberating praxis in our current times. See: Carlos Mesters, “The Liberation Reading of the Bible,” \textit{SEDOS Bulletin} 28 (1996): 164-170.
noumenon (thing-in-itself), cannot be accessed. But some recognize that the truth as a *givenness* that cannot be explained, but rather presents itself as a gift. The truth is an act of God’s love as He reveals himself to us in Jesus Christ. The poor are those, through their suffering and spirituality, who access the truth that generates knowledge. They are not the only ones who have this contact, but they teach us something that must be embraced in order to promote liberation and justice.

4. Which Ethics: Liberation Ethics

This is the proposal of the entire endeavor of an anthropology of suffering to support justice in health care as a human right from the perspective of the poor. Liberation ethics is an exercise of the transcendental spirit in the midst of the historical praxis of the poor. It is a dialogical movement of listening to the poor and being open to learn from them. Far from a romantic vision of the poor, liberation ethics is the fruit of a practical engagement in the life, suffering, faith, hopes, and struggles of the poor. Therefore, liberation ethics has two dimensions that reflect the hermeneutical cycle of liberation theology.

The first dimension is the reality of the poor and their historical praxis of faith and liberation. They do not develop an ethics as a systematic reflection upon the moral act. They simply act morally, and this act is shaped by their historical experience. First of all, I am not yet using ‘acting morally’ in the narrow sense of

---


good acts based on principles and values. There is no implication or judgment of good and evil in moral acts of the poor. I am using this expression in a simple and preliminary sense, to illustrate that all action is a matter of ethical reflection. I clarify this to avoid a common critique of liberation theology, that it makes the poor a moral option in which “being poor” necessarily means to perform good moral acts. The preferential option for the poor is not an option based on moral standards, but rather is a theological option grounded on anthropological and sociological features that see the poor as victims of violence against their dignity.

The poor live an experience of being victims of social violence. This experience shapes their worldview and their faith. Consequently, this generates a historical praxis that is a liberation ethics of resistance, struggle, and hope. The experience of the poor provides them an existential protection and a knowledge that those who are outside this reality cannot understand. This occurs in the same way black theology in the U.S. names black experience. The Protestant theologian James H. Cone develops this concept in the context of U.S. racism, as an experience of suffering of the black community under white supremacy. He stresses the suffering of black people, victims of white supremacy, and their identification with Jesus’ cross. He presents a theology grounded on the black experience and Jesus’ cross, a paradoxical religious symbol that inverts values. According to Cone, the black experience is marked by suffering and the presence of Jesus’ cross among them that leads them to struggle for justice.47 Cone argues that whoever does not have this

---

experience or is distant from it cannot understand the suffering of black people,\textsuperscript{48} and their liberating knowledge grounded on black experience of faith in the crucified Jesus.\textsuperscript{49}

The experience of the poor and their knowledge cannot be understood far from them. In a paradoxical relationship between suffering and faith, this experience is a twofold liberation ethics: one is the existential protection that their faith provides by encountering Christ amidst suffering. So their moral action is in the atmosphere of this existential protection which is their values, principles, struggles, fragility, and hope. This is their \textit{ethos}, but it is necessary to clarify what this means. Ethos is the transliteration of two Classical Greek words \textgamma\thetaος (spelling with eta) and \textepsilon\thetaος (with epsilon). Although the meaning of these words is connected, they differ in their origin. Ethos (with eta) goes beyond the Latin translation \textit{moris}, from which comes the modern meaning of ethic and moral. Ethos (eta) means the house of humankind. It is a place of permanent and habitual protection as a \textit{paraxiological framework} shaping a style of life and action. Lima Vaz defines this ethos as: “The space of ethos, while human space, is not given to man, but it is built by him or unceasingly rebuilt. The house of ethos is never finished and ready... The space of ethos soon becomes comprehension and expression of the being of man as a radical requirement of duty or of good.”\textsuperscript{50} Ethos (with epsilon) is

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 151.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 132. Catholic theologian Bryan N. Massingale continues Cone’s reflection by applying it in the context of the Catholic Church in the U.S. and its struggle to assume an anti-racism agenda that is, according to him, indispensable for social justice in the U.S. See: Bryan N. Massingale, \textit{Racial Justice and the Catholic Church} (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010).

the behavior, as the result of a constant repetition of the same acts. It could be translated by habit. It is the ethos expressed by any individual’s actions that translate his/her ethical personality. This expression articulates ethos (eta) as character and ethos (epsilon) as habit.51

The ethos of the poor is their existential house where they live as a suffering people in a walk of faith and hope. It is paradoxical because, even among their vulnerability and oppression, they know how to survive and where find their paraxiological framework. This leads us to the second aspect of the poor’s liberation ethics: the historical praxis. This praxis is an action of liberation from their ethos through resistance to the dominant status quo and struggle for justice. Just as Antonio Gramsci says: the dominant culture is not passively absorbed by the popular culture.52 There is a process of recreation of the dominant culture through the ethos of the poor, or their hermeneutical lens. This is also the knowledge of the poor, a part of their historical praxis of liberation. This knowledge is sometimes confused and fragmentary. In addition, one who is not among the poor nor in the atmosphere of their ethos cannot understand this knowledge. Neither can he/she recognize they have something to contribute in the process of liberation and justice. Gramsci was aware of this when he proposed the idea of organic intellectual embraced by Simone Weil (even probably not having read Gramsci’s work) and liberation theology. Therefore, among the poor, the dialectic occurs as an ongoing

51 Ibid., 14.
construction of a liberation ethics grounded on the experience of the poor (their ethos) and their historical praxis.
Part I HUMAN CONTINGENCY: ANTHROPOLOGY OF SUFFERING

Le malheur enferme la vérité de notre condition.
Simone Weil, “L’Amour de Dieu et le Malheur”

Os cristãos, como discípulos e missionários,
são chamados a contemplar, nos rostos dos sofredores de nossos irmãos,
o rosto de Cristo que nos chama a servi-los neles:
os rostos sofredores dos pobres são rostos sofredores de Cristo.
Latin American Bishops, “Aparecida,” no. 383

The human being is a finite being who is, as an autonomous individual, condemned to disappear from creation. Progressive limitation ending in death is the reality of all humans, whether they are rich or poor, male or female, black or white, from the north or from the south, Christian or non-Christian. As some existentialist philosophers affirm, the human being has only the temporal space between its birth and death. The meaning of human existence is found in this space. Some pessimists, like Jean Paul Sartre, argue that there is no satisfactory meaning in this space because we live between our possibility of to be the realization of our potentialities and our incapacity to fulfill them, without hope in the future that reserves death for us. Others, like Martin Heidegger, are somewhat optimistic. Although he does not hope for eschatological salvation, the meaning can be found in the temporal space by caring for the being. Yet others, those who are Christians or influenced by a religious perspective, see hope in a transcendental experience that possesses
meaning for temporal space and salvation. These thoughts all have in common the reality of the human being as a temporal being who carries its finitude reflected in its condition of contingency.

The finite reality of the human being is not a temporal fact concretized in death, but rather it is a process with biological and existential dimensions. It is biological because of human participation in the natural development of any organic creature from birth until death. This development begins in the positive progression of strengths to negative degradation of body and mind until the end. The existential dimension is the one of the transcendental spirit (psyche) that starts from the development of consciousness to searching for meaning. Between these two dimensions, life marked by joy and suffering happens. Therefore, death is the culmination of a finite existence characterized by joy and suffering and able to be conscious of this process. The consciousness of the whole process is what some existentialists call the “authentic existence.”¹

Joy and suffering are part of the human life and condition. However, considering the reality of millions of people who die prematurely because of poverty and lack of basic needs, joy seems to be a privilege for a few, and for many it is like a short aesthetic experience when gestures of generosity happen, a piece of bread is eaten, a joke is told – things that, for a fraction of a second, raise a smile, relieve pain, provide hope. On the other hand, suffering is not a privilege. All are touched by suffering and this reveals the truth of the human condition. It is true that suffering

¹ Martin Heidegger is the one who examined the relationship between conscience of finitude and authentic existence. See: M. Heidegger, Ser e tempo, v. 2, 5th ed. (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1997), see also an study on this topic in Heidegger’s philosophy in Nicola Abbagnano, História da Filosofia, v. XIV (Lisboa: Presença; 1970), 197-207.
touches people in different ways and degrees. It is also true that there are people, dulled by their privileges, who deny their suffering as a contingent being by living an inauthentic existence in the midst of material goods. For these people, very often, only illness and the proximity of their own deaths can bring the consciousness of finitude and suffering, making them recipients of compassion, a feeling that many of them have refused to embody in their entire lives.

For other people, without doubt, the immense majority of the world population, suffering is a daily reality. These people, especially those who are living in poverty and are victims of oppression, are specialists in the human condition. They know by the experience of their flesh the human contingency. Even if they want to deny it, they cannot. Their pain does not allow it. Suffering reveals the truth of the human condition and its authentic existence. Suffering is an anthropological category expressing a concrete experience in the flesh of a finite being. Other beings are also finite and they probably suffer. But, as far as we know, suffering, as a category elaborated by the transcendental spirit from the pre-comprehension of real people’s lives, can only be expressed by the human. The experience (the reality of suffering) and its expression (in a philosophical discourse) unify all humans. Consequently, suffering is anthropological: an undeniable truth of the human condition.

An anthropology of suffering begins from this common condition. This condition justifies all actions of justice that alleviate suffering, without denying the authentic existence. This means justice is an instrument to destroy external causes of those sufferings, such as poverty and human rights abuses, that prevent people
from joy and the natural flourishing without the daily risk of an early death. Those who are living this unfair suffering are experts in human existence. Their very small, experiences of joy open them to hope originating from transcendental reality. In the Christian tradition, this reality reveals itself as a Crucified God who is incarnated in the history of the poor and identifies himself with their suffering face.

Part I has the goal of developing this anthropology of suffering in order to present it as an argument to defend health care as a human right. This anthropology will be an exercise of the spirit \textit{(phyché)}, as I presented in the prolegomenon, but grounded in the experience of the poor, specialists in unfair suffering, and their hermeneutical lens. Any philosophical and theological discourse must make choices. They are theoretical and political choices. There is no neutrality. Therefore, my choice has been made and they are clear. Theoretically, I chose two bases: Simone Weil and liberation theology. They support my political choice, that is, the side of the poor and their historical liberation. Part I will present Simone Weil’s thought about suffering and \textit{malheur} \footnote{Malheur is a French word of difficult translation, especially difficult to find an English word that can express the meaning that Simone Weil uses \textit{malheur}. Because of this linguistic difficulty and in order to be faithful to Weil’s thought, I opted to keep French word and I will address it directly in Chapter 3.} (the concept she adopted to explain the “truth of our condition.”) I could choose other authors, but I chose her because she is one of the twentieth century thinkers who reflected, with a deep existential coherence, on the human condition and compassion for the oppressed. She developed her philosophical thought about suffering/\textit{malheur} considering those who are oppressed, being among them. And from this experience of compassion, she found
God who reveals himself in Jesus Christ as a God of slaves. This has influenced many Latin American liberation theologians, another theoretical source of this anthropology of suffering.

One could wonder why I am affirming liberation theology as one basis, instead of choosing one author and focusing on him/her. My answer is very simple: I am not willing to present liberation theology by developing the thought of only one of its representatives. Rather, I am doing liberation theology in company with authors who shape the young Latin American liberation theology tradition. As a Latin American liberation theologian myself, I am engaging in a dialogue with Simone Weil, a dialogue that bring with it my experience of being among the poor, serving them whether as a healthcare provider, or a pastoral minister, or a grassroots community organizer, or by simply sharing lives. Finally, although Simone Weil’s thought and sources of liberation theology are the bases of this anthropology of suffering, its authors and experts are the poor assisted by the Holy Spirit in their experience of suffering.

---

3 AD, 75.
Chapter 1
THE UNFORTUNATE BEING IN SIMONE WEIL

Simone Weil is a thinker whose writing is difficult to understand without considering her life. Writing and practice mutually shed lights. In her short life, Simone Weil, who died at age 34, came up with a philosophical thought and embodied an existential practice that has impressed very many notable people, even those who do not agree with her positions. Just as Miklos Vető affirmed, it is impossible to have a full understanding of Weil's philosophy without knowing her life. However, I will not dwell on her biography, work that I have done in a previous published study. Nevertheless, her existential journey will be presented in this

1 Examples of people who have been impressed by the philosophical, religious, and practical journey of Simone Weil are: Albert Camus, Emil Cioran, Charles de Gaulle, Emmanuel Levinas, Emmanuel Mounier, Simone de Beauvoir, Pope Paul VI, Levi Strauss, Paulo Freire, etc. Some comments from these people about Weil are at the end of the Simone Weil's selected writings edited by Florence de Fussy, Oeuvres (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), 1253-1266.

2 Miklos Vető, La Métaphysique Religieuse de Simone Weil (Paris: Librairie Philosophique L. Vrin, 1971), 10. He is one of the most important scholars of Simone Weil, especially for being the first one who ended the inappropriate division of her thought between before and after her experience of faith in Jesus. Vető proves the artificiality of this division by showing the ongoing coherence of her philosophy and the continuity of an existential ideal. He characterizes Weil as the "unique example of Platonic and Christian mystical speculation of our [20th] century." (Ibid., 148).

3 See my previous work on Simone Weil in which I developed a study about the inseparable connection between her life and her thought from her mystical experience and her reflection on suffering and grace. Alexandre A. Martins, A Pobreza e a Graça: Experiência de Deus em Meio ao Sofrimento em Simone Weil (São Paulo: Paulus, 2013). To have more detailed information on Simone Weil's life, the work of Simone de Pétrement is still the best text. Pétrement was Weil's friend. They studied together at the Lyceum Henri IV and at La Sorbonne. A few years after Weil death, Pétrement began to research about the life of her friend by collecting material and testimonies from people who met Weil and her family. As a result, Pétrement published a broad biography in two volumes in La Vie de Simone Weil, volumes I and II (Paris: Fayard, 1973). I use this first French edition and also the Spanish edition Vida de Simone Weil (Madrid: Trotta, 1997), but it is also published in English. Other biographies were published, and I mention some of them: Joseph-Marie Perrin and Gustave Thibon, Simone Weil: Telle que Nous L'Avons Connue (Paris: La Colombe, 1953); Marie-Magdeleine Davy, Simone Weil (Paris: La Découverte, 1989); Georges Hourdin, Simone Weil (Paris: La Découverte, 1989); Joseph-Marie Perrin, Mon Dialogue avec Simone Weil (Paris: Nouvelle Cité, 1984); Carmem Revilla et al., Simone Weil: Descifrar el Silencio del Mundo (Madrid: Trotta, 1995); Gabriella Fiori, Simone Weil: Una Donna Assoluta (Milano: La Tartaruga, 2009); Laure Adeler, L'Indomabile:
chapter as a presupposition, and some specific facts may be explicated in order to make clear the comprehension of her thought.

This young French thinker is also hard to fit into any kind of definition within a philosophical school. By education, she is a philosopher, but her thought goes beyond the borders of philosophy, especially the modern definition of this discipline. Perhaps she was a philosopher in the classical sense, that is, someone who developed a logical discourse from the exercise of the spirit in the search for truth. This is the way she saw herself, as a philosopher, along with Plato, who was a mystic for her,\(^4\) and far from Aristotle, who was a philosopher in the modern meaning of the term, a good narrator of facts.\(^5\) Certainly, she was not a theologian, someone who has received theological training. But she developed a transcendental philosophy of a spirit that had been touched by the experience of God’s grace, which made her feel that she had authority to reflect on some aspects of God’s mystery, such as Creation, Incarnation, Death and Resurrection, and Trinity.\(^6\) It is a theology, or a religious metaphysics, originating from an encounter with God and in dialogue with the transcendental philosophical tradition. Moreover, this encounter was with the Crucified God in the midst of suffering and as a partner of the oppressed.

She was also an activist among the oppressed of her time, that is, workers. She was not only an activist who advocated for justice for the working class, but she also became a member of the oppressed by leaving her career as a philosophy

---

\(^4\) OC IV 2, 75.
\(^5\) OC V 1, 120.
\(^6\) OC VI 4, 130-131; 180; 196.
teacher in a Lyceum. She became a worker in different settings, first as an employee in a car factory and then on a farm, until the explosion of WWII led her to exile in London. As a worker, Weil felt and testified in her own flesh the burden of oppression and the suffering of life as a part of the mechanistic, capitalist system of production that never stops its growth. In the middle of machines, under pressure of production, exhausted by long days of work, she saw how this system kills the beauty of human work by destroying the transcendental dimension (the intellectual and spiritual lives) of workers who become manual labors. She also experienced malheur which became the center of her thought and opened to the grace of the Crucified God.

Detached from the cross, the grace of God embraced the unfortunate Simone Weil and revealed the truth. It was a mystical experience in which she discovered the truth for which she had always searched. This experience clarified the entire life of a person who had been committed to the truth and the oppressed. She was a mystic of the truth on the cross: the experience of God's grace in the midst of malheur. Weil was an unfortunate being who among the unfortunates (the poor and oppressed of her time) found the truth in God's grace revealed in Jesus Crucified. In one of her letters, she affirms: “Christ loves the one who prefers the truth because,
before being Christ, he is the truth. If we turn away from him to go toward the truth, we will not go a long way without falling into his arms.”

In my previous work, I put forth three words to characterize Simone Weil’s thought and life: philosopher, activist, and mystic. From here, I continue my dialogue with Simone Weil.

1.1 Beginning From The Real

Simone Weil’s thought is a philosophy that begins from the real. In Robert Chenavier’s words, “the awakening of the real is the starting point of philosophy for Simone Weil.” He argues that she has a philosophy that is an exercise of attention to what is real. It is a philosophy from the reality, and, from what is concrete she develops her understanding of the human existence and history. However, it is not a materialist anthropology; otherwise, she would be characterized as a person who had described material realities. (This is her criticism of Aristotle and modern philosophy.) It is an anthropology from the exercise of the human spirit illuminated by the transcendent reality.

“Real” is a better word than “reality” to express the starting point of Simone Weil’s thought. Following Plato, who for her is “a mystical heir of a mystical tradition in which Greece was entirely immersed,” the real is also God who created

---

12 AD, 77.
15 OC IV 2, 75.
the earthly reality and, by the incarnation, decided to be part of his creation as a suffering God who assumes the human condition. Reality is the history which the human being walks as part of creation. Humankind and its history are real. They have the presence of God, who is real through a presence in suffering and love. The attention to the real is a double orientation: to the reality of creation where humankind realizes its being throughout history and to the reality of God who by a double gesture of self-humility creates the world and incarnates in it. Therefore, Weil’s philosophy presents an anthropology in which the immanent originates from the transcendent (by creation) and gains autonomy, and the transcendent chooses to be in the immanent (by incarnation) to love and liberate it, providing an authentic consciousness of the fragile condition of humankind as a created nature. Attention to the real is an awakening from a dream to the human condition, its fragility, and the presence/dependency on God.

We are in unreality, in a dream. Renouncing our imaginary central situation, and renouncing it not only through our intelligence, but also in the imaginative part in the soul, it is an awakening to the real, to eternity; it is to see the true light, to hear the true silence. A transformation operates then in the root of sensitivity itself, in an immediate way, to receive sensible impressions and psychological impressions.

The real begins to be real for an individual when he/she realizes the world as harmony between the earthly reality and the divine presence. This is a movement of openness of spirit to be affected by the love that is responsible for maintaining the

---

17 OC IV 1, 273. She reflects here the connection and non-separation between the Creation and the Passion.
18 OC IV 1, 300.
order of the world. This is the movement of philosophy that is presented in Plato, especially in his allegory of the cave. Moving beyond the cave, what Weil characterizes as the material reality and its organization as a human society, is an act of searching for the true light, where knowledge will flourish. It is a movement of the ascent of the human spirit to find a light that is the good. Finding this good, the human will love it and in this relationship of love raises a knowledge that is the vision of our intelligence.\textsuperscript{19} Weil interprets Plato as one who stresses the experience of revelation of the real, that is, the real human nature and its relationship with God, or in Plato’s language, the Good.

The true human knowledge, as well as the knowledge of the human being about its condition, comes from a meeting with the Good, that is, an encounter with Truth responsible for generating a noetic knowledge. This integrates the human, who is fragmented by a modern society that denies this spiritual life in order to maintain an incorrect idea of progress. This fragmentation of the human being is oppressive because it keeps it in an existence without an authentic and full realization of its human capacities. Weil saw this very well in the experience of the workers as pieces inside an unlimited system of production. This system, fruit of the modern idea of science as a materialistic and unlimited domination of nature,\textsuperscript{20} kills

\textsuperscript{19} OC IV 2, 211.

\textsuperscript{20} Weil, “Science et Perception Dans Descartes,” in OC I, 159- 221. She is not against science, but she strongly refuses an idea of science as an instrument of domination of nature motivated by a conception of unlimited progress.
the inner life of workers, who become simply manual laborers and a mass of people easy to manipulate.²¹

Attention to the real is to see the creation and the Creator in a relationship of equilibrium that is the order of the world. Once one captures it, there is knowledge of love as an aesthetic experience. The aesthetic aspect of this encounter with the Good is important for Simone Weil. This encounter is an encounter with Beauty, God as beauty that is present in the order of the world. Following the Kantian conception of “finality without end,”²² Weil argues that to be real, this encounter must happen in a will that has no desire to possess something. In order for this to happen, she says that the human being must experience the same process of humility embodied by God in creating. To create, God, full of love, had to make Himself small to allow the existence of a new reality, that is, the creation. Everything comes from God and belongs to Him. Nothing can be given to God because there is nothing unless God detaches Himself. But God made creation with autonomy in order to permit a movement to return in freedom. And in the human being, God renounced the possession of the being of the human, giving to us our “I.” Simone Weil says that the only thing that belongs to us is our “I.” In order to have an encounter with God, it is

²¹ Weil, “Réflexions Sur Les Causes de la Liberté et de L'Opression Sociale,” in Oeuvres, 278-279. She saw this attack against the life of the worker in the both systems capitalist and also communism. According to her, the latter also forgot the spiritual value of work and showed not to have ability to integrate spirit (theory) and practice (arête) in worker’s life in order of an authentic existence.

²² In a study about the philosophical source of Weil, Miklos Vető says: “Criticism has conceived the philosopheme of finality without end to explain the pleasure that the spirit experience in front of order and harmony of things. However, in Simone Weil, this concept is to explain a motivation and a moral actions, regardless interest of a individual who acts.” Vető, “Simone Weil e a História da Filosofia,” in Simone Weil e a Filosofia, ed. Fernando R. Puente and Maria Clara L. Bingemer (Rio de Janeiro: Ed. PUC-Rio; Loyola, 2011), 35.
necessary to give God the only thing we have that belongs to us.\textsuperscript{23} In other words, the encounter with God must be an encounter without our “I” because it is egoistic and will not allow our being to be emptied so as to be fulfilled by God’s grace. Therefore, this condition of emptiness, that Weil called “emptying of the self,” must be created by a process of \textit{decreation}.

Decreation is the status that makes possible restoring equilibrium\textsuperscript{24} in the world by taking the human being from a force responsible for preventing him from an authentic life. Simone Weil names this force\textsuperscript{25} \textit{pesanteur} that is a law responsible to rule natural movements of the soul. The law of \textit{pesanteur}\textsuperscript{26} is a kind of gravitational force (English translators usually translate it as \textit{gravity}).\textsuperscript{27} It is a force which causes the human being to want to search everything he/she can have in order to guarantee his/her protection. This is a way to affirm the “I” within a threatened existence. Under \textit{pesanteur}, the individual wants to satisfy his/her desires. He/she wants to fill the void that is in his/her being. Everything, material things or relationships, will be searched and used to fill the void and to satisfy the “I.” This is an illusion that Weil calls the \textit{fulfilled imagination of void}.\textsuperscript{28} It prevents the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{23} PG, 73.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Bartomeu Estelrich has an article about the relevance of Simone Weil for our current time in which he reflects about this relation between decreation and restore equilibrium in the world. See: Estelrich, “Simone Weil on Modern Disequilibrium,” in \textit{The Relevance of the Radical: Simone Weil 100 Years Later}, ed. A. Rebecca Rozelle-Stone and Lucian Stone (New York: Continum, 2010), 3-17.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Be careful for do not see the term “force” here in the sense Weil develops it as a concept responsible for reveal the misery of the human being. I will develop the concept of force in the next section of this chapter.
\item \textsuperscript{26} PG,1-2.
\item \textsuperscript{27} See: English version of Weil’s book: \textit{Gravity and Grace}, translated by Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr (London; New York: Routledge, 2002).
\item \textsuperscript{28} PG, 62.
\end{itemize}
person from an encounter with the true reality of self and the world. For Weil, the only way to be free from the force of *pesanteur* is through grace, the unique movement that is not ruled by the law of *pesanteur*.\(^{29}\)

Decreation is the way of liberating from the force of *pesanteur*. The “I,” needed act to make the person recognizes his/her inner void and assume it as part of the self, will be killed. Decreation will also destroy all desires, even the desire for God; this is a paradox because only God’s grace can reestablish the human equilibrium. Weil affirms the need for a total detachment\(^{30}\) of the self and all its desires, even for God, because if one still desires God as a goal, this will be a desire for possession in which God will become the imagination that will fill the void. Consequently, there is no God, but only one more illusion preventing the true encounter with the reality of self and the world. To achieve the state of detachment that will lead to decreation, it is necessary to have the experience of *malheur* without consolation. The suffering of Jesus embodied this experience of total detachment because he emptied his divinity to assume the human condition. So, the human being must empty itself from the illusion of being self-sufficient, that is, the illusion of being divine. Weil says: “[the human must] empty itself in the world. Take on the nature of a slave. Reduce himself to a point that does not occupy time and space. A void. Strip himself from the imaginary reality of the world. Absolute

---

\(^{29}\) Ibid., 141.

\(^{30}\) Bartomeu Estelrich affirms that in Simone Weill the detachment requests “a human effort that cuts links to objects and secular securities, and incentives people to live a live more orientated toward the transcendence.” B. Estelrich, “Filosofia Como Exercício Espiritual: Simone Weil e Pierre Hadot,” in *Simone Weil e o Encontro Entre as Culturas*, ed. Maria Clara Bingemer (Rio de janeiro; São Paulo: PUC Rio Press; Paulinas, 2009), 48.
solitude.” Then she continues: “Renounce all that is not grace and does not desire grace.” When one gets into this state, it is possible to have an aesthetic experience of “finality without end” in the encounter with God. It will be an experience of grace. Even though there is no guarantee that this grace will happen because the one who decides it is always God. The human person only creates the conditions for this grace to occur.

Moreover, Simone Weil presents decreation as an imitation of God and His total humility and detachment. It is a relationship of reciprocity between the human being and God in three movements of decreation. First, it is the living action of God creating the world. God allows Himself not to be all in order to make something that is not God exist; so the person renounces being something to be nothing. The human being imitates the humility of God to give existence to creation by renouncing its being. Second, God makes himself a matter of communion for us to eat Him, so a person makes him/herself to be a matter through suffering and malheur, opening his/her being to be eaten by God. The human being imitates the process of Incarnation which God in Jesus, as Saint Paul affirms, assumed the fragility of the human condition and all its fate until death on the cross. The person assumes his/her suffering as an open state of human drama and its anguished cry. Decreation makes people cry as Job and Jesus on the cross. Third, through the Incarnation, God

---

31 PG, 56.
32 Ibid., 57.
emptied himself from His divinity, so the human being must empty itself from its false divinity and realize that he/she is nothing.\textsuperscript{33}

Decreation does not only open the human being to receive God’s grace,\textsuperscript{34} but also embodies human suffering and its lack of meaning before the silence of God. This reveals the nature and the condition of the human being as a created, finite being. Even, if the experience of grace does not happen – Weil, following the Christian mystical tradition, emphasizes grace as a decision that depends only on God’s wish and love – decreation will liberate the person from a false satisfaction of the human void. Suffering is the privileged way to live this process of revelation of who the human being is and [perhaps] the encounter with God’s grace. The poor and oppressed have this privilege. In their suffering, they experience decreation. And, even this suffering is not a guarantee of God’s grace. It is hard to believe that God will not permit being touched by the poor. He can, but His love for the poor, especially the one manifested by the Incarnation which made clear that the poor and the oppressed are the privileged recipients of the good-news (Lk 4:18), does not permit Him to hold His grace far from the empty being of the poor.

Decreation is not destruction of creation. Rather it is the new creation that reveals what creation, especially humanity, is and its real vocation. Simone Weil says: “God created the world and wishes eternally that it is... To destroy [the world] is wrong, other that making it to pass from created to uncreated. Destruction is a

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 82-83.

\textsuperscript{34} It is a common affirmation that Weil develops a “mysticism of decreation.” See: Emmanuel Gabellieri, \textit{Être Et Don: Simone Weil Et La Philosophie}, (Louvain – Paris: Éditions Peeters, 2003), 1; 250-252.
bad imitation (an ersatz) of this operation.” Actually, decreation is the way of raising the “new man,” the new creature, as the New Testament affirms to be the experience of encounter with the Incarnated God. The new creation is not new, rather it is a movement of finding the created nature of humanity and all things in the world, a consciousness that humanity has lost by filling its void with illusions and denying its suffering condition. Commenting on this, Emmanuel Gabellieri stresses: “Yet it needs to note that de-creation, far from corresponding to destruction of the creatureliness on the contrary, corresponds to consenting to this one [creatureliness].”

Accepting our creatureliness is also “loving the order of the world.” Simone Weil has a strong aesthetic dimension on this process of decreation. Even suffering, in Weilien terms, can be seen as an aesthetic experience because both suffering and the contemplation of beauty are experiences without waiting for an award. Perhaps in different situations, one in pain and another in joy, the human action is only accepting what it is. In both, God will be present. Affirming decreation as an aesthetic dimension of “finality without end,” Weil is not arguing for a passive attitude before the world and the suffering of the poor. Actually, the opposite is true. Accepting our creatureliness leads us to see the other and to love our neighbor.

---

35 OC VI 2, 349-50.


37 Gabellieri develops the argument that, in Simone Weil, the aesthetic experience of beauty also leads to a mystical experience of decreation. He also shows how the aesthetic experience, that is a joy, relates to *malheur*, an experience of pain. See: Gabellieri, *Être et Don: Simone Weil Et La Philosophie*, 232-252. Fernando Rey Puente goes further than Gabellieri and I by understanding beauty as a privileged way to God. See: *Exercícios de Atenção: Simone Weil Leitora do Gregos* (Rio de Janeiro; São Paulo: Editora PUC Rio; Loyola, 2013), 231-242.
There is an ethical dimension that completes our love for the world and its order. She says: "Love for the order of the world, for the beauty of the world, is, therefore, the complement of love for neighbor."\textsuperscript{38}

Attention to the real looks at creation as it is; it looks at the Creator as humiliated for creation to be, and for the human to find its being. Attention to the real is to imitate God and His love for the world and for the suffering human, a love-action, not only a feeling, that is, love that makes the creation exist and the human to be. For Weil, in the world, and more specifically in society, especially where there is so much suffering and oppression, loving our neighbor is imitating God in His humiliation of love-action of creating and incarnating. She stresses: “Through loving the neighbor, we imitate the divine love that has created ourselves and that we all are similar. Through loving the order of the world, we imitate the divine love that created the universe of which we are a part.”\textsuperscript{39} Beginning from the real and in the humiliation of love-action,\textsuperscript{40} Simone Weil joined the oppressed of her time and saw the destructive power of the force against innocents. This force is paradoxical. On the one hand, it destroys human lives and must be combated. On the other hand, it also reveals the human misery and condition. Paradoxically, this force makes the unfortunates experts in the human condition and privileged recipients of God’s grace.

\textsuperscript{38} OC IV 1, 299.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{40} "Love-action" is not a term used by Simone Weil. I use it because it can express clearer her idea of love that makes things happen: love as a dynamic act from God as well as love as a dynamic act from us toward those who are oppressed.
1.2 Human Misery: Force and Its Revelation

The philosophy of Simone Weil is deeply marked by her experience among the oppressed of her time, workers and then the victims of the WWII, and identifies Jesus’ cross in the *malheur* of the oppressed and her own suffering. Not only did she have an experience of the cross, but by reflecting on the causes of such suffering, she was also intellectually attentive to this experience. In suffering, she saw the light of Jesus’ cross as the tremendous gesture of God’s self-humiliation to love humankind by assuming its condition. Paradoxically, in suffering/*malheur*, we find the beauty and the immensity of God revealed concretely in Jesus’ cross and his identification with the suffering of the oppressed. The oppressed are the poor, as liberation theology highlights. The paradox of the cross is present. The preferential option for the poor is the option for Jesus’ cross as the revelation of God’s beauty and immensity in the midst of suffering: the humiliation of God empowering the humiliated gives them a knowledge in history to transform the world.

This transcendental exercise from the real is a philosophy (and why not say a theology as well?) of humility in the paradox of suffering and beauty, as the way to truth and the revelation of the human condition – a being between its miserable fragility (finitude attached to necessity,\(^41\) and vulnerability to force) and its transcendentality, a being who can open itself to supernatural experience and find God on the cross. It is an anthropology of suffering illuminated by the transcendental humiliation of the historical experience of the cross. Therefore, Weil

---

\(^41\) Necessity is a concept that Simone Weil uses to define everything that is created and is not sufficient by itself. Only God does not submit to necessity but makes himself necessity for his grace to be present in the world. See: PG, 96-97.
affirms: “The agony on the cross is something even more divine than the resurrection; it is the point at which we find the divinity of Christ.”

Simone Weil does not dismiss Jesus’ resurrection, but she is clear that a supernatural power shines from Jesus on the cross and directly touches those who are suffering. In a reality of a people marked by suffering, identification with the Crucified Jesus, as the real presence of the transcendent God who joins the suffering of the oppressed, is visible and palpable. The Passion of Jesus connects human suffering and God’s suffering in the middle of the supernatural experience of Trinity. This is very real, for example, at the celebration of Holy Week among the poor in Latin America. The way they celebrate Good Friday, in which one can see that the suffering of an oppressed life is manifested in the face of each person walking in a procession following an image of the murdered Jesus. Songs, litanies of the saints, the noise of the crataca, praying the rosary, offering petitions, and the memory of local martyrs and people who are sick, among other expressions of pity and grief embody Jesus’ death in the life of the poor and oppressed. It is not only Jesus’ Passion, but also the people’s passion. God is present through Jesus’ cross in the life of the poor. Good Friday is the greatest day of the entire Holy Week. All go to the Good Friday procession, walk with the murdered Jesus, and listen to the priest’s long sermon connecting Jesus’ cross with the cross of the poor. Easter Sunday is a secondary feast, far from having the same number of people. Many theologians and

---

42 OC IV 2, 221.
43 OC VI 4, 122-123.
44 Catraca is an instrument that emits a heavy funereal sound and is played between prayers and songs. The noise of this instrument has the power to connect those who are hearing it to pain, suffering, and death. This is very traditional in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil.
priests, especially those who are not inserted among the poor, criticize this “exaggerated” devotion for Jesus’ cross and death, and proclaim that the center of Christian faith is the resurrection. They may even quote Saint Paul, who said, “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is without substance, and so is your faith” (1Cor 15:14). They are right about the centrality of Jesus’ resurrection, but the cross was on his way and it was God himself who was crucified. In the cross is the glory of God’s humiliation revealing the true human condition, to manifest His loving presence in the world, and to liberate and save humanity.

The resurrection is important for Simone Weil as well as for the poor in Latin America. However, she recognizes the transcendent power that shines from the fragile body nailed on the cross. The poor know that, too. They see the Crucified Jesus as God made Himself fragile to be with them, a crucified people who is empowered by the strength of weakness of love on the cross. There is an identification between the way of Jesus - marked by his relationship with God-Father, by compassion with those who are suffering and oppressed, by the practice of justice, and by his own suffering and death – and the way of the poor, also marked by faith, compassion, oppression, struggle for justice, suffering and death. This is the reason that Ignacio Ellacuría had no hesitation in calling the poor the “crucified people,”\textsuperscript{45} a strong expression that reflects a truth in the history of a people. I am freely using this expression inspired by the thought of this theologian, who himself

was a victim of force, killed in an attempt to silence his voice on behalf of the crucified people.

The force that killed Ellacuría has killed many people in Latin America and around the world. It is a concept that Simone Weil chose to characterize as the violence that “crushed those whom it [force] touches.”46 She writes: “Force [that in its rough form kills]47 makes people into things, a contradiction by principle, but it becomes a reality in which this contradiction becomes a soul in tears.”48 Force is the society itself that acts as a mechanism of oppression. Force has a huge power of attraction; people want it. Weil shows this power of attraction in many of her writings, but especially when she reflects on Hitler’s ascension to power and the spreading of the Nazis. In an essay titled “Quelques Réflexions Sur Les Origines de L’Hitlérisme,”49 Weil compares the power of Nazism and “La France éternelle” as a result of the attraction of force. According to her, what occurred in Napoleon’s France and Hitler’s Germany was the same process that Western society learned from the Roman Empire: a devotion to force that “contributes to the general imposition of brutality.”50 According to Fernando Rey Puente, Weil’s essay has three objects: “[1] Compares Hitler’s Germany with Rome, [2] shows that history is always

46 Oeuvres, 540.
47 Ibid., 530.
48 Ibid., 532-533.
49 OC II 3, 168-219.
50 Weil, “Quelques Réflexions Sur Les Origines de L’Hitlérisme,” in Oeuvres, 368
written by winners, and [3] directs our attention and even our compassion to the oppressed people.”

Force is a mechanism that must be controlled by us. There is only one way to control force: accepting the supernatural reality in the world and in society.

“Controlling this mechanism is a question of life or death for us; and controlling means to submit [force] to the human spirit.” The human spirit, able to control force, is one which is affected by the power of the fragile love of the supernatural revealed on the cross. “It is only by entering into the transcendent, the supernatural, that the truly spiritual man can rise above the social.” Moreover, there is a paradoxical element in Simone Weil’s thought about force and our protection from it. Force as violence originates from social reality, which Weil calls the “great beast” or the “big animal.” Force is paradoxical. It must be dominated and we must even be protected from it. But in the midst of its violence, the human condition is revealed through suffering/malheur in which is an open space for God’s grace. She presents this in her essay “L’Iliade ou Le Poéme de La Force.”

In her essay, Weil stresses the epic novel of Homer as a part of Greek genius that reveals who the human being is. She also affirms that the New Testament is “the

---

51 Rey Puente, *Exercícios de Atenção*, 75.
52 OC II 1, 278.
53 OC VI 2, 397.
54 She calls society of “great beast” grounded on a reflection which she compares Plato with some texts of the New Testament. Both Plato and the book of Apocalypse use this image referring to society. Society is a big animal or a great beast that is a barrier between the human being and God, and an obstacle for truth. See: OC IV, 2, 86.
last marvel of Greek genius.”

According to her, “the true hero, the true subject, the center of *The Iliad* is force. Force that is handled by men, force that subdues men, force, before which the human flesh shrinks.” She believes the concept of force is essential to understanding human history and society because all human relationships are subordinated to force. Force is always extremely cruel against the weak, but it touches everybody: winners and losers. *The Iliad* expresses this reality of human contingency in a unique way by presenting the reality of war. Wars are the most visible expression of force in their brutality. However, we need to distinguish force from *pesanteur*, as presented before. *Pesanteur* is a reality present in the world, as a created reality marked by “necessity.” For Weil, necessity is the world and human beings as they are, insufficient by themselves and abandoned to their finite condition. It is Jesus on the cross who, feeling abandoned by God, waits for God’s love. Necessity is to be accepted and loved as Jesus’ experience of the cross. Then we have the conciliation between necessity (matter) and good (God) in the middle of created reality. “Accepting and loving necessity” are to “renounce all temporal protections” and wait for God’s love. Waiting is a transcendental act of humility that places us close to God. Then Weil affirms: “I know that the author of *The Iliad* knew and loved God.” Force is connected to *pesanteur*, but they are not the same. Once there is no conciliation between force and good, there is harmony

---

56 Oeuvres, 551.
57 Ibid., 529.
58 Rey Puente, *Exercícios de Atenção*, 82.
59 OC VI 3, 188.
60 OC VI 4, 125-126.
61 OC VI 3, 189.
between necessity and good through God’s grace. Force is eliminated by God’s grace when His love “penetrates the horror of human misery.”62 Force is created by men against others and could be a consequence of pesanteur that is the gravity responsible to attach people to matter and their egoism. In Weil, these two powers, force and pesanteur, have a relationship because of the lack of a process of emptiness in which one liberates him/herself from his/her “I,” a condition to overcome pesanteur. Attached to the “I,” force becomes an irresistible attraction, a social force of destruction from some over others.

On the one hand, Weil sees in The Iliad an authentic description of force, and its power of destruction, which can be a brutal way of killing people or a way that does not kill but transforms people into things.63 Under force, people cannot express themselves; they have no voice. They are like slaves captured by winners of war.64 They not only lose their freedom, but their “entire inner lives” and have no apparent possibility to change their fate. Simone Weil says: “Such is the empire of force: This empire also goes as far as its nature allows. Nature also, when brought into play by vital necessities, removes all inner life, even the pain of a mother.”65 It is an experience of humiliation that manifests malheur, a consequence of force.66

On the other hand, The Iliad also shows that force makes everybody naked before human misery, winners and losers. All are affected by force. Weil says:

---

62 OC VI 3, 190.
63 Oeuvres, 545.
64 Ibid., 533.
65 Ibid., 534.
66 Ibid., 537.
“Hector [beaten by Achilles] does not escape from any pain and any shame that are part of the unfortunates’ lives. Alone, stripped of all [his] prestige of force, the courage that had maintained him outside the walls does not prevent him from fighting.”67 The destiny of humans is to suffer. So the death of Hector does not bring peace to Achilles, who will soon die, and his death will not bring joy to the Trojans, who will continue in battle with the Achaeans. Both will continue in their war under force and suffering. “Each one, in contact with force, suffers its infallible effect: to surrender those who have been touched [by force] to be either mute or deaf.”68 Force uncovers any veil hiding the human condition. Through force, people are naked and only a supernatural power can help them.

Even during the war, little gestures occur and they are signs of the supernatural, that is, God’s grace. They are rare moments of grace and hope in which bitterness between two people who are enemies is transformed into tenderness. This is God’s love, which can be extended over all.69 This happens because violence exposes human misery without “pretense and disdain.” All are in the same condition. Therefore, The Iliad expresses the equality of the human being. It represents the pain of winners and losers subdued to the force that dominates their soul.

The Iliad, like Jesus’ Passion, reveals the “feeling of human misery” and this feeling is “a condition for justice and love.”70 Comparing suffering under force and

67 Ibid., 540.
68 Ibid., 545.
69 Ibid., 547.
70 Ibid., 551.
the Passion of Jesus, Weil stresses: “It is only possible to love and to be just if one knows the empire of force and knows about its existence.” Then she continues: “The human misery is exposed in the proposition of love.”\footnote{Ibid., 552.} Although force must be controlled, those who are victims of force have a kind of privilege in God’s love. They have knowledge about force and justice, so they can love God and justice. It is knowledge of assuming the human condition as it is, with all its cruelty, in the way that Jesus assumed it. Therefore, the crucified people join the Crucified Jesus, their supernatural force. It is an experience of encounter and identification, a liberation spirituality that will guide the poor and the oppressed for action, where justice against force can rise in the world.
Chapter 2

ROOTEDNESS, SUFFERING, AND COMPASSION: MALHEUR AND INCARNATION

If I engage with Simone Weil’s ideas to support me in developing an anthropology of suffering it is because her thought has something to help us understand who the human being is. She develops an anthropology of the human condition that is, according to Emmanuel Gabellieri, a “radical ontology” of the human spirit rooted in reality.\(^1\) He interprets Weil’s thought as a philosophy of the human condition that begins with a radical ontological question. She does not begin from social reality, but from a question about the individual and his/her foundational desire, that is the existence of each one. This desire will become clear with the realization of social and political obligations toward all humans. This is clear in Simone Weil’s personal engagement in philosophical studies and political activism. As a young student of Alain\(^2\) – who dedicated her first work, an *agrégé* thesis, to science and perception reflecting on Descartes and the question of the subject – she moved to a deep social and political experience among the oppressed. In this practice, she developed her thought in which she stresses that ontological and ethical rootedness is a light for social-political action. For Gabellieri, this


\(^2\) Alan (pseudonym of Émile Chartier) was a famous professor of philosophy at Lycée Henri VI, where Simone Weil studied. He influenced a generation of French thinkers with his classes on Plato, Descartes, Hegel, and Kant. See: Simone Pétrement, *Vida de Simone Weil* (Madrid: Trotta, 1997), 60-61.
movement in Weil’s philosophy and life has a progressive coherence that expresses the unity of her thought.³

As I said before, Weil begins from the real, but this real is not only the historical or social reality. It is also what is true about the human person, as a created being in connection with the transcendent reality. It is a radical ontology because it is a “metaphysics of the human spirit oriented toward a full contact with the reality.”⁴ Therefore, Weil’s philosophy is not about the subject, nor about a materialist philosophy of the rootedness in the world. Gabellieri argues it is a “philosophy of the human condition” that emphasizes the “being in the world proper to man.”⁵ As such, she defines the “temporal condition of the man and his active vocation and mediation.”⁶

Who the human being really is and how he/she can live his authenticity in the world are essential questions for Weil. She believes that suffering and the experience of work reveal the human condition and provide an essential clarity for responding to these questions. In addition, this clarification occurs in an experience of opening to transcendence in which the individual finds the meaning of the human operation of spirit. Two theological concepts are particularly present in Weil: Creation and Incarnation. Suffering and discovering the human authenticity of being and its realization in history are a process of humility, as an imitation of God who

---
⁵ Ibid., 30.
⁶ Ibid.
had to humiliate himself to create and incarnate. So the radical ontology of Weil is based on a philosophy of the human being (anthropology) as an agent rooted in the world. In order for rootedness, the human being needs decreation (the creation of the new human) and incarnation (cross and love in the world).

2.1 Human Condition: From Uprootedness to Rootedness

To begin a dialogue about human rights or the rights of others, it is necessary to begin with recognition of others and our obligations as human beings sharing the same fragile condition. A young man shared an experience that had changed his life, but he only understood it several years later. At age 18, when most young people in reasonable socio-economic conditions are preparing for college in Brazil, this young man had a deep frustration in his life. He couldn’t go to college as he had expected. He was smart and any college would have accepted him, but external factors held him far from college one more year. During his preparation for college entrance exams, a group of friends, himself included, organized by a charismatic Catholic priest, were planning to do a mission in a poor area of Brazil in order to provide some humanitarian services. The whole group consisted of high school seniors preparing for college. To make the story short, all of his friends went to college but he could not. Most of his friends decided to take a vacation after high school ended and before college began. Consequently, they dismissed the mission. He was the only one who had received the news he couldn’t go to college. This was the end of the world for him. All his hope and dreams were frustrated. But he persevered and went to the mission.
In a very poor region of Northern Brazil, recovering from this frustration, he served a rural community, a mix between native and non-native peoples divided by a beautiful river of clear and fresh water, the main water resource for both peoples. He told me: *I was only 18 with a hurt soul. I didn’t know how I got there and what I could do to help someone. I couldn’t help myself.* Guided by a priest, a son of this region, who was proficient in alternative and natural medicine, the young man taught people literacy classes and hygienic habits, organized distribution of aid, and was directed to be with people and to make himself available for whatever help anyone asks. He said that the last orientation was the one he followed most. Being with locals, he was opened to any kind of experience. He worked with them on the land, played soccer without shoes, sang music during dark nights with no electricity, and swam in the river every day. One day, an old woman asked him: *Why are you here helping us, instead of living your own life?* This question deeply touched his spirit. He couldn’t answer. Only one thought came to his mind: *I am learning from you.*

He left the community with this question and many years later, even after he had finally gone to college and achieved academic success reaching even doctoral studies, he had adopted a life style of serving others through social movements and humanitarian activism, he still had this question in his mind. He testified to me: *This experience changed my life in a way that, in the midst of my pain, the other, in suffering, appeared to me as an imperative: I must be with him. It is a grace given through the other and manifested in an obligation to solidarity and justice.*
As an advocate for justice and a society where all humans can live in authenticity, Simone Weil – instead of beginning to think about society by offering a perspective of human rights able to defend the inviolability of individual dignity – begins by stating that we humans have obligations to others. For her, the defense of human rights starts from the recognition of others and their condition, especially those who are suffering because of oppression and need. Seeing others in their suffering, recognizing their names and faces, and being aware that we share the same human condition, in which all have needs to be met, is the real way to begin a debate on human rights. This is Weil's proposal in her only work in book form: *L'Enracinement.* It is a forward proposal in which Weil argues for social justice embodying actions from a supernatural justice responsible to reveal the human condition and to assume the recognition of others as an imperative. Simone Weil presents our obligations, our needs (especially the needs of the soul which connects their satisfaction as a mediation in the human condition between natural and supernatural), our condition as sharers of the same contingency, fragility, and needs as part of a historical reality among a plurality of cultures. So history, culture, and

---

7 This was written in 1943, year of her death (October 24, 1943) and was published in 1949 by Gallimard Press in the collection Espoir, organized by Albert Camus. It is now in the OC V 2. I will use the edition that is in: *Oeuvres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), 1025-1218.


9 Weil opens her book by saying: “The notion of obligation goes beyond the notion of rights that is subordinated and relative [to obligation].” She states that a right does not support by itself, but it is an obligation that originates from human beings who recognize each other the right of the other. Consequently, this leads to an obligation of respecting and promoting rights. She adds: “Identical obligations link all human beings, although they correspond to different acts according to situations.” The object of these obligations is the human being who is an imperative for the other by the simple fact of being a human. This fact connects everybody in the same requirement of fulfilling
social reality must be ways to provide us with the conditions to live as rooted beings. The human roots are connected to the natural (our social historical reality) and the supernatural (the transcendent reality, the grace that touches our condition). The supernatural reveals our obligation of recognition, inclusion, and justice for the other in an active compassion toward establishing a real participation in socio-political debate and goods. This is needed to promote human rights. Obligation to others, therefore, obligations of justice in compassion, stems from the human condition as a reality of insufficiency shared by all.

In her radical ontology from attention to the real, Simone Weil argues for an active incarnation in social reality in recognition of others, with the unfortunate first in line, toward their empowerment and promotion of dignity. The metaphor of rootedness may give the interpretation of a passive attitude in the world, but, actually, it is exactly the opposite. It is a very active and dynamic incarnation in the world from a supernatural power that defines this incarnation in society. Simone Weil’s existential choices, activism, and mysticism do not allow us to interpret her proposal in a different way. In this sense, even an argument for human rights from the metaphysical dignity of the individual, as Jacques Maritain was arguing at that time, is insufficient because this argument omits the human suffering in the midst of social conditions. A notion of inalienable rights, grounded on a metaphysic of obligations. Moreover, obligations are not limited by contexts and structures. They are eternals. See: Oeuvres, 1026-1027.

inner, “fails to be of much help when dealing with the afflicted.”11 In addition, only human rights with metaphysical foundations seem to have a very romanticized aspect that leads to a certain passivity of discourse without a practice that embodies it. Simone Weil wrote *L’Enracinement* before the International Declaration of Human Rights. She had before her the frustrated Napoleonic human declaration, the oppression of workers, World War II, and a debate about defending human dignity. Today, more than a half-century after the Human Rights Declaration, it is possible to see how human rights have been present in many discourses from world leaders, but without power to make people and nations have real obligations. It has been used according to what is convenient for the “I” (which could be the interest of one person, a group, or a nation); it has even functioned as an argument for military coups, invasions, and wars.

On the one hand, this metaphysical foundation is insufficient because it opens to a romanticized conception of human rights. On the other hand, a secular conception that dismisses the supernatural is unable to touch the authenticity of human existence and to promote it, especially where social suffering is destroying lives. Simone Weil provides a synthesis in which the radicalism of social activism is guided by the radicalism of grace in an obligation embodied by an empty “I” rooted in the real. Her radical ontology incarnates the human in the world between necessity and good, that is, between natural and supernatural. Mediation is important here between creation and incarnation of the human as imitation of God’s humble actions of creating and incarnating. Being rooted is assumed to be a

meditative function of participation in Jesus’ cross, the mediation between natural and supernatural. In *L’Enracinement*, Weil proposes a society that creates conditions for individuals to become rooted in order to participate in Jesus, the mediator with roots in natural and supernatural realities. This becomes visible in obligations, practices of compassion, love, and justice upon to others.

An uprooted country or people is a society where individuals cannot realize genuine social justice. Society does not root individuals; rather it creates conditions for “having roots that draw upon the supernatural.” Being rooted is mediation between necessity and good, natural and supernatural. Simone Weil moves freely between philosophy and theology to shape an anthropology with supernatural foundations and political implications. Emmanuel Gabellieri argues that *L’Enracinement* is a “theological-political treatise” that unifies “the lowest and the highest.” Let us see how Simone Weil achieves this unification by looking at some passages from her book, written while exiled in London and finished just before her death (1943).

*L’Enracinement* is divided into three parts. They shape a philosophical unity with strong anthropological, political, and theological characteristics. Simone Weil

---


does not let herself be affected by modern divisions of disciplines, one of the huge issues of our society that have fragmented human existence, generating an individualism disconnected from the other and the transcendent. Consequently, relationship with people and God will be in accordance with interest in the “I” and mediated by false material satisfactions. A fragmented human being is a weak person who cannot resist the attraction of force. Here is the origin of oppression of others: wars, invasions for subduing other peoples, instrumentalization of workers, and economic power as mechanisms of exploitation. All these things destroy people and their roots.\textsuperscript{15} Weil affirms: “Who is uprooted uproots. Who is rooted does not uproot.”\textsuperscript{16} Those who are uprooted have two behaviors: an inert soul, that is, a dead spirit that cannot move beyond the materiality of things and people as instruments for satisfaction of the “I;” and an activism for always uprooting others. She provides five historical examples of uprooted people and their forces: the Hebrews, who moved from being slaves to exterminating other people in order to possess Palestine; the Romans and their empire of world domination (for Weil, the main example of force that has inspired any other forces of domination after Roman civilization,\textsuperscript{17} even the Catholic Church and its intolerance of other religions);\textsuperscript{18} the

\textsuperscript{15} Oeuvres, 1052-1053.

\textsuperscript{16} Oeuvres, 1055.

\textsuperscript{17} For her, the Roman Empire has marked the entire Western world with the taint brutal force: “Today, science, history, politics, and the organization of work, even the religion seen marked by Roman taint, do not offer to the human thinking but brutal force. Such is our civilization.” Oeuvres, 1214.

\textsuperscript{18} Simone Weil wrote before the Vatican II, in a time which the Catholic Church was closed in on herself as the owner of truth against the modern world and other religious traditions. Weil’s love for the others and recognition of truth in other traditions were some of elements that held her from officially becoming a Catholic by accepting baptism, despite her conversion to the Catholic faith. She affirmed to be a Catholic “of right”, but not “of fact” because of institutional positions of the Catholic
Spaniards and the English in their colonialism; the Napoleonic Empire; and Hitler, who after 1918, founded an uprooted German people who could be easily dominated. All these empires were uprooted people who used force to oppress and destroy lives, to uproot people, even their own people. Weil stresses: “The uprooted is by far, the most dangerous illness of human societies because it multiplies itself.”

Her argument is that the human being needs a society in which he/she can be rooted. A society does not root people by itself, but rather, keeps an order of conditions that prevent people from being uprooted and, at the same time, allows them to be rooted. *L’Enracinement* purports to show how this society is possible through an impressive unity that connects anthropology, politics, and theology. The three parts of her book do not correspond to these three areas. They flow throughout Weil’s whole argument about how to be rooted as a return to the truth. However, in the first part, she begins with an anthropology. Then she presents the uprootedness of the human being in the Western world, having as reference the situation in Europe in the midst of WWII, and especially in France and its working class. This book was a project of the reconstruction of France after the war; she analyzes the reason that would lead France to collapse and to become an easy prey

---

19 Oeuvres, 1054.

20 Oeuvres, 1214-15.
for Nazi domination. In one sentence, the reason was the uprootedness of France.\textsuperscript{21}

Her analysis of France and Europe is much more than an analysis of social conjecture, but rather a study of the human fragility and vulnerability before force that leads to the uprooting. Finally, the third part of her book is the largest, and treats how people and nations can build a way to be rooted in the present, without denying people’s tradition, and open to the future, without being attached to a reality that does not yet exist. Rather, a rooted people live the present as the reality in which occurs the mediation between the natural and the supernatural.\textsuperscript{22}

According to Robert Chenavier, this society of justice between the natural and the supernatural will be a society where work has a spirituality, so Weil proposes a spirituality of work in which each person fulfills his/her existence by working, a natural burden, and thinking illuminated by the supernatural.\textsuperscript{23}

In Weil’s anthropology, it is clear that rooted humans are individuals organized in society who recognize the other as an imperative to embody obligations. These obligations are those that meet “the needs of the soul.” Simone Weil develops some important aspects of her anthropology in \textit{L’Enracinement}. She

\textsuperscript{21} Oeuvres, 1055-56.

\textsuperscript{22} Weil argues against historical determinism and for the revolutionary power of traditions for building the future in a concrete realization in the present. See: Oeuvres, 1057.

\textsuperscript{23} Robert Chenavier, \textit{Simone Weil: L’Attention Au Réel} (Paris: Michalon, 2009), 99-100. Chenavier also dedicated one of his most important books to the relationship between work and spirituality in Simone Weil in which he affirms that all of Weil’s works have a philosophy of work. See: Robert Chenavier, \textit{Simone Weil: Une Philosophie du Travail} (Paris: Cerf, 2001). See also Oeuvres, 1214-1218. Simone Weil concludes \textit{L’Enracinement} saying: “Thenceforth, other human activities, leading by men, creations of technical plans, art, science, philosophy and so forth, are all inferior to the physical work in spiritual significations. It is easy to define the place that the physical work should be in a well-organized social life. It should be its spiritual center” (Oeuvres, 1218). Weil argues for a spirituality of work many times in her book; see, for example, when she is explaining the uprooting of rural worker in Oeuvres, 1086-1087.
presents these aspects in term of needs of the soul. They are what the human being must find in a society in order to live its authenticity as a rooted being. Two things are important to mention in order to better understand Weil’s anthropology in this book and the unity of her entire work. The first is the concept of soul. Many will inadequately interpret Weil’s thought as a dualistic philosophy, especially because of her love for Plato, who has been understood as a dualistic philosopher. She totally rejects this interpretation of Plato; she argues that he is not dualistic, but a representative of the unity between necessity and good in a spirit open to a transcendent light. This made him a mystic with an integral vision of the human being searching for salvation in a harmony between reason and mystery. For Simone Weil, “soul” is closer to the Greek word psyché (examined at the beginning of Chapter 1) than to the Latin anima that has been seen as opposing the body since Descartes. Therefore, soul is the inner life of the human being in which the process of emptiness occurs to decreate the person in order to eventually be ready to receive God’s grace. This soul is in the world, where the human being finds an obligation to incarnate. In the world, organized in a political society, individuals are able to realize the needs of souls as integral persons between creation and incarnation, that is, as mediations between the natural and the supernatural. In this sense, Rey Puente suggests that Simone Weil has a Platonism that is essentially

---

24 OC IV 2, 75.
25 Vetö, La Métaphysique Religieuse de Simone Weil, 11-12.
transcendental and political, without assuming either the dualism of Neo-
Platonism or Cartesian.

Second, *malheur*, the foundational concept needed to understand Weil’s
anthropology and perhaps her entire philosophy, is barely present in
*L’Enracinement*. She opted to speak more about suffering, a broader concept. An
uprooted person may have an experience of *malheur* as a result of force that has
uprooted him/her. Living uprooted is a suffering, but it can also be a false joy
because of the lack of the authenticity and consciousness of uprooted people.
*Malheur*/suffering is a privileged experience of being crucified that identifies with
Jesus’ cross. This identification makes the experience of suffering reveal the human
condition and become mediation between the natural and the supernatural. *Malheur*
is not in the center of Weil’s anthropological exposition in *L’Enracinement*, but it is,
alongside suffering, the central concept of her comprehension of the human
condition. Although they are deeply connected, *malheur* and suffering have different
meanings for Weil. (I will address these concepts later.) They connect her previous
work on oppression and force with her last one when she was exiled in London.

Simone Weil presents fourteen needs of the soul that begin with *order,*
defined as “a texture of social relationships that do not coerce anybody to violate
strict obligations to execute other obligations,” and end with *truth,* the need “more
sacred than any other. However, this is never mentioned.” Order and truth seem to
frame all human life in a society that supports conditions for rootedness. In other

---

26 Rey Puente, *Exercícios de Atenção*, 139.
27 Oeuvres, 1031.
28 Oeuvres, 1049.
words, order creates these conditions and truth is the target to be rooted. Both require an action of attention to the order of the world, its beauty and truth that are the good present in creation, this is, God in creation.29 The social order is the place of realization of natural justice (or social justice) defined by supernatural justice (truth: Good/God).30 In the midst of natural and supernatural justice, the human being finds itself as a soul who needs order and truth. These needs are completed by others that show who the human being is: organized in a social political society. These needs fulfill the human will for freedom and responsibility, equality and participation, intellect and manual labors, risk and security, and the balance between private and collective properties.31 When Weil opens the second part of her book, she affirms rootedness as the most important need of the soul: “Rootedness is perhaps the most important and the most unknown need of the human soul. It is the most difficult to define.”32 Weil operates in a dialectic anthropology in which, on the one hand, she presents very concrete elements that must be present in society. Governments and other institutions must protect and promote these elements

29 Oeuvres, 1214.

30 Allen and Springsted, Spirit, Nature, and Community, 183-186. After explaining Simone Weil’s two forms of justice (social justice and supernatural justice), Allen and Springsted link justice with obligations, rights, and culture in L’Enracinement: “She does this [her analysis of rights, culture and supernatural justice] by proposing that we, indeed, see rights as specific cultural values, but as having a legitimacy – that is, a fundamental concern for the person – that ultimately derives from supernatural justice via an obligation each human being has toward others. Rights are then simply the specific historical and cultural specifications of this obligation, which actualize it but never exhaust it.” (Allen and Springsted, Spirit, Nature, and Community, 187.)

31 Namely, all the needs of the soul are: order, liberty, obedience, responsibility, equality, hierarchy, honor, punishment, freedom of opinion, security, risk, private property, collective property, and truth. See: Oeuvres, 1031-1051.

32 Oeuvres, 1052.
because they are needs of the human being.\textsuperscript{33} These needs are clearly defined, even truth present not only in a metaphysical aspect, but also in a practical way of human relationships, such as trials and judgments.\textsuperscript{34} On the other hand, Weil does not categorically define rootedness because she knows it is connected to the cultural, traditional habits of peoples. Culture and traditions are not rootedness, but rather, a way to draw peoples to be rooted, that is, an elevation to touch the supernatural reality and to see its presence in the world. Respecting the other – in the way a people is, including recognizing the beauty and truth of its traditions – is respecting its way of rootedness and access to the supernatural.\textsuperscript{35} This is one of her arguments against any invasion of one country over another. For example, the uprooted Europeans destroyed the roots of peoples in the Americas.\textsuperscript{36}

The recognition of the other is framed by compassion and obligations that force us to act in order to empower the other. These obligations concretize the rights of humans who must satisfy their needs in a society that allows them to be rooted. The experience of suffering is a weakness that is paradoxically a strength against to the force responsible for uprooting individuals and peoples. At the same time, suffering raises compassion, a principle for recognizing the other in his/her

\textsuperscript{33} Oeuvres, 1050-51.
\textsuperscript{34} Weil says: “The population needs to be protected from attacks against truth... There is no possibility of satisfaction of the people's desire for truth, unless for this end, we can find men who love truth” (Oeuvre, 1051). In other writing, she says: “Under the name of truth, I also include beauty, virtue, and all kind of good in the way that is for me a conception of the relationship between grace and desire” (AD, 71).
\textsuperscript{35} Oeuvres, 1052.
\textsuperscript{36} Oeuvres, 1058.
vulnerability and pain. Consequently, to be real, compassion becomes a movement to force obligations upon the human. This seems to be the experience of the young man present at the beginning of this chapter. In his suffering, he found the other as an imperative to compassionate action. At the same time, he rose to the supernatural to find his roots. In the anthropology of suffering, compassion and social reality are crucial to incarnate in the world where Jesus’ cross is manifested in people’s cross.

2.2 Malheur and the Social: Suffering, Compassion, and Incarnation

Compassion is more than a feeling; it is a social virtue that moves us to act toward the other who is suffering. This action occurs in a social reality where we are challenged to live as an incarnated people. This is a movement of assuming our human condition as a contingent being, who suffers, but who is also open to a transcendental force that makes our suffering a cross that participates in Jesus’ cross. It is a dynamic experience of recognition of our humanity, in God’s suffering on the cross and mercy toward our weakness, and an impulse to others in their suffering and vulnerability. Compassion expresses this movement of double

---

37 I present compassion as a deep feeling in the way that the gospels affirm that compassion was what motivated Jesus’ action toward the other who was suffering. This is also clear in the Good Samaritan parable in which Jesus affirmed that the Samaritan acted “moved by compassion.” The preferred term used by the gospels is splanchnizomai (from splânchna: viscera, womb, heart, love) that usually appears as splanchnisthéis (moved by compassion). This refers to a kind of very deep feeling that comes from the innards of a person who strongly wants to act to care for the one who is suffering. The Greek word has strong meaning. It is something very deep that Jesus was requiring when he told the Good Samaritan parable, that the doctor of law did not use the same word to answer Jesus (he used hilos that also can be translated into compassion, but it has a weaker meaning). See: Lk 10: 33; 15:20; Matt 9: 36; 14:14; 15:32; Mc 6:34; 8:2 in The Greek New Testament edited by Kurtt Aland et al. (New York: American Bible Society, 1966). A good study on this Greek concept in the New Testament is: Calisto Vendrame, A Cura dos Doentes na Bíblia (São Paulo: Loyola, 2001), 59-63.
recognition: of our condition in God’s mercy, that allows us to participate in the
mystery of Incarnation, and of the suffering of our neighbor, who is in a social reality
that has excluded him/her from the possibility of flourishing in a full human
experience. The social is important here because it is where the experience of
recognition happens. Therefore, compassion is not only a noble feeling, but rather a
social virtue as disquietude of one person who experiences God’s mercy and cannot
be static before the suffering of the other. Suffering and compassion are what unify
the human being and God, and human individuals with one another.

“Compassion is the recognition in the other of his own misery. Recognition of
his own misery in the malheur of the other.”38 For Simone Weil, malheur leads us to
compassion and recognition.39 She also says: “Malheur is not pain. Malheur is much
more another thing. It is a pedagogical procedure of God.”40 Malheur is probably
one of the most important concepts of Weil’s philosophical anthropology, and it is a
key concept for our anthropology of suffering.

Malheur is a French word that Simone Weil chose to express a kind of
suffering that affects human individuals. Even Weil said it was a difficult word to
translate into other languages. Frequently, English commentators and translators of
Weil’s work translate malheur as affliction.41 Malheur can also be translated as

38 OC VI 4, 117.

39 An important study on malheur and compassion in Simone Weill was developed by André
Devaux in two articles published in the 1980s. See: André Devaux, “Malheur et Compassion Chez

40 AD, 86.

41 See, for example, Allen’s and Springsted’s commentary of malheur in the chapter “The
Enigma of Affliction” in Spirit, Nature and Community, 97-110. And the translation of Simone Weil’s
essay “L’Amour de Dieu et le Malheur” that was published as “The Love of God and Affliction” in On
disgrace, suffering, misfortune, misery, anguish. But all these words have an equivalent French word (la disgrâce, la souffrance, la infortune, la misère, l’angoisse, and also l’affliction for affliction). Perhaps disgrace would be a close translation considering that the experience of malheur is a deep experience of God's absence, which Jesus felt on the cross crying why God had abandoned him. Malheur is an absence of grace. However, this translation cannot properly express the meaning of malheur because it is also an experience of decreation, an openness to receiving God’s grace. Moreover, grace is the only experience that can rescue a person from his/her malheur, without erasing this indelible mark. The experience of malheur and grace generates a noetic knowledge (or supernatural knowledge, in Weil’s words) that only the one who suffers malheur has. This person is called malheureuse by Weil and the main malheureuse is Jesus.42 Because of this linguistic difficulty, I opted for using the original French word, malheur.43 This permits me to be more faithful to Weil’s thought. However, I am not using the word malheureuse but rather the English term unfortunate because I expand this concept to include those who are suffering because of social violence, oppression, and marginalization, and are recipients of God’s grace. They are not necessarily having a malheur experience. I do so in order


---

42 AD, 80.

43 In this dissertation, I don’t intend to develop a deep commentary and understanding of malheur in Simone Weil’s work. But as I am developing an anthropology of suffering having Simone Weil as one of my theoretical sources, I cannot simply dismiss this concept. Malheur is at the heart of her reflection on suffering and grace. Therefore, I resort to malheur when it is necessary to understand Weil’s philosophical anthropology inside this anthropology of suffering. I did a monographic work on the concepts of malheur and grace in Weil’s mysticism and philosophy in which I focused on the concept of malheur, and it is published. See: Alexandre A. Martins, A Pobreza e a Graça: Experiência de Deus em Meio ao Sofrimento em Simone Weil (São Paulo: Paulus, 2013).
to open this anthropology of suffering to the experience of the irruption of the poor as treated by liberation theology.

Malheur and suffering are very close, but they are distinct realities. Malheur is deeper than suffering and affects all dimensions of human existence. It is an experience of personal and social degradation that includes a conscious recognition of being responsible for creating a “violent state of the being.” Although malheur traverses almost the entire work of Simone Weil, she dedicates one of her most beautiful and deepest essays to this topic of malheur and grace: L’amour de Dieu et Malheur. In this essay, she shows what malheur means and its indelible mark on the human soul; malheur caused Jesus to cry out in his passion and it is present in the book of Job, “a pure wonder of truth and authenticity regarding malheur.” Therefore, “the great enigma of human life is not suffering, rather it is malheur.”

The social factor is essential to the occurrence of malheur. There is no malheur without social suffering, which affects the spirit and the body of a person. Weil says: “There is no true malheur if the event is detached from a life and from an uprootedness that touches directly or indirectly all parts of life: social,

44 Oeuvres, 693.

45 Simone Weil wrote this essay in Marseille in 1942 during her time there and her way to exile in the USA. She didn’t have time to conclude it before leaving, but she gave what she had written to Fr. Perrin, that is, almost the entire essay. This version is in the Attende de Dieu, a book edited by Fr. Perrin. Weil concluded this essay in a short stop in Casablanca and this conclusion does not add any new ideas to the text left with Fr. Perrin. The completed version was published sixteen years after the publication of Attende de Dieu (1966) in a selection of Weil’s texts untitled Pensées Sans Ordre Concernant L’Amour de Dieu. Then there are two new publications: in Oeuvres (Paris: Callimard, 1999) and in OC IV, 1 in 2008. Both present the full final text. I am using the Oeuvres edition.

46 Oeuvres, 695

47 Oeuvres, 694.
psychological, physical. The social factor is essential." With malheur, all human existence suffers, its soul is hurt, and conscience recognizes the presence of malheur. The one who is living this experience loses all his/her desires and capacities. He/she feels in a state of complete abandonment in which even compassion becomes impossible. In malheur, compassion is a miracle. Malheur is a complete feeling of God's absence. The only thing that remains is a cry of pain and suffering. However, this cry is authentic just as Jesus' cry on the cross was authentic.

When we read Weil's development of malheur, it seems not to have hope for the unfortunate. She also seems to be upset that God allows malheur to dominate the human soul and to create a distance between Him and the person, larger than the distance created by sin. This leads her to return to her theology of Incarnation. According to her, with the Incarnation and Crucifixion, God created the largest distance between “God and God,” making the Crucifixion a wonder of love. She interprets the cross as this distance in which God made himself accursed for Him, in the Incarnation, to suffer the malheur. This experience of suffering distances the Son from the Father in a real experience of suffering. This space between God and God is where human existence occurs (as well as the creation being an action of God's humiliation in creating the world). This is the space for the presence of the Holy Spirit and the fulfillment of love. Hence, it is the space of the cross where God’s

48 Oeuvres, 694.
49 Oeuvres, 695.
50 Oeuvres, 694.
51 Oeuvres, 698.
52 Oeuvres, 699.
grace rescues the human person, as it rescued Jesus by raising him. The human being in *malheur* has the same experience of passion and cross that is in itself an experience of God’s mercy in his absence, because it is permission for the human to participate in Jesus’ cross and to identify with his passion.

Human misery, which becomes explicit in *malheur*, offers us the privilege of participating in the distance between the Son and the Father, a distance that is only for those who love. The abandonment of Jesus is a good, and participation in it is the greatest good that the human being can have. In a negative way (or an apophatic theology), Weil affirms that God cannot be perfectly present in us because of our body, but he can be, for us, the extreme *malheur* because He is perfectly absent. “God in the earth cannot be for us perfectly present because of the flesh. But he can be for us the extreme *malheur* because it is perfectly absent. On the earth, it is for us the only possibility of perfection. This is why the Cross is our unique hope.” It is a negative *via* of the cross, an authentic experience of human existence, once we are contingent beings, and the identification with Jesus’ cross. In the cross is our salvation.

*Malheur* also demands perseverance in love. In *malheur*, there is no reason and will for love, but Simone Weil argues that it is necessary to remain loving, even if there is no meaning. This perseverance is an act of believing that God’s grace is revealed in the midst of suffering. And only grace, the encounter with God’s love, who is also crucified, can fill the soul with compassion: God’s grace to the

---

53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
unfortunate and, through him, to others who are also suffering. Hence, love is not a state of the soul, but rather “love is an orientation... Those who remain with their souls oriented to God while they are pounded by the nail that crosses the center of the universe to hurt the center of the soul.”55 Malheur is this nail that hurts the human soul and will never leave. When the soul recognizes the presence of God’s love in the midst of suffering, the true center of all existing things manifests: God, having the cross as the point of intersection between creation and the Creator. This nail is the indelible mark of malheur. Grace does not erase it: the Raised One has the marks of the crucifixion. But now this becomes compassion, a supernatural knowledge and a social, dynamic virtue towards the other in his/her suffering.

Malheur and suffering are distinct in Simone Weil’s thought. Her reflection on malheur has a strong mystical character, as a mystic, from and for a social incarnation. In her own personal experience of God’s grace, she recognized that it was in the midst of her malheur where she encountered Jesus as the truth and discovered Christianity as the religion of slaves. She had to adhere among them.56 The question now is where are the slaves, or the poor in Simone Weil’s account? Is there a liberating aspect in her account on malheur and suffering?

In Simone Weil, the suffering of the poor – even though all of them cannot be characterized as having an experience of malheur – is closer to malheur than souffrance because the poor suffer social degradation, an essential element of

55 Oeuvres, 703.

56 She described her encounter with Jesus and the religion of slaves after her experience as a worker in a car factory. This experience hurt her life deeply, touching her body and spirit. In this moment of desolation, she had a mystical experience. See: Simone Weil, “Autobiographie Spirituelle,” in AD, 74-75.
malheur. In poverty, with all its risks of falling ill, suffering physical violence, being victims of exploitation, and dying early, the poor are far from a life of security and access to goods necessary to flourish. This instability and social vulnerability are results of institutional violence primarily responsible for socially degrading the life of the poor and preventing them from flourishing. However, the poor – especially the poor in Latin America and their irruption in history57 from an experience of faith and identification with Jesus’ cross – do not live in a permanent state of malheur. Their suffering, especially that of social origin, might never end, even though their struggle is to end it through action of liberation. Hope is always present. This suffering might lead the poor to experience malheur and to have “an uprootedness of life, as something almost equivalent to death.”58 For many, this experience will result in a concrete death. Gustavo Gutierrez says that poverty is killing people in their youth, before their time. It is not only a matter of exploitation, but an

57 When liberation theologians first wrote about the irruption of the poor in history, the poor in Latin America, especially those gathered in basic ecclesial communities, were living a spirituality of liberation that had a practical face, that is, a liberation praxis from the experience of faith and community. This was an experience of resistance and struggle for liberation that provided hope that the reality of exploitation and inequality would change soon. This experience was spread in all Latin America. Texts of Gustavo Gutiérrez and Leonardo Boff among others expressed this optimism in the 1970s and 80s. See: Leonardo Boff, A Graça Libertadora no Mundo (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1976); Gustavo Gutiérrez, La Fuerza Historica de los Pobres, 2nd ed. (Lima: CEP, 1980). Now, a few decades later, we can see that something changed. Latin America dictatorships fell and democratic governments have been established. Social democratic leaders have been elected in many countries. And many people have left poverty. However, now we do not have the same optimism when we look at reality and the life of the poor. New ways of oppression and marginalization have been created and the poor have been affected by the phenomenon of individualism that disconnects people and destroys communities. Social movements have difficulties in remaining organized and in gathering people at the grassroots. The new middle class (or in some countries, a new class because it didn’t exist before) shaped by the social ascension of millions of poor that began to have income is a class that lost its roots and lives now in an illusion of a dream of richness. It is disconnected from its origins in the irruption of the poor. And, once again, the poor are those who preserve the identification between suffering and Jesus’ cross as an impulse for their irruption in history. The challenge now seems to be bigger than it was a few decades ago.

58 AD, 99.
exploitation that also kills people.\textsuperscript{59} For these people, the experience of God's grace is a mystery that occurs in their lives and we do not understand completely; but sometimes, especially with those who have time to agonize over their death, we realize their faith and God's presence with them. I can testify to this experience of faith and grace in several opportunities being with poor people in their last minutes.\textsuperscript{50} Simone Weil does not apply \textit{malheur} and grace to this kind of situation.

On the other hand, there are those unfortunates who do not have time to agonize over their death. It happens instantly, as quickly as a shot of a bullet from a gun in the hand of a criminal, or of a military person, or in a company that holds essential goods far from the poor. For these people, \textit{malheur} is only suffering and death. The mystery of God's grace is to assume the faith of witnesses who believe that God's mercy welcomes these unfortunates in His kingdom.

Nevertheless, there are the unfortunate poor, who experience suffering in the degradation of \textit{malheur}. They lose everything but, in their cry and before the silence of God, they find the Crucified Jesus. They overcome their \textit{malheur} by God's grace; everything changes in union with God. This God is on the cross just as these people are on the cross of poverty. Nobody sees their faces. The experience of God is the identification between two crucified beings, persons: a people and a God, in the


\textsuperscript{60} I had this experience companying terminal patients in a public hospital en Brazil, when I was a chaplain there. This experience led me to write a reflection on end of life that is published at: \textit{É Importante a Espiritualidade no Mundo da Saúde?} (São Paulo: Paulus, 2009).
space of incarnation where God reveals His spirit of love, distancing God (Father) from God (Son). This identification does not eliminate suffering of a social nature – the structural violence continues to creates its victims – but suffering that only “is,” is illuminated by Jesus’ cross, God’s grace, and becomes an energy to lead the unfortunates to act for liberation in history. Together with these people, there are those who are a suffering people in social degradation, but they are not in *malheur*. They have God’s grace before *malheur* happens and are in the same process of liberation. There is no formula for God’s grace to take place in one’s life, it is always up to God. What exists is God’s grace among the poor by a prerogative of the gospel that reveals the poor as the privileged recipients of the good-news.

The challenge is to see these people who cry out for justice. Looking at the face of those who are suffering is an act of courage because it challenges us to contemplate their faces and to assume a commitment. This is the obligation to others that was felt by the young man presented at the beginning of this chapter: an obligation that starts from the recognition of others in their suffering.
Chapter 3
THE LIBERATION APPROACH TO SUFFERING: SIMONE WEIL AND LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Recognition of the other who is suffering as a victim of a system of exploitation that does not allow people to find their roots is the liberating aspect of this anthropology. This recognition permits us to approach Simone Weil and liberation theology as sources to understand the human being from its condition of contingency to a historical praxis of liberation. Both Weil and liberation theology have Jesus’ Incarnation and cross as the paradigm of human existence in which God humiliates himself to identify with human nature and its condition in order to offer his grace that allows us to participate in his mystery.¹ This happens especially in an experience in which one is able to assume human fragility where all human suffering becomes an identification with God’s suffering on the cross. Even in a deep feeling of abandonment, suffering is an opportunity to access the mystery of God, as the truth of human existence revealed by Incarnation and on the cross. This experience opens one to God’s grace and to supernatural knowledge, a noetic wisdom possessed by those who are with God. This wisdom manifests itself in the world through individuals and a people who, in the midst of oppression, identify their suffering with Jesus’ suffering. This wisdom becomes visible in their lives of faith, hope, and solidarity.

There are two different aspects in this experience. One is the experience of personal suffering and the other is the recognition of the suffering of the other. The identification of my suffering with Jesus’ cross is not restricted to a personal experience of consolation and encounter of a meaning for my life, but it is also an experience of identification with the Incarnate God and his historical mission in the world. Liberation theology presents this as an encounter with Jesus that makes us to be his disciples through an experience of conversion to solidarity with the other in his/her suffering. The suffering other becomes visible for us as a crucified person who cries out for liberation. It is the recognition of others that calls us to join them. Weil affirms that without this recognition it is not possible to see and to hear the suffering of the oppressed who cry out for better living and working conditions.

If suffering is part of the human condition, it reveals that we all share the same fragile nature and insufficient creatureliness. The liberation approach to suffering begins with the recognition of the faces of those who are suffering as victims of a system of exploitation responsible for preventing them from rootedness and from flourishing. Theologically, Latin American bishops say that in the face of the poor and the oppressed, we see the face of the Crucified Jesus. God gives preference to the oppressed by making himself oppressed in order to liberate us with his grace. Just as Weil realized, Christianity is a religion of slaves and we must

---


3 Oeuvres, 1058.

4 Aparecida, no. 393.
assume this tradition among them. Recognition of the faces of others who suffer leads us to join them in an experience of compassion and solidarity that nourishes a historical praxis of liberation in the footsteps of Jesus of Nazareth.

Therefore, continuing this anthropology of suffering, explicitly bringing liberation theology into our dialogue, I will present the liberation aspect of Simone Weil’s account of suffering and connect it to liberation theology. I argue suffering as the concrete starting point in both Weil and liberation theology by having Incarnation and Cross as their main theological bases. Hence, I present this from Simone Weil’s approach to compassion and liberation theology’s account of the irruption of the poor in Latin American history.

---

5 AD, 75.

6 Presented in this way, it seems I am only describing an experience from those who are not oppressed (but have some experience of suffering because their humanity) and their process of identification with the Incarnate God and the recognition of the other who suffers because of exploitation and oppression. If it was on this way, a critique on the existence of a romanticized vision of the oppressed could be applied because it would have the presupposition that the oppressed or the poor (for liberation theology) would be necessary aware about this identification and recognition. Consequently, they would be living in perfect compassion and solidarity. However, the oppressed and the poor also have to live the same process of identification and recognition responsible to shape an experience of community grounded on faith, hope, and solidarity. In fact, this process is already real in Christian communities raised in a context of poverty in Latin America. This was named “the irruption of the poor in history.” And these communities invite those who are outside, other poor and non-poor people, to join them in an experience of faith, solidarity, and historical praxis.

7 My goal is not present a chapter with a comparative study between Simone Weil and liberation theology. Again, I emphasize that I am using them as sources for developing an anthropology of suffering, the goal of Part I of this dissertation, an anthropology able to support a human rights framework for justice in health care. There are a few studies that have initiated a comparative reflection between Simone Weil and liberation theology. See: Maria Clara L. Bingemer, “A Desventura e a Opção Pelos Pobres: Simone Weil e a Teologia da Libertação Latino-Americana,” REB 69, no. 267 (2009): 772-791; Maria Clara L. Bingemer, Simone Weil: Mystic of Passion and Compassion (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015); Alexander Nava, The Mystical and Prophetic Thought of Simone Weil and Gustavo Gutiérrez: Reflection on the Mystery and Hiddenness of God (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001).
3.1 The Liberation Aspect of Compassion

In Simone Weil’s thought, the liberation aspect of her philosophical anthropology is in the way she approaches social reality and subjects from suffering/\textit{malheur} to compassion. As I discussed before, Weil begins her philosophy from the real, but is not restricted to a sociological comprehension. The real includes the natural reality (where society and social justice exist) and the supernatural reality (the transcendent reality that touches the natural one). Although distinct, they have an intrinsic relationship. First of all, this relation exists in order to create. For the natural reality to exist (the creation), the supernatural reality (the Creator) must humiliate itself to make everything that is not God to be. Second, the natural is submitted to necessity and matter. For equilibrium, God made himself to be present in the world in the way he assumes human fragility and its fate. It is the extreme act of God’s love and mercy for the human being, manifested through the Incarnation and the Cross, from which arises the harmony between necessity and the Good, God, the beauty of the world. This harmony occurs in the natural that is illuminated by the supernatural. The human being, who by its condition is a suffering being, participates in God’s mystery of his own suffering on the cross, that is, according to Weil, the expression of supernatural love, the proper essence of Incarnation.\(^8\) As Saint Paul said: “God emptied himself from His divinity to assume full human nature” (Phil 2:6-11).\(^9\)

\(^8\) PG, 154-159.
\(^9\) OC VI 4, 279.
In a social reality, a person has an experience of *malheur*. And it is in this reality where the unfortunate will experience the supernatural, as God’s grace and mercy which illuminates him/her and the social reality, both parts of the natural world. This is an experience of participation in Jesus’ cross that opens to the other, who is suffering, through compassion with a socio-political action. Weil develops, therefore, a liberating action in the world that is grounded on a spirituality of the cross responsible for making human suffering participate in God’s suffering, Jesus Crucified, through the mystery of Incarnation: the wonder of God’s humiliation and mercy. Emmanuel Gabrielle affirms that this is an experience of God’s mercy which leads to compassion toward the other in a suffering world.\(^\text{10}\) Weil describes this experience by presenting her own path from suffering to God’s mercy to compassion with the other as a participation in divine mercy. It is a mystical path of nuptial union with God that occurs in the midst of *malheur* and opens one to seeing the other.\(^\text{11}\) Gabrielle interprets Weil’s encounter with God as a mysticism of mercy and kenosis in which Weil, through her suffering, moves from an experience of mercy to find the fount of this mercy and, from there, to the human experience of compassion as a participation in divine mercy by the action of compassion toward the other, without waiting for a reward.\(^\text{12}\) Consequently, she arrives at the conclusion that

\(^{10}\) Emmanuel Gabrielle, “Pensar a Kenosis: Filosofia e Teologia da Misericórdia em Simone Weil,” *REB* 69, no. 276 (2009): 796. Simone Weil affirms it, for example, in one of her letters to Fr. Perrin, where she says that love the neighbor is a universal love when it becomes an anonymous love that serves the unfortunate as the Good Samaritan (AD, 104).


\(^{12}\) Gabrielle, “Pensar a Kenosis,” 797.
compassion towards others is the real proof that a compassionate person is inhabited by supernatural love, that is, by Jesus through the Holy Spirit.13

The unfortunates have a privileged way to encounter God’s mercy and the other. This is through an identification with Jesus’ cross and the Incarnation in the world through compassion, as a liberating virtue of living in the world with the unfortunates on the same path for social justice.14 The malheur of the unfortunate is not an experience that remains in the “I,” but, because malheur destroys the “I,” it leads him/her to look beyond his/her personal world. This expansion to the other is not because of human effort. In malheur, one cannot have compassion toward others. When compassion occurs, it is an action of God’s grace.15 When the unfortunate identifies his/her suffering with Jesus’ cross, the suffering of the other appears as a cry that awakens his/her conscience for the malheur of the other.16 A clear image to illustrate this experience of malheur, grace and compassion towards others is the image of an unfortunate at the foot of Jesus’ cross. In malheur, one feels the total gravity of his/her existence in the world through a degraded suffering. It places the person at the foot of Jesus’ cross with his/her head bowed down, without seeing who is on the cross. The unfortunate cannot love, nor think that love is possible. An effort of attention and perseverance is needed in order to raise one’s head and to see who is on the cross, so the grace of identification with the Crucified

13 Ibid., 801-2.
14 Richard H. Bell wrote a book on Simone Weil where he affirms that she proposes a new moral way of justice grounded on compassion. This way cannot escape from divine origin, that is, its origin is in the supernatural. See: Richard H. Bell, Simone Weil: The Way of Justice as Compassion (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998), 77-78.
15 Oeuvres, 685.
16 OC VI 4, 87.
Jesus might happen. Hence, through the cross, the unfortunate looks at the world in an act of recognition of the other in his/her suffering.

André Devaux says that Simone Weil could not escape from malheur as a personal experience and as a philosophical question. Then, malheur becomes the “vigor of her reflection at the point to see in malheur the essence of our humanity.”

And the unfortunate is the only one “who is able to make us love him with compassion... the unique just love.” Weil connects the personal experience of malheur and the malheur of others by the virtue of compassion as a social virtue for justice. In a few words, justice can only happen when the consciousness of the human condition is revealed by malheur. The unfortunates are specialists in the human condition because they feel in their flesh the suffering of social degradation, that is, malheur. She affirms: “It is the people who have an experience more real, the one that is more direct [knowledge] of the human condition.” She is referring to uprooted people because they suffer exploitation of their dignity. In her specific context, Weil had in mind workers and their families who were prevented from thinking and had to work exhaustively to support an inhumane system of industrial production. “Simone embodied the sad discovery that modern society is built around activities that compel humanity to act without thought.”

This alienates the working class and creates a humiliation, worse than suffering. Consequently,

---


18 OC VI 4, 122.

19 Oeuvres, 1069.

*malheur* touches their lives. The oppressed people, the unfortunates, know the human condition of fragility and finitude in and from their bodies. This opens them to the supernatural, to the experience of God’s grace and mercy, leading them to compassion for one another because they share the same situation. Justice rises from compassion among the unfortunates. Compassion is the presence of God in the world. It is a pure compassion because it arises from an experience of humility and recognition of the human condition through a consciousness of personal misery and the misery of others, both unfortunate beings.

Humility is a vital aspect of Simone Weil’s account of human misery and compassion. For her, “humility is the root of love. Humility has an irresistible power on God,”\(^{21}\) once the gift of Christ is a gift of God’s humility to the world. In a world led by extreme powers, the force of weakness is necessary to overcome the power of the world. This force of weakness was revealed on the cross as an act of total donation and humility, an act of God’s love in weakness. The human being is invited to assume humility in the same way, but the force of the world (*pesanteur*), because of its attraction that creates powerful peoples or its destructive power in the hand of oppressors against the vulnerable and the poor, does not allow for humiliation. However, the weak bring liberation because they find the revelation of the real human condition and a new way for building justice. The experience of suffering/*malheur* is the humiliation of the weak who present the way of love as pure compassion originating from the supernatural, that is, from Jesus’ cross in its identification with the suffering of the unfortunate. Weil says: “This compassion

\(^{21}\) OC VI 4, 125.
itself is an experience that a pure soul has of *malheur*. A pure soul experiences the same compassion before the *malheur* of the other."\(^{22}\) This is what I affirmed before when quoting Gabellieri: an experience of God’s mercy in the midst of *malheur* that clears our “I” and opens us to see the other with the same mercy. So compassion is an act toward the other as participation in divine mercy.\(^{23}\) Weil adds: “All movement of pure compassion towards a soul is a new coming of Christ to earth to be crucified.”\(^{24}\) It is Jesus who identifies himself with the unfortunate.

André Devaux argues that Simone Weil presents two forms of *malheur*: one which is the essence of creation\(^{25}\) and the other as an accidental form. This distinction seems to be true in Weil’s thought. The first form is basically what I have described until now about *malheur*. It is part of a creation that is finite and not self-sufficient, it is creation submitted to necessity. *Malheur* is part of the human essence by its condition of a fragile and finite being. Accepting this limitation is suffering, but there is no other choice. Many people live in an illusion of an inauthentic existence submitted to *pesanteur*. They use material things, political and/or economic powers to nourish this illusion. They are easily attracted by force, lose their roots, and many become oppressors. The experience of *malheur* liberates these people from illusion. (Although Weil also recognizes it is possible to be free from inauthentic existence by a spiritual, mystical way that will empty the “I” in the same way that *malheur*

\(^{22}\) Ibid., 121.

\(^{23}\) Weil affirms: “Mercy is the visible presence of God here-below [in the earth]” that is manifest in an act of compassion from God to us and from us toward the others (OC VI 4, 131).

\(^{24}\) OC VI 4, 124.

\(^{25}\) PSO, 123.
Those who experience *malheur* because of their social condition of oppression have the privilege of knowing the human condition and opening themselves to God’s grace. They know *malheur* as essence of creation, but they also know *malheur* as an accidental form. This has an external origin, generally from a social context of oppression and marginalization. The external origin is uprootedness: military, social, and economic powers that provoke this social illness.\(^2\)

The accidental form of *malheur* must be combated and its elimination is possible.\(^3\) Here is the liberating aspect of Weil’s account of *malheur* and compassion. The liberation aspect of compassion is grounded in a deep consciousness of the human condition which *malheur* provides. She explicitly says: “The feeling of human misery is a condition for justice and love.”\(^4\) And, “the consciousness of *malheur* is the imperative condition for compassion.”\(^5\) She proposes a new moral order that rises from the consciousness of the human condition and supernatural justice. The human condition and supernatural justice are mediated by Jesus’ cross, the supernatural love that makes love and justice possible on the earth. So the exercise of fairness and the struggle for justice by the unfortunate are an exercise of supernatural love.


\(^{27}\) *Oeuvres*, 1053.

\(^{28}\) Devaux, “Malheur et Compassion Chez Simone Weil” (1985), 391.

\(^{29}\) SC, 40.

\(^{30}\) André Devaux, “Malheur et Compassion Chez Simone Weil,” *Cahiers Simone Weil* 1 (1986), 75.
Simone Weil connects the human condition, faith and love of the neighbor in a new order of social justice that comes from the experience of *malheur*, the supernatural love, and the recognition of the other. She stresses: “The consented subordination of all natural faculties of the soul to supernatural love is faith. It is what Plato names justice in *The Republic*. In Saint Paul, faith and justice are constantly identified: ‘your faith was counted as justice, your faith justified’ etc. In other words, justice is the exercise of supernatural love.”\(^{31}\) In addition, supernatural love is exercised and incarnated in the world through acts of service toward others, as compassion and justice for them.\(^{32}\)

The unfortunates, who experience the *malheur* concretely, have a knowledge and a practice that come from on high, and manifest in the world through actions of compassion. They see each other, they recognize the suffering face of each one, and identify themselves with the Crucified Jesus. This is the revelation of the human condition and Incarnation that are realized in the world through the mystery of the Incarnate God and the Incarnation of the unfortunates in social reality as a community of people who love one another and struggle for justice. Weil does not say this in the terms used here. Her account of compassion focuses much more on its anthropological aspect revealed in the experience of *malheur* and God's mercy. As a philosopher who is also doing theology, she is dedicated to theoretical reflection on *malheur* and compassion. However, this reflection is based on a real experience and leads to a concrete practice to achieve social justice. This is clear

---

\(^{31}\) OC VI 4, 174.  
\(^{32}\) Ibid.
when we observe her existential journey disclosed in the unity of her work as an ontological political anthropology. Hence, if we look at her socio-political writing and at letters about her experience of encountering the Crucified Jesus, we find the concrete and practical elements of her account of *malheur* and compassion as the foundation for social justice. In other words, the liberating aspect of compassion is explicitly found in texts that reflect her socio-political commitment and her lifestyle, characterized by a humble life among the unfortunates.  

Therefore, compassion for Weil has a liberation character of social action grounded on the human condition and God's grace. This supports the recognition of others in their suffering and joins them in a fight against the accidental *malheur*.

According to Maria Clara Bingemer, compassion is a lifestyle for Weil with supernatural foundations for a life of attention to others. “The suffering, afflicted one is invisible, but the faith inspired by love is able to visualize him.” Attention to the unfortunate is very important for social justice in Weil’s account. The unfortunates must be seen and heard to initiate a path to justice. This statement,

---

33 See, for example, her critique of Marxism and her letters to the Dominican Priest Jean-Dominique Perrin collected at AD. Weil's critique to Marxism is found in three essays: “Réflexions Sur les Causes de la Liberté et de L'Oprression Social” (1943), “Le Marxisme...” (1934); and “Sur las Contradiccions du Marxisme” (1938) in Oeuvres, 273-354.


35 Bingemer, *Simone Weil: Mystic of Passion and Compassion*, 49.

36 Ibid., 54.
repeatedly emphasized by liberation theology, is present in Weil’s account and lifestyle. Bingemer affirms that the unfortunate is the Weilien name for the poor, the agents of transformation for liberation theology.\footnote{Maria Clara Bingemer, “A Desventura e a Opção Pelos Pobres: Simone Weil e a Teologia da Libertação Latino-Americana,” REB 69, no. 276 (2009): 783.} For both Weil and liberation theology, love of the neighbor in the Gospel is also synonymous to justice.\footnote{Ibid., 786.} The unfortunate people are suffering, but they also have knowledge of supernatural origin. They are experts in the human condition, they are close to the Crucified Jesus, and they live compassion in a way that the world must learn to move in as the right path to social justice. As liberation theologians affirm, joining the poor is a concrete realization of compassion and engagement in their historical praxis for justice from the universal light of the Gospel, a sign of hope in a suffering reality.\footnote{Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, Como Fazer Teologia da Libertação, 8th ed. (Petrópolis: Vozes: 2001), 67-72.}

### 3.2 Social Suffering and the Irruption of the Poor

Although suffering is part of human existence, it has the power to reveal our condition as contingent and finite beings, and to open us to the experience of grace. Suffering is an issue for theological reflection in any religious tradition. Theodicy is the word that some theologians and philosophers usually use when they address the problem of suffering. Suffering is a human reality that affects every individual and culture around the world. In Christianity, the problem of suffering becomes more intense because of an apparent incompatibility between a God who is love and the
suffering of people. There is a suffering that is part of human nature that Simone Weil names *malheur* in its essential form, but there is a suffering in an accidental form with an external cause. Liberation theology, which on some levels was influenced by Weil's thought and her commitment to the unfortunate, names this accidental form of suffering as the suffering of the poor because of the socio-economic mechanisms of exploitation and oppression. Accidental forms of suffering become social factors as producers of injustice and poverty.

From the unfortunates' experience of faith and praxis of liberation, the irruption of the poor in history makes them aware of the cause of their suffering, that is beyond a question of theodicy in the relationship between God-love and the suffering of his people. This irruption in Latin America is the origin of liberation theology, which addresses the problem of suffering from the perspective of the poor: their experience of faith, and their struggle for liberation in a reality marked by exploitation and oppression, the cause of the suffering.

The poor have knowledge which originates from their experience of suffering, faith, and historical praxis based on solidarity. Simone Weil recognized this in the same way as liberation theology does: from being among the oppressed. They express this truth in different ways and languages, but both are rooted in an anthropology developed by the experience of sharing suffering, faith, love, and hope among the poor. Thus far, I have examined the perspective of Simone Weil. Now I
will develop how liberation theology shapes its anthropology from the irruption of the poor in history.\footnote{For a deep presentation focused on the irruption of the poor in history, see: Gustavo Gutiérrez, \textit{La Fuerza Historica de los Pobres}, 2nd ed. (Lima: CEP, 1980). Or, for a shorter work published in English, see: Gustavo Gutiérrez, “The Irruption of the Poor in Latin American and the Christian Communities of the Common People,” in \textit{The Challenge of Basic Christian Communities}, ed. Sergio Torres and John Eagleson (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1981), 107-123.}

Paulo Freire affirms that liberation can only occur when led by the poor. To the oppressed, he attributes:

The humanist and historical task... to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well. The oppressors, who oppress, exploit, and rape by virtue of their power, cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves. Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both.\footnote{Paulo Freire, \textit{Pedagogy of the Oppressed} (New York: Continuum, 2000), 44.}

According to Freire, any attempt at generosity by the oppressor towards the oppressed is false because it is “nourished by death, despair, and poverty” in addition to the owned interest of the oppressors. “True generosity consists precisely in fighting to destroy the cause which nourishes false charity once it works for transforming the world by fighting to restore the humanity of the poor and social justice.”\footnote{Ibid., 45.} Working among the illiterate poor in Brazil, Freire realized the power of the poor in history between immanence and transcendence, that is, between faith in a God who provides strength and hope to deny historical determinism and to act in the immanent reality for liberation.\footnote{Ibid., 98-99.} Thus, he notes that our mission (those who
are not materially poor, especially intellectuals) is to join the poor, working for their conscientization, and together struggle for liberation.\textsuperscript{44}

The irruption of the poor is the conscientization that the cause of their suffering is neither a historical determinism nor a divine predestination; instead, there are socio-economic causes. Commenting on Freire, Gustavo Gutiérrez says: “In this process, named by Freire as ‘conscientization’, the oppressed takes away the oppressive conscience that lives in him, acquires knowledge of his situation, finds his own language, and becomes himself less dependent, more free, committing himself to the transformation and construction of society.”\textsuperscript{45} The irruption of the poor is the conscientization of the poor and their historical praxis from their experience of faith in Jesus as liberator and the action of the Holy Spirit who gathers them in communities. The best way to see the irruption of the poor in Latin America is to look at the journey of basic ecclesial communities as a new way of being Church. The historical path of faith and struggle for liberation shows the anthropology and the theology of the poor centered on Jesus, gathered in small communities of solidarity, and acting against social suffering, that is, for liberation and justice.\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{44} Paulo Freire, \textit{Education for Critical Consciousness} (New York: Continuum, 1987), 37-40. Freire’s concept of conscientization (conscientização) will be examined in Chapter 11.


\textsuperscript{46} Basic ecclesial communities are one of the origins of liberation theology and the concretization of the preferential option for the poor incarnated in these communities of faith and solidarity. I will develop it in the next chapter when I address the preferential option for the poor.
The Basic Ecclesial Communities as the Visible Experience of the Irruption of the Poor

In 2007, I was a student of theology at Salesian University in São Paulo-Brazil when the 5th General Conference of Latin American and Caribbean Bishops took place in Aparecida, a small city about 110 miles from São Paulo City. I was extremely excited by this conference and I had an opportunity to follow everything that was happening in Aparecida. I joined the Tenda dos Mártires (Tent of Martyrs) that was built close to the National Sanctuary of Our Lady of Aparecida – the Black Madonna who appeared to poor fishermen in the middle of the 19th century and became the Brazilian patroness – where the all Latin American bishops had gathered. Tenda dos Mártires was promoted by basic ecclesial communities (BECs) and Pastoral Socials. It was a huge camp-out in which we celebrated Eucharist, listened to the Word of God, and reflected on social problems. Some bishops went there to preside at the Eucharist with us, and many priests and religious men and women camped in this tent that was basically shaped by poor people. These people had faces marked by their suffering, faith in Jesus of Nazareth, a strong ecclesial sense of belonging to the Catholic Church, and hope.

During the Conference of Aparecida, Tenda dos Mártires was a powerful witness of solidarity, fraternity, sharing, and prophecy based on faith in Jesus of Nazareth. In other words, Tenda do Mártires was a sign of the Church of the Poor to

---

47 “Pastoral Socials” is the free translation for Portuguese Pastorais Sociais. Under this term, the Catholic Church in Brazil promotes social ministry of advocacy of the oppressed and marginalized in several socio-political arenas, such as public healthcare, agrarian reformation, drug addiction and trafficking, human trafficking, popular education, employment and better working conditions, housing, and so forth. See: Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil, A Missão da Pastoral Social (Brasília: Edições CNBB, 2008).
the bishops gathered in Aparecida. One major event marked this witness. It was a pilgrimage organized by BECs and Pastoral Socials on May 19th, 2007 in which the poor people gathered in a village 10 miles from Aparecida and walked all night – praying, singing, and making memory of Latin American martyrs – to the Sanctuary of Our Black Mother of the poor. This pilgrimage concluded in the Sanctuary with a 9:00 morning mass that was known as Mass of the BECs. Many Brazilian bishops attended this mass; only one non-Brazilian was present – the Cardinal of Buenos Aires, who was to become Pope Francis five years later. He expressed his appreciation and support to BECs.

Cardinal Bergoglio was the head of the writing committee of Aparecida’s final document. This document, in its original version, approved by the Latin American bishops, gave a strong emphasis to BECs and their new way of being Church, but this emphasis was limited by the Vatican’s revision. The final document, after Vatican approval, marked BECs as only one experience of the Catholic Church among others, such as ecclesial movements.

It seems that BECs have a special place in Pope Francis’ heart. This is visible when he mentions BECs in his apostolic exhortation, Evangelii Gaudium, no. 29. In addition, he was the first pope to write a letter to an inter-ecclesial meeting among Brazilian BECs that has 40 years of history and in 2014 promoted its 13th edition.48 Pope Francis has said that he dreams of a Poor Church. This makes us believe that

---

the time of institutional persecution against BECs, which happened during the last two papacies, is over and a new time of hope rises again.

Different from when BECs began in the middle of 1950s, now they have a history that is grounded in the memory of their beatos (blessed) and martyrs. This journey allows us to look at this new way of being Church as an experience of the People of God with God in history among suffering, persecution, oppression, and poverty, but also among faith, hope, solidarity, and love. Moreover, history and memory allow us to think about BECs in order to renew their prophetic and missionary passion to address challenges of our current time that need once again an irruption of the poor as the theological and social locus for a movement of liberation and justice. BECs are a new way of being Church that concretizes the Church of the Poor as an authentic ecclesial expression of the People of God in Latin America. In other words, BECs are a Church of the Poor, the People of God incarnated in history, with a plurality of experiences, throughout Latin America. This leads me to now examine the theological foundations that characterize BECs as a visible manifestation of the irruption of the poor.

Theological Roots of Popular and Small Communities

The theology of the Latin American Bishops Conference of Medellín and Puebla presents BECs not as a movement in the Church, but as a new way of being Church in the popular base and as popular base being Church. The basic community is “first and fundamental ecclesial nucleus,” as Medellín affirms,\(^\text{49}\) and “a place of

\(^{49}\) Medellín, 211 (no. 15.10).
interpersonal relationship, listening to the Word of God, participation in the Eucharist, life review, and commitment to justice in light of the Gospel,” according to Puebla.\(^5^0\) In short, the main theology of small communities in Latin America is Medellín and Puebla.

The Conferences of Medellín and Puebla are essential to understand the walk of the Catholic Church with the poor and the preferential option for the poor that is the heart of BECs and their christological faith. Medellín made an option for a *Poor Church* (Igreja Popular) among the poor. Puebla expressed this option through the *preferential option for the poor* against poverty and all mechanisms of oppression and exploitation. I will highlight some fundamental elements of the *Poor Church* and its preferential option for the poor, of which the BECs are its authentic expression.

The ecclesiology and christology of Medellín and Puebla gained expression in BECs and were fostered by the witness of many prophetic bishops, such as Helder Camara in Brazil, Leonidas Proaño in Ecuador, and Manuel Larraín in Chile. They testified to an ecclesiology that heard the cry of the poor in Latin America. It is an ecclesiology grounded in Vatican II’s theology of *signs of the times* and in the *Gospel’s message*\(^5^1\).

The prophetic bishops as well as many religious communities who went to live among the poor in *inserted communities* (*comunidades inseridas*) were, on the one hand, an answer to the cry of the poor by the institutional Church and an impulse to BECs as a new way of being Church; on the other hand, the BECs arose

\(^5^0\) Puebla, nos. 629; 640.

\(^5^1\) Medellín, 202 (no. 14. 7).
from the poor and their pastors among them. They are not a sectarian movement in the Catholic Church, but rather it is the Catholic Church in popular base, that is, the Church of the Poor.

The theological root of BECs in one sentence is: The faith of a people in Jesus of Nazareth lived in community and amidst poverty and the struggle for justice.

Theological reflection is about this experience of faith in Jesus that the poor have lived in Latin America. In order to explore more fully this christological experience of the poor in basic communities, I present seven aspects that characterized the theology of BECs:

1. The Meaning of Basic, Ecclesial, and Community
2. Centrality of the Word of God
3. Preferential Option for the Poor
4. Historical Praxis: Justice and Prophecy
5. Liberation and Salvation
6. Popular Religiosity
7. Feast: Celebration of Faith

The Meaning of Basic, Ecclesial, and Community. BECs “are recreating the Church of God,” the Church of Christ that subsists in the Catholic Church. BECs are a new way of being Church that expresses its catholicity from the base of our society which has

---

52 Leonardo Boff, Church: Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and The Institutional Church (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 126.
a people of kings, priests, and prophets. BECs recreate the Church, not by building a new temple or institution, but by recovering the experience of the early Church as a community of brothers and sisters around their faith in Jesus and listening to the apostles’ preaching. There is no contradiction between the institutional Church and BECs, but “BECs, as an experience of community within the institutional Church, are an ongoing leaven of renewal and upholding in the Church.”

Basic means from below, that is, from the base of society and the Church. This base is the poor, the lower-class, and grassroots people who support society and are marginalized. The bases experience faith and see society from poverty and oppression. The perspective of the poor is in the base where they struggle for life and justice. From the base, there are new ecclesial and social views that challenge the status quo and the pyramidal vision from the top, a minority with privileges, to the bottom, the majority who do not have a voice. Ecclesial means that this base is gathered in a community of faith within ecclesial structures. The explicit faith in Jesus with reference to religious elements and the institutional Church defines the community.

It is an ecclesial community that understands itself as a presence of the Church and a sign of liberation and salvation in the world. The basic ecclesial faith of the poor is lived in community, as a dynamic and spontaneous social interaction in which the poor: know each other; share faith, suffering, and struggles;

---


listen to the Word of God; celebrate the Eucharist; and live a mutual relationship of help and belonging.

**Centrality of the Word of God.** The popular catechists in several dioceses in Brazil that began in the 1950s was a movement to gather people to read the Bible in community and celebrate their faith. This experience of popular biblical circles spread throughout Latin America in small groups of ten or fifteen people. These groups are the first BECs that never abandoned this practice of popular reading of the Bible. The Gospel gains life in the hands of the community that reads it with freedom from their perspective and context. At the same time, the Gospel enlightens the community’s life and strengthens the faith and hope of the poor. “The Gospel is heard, shared, and believed in the community, and it is in its light that the participants reflect on the problems of their life.”\(^5\) BECs use the method of confrontation to read the Gospel, that is, they confront biblical passages with the reality and context of the community in a way that everybody has voice and does popular exegesis.

This method has a hermeneutic principle that is grounded in three criteria and follows three steps. The criteria are: *text, community, and reality*. They work as three moments of popular identification: knowing the Bible; creating communities; and serving the people through a transformative praxis. In the community, the Bible is read in three steps that are inspired by Jesus and his talk with the disciples of Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35). First, reality is the starting point. People share their reality,

\(^{56}\) Boff, *Church: Charism and Power*, 127.
lives, sufferings, and hopes as the disciples of Emmaus shared their context to a pilgrim (Lk 24:13-24). Second, it is the reading of a biblical passage that is interpreted in light of the context of people gathered in community, as Jesus did with the disciples of Emmaus when he presented the Scripture and interpreted it in connection with reality (Lk 24:25-27). Third, it is the celebration and moment of sharing food in the community, as Jesus and the disciples of Emmaus did when they broke the bread (Lk 24:28-32). These three steps result leading people to engage in a transformative praxis, as the disciples of Emmaus also engaged in the praxis of returning to Jerusalem (Lk 24:33-35).

*Preferential Option for the Poor.* The option for the poor is the heart of this new way of being Church. For BECs, this option is not preferential, rather it is a decisive choice for the poor that rises from faith in Jesus who became poor. For these communities, the example of the historical Jesus is enough to support their option for the poor. The option for the poor is not only seen as a principle or an epistemological concept (as many theologians treat it), but it is an existential commitment of faith lived in community. BECs are the visible expression of this existential commitment which the entire Church is challenged to assume. Puebla says: “We affirm the need of conversion of the whole Church into a preferential

---

option for the poor in order to promote integral liberation.” Aparecida confirms this option as a christological faith.

The preferential option for the poor begins with a mysticism that leads to a commitment to transform reality from below in solidarity with the poor. It is a spiritual journey that happens at two levels: the level of the poor who are awakened for liberation (popular education and the reading of the Bible are ways to awaken the poor), and at the level of those who are not poor but leave their privileges and join the poor in a liberating praxis. Consequently, the option for the poor is embodied in social practices that address injustice, inequalities, and structural violence in order to promote the life of the poor and their social development.

*Historical Praxis: Justice and Prophecy.* BECs are a community of the poor that is a sacrament of the Church of the Poor, a people of kings, priests, and prophets who walk with God in history for liberation. Confronting the Gospel’s message with the reality of poverty and structural violence leads the community to an historical praxis of liberation. What supports this praxis is not any ideology of Marxist character – as many people like to say to dismiss BECs – but rather the biblical prophecy and the

---

58 Puebla, no. 1134.
59 Aparecida, no. 392.
61 I will develop more fully the preferential option for the poor as an existential commitment in the next chapter, dedicated exclusively to this concept.
62 João Batista Libanio examines some different ecclesiological organization of the Catholic Church in Latin America, including BECs. Hence he presents some of the most common critiques to BECs and some of liberation theologians’ responses to these critiques. See: João Batista Libanio, *Cenários de Igreja*, 2nd ed. (São Paulo: Loyola, 2000).
Gospel’s demand for justice in the world. BECs are prophetic communities that struggle for justice in light of the Gospel and are fed by the Eucharist. BECs’ historical praxis is a commitment to social justice that comes from a deepening of the Word of God in which God reveals himself as liberator. The theology of the Exodus shows that God is a liberating God who acts for his people against all forms of oppression and exploitation. This theology is strengthened by the Incarnation of God in Jesus who shows that “the truth of our relationship with God is measured by the truth of our relationship with others.”Jesus is the merciful and poor God who is with the poor to say: “Blessed are those who are poor” (Lk 6:20). The method of historical praxis of BECs is not a Marxist method, but employs the see, judge, and act methodology of Catholic social reflection and practice. It is to see the reality where the community of the poor are living and understand mechanisms of structural poverty; to judge this reality in light of the Gospel's message that challenges for change; and to act as a prophetic People of God who denounces injustice and struggle for liberation through a praxis that proclaims the kingdom of God.

Liberation and Salvation. The basic ecclesial community is a people of hope that comes from faith in Jesus and certainty of salvation. Unlike its critics’ belief that BECs are an historical materialist movement based in the historical Jesus and vulnerable to Marxist ideology, the basic community is shaped by poor people who have faith and hope. In a Brazilian saying: It is a people who never gives up (um povo que nunca desiste). Historical praxis of liberation is strengthened by the

---

63 Boff, Church: Charism and Power, 24.
eschatological dimension of faith, which becomes a fount of hope and courage. BECs assume liberation as an historical mission that God entrusts to his people, whose foundations are the Exodus and the mystery of Incarnation. The People of God continues in history the mission of God who became flesh, “brought good news to the poor” (Lk 4:18) and announced “the kingdom of God is near” (Mk 1:15). Jesus lived this mission in the Holy Spirit who is the oil that God used to anoint him (Lk 4:17). In Pentecost, the community is anointed with the same Spirit to continue this mission. This anointed people assumes that its destiny is an eschatological reality.\(^6\)

The eschatological dimension of the People of God makes this People walk in hope and perseverance in a project to build the kingdom of God. It is an historical people with a temporal project to be a free people and, at the same time, it is a People who looks beyond this reality. The eschatological dimension gathers the people as a community of faith and hope in which each person has dignity and is an agent.\(^5\)

Historical praxis of BECs is from a communion of faith and hope that reflects the Trinitarian communion.\(^6\) The mysteries of Incarnation and salvation lead the community into a journey of liberation that is guided by the Holy Spirit.

**Popular religiosity.** Puebla affirmed: “popular religiosity expresses a religious identity of a people”\(^6\) Aparecida confirmed this by saying: “The rich and deep popular religiosity, which appears in the soul of Latin American peoples, is a

---


\(^5\) Ibid., 213-215.

\(^6\) Aparecida, no. 157.

\(^7\) Puebla, no. 109.
precious treasure of the Catholic Church in Latin America.”\textsuperscript{68} In addition, it said:

“Popular piety is a legitimate way of living faith, a way of feeling part of the Church and a way of being missionary (...) It is the historical cultural originality of the poor of this Continent, and fruit of a synthesis between cultures and Christian faith.”\textsuperscript{69} It is through this religiosity that God has visited the poor in Latin America.\textsuperscript{70} Popular religiosity helps the poor live in an atmosphere of faith and hope, fosters creativity, and gathers brothers and sisters. BECs do not deny canonical forms of living the Catholic faith, rather they appreciate this form. However, popular religiosity provides a rhythm for daily life and leads to feasts that are celebrated as a \textit{kairos}.

\textit{Feast: Celebration of Faith}. One of the characteristics of the Latin American people, especially Brazilians, is to celebrate life and thank God for all things. This celebration is not only a moment of joy, but also a \textit{kairos} in which the poor enter into God’s time. BECs are not only defined by their commitment to justice and liberation. They are also communities that celebrate liberation. Boff says: “[The BEC] celebrates the liberation that God achieved for us in Jesus Christ; his presence through the word and the sacraments is celebrated and the faithful are comforted by his promises.”\textsuperscript{71} While popular religiosity provides the rhythm for daily life, celebration of faith is the apex of this piety where God kisses the heart of his people through sacraments. Feasts are \textit{kairotic meetings} to thank God for life, to make

\textsuperscript{68} Aparecida, no. 258.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., no. 264.
\textsuperscript{70} Boff, \textit{Church: Charism and Power}, 130.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 129.
memory of martyrs and beatus (blessed) of the community, and to be strengthened for liberation. Finally, feasts are celebrations of faith around the Word of God and the Eucharistic table. A BECs’ popular piece of music says: “receiving communion is to become dangerous, we are coming to transform with the suffering struggle of a people who wants to have voice, chance, and place.”

_The Irruption of the Poor in the Church of the Poor_

This visible irruption of the poor earned words of hope coming from the Apostolic Blessing of Pope Francis to the 13th Inter-ecclesial Meeting of the BECs. In his letter, Pope Francis presents the Church as the People of God who assumes the duty of evangelization as a pilgrim Church. BECs are called to “assume their important role in the Church’s mission of evangelization.” Francis recognizes the role of BECs as an authentic expression of the People of God. However, it is not clear whether he affirms BECs as one movement of the Church – a possible interpretation of Francis’ statement that BECs have an “important role in the Church's mission,” especially because he cautions BECs to “not lose contact with the rich reality of the local parish and to participate readily in the overall pastoral activity of the particular Church” in reference to _Evangelii Gaudium_, no. 29 – or as a new way of being Church that is pilgrim and shaped by missionary discipleship with the poor.

---

72 Comungar é tornar-se um perigo; viemos para transformar com a luta sofrida de um povo que quer ter voz, vez e lugar (original in Portuguese).

It is clear in Francis’ letter that the Catholic Church is a pilgrim Church with the poor in the countryside and in the city. He confirms BECs as an expression of a pilgrim Church. He also affirms BECs as an “instrument that allows people to attain greater knowledge of the Word of God, a greater social commitment in the name of the Gospel.” Francis appears to know well the relationship between listening to the Word and social commitment in BECs’ practice. It is the Gospel that impels and enlightens BEC’s historical *praxis* and not ideological theories. However, “as an instrument,” BECs lose their new way of being Church because they are only a tool to be used by the institutional Church and not the base that supports the institution. As the base is formed by the poor, the base community shapes the Church as the Church of the Poor. Finally, the most significant element of Francis’ letter is that BECs “bring a new evangelizing fervor and a new capacity for dialogue with the world whereby the Church is renewed” (again in reference to *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 29). BECs have the potential for renewing the Catholic Church from their fervor and capacity for dialogue with the world. This is an important recognition of BECs as a fount of renewal inside the Catholic Church. It is the evangelizing power of the poor in the Church.

Despite a certain ambiguity in Francis’ letter, it fosters a great recognition of and encouragement to BECs to continue on their pilgrimage in the world as a visible expression of the Church of the Poor. BECs had never received this kind of support from the Vatican. Francis’ letter and Apostolic Blessing made the eyes of all the poor gathered in basic communities shine with joy and hope. They love the Catholic Church and do not want to be seen as rebellious children.
BECs have provided a place of recognition for the poor. Gathered in BECs, the poor share their suffering in an experience of faith and solidarity. BECs become spaces for the poor to express their voices, listen to the other, live their faith, identify their suffering with Jesus’ cross, embody compassion, and point to the praxis of liberation. BECs are also a place of conscientization, a process joining manual and intellectual labor, essential for Simone Weil to move against mechanisms that exploit the worker and the poor. The irruption of the poor gathered in BECs embodies the natural illumined by the supernatural in a concrete experience of compassion, recognition, and historical praxis. The anthropology of suffering is the life of the poor in their expertise of the human condition, their identification with the Crucified Jesus, their connection to God’s grace, and their concretization of compassion. All of these lead them to a historical praxis. At the heart of this experience is the preferential option for the poor that I will further explore as an existential commitment in the next chapter.

Liberation theology is the explicit theological reflection raised from the irruption of the poor in history, gathered in small communities (BECs) in Latin America. This reflection is shaped by the experience among the poor: the recognition of their suffering faces, the engagement in their struggle for liberation, and the celebration of faith and hope within a community of compassion. Thus the preferential option for the poor has become the heart of this theological reflection and of a liberating praxis from below. Liberation theology is from the reality of the poor (theological and hermeneutical locus) who are, at the same time, anthropological subjects and agents of theology and historical praxis from their
experience of *malheur*, as identified by Simone Weil. Therefore, the anthropology of suffering is grounded on the option for the poor, which leads us to those who are experiencing accidental forms of *malheur*: the poor, experts in the human condition.
Chapter 4
THE PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR AS AN EXISTENTIAL COMMITMENT

An anthropology of suffering – rooted in an encounter with the supernatural in its merciful face as an experience from the cross to compassion and recognition of the other who is suffering – leads us to move beyond our own pain to contemplate the faces of those who are victims of a system of exclusion and exploitation. These people are not only having an experience of suffering as the essential *malheur* of the human condition, but they are victims of *malheur* in its accidental form, that nowadays has acquired a structural mechanism of socio-economic exploitation. Poverty is the most visible result of this mechanism, and is the number one cause of death in the world.

The recognition of the other – originating from the revelation of the fragility of the human condition in an experience of the cross and God’s compassion – is an act of seeing and being with the other who is suffering because of accidental forms of *malheur*. These forms are responsible for creating poverty and preventing people from flourishing. These people are called the poor in the Christian tradition that absorbs Jesus’ teaching on love-service for and with the poor (Jn 13:1-17). Love-service for and with the poor situates them in the first place as privileged recipients of the gospel, the good-news of life and justice (Lk 4: 17-30). The recognition of the other is primarily an act of seeing the faces of those who are suffering and identifying their faces with the face of the Crucified Jesus. This is an act of joining their lives and experience of suffering. The recognition of the other is also realizing
that the poor have a knowledge originating from their experience of suffering and encounter with the supernatural, the transcendent reality. Recognition is a movement of humility and commitment to others. It is a movement of joining as a community of fellows who share the same human condition, history, hope, and praxis of liberation. In other words, recognition is a movement of compassion that gathers people into a community of faith, hope, and historical praxis.

Liberation theology expresses this movement of compassion as “solidarity with the poor,” gaining the nomenclature of the preferential option for the poor. From the personal discovery of our human condition and encounter with God’s mercy on the cross, the recognition of the other requires a choice for those who are suffering as victims of accidental forms of *malheur*, that is, the unfortunates in their context of marginalization and poverty: the poor. In addition, this option originates from the truth of the gospel in which the Incarnate God manifests himself as a humble person among the poor. Just as Leonardo Boff states, there can be no neutrality for the Christian; rather we are called to make a fundamental decision for the unfortunates. Pretending neutrality is an option for the powerful and for those who use it to exploit the poor.¹

The preferential option for the poor is at the heart of liberation theology as well as at the heart of our approach to social justice in health care. With an impressive harmony, this option dovetails with Simone Weil’s account of suffering/*malheur*, identification with Jesus’ cross, and her existential commitment to the unfortunates. Hence, now is the time to move closer to the preferential option

for the poor as it has been embodied by liberating praxis of Latin American
communities and its later formulation by liberation theology. I begin examining this
option from a concrete experience.

On April 25th, 2007, a few weeks before the beginning of the Fifth Conference
of Latin American and Caribbean Bishops in Aparecida, Brazil which Pope Benedict
XVI opened, I went to a panel at Saint Benedict Monastery in São Paulo. Two
professors discussed Benedict XVI and his relationship with liberation theology. It
was the first visit of Cardinal Ratzinger to Latin America after he became the pope.
His concerns about liberation theology were well known. When he was prefect of
the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, he had expressed these concerns in
two documents. He had also censured many liberation theologians, e.g. Leonardo
Boff. About one month before the Conference of Aparecida, the Congregation for the
Doctrine of the Faith made public a notification censuring the Christology of Jon
Sobrino. One of the professors on the panel, a Dominican priest, said that Benedict
XVI did not know what liberation theology was because nobody can understand
liberation theology from behind a desk. He also said that if Benedict XVI wants to
know what liberation theology is, he needs to change his white clothes, put on a hat,
go to a Brazilian slum (favela), and share the suffering of people who are there,
hungry and sick.

---

2 Congregação Para a Doutrina da Fé, Instrução Sobre Alguns Aspectos da Teologia da
Libertação (São Paulo: Edições Paulinas, 1984), and Instrução Sobre a Liberdade Cristã e a Libertação

3 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Notification on the Works of Fr. Jon Sobrino, SJ
(November 26, 2006).
http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20061126
In a short article, Gerhard Müeller, the current prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and a friend of Gustavo Gutiérrez, said that he only understood what liberation theology and the option for the poor were when he visited a Peruvian slum with Gutiérrez. There he could contemplate the face of the Crucified Jesus in the suffering faces of Peruvian people.  

Many of important figures of liberation theology who, such as Gustavo Gutiérrez, Leonardo Boff, and Jon Sobrino, studied theology in European centers. When they came back to their countries, they found a reality of injustice and poverty. They went to work with the poor. Leonardo Boff, for example, went to the Amazonian area in Brazil. He testified that when he saw the reality of the *ribeirinhos* (poor people who live on the banks of the Amazon river) lacking everything, hungry and sick, he realized that the theology he had learned in Munich (where he had Joseph Ratzinger as one of his professors) was inadequate in the face of this reality. He met a suffering people who had great faith in Jesus and learned from them how he could do a new theology. Sobrino, a Spaniard, also related in his book, *The Principle of Mercy*, that when he went to El Salvador he had a Christian European truth. He was convinced he would have to liberate the Salvadorans from their naïve faith. However, when he began to live with these people, sharing their lives, and

---


5 I heard Leonardo Boff’s testimony in a course with in him in 2006, and several times in conferences. The last one was in 2010 in a Congress promoted by SOTER (Brazilian Society of Theology and Religious Studies) that took place at Catholic University of Minas Gerais – PUC.
contemplating their faces, he was the one who needed to be liberated from a
dogmatic and inhuman slumber.  

I present these events because there is no liberation theology apart from the poor. There is no liberation theology without a preferential option for the poor that leads one to share his/her life with the poor and contemplate their crucified faces. This option shows the faces of those who are specialists in the human condition through their own experience of suffering. I have noted that many theologians, especially in the First World, who write about liberation theology and the preferential option for the poor, have forgotten the poor themselves. In other words, they talk about the poor, but they are not with the poor. They talk to the poor, but they do not hear the poor. They are at their desks, offices, and universities, where the poor do not have space or voice. My goal in this chapter is to address theologians, who presume to do theology from the perspective of the poor, and other intellectuals who develop theories to the unfortunates, yet do not know the poor, their faces or names. Consequently, such intellectuals do not know their suffering nor do they recognize their knowledge as experts in human condition through their suffering and identification with Jesus’ cross.  

Such an approach promotes liberating theories that have “liberation” yet without a liberating practice; a “theology” yet without living faith in Jesus the liberator; and an “option for the poor” yet without the poor themselves. How is that possible in liberation theology?

---


7 The same criticism can be applied to public health care and some theories of justice in health care which intend to present a proposal re. the reality of poverty, but dismiss the voices of those who live in this reality. I will directly address this issue in Part III, chapter 10 of this dissertation.
In order to attain my goal, I will discuss liberation theology as a commitment to the poor. This commitment is necessary to recognize the wisdom of the poor and their irruption in history. I have noted that many articles which affirm to do liberation theology or examine its concepts have created epistemological boundaries responsible for limiting the preferential option for the poor. This has a twofold aspect. On the one hand, it brought liberation theology to the academy and gave it an academic status and acceptance. The preferential option for the poor became an epistemological concept and a hermeneutic key to doing theology. On the other hand, this movement into the academy removed liberation theology from the poor. The preferential option for the poor has been removed from its initial commitment to be with the poor and has become an epistemological concept. Consequently, the poor do not participate in this environment and liberation theology has been discussed apart from the poor and their social reality. I argue that liberation theology cannot be done without the poor. A commitment to the poor through an historical praxis is necessary to understand their reality in which we are invited to share our lives. Only in the midst of the poor can one recognize their knowledge about the human condition that rises from their experiences of suffering and encounter with the supernatural. Liberation theology, apart from the poor, loses its liberating aspect and becomes an elitist theology that speaks about the poor, but does not hear the poor. Liberation theology, as a professional study, is a second action that is supported by a concrete practice among the poor and their struggle for justice and liberation.
This chapter will follow four steps. First, it will take a narrative approach. I will tell some stories from the poor and their experience of struggling for liberation. Second, I will discuss the boundaries of a narrow epistemological understanding of the preferential option for the poor. Third, I will present the locus of liberation theology and its first theologians. Finally, I will propose the option for the poor as an existential commitment that arises from our faith in Jesus and leads us to be with the poor.

4.1 Previous Stories: Social Crisis, Community, Bible, and Language

I will tell stories from my experience with the poor. I know this is not well-received in an academic environment. However, as I argued in the Prolegomenon, the experience of the poor, their stories, and worldview are the way they appropriate texts and symbols of faith. This appropriation happens in a concrete context from which the poor create and recreate their world by achieving new meanings expressed in their own narratives.

Stories and narratives are how the poor express their experiences of suffering and wisdom. Stories are their way of transmitting knowledge, of joining in community, and of resisting the situation of oppression. Sharing in the lives with the poor – or being “in the company of the poor,” copying an expression that Paul Farmer and Gustavo Gutiérrez chose as the title of a book in which they share their work among the poor\(^8\) – means to participate in their universe and learn from their

stories. Liberation theology begins with this experience. Just as God through Jesus became poor to enrich us with his poverty (2 Cor 8:9), we are invited to join the poor in their reality and walk with them to liberation.

Liberation theology, as a professional theology, began in Latin America in the 1960’s. However, liberation theology did not start with the Latin America Bishops Conference of Medellín (1968) or with its first systematization in 1971 with Gustavo Gutiérrez’s book, Teología de la Liberación. Medellín and Gutiérrez only put on paper what the Church in Latin America was already living, an experience of a spirituality of liberation among the poor which had led the Church to a new way of expressing its faith in Jesus of Nazareth.⁹ We would not have Medellín, Puebla, or books about this new theological perspective without a strong movement within the Church together with the poor. Without Catholic Action and its movements such as JUC (Catholic University Youth), JOC (Catholic Worker Youth), and JAC (Peasant Youth) which applied the pastoral method of See – Judge – Act; without CEBs (Basic Christian Communities); unless many priests and religious had gone to live in the midst of the poor in comunidades inseridas (inserted communities); without prophetic bishops who participated in Vatican II and assigned the Catacomb Pact in which they committed to live among the poor in an austere life;¹⁰ in short, without a

---

⁹ Gutiérrez himself recognizes the origin of Liberation Theology in a new consciousness and spirituality of liberation that arose in Christian Communities in Latin America, called “the irruption of the poor in history.” See: Gustavo Gutiérrez, We Drink from Our Own Well: The Spiritual Journey of a People, 4th ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2003), 1-5.

¹⁰ “O Pacto da Igreja Servidora e Pobre” (Pacto das Catacumbas) in Boaventura Kloppenburg, Concílio Vaticano II; Quarta sessão (1965), v. 5. (Vozes: Petrópolis, 1966), 526-528. This Pact became the draft for the Document of Medellín. The Bishops who signed it wished that Vatican II had incorporated the concept of Church of the Poor, an appeal of John XXIII. This did not occur at the Council, but it occurred in Latin American Church in the 1960s. Ironically, today we see Pope Francis
Church of the Poor that was driven by the fresh air of Vatican II, we would not have liberation theology. Medellín expressed this effervescence in a pastoral text in order to apply the aggiornamento proposed by Vatican II, to promote and support the Church of the Poor, and its struggle for liberation.

Medellín affirms:

The Church in Latin America, because the condition of poverty and underdevelopment of the continent, feels it is urgent to translate this spirit of poverty into gestures, attitudes, and norms that make the Church a lucid and authentic sign of the Lord. The poverty of many brothers cries out for justice, solidarity, witness, commitment, effort, and liberation to fulfill the salvific mission trusted by Christ.  

The Church is God’s People and the poor are privileged recipients of the good news. Among the poor, we learn from them and we are obligated by their reality to change our perspective. From that arises a theology from the perspective of the poor.

The social crises that Latin America was living during the 1960’s and 1970’s under military regimes made the Catholic Church, led by the Holy Spirit, to take the side of the poor. This meant, first of all, being with them and hearing their cry. Nowadays, being a poor Church with the poor, as Pope Francis dreams, requires the same starting point of sharing and listening. We need to leave our comfort zone, join the poor and walk together. It is necessary to have the courage Simone Weil and

calling for a Church for the poor. More about the Catacomb Pact, see: José O. Beozzo, Pacto das Catacumbas: Por Uma Igreja Servidora e Pobre (São Paulo: Paulinas, 2015).

11 Medellín, 202 [no. 7].

12 Based on the preferential option for the poor as “implicit in our Christian faith,” Pope Francis stresses: “This is way I want a Church which is poor and for the poor.” (EG, no. 198).
many people in Latin America had in order to live an experience of community with
the poor and the oppressed.

Once, I was talking with an old woman in the Brazilian Northeast. She had on
her face the mark of her poverty. She said: “People are saying that we are living in a
social crisis and this is why we do not have enough food, but I do not know what
social crisis is, I only know that if I did not pray for my ‘Padrin Cícero’ to God to help
me, I can't go to work tomorrow because I won't have strength. If I wait to solve this
thing of social crisis, my children will die hungry.” Then she told me a story about
her father who moved to Juazeiro do Norte (a city in the middle of the Brazilian
backwoods) because there people were helping each other as a community and a
holy man was teaching them to use the land to plant. (This holy man was Fr. Cícero,
a non-canonized saint to many Brazilians.)\footnote{Father Cícero Romão Batista (1844-1934), known as Padre Cícero, was a Catholic priest
from the Northeast of Brazil who dedicated his life to serve the poor as a priest and a mayor in a very
impoverished village area marked by drought. Many poor people from all over the Brazilian
Northeast went to this village, known as Juazeiro do Norte, because of Padre Cícero and his work for
the poor. Then Juazeiro do Norte began to grow and develop. Padre Cícero had problems with
ecclesiastical authorities who had removed his priestly faculties. But he remained faithful to the
Catholic Church and his people until his death. After his death, Juazeiro do Norte became a place of
Catholic pilgrimage, attracting people who believed in Padre Cícero’s sainthood. The Catholic Church
began a process of reviewing Padre Cícero’s ecclesiastical faculties and a process of beatification. See: José
Comblin, Padre Cícero de Juazeiro (São Paulo: Paulus, 2011).} She told me that her community (a
basic ecclesial community) was a place where she could share her suffering with
others and pray for Fr. Cícero to help her. It was in the community that she heard
about such “social crises.”

The community is a place of encounter with people who share the same
suffering, a place of encounter with God, a place of learning, and of resisting
situations of oppression. This old woman did not know anything about social crises,
structural violence, or economic exploitation. But she knew the true experience of Christian faith that happens in a community. God is in the community and participates in the suffering of His people. She did not know systematic theology, but she knew that her experience of faith is an encounter with Jesus and an experience of community. Through life in community and faith, she identified her pain with Jesus’ cross in an experience of hope. This is an impulse that makes her work to sustain her children and resist exploitation. While intellectuals are talking about social crises, the poor are suffering. While these intellectuals are pretending to understand their suffering, the poor know what it is in their own flesh. If the poor do not do anything, they will die while intellectuals are still debating. The experience of faith, lived in the community, is a way of resisting and struggling for justice. The community is the place where the poor see their dignity recognized and from where their irruption in history occurs, as described in the last chapter.

In the beginning of 2004, I joined the CEBI (Popular Ecumenical Center of Biblical Studies). It is a group of people who read the Bible with the poor in a *popular way.*14 My professor, a preeminent biblical scholar, invited me to go with him to a biblical circle in a slum (favela) in São Paulo. We left the university, took two buses and one train; two hours later, we arrived in the neighborhood. Then we walked for 20 minutes until we arrived at the location where a BEC was placed. Approximately 20 people came to the 8 p.m. biblical circle meeting. I was impressed that a famous professor, after working all day long, had come to read the Bible in

---

14 Popular way is the translation of Portuguese expression of *de um modo popular*. In Latin America, whether in Portuguese or Spanish, when affirms that something is *popular*, it means “from the poor.”
one of the worst places in São Paulo and with poor and humble people, some of whom were illiterate.

My professor began with a prayer and read Gen 16:1-16. They reflected on the passage when Hagar flees from oppression in Abraham’s household and talks with God in the desert close to a well. From the biblical text, people expressed their own experiences of working as housecleaners and construction workers, their experience of oppression in the world of underemployment, their daily struggle of spending almost three hours to getting to their job, and not making enough money to support their families. One person compared his life in a large metropolis with an experience in the desert. Another said that the community was the well in which she talks with God freely and shares her suffering with others. The community was the place of encounter with God and people. The professor asked them: “What does Genesis 16 help you within your daily struggle?” And, “does Genesis 16 say something to encourage us to struggle against oppression?” These humble people answered these questions from their experiences of being poor and oppressed. They expressed alternative ways to continue struggling for liberation as a community that talks with God in its historical situation.

The biblical circle ended and the professor did not say any word on biblical exegesis nor systematic theology. He just listened to these people and learned from them. When we were on our way back, the professor said to me: “Alexandre, these people know more theology than I do.”
4.2 “Academic Confusions”: The Preferential Option for the Poor from Above – Epistemological Boundaries

I am not afraid to say: There is no liberation theology without Jesus, the Liberator and the option for the poor. There is no preferential option for the poor without the poor, and/or being apart from them. First of all, liberation theology is an experience of faith among the poor and their struggle for liberation.

The preferential option for the poor is the heart of liberation theology and I am making it the heart of this anthropology of suffering because it is a choice that leads us to the recognition of the other in his/her suffering. The option for the poor is a concept that guides theological reflection on faith in which salvation and historical liberation are together. However, it is also an existential commitment that leads us to join the poor and to walk with them to liberation. It is a commitment of faith that arises from our faith in Jesus who chose the poor as privileged recipients of the Gospel (Lk 16:18).

As we learned from Saint Thomas Aquinas, there is no theology if there is no experience of faith. Theology is a second movement in which we reflect on what we believe and experience. In other words, theology is a systematic reflection about the experience of faith. Hence, liberation theology is the same reflection, but from the point of view of the least of society. It transforms into theos – logia, that is, how a community of faith lives with God in history. There is no liberation theology without a liberating practice in history, just as there is no theology itself without faith.

---

15 Summa Theologiae, I Q. 1, art. 1.
Medellín and Puebla express a pastoral commitment in which the Church, through the historical praxis of small communities and their spirituality, experiences Jesus within a liberating practice among the poor. Medellín affirms and encourages a “Poor Church that denounces the unfair needs of goods in the world and the sin that promotes it; preaches and lives a spiritual poverty as an attitude of spiritual innocence and an openness to the Lord; and commits herself to live the material poverty.”

The Poor Church lives the salvific mission of Christ within the historic situations of the poor in Latin America. The situation of scandalous poverty and the faith in Jesus, who made himself poor to proclaim the good news to the poor as privileged recipients, led the Church to take place among the poor. “The poverty of many brothers cries out for justice, solidarity, witness, commitment, effort, and liberation to fulfill the salvific mission trusted by Christ.” From the heart of the Gospel and confronting of the situation of millions of people in Latin America arose a concrete solidarity with the poor and a theology with a liberating perspective. This solidarity means the issues and struggles of the poor belong to the Church.

Liberation theology is a reflection upon the historical experience of Jesus, who chose to be with the poor and continues walking with them in the history for liberation through His Spirit. It is an experience of solidarity with the poor that makes theology acquire a new perspective, a perspective arising out of the historical praxis of the poor. “Theology as a critical reflection of historical praxis is a liberating
theology, theology of liberating transformation of human history gathered in
ecclesia that confesses openly Christ.”¹⁹

Puebla formalized this new theological paradigm:

The Conference of Puebla assumes again, with a renewed hope in the
vivifying strength of Spirit, the statement of II General Conference that made
a clear and prophetic preferential and option for the poor in solidarity,
nevertheless mistakes and interpretation that some made and misrepresent
the Medellín spirit, ignorance and hostility of the others. We affirm the need
of conversation of all Church into a preferential option for the poor in order
to promote integral liberation.²⁰

Puebla invited the entire Church to convert to this option and to live this
prophetic solidarity with the poor. The preferential option for the poor, before being
an academic concept, is a conversion to the poor; it is an existential commitment
that leads us to live in solidarity with them.²¹ This solidarity is not an abstraction;
rather, it is with human beings who have flesh and blood and live as crucified
people. “The solidarity required by the preferential option for the poor forces us
back to a fundamental Christian attitude: a grasp of the need for continual
conversion.”²²

This conversion means that the preferential option for the poor cannot be
only or even principally an epistemological concept, restricted to an abstract
reflection upon the poor and their social reality. Rather, it is joining the poor and
seeing the reality from their perspective of faith and oppression. Among the poor,

²⁰ Puebla, no. 1134.
²¹ Gutiérrez, We Drink From Our Own Wells, 104.
²² Ibid., 106.
we can affirm that we have a new way to do theology, that is, from below. It is from below because there is an experience of faith and resistance to oppression among the poor in which we participate in their liberating praxis. All theological reflection will be the second movement in which we explain this experience from a new seeing.

The Conference of Aparecida once again confirmed the preferential option for the poor as a decisive requirement of our faith in Jesus Christ:

Our faith proclaims: “Jesus is the human face of God and the divine face of man.” Because of that, a preferential option for the poor is implicit in our Christological faith in a God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty. This option arises from our faith in Jesus Christ, God made man, who became our brother; option, however, that is not exclusive neither exclusionary.”

The preferential option for the poor arises from our encounter with Jesus. It is the fruit of our experience of faith in the community. Pope Francis in the first magisterial document written by his own hand affirms: “The Church has made an option for the poor which is understood as a special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity.” Then he quotes the text of Aparecida no. 392 that I just presented. He continues: “I want a Church which is poor for the poor. They have

---

23 Aparecida, no. 392. The highlighted sentences are words of Pope Benedict XVI on the Openness Address of the Conference of Aparecida in 13 of March of 2007. It was the first time that a CELAM’s document states the option for the poor as a christological option, but christological foundations for the option for the poor were present in Medellín and Puebla. Moreover, liberation theologians have affirmed this since the 1970s e.g. in Leonardo Boff’s book Jesus Christ Liberator published in 1972. See: Leonardo Boff, Jesus Cristo Libertador: Ensaio de Cristologia Crítica Para o Nosso Tempo (Petrópolis: Vozes, 2012), 12-13.
much to teach us. Not only do they share in the sensus fidei, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them.”\textsuperscript{24}

I want to comment briefly on two aspects of Pope Francis talk: the option for the poor as an exercise of charity, and the poor who teach us. Gutiérrez says that charity only exists in concrete gestures.\textsuperscript{25} There is no option for the poor without solidarity with the poor. This option requires that one goes to their locus and acts with them. The poor are not objects of a theological target, but they are agents of faith and social transformation and we join them. Among the poor, we are open to dialogue and learn from them. The poor teach us through their faith, lives, language, resistance, and suffering. The preferential option for the poor leads to a new way of doing theology in which the poor are active agents.

Of course, theologians also have something to offer to the poor, but this happens through an experience of community and in a dialogical way. \textit{Popular education}\textsuperscript{26} is a way that theologians might engage in a dialogue with the poor. The document of Aparecida also encourages a pastoral engagement in a popular education that assumes a social commitment from the perspective of the poor.\textsuperscript{27}

Aparecida says it is necessary “to promote more effective ecclesial ways in order to

\textsuperscript{24} EG, no. 198.

\textsuperscript{25} Gutiérrez, \textit{Teologia da Libertação}, 106.

\textsuperscript{26} Popular education is a free translation of a Portuguese expression \textit{educação popular}. Both Portuguese and English versions are similar because of their Latin root. However, the meaning of \textit{popular} is very different. In Portuguese, popular means something that is \textit{for and from} the poor. In the Brazilian context, popular education is exercised by the \textit{popular educator}, the one who teaches the poor, especially those who don’t have an opportunity to go to school and are illiterate. In addition, a popular educator provides political education in order to create an environment, in which people can develop a critical consciousness. \textit{Popular education} is a method of education of the poor that was deeply developed by the Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire. See: Paulo Freire, \textit{Educating for Critical Consciousness} (New York: Continuum, 1987).

\textsuperscript{27} Aparecida, nos. 400-402, 180-181.
prepare the lay people to assume their social commitment and to intervene in social issues." According to Aparecida, the ecclesial role in society must be from the perspective of the poor with a structured social ministry. It should also focus on the poor and excluded ones. In addition, it requires a creative ministry in a way that supports people in the public arena and in the decision-making process.

Liberation theology is not solely a theology of the academy, but it is also a theology of a historical practice of liberation among the poor. Now liberation theology enjoys a positive position among theological studies at universities. However, it cannot be limited by the boundaries of an academic systematization. The academy accepts the preferential option for the poor as an epistemological concept and a hermeneutic key to do theology. On the one hand, this is good because liberation theology achieves its autonomy in the academy by receiving the status of theological discipline. On the other hand, there is a risk of becoming limited by epistemological boundaries that take liberation theologians away from the poor and their context. Consequently, liberation theology becomes a discussion about itself grounded in papers and loses its prophetic aspect of a critical reflection on reality from the perspective of the poor.

---

28 Ibid., nos. 400, 180.
29 Ibid., nos. 399, 180.
30 Ibid., nos. 401, 181.
31 Ibid., nos. 402, 181.
32 Ibid., nos. 403, 182.
I present below a few *epistemological boundaries* of a liberation theology restricted to an academic reflection, apart from the poor and their historical experience of faith and struggle for liberation.

I. The preferential option for the poor becomes only an epistemological concept. This makes the option for the poor weak, losing its prophetic praxis because it would be apart from the poor.

II. As only an epistemological concept, the preferential option for the poor offers a hermeneutic mediation to do theology, but it loses its social locus of doing theology.

III. There is no dialogue with the poor. It is only a monologue in which theologians speak to the poor who do not participate in the decision-making process. So the poor are excluded from the theological arena and become objects.

IV. Promoting a dualistic perspective of theory and practice as two incommunicable things. Consequently, it is no longer a theological reflection from the poor upon a historical praxis in which theologians are participating in historical movement of liberation with the poor.

V. Liberation theology does not hear the poor because theologians are far from them.

VI. Liberation theology is limited to the academic language that is not accessible for all, especially for the poor. Theologians do not bother to translate this language into one way that the poor can understand.
VII. Liberation theology may be limited to talk about itself and answer only academic questions from articles and books. Dialogue happens only among those who are in an academic environment.

VIII. Liberation theology loses the act zero\textsuperscript{33} of its origins as a critical reflection on historical praxis because theologians are not with the poor and have no liberating practice.

IX. Liberation theology dismisses the experience of the community of faith.

X. Liberation theology excludes the force of popular education and the role of the poor in history.

XI. The poor do not have anything to offer to theological reflection nor to social transformation.

XII. Liberation theology becomes an academic discipline and loses its character to be a new way of doing theology through a critical reflection on a historical practice from the perspective of the poor and the Christological faith.

4.3 \textit{Bereshit:}\textsuperscript{34} The Locus of Liberation Theology

In 1985, the Editora Vozes (Brazil) and Ediciones Paulinas (Argentina and Spain) began a project to publish a book series with 55 tomes in Portuguese and Spanish in order to offer theoretical reflections to all Christian communities in Latin America.

\textsuperscript{33} The act zero of liberation theology is the moment before the theological reflection. It is of a concrete commitment to the poor and their praxis in which the theologian are among them acting for liberation. See: Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, \textit{Como Fazer Teologia da Libertação}, 8th ed. (Petrópolis: Vozes, 2011), 41.

\textsuperscript{34} Hebrew expression that is in the Gen 1: 1 and means \textit{in the beginning}. 
America, especially to those who served in some form of ministry. The project involved more than 100 theologians and was called *Theology and Liberation*. This project (as well as the publication of *Mysterium Liberations* edited by Jon Sobrino and Ignacio Ellacuría) shows that liberation theology is not a theological discipline such as christology, moral theology, liturgy, and so forth. Liberation theology is a way of doing theology from the perspective of the poor that reflects on a historical praxis and affects all areas of theology. Therefore, we do not talk about liberation theology, but we do christology from a liberating perspective, for example.

This way of doing theology does not begin in an office or in a classroom, but it begins among the poor through an experience of faith and a liberating practice. Then, as second and third acts, liberation theology goes to the classroom to do theology in a narrow sense (or professional theology). The professional theology develops from a context that, in Latin America, has been the context of the poor in their experience of faith in Jesus Christ.

All theology has two *loci* in its basis. There is an *epistemic locus* and a *social locus*. The *epistemic locus* is autonomous because it belongs to the regime of knowledge. It is a theoretical reflection that obeys its own instruments and an internal regime. It provides a theological discourse with its own methodology and tools that allow us to judge the theological production in itself. In this sense, there is not, for example, a European christology and a Latin American. There is not a

---

35 One example of book from this series is: Jon Sobrino, *Jesus, O Libertador*, 2nd ed. (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1996).

theology from the center and another from the periphery. These kinds of adjectives are inadequate.\textsuperscript{37}

However, the \textit{social locus} is where we do a theological reflection. It is a regime of dependence, that is, theology depends on a context in which one thinks about theological subjects. In other words, the social locus is a context in which one elaborates a theological reflection. This allows us to affirm that there is a Latin American christology because it depends on a determined social practice. In addition, if this practice is of liberation because of a context of oppression and poverty, theological reflection demands a liberating characteristic able to embody this social practice and to show hope, that is, a prophetic theology. Therefore, a theology that is prophetic has a commitment to an economic, social, and political liberation of oppressed groups.\textsuperscript{38}

The social locus of liberation theology is the social reality of the poor and their struggle for liberation. In this locus, theologians are confronted by the reality of the poor in which they live their faith in Jesus of Nazareth. The epistemic discourse will be re-thought from the social locus and will seek, as Gutiérrez says, “theological answers to problems that rise from a Christian life that opted for the oppressed against the oppressors.”\textsuperscript{39}

If liberation theology is restricted to academic studies, it will lose its social locus and will no longer be liberating. It will lose its capacity to join theory and

\textsuperscript{37} Boff, \textit{Jesus Cristo Libertador}, 13-14.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{39} Gutiérrez, \textit{Teologia da Libertação}, 115.
practice because it will no longer be a critical reflection from a liberating practice with the poor.

In its social locus, liberation theology follows four steps that begin with the poor and end with them. First, step zero is participation in liberating practice with the poor. In this step, theologians join the poor in their suffering and struggling for liberation and justice. Second, it is step 1 that is the social-analytic mediation (See). It is an analysis of social reality and seeking for structural causes of oppression and injustice. Third, it is the hermeneutic mediation (Judge) that is step 2. The poor will interpret this reality from their faith, religious tradition, and biblical reading. Fourth, it is step 3 that is the practical mediation (Act) in which the poor will organize in community and social organization to act in order to achieve their liberation.40 Liberation theologians walk with the poor and the Christian community on these steps. They bring their knowledge to contribute to the poor and also learn from those who provide material to develop liberation theology as a professional study.

The preferential option for the poor is an existential commitment in a concrete way to live the discipleship of Jesus in solidarity with the poor in their social locus. Gustavo Gutiérrez affirms: “The option for the poor is deployed in three arenas: the following of Jesus, theological work, and the proclamation of the Gospel. These three dimensions give the preferential option for the poor vitality and shape.”41 Following of Jesus means to walk “in the footsteps of Jesus,” which leads us

40 Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, Como Fazer Teologia da Libertação, 71-72.
to serve the poor and to see their reality as a privileged place for following Jesus.\textsuperscript{42} Theological work rises from the experience among the poor that provides “a hermeneutics of hope.” This work presents a theological reflection “that tries to accompany a people in their suffering and joys, their commitments, frustration and hopes.”\textsuperscript{43} The proclamation of the Gospel is a “prophetic announcement of the good news” that has the option for the poor as its essential component.\textsuperscript{44}

Boff says, “Liberation theology is a new way to be a theologian.”\textsuperscript{45} Theology will always be the second act from a specific locus and within a dialectical movement between theory of faith and practice of charity.\textsuperscript{46}

**4.4 Option for the Poor: Being with the Poor**

The preferential option for the poor is the heart of liberation theology as a deep expression of the christological faith. Liberation theology has a great task. It wants to change the world into a better place. To do it, there is no way to renounce the human condition and those who are experts on it because of their experience of suffering and identification with Jesus’s cross. The suffering of the poor reveals who we are, as fragile humans; who our hope is, the Crucified Jesus; and where we want to go, toward justice and peace. Pope Francis affirms that the wish to make the world a better place belongs to an authentic Christian faith. “An authentic faith –

---

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 319.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 322.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 323.
\textsuperscript{45} Boff and Boff, *Como Fazer Teologia da Libertação*, 42.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
which is never comfortable or completely personal – always involves a deep desire
to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we
found it."\(^{47}\) This task is not easy, but it can only be possible if it begins from the poor,
who make up the immeasurable majority of the world population and have
knowledge to offer. Only the oppressed can liberate themselves and also the
oppressors.\(^ {48}\) Liberation will never happen from above.

The process of liberation begins “in the company of the poor”, that is, the first step is sharing life with the poor. This requires a movement of compassion that
leads us to recognize the suffering faces of the poor and to be humble to hear them.
Recognizing the face of the poor means being open to hearing stories of conversion,
resistance, and struggling for liberation that happen among the poor. The
preferential option for the poor is a liberating spirituality that converts us to
following Jesus among the poor and learning from their experience of encounter
with Jesus and their historical situations. It is a spirituality of solidarity and a
historical commitment\(^ {49}\) in which we discover the power of the poor in history.

Gutierrez testifies: “The preferential option for the poor is not only a pastoral issue
and a theological perspective, it is also, and first of all, a *spiritual walk* in the strong

\(^{47}\) EG, no. 183.

\(^{48}\) This argument is developed by Paulo Freire from an anthropological and historical perspective. He affirms that the vocation of the human being is to be human, but the process of oppression dehumanizes the oppressed and alienates them with a historical determinism. This also happens with the oppressors who use violence to retain their status which distorts the vocation of the human being to achieve full humanity. Only the oppressed can change this reality because they can recreate the reality. Oppressors can never do this because they, even though alienated, are beneficiaries of it. Therefore, Freire concludes: “This is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and the oppressors.” Paulo Freire, *Pedagogia do Oprimido*, 59th ed. (Rio de Janeiro; São Paulo: Paz & Terra, 2015), 41.

\(^{49}\) Puebla, no. 1147.
sense of this expression.” If we are limited by the walls of an academic environment, we will do liberation theology from above. That means studying liberation theology as a mere discipline from books, without the poor, without the liberating spirituality, and without the historical praxis of liberation.

Doing theology is only the second act of liberation theology. The first is to be with the poor, to contemplate their crucified faces, and to walk together in a liberating spirituality marked by a historical praxis of liberation. It is an existential commitment that arises from our Christological faith and puts us in the company of the poor. Being with the poor, we know their faces, stories, and concrete suffering. It is the process of recognition in which we hear and learn from them. We know that the woman from the Brazilian Northeast who prays for Padrin Cícero to help her has a name. Her name is Dona Raimunda. In the company of the poor, we give them voices, and recognize their dignity. People in a slum in São Paulo have faces, names, identities, and dignity. Liberation theology, when enclosed by “the safe walls” of the academy, does not know the names of the poor.

---

The cross, whether the people’s or Jesus’, is at the center of liberation theology and Simone Weil’s thought. The attention to the reality of the poor or unfortunates in their daily cross as victims of social injustice is also at the center of these two sources of reflection about the human condition. Weil found in Jesus’ cross the truth of human existence in its fragility experienced without masking by those who are touched by malheur. Her own malheur led her to discover the Crucified Jesus in whom her pain and the pain of all human beings were assumed on the cross, the highest expression of love from where truth shines. The oppressed, or the unfortunates know this truth from their own experience of suffering/malheur. And once one discovers it, there is no other choice, but to join them in their reality and way of encountering the truth. The light that shines from Jesus’ cross guides the one who sees this light to recognize others in pain, especially those suffering because of accidental forms of malheur.

In liberation theology, the accidental form of malheur is social injustice against the poor, performed through socio-economic structures of violence, that is, institutionalized mechanisms of exploitation. The suffering of the poor is their crucifixion on the wood of a life with no access to the goods of the earth necessary to flourish. In Latin America, the poor explicitly manifest their devotion to Jesus’ cross in which they find strength to continue their existential journey. They become a crucified people seeing their suffering reflected in the face of the Crucified Jesus,
where they find the truth, as a merciful God who is among them and suffers like
them. The light of God shines from the cross, touches the lives of the poor, and leads
them to shape a community of solidarity, faith, and hope.

On different roads, but driving in the paths of human suffering, Simone Weil
and liberation theologians found in Jesus’ cross the truth of a Crucified God who
reveals the fragility of human life and identifies Himself with it: an act of God’s love
that opens to human participation in His mystery. Moreover, those who are
suffering find an open path to God in an experience of grace through identification of
suffering with Jesus’ cross and the recognition of others’ pain. It is the process of
compassion in feeling and seeing: feeling God’s mercy and seeing the other in a
human-spiritual-historical dynamic of incarnation in the world.

The incarnation in the world is a concrete and committed way to live our
humanity illuminated by the Christian faith. This begins from the acceptance of our
condition of creatureliness, that is, our humanity as a contingent being. It is a
process of humility which many people do not achieve. For these people, only
personal suffering generates this acceptance. It is an anthropological perspective as
the foundation for an authentic existence in an attitude that opens to the
supernatural and the recognition of others. It is the humility of a contemplative
passivity before the human condition, the finitude of the world, the love of God, and
the fragility of the other who participates in the same humanity. Consequently,
incarnation is a commitment to the fragility of the world, of creation, and to those
who are more vulnerable, the poor. Caring for creation, the earth, and for the poor
will be the translation of this commitment that will also take historical forms of justice for the earth and for the poor.¹

Simone Weil and liberation theology share an anthropological perspective as the starting point to create justice. Both perspectives originate from the experience of suffering and encounter with Jesus’ cross, and move to a historical commitment to the poor in a praxis of liberation. They also share a liberating spirituality in which the incarnation in the world is a process of compassion, the fruit of contemplation and historical praxis in the midst of the poor. Therefore, the answer to human suffering is not an attitude of passivity before a mystery, but rather an attitude of dynamic incarnation in the reality of those who are suffering because of accidental forms of malheur or social injustice. On the one hand, one can affirm that a certain kind of suffering is still a mystery. This is the essential malheur which reveals the real condition of all humans. This revelation is a liberation that occurs in a process of identification with Jesus’ cross, an experience of God’s grace in a spirituality of compassion and mercy. It is also the revelation that we all share the same condition that, because it is fragile, demands caring for one another, expressed in Jesus’ words: “Love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 13:34).

On the other hand, there is the recognition of the suffering of others that is not a mystery. Rather, it has clear causes spread in society through socio-economic mechanisms of exploitation of the vulnerable, especially the poor. Paradoxically, this suffering also reveals the human condition and leads the unfortunate to encounter

God’s grace on the cross. This is what makes the poor specialists of the human condition. However, it is not a suffering that can be accepted as part of our creatureliness. This suffering is accidental. It touches the lives of the unfortunate with the force of injustice and exploitation. Hence, it must be combated. It can never be accepted. Because it is accidental (an accidental form of *malheur*), in liberation theology, we affirm that the preferential option for the poor is for the poor against poverty. All suffering created by poverty is accidental *malheur*. It does not belong to the human essence of a contingent being. Thus, all forms of accidental suffering, responsible for preventing people from flourishing and living with dignity, such as lack of adequate social determinants of health and health care, are against the nature of the human being and an attack against individuals’ rights to a full human existence. This anthropological account is the foundation of our responsibility to build a society in which all have rights and opportunities to access the goods necessary for people’s flourishing, goods free from any socio-economic mechanisms that make the goods private commodities inaccessible to the poor. Incarnation in the world, together with the unfortunate, is the way to combat accidental forms of suffering. This incarnation is the rootedness in the world of the unfortunate, the preferential option for the poor against poverty.

The answer to suffering is a spiritual/mystical answer in a spirituality that affirms full humanity in its fragility and need for care. It is a spirituality with a dynamic social implication because it leads us to oppose and struggle against everything that denies the full humanity of vulnerable individuals. Finally, illuminated by Jesus’ cross, it is a liberating spirituality committed to the historical
liberation of the poor in an experience of communities of faith and hope among them.

5.1 Emptying as a Mystical Answer to Suffering

As I said before, Part I is not a comparative work between Simone Weil and liberation theology. Of course, some comparisons are inevitable once I use these two thoughts as sources for constructing an anthropology of suffering. It is also difficult to compare Weil and liberation theology because the latter is not a person, but a new way of doing theology that has been done by many people, myself included. The best way of comparing Weil and liberation theology would be to do so with a liberation theologian, such as Alexander Nava does by comparing Weil and Gutiérrez. Hence, I am using liberation theology in a free sense as a reference when I am not commenting on Weil or a specific theologian, but I am presenting the ‘consensus’ perspective of liberation theology. In addition, if we accept liberation theology as a movement that begins in Latin America, from where I speak (although there are other liberating theological reflection in other parts of the world that appeared almost at the same time, such as the black theology in the USA), it is important to understand that liberation theology is not only the reflection developed and published by theologians. This reflection is a product of liberation

---


theology as a professional theology. However, the poor, and the ones who are suffering as victims of social injustice and who identify their experience with Jesus’ cross in the life of a community of faith and hope, are also liberation theology. They provide us with precious material for professional reflection, and together we act for liberation.

In her context and time, different from Latin America in the 1960s, 70s, and today, Simone Weil saw these suffering people as owners of knowledge of the human condition with a supernatural origin, whether or not they are aware of Jesus’ cross. She has a universalist perspective in which God’s compassion and solidarity with human suffering are present in the entire world through different experiences of transcendence or religious traditions. The Crucified God is not exclusive to Christianity, despite the fact that the Christian tradition has an explicit manifestation of God’s Incarnation and truth revealed on Jesus’ cross. As suffering belongs to the nature of the human being, God does not allow other peoples with no possibility of encountering His mercy and grace. For Simone Weil, transcendence is the way to find the Crucified God (even outside of Christianity), to receive supernatural knowledge (noesis, here she is Platonic) that reveals who we are as humans, and answers the question about suffering. It is a mystical experience of liberation to be incarnated in the world. The experience of transcendence is universal and is a liberating spirituality that responds to suffering in two directions:

---

4 Perhaps I am doing this here because I am developing a professional piece.

5 Oeuvres, 1069, 1138.

6 Weil sees this Christian truth as the truth that is present in other traditions, even before the Abrahamic traditions. She dedicated a long essay, named Intuitions Pré-Chrétiennes, to focus on Christian truths present in other traditions, including ancient philosophy. See: OC IV 2, 150-293.
the empowerment of the human condition as a fragile being and the historical praxis against all procedure of accidental forms of suffering/malheur.

The human being is attached to its condition of a suffering being in which malheur is in its essence. Malheur does not touch all individuals as suffering does, but, once there is malheur in the flesh and soul of a person, the only way to deal with it is through a movement of transcendence. It is a movement to find human authenticity, a liberation of spiritual order. There is no liberation in the life of a person if there is no emptying of the “I.” Weil describes the emptying as a spiritual path to liberation. It is a mystic from compassion to mercy, in a kenosis of human spirit to the truth of its reality and the foundation of the world, the Incarnate God. Without an empty “I,” liberation and achievement of supernatural knowledge are not possible. Neither is it possible to see the suffering of others.

The answer to suffering is through emptying the self, which creates a free path to receive God’s grace. For Simone Weil, the answer to suffering in the world is a spiritual order in an experience of transcendence. Weil describes this by presenting her own mystical experience in the midst of malheur, the fruit of her time as a factory worker where she had her first contact with malheur. She says: “Being in the factory, mixed in the eyes of all and even in my own eyes with an anonymous mass, the malheur of others entered into my flesh and soul... I received the mark of slavery forever.” Marked by malheur, she encountered God in Jesus’ cross. It is an

---

7 Oeuvres, 1086.
9 Oeuvres, 770.
experience of transcendence that ruptures the historical-temporal order through an ontological relation of the being in its participation in the transcendent being. This occurs in the middle of *malheur*, responsible for emptying the self, in which God’s mercy manifests itself to the unfortunate.\(^\text{10}\) The Incarnate God is the one who embraced the human experience of *malheur* and guides the unfortunates to see others in their *malheur/suffering*. Commenting on Weil’s mysticism, Maria Clara Bingemer says:

> Only through the incarnation of God, or kenosis, is it possible to shift the focus from oneself to those who are suffering, and to help them out of their lethal circumstances, for it is through the incarnation that Christ himself lives amidst our human misery. According to Weil, to give to and receive from the afflicted and suffering is, therefore, a mystical experience.\(^\text{11}\)

According to Bingemer, this mystical experience results in assuming compassion to others as a lifestyle.\(^\text{12}\) Compassion at a deep level of commitment to the unfortunate, the poor, is only possible when a person is emptied from all illusions that hide the authentic existence and prevent him/her from achieving the truth of the human condition. Emptying opens to the supernatural, to the Incarnated God, and to the neighbor who is suffering. Consequently, the commitment to the poor becomes an identity, a lifestyle with a meaningful spiritual support from Jesus’ cross.

---

\(^\text{10}\) AD, 96.


\(^\text{12}\) Ibid., 48.
Nevertheless, *malheur* is not the only way of self-emptying and achieving this commitment to the poor. One can also live this process through a spiritual asceticism. Although the originality of Simone Weil is in her account of a mysticism of *malheur*, she follows the Christian mystical tradition of asceticism, which has a process of catharsis in creating conditions of a mystical encounter with God. Robert Chenavier says this is another way of decreation. It is the way of attention to the void, as a desire for emptying.  

13 As Weil describes it: “All faith that a human being accomplished is an effort of attention to the only one desire for becoming more apt to grasp the truth. He acquires these highest aptitudes, even if this effort does not produce any visible fruit.”

14 The process of emptying is an effort of decreation by attention. This occurs in a spiritual exercise of prayer that affects all human knowledge in a spiritual progress.  

15 For Simone Weil, attention integrates the human being and raises it to the finest element of the spirit, in which there is no distinction between reason and emotion. Instead, there is an ontological integration of all human faculties and a strength that nourish all desires. These forces do not exist anymore because they were killed by the emptying of the self, making room for *finality without end*. Now there is only one desire responsible for making the person rise, in a movement of spirit of an individual being ready to receive the wonderful light of God’s grace. Weil is totally inside the Christian tradition of speculative

---

14 OC IV 1, 257.
15 Ibid. Simone Weil also says that attention to study develops the capacity to be attentive to God during personal prayer. “The quality of attention is for many in the quality of prayer” (OC IV 1, 255).
spirituality of mystical unity with God. And just as the whole tradition proves, Weil also affirms that mystical unity depends only on God’s love, that the human only creates conditions for this unity by emptying his/her self.

Attention is a key concept for Simone Weil. It is the concept that connected these two ways of emptying to open the self for God’s grace. In the way of malheur, attention challenges the unfortunate to persevere in his/her existential journey, even with no reason to believe that there is salvation. For Weil, this is the perseverance of Job, who represents the truth and authenticity of malheur. In the way of spiritual asceticism, attention is perseverance in the spiritual life of prayers that will empty the self. Both are very difficult exercises that can be easily overcome by pesanteur. Spiritual asceticism is a personal endeavor and anyone can give up at any time. In the way of malheur, there is no choice because it does not depend on personal choice to begin the process. Therefore, this leads to the understanding that the poor, the unfortunate, have the privilege of being objects of God’s attention not because of any moral assertion, but rather because of their suffering/malheur in which God creates strength raised from weakness. In both ways, the experience of God’s grace is an act of His mercy depending only on Him; the emptied person has to wait – to wait in the midst of the huge silence of God.

---


17 OC IV 1, 267; LG 82-84.

18 Oeuvres, 695.
Waiting, that is, an attitude of humility, is what we can do before God’s silence. Weil says: “Waiting is the foundation of spiritual life.”\(^{19}\) Then she adds: “Waiting is the passivity of a thought in act... Waiting is the transformation of time in eternity.”\(^{20}\) It is humility, the root of all love. Without this attitude it is not possible to be sensitive to God’s grace present in a cross nor is it possible to move our eyes to see others on their crosses. Waiting is not passivity before a social reality that makes vulnerable people victims of exploitation; it is an element of spiritual progress in which the person accepts his/her condition of finitude. “All that exists here [on the earth] is a slave of death... the acceptance of death is the unique liberation.”\(^{21}\) Waiting is not to deny who we are, as fragile beings; it is to be open to God’s grace that will be a presence of mercy in our lives.

For Simone Weil, emptying and waiting for God’s grace, whether through \textit{malheur} or asceticism, is the answer to suffering. It is an answer to suffering as a mystery of the human condition of contingent beings, and also the impulse to compassion toward the other in a movement of recognition that there are people who are suffering accidental forms of \textit{malheur}. Thus, the pain of the other becomes an object of attention. The answer to this suffering is to join the unfortunate in their struggle against these forms of \textit{malheur}. More than in her writings, Weil shows this commitment with her life in the midst of the oppressed of her time. “After she came to know Christianity as well as a deep love for the crucified Christ and for God the Father, Simone would never disassociate in her conscience the urgent need for

\(^{19}\) OC VI 4, 126.
\(^{20}\) Ibid., 129.
\(^{21}\) Ibid., 142.
justice from the commitment to the poor and afflicted.”²² A liberating spirituality is necessary for raising and supporting this commitment to the poor. Weil says:

While man tolerates having a soul full of his own thoughts, of his personal thoughts, he is fully controlled, including the most internal [part] of his thought, by the coercion of necessities and by the mechanic game of force. If he believes that this is not the case, he is wrong. However, everything changes when, through the virtue of true attention, he empties his soul and permits eternal knowledge to penetrate his thoughts.²³

Without this spirituality, people cannot support an ethics capable of building and sustaining a society of justice and tolerance. This spirituality is the supernatural justice that guides the natural justice on earth. It is in this way that Weil thinks of the reconstruction of post-war France, through a spirituality of work.²⁴ Despite her proposal toward a new society grounded on a liberating spirituality of people committed to the most vulnerable, Simone Weil’s account is strongly focused on the individual experience. She also rejects any collectivism that suppresses the individual.²⁵ A grouping is only valid when it works for the interest of marginalized and oppressed people.²⁶ In addition, this grouping should never manipulate the

²² Bingemer, Simone Weil: Mystic of Passion and Compassion, 53.
²³ Oeuvres, 1211.
²⁴ Ibid., 1086.
²⁵ Simone Weil distinguishes two kinds of groupings: of interests and of ideas. Grouping of interests is an organization ruled by some discipline and with a common goal. It is a grouping of free people who want to defend its interests, e.g., unions for defending workers’ interests. However, this grouping must be monitored by public powers in order to retain its goal that must always be from the perspective of what is good for the poor. Grouping of ideas should be damned because it does not allow circulation of new and different ideas. It becomes an arbitrary ideology. This kind of grouping would only have authorization to exist under two conditions: “no excommunication” of anybody and existence of “real circulation of ideas”. The freedom of any grouping must not be above freedom of an individual’s opinion. She said: “Associations must not be free; they are instruments, they must be submissive. Only the human being is fit to be free.” (Oeuvres, 1046-47).
²⁶ Oeuvres, 1046.
freedom of ideas and opinions of its members.\textsuperscript{27} (She is wary of any collective mentality. She even presents it as an argument for her rejection of being baptized in the Catholic Church because of the risk of being influenced by a Church’s collective mentality.)\textsuperscript{28} Her critique suggests a society that takes care of the social good and, at the same time, supports the freedom and intellectual autonomy of its citizens. However, with her focus on the mystical experience of the individual, she lacks the experience of community, especially the experience of a community of faith in a context of oppression.

The communitarian experience of the poor in a journey of faith and historical praxis based on the identification with Jesus’ cross is not present in Weil’s account. Perhaps I cannot ask that Weil would go that far, especially considering her context and her short life. But, in fact, no reflection on communitarian experience of faith and praxis of liberation is mentioned in her entire work. The community of faith, as a group of free people centered on Jesus of Nazareth and grounded in a liberating praxis from the commitment to the poor, is an experience present in the history of Christianity since Jesus’ preaching in Nazareth and early Christian communities. Even on many occasions in history, the institutional Church had rejected the freedom and the liberating aspect of grassroots communities of faith. They always existed both inside and outside of the Catholic Church. Liberation theology is a recovery of this experience, which gained force in the historical praxis of the poor in Latin America and became visible in basic ecclesial communities. (This is “the

\textsuperscript{27} Oeuvres, 1043.
\textsuperscript{28} AD, 59-60.
irruption of the poor," which was discussed in chapter 3). The community of faith in Latin America is grounded on a liberating spirituality guided by the Holy Spirit. This communal experience does not impair individual freedom and intellectual autonomy; rather it is a space of encounter where the poor find the freedom to express their voice. From there, a liberating praxis rises from the poor themselves. Therefore, the community of faith, in its liberating spirituality and praxis, is against any collective mentality that manipulates the mind of the poor to prevent any revolution. This community is shaped and sustained by the Spirit of freedom, as the apostle exhorts: “Brothers, I exhort you through God’s mercy... do not accept the frames of this world, but rather transform yourself through the renovation of the Spirit” (Rom 12:1-2). The community lives according to the freedom of the Spirit and empowers the liberty of those who are oppressed. “This liberty, built through conscientization, organization, and articulation of the oppressed, affirms primarily itself against the current system [of manipulation and oppression].”

The preferential option for the poor is a fruit of the Spirit in a liberating spirituality with social implications. It is in this way that liberation theology presents its answer to suffering. An answer from a faith in a community that loves the Father permits it to be guided by the renovating force of the Holy Spirit, and acts in the world in the footsteps of Jesus of Nazareth and His tradition of putting the

---


30 The *Tradition of Jesus* is an expression that has been emphasized by some recent liberating theology publications. It intends to emphasize the historical Jesus in his preferential love for the poor and non-institutionalized religion, but a lay community. See: José Comblin, *O Espírito Santo e a Tradição de Jesus* (São Bernardo do Campo: Nhanduti Editora, 2012).
poor first. Focusing on the individual, Weil did not realize that the experience of encounter with the truth on Jesus’ cross could also occur in a community of faith.

5.2 The Option for the Poor: Liberating Way of Emptying and Social Implications

In my work with the poor in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, I saw a small Catholic community formed by poor people organizing themselves to help one who was sick. They promoted a moment of prayers and food sharing, called quermese, in which everyone pays whatever they can for the food in order to raise money to the person who was sick and needed a treatment. (One has no healthcare assistance in Bolivia unless he/she can pay for it). People from this community do not have much money; they are poor and struggle daily to earn enough money for their own food. Most of them have no formal job. I asked a woman: “How could you help this sick person, if you don’t have enough money to provide enough food for your own children?” She answered me without hesitation: I don’t know. It is like in the Bible, thank God. Perhaps she was thinking about the miracle of multiplication of loaves in the gospels, the most well-reported of Jesus’ miracles. It appears six times in the gospels (Mk 6:30-44; 8:10; Mt 14:13-21; 15: 32-39; Lk 9:10-17; Jn 6:1-13). Certainly, this quermese is an example of a miracle of solidarity in an incarnated experience of

---

31 I went to Bolivia in the summer of 2015 to conduct research about the experience of poor Bolivians when they need healthcare assistance. It was a project to collect data in a liberating ethnographic approach in which I interviewed some people and shared communal experiences with them. The goal was to hear the poor and bring their voices to healthcare debates in justice and present their voices in this dissertation. The name of this project is Global Health and Justice in Health Care: A Liberating Approach from Below and its procedures was approved by Marquette University Institutional Review Board (an ethical committee for research with human beings) and sponsored by Marquette University Center for Transnational Justice. Chapters 7 and 8 will focus on this project.
faith. It is the poor themselves embodying the preferential option for the poor in a community of faith, solidarity, and hope. It is an emptiness of the self in the midst of suffering translated into solidarity with the poor. Jesus’ cross is among this community showing God’s love. There, I learned from the poor how the biblical miracle continues to happen in history.

Talking to the person who was sick, I also realized that his suffering was personal and social. Personally, he was feeling the pain of illness in his own flesh. Socially, his pain was the consequence of the lack of good living conditions (which was the cause of his illness) and the lack of healthcare access (because he was poor and could not afford the necessary medical care). The only hope was the solidarity of his community.

Suffering is a personal and a social reality. It is the experience of an individual who is suffering, but it is also an experience that is lived in the midst of a community that can be a large community, such as society, or a small one, a community of faith, or even smaller, a family or group of friends. One can affirm the presence of suffering because of health conditions or existential pain. (In addition, one can say this about the suffering of a baby who was born with an incurable illness that generates pain for him and his parents. Theodicy categorizes it as the suffering of the innocent.) Liberation theology sees this reality of personal suffering from the perspective of the poor and also notes social factors as causes of suffering. These factors prevent people from flourishing and having a life with dignity. These factors are also responsible for premature death of many people. Therefore, the preferential option for the poor is a cry against all social factors that make the poor
suffer. There is also an innocent suffering because of this social violence. The innocent are the poor.

The Christian tradition affirms that God is love and, because of His love for us, He incarnated in the world and died on a cross to save all humankind. The cross is God’s solidarity with human suffering. A symbol of pain becomes a way of liberation.\(^{32}\) This is the mystery of incarnation and salvation. When we look at suffering as part of a contingent reality, we can easily accept that suffering belongs to the human condition revealed on Jesus’ cross. However, when we look at realities marked by injustices and oppression, and see people suffering and dying because of the lack of basic needs, we ask why these people have to carry this burden. It is a suffering that goes beyond human fragility and contingency, but rather is a burden of social injustice and exploitation (accidental forms of *malheur*). On the one hand, suffering is part of the human condition; everybody is vulnerable to suffer. On the other hand, there is an unfair social burden that makes people suffer and die prematurely. This is not part of the natural human condition of fragility. This causes Gustavo Gutierrez to raise the following questions: “How are we to talk about God who is revealed as love in a situation characterized by poverty and oppression? How are we to proclaim the God of life to men and women who die prematurely and unjustly?”\(^{33}\)


Liberation theology began addressing the problem of the suffering in Latin America, a suffering with social causes. Liberation theologians, such as Gustavo Gutiérrez, Leonardo Boff, and Jon Sobrino, handle this issue in Latin America from the perspective of the poor. God as love, the historical Jesus, the Spirit of Freedom, and the preferential option for the poor are central. Liberation theology offers a theological reflection grounded in a strong liberating spirituality in which the poor identify their suffering with the suffering of Jesus on the cross, and trust in God-love as their hope for liberation and salvation, guided by the Holy Spirit. In addition, these theologians use the socio-analytic mediation in order to help them understand the causes of the suffering of the poor. This mediation helps them to develop concepts that explain roots of suffering and death in Latin America, such as institutionalized violence, structural oppression, and social sin, concepts that will lead to a process of critical consciousness and praxis.

The Suffering of the Poor is the Suffering of the Innocent: The Silence of God

There is suffering as an existential reality and suffering as a social production. Nobody is immune from the first one, and this lack of immunity leads us to combat the second. There are social structures that prevent the poor from developing their lives with dignity. These social structures protect a privileged small class and marginalize the majority of Latin American population as well as the

---

global population of the vulnerable. Gutierrez, already in his first major work, developed the concept of institutionalized violence. This violence is the main cause of the suffering of the poor in Latin America. Moreover, he identified that the historical praxis of the poor is a process of liberation against this violence. Leonardo Boff sees in this praxis the presence of God’s grace that penetrates the life of the poor and assists their journey.

Suffering as social production is not a mysterious dilemma of the human finite condition. It is known in its origins and its consequences in the lives of innocent people: injustice and premature death. It has concrete hands that touch an immense population in the world and hold them from accessing essential goods for flourishing. These hands are strong and present everywhere by manipulating socio-economic systems of exploitation. The poor are their victims. They are innocents who cry for God’s help and liberation.

Before the suffering of the poor, is God silent? If there is no mystery about the causes of this suffering, why is God silent? God is not silent and the poor gathered in a community of faith testify it. However, God does not talk in the way we, the learned, want to hear. He talks to the poor in a way that Jesus praises God for revealing Himself to them: “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children” (Mt 11:25).

---

36 Gutiérrez, We Drink from Our Own Wells, 27.
The poor live in a community that is united to God. In other words, God is in the midst of the suffering together with His people. It is an incarnated presence. God’s presence happens in a compassionate silence in which he is with the poor, suffering with them. Maria Clara Bingemer speaks about “a vulnerable and compassionate God.” It is a God who interacts with His people through a “creative and productive life-force.”

It is a God in communion, in a personal relationship with each individual who is suffering and the whole community as well. God makes Himself vulnerable and does not allow His people to suffer alone. Bingemer affirms: “God goes deep into the mystery of history, suffers inside it, and thus transforms it – turning love into the last word on the human adventure.”

In the context of suffering, one can see God’s presence through a personal relationship with Him and solidarity among the community that supports one another.

In his book, On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent, Gutiérrez addresses the problem of suffering and God’s silence by examining the biblical story of Job and his dialogue with God in the midst of his pain. I highlight three things from this book that show the movement of recognition from personal suffering, to encounter God’s compassion, to the other.

First, it is about the experience of Job. According to Gutiérrez’s interpretation of Job’s story, the personal suffering legitimates a revolt against God. Job expresses his anger against God, and confronts him by arguing that he has been faithful to

---

38 Maria Clara L. Bingemer, A Face for God: Reflection on Trinitarian Theology for Our Times (Miami: Convivium, 2014), 57.
39 Ibid., 59.
God’s commands and there is no reason for his suffering. This confrontation finds the silence of God and creates an existential crisis. On the other hand, this confrontation shows that Job’s suffering is not a God’s punishment because of his sins. Gutierrez says that this confrontation is important because the suffering person does not reject God, but still dialogues with Him. This leads to a second movement, that is, to realize that personal suffering is not the only one: recognition of the other. There are other people who are suffering as well. Job also questions God about this suffering. Gutierrez says this is a movement from a prison in our own pain to see the suffering of others. This movement leads us to be in solidarity with those who are suffering.

Second, it is the experience of solidarity. Gutierrez affirms that Job is the archetype of human experience of suffering. In this movement beyond his own pain, Job realizes the suffering of the poor in the world: the recognition of the other. They are also innocents who suffer because of injustice and oppression. This suffering challenges us to be in solidarity with them. Job notes that God is not in silence, but rather God is with him, in solidarity. Gutiérrez stresses that God is in history in solidarity with those who are suffering. The poor realize this presence of God among them. It is a presence of love and hope that leads the poor to walk in history to their liberation.

---

41 Ibid., 58.
42 Ibid., 66.
43 Ibid., 05.
44 Ibid., 48.
Third, it is the reasons of suffering. God’s compassion and our solidarity with those who are suffering are not enough to explain the pain of the innocent. Gutiérrez addresses the causes of suffering in twofold. First, there is a kind of suffering that is in the universe of mystery and we cannot know its reason. Solidarity is the only way we have to address this suffering. Solidarity is an experience of compassion in which one shares his life with another in suffering. In solidarity, I suffer with those who are suffering. I become part of his/her passion (com – passion: with – passion).45 Second, it is the suffering because of social reasons. The causes of this suffering are not mysterious. They are part of human freedom that permits some people to exploit others. This suffering requires a commitment to those who are victims of exploitation. Solidarity will lead us to join the poor and walk with them against their social suffering.46 God is in history with the poor, in an attitude of solidarity that shows the love of God for His people.47

This movement of Job from focusing on his own suffering to seeing the other is a liberating spirituality that supports liberation theology. “Job sees that commitment to the poor puts everything on a solid basis, a basis located outside his individual world, in the needs of others who cannot be ignored.”48 The poor in Latin America are living an experience of suffering in their own land. Gutiérrez says that this experience is an experience of exile, that is, the poor become foreigners in their

---

46 Ibid., 48.
47 In other work, Gutiérrez says that solidarity begins with a conversion that guides us to join the poor. Solidarity is lived among the poor, therefore, the commitment to the poor becomes a real engagement in their reality and struggle. At the same time, it is supported by the experience of faith lived in a community of solidarity. Gutiérrez, We Drink from Our Own Wells, 95-106.
own country because they cannot access the resources to meet their needs. The liberating spirituality is the experience of the poor who realize God’s compassion. The solidarity of God is the supernatural that touches the natural reality. It is a spirituality of a liberating Spirit who gathers the poor in communities and leads them to an experience of compassion and historical praxis. It is a spirituality that shows that spiritual life and socio-political life are together. This awareness is the movement of Christian communities in Latin America, movement of compassion and recognition that leads them to addresses the problem of suffering, accidental forms of malheur.

The Emptying of the Poor and Christology

The liberating spirituality is an emptying of the self in which the identification with Jesus’ cross assumes the concrete form of a life of solidarity with the poor through the preferential option for the poor. The christological foundation of this process rises from God’s compassion. There is no identification with the cross itself, but with who is on it. The cross is rejected; but as it is part of the life of the oppressed, the cross becomes a signal of love from where shines the divine light to liberate. Leonardo Boff says:

If God were cross, Jesus’ redemption and solidarity with the crucified of the world wouldn’t have meaning. To suffer, God has to assume what is different of him... He assumes [the cross] as solidarity with those who suffer. It is not to sublimate or to eternalize the cross, but it is solidarity with all who suffer on the cross. It is to transform it in a sign of blessing and suffering love... It is not

---

49 This is Gutiérrez’s thesis in the first chapter on Latin American liberating spirituality: Gutiérrez, We Drink from Our Own Wells, 7-18.
to cushion the consciousness in the fighting against the passion of the world, but it is to say that only in solidarity with the crucified people, we can fight against the cross.\footnote{Boff, \textit{Paixão de Cristo, Paixão do Mundo}, 196.}

The cross reveals a suffering face, the face of Jesus reflected in the lives of the poor. Jon Sobrino stresses these lives and faces as \textit{a crucified people}. Following his friend Ignacio Ellacuría who was killed because of his commitment to justice for the poor, and reflecting on Latin American context, Sobrino affirms that the poor are historical victims of a structural system that crucifies them, just as Jesus was.\footnote{Jon Sobrino, \textit{O Principio Misericórdia: Descer da Cruz os Povos Crucificados} (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1994), 86-87.} The suffering of the poor and premature deaths of many in Latin America are a new experience of crucifixion in which God has been crucified in the face of the poor.\footnote{“Crucified people” was a concept developed by Ignacio Ellacuría. He used this concept in many of his sermons and writings to refer to the Latin American people who were suffering and dying because of oppression and exploitation, especially the El Salvadorian people, victims of a systematic persecution and oppression by El Salvador dictatorship in 1970’s and 80’s. The crucified people were theologically articulated in an essay published in 1978 titled: “El Pueblo Crucificado: Una Ensayo de Soterología Histórica.” Ellacuría presented salvation in perspective of historical liberation and eschatological salvation in a double hermeneutics of Jesus’ death and the death of people in Latin American, the crucified people. See: Ignacio Ellacuría, “The Crucified People: An Essay in Historical Soteriology,” in Ignacio Ellacuría: Essays on History, Liberation, and Salvation, ed. Michael E. Lee (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2013), 195-224. Ellacuría’s premature death ended his theological and militant endeavor. Jon Sobrino, his personal friend, certainly assumed the mission of continuing to develop Ellacuría’s reflection on the crucified people.}

Sobrino addresses the problem of suffering in Latin America from a christological reflection in which he affirms to be a \textit{Christology from the perspective of the victims}.\footnote{This is present in his two volume books on christology. Sobrino, \textit{Jesus, O Libertador I: A História de Jesus de Nazaré}, 2nd ed. (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1996) and Christ the Liberator: A View from the Victims} The suffering of the poor in Latin America is the consequence of structural sin and institutionalized violence, and from this perspective, Sobrino...
presents Jesus of Nazareth as the Liberator God who is in solidarity with the victims. Solidarity is also an essential concept in Sobrino’s theology. He emphasizes Jesus as the Incarnated God who is in solidarity with the poor in history.\textsuperscript{54}

In Sobrino’s theology, the problem of suffering is the crucifixion of the poor in Latin America. Of course, this is a metaphor that Sobrino theologically uses to explain the suffering and early death of the poor and their identification with Jesus’ cross. He says: “Crucified people is useful and necessary language at the real level of fact, because ‘cross’ means death, and death is what the Latin American peoples are submitted to in thousands of ways. It is a slow death, but real, caused by poverty generated by unjust structures – institutionalized violence.”\textsuperscript{55}

In a context of social suffering, the starting point of any christology must be the historical reality, where the poor experience their faith in Jesus, an experience of identification, compassion, and recognition. This characterizes an historical approach \textit{from below} in twofold. First, it is from below because the historical Jesus is the starting point for doing christology. The deeds and teaching of the historical Jesus, as they are in the gospels, reveal elements of God’s mystery. Second, it is the poor’s experience of faith in a concrete reality, where they live without abstraction or metaphysical formulations. The poor encounter Jesus in the midst of their reality in which the life of Jesus of Nazareth is understood in a horizon of meaning and liberation. This encounter happens in a context of poverty, oppression, marginalization, and death. God reveals His grace in history through a way that

\textsuperscript{54} Sobrino, \textit{Jesus, O Libertador}, 11-22.
\textsuperscript{55} Sobrino, \textit{O Princípio Misericórdia}, 85.
makes the reality of the poor the locus of doing christology. The theological locus of our faith is the reality of the poor where the supernatural touches the natural, and new knowledge arises. This is a truth that is confirmed by the gospels by showing Jesus preaching the good-news for the poor as privileged recipients (Lk 4, 16-30, Mt 11:25).

The historical Jesus reveals essential elements of God’s mystery. In other words, Jesus shows who God is through His way of living in the world. And this way is among the least of society, the foundation of the preferential option for the poor. Sobrino says Jesus reveals God in two ways. The first is Jesus’ relationship with God. The Jesus–God relationship was based on intimacy, fidelity, and trust. The gospels show that Jesus prays to God; they talk and they know each other. This relation reveals that God is a loving father (daddy – Abba) as well as he is merciful, goodness, and liberation. From God-Father, Jesus received His mission to preach the good-news to the poor. This good-news is the kingdom of God, a present and future reality (now and not yet). In addition, Jesus is the kingdom of God in history.

Second, all Jesus’ deeds and teaching reveal God’s mystery and will. Jesus chose to be poor and to live in solidarity with the poor. He lived in a way that those who are marginalized and voiceless were recognized as people with dignity. Jesus did not preach about Himself. Rather, He preached about the kingdom of God; His attitudes revealed characteristics of that kingdom, such as justice for the poor, solidarity with the sick, and freedom for the oppressed. The Gospel of Luke shows

---

that Jesus is the one who had been anointed by the Father with the oil of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the good-news to the poor (Lk 4, 16-18). Therefore, the poor are the privileged recipients of the gospel. According to Sobrino, this highlights the centrality of the poor in Jesus’ ministry, and consequently, in God’s heart.58

Jesus of Nazareth died on the cross as a consequence of a life of love-service for the poor. It was a terrible death as a result of His love and struggle for justice. Boff says: “The cross enters thus inside history of love, what love is able, as capacity of solidarity. The cross is the place where reveals the most sublime form of love, where shows its essence. The cross is not love, but the fruit of love.” 59 Later, this will gain the theological interpretation as a salvific death for human sins. The poor in Latin America look at Jesus’ cross from their concrete suffering and see the love on the wood. They encounter Jesus in the midst of suffering and see God’s compassion present in their reality. This is the presence of God in history, a liberator God who strengthens the poor to walk toward liberation.

In the concrete reality of suffering, the poor identify their suffering with Jesus’ cross. This is an experience of God’s solidarity and love for the poor. Jesus of Nazareth shows that God is a God in history, a God who participates in the fate of oppressed people. In the faces of the suffering people in Latin America and anywhere, we contemplate the face of the Crucified Jesus. Therefore, this people are a crucified people searching for liberation.

58 Ibid., 124-125.
59 Boff, Paixão de Cristo, Paixão do Mundo, 198.
The Holy Spirit Sustains the Faith and the Praxis of the Poor

The preferential option for the poor as an existential commitment is an emptying of the self in a communitarian life of solidarity among the poor. This is an action of the Holy Spirit, who shapes and sustains the Christian community and its commitment to the poor. Thus, liberating spirituality is a pneumatological experience of faith in history. It is following Jesus in an unconditional love for the poor in which the kingdom of God has real signs in the world and eventually can lead us to have the same fate as Jesus, the death.\textsuperscript{60} Using Weilian terms, the natural reality guided by the supernatural is a “life according to the Spirit” (Gal, 5:16).

Life in the Spirit is a transformative experience of action, freedom, speech, community, and hope. It is a spirituality in which the poor become \textit{subjects} and \textit{agents} of transformative action. They are \textit{subjective} because the Spirit acts in them in a way that She empowers the poor to create communion among themselves and to be \textit{agents} in their relationship with the material world. The experience of the Spirit makes the poor historical agents of liberation through transformative social actions. They act freely because the Spirit provides a self-liberation in which they assume a new personality – a new man and woman are born, in Pauline language – and a \textit{praxis} opens for the experience of martyrdom. The Spirit gathers the poor in communities that become centers of life. In basic communities, the poor can speak, they have a voice, and they are encouraged to read the Bible in confrontation to their reality. Basic communities create a social life for the poor, a space of creative

\textsuperscript{60} Boff, \textit{O Espírito Santo}, 215.
and experiential transformative social relations, a space for rootedness. All of these generate an experience of life in which there is a harmony between the experience of acting and of the Spirit who acts in the poor, their irruption in history.\(^{61}\)

José Comblin interprets the experience of the poor in basic ecclesial communities as an experience of Pentecost that recreates the Church from inside, as a response to the challenges of Latin America’s condition of poverty and anonymity of the poor. This renewal of the Spirit has different expressions and forms. It does not belong to the Latin American Church, but to the universal Church. This experience of the Spirit takes form according to the challenges where people are living. Despite the catholicity of this experience, Comblin focuses on Latin American experience and affirms:

My thesis is that this [basic ecclesial communities] is an experience of the Holy Spirit. (…) Experience of the Spirit comes about within history, in the action of subjects – agents – of their history. It cannot be separated from acting in the world. It is an experience of freedom. This freedom is expressed in speech which is public testimony, effective speech that generates community. Experience of the Spirit is not an individual thing; it is tied to the building of community. Such experience of the Spirit is life and resurrection, newness of life. It is felt as new birth.\(^{62}\)

In Latin America, a new spirituality arises in an individual as part of a community. It is the experience of the Spirit among the poor. The poor are the basis of the Church that is gathered by the Holy Spirit. As the base, the poor sustain the Church as the Church of the Poor that concretized the People of God through a visible experience of a new way of being Church (as basic ecclesial communities).


\(^{62}\) Ibid., 41-42.
For Comblin, the Church is not a visible architecture open for the poor to enter. The Church is the poor who follow Jesus and are gathered in community by the Holy Spirit. It is a Church of the Poor that celebrates its faith and struggle for liberation. The Spirit works to create new communities that become the house of the poor, gathered as a Church of the Poor. Comblin affirms:

The Spirit goes on creating the church from communities of the poor; the experience of Latin America is evidence of this fact. (…) The Spirit, however, is with them and brings them together in the people of God. The clamor of the poor, the cry of the oppressed, rises up from them, and the Spirit is at the source of the cry of the poor (cf. Rom 8:18-27). The church is the huge caravan of the rejected of the earth who call out, cry for justice, invoke a Liberator whose is often unknown to them.  

The community of faith guided by the Holy Spirit has a historical experience in a praxis of spiritual basis. This historical praxis is in a movement of compassion in identification with Jesus’ cross and recognition of the other. By the nature of the Spirit, that is, freedom, the community does not take away the individual encounter with Jesus nor the autonomy of each person. Rather, it is in community that all individuals realize their autonomy by expressing their voices and creating a movement of liberation.

The poor know the human condition of fragility in their own bodies. In their pain, but also in their faith and hope, they encounter the Crucified Jesus and the light that shines from His cross, the Holy Spirit. It is an anthropological experience because it is at the heart of human existence, from there to the world, incarnating in history.

---

63 Ibid., 94-95.
CONCLUSION PART I

“When we can’t do anything to help the other, we can at least be together and listen.” This sentence was said many times by Luciano Mendes de Almeida (1930 – 2006), a Brazilian bishop who spent his life defending and loving the poor. He used to say this before situations of great suffering of others when he felt unable to do anything to relieve their pain. Listening is the beginning of any process of compassion. Sometimes, listening is hearing words, but it is also hearing tears, groans, gestures, silence, pain, hunger... To listen is to recognize the other and to be with him/her in his/her suffering.

At the beginning of this dissertation, I presented a prolegomenon of a project in which I proposed a method to develop an anthropology of suffering as an act of spirit, the intellectus spiritum that leads us to think and to develop concepts. In addition, I suggested a hermeneutics from the perspective of the poor. In other words, the act of intellectual spirit is from listening. Part I began this process listening different voices: Simone Weil, liberation theology, the poor, and the transcendental Spirit. This part intended to develop an anthropology of suffering: weakness and strength of the human being, without denying its contingent condition and openness to the possibility of transcendence. It was an exercise of spirit that began with our condition revealed in the experience of suffering and ended with the Spirit, the Holy Spirit who provides hope and guidance.

Although Simone Weil's thought and liberation theology were the theoretical sources for this anthropology, the main protagonists were the unfortunates, the
poor and their expertise as knowers of the human condition. In some moments of my argumentation, it seems that the voice of the poor disappeared because I used dense and complex philosophical, theological (even metaphysical) language. This was necessary to enter into the texts of my theoretical authors and to understand them. However, based on the experience of listening to the voice of the poor, even this dense argumentation was the fruit of a dialogue between the authors and myself mediated by the poor in their suffering, faith, hope, and historical praxis. Some moments, their voices explicitly appeared in stories that presented the wisdom of the poor, or their knowledge as experts of the human condition. Nevertheless, I recognize that this anthropology of suffering is not easy to understand because it flows between the academic language and the knowledge of the poor. This is coherent with the initial proposal of constructing an anthropology in a dialogical way with the poor.

This anthropology of suffering does not end in a silence before the cry of the unfortunates, the poor. It ends with hope that arises from, once again, the experience of the unfortunate on the cross, identified with Jesus’ cross, from where the light of truth and hope shine. This light is God’s grace, his compassion upon the unfortunate who opens his/her eyes to the suffering of others. It is a light of hope that is translated into a historical praxis embodied in a community gathered and led by the Holy Spirit. The light is the Spirit of God, the love between the Father and the Son given to the world.

Part I provides a foundation for supporting health care as a human right in opposition to the commodification of healthcare assistance. The foundation of
delivering health care as a human right is based on an anthropological obligation in which we all share the same contingent, finite, and fragile human condition that obligates us to promote and to defend the right of the other. Grounded on our natural condition, without accessing some essential goods, human individuals cannot fully develop their own process of flourishing. These goods are common goods that must be shared by all in a perspective of globalized solidarity. Among these goods is access to quality health care. Without social conditions that prevent people from high vulnerability to get ill and to die early, and from accessing healthcare services when it is necessary to restore health, there is no possibility to have a full human experience of flourishing. Social inequalities and poverty clearly show that the poor have been prevented from their right to have a full human experience of flourishing. Unfortunately, those who are not poor and have control of essential goods only “know” about the existence of the poor as statistics, but they cannot see their suffering faces. There is no recognition of the suffering of the poor, instead there is exploitation through socio-economic mechanisms of institutionalized violence.

The way to change this reality and offer a foundation that supports access to health care and other essential goods as human rights is through an anthropology that touches the existence of all in their contingent, fragile condition. The experience of suffering is the only way to present this foundation and make someone to see the face of those who are suffering because of exploitation and marginalized from essential goods. Suffering touches the flesh of all human individuals. It is part of our existence and natural condition as an essential malheur that makes all equals. This
undeniable anthropological equality leads us to see those who are suffering because accidental forms of *malheur*, which are the fruit of injustice and exploitation. The accidental *malheur* makes human individuals different because it touches only the flesh of those who are poor and oppressed. The accidental *malheur* prevents people from having the full human experience of flourishing. This must be combated.

The anthropology of suffering is not only a theoretical foundation for a human rights framework for health care, but it is also a movement of recognition of the human condition and the other who suffers, practical knowledge that the poor are experts. This movement of recognition is needed in order to see the faces of those who are victims of social exploitation and injustice. It is a movement of compassion toward liberation. It is action in order to embody a liberation ethics rooted in an anthropological foundation. This means: from the essential *malheur* – that reveals the authentic human condition and an openness to the other – to the recognition of the accidental *malheur* that is not natural and must be eliminated.

Here is the crucial theoretical and practical step of an anthropological framework for health care as a human right that rises from a liberation ethics among the poor and their expertise in human condition.
Part II SUFFERING AND INEQUALITIES IN HEALTH

Quando dou pão para os pobres me chamam de santo.  
Quando pergunto pelas causas da pobreza  
me chamam de comunista.  
Dom Helder Camara

*How Blessed are you who are poor: the kingdom of God is yours.  
Blessed are you who are hungry now: you shall have your fill.  
Blessed are you who are weeping now: you shall laugh.  
Blessed are you when people hate you, drive you out, abuse you,  
denounce your name as criminal, on account of the Son of man.  
Rejoice when that day comes and dance for joy,  
look! – your reward will be great in heaven.  
This was the way their ancestors treated the prophets.*  
Jesus of Nazareth (Lk 6:20-23)

The recognition of the other who suffers goes beyond feeding a homeless person on street. Recognition means a commitment to the homeless and, through him/her, to all people who are suffering because of poverty and the lack of access to basic needs to flourish. In today's world, especially in developed nations, the practice of philanthropy is common, that is, a noble practice to do charity by giving money to non-profit organizations which help people in need.¹ This beautiful practice has supported many non-governmental organizations that address social

---

¹ I am using the term philanthropy in the narrow meaning of the practice of people and companies that donate money to charity in order to have some benefits (such as tax insertions) or social status, but they do not have a real commitment to justice, but their actions, although important to meet the immediate need of poor person, do not impact the structure towards social justice. As Pope Benedict XVI said: “Justice is inseparable from charity, and intrinsic to it. Justice is the primary way of charity... Charity demands justice: recognition and respect for the legitimate rights of individuals and people.” (CV, no. 06).
justice issues throughout the world, including in global health. Although the merits of this practice must be recognized, it is usually given by very rich people; philanthropy fails to address structures responsible for injustice and poverty. The reason for this failure is mainly because there is no recognition of the other who suffers. Consequently, philanthropy is more an action to make the philanthropist look lovely than to change the world into a place of justice where the poor are empowered to be agents of their own lives and development. Once I heard from a colleague that this practice of philanthropy is the cruelest face of modern capitalism because it makes capitalism appear generous. On the one hand, it keeps the poor alive, poor, quiet, and thankful for receiving crumbs that fall from the table of the rich. On the other hand, it solidifies the structures and status quo that continue exploiting the poor and preventing them from making their own revolution.

Those who feed the poor, whether directly or through huge philanthropic donations, are usually seen as virtuous, charitable, and even saints. I don't deny they might deserve this reputation when viewed from the perspective of an individual

---

2 Helder Camara was one who recognized the value of philanthropy, especially charity contributed by the poor and middle class; but he strongly affirmed that this practice was not enough. He stated: “But I have not come to help anyone to delude themselves by thinking that all we need is little generosity and social work. Of course, there are cases of shocking poverty to which we have no right to remain indifferent. Very often, we have to give immediate assistance. But don’t let us think that the problem is limited to a few minor reforms, and let us not confuse the beautiful and essential idea of order, the goal of all human progress, with impoverished versions of it that are responsible for keeping in place structures that we all recognize cannot be retained. If we want to get to the roots of our social problems, we will have to help the country break the vicious circle of underdevelopment and destitution.” Helder Camara, *Essential Writings*, ed. Francis McDonogh (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 40.

3 Based on liberation theology and Freire’s thoughts, Paul Farmer examines how practices of philanthropy in health care do not address the real problem of injustice. Consequently, these practices contribute to maintaining structures of violence that create poverty in order to have those (the poor) who will be the target of these practices by rich people and nations. Paul Farmer, *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 152-154.
who acts this way. However, two things must be said: this is not sufficient because the structure of violence is left untouched and the circle of marginalization keeps the poor in their poverty. Second, the poor do not participate in a process of liberation. They continue with no face or voice. There is no recognition of the poor in their reality as the other who is suffering. Those who realize that their philanthropy is not enough, and that it is necessary to ask why people are poor are often taken as rebellious and dismissed by high sectors of society. This happened with Helder Camara (1909-1999), Archbishop of Olinda and Recife, in Northeast Brazil. While he was giving bread to the poor who approached him, these high sectors were praising him. He was not touching the status quo. When he realized that this was not enough, and it was necessary to organize the poor and to ask why they do not have access to basic goods to flourish and to live with autonomy, the same sectors criticized him for promoting rebellion against the social order even labeling him as communist. Helder Camara was always a devoted Catholic bishop who died faithful to the Church and the poor. When he contemplated the face of the poor and saw the Crucified Jesus, he joined them in their suffering and struggle for justice and life with dignity. In a process of compassion, Camara recognized the fragility of human existence and the face of the other who was suffering.4

Jesus himself is an example that any process of transformation begins from those who are marginalized. His public life was among the poor, serving them, and preaching the kingdom of God for/with them. At the same time, Jesus invited people

---

4 There are many biographic publications about Helder Camara. I suggest a new one that goes beyond a biographic work and presents the impact of Camara’s activism, ministry, and thought to shape an education for liberation and solidarity. Martinho Condini, Fundamentos Para Uma Educação Libertadora: Dom Helder e Paulo Freire (São Paulo: Paulus, 2014).
to join him in that humble life of service in the midst of poverty. The justice of the
kingdom of God must be preached and historically built with the poor. In their
midst, we share the bread, but we also struggle to have structures that allow us to
access the means that make this bread available for all. We acknowledge the force of
the poor in history recognizing their suffering faces as humans who share the same
fragile condition as we do. Hence, the process of recognition of the other leads us to
eliminate the division of them and us to shape a community of we, in a journey for
liberation in faith and hope. This means a community which some people answer
the call to be a prophet within a prophetic people. Blessed are the poor, the hungry,
and the sufferer because God is in their midst. Blessed is the one who is persecuted
because he/she is among these unfortunates, because God is with him/her and all
communities that struggle for justice.

The way of justice begins in the process of recognition of the other and
his/her human condition. Part I developed an anthropology of suffering in which the
experience of suffering reveals the contingency of the human condition. It shows
how personal suffering opens to transcendence in an experience of compassion that
leads to an encounter with the other who suffers. This opens the eyes to the reality
of social suffering where the poor are suffering as victims of structural violence. At
the same time, it shows that they are experts in the human condition because they
feel in their flesh the pain of being oppressed and marginalized from the basic goods
needed to flourish.

Simone Weil showed us that there is an essential form of malheur/suffering
that reveals the contingent condition of all humans and cannot be denied. In
addition, there is an accidental form of *malheur* /suffering that is caused by external action against a person or a group. This form must be combatted because it prevents people from developing their own lives with dignity and freedom. This form harms societies and human lives. It is responsible for injustice and oppression. Liberation theology proposes that accidental *malheur* is structured by institutionalized mechanisms that support the status quo against the liberation of the poor. Therefore, the preferential option for the poor is necessary to combat the accidental *malheur*. The option for the poor is to engage in a process of mutual listening and learning to shape a liberation ethics from the hermeneutical lens of the poor and with an anthropological basis.

Part I presented an anthropology that proves all humans are equal by the mere fact we share the same condition of fragile, contingent, and finite being. Some people even try to deny this truth, but the experience of suffering, which at some point touches the life of every individual, has the power of revealing our condition. The process of recognition and compassion is to accept that the fragility of my existence is also present in the other. Therefore, all individual decisions have an impact on humanity. This is a process of an experience of solidarity with the other in a humanitarian global perspective by which we become co-responsible for one another. For a consistent discourse with concrete practices, the anthropological foundation offers an obligation to empower and promote fellow human beings. This extends to any social area that must be addressed in order to make essential goods available for those who are excluded from them, that is, from the common good.
Hence, the discourse and practice of healthcare as a human right must be grounded on our condition as contingent and fragile beings.

Moreover, because the world is already a reality of injustice and inequalities supported by socio-economic structures that privilege a few and marginalize the immense majority of earth’s population, a liberation ethics is necessary to transform this reality. This ethics must be democratic, inclusive, plural, and prophetic. It can only happen from below, that is, from those who are marginalized by these structures: the poor. Their empowerment and socio-political participation are essential for addressing injustice and inequalities. Therefore, a liberation ethics rises from the voices of the poor who show the world our true condition. They are experts in the human condition because of their own experience of accidental malheur and can offer ways of compassion and solidarity to transform inequalities into the justice of human obligations which embody human rights.

Part II will now speak to the experience of accidental malheur of the poor, their social suffering as victims of socio-economic structures of institutionalized violence. The voices of the poor are the most liberating aspect of this work that is grounded on an anthropology and points out to liberating action for social justice and population health. Part II will shape this liberation ethics in two movements: first, because I am inside the Catholic social tradition, the first section will present what exactly this liberation ethics is by showing its methodological difference from Catholic social teaching. This will be a transitional chapter that will develop an ethics that goes beyond Catholic social ethics through a hermeneutical approach responsible for integrating the voice of the poor, their experience and knowledge
into the health justice discourse. Second, the following chapters will be a presentation of the voices of the poor through their narratives. Rather than primarily focusing on sociological studies and statistics on health disparities and poverty, I will present the experience of the poor, their expertise in the human condition, their creativity in addressing problems, their experience of community and solidarity, and their faith, hope, and historical praxis.

Following the methodology presented in the prolegomenon that recognizes the knowledge of the poor and their ability to create and recreate the world, having given the anthropological foundation developed in Part I, and guided by the principle of the preferential option for the poor, Part II will construct a liberating ethics from the voice of the poor in a dialogical perspective for justice in health care.
Chapter 6
LIBERATION ETHICS: INCLUSION FROM BELOW

What makes an ethics to be of liberation is both its locus and historical movement toward social justice. In Aristotle’s words, ethics is a practical science that reflects on human values and habits responsible for guiding social practices and intersubjective relationships among humans, who are by nature political animals. Aquinas agrees with Aristotle and extends his master’s perspective by affirming that the human is also by nature a religious animal. Hence, following Aristotle, reflecting on the human satisfaction, Aquinas says that human satisfaction is realized when it participates in the common good. But the common good has two dimensions: the political common good and the supernatural common good. The first one is provided by the social order where justice is the main virtue to make it possible for all individuals. Social justice occurs when all participate in the political common good. Consequently, all citizens to flourish will have access to goods and, at the same time, will contribute to grow the common good. The supernatural common good is a transcendent reality in which a person participates in the mystery of God through his/her religious experience. In the Christian tradition, this contact with God’s mystery is God’s grace.¹

This Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophical tradition has inspired Christian social ethics for centuries. And it is present in Catholic social teaching. As a practical

¹ On Aristotle’s and Aquinas’s accounts of politics and ethics, see: Mary M. Keys, *Aquinas, Aristotle, and the Promise of the Common Good* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), especially attention, regarding what I presented, to Chapters 1 and 2.
science, ethics, according to Aristotle, is a *science of the ethos* because it looks at particular societies and what shapes the relationships among their members. Aquinas sees ethics in the same way, although he affirms Christian values and principles and their transcendental character as the ones that guide any socio-political organization toward social justice and happiness. Both have a philosophical system of social ethics that originates from very narrow human experiences of social organization: the small Athenian society of citizens when most of the population was not included in this classification, and the hegemony of Christianity in mediaeval Europe. Although *ethos* can be translated as *habit, custom, or existential home* (see my explanation on ethos in the Prolegomenon), both thinkers have a very abstract social ethics based on an experience that marginalizes the lives of those who were outside of their classification of citizens or Christian citizens. Their systems are valuable, but they have no liberating character because they are directed toward a small, select group of people. In other words, their systems are *from above*. This perspective has deeply influenced Catholic social ethics.

Liberation ethics inverts this perspective and makes those who are *below* protagonists of this *science of ethos*. The reality of the poor, who are those at the bottom of society, marginalized from participation in the political common good, is the locus of liberation ethics. The historical movement of the poor, who are not excluded from participation in the supernatural common good, is a practice of liberation in solidarity toward social justice. Liberation ethics means the poor being agents of their own lives and re-writers of history. Ethics as a reflection on social practice among intersubjectivities (two or multiple people as subjects/agents) is
liberation ethics when it begins from below and presents the voices and the historical praxis of the poor.

Aristotelian-Thomistic politics and ethics share with liberation ethics the goal of a society in which all can participate in the common good. However, there is a difference that makes them very distinct in their way to achieve social justice. This distinction can be defined by the term inclusion from below. While Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition offers a system that visualizes a fair society in which all participate in the common good, it does not include the agency of the poor in this process. Thus, it is an abstract ethical theory of aristocratic character. Liberation ethics is created by those who are below. It is an inclusion of the poor by their own social agency. There is no aristocracy that guides society according to its own interest, but a community of people who live in solidarity and build their history.

The goal of this chapter is to develop the main elements that characterize liberation ethics. I will do this by comparing Catholic social teaching and liberation theology. The choice for this mode is justified because liberation ethics is a social ethics situated within the Catholic social ethical tradition and yet part of the new way of doing theology proposed by liberation theology. Theologically speaking, liberation ethics is a liberation theology that is ecclesiastically inside Catholic social ethics and Christian communities. Although there is mutual complementarity, liberation ethics goes beyond the Thomistic influence on Catholic social teaching by inclusion from below based on the preferential option for the poor and the human condition of fragility and contingency.
6.1 Different Approaches: Catholic Social Teaching and Liberation Theology

The Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum* (1891) marks the beginning of what is now known as Catholic social teaching (CST). This teaching can be characterized by two major moments: *pre* and *post* Vatican II. The Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes* (1965) is a keystone of CST. It opened the Catholic Church to dialogue with the modern world by presenting a new perspective based on *dialogue* and *collaboration*, rather than a posture of defense and shutdown of the Church in herself. From Vatican II until now, CST has been very productive and many foundational texts have been issued from the pope’s chair. Liberation theology appeared on the Church scene after Vatican II, primarily as a result of the Church’s application of the council’s documents in Latin America, and then gained its own form as a new way of doing theology from a historical praxis. I will now compare CST, especially its post-Vatican II development, and liberation theology as new way of doing theology. I will present the particularities of these two approaches and show their application in the context of justice in health through collaboration that can shape a liberation ethics.

_Gaudium et Spes_ as well as all the documents of Vatican II do not only assure a fruitful production on Catholic social ideas from the side of the Petrine Magisterium, but also theological production has been very dynamic all over the world.\(^2\) Moreover, local bishops and episcopal conferences embraced this spirit of

---

\(^2\) An example of this dynamism was the creation of Brazilian Society of Moral Theology and its theological production. Its first series of publication was deep influence by Catholic social teaching immediately after Vatican II. It called “Moral Theology in Latin America,” published by Editora Santuario in 12 volumes from 1987 to 1996. See: Francisco Moreno Rejon, _Teologia Moral A Partir_
dialogue and collaboration right after the council. Without doubt, the Latin American bishops, gathered in CELAM’s meetings, were the portion of the Catholic Church that showed tremendous dynamism in embracing the Vatican II spirit and in applying its ideas in the Latin American context. The Conference of Medellín (1968) had the goal to adapt Vatican II innovations in the Latin American context.\(^3\)

Medellín was a phenomenon for the Catholic Church in Latin America. The documents, which were the fruits of this meeting, embodied the dynamism of Latin American experiences that were happening in the midst of Catholic communities in a context of oppression, injustice, and marginalization. Basic ecclesial communities, social movements of pastoral character, and the movement of Catholic leadership (especially male and female religious, but also some prophetic bishops) to join the poor in their way of life and struggle for justice were embodied in the Medellín document. These experiences were characterized by people who were gathering as communities of faith in Jesus of Nazareth and had a historical praxis for liberation. A new way of doing theology rose from this context: \textit{the theology of liberation}. Therefore, at Medellín, a \textit{new way of being} church was embodied: the basic ecclesial community; a \textit{historical praxis} gained identity: the praxis of the poor for justice and liberation; and a \textit{new way of doing theology} became visible: the theology of liberation.

From Medellín to Puebla (1979), these experiences were strengthened in Latin America and heads of the Catholic Church in Rome positively approached this ecclesial and theological phenomenon. Social documents issued by Pope Paul VI, such as *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971) and *Evangelii Nuntianti* (1975) promoted magisterial support to the Latin American Church’s social engagement for justice. Liberation theology was systematized by theological productions from many theologians, such as Gustavo Gutierrez who wrote *A Theology of Liberation* (1971) and Leonardo Boff who published *Jesus Christ Liberator* (1972). Latin America lived a true irruption of the poor that was made possible - according to Gutierrez in his book, *We Drink From Our Own Wells* (1981) - because of the liberating spirituality of the poor. Furthermore, the preferential option for the poor became the heart of this historical praxis and liberation theology as well. In Puebla, the bishops defined this option as the leading motto of the Catholic Church’s pastoral and historical praxis.

With these brief descriptions, I have presented CST and liberation theology. Both of these theological and social practice perspectives are grounded on Christian foundations. Both address issues of social justice, are concerned about the poor, and are inspired by the prophetic ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Both are living in the universe of the same Catholic Church and want to spread the good-news of the

---


8 Puebla, no. 1134.
kingdom of God in the world. However, they have different perspectives about main concepts, and they approach social, moral, and ecclesial issues with different methodologies. I argue that the origin of differences between CST and liberation theology is a foundational element of methodological and practical characteristics. In other words, CST approaches social and ecclesial reality from above and liberation theology from below. These two approaches are not contradictory. Rather, they complement each other in many aspects (e.g. CST provides magisterial and theological foundations for liberation theology, and this new way of doing theology challenges CST to assume new perspectives and reflections). Justice and peace in a world of solidarity is their common goal. However, the way they approach reality and faith leads to different theological reflections, and social and ecclesial practices.

I will briefly present these different approaches.

6.2 The Catholic Social Teaching Approach

Catholic social teaching is a teaching from above. (Here I want to be clear; I am not using from above in a pejorative way). First of all, by its nature, CST is from above. That is, it is a teaching that comes from the official voice of the magisterium, particularly from the pen of the successor of Peter.

One can argue that CST has a long tradition and we do not know exactly when it started. Since the Patristic period, the Catholic Church, through theologians and ecclesial authorities, has spoken about and acted on behalf of social justice. However, it is commonly agreed that modern CST began in 1891 when Pope Leo XIII
issued the encyclical letter, *Rerum Novarum*. From Leo XIII to Francis, all popes have issued documents that address social concerns. These documents respond to challenges of their time in the way they develop some concepts. These concepts became principles for social life, such as the principle of solidarity, the principle of subsidiarity, and the notion of the common good. They are not new in the universe of Catholic social theology, but they gained certain magisterial authority when they were presented in a papal document.

Many social concerns are present in CST, and all documents intend to promote justice and peace in a society of solidarity. Sometimes, they address particular issues: the exploitation of workers (this issue is present in several documents, such as *Rerum Novarum* and *Laborem Exercens*); concerns about the development of socialism and capitalism (most papal documents have a severe criticism of socialist ideologies and a soft one against some forms of capitalism); issues on war and peace (several documents are worried about the arms race, especially those written during the Cold War); ecological concerns (this appeared for the first time in 1971 Paul VI's encyclical *Octogesima Adveniens*, no. 21, it was

---


11 QA, nos. 111-114, 120; PT, nos. 132-134; LE, nos. 11, 14; SRS, no 21; CA, nos. 13, 19, 41-42; CV, nos. 22-25.

12 QA, nos. 101-109; MM, nos. 104-109; LE, nos. 12, 13; CA, no. 15; CV, nos. 35-37.

13 PT, no. 110; GS, no. 81; CA, no. 18.
mentioned in several of John Paul II’s texts,\textsuperscript{14} it was developed in 2009 by Benedict XVI’s encyclical \textit{Caritas in Veritate}, no. 51, and Pope Francis dedicated his 2015 text, \textit{Laudato Si}, to ecological concerns and its relations with social justice); and poverty in the world (John Paul II, in 1987, was the first one to introduce the preferential option for the poor in a papal document;\textsuperscript{15} an option that was confirmed by Francis in 2013 as a principle of the christological faith).\textsuperscript{16} Dealing with these social issues, the Catholic magisterium, little by little, shaped a social teaching based on certain principles.

These documents have in common their concerns about social issues and the Christian Catholic Tradition. They address social issues from the perspective of Catholic Tradition. In other words, they look at reality through the eyes of the magisterial tradition as the hermeneutical lens to see reality and its social concerns. One way to check this is to see that many social encyclicals were written on the anniversary of another, especially the first one (RN), and they begin by highlighting key points from that encyclical. In addition, all documents present major ideas or principles developed in the previous ones.

CST assumes a methodology that begins from a theoretical presentation. It recaptures Catholic tradition praising what had been said before and its relevance for all times. Then an analysis of social facts in the present reality takes place in the document. This analysis usually follows a philosophical way of developing arguments and presenting social concerns. It is very abstract (an intellectual

\textsuperscript{14} SRS, no. 26; CA, no. 37.
\textsuperscript{15} SRS, no. 39.
\textsuperscript{16} EG, no. 198.
exercise), which is a characteristic of papal documents. Although CST presents social elements of reality based on observing temporal social conjectures, it does not use sociological mediation as the main constitutive part of its method. Some texts, for example *Populorum Progresso* (1967) and the recent encyclical *Laudato Si* (2015), use some substantially sociological tools to understand the reality. But other texts evidence a preference for theological analysis of social reality grounded in traditional theological and philosophical views, such as *Caritas in Veritate*, which uses a Thomistic reference to understand political and social conjectures.

The main corpus of CST is the papal encyclicals, and their literary style reveals a method from above. Encyclicals are official documents that come from the desk of the successor of Peter; therefore, they comprise a teaching with authority. Here there is the authority of one voice that is embodied in the Petrine magisterium for the entire Catholic Church. Hence, CST has a *universalist* aspect. It does not present details of specific cultures and local problems, nor pragmatic recommendations. Because of the nature of papal ministry, CST embraces the entire Catholic Church and proposes a teaching that can be useful for the whole world. Instead of presenting pragmatic solutions for social issues, CST provides principles that can guide actions in the world. In this sense, CST is open to dialogue with local realities and specific social problems, challenges of local and/or temporal natures for the Church teaching. As Paul VI stated:

> It is up to the Christian Communities to analyze with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country, to shed on it the light of the Gospel’s unalterable words and to draw principles of reflections, norms of judgment and directives for action from the social teaching of the Church... It is up to these Christian communities, with the help of the Holy Spirit, in communion
with the bishops who hold responsibility and in dialogue with other Christian brethren and all men of good will, to discern the options and commitments which are called for in order to bring about the social, political, and economic changes seen in many cases to be urgently needed.\footnote{OA, no. 04}

This universalism and authority of CST have two faces: \textit{obedience} and \textit{dialogue}. The first face addresses its primary and main audience, Catholic people around the world (the entire People of God – clergy and laity). For this audience, CST speaks as a master who provides the path in which disciples must follow. These disciples have to obey the voice of the master and work at applying his teaching into their concrete reality. The second face looks at the world beyond the Catholic community. It is a face that wants to dialogue with the secular (modern) world in order to seek for justice and peace together. Here CST speaks as a seer, a wise ancient who has walked throughout history and has much wisdom to advise leaders of the secular world. It is a humble teaching that wants to collaborate to build justice and peace in the world.

CST is methodologically from above because it has not been built in partnership with those who are at the bottom of society, the poor. The historical praxis of the poor and marginalized people is not a basis of the CST. Despite the fact that CST presents the preferential option for the poor as one of its principles (see: SRS no. 39 and EG no. 198) and wants to promote social justice for those who are marginalized from accessing the common good, the voice of the poor is not in the CST. They are not active agents who are responsible for building their own liberation, but rather they are recipients of a project of social justice that was built...
by an authority. The mission of the poor is to follow this project. The positive aspect is that, on the one hand, this project can be arranged according to local and temporal challenges of the poor. It is not a strict agenda, neither is it a systematic socio-economic-political project. Rather, it is a body of social principles. On the other hand, CST works as a social abstract theory as an intellectual exercise without a historical praxis and pastoral experiences that embody its principles. Consequently, CST might be only one more theory among others that is arbitrary for being abstract and universalist, instead of being a body of principles that welcome the historical praxis and faith of Christian communities, and has the potential to empower the poor in their struggle for liberation.

Despite the fact that the main corpus of CST from papal documents has this methodological aspect from above and is grounded on texts from the magisterial tradition, the last two documents issued from the Petrine chair by Pope Francis have some particularities that introduce new elements into this Catholic social tradition. I highlight three particularities of Francis’ apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, and encyclical, *Laudato Si*. First, voices from the worldwide Catholic Church are integrated in Francis’ discourse. In his texts, pope Francis does not only quote other popes’ documents, but he also refers to documents issued by episcopal conferences from several parts of the world, such as the Philippines, Brazil, and the USA. For

---

18 John Paul II claimed this authority as part of the Church’s ministry in the world as an “expert in humanity.” So she “has something to say today, just as twenty years ago, and also in the future, about the nature, conditions, requirements, and aims of authentic development.” SRS, no. 41.

19 To check this easily and concretely, you only need to see the footnotes of *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Laudato Si*. For example, EG, no. 10, footnote 4; no. 64, footnote 59; no. 86, footnote 66; no. 122, footnote 98. LS, no. 5, footnote 13; no. 14, footnote 22, no. 38, footnote 24; no. 41, footnote, 25; no. 52, footnote 31.
instance, when Francis affirms that the preferential option for the poor is an option of “our christological faith,” he is quoting the 2007 CELAM’s document of Aparecida. Second, Francis also stresses, in a positive and practical way, a dialogue with sciences, the secular world, and non-Christian traditions. He makes this clear in his encyclical *Laudato Si* in which he uses secular and scientific sources, even quoting a Muslim mystic to emphasize the human responsibility to care for environment, our common home. These two aspects reveal the introduction of a concrete CST openness to learn from the non-Catholic world. The third of Francis’ particularities concerns the way he addresses social justice issues, that is, in partnership with the poor. Besides the option for the poor, he emphasizes the crucial importance to be with the poor and to learn from them. It is a dialogical perspective that matches Francis’ proposal of a poor Church and a Church of the poor that collaborates with the world to empower the poor, to protect the vulnerable, to care for nature, and to promote justice and peace.

**6.3 The Liberation Theology Approach**

Liberation theology is *from below*. Many scholars who are not liberation theologians (and are commonly in developed countries) usually begin studying this

---

20 EG, no. 198; Aparecida, no. 392.
21 LS, no. 3; 14.
22 Ibid., no. 17-61.
23 O Papa Francisco refers to the Muslim mystic Ali al-Khawas at the no. 233 of *Laudato Si*.
24 EG, no. 198; 199; LS, no. 149; 179.
25 Francis stresses: “I want a Church which is poor and for the poor.” EG, no. 198.
theological school from a wrong way. They first approach liberation theology from its late, well-systematized reflection. To be more precise, their first contact with liberation theology is through books, especially Gustavo Gutiérrez’s book, *A Theology of Liberation*. This book is crucial for liberation theology because it is the first systematization of this new theological reflection that arose in Latin America after Vatican II. However, liberation theology is only the theological reflection upon a historical praxis in Latin America that has had the poor gathered in Christian communities as its main agents. Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, in a short book entitled *How We Do Liberation Theology*, affirm that theology of liberation is only a second step of a liberating commitment through a historical praxis among the poor. The liberation theologian is one who is *among* the poor struggling for justice. He/she is a person who is part of this historical process of liberation. Therefore, one who begins studying liberation theology from its theological production begins from above. This betrays the spirit and method of this movement and shows little understanding of its roots: *the irruption of the poor in a historical praxis*.

This erroneous starting point to approach liberation theology is (in some sense) responsible for the dismissal of the experience of faith of the poor, their irruption in a reality marked by poverty and oppression, their practice of solidarity, and their historical struggle for justice. Consequently, liberation theology is restricted to an abstract reflection based in sociological analysis of reality. It is an *academization* of liberation theology that dismisses the historical praxis for

---

liberation and makes the voice of the poor disappear. This occurs in ecclesiological ways as well, through a process of magisterial incorporation of some key ideas of liberation theology, such as the preferential option for the poor that was incorporated by CST. The Magisterium takes for itself these ideas and presents them in an abstract way that does not express the voice of the poor.

Gustavo Gutiérrez affirms that the theology of liberation is a new way of doing theology upon a historical praxis. The Boff brothers say that liberation theology is the theological reflection of a liberating praxis among the poor who are gathered in basic communities and around their faith in Jesus of Nazareth. They assert that liberation theology is walking with the poor in their reality and fighting with them for justice in an experience of solidarity and faith. Then, theologians reflect on this historical and ecclesial praxis grounded in faith. Therefore, liberation theology is only the second act of a historical and ecclesial praxis of the poor.

The beginning and the ending of liberation theology is the irruption of the poor in history, those who are, according to Jon Sobrino and Ignacio Ellacuría, a 

*crucified people.* In history, the poor are victims in whom the crucified face of Jesus is reflected. CELAM’s document of Aparecida says that in the face of the poor, we

---

27 SRS, no. 38; LS, no. 158.
29 Boff and Boff, *Como Fazer Teologia da Libertação*, 26-27.
30 Ibid., 42.
contemplate the suffering face of Jesus.\textsuperscript{32} Gutiérrez stresses that the poor in Latin America have lived an experience of exile.\textsuperscript{33} In their own land, they live as foreigners exploited by an oppressive power responsible for institutionalizing violence. In the biblical tradition, the land is a gift from God for flourishing, but, in Latin America, it became a place of oppression and marginalization from goods that would provide a life with dignity. The poor trust in God and, just as the psalmist proclaim: “So our eyes are on Yahweh our God, for him to take pity on us” (Ps 123:2). They sing for God who is their hope for justice. They have a close relationship with God who, by his Spirit, gathers them in community and, by the historical life of his son Jesus, inspires them to walk for liberation in history. From that experience arose a new awareness: poverty and marginalization, roots of this exile, have social and political causes, but God is a liberator God. The poor embodied a liberating spirituality in their communitarian experience and this spirituality leads them to walk in history with God for justice and liberation. This is the irruption of the poor in Latin America, the starting point of liberation theology, the theoretical part of a historical movement for liberation.\textsuperscript{34}

The Boff brothers speak about the method of liberation theology in terms of a \textit{hermeneutical circle}\textsuperscript{35} in which the practical and theoretical foundations are the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{32} Aparecida, no. 393.
  \item \textsuperscript{33} Gutiérrez, \textit{We Drink From Our Own Wells}, 9-18.
  \item \textsuperscript{34} On the liberation spirituality and the irruption of the poor in Latin America, I suggest to see: Gutiérrez, \textit{We Drink From Our Own Wells} and Jon Sobrino, \textit{Espiritualidade da Libertação: Estrutura e Conteúdos} (São Paulo: Loyola, 1992).
  \item \textsuperscript{35} They do not use the term “hermeneutic circle,” but present this circular form of doing liberation theology around of the option for the poor and the historical praxis. See: Boff and Boff, \textit{Como Fazer Teologia da Libertação}, 41-72.
\end{itemize}
preferential option for the poor. It is *hermeneutic* because it has an epistemological way of reading social and ecclesial realities as well as the experience of faith in history. It is a *circle* because it is a reflection among the poor from the beginning to the end. The preferential option for the poor is its main foundation because it comes from an encounter with Jesus that makes us his disciples who follow his footsteps in the margins of history. The preferential option for the poor reflects the christological foundation of liberation theology, a christology with two historical pillars: the *historical Jesus* and the *historical experience of the poor* walking with Jesus in their struggle for justice and life.\(^{36}\)

Inside this hermeneutical circle, the liberation theologian is among the poor. He/she is part of the basic community and walks with the poor for liberation.

He/she has the same experience of faith as the poor, and permits suffering to touch his/her flesh. "In the company of the poor,"\(^{37}\) the liberation theologian preaches the good-news and helps the poor to understand the causes of their poverty and oppression. Thus, liberation theology listens to the poor, develops a reflection upon their faith and historical praxis that is part of the liberation theologian’s life, faith, and practices. This reflection eventually becomes papers, articles, and books and returns back to the poor in order to strengthen their faith and historical praxis. Doing so, this reflection embodies a critical function in the midst of the community.

\(^{36}\) Jon Sobrino is surely one who more focuses on this christological reflection. See: Jon Sobrino, *Jesus, O Libertador I: A História de Jesus de Nazaré*, 2nd ed. (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1996).

\(^{37}\) This term has been used by the medical anthropologist Paul Farmer and by the liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez for characterizing their experiences among the poor, one as a physician and another as a priest. And this was the title chosen for a book of dialogue between both. See: *In The Company Of The Poor: Conversations Between Dr. Paul Farmer And Fr. Gustavo Gutiérrez*, ed. Michael Griffin and Jennie W. Block (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2013).
that educates to a critical consciousness and strategies of actions. Liberation theology presents the voice of the poor and, at the same time, empowers them to be agents of their own liberation.

Liberation theology is from below because it is among the poor. It is from below because of the irruption of the poor in history and liberation theology is the irruption of their voice in theological reflection. Liberation theology is from the perspective of the poor and their experience of faith and liberation. This theology does not deny, nor does it dismiss other theological approaches to the christian faith. It approaches all aspects of this faith from the perspective of the poor and their historical praxis. Hence, liberation theology is not one more theological discipline, but rather it is a new way of doing theology that re-reads all theological disciplines and traditional aspects of faith from the perspective of the poor. This is what Sobrino does in his christology. He reflects on christological dogmas from the “perspective of the victims of history in Latin America” (Christ the Liberator), just as Leonardo Boff reflects on the Trinitarian mystery from the experience of God-Trinity of the poor gathered in basic ecclesial communities (Trinity the Perfect Community). Therefore, liberation theology, even being from below, is a dialogue with Christian theological tradition.

38 Jon Sobrino, A Fé Em Jesus Cristo: Ensaio A Partir Das Vítimas (Petrópolis: Vozes, 2001).
6.4 Catholic Social Teaching and Liberation Theology in Healthcare Justice

I will now draft an application of CST and liberation theology in the context of justice in health. However, liberation theology is a new way of doing theological reflection on social life, differing from CST in its fundamental orientation from the praxis of the poor. Although CST has principles and values for a liberation ethics in health care, the liberation ethics in this context originates from the standpoint of the poor. (This application will be deeply developed in the following chapter which is about the liberation ethics in healthcare context.)

Justice in health requires social justice. Actions for promoting justice in health care cannot be isolated from the healthcare sector. A broad social intervention is necessary to address social inequalities in a way that social determinants of health influence population health positively. Unfortunately, social determinants of health have played a negative role in population health that have affected the lives of millions of people around the world, especially those who are the poor. Moreover, justice in health requires a healthcare system that is free from the interests of the free market. Healthcare services cannot be seen only as products that can be obtained by those who have money. The mentality that a free market could solve health inequalities has created more marginalization and prevented people from accessing essential goods that they need to flourish. Health care as an

---


essential need for human flourishing, must be considered a human right in which health care is a good to be shared by all in order to promote population health and an integral development of human societies.\footnote{An important study of medical and anthropological character and in dialogue with liberation theology, that presents the relationship between poverty and health and argues for health care as a human right, is the work of Paul Farmer published in many books. To begin this study, I recommend: \textit{Pathologies of the Power: Health, Human Rights, and The New War on the Poor} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).}

This previous paragraph makes clear that I am supporting a perspective that health care is a human right, and we need social justice to address health care inequalities. In addition, the anthropology of suffering developed in Part I provides the foundation to a human rights framework from the human condition of a contingent being. Now the question is how can we develop arguments for the liberation ethics to support a human rights framework in health care and actions that promote social justice and population health. I argue that the way to address this question must arise from a liberation perspective that includes the voice of the poor and marginalized in healthcare debate. This liberating perspective must be \textit{from below}, that is, from the experience of those who are excluded from accessing essential goods that they need for flourishing and for living with dignity. In order to promote social justice and population health, the voice of the poor must be heard. This is not an easy task, but it must be done. Abstract theories of justice alone are not enough to promote justice. We need a broad debate in which the poor can show their faces and voices. They have to participate in this debate as agents of a social transformation. Any theory should be confronted by the poor and their reality.
Aware of abstract theories’ limitations in promoting social justice and population health, I understand that the healthcare justice debate can benefit from a dialogue between Catholic social teaching and liberation theology. CST presents some principles\textsuperscript{43} that support a human rights framework in health care,\textsuperscript{44} but they are insufficient to guide concrete actions in promoting social justice and population health because this teaching is grounded on abstract principles. A liberating approach is necessary to empower the poor to be agents of social transformation in a process of liberation that can lead them to social justice. Consequently, the poor will participate in the promotion of justice in health by addressing social inequalities. Collaboration between CST and liberation theology shapes a liberating ethics that leads us to join the poor and guides us as a community to address healthcare inequalities from the perspective of the poor. These two approaches are important to promote social justice and justice in health. Together, they offer a significant contribution for justice in the delivery of health care. They have a potential to lead us into a deep debate about social justice and health inequalities able to involve the poor in a decision-making process. Only a liberating approach to health care can bring CST to the reality of the poor and force it to be challenged by those who are at the bottom of the world in order to shape a dialogue in which the poor are agents of social transformation and population health.


\textsuperscript{44} Pope John XXIII, already in 1963, defended health care as a human right. See: \textit{Pacem in Terris}, no. 11.
Catholic Social teaching and liberation theology have different approaches to address social issues from a Christian perspective. As I said before, they are not contradictory, but they complement each other. One has a universalist aspect and another is more contextual. One presents the voice of the ecclesial authority and another reflects the voice of the poor. CST is the fruit of Catholic Church tradition as a magisterial concern about social injustice. It attempts to move the Catholic Tradition into a social justice setting in order to show the good-news of Jesus Christ. CST provides principles that challenge liberation theology to translate them into a historical praxis in a concrete reality marked by poverty and oppression. The dialogue with the poor is the way to begin this translation and, why not say CST inculturation in the reality of the poor? On the other hand, liberation theology challenges CST to make itself humble by hearing the voice of the poor. It challenges the ecclesial authority to be among the poor, to listen to the poor, and to speak as a master who walks with the poor, the privileged recipients of the Gospel (Lk 4:16-18), in their historical reality. CST and liberation theology have different approaches and methodologies, but both want to promote justice and peace in the world.

Considering this collaboration between CST and liberation theology, but strongly grounded on the experience of being with the poor as one community and committed to their hermeneutical lens, liberation ethics is, first, an ethic (moris) of the daily life of the poor who act based on values arising from their experience of suffering, faith, solidarity, hope, and struggle to survive. Second, liberation ethics as ethics (science of ethos) is the reflection arising from the irruption of the voice of the poor. It is the voice of the poor organized in a discourse that reflects their ethic and
embodies their struggle for justice. Therefore, liberation ethics is the inclusion from below: the poor include the ethicist, the philosopher, the intellectual, the priest, the nun, the social activist, the politician and anyone who want to participate in this dialogical praxis into their historical experience of walking for liberation.
Chapter 7

THE SUFFERING OF THE POOR AND THEIR VULNERABILITY: VOICES FROM BELOW

World history has been counted by those who built their victory on the blood of the losers. The winners are responsible for providing the official history that we know. Many of them became heroes, but this honoring was achieved by the blood of thousands of innocent and ignored people killed by the greed and power of the winners, such as Hernán Cortés who led the genocide of people in the (for him) new land called America to honor another conquistador, Américo Vespusio. The chosen name, America, permits an interpretation of domination that reflects the power of the man. Américo Vespusio was a European male honored in naming the new land, but in its female version América (in Spanish). The new land or the new world is an encounter with the other as the woman, an índia (female indigenous) who was used, exploited, and discarded when she could not give pleasure, power, and wealth to the man.¹

The history of an exploited and then discarded índia is the history of the America and its native peoples. This history is still ongoing in its Latina part, a source of wealth to its powerful northern neighbor that now leads this exploitation started at the end of the 15th century. This neighbor has even declared the first leader of this exploitation a hero, honoring him with a national holiday, Columbus’ Day (October 12th). This reflects how the official version of history has been

presented by the winners and, at the same time, it praises them for having silenced the voice of those at the bottom and who were militarily weaker. I present the American example, but this is the reality of the entire world history. Who knows the history of the black Africans and their traditions, struggles and achievements? Very few people and experts in African history know. What is well known is that Europeans went to Africa to capture blacks to be slaves in the new world. Dismissing the people at the bottom has also occurred in Eastern history, little known in the West. But their official version of history is also counted by the winners.

The voices of the weak, or the poor (to maintain using the key concept for this dissertation), have been ignored by history. It seems that they did not exist and are still non-existent. The poor are like an object that those at the top use when it is good for their interest. The poor are still the female India to be exploited by the man. It is a relation of power, domination, and patriarchal submission that affects all vulnerable people: the poor and the marginalized groups among them, such as women, gays, indigenous, blacks and any other minority victims of male exploitation, today in an institutionalized form of structural violence. However, the voices of the poor are not totally lost in history. It is possible to hear their voices behind the lines of official texts, in many artifacts that reveal their lives and culture, and in the religious expression of the poor that still brings their ancestral ways to celebrate their faith and social organization.

Literature is a domain that provides precious pieces that allow us to see the life, the wisdom, and the resistance of the poor. For example, the Brazilian romantic
writer José de Alencar (1829-1877) wrote a book that tells a story of a beautiful
table: a word shaped by the inversion of America. This romantic story shows
of the bases of formation of Brazilian people. Even with
from above, a new people was born from below in which the poor
in the creation of the present Brazilian people. According to the anthropologist
Darcy Ribeiro, this agency made Brazil the unique country in the new world to
create a new people: the Brazilian people, who are neither European, nor
Indigenous, nor African, but Brazilian as a result of these three races running in the
same blood.3

The poor have not been simply passive as the official history tells us.4 It is
to look at history from their eyes. And believe: you will be surprised. There
are a few projects in the world that seek to recount the history from the perspective
of the losers or forgotten. Focusing on Latin America because of practical and
methodological reasons, I refer to one group of historians and theologians who in

2 José de Alencar, Iracema, 6th ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2006).
3 Darcy Ribeiro, O Povo Brasileiro: A Formação e o Sentido do Brasil, 3rd ed. (São Paulo:
4 Mercedes Serna, ed. La Conquista Del Nuevo Mundo: Textos Y Documentos De La Aventura
Americana (Madrid: Castalia Editorial, 2012). In this book, Serna collected texts and reports from
those who had invaded the Americas and their cruelty against the natives of this land. They reported
their actions as heroism and as a good for this “new land.” Serna analyzes these primary texts, that
helped to create the imagination of the discovery of America as a heroic event, with precision and
strong criticism against the version that became the official for centuries (and it is still supported in
some conservative cycles).
1970s began a huge project to recount the Latin American and Caribbean history from the perspective of the poor: The Commission for the Historical Studies of the Church in Latin America and Caribbean (CEHILA). This group was fostered by the Latin American Bishops' Conference of Medellín (1968) and was officially created as an autonomous institute of research in 1973 under the leadership of Argentinian-Mexican philosopher and historian Enrique Dussel. CEHILA gathers experts from all the Americas and has published many works. Perhaps the most important is the ongoing endeavor, História General de La Iglesia, in which the tenth tome was launched in 2015. This historiographical approach shows that the voices of the poor are not lost. Their perspective can be recovered and has something to teach us.

The perspective of the poor reveals that veins of the oppressed, opened by the hands of the winners and their weapons, still throw out their blood running on the ground of their own land. Paraphrasing Eduardo Galeano, the veins of the world of the poor are opened. In the 1970s, Galeano wrote an important book on Latin American history. The importance of this work can be seen in his introduction: “This book was written with the goal to disclose certain facts that the official history, the

---

5 Lourenço Stelio Rega examines the method and work of Enrique Dussel and how his contribution to build “another history,” the one that is counted from the perspective of the poor and the oppressed. See: Lourenço Stelio Rega, Por Outra História Da Igreja Na América Latina: A Alter-História Construída Por Enrique Dussel (São Paulo: Faculdade Teológica Batista de São Paulo Press, 2011). For a general discussion on the history of the Americas from Dussel’s analysis, I recommend the study in which he examines the origin of the myth of modernity at the end of the 15th century. According to him, this myth “justifies European violence.” He adds: “Europe never discovered (descubierto) this Other as Other but covered over (encubierto) the Other as part of the Same, i.e., Europe”. So his proposal is to present history with the commitment to “minorities in politics, sex, and languages.” Enrique Dussel, The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of “The Other” and the Myth of Modernity (New York, Continuum, 1995), 9,12.

6 Information about CEHILA, its origin, members, and projects can be seen in its official webpage. It also makes available for download CEHILA’s main publication, including the ten volumes of História General de la Iglesia. Available online at: http://www.cehila.org/ (accessed February 8, 2016).
history counted by the winners, hides or lies.”\(^7\) He also affirms: “Our loss has always been implicit in the victory of others; our wealth has always generated our poverty to nourish the prosperity of others: the empires and their native bodies. In the colonial and neocolonial alchemy, golden becomes scrap, and food converts into poison.”\(^8\)

Throughout history, the life of the poor has been marked by suffering as victims of structural violence. Those who are at the top ignore their voices, deny the existence of their suffering faces, and dismiss their knowledge. However, the poor are continuously creating and recreating their world through an experience of resistance. They are not mere passive receivers of the dominant culture. For example, the religious syncretism of some Latin American communities is a powerful expression of a history of resistance of a people who did not accept submissively the religion of the colonizer, but rather it is a process of inculturation of the Catholic faith by those who were oppressed. The Mexican faith in La Virgen de Guadalupe\(^9\) and the Candomblé\(^10\) in Brazil are perfect examples of the poor’s agency in history. They have knowledge, voice, and are responsible for creating culture and ways of liberation. This occurs in the midst of suffering, what makes the poor experts in the human condition, but also in the midst of beauty, solidarity, faith, and


\(^8\) Ibid., 26.


hope. Ignoring the voice of the poor is to make an option for the incapacity of a top-down approach to transform the world.

Now I will present some voices of the poor from my experience of sharing life with them in their reality and historical praxis. I will do it from the experience of working with humble communities in Latin America, specifically my work in Brazil and a time of field investigation in Bolivia. The goal is to show some narratives of people I have met on my way as a Latin American pilgrim who had the opportunity of listening to their experience, testifying to their struggle to flourish, and learning from their knowledge, solidarity, faith and hope. It is only in the midst of the poor, that this wisdom and power of transformation can be seen, recognized, valued and incorporated in a dialogue toward a better world.

7.1 The Voice of the Poor: The Voices of Bolivia's Pueblos

The Uruguayan writer, already introduced, Eduardo Galeano, has a poem of beautiful verses that express the sad reality of our world. With dramatic words and his poetic Spanish, Galeano shows the suffering of those who are nobodies in this world where the poor have no recognized dignity:

Fleas dream of buying themselves a dog, and nobodies dream of escaping poverty: that one magical day good luck will suddenly rain down on them – will rain down in buckets. But good luck doesn't rain down yesterday, today, tomorrow, or ever. Good luck doesn't even fall in a fine drizzle, no matter how hard the nobodies summon it, even if their left hand is tickling, or if they begin the new day with their right foot, or start the new year with a change of brooms.

The nobodies: nobody's children, owners of nothing. The
nobodies: the no ones, the nobodied, running like rabbits, dying through life, screwed every which way.

Who are not, but could be.
Who don’t speak languages, but dialects.
Who don’t have religions, but superstitions.
Who don’t create art, but handicrafts.
Who don’t have culture, but folklore.
Who are not human beings, but human resources.
Who do not have faces, but arms.
Who do not have names, but numbers.
Who do not appear in the history of the world, but in the police blotter of the local paper.
The nobodies, who are not worth the bullet that kills them.  

Structural violence depersonalizes those who are at the bottom of society.
Accidental form of malheur makes the unfortunates, the poor nobodies, beings with neither faces nor names. Nothing created and originated from them has value. They are only numbers wandering on the earth where the dignity to be someone with a face and name belongs to those who enjoy high socio-economic status quo. Just as Galeano says: “Who do not have names, but numbers,” seeing the poor as numbers is what those who develop theories and projects to address social inequalities do.
They usually create projects of social reforms for the lives of the poor, but without

11 Here is the Spanish version: “Sueñan las pulgas con comprar un perro/ y sueñan los nadies con salir de pobres, / que algún mágico día llueva de pronto la buena suerte, / que llueva a cántaros la buena suerte; / pero la buena suerte no lleave ayer, ni hoy, / ni mañana, ni nunca, / ni en lloviznita cae del cielo la buena suerte, / por mucho que los nadies la llamen / y aunque les pique la mano izquierda, / o se levanten con el pie derecho, / o empiecen el año cambiando de escoba. / Los nadies: los hijos de nadie, / los dueños de nada. / Los nadies: los ningunos, los ninguneados, / corriendo la liebre, muriendo la vida, jodidos, / rejodidos: / Que no son, aunque sean. / Que no hablan idiomas, sino dialectos. / Que no profesan religiones, sino supersticiones. / Que no hacen arte, sino artesanía. / Que no practican cultura, sino folklore. /Que no son seres humanos, sino recursos humanos. / Que no tienen cara, sino brazos. / Que no tienen nombre, sino número. / Que no figuran en la historia universal, sino en la crónica roja de la prensa local. /Los nadies, que cuestan menos que la bala que los mata.” Original version is: Eduardo Galeano, El Libro de los Abrazos, 29th ed. (Madrid: Siglo XXI de España Editores, 2009), 59. I used the English translation that is in: Paul Farmer, Pathologies of Power, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), I.
their participation, because they are nobodies, only numbers. Reformist ways cannot transform the world; it needs a revolution that can only happen if it comes from below, when the poor become agents of history. This requires the process of recognition and compassion described in Part I, an anthropology of suffering able to lead us to see the faces and to learn the names of the poor. An act of sensitive courage is central in this process that unifies us as beings who participate in the same contingent condition.

*Sensitive courage* is what Jesus had when he found those who were suffering along his way. To illustrate it, let’s see Jesus’ encounter with a woman who had a hemorrhage for twelve years. This passage is in the three synoptic gospels (Mk 5:25-34, Lk 8:43-48, Mt 9: 18-22). This encounter is situated in an episode in which Jesus is talking to a person of high status, named Jairus, who is introduced by the gospel as “the president of the synagogue.” He came to Jesus because his daughter was sick. The gospel describes Jesus meeting him in the middle of a crowd where he was touched by an anonymous person. See how Mark, the earliest narrative, describes this encounter:

Now there was a woman who had suffered from a hemorrhage for twelve years; after long and painful treatment under various doctors, she had spent all she had without being any the better for it; in fact, she was getting worse. She had heard about Jesus, and she came up through the crowd and touched his cloak from behind, thinking, “If I can just touch his clothes, I shall be saved.” And at once the source of the bleeding dried up, and she felt in herself that she was cured of her complaint. And at once aware of the power that had gone out from him, Jesus turned around in the crowd and said, “Who touched my clothes?” His disciples said to him, “You see how the crowd is pressing round you; how can you ask, ’Who touched me?’” But he continued to look all around to see who had done it. Then the woman came forward, frightened and trembling because she knew what had
happened to her, and she fell at his feet and told him the whole truth. “My daughter,” he said, “your faith has restored you to health; go in peace and be free of your complaint.”

The scene is dramatic and involves three main characters: a woman, Jesus, and his disciples. The narrator affirms that this woman had been bleeding for twelve years. This led her to spend all she had to be cured without success. Consequently, she became a poor and abandoned person on the street (probably a homeless person).\textsuperscript{12} The fact that this character is a woman is very significant. Women were highly discriminated against and vulnerable in that society. They were totally dependent on men (in this order: father, husband, son), prevented from having possessions, and considered an inferior human because of their natural condition of being impure every month. It was legal to put women away during their period as it was with any other bleeding, because blood made them impure.\textsuperscript{13} In addition, the woman in the gospel was also poor, another reason for exclusion. She was an anonymous person, a nobody who was struggling to survive. This guided her to Jesus. On the other hand, Jesus was full of sensitive courage. He realized that a person in the middle of a crowd needed his attention. He recognized this anonymous woman in her entire life, full of suffering and dignity. The third character is represent by Jesus’ disciples. The narrator does not say who they were or give name to this voice. It seems the author wanted to put in one mouth the voice

\textsuperscript{12} Calisto Vendrame, \textit{A Cura dos Doentes na Bíblia} (São Paulo: Loyola, 2001), 133-134.

of a society that excludes those who were suffering at the bottom. This society does not want us to see those who are the unfortunates, they are anonymous, nobodies, who cares...? We need to go to the house of the president of the synagogue. However, Jesus cares for all the least ones of society. He stopped, recognized the face of this woman, listened to her story of suffering and marginalization, and praised her for having such great faith. In front of Jesus, she was not a nobody any more. She had a face and a story, she was worth having an opportunity to flourish, and she had such a strong faith that she taught everybody the power of faith and hope in moving to a new, better life.

*Sensitive courage* is to be sensitive to recognize the face of others who are suffering as victims of structural violence. It is the recognition that the poor are not numbers, but rather crucified faces who teach the world the power of faith and hope. They are not nobodies. They have names and a story with revolutionary power. *Sensitive courage* is to have courage to break social barriers that prevent us from moving beyond our comfort zone of analyzing numbers and creating theories to join the poor in their reality.

Sociological studies and statistics that present poverty rate and health indicators are important, but their numbers are not enough to provoke a real transformation. They show, for example, that the global population health is not doing well. They provide evidence through scientific methods that poverty is the number one cause of premature death in socio-vulnerable areas. They help us to think of the best ways to allocate resources more effectively in promoting

---

population health and many other actions in global public health. However, these numbers are not strong enough to force us to embody a real democratic transformation with empowerment and participation of the poor. Numbers hide their faces. Consequently, any reformist action will only be palliative and without giving the poor the opportunity to be agents in the flourishing of their lives. Moreover, actions without this participation will be top-down, shaped by the mentality of those who hold power, and imposed on the unfortunates without considering their culture, traditions, and values. The cultural and anthropological damage could be higher than the potential benefit. (By the way, this was what happened in the history of colonization and neocolonization in Latin America and Africa).

Sensitive courage is the dynamism of the preferential option for the poor in a movement of recognition of crucified faces against accidental malheur. Listening to the poor, in a mutual process of dialectical learning, is the starting point for a real transformation. This is the way to bring the voices of the poor, together with their faces and names, to the debate for justice in health. This is a liberating approach that promotes participation from below towards a democratic process of transformation. The voices of the poor will tell us what their suffering and struggle mean, and help us shape collective actions able to respond to their social and health inequality challenges, without an anthropological destruction.
The Voices of Bolivia’s Pueblos

The Spanish word pueblo is not equivalent to its common translation into English, people. The English word people is plural of person (one person – two people). In Spanish, this corresponds to una persona – dos personas. Pueblo (originated from Latin populus) is a collective noun. It is a singular noun that expresses a social group of individuals unified by their history, culture, traditions, beliefs, worldview, ethnicity, and language. As a noun, pueblo can also be used in the plural, pueblos to refer to different groups.¹⁵ Joining the poor and listening to their voices mean to be sensitive to different pueblos and to have the courage to interact with them from their worldview. This does not mean we must accept uncritically everything that comes from them, but we are to establish a dialectical and respectful process of mutual learning to develop ways of liberation with the participation of marginalized pueblos.

Today, Bolivia is certainly the most diverse country in the Americas with many pueblos together sharing the same land.¹⁶ With a peculiar geography divided between eastern lowlands and western highlands, framed by the humid Amazon rainforest in the northeast and an arid land with an unique ecology called the Chaco in the southeast,¹⁷ Bolivia maintains its traditional pueblos whose ancestors were

---

¹⁵ Throughout this dissertation, you have noticed that sometimes I have used the word people followed by a verb in the singular form and other times people as peoples. When I am doing it is because I am not talking about two or more individuals, but I am talking about a group of individuals unified by their ethnical background, that is, pueblo/pueblos.


the pueblos before the Spanish invasion. Together with this beautiful cultural
diversity, Bolivia is also marked by political division, exploitation, and oppression of
its pueblos that have led it to be one of the poorest places of the Americas, losing the
first position only to Haiti. I chose Bolivia to be the place to perform a field
experience of listening to and sharing life with the poor. The reason I chose Bolivia
was practical and obvious. First, I wanted to be in a place where its people have
been explicitly marked by the experience of being victims of structural violence in
Latin America. It is true that one can see poor people with this experience
everywhere, even in the USA and Europe. But I wanted a country where this reality
was easily noticed. I had to choose between Haiti and Bolivia, considered the two
poorest countries in the Americas. Second, I chose Bolivia over Haiti because of the
existence of many different pueblos in the same territory. Finally, I stayed with
Bolivia because of language. In a Spanish speaking country, I could better
communicate with its citizens, although I was aware I would find many people who
only speak their own traditional native language. And that is what I found. Fluency
in the common local language is an important factor for joining the poor in their
authentic experience. It is a sign of respect, appreciation, and a tool that helps us to
be one of them. In addition, my own Brazilian origin, a pueblo result of a mix of
races, helped me to be easily accepted by the groups I met.\footnote{Bolivia also was a very familiar place for me because I had been there in other occasions and had an opportunity to visit Bolivian communities of immigrants in São Paulo, Brazil as well as in the State of Acre, where Brazil and Bolivia share borders.} Let’s now learn a little bit about this country and its pueblos.
The Plurinational State of Bolivia with 10.027.254 million inhabitants is characterized by cultural diversity originating in its rich ethnical plurality of pueblos, traditions and languages previous to the invasion of the Spanish in the 16th century. Bolivia achieved its independence in 1825 and was named to honor Simón Bolivar. Born in Venezuela, he worked for the independence of Andean countries (Venezuela, Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia). The most ancient people who lived in the region of Bolivia were the Tiwanaku, who were descendants of the Incas and are ascendants of the Aymaras, Urus, Kollas, and Lupacas. These peoples are from Western Bolivia. In Eastern Bolivia, there are people who belong to the ethnical groups of Moxos, Brus, Cambas, Guarany, and Moxeños. These are the largest ethnical groups among several others that shape the cultural richness of Bolivia. The ethnical diversity also marks the political division that is mainly separated by geography into two groups. In the highlands, there are los Kollas who are largely descendants of the Incas and Aymaras. They resist Western modern influence and have a strong social organization in sociopolitical movements, such as labor unions and farmers' cooperatives. The first indigenous president of a country in South America comes from this region, Evo Morales, son of a Quechua mother and an Aymara father. In the lowlands there are los Cambas, who are most concentrated in the Department of Santa Cruz, around the city of Santa Cruz de La Sierra, the most populated city of Bolivia. They are more influenced by Western


values, especially from the USA, and want more autonomy from politicians from the highlands, where La Paz, the administrative city and place of the governmental headquarters, is located. These geographic and ethnical divisions are reflected in political and socio-economic perspectives and conflicts.

The government recognizes 37 official languages.\textsuperscript{21} 88.4\% speak Spanish, 28\% Quechua, 18\% Aymara, 1\% Guarany. Other languages form 4\%. According to the 2013 census, 78\% of the Bolivian population are Roman Catholics, 19\% are Protestants, 2.5\% have no affiliation, and 0.2\% belong to religions other than Christianity.\textsuperscript{22} Although, it is a country with a large majority of Christians, the way many people live their faith, especially in the Catholic tradition, has incorporated many elements of the ancestral traditions of Bolivian ethnical groups. So there is a great deal of popular piety and syncretism. An example of this syncretism is the way Catholic Bolivians celebrate the Feast of Corpus Christi. I was there for this feast and was impressed by how large this celebration was in which thousands of Bolivians walk in an immense procession following a huge monstrance that displays a Consecrated Host and looks like a sun. Walking with them, I asked some people why this feast was so big and if Christmas and Easter were celebrated in the same way. All answered: \textit{no, this is bigger because everybody comes to the streets and has fireworks}. Talking to a priest, he told me that Corpus Christi became the most important Catholic feast for Bolivians because it fits their cultural imagination originating from their traditional religions where they worshiped the sun.

\textsuperscript{21} Constitución Política Del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia (La Paz: Ministério de la Presidencia, 2009), Artículo 5.

\textsuperscript{22} Werner, Bolivia in Focus, 23-41.
In terms of population health, Bolivia is a country with many challenges that must be addressed. There is no universal healthcare coverage. The health system is based on work contribution. So those who have formal employment pay a small mandatory tax for a public insurance that is managed by the government. It is a social security benefit that allows access to certain healthcare assistance in public institutions. One issue is that Bolivia has a high rate of unemployment (8%) and around 50% of workers do not have a formal job that allows them to have this benefit. They are informal workers who might do anything to make some money, such as selling food on the streets, offering home services, driving cars as taxis and so on. There are no private insurance companies in Bolivia. Those who want and can afford private healthcare assistance must go to private clinics (usually owned by physicians) and pay the healthcare provider directly. The public system only offers universal coverage for pregnant women, children under 5 years old, and people over 60 years old. However, services are limited and precarious. In addition, this system provides some clinical assistance for young people and adults. This assistance only consists in the health professionals diagnosing the problem. The government pays these professionals, but all medical stuff and medication must be paid for by the patient at the time of the diagnosis. Otherwise the health workers cannot care for the patient because they do not have medical stuff and medication. Also this professional assistance is limited and very often physicians and nurses are not able to provide services because the patient cannot afford medical stuff and medication.

In short, an adult in Bolivia without money basically has no healthcare assistance, even for emergency care.

However, since Bolivia has had an indigenous person in charge of federal administration, there has been an attempt to establish a new system of health that better or more adequately fits into the culture of Bolivian pueblos. This attempt is guided by the indigenous concept of *vivir bien*. It constitutes “the fundamental theoretical foundation of this new state, oriented to building development alternatives based on recovering national cultural identity and state sovereignty, building a participatory democracy, and restoring natural resources. This change drew on the Andean and Amazonian people’s world view.”²⁴ *Vivir bien* or “living well” is a harmonic relationship between humans and nature. It is based on caring of human co-responsibility shaped by a cosmological view. Its main characteristic is that an individual lives well when the community is living well.²⁵ This concept corresponds to the Bolivian pueblos’ worldview and has guided some actions in the delivery of health care in a community-based approach. These actions have not yet spread to have a significant impact on Bolivian public health system, but I could notice in the discourse of those to whom I had talked that the *vivir bien* approach is the one that the poor Bolivians most appreciate.

Some numbers show the reality of population health in Bolivia. First of all, the social determinants of health have significant impact on population health and generate health inequalities. One thing is unemployment and working conditions, as


²⁵ Ibid., 334; 336.
we have seen before. Another example is basic sanitation. According to the World Health Organization, only 46% of Bolivians enjoy sanitation and about 20% do not have access to drinking-water resources.\textsuperscript{26} There is huge variation from some region to region. For instance, in a Guarany village more than 80% of people do not have clean water to drink due to the pollution of their water resources (a river) as a consequence of years of research and exploration for oil by big international corporations.\textsuperscript{27}

The government has decreased its annual health expenditure. In 2000, 6.1% of GDP was spent on health, 5.8% in 2012.\textsuperscript{28} But in 2015 occurred a small increase in which the government spent 4.8% of its national budget.\textsuperscript{29} This makes national health expenditure rises to 6.1% of GDP.\textsuperscript{30} This increase took out Bolivia from the least amount of money invested in health in the South America (Position now that is hold by Peru with 3.3 of its GDP). Brazil, for example, spent 9.7% in 2015 (while USA spent 17.2% in the same year).\textsuperscript{31}

Some health indicators show clearly some challenges for population health in Bolivia. Life expectancy at birth is 68 years (while Brazil in the same region is 75

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{27} This was the report from health officials and professionals who work in this village told me during my time there.
\item \textsuperscript{28} World Health Organization, *World Health Statistic 2015*, 126.
\item \textsuperscript{29} Ministério de Economía y Finanzas Públicas, *Presupuesto Ciudadano 2015* (La Paz, Bolivia, 2014), 29.
\item \textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
and USA is 79). The infant mortality rate (that is, the probability of dying by age 1 per 1000 live births) is 31 (by comparison, it is 12 in Brazil and 6 in the USA); and the under-five mortality rate is 39 per 1000 live births (Brazil is 14 and USA is 7). Maternal mortality in Bolivia is 200 per 100,000 live births (Brazil is 69 and USA is 28). These numbers also have a big variation from one region to another. For instance, in the Guarany village, life expectancy is 50 years and infant mortality under-one is over 40 per 1000 live births. Based only on this few numbers, we can see population health in Bolivia is a major issue.

*Experience with Bolivia’s Pueblos: The Goal*

Knowing the challenging reality of Bolivia, especially in health care, I decided to go to Bolivia to have an experience among its people. I planned a research trip to Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia from May 15 to Jun 6, 2015. First of all, I went there to listen to the experience of poor Bolivians in their struggle to access health care. In addition, I also developed an empirical-ethnographic investigation named *Global Health and Justice in Health Care: A Liberating Approach from Below*, sponsored by the Marquette Center for Transnational Justice.

---


33 Thank you for Marquette Center for Transnational Justice that provided a research grant with necessary funding for the realization of this project. The realization of this project was an opportunity to strengthen an academic research on global health and justice in health that is committed to hear the marginalized people from Latin America and allow them to express their suffering and struggling for justice. In addition, the result of this project makes it possible to bring the voice of the poor from the global south into the academic debate on justice in health and strengthen an international debate on justice in global health.
Camillus mission and performed semi-structured interviews and ethnographic observations regarding population health and health care. I spent my time in two settings: one was a periphery of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, where the main activities of the priests of Saint Camillus are located. The second was in a village called Gutiérrez, an indigenous community of the Guarany people, located four hours south of Santa Cruz.

Therefore, my proposal in Bolivia was to engage with the poor and marginalized people in order to hear their struggle to access healthcare services. The procedure was based on a Participatory Action Research methodology in which the researcher interviews people about their experience as they need health care services. I used semi-structured interviews that were combined with ethnographic observations from engagement in public discussions, community meetings, and life sharing. This research was approved by the Marquette University

---

34 In a mission led by the Camillian Brazilian Province, Camillians have been in Bolivia since 2000. Initially, two priests, Fr. Luis Gemeli and Fr. Geraldo Bogoni, went to Santa Cruz de la Sierra as a response to Cardinal Julio Terrazas who invited them to come to the Archdiocese of Santa Cruz to work in Pastoral Care and to help develop this activity that was so limited in the entire country. The invitation was directed to the General of the Order of Saint Camillus in Rome who charged the Brazilian Camillians to found a community in this South America country. After a period of conversation between Camillians from Brazil and the Cardinal Terrazas, Fr. Gemeli and Fr. Bogoni arrived in Bolivia on April 14th, 2000 and went to live in a small church localized on the periphery of Santa Cruz. This became the Paroquia Espíritu Santo (Holy Spirit Parish). This mission has been fruitful for the people of Santa Cruz de la Sierra. These fruits are visible in the life of the community and in the area around Holy Spirit Church. Community members are also so thankful for the presence and action of Camillians. The religious of St. Camillus currently serve this community by pastoral, social, and healthcare activities.

35 Craig McGarvey, “Participatory Action Research: Involving ‘All the Players’ in Evaluation and Change,” in *GrantCraft* (2007): 1, available online at: http://www.successmeasures.org/articles/participatory-action-research-involving-all-players-evaluation-and-change (accessed May 13, 2015). McGarvey defines PAR as: “A tool for evaluation, participatory action research (PAR) works in two important ways: it produces evidence about an ongoing process of change, and it promotes learning among the people closest to the change. PAR can help ignite a cycle of inquiry that is participatory, committed to action, and attuned to the demands of rigorous research.”
Institutional Review Board (an ethical committee for research with human beings). I interviewed twenty people, who were volunteers and had signed an informed consent form. These interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed along with the notes from ethnographic observations. In addition, valuable insights came from informal conversations with people I met in Santa Cruz and Gutierrez. All interviews were with people from Santa Cruz. In Gutierrez, because its ways of life are much closer to ancient indigenous traditions, I did not formally interview anybody. There I opted to be with people and to listen to their spontaneous stories. They had a small health clinic with a few health workers. Conversations with them were very meaningful, especially because they provided health indicators of this Guarany community and their struggle to provide better services.

_Experience with Bolivia’s Pueblos: The Method_

Before presenting the results of this experience among some Bolivian pueblos, I want to describe the methodology used in setting and analyzing the stories and experience I had heard. Above all, I was not interested in collecting statistical data. The goal was to do an experience of fraternity and hear people share their struggles with health care and their daily historical faith. Academics call this research a _qualitative study_ because it aims to analyze the content of people’s discourses. Although my research does not fit perfectly into this classification, it is appropriate to affirm that I performed a qualitative study. However, it goes beyond

---

this because of the theological-anthropological nature of my investigation and its liberating character.

The method of this project was grounded in a liberating perspective inspired by liberation theology and Participatory Action Research. It was methodologically structured in three moments that shaped one unified whole: Liberation Theology Method, Empirical Finding (Participatory Action Research), and Confrontation.

A. The Liberation Theology Method

This method was structured in two steps. First, it was bibliographic research. It consisted in an academic research on social justice, global health, health inequalities, social determinants of health, and the reality of the poor in low-income countries. This step aimed to raise data about these issues and sociological analysis in population health and life conditions of vulnerable groups in the global south focusing on the Latin America context. It also targeted selection of theological and anthropological sources able to provide theoretical foundations for this project.

Second, the heart of this research is based on the liberation theology method see – judge – act. It joined the poor in their reality in order to share lives and to hear their voices. When I was among the poor, the goal was to hear poor Bolivians

38 Craig McGarvey, “Participatory Action Research,” 1.
39 I have experience with this method that I used before in another research project on health care in Brazil. See: Alexandre A. Martins, Bioética, Saúde, e Vulnerabilidade: Em Defesa da Dignidade dos Vulneráveis (São Paulo: Paulus, 2013).
and to develop activities in which they could share their suffering, their struggles to access healthcare services, and their concerns and hope for social justice. After hearing these voices, narratives were developed as a way to express their experience. This provided concrete material to confront the theoretical first step.  

B. The Empirical Finding – Participatory Action Research (PAR)

The empirical project adopted many of the principles of an emerging social science approach called Participatory Action Research. PAR “produces evidence about an ongoing process of change, and it promotes learning among the people closest to the change. PAR helps ignite a cycle of inquiry that is participatory, committed to action, and attuned to the demands of rigorous research.” This approach has strong resonance with the Liberation Theology Method.

This part consisted in data collections through participant observation in activities in the field and semi-structured interviews combined with ethnographic

---

41 The Liberation Theology method with more details means:
- See: being with the poor, caring about them, and listening to their stories of suffering and hope.
- Judge: understanding the reality of the poor, the causes of their suffering and lack of basic needs and difficulties to access healthcare services. This part also addresses the role of faith in the life of the poor for struggling for justice and liberation, and tries to understand the mechanism of structural violence from a theological perspective.
- Act: observing the actions that have already been done by the local community for social justice and access healthcare services. Strengthening these actions (if there are any) and developing new actions which can empower the poor in the local community to become aware of the reasons for their social suffering and enable them to struggle for healthcare advocacy.

42 Craig McGarvey, “Participatory Action Research,” 1.


44 All interviews were realized with permission based on informed consent, including confidentiality and freedom. It was according to Marquette IRB and international rules for research
observation from engagement in public discussions, community meetings, social activities, and following people in their search for healthcare. Then, all the data collected was organized for a qualitative analysis (considered from a liberation ethics point of view). Finally, it was the engagement that was the confrontation of the collected data (especially the narratives) with other sources and studies of anthropological and theological characters. This is basically the result of the research project that is developed here in this dissertation, that is, the voices of the poor.

In both interviews and ethnographic observation, I observed and took note about their cultural values, faith, beliefs, experiences, opinions, social struggles, cultural behaviors, personal and familiar relationships and relationships with health workers. Observation focused on the connections between their narratives and their health and struggle for health care. See: João Biehl and Adriana Petryna, eds., *When People Come First: Critical Studies in Global Health* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013). It focused on narratives of members of local communities in poor areas of Santa Cruz de La Sierra and in gatherings of people with the purpose of engaging them in a community-based participatory action research that can empower them in their social action to improve life conditions, health, and healthcare assistance. See: Barbara A. Israel et al. “Community-based Participatory Research: Policy Recommendations for Promoting a Partnership Approach in Health Research,” *Education for Health* 14, no. 2 (2001): 182-197. DOI: 10.1080/13576280110051055 (accessed June 10, 2015).

The voices of the poor that I hear in Bolivia are more specifically presented now in Part II, but they are present, along with voices of other people I had heard in my Brazil, throughout the entire dissertation. Their voices are the main inspiration for what I am systematically developing. Without my experience among the poor and their voices, this anthropology of suffering and liberation ethics towards justice in healthcare could never exist. Participants in this research project in Bolivia were never treated as subjects of research, but they were seen as agents in their own social context, as it is proper of PAR (a pluralistic method to knowledge making and social change). They were never approached as mere “human subjects” of a research, but they were encouraged to be agents of a social action in which occurred an interaction between research and action with mutual learning. This, grounded on theological principles of social engagement and action for liberation, is part of the third step of Liberation Theology Method and provides a theological analysis and community-based social action for justice in health.
7.2 Listening to the Poor and Population Health: Experience with Bolivia’s Pueblos

In the first interview, one person said: *I believe that health doesn't have a price. Health should be primordial everywhere, in the entire world, because one life is one life, isn’t it? … [they] must have solidarity.* These simple words, from a humble person who had never studied healthcare or bioethics, express that health care is an essential value for human flourishing. This person is saying that health care is a human right because every life is a life with a deep value. In addition, she/he appeals to solidarity as a value to be embodied by health systems and workers. In these words there are elements essential for promoting justice in healthcare: recognition of the value of life, health care as a human right, and solidarity as a principle to guide healthcare decisions and actions. Moreover, participation is key. Once this person is speaking, she/he is contributing in a historical process that might lead to a social transformation. She/he presented elements that many scholars and I affirm as crucial to promote justice in health. How does she/he know that? She/he knows based on her/his experience of struggling for better living condition. This is an experience of suffering that reveals the fragile nature of the human being and what it needs to flourish. My goal in Bolivia was to hear people’s experiences when they need some kind of healthcare assistance. We have the moral obligation to listen to voices like this one and to integrate them in our debate for social justice.
Engaging with the poor is an opportunity to hear from those who are not usually heard by sociological studies on population health and health care. Moreover, it is a way to see the relationship between culture and health among local people and the way they envision what could be done to improve living conditions and healthcare assistance. In the company of poor Bolivians, I opened myself to learning from them. I joined the St. Camillus mission in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, the work of Camillian priests who have served in this area for years. They provided me a local support to establish contact with the community. I spent the most part of my time in a periphery of Santa Cruz, a city with over two million inhabitants and much cultural diversity, although the majority of people identify themselves as Cambas. In this city, I shared daily life with the local community around Espiritu Santo church, the central pole of the St. Camillus mission. Informally, I attended local festivals, family and community gatherings to help those in need (Quermeses), liturgical celebrations, and popular activities of religious devotions. It was an opportunity to experience their life style and to make some ethnographic observations. In all these activities, we had spontaneous conversations about life and working conditions, traditions, habits, health, and health care. I also visited three public hospitals. I formally interviewed twenty volunteers from the community who wanted to contribute to this research. Before my arrival, they were recruited by staff of the St. Camillus mission who advertised the need for volunteers. They were people from 22 to 67 years old, 4 men and 16 women. 18 had no resources to pay for any private healthcare assistance.
Furthermore, I visited a Guarany Village four hours south from Santa Cruz. This village has approximately 13 thousand people who speak Spanish and Guarany. However, there is a high percentage of people who speak only Guarany. Social conditions and population health in this village are complex and marked by injustices and lack of resources. I stayed a few days in this community talking with local people and some healthcare workers and was able to realize some issues. There is a small clinic that provides some healthcare assistance. Its resources are limited and it has difficulties serving the entire community. Guarany people are not concentrated in the village, but spread throughout the area in small groups. The health system divides the entire Guarany area into seven small regions. Each one has a nucleus of health care. These seven nuclei are supposed to have at least one family doctor, one registered nurse, two assistant nurses, and two or three community agents of health (people who are from the community and could provide a bridge between families and healthcare workers. They receive some training to do it and also to provide some health education. However, they are volunteers and work without payment, which makes recruitment difficult. The nuclei are connected to the clinic at the village which is supposed to have a larger team of health workers with at least three physicians (a gynecologist, a pediatrician, and a generalist). The goal of this system is to provide primary assistance and some ambulatory and emergency care. More complex cases would be moved to Santa Cruz.

Theoretically, it is a good system based on the concept of *vivir bien* that fits well with the local worldview, but it suffers from the lack of resources, political and cultural barriers. First of all, it is far from having enough health staff and stuff. For
example, there are only three physicians for the seven nuclei and they are not full
time workers. There are only two registered nurses and it is a huge difficulty to find
community health agents because they are unpaid. The lack of health agents
prevents health professionals from accessing families because these agents are
essential to breaking cultural and linguistic barriers between Guaranies and health
professionals. The clinic has only one full-time physician, who is also the director of
the entire local system and was the one who presented me with the health
conditions in this village. According to him, this community has a high prevalence of
infectious diseases, such as tuberculosis, malaria, dengue, and chikungunya.
Malnutrition affects almost all the children, pregnant women and elders of this
village on different levels. But 40% of children up to 12 years old suffer from
chronic malnutrition. He believes that the main reason for that is their poor diet (the
main food resource is corn, and sometime the only one for many families) and the
lack of drinking-water.47

In this village, I didn’t formally interview anybody, but I engaged in many
conversations with local people, visited some families and interacted with
healthcare workers and volunteers whom I met. This village has a small school for
nursing assistants for indigenous people who come from many different places. This
school was founded by a Catholic missionary priest from Italy who has been there
for 40 years. It is sponsored by donations from Italy and teachers are usually

47 All this information was collected based on the conversations of health workers who work
in Gutiérrez. They workers shared they reality that they see every day and the numbers are based on
case that they have on the clinic or the nuclei of health. Therefore, these health indicators are not
exact because of the lack of systematic studies on this matter in this region. But they reflect well the
reality of Gutiérrez.
volunteers from nursing schools in big cities or from other countries. The students are natives who are chosen by their communities to study nursing and to go back to work for their people. It is a system that works well because it fits into the worldview of these ethnic groups far from big urban centers; a worldview from the perspective of the community’s needs and not from individual choices.

This experience in Bolivia provided me with valuable material from my dialogue with locals. This material is their voices result of an effort to engage and to share life with Bolivians in their struggle for better living conditions and health. It was an exercise of listening and learning from them. From this experience arises the moral obligation to make their voices enter into the debate for justice in health care and global health. Their voices, as well as other voices from below I heard in Brazil, are the inspiration for this dissertation that, I hope, is transmitting the wisdom of the poor and their hope.

The next chapter will present the narratives of the poor from Bolivia. I now conclude this one by saying that being among the poor made even clearer how structural violence is at the basis of inequalities and injustices in health, and how it damages the life of those who are vulnerable, that is, the poor. This structural violence has domestic and international faces as well as social, economic and political hands that touch the lives of those who are poor and who struggle every day to continue to live. The lack of drinking-water in the Guarany village is a clear example of these faces and the hands of structural violence. These people who live and suffer in this village are not numbers, they are human beings with faces, names, and voices. We must see their faces, know their names, and hear their voices as well as those of
the immense population of marginalized people like them in the world. Being with
the poor is to see that they are not *nobodies*. They are people as the bleeding woman
in the gospel who has identity, dignity, courage, faith, and hope. But to see them, it is
necessary to be like Jesus and acting with *sensitive courage* to recognize the
crucified face of the other, victims of accidental *malheur*, but with something to offer
us. As Jesus praised this woman for her huge faith, I end with words of gratitude for
these beautiful Bolivian people whom I met. Thank you for welcoming me. Thank
you for talking to me and giving me the opportunity to learn from you. We are
together in this fight for justice in health.
Chapter 8

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE BEYOND NUMBERS: LEARNING FROM THE HERMENEUTICAL LENS OF THE POOR

Perhaps the one who is reading this dissertation, especially Part II, is not happy with the simplicity of its language and passionate character. An academic reader is perhaps thinking that this dissertation fails in its academic formality, objectivity, and neutrality. But a curious reader, who is certainly not influenced by narrow standards of a common genre for this kind of writing, is freely reading these lines hoping to see and to learn something different, new. Freedom from standards and moorings that tell people that something must be done in a specific way and cannot be different, and even freedom from prejudice of any matter, is what opens us to see the different and learn from it. This freedom requires an act of sensitive courage to move us beyond the common sense, usually imposed by a group who holds power, and realizing the beauty and wisdom that can rise from the different. In classical theistic philosophy, we learn that God is ‘The Being’ because it is simple; the complex divides and makes the simple lose its grandiosity. The poor – maybe because their lives are so humble as a consequence of their own socio-economic conditions that lead them to value immensely the little they have – show how life is simple and we do not need much to live with dignity. Once a person asked me: Why do I need too much food if I can’t eat all of it and the rest will be wasted? The modern capitalist culture tells us we have to buy more and more, no matter how much we have and need. Consumerism comes first. This improves the economy. Sensitive
courage is to be free from this mentality to learn a new way to relate to the world, its resources and inhabitants.

I learned two words in Guarany: ikavi and iporäa. Ikavi means something that is good at the beginning, and then we do not enjoy anymore and eventually becomes disagreeable. Iporäa means something that is a little agreeable in the sense it is good, but it is not enough to satisfy. It will be good when it is completed by something else. A Guarany person told me that ikavi and iporäa must be together. They will balance one’s life who will know he/she cannot have too much of only what it is good, but also what is not so good. This will provide a harmony in the nature and in the community. I did not understand well what this meant, so the person gave me an example:

A little girl ate for the first time corn and she loved it. She only wanted to eat corn, but she couldn’t find enough corn in her tribe. When she grew up, she went to live in the city. She worked and bought only corn to eat. After a while, she couldn’t eat corn anymore and, then, she said: “I hate corn, I need to eat something else.” One day, she went back to her tribe. There, her mother, knowing she loves corn, was waiting for her with a nice meal of corn, but with something else. When she saw that, she thought: “corn again?” Because she didn’t want to offend her mother, she ate and she loved it again. It was a different corn than the one she ate in the city. It was a corn with iporäa. This corn completed another thing and this thing made the corn tasty. This corn had together all difficulty that was to get it, difficulty that that girl had forgotten when she was in the city. Corn is good, but with no harmony it is not enough. Its taste has a limit by itself. All things that the mother earth gives us are connected and we need ikavi and iporäa to see it.

Ikavi and Iporäa show the simplicity of existence, that is, at the same time, the grandiosity of finding harmony between good and what completes the good by telling us the necessary limit to retain the good as an enjoyable thing. This person
also said: iporāa is also important, for a person does not have all goods. Others want this good, too. Ikavi and iporāa are meant to harmonize the community.

The modern mentality of consumerism, nourished by a capitalism of exploration without limits, is the opposite of these Guarany words’ teaching. The story of the Guarany person teaches the importance of knowing the limit of a set of things (that some are good and others are not too good, as the difficulty for the tribe to have corn). Different things/goods complete each other in a way that creates harmony when their limits are recognized. Suffering (as essential malheur) is the natural reality of the human condition that shows the limits of our own existence, an existence in which its destiny is death. In the midst of this limitation, the challenge is to find the harmony that recognizes the limits of things and the limit of one’s ability to enjoy something in order to live well (vivir bien) with the community and the nature.

The poor teach this to us because they are free from the mainstream mentality that says: we have to consume limitlessly. Guaranies teach, for example, that my good is the good of the community and the earth. Pope Francis recognizes this as a wisdom we have to learn from indigenous communities in order to establish a caring relationship with the earth and the other.¹ They teach us with their own language, simple and free, without studies, but marked by the daily experience of being a human seeking for living well and struggling against the violence that holds them from the necessary resources to live in harmony with the community and the nature.

¹ LS, no. 179.
Moreover, the poor are not innocent and totally passive receivers of the dominant Western culture of individualist consumerism. They are vulnerable to this culture, especially when socio-economic conditions make poor people migrate from their land to big urban centers, as the woman in the previous story did. We have to admit, Western culture and the comfort that it can provide are very attractive. And it is not an evil by itself. It becomes an evil when the achievements of our age are enjoyed without *iporäa*. When they are *ikavi* only for a few people who keep their comfort, the harmony is broken. Consequently, this generates unlimited exploitation of the earth and its resources, exploitation of those who are vulnerable and poor, and marginalization and oppression of different cultures. This is visible in the current socio-ecological crisis that, according to Pope Francis, is a moral issue in which the poor are the first and the most vulnerable to suffer from the lack of harmony and caring.²

The poor are aware about the breaking of this harmony. They know that their suffering is because of lack of social caring and opportunities. They know this is social exploitation and not the fate of an unblessed life. They resist this violence as much as they can, and are creative in their struggle to survive. They do not have consciousness of all the socio-economic mechanisms of exploitation. They never thought that there is such thing as institutionalized violence. But they know that something is wrong. Told in stories, their experiences present their suffering. Listening to their stories and contemplating their faces, it is possible to see the suffering body of the victims of this breaking of harmony. At the same time, their

² LS, nos. 48-49.
stories and those of their ancestors create in them a wisdom that makes them still to believe that tomorrow could be better. These stories, whether they are tales or experiences, are narratives that nourish creativity, solidarity, and co-responsibility. They are free stories, used and interpreted by people and communities in interaction with their context in a process of re-creating the world. It is a dynamic process of creating new meanings responsible for shaping knowledge with historical power. In Christian communities, the biblical narratives are approached in the same way. All this creative process of re-creating the meanings of reality is the development of the hermeneutic of the poor in the middle of praxis of resistance and liberation. This hermeneutic is not systematic knowledge, which academics favor. It is unsystematic because it is free from formalities and rules (what the academy is not) and seeks to respond to their real challenges of daily life. (These challenges are no doubts between choosing to consume A or B, rather what should we do to have food, to find a job, to raise children, to care for the sick and, to be brief, to keep alive and to believe things can be better tomorrow.)

Little things, that seem to be very simple for many academics, are very precious for the world because they are what keep the unfortunates walking in history for liberation. The language is simple because they, the poor, are simple, but the simplicity is the grandiosity of what is real, where the poor and their historical power are. It is not neutral because it is an option for the poor and their social, economic, and cultural experiences. But it is not ideological nor sectarian once the process comes from a direct connection with the poor and their common culture, ethos, and beliefs. From the bottom arises the study of the comprehension of reality
and the movement of transformation, not from ideological socio-economic analysis. In addition, it is not closed in on itself. The knowledge of the poor and its historical praxis are *ikavi* that must be completed by *iporäa*. This forms a dialogue with other actors and sectors of society, including intellectuals, church leaders, activists, and politicians. Therefore, in this process of re-creating world harmony, sensitive courage is joining the poor in a dialectical process of learning to write the new pages of history.

### 8.1 Learning from the Victims and Health Inequalities: Knowledge from Below

*No perdemos la esperanza. De esperanza vivimos.* A lady said this at the end of an interview after she described her experience using some healthcare service in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia. Literally, she said: *We don’t lose hope. Of hope we live.* Hope is a virtue that has a strong power among those who are poor and marginalized. It is usually connected to a utopia and fed by something transcendental. In the midst of the poor, this is clear. Utopia is very simple and concrete. It originates from the lack of something that the poor think is essential for their lives, such as health care. In other words, utopia is to have food when there is hunger; it is to have medical care when one falls sick. The poor struggle every day to achieve some utopia and they believe they can get it until the day of their death. The transcendent is what nourishes this conviction and strengthens the poor to fight for their lives. This is the transcendental knowledge that Simone Weil stresses as the supernatural reality to guide the natural one. The transcendent can be manifested in different forms and ways experienced by people. However, according to Weil, an
authentic experience of the transcendental knowledge will be the one that roots a people. Thus the transcendent is an experience of rootedness.³

Hope is not a passive virtue, but rather it makes people move towards their needs. Being with the poor in Bolivia, I was able to see the role of hope in their lives and historical praxis. But, as I just said, hope has a transcendental nourishment. In the case of the people I met, this food comes from their experience of faith, specifically a Catholic faith (I was in a Catholic community). Nevertheless, this Catholic faith is not lived in the way that many people, especially from the Northern hemisphere, think being a Catholic means. It is an inculturated faith connected to the ancestral traditions of this people, their roots. Even though the Spanish colonization and the process of implantation of the Catholic faith in the molds of European style tried to take the Bolivian pueblos away from their beliefs, and in addition, many conflicts that still exist with some leaders of the Church hierarchy, their ancestral traditions are still present in the way they live the Christian faith today. These traditions are their roots, and being connected to them is the transcendental experience towards the rootedness. It is the food to grow hope and strength to seek the utopia. It is a syncretic faith that reveals Jesus in the midst of hope and utopia with the local face.

Catholic theologians and the Church hierarchy call this way of being connected to God popular pity or popular religiosity. For many years, Catholic leaders from the North have had a tendency to see popular pity as something inferior, naïve, from what they have to liberate Latin American people from it. Jon

³ See Chapter 2, 2.2 in which I discuss this Weil’s idea.
Sobrino is one who testifies to this when he went to El Salvador as a Spanish Catholic missionary; then he realized that who needed liberation was himself. After Vatican II, the Latin America Church has had a positive approach to this way of expressing faith. CELAM’s documents prove this. The most recent one says:

The religion of the Latin American people is an expression of the Catholic faith. It is a popular Catholicism, deeply inculturated, that has the most valuable dimension of Latin American Culture... We cannot depreciate the popular spirituality or consider it as something secondary in Christian life, because it would be to forget the primacy of the Spirit’s action and the free initiative of God’s love. The popular piety has and expresses an intense meaning of transcendence, a spontaneous capacity of supporting itself in God and a true experience of theological love.

Pope Francis confirms the Latin American Bishops’ statement in an apostolic exhortation saying we also have to learn from this experience: “Genuine forms of popular religiosity are incarnate, since they are born of the incarnation of Christian faith in popular culture.”

In the speech of all the people I interviewed in Santa Cruz and many others that I spoke to, I can see clearly their hope and connection to faith and practices of resistance to suffering. Brazilian people has a saying: *We never give up.* I did not hear this from Bolivians, but it is a saying that can be applied to them. Hope, fed by this

---


5 Aparecida, nos. 258; 263.

6 EV, no. 90. He has repeated this in many of his discourses and homilies, for example, see his homily in Chiapas, South of Mexico in February 15, 2016, available online at: http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/events/event.dir.html/content/vaticanevents/en/2016/2/15/messicochiapas.html (accessed February 19, 2016).
rooted transcendental experience, is what makes them believe things can be better and acting. Action originating from this rootedness is liberation ethics.

In Santa Cruz de La Sierra, I interviewed twenty people. These conversations were an exercise of listening to their experiences. In their voices, reporting some experiences when they needed healthcare assistance and presenting their hopes for a better system, I could contemplate a suffering printed in their faces. At the same time, I could see, with them, the crucified Jesus, with an indigenous Bolivian face. I now present some voices of these interviews and conclusions of my analysis. (These conclusions are not a close diagnosis of Bolivian voices about their healthcare system and suffering, but rather they are voices that show the suffering of victims of a global structural violence affecting individuals in their daily life. Moreover, they are voices that reveal the fragility of the human condition experienced by marginalization and oppression. This makes them experts in the human condition showing us our contingent, finite nature.)

On the one hand, listening to these people confirmed that they have something to teach us about faith and theology, about ethics and historical praxis, and about social justice. On the other hand, listening to them shows that they have limits and need help in their work for building a better society. Fragility, lack of organization, lack of structural imagination to shape a new society, lack of technical knowledge, conflicts, discouragement, acceptance, corruption are also present among them. Although they do things in many creative ways to achieve the goods they need and to resist oppression, they have difficulties seeing how their historical power can lead them to social justice as a community of fellows. The knowledge of
the poor and their historical power of liberation cannot be romanticized. They must be empowered, that is, they need to have partners, compañeros who can help them to fill what is lacking. The preferential option for the poor is to lead those who are not socially poor but have other knowledges and skills to join the unfortunates in a dialogical process of learning. This will empower the poor and create a dialectical process of social transformation. Therefore, the poor will be agents of liberation and we will be with them as a community of mutual learning in a dialectical historical praxis.

These twenty interviews also show the face of a crucified people. Recognizing them is essential for empowerment of the poor in order for their participation in the just health care debate. They cannot be excluded from the decision-making process in health. They know what works and what doesn’t; they know what they need and the pain of unfair and inefficient systems; they know what it means to have less dignity because of they lack money for paying for health care as a commodity. Their voices and pain show what health care means when it is treated as a commodity. Their suffering and cry is a discourse on the human condition, the basis to make health care a right for all humans. It is a knowledge from below. It is not enough by itself, but it is necessary. Engaging the poor is a new paradigm for decision-making towards social justice and health equality. It is a new democratic paradigm.

From these twenty interviews, I used eighteen. Two were discarded because they did not fit into the criteria established for selecting the interviewees, that is, being a low-income person without health insurance. These were semi-structured interviews, that means: they were not a set of questions that all interviewees have to
answer. I had some previous questions, but I was not attached to them. So interviews were actually free conversations about people’s experiences when they need healthcare assistance. I had an initial question: *What do you think about the Bolivian health system?* Subsequent questions were asked based on what the interviewee was sharing. Sometimes I reshaped the pre-elaborated questions; other times I created new ones. But four common points guided all interviews: their opinion about the healthcare system, sharing a personal experience, solidarity with community and family, and participation and social action to improve the system.

### 8.2 Santa Cruz de la Sierra’s Voices

*Actually health care in Bolivia is not good. It is not good. Who doesn’t have money dies, [he] dies because there is no attention for the most suffering one, the most afflicted [one]. (Lourdes).* Without exception, all interviewees began their speech saying that the Bolivian healthcare system is deficient and bad. Many of them, as Lourdes, even emphasized that it is particularly bad for the poor. Maria said: *It is very bad for the poor like me. We have to ‘madrugár’ (it means going to a public clinic at 2 a.m. and waiting in a line till 7 a.m. to get a number to be attended by a doctor. There are very limited numbers and only the first-to-arrive can get them. This is the reason why people have to arrive earlier and earlier).* She adds: *They do not provide

---

7 I will use some fictitious names because I want to emphasize that these people have names and faces. Respecting their names and looking at their faces was a way to treat them with all dignity that they deserve. This is the process of recognition and compassion of “the other” who suffer. However, because of ethical reasons in order to protect their identity and following the directives of Marquette University’s Institutional Review Board, I cannot disclose their real names. Therefore, using fictitious Bolivian first names was a way I found to show they have names and faces. And we need to recognize this.
medications. Maria is referencing the public system which has a few health professionals (who are paid by the government) in small health clinics (known as Postas de Salud, small health centers for primary care). These professionals examine their patients, but there are no medications for them. So a doctor, for example, cannot do much, unless the patient buys her own medication. The most ironic dilemma is that close to many of these public clinics and hospitals private stores sell medications. Sometimes they are inside clinics and are inside all public hospitals. The experience of Madalena illustrates this. She told me how she discovered she had diabetes:

_I was feeling very bad, in a way I couldn't walk. Then I passed out. My neighbor came to my home, saw I was out and took me to the hospital. Doctors helped me as much as they could. Then they told me that I passed out because my diabetes was so high and that I needed insulin. They told me 'we gave insulin to you now, but you have to pay for that and if you don’t buy more, you can’t apply anymore in you.' I didn’t have money that time and my neighbor paid for me. Then my family came and bought more._

I asked her how she controls her diabetes. She answered: _When I feel bad, like my diabetes is high, I go to the Posta de Salud and a nurse does a test. If my diabetes is high, I go to the drugstore and buy an injection of insulin._

I asked: Do you have money for this? She said: _Honestly, I don’t, but I have no choice. My children help me when they can._

Madalena is a 60 years old woman, who also has bone issues that obligate her to have a treatment of traumatology and physiotherapy. She also shared:

_I am using the service of traumatology and physiotherapy. But for that, I have to go at 2 or 3 a.m. to get a number. Can you image a person of third age has to stay all night long waiting until 6 a.m. to get a number? And after, I still have to wait in another line to be attended by a doctor. Sometimes I need an exam, but I have to pay for that and private is very expensive._
We can feel the suffering in Madalena’s words. What she needs is not very expensive or high tech medicine. She only needs primary care and she cannot afford it. Her suffering is a result of structural violence that does not see her, does not recognize her dignity, fragility, and need. Rather it is an institutionalized mechanism shaped by the commodification of health towards profit and not people. This mechanism even takes advantage of people’s suffering and misery. The poor will do whatever is possible to buy medication; otherwise they will die. (Unfortunately, death is the end road for many other stories like Madalena’s.) In theological terms, this is a social sin because it is the negation of the intrinsic dignity of the human person. Once again Jesus is being crucified. This mechanism has created a globalization of indifference to keep the status quo of a few people. Criticizing the false promises of the free market, Pope Francis is one who denounces this injustice and inhumane exploitation responsible to make “human beings consumer goods to be used and then discarded.” In a strong statement against market use of human beings and for the dignity of the poor, he says:

In this context, some people continue to defend trickle-down theories which assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world. This opinion, which has never been confirmed by the facts, expresses a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralized workings of the prevailing economic system. Meanwhile, the excluded are still waiting. To sustain a lifestyle which excludes others, or to sustain enthusiasm for that selfish ideal, a globalization of indifference has developed. Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people’s pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else’s responsibility and not our own. The culture of prosperity deadens us; we are

---

8 EG, no. 53.
thrilled if the market offers us something new to purchase. In the meantime, all those lives stunted for lack of opportunity seem a mere spectacle; they fail to move us.\footnote{EG, no. 54.}

Pope Francis is one voice of the Catholic social teaching who takes the side of people like Madalena and many others I met in Bolivia. Madalena is a face that represents many crucified people around the world who are victims of exploitation through institutionalized mechanisms; the free market is its guideline. Globalization of indifference is present in the experience of those I heard in Santa Cruz de la Sierra. They feel this indifference in their skin when they go to a health institution. This indifference has even affected healthcare professionals. It was a common complaint from the interviewees that health professionals do not serve them with minimal compassion and attention. Some interviewees especially highlighted that those poor people who come from far way (\textit{campesinos pobres}) to seek a treatment are very badly received by professionals. Raimunda said: \textit{Doctors do not give much attention, especially if you are poor and come from the countryside. As they don't provide exams and medication, we have to buy or go to the particular [a private clinic]. When you pay, the doctor treats you well.} This testimony shows how the dignity of a person is connected to his/her ability to buy goods, in this case, an essential good, health care.

In the eighteen selected interviews, seventeen affirmed that healthcare professionals have no compassion with their patients. Only one person said differently. Joaquina said:
As I go to the oncologist, often I see many people who have come from rural areas and they're all alone without anyone to help them, and the medical personnel and nurses are sympathetic to them, and I’ve seen that in some cases they’re able to get them the medicine they need, or they treat them with care and compassion, which is very important. Perhaps even more important than medicine is that loving and compassionate care, which helps the patient to respond well to their treatment.

However, at some point in her interview, she also recognized that people have concerns going to the public hospitals or clinics because of lack of confidence in health professionals. In addition, it was unanimous that when people pay for healthcare assistance, they will receive more attention. See what Josefina told me:

Here in Bolivia, when a person feels sick there is a tendency to hide it and to stay at home. They don’t want to go to the hospital. They prefer to die at home than to go to the hospital and die there. There is much distrust in the treatment in the hospital. There is fear to know the disease because the treatment is very expensive and [they] don’t want to spend [money]. There are people who lost even their casita [little house] to pay for the treatment. They have to sell everything they have, even the house.

There is no sensitivity when the market dominates health care and makes this essential good a commodity. There is no human dignity; there is no recognition of the other who suffers. Those who have no money have no face, no dignity, and, as Galeano says, they are “the nobodies, who are not worth the bullet that kills them.”

This generates a human indifference that gains globalized dimensions by denying the fragility of human life revealed without masks in the face of the poor. The commodification of health care does not see people, only sees numbers and profit.

---

An interesting fact is that my interviewees were not angry because of the lack of sensitivity from many healthcare professionals. Some repeated the same idea: “They are mad because they have not been well paid. The system should pay them better once they invest so much to get this education.” They are right. Health professionals do not make enough money working for the public system and the poor are sensitive to this situation. This leads professionals to do private services, even inside public institutions, contributing for the corruption of the system.

There is a great deal of solidarity among the poor. All of the interviewees highlighted the solidarity among neighbors, family members, and in communities to help those in need because they fell sick. Continuing my talk with Josefina, who told me people lose their houses to pay for treatments, I asked her, when there is nothing, no money at all, what do they do? She answered:

*The community helps. In the neighborhood, there are people who organize a ‘quermese solidaria’ [an event of solidarity], as we call here, to help with the cost that he has [cost of medical treatment]. But we can’t pay for everything. Well, people have solidarity, raise money, but it is not enough in many cases because [medical] materials are very expensive. The treatment that one has to do is very expensive and our community can’t raise enough money. Bolivian people is very hospitable, we are united. The unique problem is that many people can’t help because they don’t have money.*

They do not have money because they are poor as well. It is the poor help the poor when one individual in the community urgently needs more than others. *Quermese solidaria* is a communitarian lunch or dinner in which everybody donates food. Then they gather in one’s house where they make meals and sell them. Everybody from the local community, including those who are involving preparing meals, will buy the food. In addition, they announce on the radio and in churches
when the *quermese* will be and its reason, inviting people from the whole city to come and help. I attended one *quermese* and it was a great experience of community, joy, and solidarity. It is a joyful moment that breaks the toughness of their lives and gives hope, especially for the one who is sick and his/her family. It is a moment of *kaiρός* in which the transcendent touches the natural reality of a community that creatively acts in history making solidarity real, in its social dimension. Another aspect of *quermeses* is the religious in an atmosphere of thanksgiving. It is a moment of celebration which the priest is also contributing as a brother. People pray, eat and make an effort to be together to celebrate a concrete act of solidarity that will have a social impact.

Yet about a *quermese*, Lourdes told:

*I am part of the Legión de Maria, a group that gathers to help the needy when they arrive in our parish. When someone comes because he is sick or has a sick person in his family who needs help, we prepare a quermese. We organize everything. We make food and make the quermese happen. This people of Santa Cruz has solidarity. But we do what is possible and sometimes we can’t raise enough to pay for all treatment and medication because sometimes it is very expensive.*

Solidarity is very strong among the poor. All interviews and my experiences with Bolivians proved this. I saw people take food from their mouths to give someone hungrier. A couple wanted to give me their bed to sleep because they were worried about me having to sleep in a hammock. They said that for who never has slept in a hammock before, it is very hard to do it. (They did not know I have slept in hammocks several times in some communities in Brazil, where I had the same experience of solidarity.) Catholic social teaching affirms that solidarity is a social
principle with power to transform social realities into better places.\textsuperscript{11} It is a principle that must be present in the decision-making process and lead actions toward justice. In times of globalization, when we see the spread of a globalization of indifference, it is necessary the globalization of solidarity with its power of creativity and transforming lives. The Document of Aparecida affirms:

Therefore, in the presence of this form of globalization, we feel a strong calling to promote a different globalization that is marked by solidarity, by justice and by the respect of human rights, making Latin America and the Caribbean not only the Continent of hope, but also the Continent of love... This should lead us to contemplate the faces of those who suffer... A globalization without solidarity affects negatively the poorer sectors. It does not refer simply to a phenomenon of exploitation and oppression, but something new: social exclusion. Therefore, belonging to a society, where [the poor] live, is affected in the roots, because [the poor] are not at the bottom, in the periphery or with no power, but rather they are out. The excluded are not only the “exploited,” but the “superfluous” and the “discarded.”\textsuperscript{12}

In a context where the poor are the exploited, the superfluous and the discarded, creativity arising from solidarity creates a space where the poor find their dignity and show their historical power of resistance. \textit{Quermese} is an example of an experience of rootedness in a movement of historical irruption against social exclusion that denies even the human condition. Actions such as Bolivian \textit{quermeses} are a sign that solidarity is actually a social principle with the social and historical power of rescuing human dignity and changing lives. This is a teaching to the world that comes from below. At the same time, it shows the fragility of the human

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{11} SRS, no. 39.
\item \textsuperscript{12} Aparecida, nos. 64; 65.
\end{itemize}
condition and the grandiosity of human solidarity, two essential elements for the
defense and promotion of human rights.

The irruption of the poor is a historical power embodied in many different
ways of organization and action of resisting structural violence. The poor do it, but
they are not aware that their actions also have a revolutionary power. All power
belongs to the people, but they have difficulties seeing this force in broad social
dimensions. This also was noticed in the interviews.

All interviewees shared experiences when they needed healthcare assistance.
Based on their own experience, they presented deficient aspects of the healthcare
system. They basically talked about the same problems, such as lack of medications
and medical materials, precarious structures, limited medical services, lack of
enough staff (especially nurses and doctors), slow and heavy bureaucracy,
inefficient emergency care, and inadequate federal funding for health care in the
country. My interviewees stressed that the maternity and child care are provided by
the government without extra-cost, but they highlighted that these services lack
quality and could be expanded to children over five years old. They also appreciated
the Postas de Salud because they are closer to them. Postas de Salud are small clinics
for primary care. They correspond to the local culture because they are formed from
the concept of vivir bien, which seeks to integrate the community into the routine
and the decisions of these small clinics. Each Posta serves a limited population of a
barrio (a neighborhood of about ten thousand people). However, Pastas de Salud
offer a very limited number of health services. They lack health professionals.
Consequently, they cannot serve all the people who arrive. This is one of the reasons
why people must begin a line about 2 a.m. to get a number that will allow them to see a doctor. For example, a doctor works a five-hour shift in a *Posta de Salud*. During this time, he sees about twenty patients. At 7 a.m., the staff begins to distribute numbers; only the first twenty comers are able to see the doctor. The concept of *Posta de Salud* is good, especially because it is a concept of community-based care. But there are structural barriers that prevent *Postas de Salud* from working as they should. Therefore, the poor are those who suffer because of social vulnerability. The lack of efficiency of the *Postas de Salud* as well as of the entire public health system create a gap that is partially filled by private health services. But these exploit the poor or simply leave them without any assistance.

The poor are aware of the problems. On the one hand, the interviews show that there is a historical force that makes the poor Bolivians act to resist exploitation and find ways to solve problems. On the other hand, there is a passivity regarding developing a social activism to press for improvement in the public system. When I asked the interviewees if they could do something about sociopolitical transformation able to improve their lives and the healthcare system, all of them said yes. Then I asked: Do you do something? They answered things they do in their ecclesial community to help the needy: very specific and local actions, such as *quermeses*. I challenged them whether they could go beyond that. They said yes. Then I asked: How? Five could not say anything. Twelve said: through protests,

---

13 Chapter 11 will present a method of community-based approach of delivering health care and popular education.
groups that agitate for better social conditions (like social movements), and social ministry by the Church.

During my time in Santa Cruz, a Camillian priest was promoting a national campaign requesting raising the Federal budget for health expenditure from 4.5% to 10%. He had a project about using this money to expand and improve public healthcare assistance throughout the entire country. This priest was organizing street protests in all major cities of Bolivia. Once at a Mass, I heard him to complain that the Cambas (people from Santa Cruz) did not attend one protest, which had occurred days before. Only a few people joined him and his team. In his words: “This event was a failure. How can we improve the health of our people if we don’t do anything, if we don’t have courage to go to the streets and show our voice?” I asked my interviewees what they thought about this campaign, known as 10% para la Salud. All affirmed that it was important and must be supported. But among them (18 people), only three had been involved in this campaign. I encouraged them to engage in such future protest, and all agreed with its legitimacy as a way of social transformation. I also challenged them to think of ways that their community could develop social actions to improve not only their personal lives, but the living conditions of all Bolivians. When I raised this challenge, I heard elements of why they need to be empowered. Luis said:

*Our people have solidarity, and want to do a lot. We want a better life. But we don’t know what we can do. I do little things to help my neighbor. I go to a quermese and I help the church. But I don’t know how I can do more. It is true I could help Fr. Mateo [the leader of the campaign]. He is very good. I think we need someone to organize us and tell us what we can do and how we can do it like Fr. Mateo. We need to know more, and whether we can do something, and not fear the government.*
A clear gap exist between their creative historical power to address issues that affect them which require an urgent solution, and how to use this power to address social structures responsible for their lack of opportunities and vulnerability. Culturally, I noticed the people of Santa Cruz (and also in Gutiérrez) live for the day, in a sense that tomorrow does not need to be planned. Empowerment of these people must include creating a belief that they are responsible to build their future. Consequently, they can organize themselves acting in history to create the society they need to flourish with dignity. This could be our (partners bringing other skills) role among them in a dialectical process of mutual learning and community-based activism.

It seems that the Catholic Church (and certainly other religious communities) has the resources to fill this gap. Purita told me she felt that it is a lack of leadership and organization. She believed that the Church could fill this gap because this had already occurred in some places. Purita explained that living conditions in her neighborhood improved because of actions by people led by a priest. She said:

*In 1983, Fr. Luis gathered our community to explain that people were suffering and getting sick because our streets were not paved and had no basic sanitation. He told us we needed to press the public administration to fix our streets and to create sanitation. He organized meetings, talked about this problem during masses and invited everybody to join him. The entire church [local Catholic community] got involved and we got what we wanted. The result of this action is we are better now. We are a Catholic people, a people of faith. We believe the church can help us to do something.*

The Catholic community is a space of social organization. It has the force, a pneumatological premise, to shape communities. The Holy Spirit gathers the People
of God in a community of faith, love, solidarity, and hope. At the same time, She sustains this community and guides it in liturgical, communitarian, and social actions. The Holy Spirit also creates leaders who will serve the community using their skills and mission among the people as a group of equals. Purita’s words present this experience of the Spirit in responding to the issues of her community. Therefore, the Catholic community becomes a space from which the community celebrates faith and the joy of being together. In addition, it is a space of learning, dialogue, discernment, planning and the starting point from which social action begins.

In Purita’s experience, the leadership came from a priest. However, anyone can be called to be a leader. Local leaders, lay people from the community are urgent and necessary. Hence, the Catholic community is also a space to discover local leaders, educate them, support and trust in their work as communitarian leaders. This local leadership animates and strengthens all members of the community in its social activism for a better life because it is a leadership close to people, embodied by individuals who share the same experience that creates a local knowledge.

8.3 The Village of Gutiérrez: The Guarany Mind

_Tekove Katu_ means “healthy life” in Guarany. This was the phrase chosen as the name for the School of Public Health of Chaco, a school to educate nursing assistants held in Gutiérrez, a small town in the middle of a Guarany territory. This school was founded by a Catholic missionary priest from Italy in the 1970s. When
Fr. Tarcisio arrived in this land, he found a widespread epidemic of tuberculosis. He began to work with the Guaranies to address infectious diseases that were killing many people. He provided vaccines and helped them treat their water. Little by little, he was learning the ñandereko guaraní (mode of being Guarany) through an experience of encounter and sharing. The idea of creating a school able to incorporate this mode of being and to prepare local women and men to walk around caring for the sick arose from this encounter. Thus, the School of Public Health of Chaco Tekove Katu was born.

The goal of this school is educating indigenous people, mainly Guaranies, in public health and primary care focusing on nursing care. It is funded by donations (mostly from Europe) and staffed by volunteer teachers who come from different part of Bolivia and other countries. This school is shaped by a community-based approach with the participation of the local community in its decision-making process. The community decides who will attend the school, not by eliminating candidates who want to study, but through choosing members of the community who will attend school. Those who are chosen have a mission to go back to their original place to serve their people. Ñandereko guaraní is a worldview in which the community comes first and there is no priority of individual desires. For those of us formed by a mentality of the individual being of Greek origin, it is hard to think of this. There no such thing like “I am,” “I want to be,” but rather “the community where I am,” “what the community is, I represent what the community is and make it to be,” “What is my mission to make the community to be what it is.” It is very complicated for us to understand, especially because our modern languages cannot
escape from the “to be” verb in our attempt to express the nature of a people.

Talking to an elderly person, who speaks limited Spanish, I asked him something that I had heard years ago about the language of the native people in Brazil (which also had Guarany pueblos). I heard from a professor that these languages did not have the “to be” verb before their encounter with Europeans. I asked if this was true. The elder answered he did not know if the ancient Guarany did not have the “to be” verb, but he said that they almost do not use this verb when they are speaking in Guarany. He said: *We don’t say like you do, I am, I go, I, I for everything we have to say.*

It seems that the individual being dissolves in his/her living to fulfill the nature of his/her community. Moreover, the community is not only people. It also includes the earth, understood as a female person who provides life and everything that forms their cultural and religious imagination, and needs to be cared for.

The community is a harmony. It has been suffering because of the influence of Western culture that has brought conflicts, especially among young people. One conflict, for example, is alcoholism that has affected many people, especially young Guaranies and has become a public health issue. At the Tekove Katu school, a volunteer, a young lady from Uruguay, told me a story about a student who had a problem with alcohol. He was drinking too much, missing classes, involved in fights, and getting sick very often. This volunteer unsuccessfully tried to help him, but he disappeared. She was frustrated and went to talk to Fr. Tascisio who told her:

*Here we have to learn ñandereko guaraní. When one person is sick, it is not a person sick, but the entire community is sick. The Community will address this issue in its own way and time. Perhaps we will not be satisfied with their way and it could be too late for us, but not for them. Sometimes, the only thing we can do is to be with them.*
Then this young lady said:

*In Tekove, we learn that – to improve health conditions of people, to achieve a healthy life – the first step is to be. Sharing with the other, being in his mode of being and viewpoint, and handling the world, in his everyday living, in his smiles and in his tears. Being with the other in a way that his disease is ours, in a way that his misery is ours; his sorrows, his accomplishments, his works, his learnings...*

Another volunteer from Italy testified that the school works in the Guarany mind. She said that all volunteers, when they arrive, think that everything is wrong, disorganized and precarious. So they have to pass through a process of realizing the mode in which the Guaranies see the world and their relationship with everything in it. The Uruguayan lady added: *Not everybody gets it. It requires time and there are always conflicts. Sometimes the only way to realize the Guarany mind is to be with them.*

Being with the poor is the first step to begin a movement towards justice and better living conditions. Being is a process of humility, sometimes very difficult, but it is a process of learning. It is also a process of dialogue in which people learn from one another. This requires time. Being with the poor cannot be a day experience isolated from the rest of life. It must be a way to see the world and address its problems, a life style of a humble existence, always sensitive to the cry of the poor and open to learning from them. Learning from them does not usually happen in one meeting, but it happens in an encounter that occurs in the midst of being with them, as a community of mutual learning and historical praxis.
My time with the Guarnies was very short. This is a reason I do not want to extend this section. Certainly, I did not have enough time to realize the Guarany mind. But I could not just refuse to say anything from my experience there and what I learned from the community-way of addressing things to seek and maintain harmony: *ikavi* and *iporāa*. There I learned that healthy life is lived in harmony with the community and nature. And I saw how the exploitation of market fundamentalism has affected this harmony, made people and the community sick, and killed lives.

Pope Francis resonates this breaking of harmony: "Today... we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor." 14 I saw this cry explicitly in the faces of Guarany people and in their lands. "The cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" is an expression that Leonardo Boff, in a book with the same title, 15 has used as a motto in his advocacy for the earth and the poor. Boff stresses that the poor are the first and the most affected by the unlimited exploration of the earth grounded on a mechanistic paradigm of infinite progress. Using Pascal’s notions of *spirit of geometry* and *spirit of finesse*, Boff says that the modern capitalist world is led by a spirit of geometry. This spirit sees the earth as a source to be explored by human force and reason. With the advent of industrialization, free market, and the victory of capitalism, the spirit of geometry became a machine of destruction, exploitation,

---

14 LS, no. 49.
15 Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997).
and injustice. This has made the earth a private property of those who hold this machine. As a result, the earth is crying in a passion of suffering, the source of life that is dying. Together with the earth are the poor who are also crying as victims of this machine and are excluded from accessing the goods of the earth.

The cry of the earth and the cry of the poor is a motto for a different approach to the earth and its resources. It is a cry for ecological and social justice. Boff argues we need the spirit of finesse over the spirit of geometry. The spirit of finesse rises from contemplating the harmonic beauty of creation. It is a spirit of tenderness, caring, humility, and community. It is a wisdom that comes from the heart. Augustine called it *intelligence of the heart*.\(^\text{16}\) According to Boff, a new paradigm of progress must be based on the spirit of finesse, a tender and humble spirit that recognizes the wonder of the earth as our common mother who provides every resource we need to flourish and, at the same time, her limits as a fragile mother who deserves our care. The native peoples of Latin America express this relation with the earth in a maternal way by saying *Pachamama*, the great mom earth.

Pope Francis defends an “integral ecology” in which he invites us to assume values of “great sense of responsibility, a strong sense of community, a readiness to protect others, a spirit of creativity and a deep love for the land.” And he adds: “These values are deeply rooted in indigenous peoples.”\(^\text{17}\) These peoples, humble and poor, the first victims of environmental devastation, have essential values to


\(^{17}\) LS, no. 179.
teach the whole humanity, especially those who build their power and status in a spirit of geometry of unlimited exploration of the earth and inhumane exploitation of the poor. The spirit of geometry has the market forces as its main instrument of exploration and exploitation. This instrument is killing our great mom earth and her little children, the poor. Pope Francis clearly affirms: “The environment is one of those goods that cannot be adequately safeguarded or promoted by market forces.”18 Just as Boff calls for a new paradigm, Francis joins his call by invoking an ecological and community conversion. “This conversion calls for a number of attitudes which together foster a spirit of generous care, full of tenderness.”19

_Spirit of finesse, spirit of generous care, full of tenderness_ is a perspective that recognizes the beauty of creation in which we, humans, are living in the same common house, the earth. This spirit seems to be far away from market forces that are grounded on a fundamentalist paradigm of unlimited exploration and exploitation of the earth. This is a market fundamentalism that causes the earth and the poor to cry in their agony of death. Theologically speaking, this cry is once again the powers of the world dismissing and crucifying the truth of caring and justice to maintain the status quo. The cry is the identification with Jesus’ suffering on the cross, visible in the face of the poor, victims of market fundamentalism.

In the Guarany village, I saw the faces of those who suffer from this fundamentalism and the impact of its exploitation in their lives and health. There is no _tekove katu_ (healthy life) in the environment – the mother-earth who generously

---

18 LS, no. 190.
19 LS, no. 220.
provides everything we need to flourish – has not been cared for. This is part of the social determinants of health essential for tekove katu, or population health. (This will be the subject of the next chapter.)

Theology is also an act of faith in which we connect ourselves to a transcendent reality. Liberation ethics begins with our thanking God for being with us and, especially with the poor in their historical journey. Christian Theology is gratuity for the loving act of God’s Incarnation to choose the reality of the poor to reveal Himself in history with a human face. Therefore, I conclude this chapter with a prayer of thanksgiving and hope.

Querido Papá, I praise you with the words of your son, “I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to little children.” Thank you for being among the poor, recognizing their faces, and knowing their names. You make them not to be nobodies, But beloved children. You give them the gift of love of the earth, care for the Mother-Earth and feeling for the other. You send your Spirit to gather them in a community where they find their roots and dignity. Thanks for teaching me that being with the other is more than only being.
It is sharing, suffering, joy, companionship.

It is recognition, compassion, faith, and hope.

When the harmony is broken,

May your Spirit lead the historical movement

of caring and liberation.
Chapter 9

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE AND SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH: THE VULNERABILITY OF THE POOR

In this chapter, I will show that the poor do not only suffer because of the lack of healthcare assistance, but they are also more vulnerable to falling sick and this vulnerability is a consequence of their social conditions. The lack of resources and the deterioration of living conditions have a significant negative impact on the life of the poor. Now I will present the vulnerability of the poor in Latin America, focusing on Brazil, a country that I know quite well because I have served for years among the poor. I begin with a dramatic story that I witnessed in the Northeast of Brazil.

I was serving in a favela (slum) that is a contradiction in itself. This favela, known as Pirambú, is in one of the most beautiful cities of Brazil, Fortaleza, located on the Atlantic coast. This city has great beaches of warm waters that attract tourists from around the world. But together with this beauty there is the contrast of poverty and many other social concerns. One problem, easily noticed, is prostitution of young girls on the beaches during the evenings. Pirambú is one of the poorest areas of Fortaleza and reflects this contradiction. It is an immensely poor neighborhood that is, on the one hand, marked by the ugliness of lack of resources and poor living conditions and, on the other hand, has the beauty of a blue ocean. The majority of girls who are prostitutes on the main beaches of the city come from Pirambú. These girls average 16 years old. In this favela, I joined the work of a Camillian priest and a brother who are a physician and a nurse. They, together with
a group of nuns, serving in this area, focus on girls who are, in their language, in a “situation of risk.” The priest, a gynecologist, explained that there is a high social vulnerability because of the lack of education, jobs, and appropriate living conditions. There is also a high rate of violence, sexual abuse, and drug addiction. Women are those who are most vulnerable. Many of them end up in prostitution. Young girls are at constant risk of sexual harassment, using drugs, and becoming a prostitute. Walking through Pirambú’s streets, I could see its poor social conditions. There was no adequate basic sanitation. As little streams, sewers, watched by mosquitos, run in the streets toward the ocean. Fragile little houses are spread throughout the area. Many houses have only one tiny room where an entire family lives in precarious conditions of hygiene.

In this favela, I had an opportunity to listen to many people and to learn from their stories, especially from the prostitutes. I remembered the story of Maria who told me that she was a *puta velha* (old prostitute) and men did not want her any more. Actually, in her early 30s, she was not old. But according to her, she was not as attractive to tourists. Maria looked older than her 30 years, and I met her, dirty and very weak, on a bench of a square. I sat with her and we talked for a half hour while the priest-physician was examining some women, mostly young prostitutes, in an improvised “open office” by a tent in this square. He would usually come here once a week. Maria told me that she had never wanted to be a prostitute, but one day she began to sleep with men and to make money. She said: *I was fourteen and every man wanted me.* I asked her how she began. She answered that she was living in poverty; her mother did not have a good job. Her father was in prison and she did not like
school because she felt she had to work to help her family. She dropped out of
school to find a job, but this did not work. She met other girls who were prostitutes
on the beach and invited her to join them. She said: *Then, I was there.* To end her
story, she shared that she made some money, but she lost it. She had been beaten
many times by men, gotten sick on several occasions, become pregnant, and had an
abortion. When I met her, she was living on streets.

Stories like Maria’s¹ are common among those who were served by the
priest-physician and the brother-nurse in Pirambú. They, together with a group of
nuns, created a house where women like Maria were welcome. In this house, led by
the nuns who also lived there, girls in risky situations received a bed (in a dorm with
other girls), clothing, and food. These religious with the local community created a
center of professional education, where the girls received an education to prepare
them to find a job. They were trained to be housekeepers in hotels, cooks,
seamstresses, craftswoman and other positions that could help them find a job in
the local market. Those who were in the sisters’ house were encouraged to attend
this professional center and they stayed with the nuns until they were able to find a
job and could rent a place to live. This system works well and is supported by the
generosity of people from the local community and other resources originating from
partnerships with private and public institutions. But it is small and doesn’t have the
capacity to serve all girls who arrive there.

¹Prostitutes also have difficulties accessing to healthcare services because of prejudice,
gender inequalities, stereotypes, and inappropriate services to meet their needs. See: Wilza Vieira
Villela and Simone Monteiro, “Gênero, Estigma e Saúde: Reflexões A Partir da Prostituição, do Aborto
Listening to the girls in this house, I met Estela, a 16-year-old pregnant girl. She was not a prostitute, but had come to the sisters’ house fleeing from her parents’ home where she was a victim of sexual abuse by her stepfather. Her story was so dramatic and she only confided in me after we became close friends. Estela never knew her father. When she was ten years old, her mother began living with another man. They lived in a tiny, two-room house. When she was about twelve, her stepfather began to sexually abuse her. Fearful and ashamed, she did not tell anybody. One day, her mother discovered her situation and fought with the stepfather. When he threatened to leave them, the mother did nothing. After a while they were at peace again. However, Estela continued to be sexually abused and her mother did not say anything. She accepted Estela’s abuse because she needed this man to sustain her and her daughter’s lives. One day, Estela got sick, with bleeding and vomiting. Her stepfather refused to take her to the hospital. This caused Estela to run to the nuns’ house. She told the nuns her story. Fearing some aggressive reaction from her stepfather, the nuns called the police and denounced him. He was arrested. While she was living with the sisters, Estela discovered she was pregnant.

The stories of Maria and Estela show how living conditions in the midst of poverty and the lack of education and opportunities determine people’s future.2

---

2 There is also an issue of gender inequality and the vulnerability of women. Gender inequality is social determinant of health that affects the entire world, but its effects are especially strong in low-income countries. There is not a way to improve population health without addressing gender inequality and the social vulnerability of women. I recommend the extensive study about gender inequality developed by The Lancet Commission on Women and Health. It concludes: “That gender-transformative policies are needed to enable women to integrate their social, biological, and occupational roles and functions to their full capacity, and that healthy, valued, enabled, and empowered women will make substantial contributions to sustainable development.” See: Ana Langer et al., “Women and Health: The Key for Sustainable Development,” *The Lancet* 386, no. 9999
This situation is a consequence of social injustice and inequalities that put people in situations of risk, make them vulnerable to diseases, and prevent them from flourishing. Social vulnerability damages population health having poverty as its beginning and more poverty, with violence and death, as its end. It is a vicious cycle of evil, a social sin.

There is an intrinsic connection between social conditions of life and population health. Exhaustive and specific studies are not necessary to prove that social conditions where people live are crucial to determine their health, especially if we accept that health is not only the “absence of disease or infirmity,” as the World Health Organization (WHO) affirms in its Constitution. However, an increasing number of studies prove that social conditions have significant impact on population health. Precarious conditions and lack of social opportunities make people vulnerable to diseases and are the main causes of health inequalities. Social determinants of health (SDH) are the expression which refer to this connection between social conditions and health. SDH can lead populations to a better health status, but in a context of poverty and social injustice, they have an opposite result.

Affirming that health is not only the absence of disease, but also a “state of complete physical, mental and social well-being,” and that social conditions determine population health leads us to change the way to understand actions to promote health and health care. Health and healthcare must be thought of as inside

---


4 Ibid.
a social conjuncture. Considering the human condition of fragility and the liberating approach, the poor have the right to participate in the process of health promotion because they are the first and the most likely to suffer the impact of precarious SDH. Here is an entire shift of perspective that will affect political, economic, and social decisions. When we observe reality, such as in Pirambú favela, it is not enough to cause transformation if it is seen from afar. It is necessary to present concrete demonstrations of the SDH attached to the face of those who are suffering. Thus a dialogue can be established in order to raise actions toward changing injustice and health inequalities.

The poor and vulnerable groups are harmed the most by social inequalities and have their health harmed. We heard this in the voices of the poor in the previous chapter as well as in the voices of Maria and Estela. Now I will examine some studies that confirm their experiences. I will do this in a way that brings these studies into dialogue with the poor towards the same goal of liberation. Laurie A. Wermuth says:

Poverty is harmful to health in two ways. First, basic human needs for food, shelter, and drinkable water are insufficiently met. And, second, poverty alongside of affluence contributes to a lack of trust and cohesiveness within a social group. This social inequality and lack of social trust create poorer health than would otherwise be expected in populations.\(^5\)

Poverty prevents people from accessing the primary goods that all need to develop their lives. The poor are more vulnerable to diseases, and without good

---

health and living in risky areas, they do not meet necessary conditions to flourish in minimal dignity. Good health is a condition of development and social opportunities. In other words, poverty causes bad health that makes vulnerable people even poorer, and thus produces a lower health status. This is a structural cycle of violence and injustice against those who never have the opportunity to change their lives.

If health also implies well-being, healthcare actions cannot address diseases only. Health programs should also include actions that promote and protect population health and improve living conditions. Therefore, the health sector must work with other social sectors to reduce health inequalities and include the participation of those who are more affected by these inequalities. SDH is a complex reality that requires a deep social analysis and collaborative actions in a dialogue that begins from below. Social injustices provoke health inequities. Collaborative actions are required to respond to that reality and promote global health.

Health inequities exist throughout the world, but there are countries or regions that suffer more than others. This chapter will focus only on one region characterized by such inequality. In Latin America, social inequality is still the greatest problem, even as it has begun to experience economic growth. Economic development has not generated corresponding social and human development. Among Latin American countries, I will focus on Brazil for three reasons: first, Brazil is the largest Latin American country with a universal public health care system

---

numbering about 170,000 dependents; second, this country has invested in primary care and health equity; and third, despite the economic growth between 2000 and 2014, there is significant social inequity with a negative impact on population health that has worsened with the current economic crisis. This has affected basic areas, such as education, public health, and job security.7

First of all, I will present a social panorama of Latin America, then move toward understanding SDH in Brazil. I will affirm that equity is a central concept to address SDH, and equity must lead to political and economic decision-making to promote participation, social justice, and population health. However, equity has risks of which we need to be aware. Thus, dialogue with other areas can be important to improve its decisions. Finally, I will bring the preferential option for the poor and its contribution to the debate concerning SDH and equity. The goal is to better understand the connection between the social situation and the Brazilian people’s health status, especially vulnerable people, from the perspective of the poor. Moreover, with a liberation ethics, I will examine the concept of equity in a new democratic paradigm from below in dialogue with the principle of the preferential option for the poor from Catholic social teaching.

---
7 Liana Maria da Frota Carleial, “Política Econômica, Mercado de Trabalho e Democracia: O Segundo Governo Dilma Roussef,” *Estudos Avançados* 29, no. 85 (Sept. 2015): 201-214. Carleial examines the Brazilian polític-economic scene since 2003, focusing on the current economic crisis that began in 2014 and its impact on areas such as education, health, industry, and welfare programs.
9.1 Social Panorama of Latin America

Inequality is perhaps the word that best characterizes the Latin American scene from a socio-economic point of view. In general numbers, despite economic crises in countries such as Brazil, Venezuela and Argentina, this continent has seen economic growth. But that growth is very irregular and has not significantly impacted social life toward decreasing the distance between rich and poor. Income concentration still provokes social inequalities and lack of opportunities for most poor people.

Contradiction is perhaps another word that can be applied to the socio-economic reality in Latin America. Most evident is the contradiction between the production of wealth and the lack of primary needs-fulfillment for millions of people. In 2011, the GDP grew 4.3% in Latin America, and international economic crises did not affect this region. But the number of people living in misery or poverty is still high. With improvement from 2002 to 2011, the poverty rate decreased from 43.9% to 29.6%. However, according to CEPAL (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean), the income concentration still provokes social inequalities and lack of opportunities for most poor people.

---


10 Pan American Health Organization, Health Situation in the Americas: Basic Health Indicators 2015.
America), the economic growth has decelerated to below 3%. Thus the poverty index has remained about the same (28% in 2014), showing a stagnation also visible in the misery index of 12% in 2014.\textsuperscript{11} This is the equivalent of 167 million living in poverty and 71 million living in extreme poverty.\textsuperscript{12} Comparing rates since 1990, it appears that Latin America has improved its war against poverty, but stagnation has occurred since 2011. This stagnation began when social expenditures decreased.\textsuperscript{13} The situation is still shocking. On the one hand, decreasing poverty occurred because of the raising of income in some sectors of labor and the transfer of public expenditures to more vulnerable sectors through welfare programs of socio-economic inclusion. On the other hand, there are many social groups that did not have the opportunity to change their situations and were not able to raise their income, such as women with low socioeconomic resources and informal workers.\textsuperscript{14} “Poverty, indigence, and vulnerability are strongly marked by determinants of gender, race, and ethnicity, as well as by determined moments of lifecycle, such as childhood, youth, and old age.”\textsuperscript{15}

This situation of inequality and contradiction has an impact on population health and well-being. CEPAL points out that the number of people per family and socio-economic level determine the possibility of well-being. Families with fewer


\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 12.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 46.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 29-30.

\textsuperscript{15} Comisión Económica Para a América Latina y Caribe, \textit{Panorama Económico y Social de la Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribeños} 2015, 36.
dependents live in better conditions than larger families. Women with fewer children have greater access to labor opportunities. Education is another factor that affects well-being, fertility, job, and income. The rate of maternity amid teenagers is extremely high among women with less literacy and income. Socio-economic inequality and limited access to education are huge obstacles to the improvement of maternal health. These SDH statistics are a challenge to Latin Americans moving forward to achieve a sustainable development that addresses social inequalities. Consequently, these conditions have an impact on the infant mortality rate, currently 15.5 per 1000 live births, increasing to 18.9 for under five-year-olds. In the U.S. these rates are 6.0 and 7.0 respectively. Most infant deaths occur among low-income families and women with low literacy. Universal access to maternal health, job opportunity with the possibility of increasing income, and education are essential to the improvement of population health.

The increasing unemployment of young people in Latin America has provoked violence. Between 1999 and 2009, 64% of deaths among young and adult populations (10-49 years-old) was due to suicide, homicide, and accident. That means an average of the 319,000 deaths per year that directly affect the active population. The last data available shows the mortality rates because of land

\[16\] Ibid., 53.
\[17\] Pan American Health Organization, Health Situation in the Americas: Basic Health Indicators 2015.
\[18\] Ibid.
transport accidents and male homicides are respectively 17.3 and 41.4 deaths per 100,000 people. In Brazil, for example, land transport incidents also become a public healthcare issue due to the high demand for public healthcare services because of that kind of accident. The chief cause of car accidents is the lack of public expenditure on road structure and traffic education.\(^\text{20}\)

In Latin America, public expenditure in the social area has a positive impact upon poverty reduction. In 2012-2013, this continent spent 19.1% of GDP in public expenditure to address social areas, such as education, health, social security and shelter.\(^\text{21}\) This was greatly responsible for reducing poverty and inequalities. In addition, countries that spent public money for public health care focusing on primary care improved some indices of population health, such as life expectancy and infant and maternal mortality. In 2012-2013, the entire Latin America spent 4.2% of its GDP on health.\(^\text{22}\) Moreover, the life expectancy is 75.5 years old, infant mortality is 15.5 per 1000 live births, maternal mortality is 59.1 per 100,000 pregnancies.\(^\text{23}\) Countries with the most public health expenditures had the best results. For example, Cuba spent 9.6% of its GDP, as a result, the same rates are 79.6, 4.2, and 35.1. Bolivia, on the other hand, spent only 4.8% of its GDP on public health and its life expectancy is 67.3 years old.\(^\text{24}\) Haiti has the worst infant and maternal mortality.


\(^\text{21}\) CEPAL, Panorama Social de América Latina, 45.

\(^\text{22}\) Ibid., 47.

\(^\text{23}\) Pan American Health Organization, Health Situation in the Americas: Basic Health Indicators 2015.

\(^\text{24}\) Ibid.
mortality rates in Latin America and the Caribbean and spent only 0.7% of its GDP on public health.\textsuperscript{25}

A study conducted by CELAM (Bishop’s Conference of Latin America and the Caribbean) points out that poverty and social inequalities due to race, gender, age, class, and literacy are the causes of poor health in Latin America.\textsuperscript{26} In addition, this document states that Latin American countries have tried to implement a neoliberal economic model. This harms the social public expenditure for health, education, and social security.\textsuperscript{27} Therefore, this model has prevented people from accessing the primary goods needed for their flourishing. The bishops have proposed a new development model that focuses on human promotion instead of profit.\textsuperscript{28} CELAM’s document affirms that political decisions and social actions to promote population health must integrate diverse social sectors with an economic model from a communitarian perspective able to integrate the poor towards worthy, sustainable, just, and equitable human development.\textsuperscript{29}

\textit{Inequality} and \textit{contradiction} are the words that characterize Latin America. The beauty of Fortaleza and the lives of Maria and Estela provide an image and a face for this reality. Wermuth says: “Latin America has the highest social inequality

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid. The situation of Haiti is extremely complicated, with a huge lack of resources, especially economic, to use in social programs. Its almost entire health expenditure is from the private sector, especially from many NGOs which serve there. This expenditure totaled 8.7% in Haiti’s GDP.

\textsuperscript{26} Conferência Episcopal da América Latina e Caribe, Discípulos Missionários no Mundo da Saúde: Guia para a Pastoral da Saúde na América Latina e no Caribe (São Paulo: Centro Universitário São Camilo Press, 2010), no. 19.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., no. 15.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., no. 16; 35.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., no. 37.
in the world, which has a negative impact on population health.”\textsuperscript{30} Social inequalities harm population health and are an obstacle to the improvement of health, well-being and opportunity for integral human flourishing. In this region, contradictions worsen the situation of injustice and increase the vulnerability of the poor. Socioeconomic analysis of Latin America reveals that actions to address SDH and public expenditure in public health care focusing on primary care have a positive impact on population health. Furthermore, these actions require political and economic decisions for promoting human dignity and social development.

9.2 Social Determinants of Health in Brazil

The health context in Brazil is a complex reality that suffers from social injustices and inequalities. This country has a universal public healthcare system that is supported by the government through taxation with a participative style of management. SUS (the Portuguese acronym for Unified Health System) is the Brazilian public healthcare system that concretizes the Federal Constitution which affirms: “Health is the right of all and the duty of the state.”\textsuperscript{31} Despite this wide system of health coverage, Brazilian health is connected to the social reality, so SDH is a crucial issue to be considered in order to develop policies and actions able to address health inequalities. SUS cannot act in isolation to promote health and healthcare services. Rather it must be interconnected with other social sectors

\textsuperscript{30} Wermuth, \textit{Global Inequality and Human Needs}, 83.

toward a positive SDH. There is no promotion of population health without the
creation of high standards of living condition and social opportunities for those who
are at the bottom of society: vulnerable people who have to be empowered.

Before presenting a picture of social inequalities in Brazil and their
consequence for population health, it is important to understand what SDH means.
SDH has a broad conception since it is possible to put everything connected to
human life under the umbrella of social and a wide sense of health. Because human
beings are socio-political animals, with a need for health to enjoy their lives, and the
principle of human dignity is not universally accepted equally, SDH can be
understood in different ways. The way SDH is understood guides the identification
of what is determining whether people have high or low standards of health, where
social injustice and health inequities happen, and those who are the most
vulnerable.

The widespread conception of SDH is that living and working conditions of
individuals and social groups are related to their health status. WHO adopts a wider
definition. According to WHO’s Commission on Social Determinants of Health, these
determinants are:

The conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age, including
the health system. These circumstances are shaped by the distribution of
money, power and resources at global, national and local levels. The social
determinants of health are mostly responsible for health inequities – the
unfair and avoidable differences in health status seen within and between
countries.32

32 World Health Organization, Social Determinants of Health, available online at:
This definition shows in itself the complexity of SDH since it involves many elements of human life through individuals organized in society. Moreover, SDH reveals that actions to promote and protect population health must be in different areas, and not only in health care. This requires a new conception of health action that needs to be people-centered\textsuperscript{33} to address health, well-being, and the creation of social opportunities, going beyond a curative perspective of medical care centered on the sick.

Focusing on SDH has two initial implications. First, to address population health it is necessary to fight against social injustice and inequalities. The goal should be to empower the poor to have access to the primary goods and to live in social conditions that favor their flourishing. The health care sector cannot do that by itself. Actions in the public arena – at political, economic, and social levels – are necessary to empower the vulnerable and the poor to participate in the decision-making process and in the common good.

Second, it is the specific responsibility of the healthcare system. Focus and priority are key words. The focus needs to be on population health and not only care for the sick. This requires people to be at the center of health actions rather than to be reactive responders to diseases. The target is to have healthy people and not only sick people in good hospitals. Consequently, the healthcare priority will be primary care with actions involving health education and local participation through community-based organization – in interaction with health professionals and the

system – and popular participation in decision-making about healthcare actions at the national level. Hence, public health systems must be people-centered in order to expand social participation and to maximize equity and solidarity.\textsuperscript{34}

These two implications affect political and economic decisions since they must be led by the goal of achieving social justice and empowering the poor to participate in both decision-making and accessing the goods needed to flourish. Political decisions that involve health, such as resource allocation, research, and healthcare services, will be linked to population health and equity. In addition, political authorities must create spaces of popular/social participation. However, the civil society needs to feel responsible for promoting health equity and social justice; it cannot only wait for political decisions. If officials do not create these spaces of participation, people, especially the poor, must organize themselves in such a way that they press for social transformation. It means that people need to organize for actions toward participation in the decision-making process and measurement of public actions, showing their historical power. Intermediary organizations and institutions are important to mediate relationships between governments and people, especially the poor. And the governments need to create legitimate spaces of popular participation. Thus, equitable actions are crucial to empower the poor and make them able to participate.

Social transformation is necessary to change a reality of inequality, and not only a social reform, or, as WHO proposes, health reforms integrated with all social

\textsuperscript{34} World Health Organization, \textit{The World Health Report 2008: Primary Health Care}, 06.
sectors.\textsuperscript{35} Transformation must come from below, from the poor who live in situations of marginalization. The Brazilian people took an important step toward this transformation in the health field, but SDH – through social inequalities and new-liberal political decisions – prevents the health system from an ongoing process of transformation and liberation. SUS is a popular achievement, but it is not enough to promote justice and equality, especially because SUS is the first organization to suffer the contradiction of Latin America responsible for sustaining inequalities. The logic is the opposite. Social justice and equality strengthen the public health system and this combination promotes population health.

SUS was an accomplishment of the Brazilian people between the 1980s and 1990s, motivated by grassroots movements with significant participation of the Catholic Church. It is a social system of public health and its principles are \textit{universality, integrality} and \textit{equality}, economically supported by public financing through taxpayers. Executive bodies manage SUS without centralization, but rather through social participation in which the people force decisions by their participation Councils and Conferences of Health on three levels: local (or municipal), state and federal. They work hand in hand with the executive body: municipal and state secretaries of health and the national ministry of health. In summary, SUS is a social system with popular/social participation that promotes health through primary care and healthcare assistance for all. This accomplishment had the participation of many social movements, among them those who were

stimulated by the social pastorals of the Catholic Church, and were led by the sanitary reform movement that promoted the 8th National Health Conference (1986) for a universal public health system offered by the state as a right of all. The Brazilian Constitution is the fruit of a widespread mobilization for democracy in the 1980s against dictatorship led by social movements, including the one for sanitary reform. Known as the democratic constitution of 1988, it recognizes health as a people’s right and a duty of the state, “guaranteed by social and economic policies that reduce the risk of diseases and other adversities and by universal and equal access to actions and services.” This determined the basis for the creation of SUS. The implementation of SUS began in the early 1990s by the new healthcare policies. They established the organization and administration of SUS as a system for universal coverage and popular/social participation.

Popular activity, especially in grassroots movements, was fundamental to the creation of SUS and is still essential for the advancement of public healthcare services. There are, however, significant deficiencies and many problems that

36 Social Pastorals, or Pastorais Sociais in Portuguese, are the social ministry of the Catholic Church that acts in several areas, such as public healthcare, immigrations, agrarian reformation, gender inequality, human trafficking, child labor, political education and so forth. They are social ministry for advocating for the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized. And they are inspired by Catholic social teaching. See: Conferência dos Bispos do Brasil, A Missão da Pastoral Social (Brasília: Edições CNBB, 2008).


prevent SUS from full implementation and ongoing progress in its coverage and quality of service. Unfortunately, the current situation requires reinforcing popular participation and mobilization to face up to the deficiencies of SUS in order to promote population health. Without people confronting this challenge, SUS would never have been born. Now the challenge goes in the direction of empowering poor people to effectively participate in decision-making. For that, knowledge and responsibility are essential, together with a process of mutual learning in dialogue with the poor. (In Part III, Chapter 11, I will present concrete ways of acting to reinforce popular participation from grassroots activism that empowers the poor in a dialectic of mutual learning from below.)

In terms of organization, SUS does not need to change. It is a global model of people’s participation in decision-making in health. But SUS is not working because the social reality still needs transformation. Social injustice and inequalities affect population health negatively and prevent SUS from working as it was structured to service the population, according to its structural and functional principles. Therefore, the greatest challenge to health in Brazil is SDH, including governance, financing, management, accessibility, disparities, social injustice and health inequalities.

---

40 The doctrinal or structural principles of SUS are integrality, universality, and equity. These principles are applied through functional principles that are regionalization, hierarchy, decentralization, social control, councils, rationalization, and partnership with private sector. For understanding what each principle means, see: Ministério da Saúde, *Legislação Básica do SUS.*
The Brazilian National Commission on Social Determinants of Health affirms health inequalities in Brazil are “our most serious disease.” In addition, it illustrates this with an example. The mortality rate in under-five children is almost 2.5 times larger among women with three or less years of literacy than women with eight years of education. The child of a woman with less education has 23 times more probability to be illiterate than the child of a woman with 11 years of education or more.

Inequalities in health care are consequences of social inequalities. As with the Latin American reality, Brazil is a country that suffers much from inequalities and contradictions. The gap between rich and poor is enormous, and income concentration is still a problem, despite the economic growth in the last decade that allowed millions of people to leave extreme poverty. The option of the Brazilian government to prioritize economic growth according to neoliberal laws of the market has increased the gap between rich and poor, and created a middle class that suffers from government taxes and market variations. This gap has increased with the current economic crisis that Brazil has experienced since 2014. The Federal administration prioritized actions of social development through governmental welfare instead of a real empowerment of the poor. The main national welfare program is Bolsa Família. This program has contributed to raising many poor from poverty. However, it does not create conditions for these people to be independent

---


42 Ibid., 2.
and to have opportunities to improve their lives through jobs, education, and living in a healthy environment. These people do not have social autonomy. Instead they depend on government. With the economic crisis, the federal government cannot continue this program in the same way. Living conditions of the poor are still precarious and without full access to primary goods, such as education, adequate sanitation, jobs, and housing. In addition, the poor live in regions of more adverse geographical and climatic conditions, or in slums in large urban areas. These regions and urban areas have the highest rates of infant and maternal mortality, and the lowest life expectancy.\textsuperscript{43} They are areas that also suffer from low coverage of basic sanitation and scarce healthcare assistance.\textsuperscript{44} UNICEF stresses: “Children in rural areas are five times more likely to lack improved sanitation facilities, and 11 times more likely to lack an improved water source, than children living in urban areas.”\textsuperscript{45}

Inequalities affect social groups differently. For instance, the infant mortality rate among those of Afro-descendant is 37 percent higher than for the white population, and among indigenous people it is almost the double than that of whites.\textsuperscript{46} Afro-Brazilians and the indigenous are the population groups also having less years of literacy. This inequality is even higher among non-white women.\textsuperscript{47}

\begin{flushright}
\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 20-21.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 9.
\end{flushright}
According to the Brazilian National Commission on Social Determinants of Health, the poor are the most vulnerable because social inequalities and injustices affect them and harm their health since they live in precarious living conditions.\(^{48}\) Paulo Buss and Alberto Filho, two Brazilian experts in public health and commissioners of the Brazilian National Commission on Social Determinants of Health, affirm:

The main challenge of research on relations between social determinants and health is to establish a hierarchy of determinations amid social, economic, and political factors and mediations that can present how these factors affect health status of groups and individuals since a relation of determination is not an exact relation of cause-effect.\(^{49}\)

Addressing population health requires actions to reduce social inequality. It is necessary to know concretely which factors are beneficial and which are detrimental to health flourishing, and then to address these in a participatory way that involves those who are impacted by these factors. It is essential to know those who are the most vulnerable, their living and working conditions, and their social risks. In other words, the faces and names of people like Maria and Estela must be known. The knowledge from studies as the ones presented and the knowledge of the poor oriented from their experience of suffering that shows the face of the victims must engage in a dialectic of mutual learning. This will lead the decision-making process in order to determine political and socio-economic policies and actions.


Additionally, the public health system needs to work in an integrated and people-centered perspective able to maximize participation, services, equity, and solidarity.

### 9.3 Equity in the Social Context of Health Care

In the technical terms of public health care, *equity* is a key concept for guiding policies which address social injustice and health inequalities. “Equity can be understood as the effort of treating the unequal unequally according to their needs. This interpretation has diversified bases and defends the position that treatment given to people should be different when it is grounded on each person’s needs.” An unequal and unfair society requires special attention for those who are marginalized from equal access to the common good and are victims of injustice. In this scenario, equity is a concept that leads to adjusting policies to prioritize those who are at the bottom, those lacking social opportunities. This means empowering the poor to participate in the common good.

In this section, I will examine some proposals about the concept of equity in health care, especially in the reality marked by underdevelopment and health inequalities. I will dialogue with secular perspectives of equity, as a pragmatic concept to guide sociopolitical actions, and suggestions of primary health care strategies to address population health. I will do this in a dialogical way by presenting limitations of these perspectives if they do not integrate the voices of the poor in decision-making processes. At the end, I will return to the Brazilian public

---

healthcare system which was structured around the concept of equity and
popular/social participation. But it has failed because federal administrations
focused on neoliberal models of economic investment. Hence, this opens to the last
section of this chapter which will be the liberating contribution in this debate.

The concept of equity is controversial since it is close to equality. However,
they are different concepts. Equality is the end and equity is a means to achieve this
end. In addition, the end requires justice as a condition for an equal society, where
everybody has access to social goods and the opportunity to flourish freely. In a
context marked by injustice and inequalities, it is necessary to handle differences
among social groups differently. In other words, in a context of hunger, we must
provide food for those who are suffering hunger because they have nothing to eat.
Those who already have food do not need more food and excessive storage may
cause waste. It is the Guarany wisdom of ikavi and iporäa, presented in the previous
chapter. If one has more food than he actually needs, the harmony of the community
will be affected. Thus, he is invited to share that good to maintain harmony. Sharing
means contributing to justice. Equity is a socio-economic concept that guides
political decisions to empower those who are marginalized from accessing social
goods. They are most vulnerable – living in areas with more risky situations of
human rights abuses, diseases, and early death – as a result of social inequalities and
injustice supported by an institutionalized system of concentrating wealth in only a
few hands.

Equity is a pragmatic concept with social, economic, and political
implications. It guides us to look at areas where inequalities and injustices that
prevent people from participating in the common good are occurring. Based on equity, policy-makers are expected to create primary goods, such as education, food, and health care, making these available to those excluded from these goods.\textsuperscript{51} Equity is fundamental to promoting development. Amartya Sen affirms that development cannot be measured only by economic growth, but also must be measured by social development. According to him, development requires that all people are free to participate in the public good, so they can improve their lives.\textsuperscript{52} I now present some elements from Amartya Sen’s thoughts, and then explore equity as a pragmatic concept that can contribute in the process of empowerment of the poor to participate in the common good.

In the political and socio-economic arena, the greatest challenge in the world at this time is to reconcile economic growth and social development – both as essential elements of an authentic democracy. In other words, the focus on economic development is not sufficient to promote social justice and empower the poor, the marginalized, and vulnerable social groups. The challenge is to join freedom and equality in a democratic society in which all people have access to the

\textsuperscript{51} The definition of primary goods must be based on what a human person needs to flourish with dignity. An anthropological perspective that sees humans as fragile beings who need certain goods to develop according to their nature leads to the protection of an amount of goods toward their availability for all. These goods are primary goods; goods to be shared and not to be objects of a competitive race. Lisa S. Cahill affirms primary goods as basic goods known to all cultures. Cahill says: "First, just like every other creature, humans seek self-preservation by protecting their own lives. Second, like other animals, humans seek sexual intercourse, then nurture and educate their offspring. Finally, human beings, through their distinctively human intelligence, seek to know the truth about God and to live in society" Later, she adds: "Recognition of basic human goods is necessary for any program of social justice in a global era." Primary/basic goods will be those that will meet the natural needs of all human beings. In Cahill’s perspective, based on a Christian notion of participation in the common good and natural law, these goods are needed for people’s flourishing and living with dignity. See: Lisa S. Cahill, \textit{Global Justice, Christology, and Christian Ethics} (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 258-59.

common good and liberty to express themselves. (Democracy thus must include full participation in political and social goods.) On the one hand, capitalist logic has prioritized freedom and made the free market system sovereign. This logic has created much wealth, but has also created much injustice and many inequalities in social life and access to the common good.\textsuperscript{53} It is a logic of wealth concentration and exploitation of natural resources without limit that breaks the cosmological harmony. On the other hand, communist logic has prioritized equality and state control. Some communist experiences oppressed people through state force, lack of freedom and the enrichment of a small group of individuals who had state power. Consequences of the partiality of political and economic choices have impacted health and health care through the social determinants of health.\textsuperscript{54} Moreover, neoliberal models of development have harmed the public health and population health on both individual and collective levels.\textsuperscript{55}

Freedom and equality are goals that every society should have together to promote the dignity of the human being. Recent history has proven that prioritizing one to achieve the other does not work. At the current time, free market systems still have power and autonomy, but states also have significant and necessary

\textsuperscript{53} The gap between rich and poor has immensely increased, even in developed countries. Concentration and accumulation of wealth in the hands of few have been the logic of capitalist societies. This was an intense process that created more inequalities, especially in the last century. See: Thomas Piketty, \textit{Capital in the Twenty-First Century} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 2014), 20-22; 39-.71.


functions. A vicious relationship exists between markets and states in our contemporary globalized world. However, the free market has become hegemonic. At the same time, it shows its inability to empower the poor and to promote social justice. The political challenge is to create development with economic growth, justice, and social security. But this cannot occur without the participation of the poor. Although his perspective is limited, especially because he refers only to numbers and statistics without the voices of the poor, Amartya Sen, with authority of a Nobel Prize winner, attempts to promote freedom and equality in a way that the common good becomes accessible to all. He recognizes the importance of economic growth and the role of markets. But he also affirms the urgent necessity of focusing on the needs of the poor for human development and participation in the common good in a democratic society.

Sen stresses that freedom means capability to participate in the common good. For a country to grow in socio-economic equality, democracy is essential for development without oppression, and for democracy to occur, freedom is necessary. However, Sen does not understand freedom in the restrictive way that market systems do. He examines the benchmarks needed for fulfilling freedom. Thus real

---


58 Sen’s perspective is known as “Capability Approach” and was initially developed with his intellectual partner Martha Nussbaum. See: Martha Nussbaum, Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).
freedom is the capability to participate in the public good through a society that creates opportunities for all people to improve their life according to their values.

Amartya Sen’s thesis is: an authentic development promotes freedom and empowers people to be able to improve their lives with adequate social conditions. This conjecture of favorable social conditions shapes an authentic democratic society. In the book *Development as Freedom*, Sen relates individual freedom and the achievement of social development showing that individual freedom is not against social justice, but rather social justice and access to basic needs are essential for freedom. Hence, Sen distinguishes five types of freedoms: political freedom, economic facility, social opportunity, transparency guarantee, and protective security.\(^59\) He says freedom is intrinsically important for human beings. It is what constitutes a necessary instrument to promote human development. The five types of freedoms are instruments that create capabilities for people accessing social services and goods. Freedom is the end of development, but it is also the means by which development occurs. Thus, human freedom means that individuals are able to use resources to live well; but to improve their lives, people need to be able to access resources. So a society needs individuals with capabilities created and supported by political, social, and economic arrangements. Therefore, human freedom is both the ends and the primary means of development.\(^60\) According to Sen’s view, development is a process of substantive freedom integrated to political, social, and economic aspects of human beings organized in democratic societies.

---


\(^60\) Ibid., 53.
Equity is a way to empower the poor to be able (having capabilities) to participate in the public goods, such as health care. Enjoying good health and accessing health care are essential to living with dignity and to contributing to economic development. WHO argues that population health is crucial to economic growth\(^6\) and that healthcare actions and social decisions to improve health should promote “equity and people-centered care.”\(^6\) WHO’s Commission on Social Determinants of Health clearly argues that social inequalities affect health and a focus on equity is a way to struggle against health inequalities.\(^6\)

The focus on equity in health care corresponds to the imperative of justice\(^6\) and responds to the lack of democratic access to primary goods. Equitable acts are addressed to the poor to make them free to improve their lives. This becomes more efficient if the poor themselves participate in the decision-making process to elect equitable acts. Policies based on equity create capability for the poor to access the public good. Consequently, it promotes social development. It is a pragmatic concept that addresses social justice and empowers people. Following Sen’s arguments on living substantial freedom in a democratic society, equality “is providing all with the social bases of self-respect and a conviction that prospects in life are fair.”\(^6\)

WHO has two studies that address equity in health care. First, it is present in *The World Health Report 2008* about Primary Health Care. This report proposes

---


\(^6\) WHO World Health Organization, *Closing the Gap*, 8-10.

\(^6\) Daniels, Kennedy, and Kawachi, “Health and Inequality, or, Why Justice is Good for Our Health,” 23.

\(^6\) Ibid., 65.
healthcare reforms with primary health care at the heart of healthcare actions.

Primary health care focuses on people and health promotion. “The PHC [Primary Health Care] values to achieve health for all require health systems that: Put people at the center of health care.”\textsuperscript{66} Health/health care is a right that must be promoted by actions capable of “maximizing equity and solidarity while being guided by responsiveness to people’s needs.”\textsuperscript{67} This report calls for a change of paradigm in health care along two lines. The first is to go beyond the medical care paradigm which sees health from the perspective of diseases. Primary health care looks at reality and the conditions responsible for making people healthy or putting them under high vulnerability to become ill. The second is an inter-sectorial vision. Health issues are not a problem only for the healthcare sector. There is an interrelationship among many social sectors and actors. Social injustices and inequalities create health disparities. Thus, promoting population health involves decisions and actions in social, political and economic arenas. In addition, three values are essential to local and global health: equity, solidarity, and social justice. These values guide a framework to PHC reforms that, according to WHO, need four sets of reforms: \textit{universal coverage} reforms to improve health equity; \textit{service delivery} reforms to make health systems people-centered; \textit{leadership} reforms to make health authorities more reliable; and \textit{public policy} reforms to promote and protect the health of communities.\textsuperscript{68}

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 10. One limitation is that WHO’s perspective does not involve the participation of the poor in this proposal of health reforms. It is a theoretical approach based only on statistics that do
Primary health care is essential to promote people’s health, but it is not sufficient to respond to all challenges in the health area. Hence, working towards the promotion of social justice is extremely important to decrease social exclusion and disparities in health.

Second, the report on social determinants of health presents how social inequalities have affected health across the world.

The bulk of the global burden of disease and the major cause of health inequities, which are found in all countries, arise from the condition in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age. These conditions are referred to as social determinants of health, a term used as shorthand to encompass the social, economic, political, cultural, and environmental determinants of health.69

Equity is central to promote health through actions that involve all social and economic sectors. All social agents need to be aware that equity is important to guide policies toward social development because equity in health needs to be a “shared responsibility and requires the engagement of all sectors of government, of all segments of society, and of all members of the international community, in an all for equity and health for all global action.”70 Equity is a principle that requires wide collaboration and a sense of solidarity. All are responsible for the growth of primary

---

69 World Health Organization, Closing The Gap, 2.
goods to be distributed according to people’s needs (contributive and distributive justices toward social justice).

As a principle, equity orientates political and economic decisions affecting the distribution and access to common and primary goods. They cannot be subject to the rules of the liberal marketplace. According to Sen, first of all, people need to be able to participate in the public good with equal opportunities before they can play in the marketplace. For sharing opportunities, it is necessary to provide primary goods, such as education, health and availability of resources. Developing countries need a public policy of creating social opportunities and developed countries must contribute to it in a global spirit of collaboration.

Addressing population health requires support through equitable actions capable of creating social justice. This is a requirement of “extensive public health, medical, and social support services aimed at promoting normal functioning for all.” For improving population health and reducing health inequalities, healthcare reforms need to be inter-sectorial in such a way that primary goods become affordable for all. (But these reforms must be carried out in a way that takes health care out of the hands of the free market through a socio-economic transformation that supports health care as a human right.) Amartya Sen also affirms that health equity must be connected to social justice. Health is a space where justice must be a

---

71 For a general discussion on contributive and distributive justice in a context of poverty, see: David Hollenbach, The Common Good and Christian Ethics (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2002), especially Chapter 7: “Poverty, justice, and the good of the city.”

72 Sen, Development as Freedom, 143.

73 Daniels, Kennedy, and Kawachi, “Health and Inequality, or, Why Justice is Good for Our Health,” 79.

74 Ibid., 87.
value, or, in other words, justice theory needs to value equity in spaces where we
want equality. Equity cannot only guide decisions about health care distribution,
but health equity needs to be “integrated with the broader issues of social justice
and overall equity.” Therefore, improving population health requires broad
actions to address social justice and social determinants of health. For this, it is
necessary to begin from below, among the poor in a process of mutual learning that
will lead to their empowerment and our action with them, and not for them.

The Brazilian public healthcare system has equity as one of its principles and
primary health care as its main strategy to promote health. The creation of SUS
(Unified Health System) received direct influence from the Alma-Ata declaration
that invokes the responsibility of states to promote health for their people through
primary assistance and health equity. Equity is a doctrinal principle and primary
care is an operating principle in the Brazilian public system. However, this health
system has limited success in improving and expanding its healthcare actions
because of the social determinants of health – among them the priority of the last
federal administration to focus on economic growth through a liberal model,
increasing the gap between rich and poor and the lack of sustainable social
development –, the difficulty of integrated and coordinated actions between the
health sector and other social areas, corruption and deficient management, and the

76 Ibid., 31.
78 Mendes, “A Saúde Pública Brasileira no Contexto da Crise do Estado ou do Capitalismo?” 75-78.
lack of adequate financing. To address this reality, popular/social participation is fundamental to overcome the deficiencies preventing progress toward better living conditions and well-being.

### 9.4 Equity and the Preferential Option for the Poor

The preferential option for the poor contributes to the promotion of population health. It leads officers, public leaders and scholars to join those who suffer providing faces and voices for the numbers. Likewise, it offers a perspective that engages the poor in the process of the dialogical construction of health justice. Therefore, the preferential option for the poor fills the gap left by the analysis shown before by opening the door for learning from the poor and offering orientations to strengthen the equity concept.

Remaining in the Brazilian context because of its great achievement in building a universal public health system of popular/social participation and its social contradictions, the Unified System of Health (SUS) is the result of a popular achievement occurring during the 1980s. Christian Communities, especially Catholic social movements, gave a significant contribution to the consolidation of a universal public health care system in Brazil. The preferential option for the poor guided Christian leaders to join the poor, to organize small communities, and to act in the public sphere. The Catholic Church created the *Pastorais Sociais* that are social ministries of the ecclesial community for justice in the public arena, such as *Pastoral of Land Reformation, Pastoral of the Homeless, Pastoral of Faith and Politics, Pastoral of the Child, Pastoral of Health* and so forth. Developed in light of the Gospel, shaped
mostly by poor people gathered in basic ecclesial communities, these pastorals are
an act from below, from the poor and their partners. The poor are the main agents
in these pastorals, in which actions began from the small community and moved to
the public arena. The Pastoral of Health has been important in its role of advocacy
for universal public healthcare as a human right. The experience in Brazil stresses
the force of the preferential option for the poor to guide people’s activism and
policies. Thus, it has potential for developing global health with an active
participation of the poor toward population health in dialogue with the secular
society. Approaching the concept of equity with the option for the poor provides
both a fruitful dialogue between studies on global health, especially regarding the
impact of social determinants of health on people’s lives, and the hermeneutical lens
of the poor, that shows the face of suffering revealing the fragility of the human
condition. This human contingency is the anthropological foundation for health care
delivered as a human right. Hence, this approach creates guidelines for political and
socio-economic decisions for an integral human development with full participation
by the poor.

As a pragmatic concept, equity has an operational function to make primary
goods accessible for those excluded from these goods. However, there are two risks
in this pragmatism. The first is the risk of welfarism and dependency in which the
poor become a target of welfare actions, whether from state policy or philanthropic
activity, unable to promote independence, autonomy, and poor’s agency to flourish.
The second is the ignorance of the voices of those in need and the burden of their
living conditions by dismissing their suffering faces and participation. Hence, there
is also the risk of incorrect allocation of resources and manipulation of these resources according to the interests of those who hold power, opening ways for corruption. Oriented from below and with the agency of the poor, the preferential option for the poor can prevent these risks because it strengthens people's participation in the decision-making process and advocacy for the implementation of policies.

First of all, the preferential option for the poor challenges us to see reality from a new perspective, that is, from the hermeneutical lens of the poor. This shift of perspective has significant impact on our decision-making process once it establishes a dialogue with the poor and the ability to recognize their crucified faces and knowledge. Consequently, policies and social actions are not thought of in a top-down path, but they are thought of from below with active participation of the poor who become decision-making agents in a new democratic paradigm of dialectic mutual learning. This provides new insights to understand the reality in which the suffering of the poor is seen by being close to them, listening to their voices, and learning from their experiences. This perspective allows us to see the structures responsible for creating poverty and misery and the concrete consequences of these on human life. Therefore, structural violence becomes visible in the faces of people who remain poor due to social inequalities. Catholic social teaching affirms that

---

79 One may criticize this by saying that the perception of structural violence does not necessarily occur among all who are in close contact with the poor. Some can never move beyond a philanthropic action to engage the structural reason for the condition of the poor. This critique is true. In the introduction of Part II, I critique this kind of philanthropic actions, even without this explicit desire, which helps to keep the structure responsible for social violence. The shift of perspective promoted by the preferential option for the poor is the one that assumes the hermeneutical lens of the poor, contemplates their suffering faces, and establishes a process of mutual learning. Consequently, the poor will not be passive recipients of aid, but active agents of social transformation.
discerning the *signs of the times* is necessary to understand reality and to realize ways that must be taken for promoting social opportunities and better living conditions.\(^{80}\) From the perspective of the poor, the signs of the times indicate that structural violence, or, in theological language, *structures of sin*,\(^{81}\) are responsible for making people live without dignity since they do not have access to primary goods. With the poor, it is possible to understand what privation from goods concretely means, and that poverty exists not because there are not enough resources in the world for all. Rather there are structures promoting inequalities and injustice, in which the unfortunates do not have opportunities to pursue the common good, controlled by a few people who have economic power and are supported by structures of exploitation of the weak and natural resources. The hermeneutical lens of the poor highlights the fact that actions must not be limited to economic reforms that keep the same institutional mechanisms, but rather a structural change towards liberation, in a new world order of globalized solidarity and caring for the other and the common house.

Second, I presented a way of understanding the reality, its mechanisms of oppression, its structural violence, and what kinds of changes are needed at political, social, and economic levels. The second step is to identify who are the oppressed and what are their needs. The preferential option for the poor shows that the poor need dignity and not only food and humanitarian (philanthropic) healthcare assistance. They have names, families, traditions, histories, and want

\(^{80}\) GS, no. 04.

voices. If one asks a hungry person what hurts the most, he/she will probably
answer that it is the shame of living without dignity. Being seen as the least in
society, a superfluous number, a discarded object is more hurtful than a hungry
belly. Therefore, the option for the poor implies a commitment to promote human
dignity and autonomy. In other words, the poor want social conditions in which they
can live with dignity and flourish according to the values and the meaning of their
existence. Equity in health care means making it available as a primary good that
creates opportunity for people to be able to build their own lives. As Sen suggests,
health equity is not only healthcare distribution, but must also address people’s
capabilities. It requires rearranging the society so that people are able to access
good living conditions, education, jobs, healthcare, and the well-being to improve
their lives.

Third, the preferential option for the poor teaches us that the poor have
something to offer. They are not mere receptors of actions and decisions. (I
discussed this in the previous chapters.) The transformation of reality never comes
from above, but from below. For that, empowerment of the poor is essential to
liberate them from structural sin. This liberation can only happen if it comes from
the irruption of the poor and their historical power to liberate the entire world.
Liberation will never come from those who are at the top enjoying the status quo
provided by the current institutionalized mechanism of exploitation.82 The poor are
the agents of transformation through their irruption in history. Empowering them

---

82 In Chapter 3, 3.2, I discussed the perspective that liberation comes only from below, from
the oppressed. I examined this in the context of liberation theology presentation of the irruption of
the poor in dialogue with Paulo Freire. See: Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (New York:
Continuum, 2000), 44.
to participate in the decision-making process is the path for this shift. WHO affirms that solidarity is a core aspect in promoting global health. The first thing the poor teach is what solidarity means. Even in situations of extreme necessity, solidarity occurs. In my country, there is a saying to illustrate this. When a person is suffering a lot, he/she usually says: *My life is hard, but there is someone who has a life harder than mine, and I can help him.* This saying exemplifies the strong sense of hope and solidarity among the poor, a sense embodied in concrete gestures. Hope boosts the fight against injustice; and solidarity concretizes actions to change dramatic realities. Solidarity is a social value that goes beyond individual relationships among persons. Therefore, solidarity implies a new social order to make the common good affordable for all.  

CST stresses that both contributive and distributive justices are necessary for social justice. Furthermore, participation is a condition for social justice. The option for the poor emphasizes that the poor must participate in the process of transformation and make their contribution. There is no transformation without them. From a Catholic social perspective, justice includes active participation in the common good, in which everyone contributes according to his/her “own abilities and the needs of others;” therefore, equity in health means empowering the poor

---


84 Ibid., no. 167; QA, no. 58.


86 Ibid., nos. 182-184. For a general discussion on the need for the participation of the poor in the common good and in the debate on social justice from a Catholic social perspective, see: Cahill, *Theological Bioethics*, Chapter 2.
to participate in a society with proper living conditions of well-being and access to health care. As a result, with good health, the poor will become social agents and contribute to economic development.

Fourth, the preferential option for the poor reveals where the needs are and where we should go to join the unfortunates in their labor to liberate themselves from injustice. This option allows interaction among different levels of decisions and the possibility of wide participation. Hence, political and economic decisions for equitable actions should not come from a few individuals gathered in meeting around a table, but rather from the interaction with the poor in a mutual process of learning. Here those who are in the field of theological ethics/bioethics have strong potential to contribute by promoting participation of the poor in decision-making. But this bioethics must be a liberation ethics that meets the poor in their reality and transmits knowledge with a language understood by everyone. Therefore, theologians must function like a bridge between the complex political and academic environments and the reality of the poor with their voices. To the legitimate authorities, on the one side, this shows the poor and their needs, and on the other side, it democratizes knowledge to empower the poor to be able to participate in the decision-making process.

Finally, the preferential option for the poor invites us to an existential commitment to the life of the least ones of society, in an act of sensitive courage. Equity is a social responsibility as well as solidarity to work with fellow human persons towards their enjoyment of good health and well-being. Equity and the

87 GS, no. 30.
preferential option for the poor are social values with political and socio-economic implications that present humanity as a large community in which we are responsible for our neighbors and the planet. Unfortunately, it seems this is not possible without a process of recognition and compassion in an anthropology of suffering that reveals our human condition of fragile and contingent beings. This anthropology grounds the belief that all human beings have the right to live a full human experience of flourishing in a communitarian and cosmological harmony. Following this process of recognition and compassion, analysis of reality to comprehend the living and working conditions of the poor, collaborative actions, and dialogue involving different perspectives with the objective of empowering the poor and most vulnerable groups are essential to address population health in Brazil, Latin America, and in the entire world. In a context of social injustice and inequalities, understanding the reality from the hermeneutical lens of the poor, creating a dialectical process of mutual learning, and equitable actions are requirements to change the logic of exploitation and to transform social reality, in a cosmological process of re-creation of the world.
CONCLUSION PART II

*Estoy con ella, hacemos cosas juntas y ayudo no que se precisa. Estar con ella es estar evangelizando.* These are Celita's words about her relationship with an HIV-infected friend who got sick and needed help. Literally, this Bolivian woman said: *I am with her, we do things together and I help in what is needed. To be with her is to be evangelizing.* Solidarity is an action of faith that shows God’s compassionate face. It is a Samaritan face, the one presented by Jesus in a gesture of love through the simple act of being together. However, this is not simple. This is the grandiosity of human care resulting from a process of recognition of our contingent condition revealed in the fragility of the other who is suffering. It is a supernatural experience in which the transcendent reality guides one to care for the natural reality in its fragility. In Christian tradition, it is an encounter with Jesus in the midst of the human condition of vulnerability and suffering, an experience of grace that leads the faithful to serve the neighbor in pain. Being together is the starting point of evangelization in which Jesus shows his Samaritan face (Lk 10: 29-37) and his suffering face (Mt 25: 36) in the caring companionship between fragile humans. This is not simple. It is faith, hope, and love embodied in the liberating force of being together with those who are suffering.

Part II began with the presentation of a proposal of liberation ethics as an *inclusion from below* toward social justice. As with everything else, nothing starts *ex nihilo*, so liberation ethics rises from the extension of Catholic social tradition in a new movement, that is, a movement from below, from the irruption of the poor. This
inverts even the Catholic social tradition’s logic that is re-created by the experience of the poor, from where their hermeneutical lens guides their appropriation and interpretation of this tradition to respond to the challenges of a specific context. Liberation ethics is the voices and the faces of the poor revealing the human condition, providing knowledge, and boosting actions to recreate the world. In addition, liberation ethics is an inclusion from below in which we all are included in the world of the poor, by their generosity to welcome us, to establish a process of mutual learning. Part II ended with studies on health inequalities and their social determinants in dialogue with liberation ethics, especially with the benefits from the preferential option of the poor to the challenge of delivering health care and promoting population health. Between the beginning and the end, there is the heart of Part II, perhaps the heart of this project, the voices of the poor.

Liberation ethics is, first of all, the voices of the poor presented to the world. It is the irruption of the poor strengthening a new democratic paradigm of a dialectical process of mutual learning. The voices of the poor are cries out of suffering, not a mere complaint; they are a historical power that reveals the human condition and set the anthropological basis for the necessity of seeking socio-ecological harmony. The cry of the poor is a revolutionary lament with knowledge that cannot be dismissed. There is no authentic social transformation without the agency of the poor in which they include us among them to shape only one community.

With the conclusion of Part II, two foundations to sustain health care as a human right are set: an *anthropology of suffering* and *liberation ethics*. As I said in
the general introduction, these foundations are the basis of a house whose roof is the final argument for health care as a human right. Going beyond numbers of rates of poverty, health indicators, and socio-economic statistics is essential to see the faces and to hear the voices of those who are victims of institutionalized mechanisms responsible for creating these numbers. They reflect a reality that is true and dramatic, but they are unable by themselves to cause a movement of transformation. Although they are important and should not be dismissed, they are a top down approach with no capacity to sensitize leaders toward a structural transformation. Only the face of the poor can do this because it reveals our real human condition and the pain of victims of exploitation and injustice. The recognition of the face of the poor is also a process of sensitive courage of being with them, where their voices can be heard. Listening to the poor is the openness for the democratic paradigm of the dialectical mutual learning. The perspective of the poor and their historical force are integrated in an endeavor to recreate social and ecological relationships toward a communitarian work for social justice and a system of healthcare delivery able to respond to the needs of all humans.

Beyond a romanticized vision of the poor, Part II brought the voices of marginalized people from different cultures and countries to participate in the utopia of a society of communitarian and ecological care. That shows the voices and the faces of the poor. We realize their suffering, vulnerability, oppression, and limits. In addition, we learn from their history and stories, from their creativity, solidarity, faith, and hope. All these shape their knowledge and historical force to resist oppression, to survive in the midst of scarcity, and to recreate their world. There is
no revolution if this process does not come from below. However, the poor cannot
do it alone. They do not want this alone. They are open to include others who have
knowledge and skills that they do not; others who can work with the poor, educate
them and learn from them as well. The poor welcome others in an incredible way.
These others are challenged to accept that the poor have precious things to offer, as
presented so far. The process of dialectical mutual learning and communitarian
praxis from below are the liberation ethics to social justice and to sustain health
care as a human right.
Part III ANTHROPOLOGY OF SUFFERING AND LIBERATION ETHICS: BASES FOR HEALTH CARE AS A HUMAN RIGHT

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

(Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25)

Beginning our discussion of the rights of man, we see that every man has the right to life, to bodily integrity, and to the means which are suitable for the proper development of life; these are primarily food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical care, and finally the necessary social services. Therefore a human being also has the right to security in case of sickness, inability to work, widowhood, old age, unemployment, or in any other case in which he is deprived of the means of subsistence through no fault of his own.

(John XXIII, Encyclical Pacem in Terris, no. 11)

The notion of a preferential option for the poor challenges us by reframing the motto: the homeless poor are more deserving of good medical care than the rest of us. Whenever medicine seeks to reserve its finest services for the destitute sick, you can be sure that it is option-for-the-poor medicine.

(Paul Farmer, Pathologies of Power)

The human condition shows the contingency of all human individuals, fragile and finite beings. This undeniable truth, that becomes visible before suffering and death, reveals the imperfection and equality of our people on the earth. People’s wisdom affirms: many injustices exist in the world, but death is fair for everybody. As we discussed in Part I, the experience of suffering or, properly saying with Simone Weil’s concept, *malheur* reveals the contingency, fragility, and finitude of the human being. This is not only an argument, but rather the exposition of an existential
condition of an earthly being. The anthropology of suffering is grounded on a philosophy that explains this condition in dialogue with the western theological-philosophical tradition that, in several different ways, has developed systematized reflections attempting to answer the question, who is the human being? This tradition has shown that the human being is a rational political animal (a perspective originating in Classical Greek philosophy), and open to a transcendent experience (already presented in the Classical thinkers but strongly developed by Christian philosophers and theologians). Within this tradition and grounded on Simone Weil’s thought and liberation theology’s approach, I developed an anthropology of suffering/malheur that reveals to individuals their condition through suffering and opens them to an experience of transcendence in an encounter of the true light shining from the Cross. Consequently, this encounter leads to the recognition of the other who suffers. In one expression, the anthropology of suffering is a twofold experience of compassion: the transcendent compassion felt in the personal encounter between a suffering person and God’s grace as crucified love; and the compassion for the other fellow human who is suffering, that is, the recognition of his/her fragility that boosts an action of solidarity and companionship. Moreover, this experience of compassion and recognition raises the consciousness of those sufferings that are not a result of essential malheur, but accidental malheur. It touches the lives of those who are most vulnerable, the poor, through social mechanisms of violence and exploitation. Therefore, the preferential option for the poor is the concrete expression of this experience in a movement of compassion towards justice. This anthropology of
suffering is the elementary basis for defending any argument supporting health care
as a human right. Our common condition reveals our fragility and, at the same time,
our responsibility to care for one another.

Furthermore, once one sees that poverty, a consequence of structural
violence, is the main cause of diseases and premature death, then the struggle
against accidental _malheur_ in health care becomes an ethical imperative. Liberation
ethics arises from this imperative when the movement of recognition and
compassion leads us not only to see the other in suffering, but also to join those who
are the victims of structural violence, the poor. Hence, the preferential option for the
poor is the commitment to the unfortunates in their reality from where liberation
ethics is embodied by a historical praxis. This commitment is an act of sensitive
courage and humility to be with the poor by accepting inclusion from below.

In my account, the anthropology of suffering and liberation ethics are
intimately connected, and their hermeneutical locus is the reality of the poor. The
experience of social suffering makes the poor experts in the human condition and
this knowledge shapes a hermeneutical lens of seeing the world. Thus, the
anthropology of suffering and liberation ethics are the theoretical and practical
foundations for advocacy for health care as a human right; foundations able to
support a human rights framework in health care and to develop a dialectical
process of mutual learning. This is a new democratic paradigm in which the faces of
the poor are seen, their voices are listened to, and their knowledge is relevant for
social transformation and justice in health care.
Affirming health care as a human right is a common discourse among many human rights and public health activists. They do not always provide a solid argument grounding this social right. I do not think that all who advocate for health care as a human right and those, who are only seeing what seems obvious based on their needs and experiences, such as the poor, should have a highly developed argument to sustain this human rights perspective. They usually advocate for health care free from its commodification by the market founded on their passion and experiences. This is the process of compassion and recognition that I have explained systematically. Presenting this in an elaborated argument may be my mission, and of others who dedicate time to systematize a theory of justice in health care from a human rights approach. However, this mission is valuable only if it is in the company of the poor, in which their voices are listened to and the systematic argument or human rights framework originates from a dialectical process of mutual learning from below.

The discourse that health care is a human right also has a value in itself for two simple reasons. First, it reflects how easily people, regardless of culture, identify the importance of health and health care necessary for human flourishing. In addition, it shows that international consensus on human rights has a broad acceptance, although there are divergent ways these rights must be addressed or, in the case of health care, exactly what delivery of health care as a human right means.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the main expression of world consensus on some political and social rights in which health care is stressed as a social right. Although criticized for being a document of western mentality, it seems
to be very simple and obvious, but it is not. There are still many human rights abuses to prove that we must continue to fight against them and for people’s right to flourish in freedom and full participation in the common good.

The Catholic Church adopted the human rights agenda, initially with Pope John XXIII who clearly stated regarding health care that “medical care” is a right necessary for persons to fulfill their “right to life, bodily integrity (...) and the proper development of life.”¹ This was incorporated by Vatican II² and became part of the Church’s social ministry, embodied by many social practices around the world and incorporated into the Catholic social teaching after the council. Additionally, inspired by the Gospel, the Church’s activism against human rights abuses led many of its members to take the side of those who are the victims of such abuses and structural violence, whether direct abuses against political rights or indirect ones against social rights through institutionalized mechanisms of exploitation.

As I said before, what seems to be simple and obvious is not. In health care, many people defend that health care is not a human right or they affirm that health is a right in the sense of individual natural freedom to choose to take health risks or to pursue an insurance policy according to individual autonomy.³ Consequently, health care becomes a commodity ruled by the free market in which people are free to take risks and to buy insurance to manage the risks based on their financial

¹ PT, no. 11.
² GS, no. 25, 26, and 29; DH, no. 1.
capacity, priorities, and needs. This conception is very strong in the United States, the only developed country in the world that does not offer universal public health care coverage to its citizens. Briefly, one argument that supports the commodification of health care is based on a theory of natural rights that links individual morality and social order by a principle of noninterference. Therefore, according to Robert M. Sade, the natural rights “impose a duty not to interfere with the action of others.” This is a negative right that protects people from interference by government actions and regulations; it also opposes social or moral rights which are positive because they impose “duties or obligations on others.” Sade believes that the free market is the “practical expression of natural rights” originating “in human nature.” Hence, the free market in health care means that all individuals must be responsible for their own health care and that societies have no duty or responsibility for ensuring access to health care. This perspective would properly fit into both human nature and US values which, according to Richard E. Ralston, are: “Freedom, individualism and the right to life, liberty, property and the pursuit of happiness.” For him, health care policies must be grounded on moral principles that reflect these values. Consequently, he concludes that any attempt to create

---


6 Ibid.

7 Ibid., 461.

socialized medicine and health care policies based on any collective perspective are immoral.\footnote{Ibid.}

These two authors represent well those, especially in the USA, who do not see health care as a human right. In the US context, they think that health care reform must minimize as much as possible governmental participation and regulation in health care. They strongly oppose the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (known as Obama Care) and believe that the free market alone can fix health care. It is not my wish to go into the US debate on health care reform, but I do want to say a few words. Free market advocates have an insensitive and individualistic perspective that does not care for those who are suffering because of lack of health care and social opportunities. According to them, people are primarily consumers; consequently those who cannot consume are beyond their scope of interest, that is, the interests of market. This also affects the concept of human dignity that tends to flow from the capacity to purchase goods/commodities and not from human nature. Consequently, this idea denies the conception that human dignity is intrinsic to all human persons, a perspective defended by many institutions, especially the Catholic Church, and also present in the Article I of the Human Rights Declaration: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” In the US context, free market advocates do not recognize that that Obama
Care aims to promote justice in health care in the US by providing healthcare insurance for 32 million of the uninsured.\textsuperscript{10}

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act is an important step to the universalization of health care in the USA, but this reform is not enough because it depends on a private healthcare system and is hostage to the neo-liberal rules of the market. In other words, Obama Care is a \textit{fair proposal} considering the previous situation, because it has the goal of universal coverage for US citizens, but is \textit{incomplete} because it is hostage to private interests, keeping health care as a commodity. It is also isolated from broad social reform. \textit{Fair but incomplete} means that Obama Care plays inside the liberal market with its rules. It is a reform grounded in the liberal market system that prioritizes economic gains over social development, instead of creating a system that is public and prioritizes social development and social justice. A public system must go beyond the market rules and address economic growth as a consequence of social development. In a society with health care grounded in a private system, health reform will never be sufficient to promote justice. It must go beyond reformist social and political actions. It is necessary to create real social transformation that affects the private system. Another system must rise in which health and health care gain the status of a social good, as a human right that can flourish in the midst of a new social structure.

The US reform is a good example to show that even in the US, with its strong polarization between health care as a private good and as a public one, health care

\textsuperscript{10} For more details on US health reform and the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, see: John E. McDonough, \textit{Inside National Health Reform} (Berkeley: University of California Press; New York: Milbank Memorial Fund, 2012).
has been handled as a social good. This is the thesis of David M. Craig who defines social good as a good that “is valued so highly by the members of a society that they share it and pay for it together through extensive and coordinated social investment.”\(^{11}\) Craig disagrees with the individualistic interpretation of US values, such as free market advocates’ perspective, and shows that health care in the US has been addressed as a social good supported by the society through innumerable social investments from the government with taxpayers’ money, such as Medicaid and Medicare. It is true that US health care is market based, not only because there are many public investments, which reflect US values, including solidarity.\(^{12}\) However, Craig says this is a partial solidarity that has a high cost, lacks social coordination, and is not sufficient.\(^{13}\) Then he affirms:

> The social good of US health care must be evaluated in light of all of the shared values meant to be served by public funding and the delivery structures it supports. Examining US health care through this wide-angle lens, we see that it is an incomplete social good that needs much better social distribution alongside the many social investments that Americans have made.\(^{14}\)

> US health care reform is an example of liberal reforms still dependent on the free market. To be free from the commodification of health care, a health care transformation that occurs alongside with a social transformation able to address the social determinants of health is necessary. This cannot occur without broad


\(^{12}\) Ibid., 103.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 109.

\(^{14}\) Ibid., 112.
social participation, including the voices of the poor who are the primary agents of transformation. This shows the relevance of the preferential option for the poor to a human rights framework in health care. The option for the poor reveals the fragility of the human condition, highlights the victims of accidental *malheur*, and makes concrete the dialectical process of mutual learning towards justice in health care.

Based on his experience of medical practice from the option for the poor, Paul Farmer says: “Human rights abuses are best understood (that is most accurately and comprehensively grasped) from the point of view of the poor. This too is a relatively novel exercise in the human rights community. In no arena is it more needed than in that of health and human rights.”\(^{15}\) Farmer is one who defends the necessity of being prophetic in health care and medicine. This prophetic stance only happens when healthcare providers and human rights advocates join the poor in a practice of “pragmatic solidarity.”\(^{16}\) Among the poor, it becomes clear that the commodification of health care actually destroys lives. It is an evil that prevents the poor from realizing their intrinsic dignity and “the proper development of life.” The commodification of health care does not work to save lives, but rather to serve market systems that divide peoples and kill innocents around the world, including our common home, the earth.

Simone Weil affirms that a discussion on human rights must begin from presenting our obligations as equal humans sharing the same fragile condition. This debate should not begin at the table of closed meetings, but rather in the company of


\(^{16}\) Ibid., 163-164.
the poor, that is, the human rights must start in dialogue with those who are experts
in the human condition and are victims of accidental malheur that tends to diminish
their humanity. Part I and II developed the foundations for a human rights
framework in dialogue with the poor. In addition, they stressed, anthropologically,
ethically, and dialectally, the human obligation to care for the other and for nature in
order to keep communitarian and socio-ecological harmony.

Now Part III will present the practical side of these foundations applied in
health care toward the empowerment of the poor and justice in health. As a result of
a dialogical process of mutual learning involving: the poor and their hermeneutical
lens; Catholic social tradition, especially its liberating dimension; philosophical and
pedagogical theories; and other empirical studies on population health, Part III will
move from presenting the insufficiency of theories of justice towards the goal of
social transformation to developing practical actions whereby the poor are active
agents engaged in a process of recreating the world. Therefore, Part III is divided
into two chapters. The first chapter highlights the human rights framework in health
care from below, in dialogue with theories of justice. The second chapter presents a
practical proposal of mutual learning to engage the poor in a process of
empowerment and health care advocacy through popular education.
Chapter 10

GLOBAL HEALTH AND HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK FROM BELOW: THEOLOGICAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

In a globalized world, justice in health care is not only a local problem. It is a global socio-economic problem. In a world with over 6 billion people in which more than half of this population live in poverty, and one third live below the poverty line, misery, hunger, diseases, unemployment, lack of education, clothing, and shelter are not only local issues that prevent people from human flourishing. They are also the result of global socio-economic structures and decisions that create victims of socio-economic injustices and inequalities. It is an institutionalized violence that creates victims by oppressing and marginalizing vulnerable people. Theologians affirm this is a social sin that creates a crucified people in history.

In a globalized world in which a globalized economy is the extension of a world kingdom, local issues – the visible ones, those who have face and can be touched – are not isolated from the global. Additionally, one social issue, such as

---


health inequalities, is not independent from others. Therefore, addressing health inequalities also requires addressing socio-economic structures responsible for social injustices and their consequences for lives of vulnerable people, such as lack of education, basic sanitation, employment, clean water, and safe environment.

Listen to this story. In a rural area of a Northern state of Brazil, a gentleman who worked on a large cattle farm in the midst of the Amazon rainforest shared his life with me while he was waiting for a doctor at the small hospital emergency room. He had a fever, back pain, and a headache, and was also trembling, and sweating. He had all symptoms of dengue (that region was under a dengue outbreak that time). The emergency room looked like a military camp for injured soldiers in the middle of a war. There were people everywhere. The floor became beds. The few healthcare workers could not treat all of them adequately. Some volunteers from the local community were trying to help to accommodate patients and to give them food and water. This gentleman told me he had been born and raised in a little farm that belonged to his father. His family worked in plant extraction in a way that did not need deforestation. He said that everybody had good health and the forest provided all they needed. One day, people from other regions (he could not explain who these people were) began to buy property there and to tell small farmers that their lands do not belong to them. These farmers had to accept the little money that had been offered; otherwise they would lose their lands for nothing. Without any kind of information and education, these small farmers accepted this offering and went to live in the village, a small town that had no structure to receive these people. Consequently, they went to live in extremely poor areas with no urban structures,
such as sanitation, electricity, and clean water. In addition, they could not find jobs and went back to the farms, which now were large parcels in the hands of national and international corporations. They became farmworkers under precarious conditions of labor and lived in terrible living conditions. They became vulnerable to all kind of diseases, especially the tropical ones, such as dengue fever.

This gentleman told me that he missed his childhood when he could drink clean water. He said: 

“I am sick now and it seems I have dengue that I got because of the water around my house. They said I am not going to die because of dengue and the doctor will heal me. I just have to be patient. But there are many people here and the doctor does not have time to see me. I am afraid I will die before I see the doctor or the nurse. I am also worried I will lose my job and I need it to feed my children.” Then I asked him: “Does your boss understand you are sick and need some days off to get better again?” He answered me: 

He does not care, if I don’t go to work, he will pick another person because he always says that work can never stop. And I know there are many people who need a job. I like farm work, but I hate my job. I need it. I have no choice. This man was only 35 years old but looked as if he were 50. He is a concrete example of a local face who was prevented from a life with minimal dignity and goods to meet his needs. He is an example of a crucified person who is victim of an institutionalized violence with both global power and local damage. This violence made this man and his family to lose his small property. Consequently, they moved to the poor area of a small town, with no urban structures to receive the massive influx of people fleeing the rural area because of agribusiness’ exploitation. In addition, these new urban residents will live in areas without basic sanitation,
adequate housing, and opportunity to find a job. This kind of areas has also high urban violence rate. All these social factors make this new urban population extremely vulnerable to get ill in a cycle of poverty – diseases – poverty, and eventually premature death. The agribusiness will also exploit the workers, who before were campesinos in their own small property, and destroy the ecological system. This is the structural violence that creates poverty, destroys nature, makes people sick, and kills lives.\(^3\)

Following the methodology of this dissertation, that is, from the perspective of the poor who are at the bottom of society, the previous story shows the fragility of the poor before the inhuman force of structural violence through its mechanisms centered in economic gain rather than people. As I have affirmed previously, this story presents what, in theology is called a perspective that comes \textit{from below} and is grounded on the preferential option for the poor. In global health, one says this is a \textit{people-centered approach} that hears the local experiences, beliefs and struggles of those who are the most vulnerable to get ill and have lack of healthcare assistance, that is, the poor. Both approaches, \textit{from below} and \textit{people-centered}, lead to encounter those who are poor and marginalized in order to hear their voices. These approaches shape a framework that can address issues of justice in health in a globalized world from the perspective of the victims of the institutionalized violence

\footnote{Paul Famer develops this concept of structural violence and its consequence for health and health care in the world. He presents stories of victims of structural violence from different parts of the world, such as Haiti, Mexico, Peru, and Russia. See: Paul Famer, \textit{Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), especially attention to pages 29 to 50, where he presents the story of the Hatian Acéphie Joseph and Chouchou Louis; pages 95-104, where he presents the suffering and people from the small village of Moisés Gandhi, in Chiapas, Mexico; and the story of Sergi from Russia, at pages 114-129.}
and in connection with their faces in their local reality. Therefore, my aim is to
establish a dialogue between these two approaches in justice in health able to
empower the poor and support health/health care as a human right that must be
free from a globalized socio-economy of a neo-liberal character. The anthropology of
suffering and liberation ethics, because they reveal the communality of all human
beings and brings the voices of the poor to the health justice debate, support the
liberation of health care from its commodification and lead to people-centered inter-
sectorial systems to population health.

Concretely, in this chapter, I will discuss health/health care as a human right
from an anthropological-theological approach. I will present issues of justice in
health in terms of global health that considers our globalized world and the local
reality of the poor. My aim is to draft a human rights framework that supports
health/health care as a social good. All have the right to enjoy and access services to
restore health and wellbeing. This framework will be grounded on a liberating
perspective that rises from below and an anthropological people-centered approach
in global public health. Both value local culture, reality, and the experience of the
poor as victims of structural violence. Therefore, following the dialectical process of
mutual learning, this chapter will present a framework of health/health care as a
right in a dialogue between social sciences analysis on health inequalities, a
philosophical foundation on health/health care as a social good that must be
distributed as a right, and a liberation ethics that affirms that real transformation
must begin from below.
10.1 Global Health: Poverty, Ill Health, and Population Health

I begin this section by addressing the connection between poverty and health. Those who are poor and live in areas of great social injustice are most vulnerable to illness.\textsuperscript{4} In addition, they are victims of institutionalized violence that prevents them from accessing basic health care. There are social injustices responsible for inequalities and disparities in health that primarily affect those who are poor and live in low-income countries.\textsuperscript{5} Addressing justice in health care \textit{from below} means seeing justice in health issues from the perspective of the poor, who are disproportionately impacted by health care inequities and disparities. The preferential option for the poor sustains a people-centered approach to justice in health care and, at the same time, develops alternative ways to respond to the challenge of inequalities in health.

Although the preferential option for the poor is a theological concept, the nature of global health as a discipline and world activism for justice in health, requires an interdisciplinary approach\textsuperscript{6} to address the link between poverty, illness,


\textsuperscript{5} The many voices from the poor presented so far on this dissertation have proved this connections poverty and health/diseases and the vulnerability of the poor. All confirmed by studies.

\textsuperscript{6} As an interdisciplinary approach, global health deals with many different areas of knowledge and social sector to address population health. In addition, some concepts are important to be present, especially: \textit{Public health}: actions and studies that focus on population health. \textit{Biosocial approach}: it is an approach to health that includes social, political and economic factors and analysis in order to build a field of global health with an interdisciplinary character. \textit{International health}: the state is the base unit of health care actions; it also regards relationships among nations. \textit{Global health}: it is the role of non-governmental organizations, private institutions, and community-based organizations in health around the world. \textit{Global health delivery}: the provision of health
and population health. The preferential option for the poor contributes to global health by revealing the impact of institutional violence on local realities from the perspective of the victims. Moreover, it connects the common human condition of fragility and contingency to those who, through their daily suffering as victims of injustice and health inequalities, reveal this condition. Many health disparities create a burden of disease for poor countries and vulnerable people. This burden has social, political, and economic causes that prevent improvement of population health. Therefore, according to Farmer and Kim at al. “The health of individuals and populations is influenced by complex social and structural forces; addressing the roots of ill health – including poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation – requires a broad-based agenda of social change”.

The interdisciplinary nature of global health opens a space for theology and anthropology to address issues of poverty, health inequalities, and population health from below. Hence, the preferential option for the poor in health care is welcomed in order to lead a dialectical process of mutual learning in global public health care that occurs primarily in the locus of the poverty, where the poor and their wisdom reside. Subsequently, this dialectical process guides the creation of healthcare systems. Paul Farmer, as a medical anthropologist, is one who is inspired by the preferential option for the poor to develop his research and medical work on interventions. See: Paul Farmer, Jim Yong Kim et al., Reimagining Global Health: An Introduction (Berkeley, London: University of California Press, 2013), 9-10.

Global health is characterized by a collection of problems and demands interdisciplinary cooperation, including a biosocial analytic endeavor. See: Farmer, Kim et al., Reimagining Global Health, 2.

Farmer, Kim et al., Reimagining Global Health, 10.
global health. Farmer applies insights from liberation theology to health care and issues of social justice. He shows how the preferential option for the poor sheds light on the reality of the poor and their struggle for health. The poor are in a social reality that makes them vulnerable to getting sick and dying prematurely due to the lack of healthcare assistance. Liberation theology shows the mechanisms that oppress the poor through a structural violence. Farmer stresses how this reality impacts the poor and their health, and how liberation theology suggests ways to address this issue from below, that is, in ways that the poor become agents of their own liberation. It is liberation theology's principles applied in medical practice. He supports the thesis that physicians and global health activists must address structural violence and make a preferential option for the poor.¹⁰

The connection between poverty and ill health is undeniable. The poor and other vulnerable groups are the most affected by social inequalities and have their health harmed. Discussing vulnerability and health in the context of justice in public health, Roque Junges says:

There are two kinds of social iniquities that make people’s health vulnerable in our situation. One is the lack of basic conditions to live with dignity: lack of food and adequate housing, lack of a healthy natural and social environment, or, in other words, a worthy salary able to feed and to provide quality of life

---

⁹ Paul Farmer even uses the liberating method, see – judge – act, in his medical practice and shows the efficacy of this method to deliver healthcare in areas marked by poverty. He says: “Liberation theology, in contrast to officialdom, argues that genuine changes will be most often rooted in small communities of poor people; and it advances a simple methodology – observe – judge – act. Throughout Latin America, such base-community movements have worked to take stock of their situations and devise strategies for change. The approach is straightforward. Although it has been termed ‘simplistic’ by technocrats and experts, this methodology has proven useful for promoting health in setting as diverse as Brazil, Guatemala, El Salvador, rural Mexico, and urban Peru. Insights from liberation theology have proven useful in rural Haiti too, perhaps the sickest region of the hemisphere and the one I know best.” Farmer, Pathologies of Power, 140-141.

¹⁰ Farmer, Pathologies of Power, 165.
to workers and their families, that makes it possible to access proper housing and basic sanitation, and prevent social insecurity and violence. Another vulnerability is the lack of access to quality healthcare services when one falls sick... The first one regards social conditions necessary to enjoy a healthy life, that is, making health free from an ongoing threat because of avoidable social and environmental determinants. This is a question of justice. The second means accessing necessary therapeutic resources to treat diseases. This is a question of equity.\textsuperscript{11}

Poverty is the result of social injustice that creates vulnerability and prevents people from accessing primary goods which is needed to develop their lives. The poor are more vulnerable to illness, and without good health, they do not have the conditions necessary to improve their lives, since good health is a condition for development. In other words, poverty causes bad health that makes people poorer, and thus produces a lower health status.\textsuperscript{12} There is a structural cycle of violence and injustice against those who have never had the opportunity to change their lives.

The connection between poverty and population health also leads to the connection between health and macroeconomic issues. According to WHO Commission on Macroeconomic and Health's report, health is necessary for economic development.\textsuperscript{13} CMH proposes a shift of paradigm from economic growth as a precondition for real improvement in health to improvements in health as an important factor for economic growth. Countries should address health issues to

\textsuperscript{11} José Roque Junges, “Vulnerabilidade e Saúde: Limites e Pontencialidades das Políticas Públicas,” in 
\textit{Bioética, Vulnerabilidade e Saúde}, ed. Christian de Paul de Barchifontaine and Elma L. C. P. Zobil (São Paulo: Centro Universitário São Camilo Press, 2007), 120.

\textsuperscript{12} Norman Daniels; Bruce Kennedy; and Ichiro Kawachi, “Health and Inequality, or, Why Justice is Good for Our Health,” in \textit{Public Health, Ethics, and Equity}, ed. Sudhirr Anand, Fabienne Peter, and Amartya Sen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 65-66.

create conditions for economic development in a way that public spending focuses on healthcare needs of the poor.

Developing countries are those that suffer more with inequalities in health and have a huge population in conditions of vulnerability. They bear 93% of the worldwide burden of diseases and account for only 11% of global health spending.\textsuperscript{14} To address health issues, these countries have to increase their domestic resources available for health. However, they don't have enough resources. They need international aid from wealthy countries. CMH affirms: “Health is a cornerstone of economic growth and social development.”\textsuperscript{15} In addition, it says: “To achieve these huge gains in health and economic development, the Commission calls for a major increase in the resources allocated to the health sector over the next few years. About half of the total increase would come from international development assistance.”\textsuperscript{16} CMH calls for global actions that address health issues and population health. These actions, first of all, must target those who are in health risk and vulnerability, that is, the poor, especially the poor in developing countries.

CMH’s report also raises the question about the importance of health aid from high-income countries to address health issues in low-income countries. In addition, international health aid should not only be economic, but it must address social development and international relationship in terms of market. In other

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 16-21.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 14.
words, health aid also involves social investment that addresses education, water, sanitation, employment and so on.17

The link between poverty and disease requires broad social interventions. Knowing the burden of disease and health vulnerability, some global health scholars identify global health priorities. They say: “Advancing global health equity entails transformational social changes.”18 Six areas need to be addressed as global health priorities because they present the disparities between low-income and high-income countries in the burden of diseases. (This proves that poor and low-income countries have basically 80% of all disease burden and less than 10% of resources. Africa, for example, has 24% of the global disease burden and only 1% of financial resources for health.)19 The six areas of priority are: maternal and child health; AIDS, TB and malaria; neglected tropical diseases; noncommunicable diseases; cancer; and surgery.20 The poor, who previously died principally from tropical and communicable diseases, are now dying because of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) as well, such as cardiovascular illnesses. NCDs are responsible for 60% of

17 Developed countries and some of their aid agencies must stop pressing low-income countries for economic structural adjustment, that means to open markets to international business in which health care is made a commodity and reduces social spending by governments. This was strongly emphasized in 1980s and 1990s by international institutions, especially the IMF and the World Bank, but it is still being used today. Policies of structural adjustment have been the main cause of an increase in inequalities and poverty. “Since poverty and inequality are the two greatest risk conditions for preventable disease, it is not surprising that structural adjustment led to a slowdown or reversal of health gains, particularly affecting the poor, rural populations, women and children.” “The Health Crises of Neoliberal Globalization,” in Global Health Watch 4: An Alternative World Health Report, ed. People’s Health Movement et al. (London, UK: Zed Books, 2014), 14-15. For a good summery on the rise of neoliberalism and the impact of structural adjustment in global health, see: Matthew Basilico, Jonathan Weigel et al. “Health for All? Competing Theories and Geopolitics,” in Paul Farmer, Jim Yong Kim et al., Reimagining Global Health: An Introduction (Berkeley, London: University of California Press, 2013), 84-110.

18 Farmer, Kim et al., Reimagining Global Health, 303.

19 Ibid, 303.

20 Ibid, 305-331.
global mortality and 80% occur in poor countries.\textsuperscript{21} A “diagonal approach” seems to be the best way to address these priorities in a way that the combat against diseases are integrated into a primary care delivery.\textsuperscript{22} The diagonal approach means health strategies in primary care that build a bridge between healthcare interventions, including highly cost-effective ones, and community-based actions from local clinics and even from homes. Thus this approach connects health professionals and members of local communities, especially health workers, in a collaborative way to address health issues.

This diagonal approach does not only cross diseases, but it crosses the local reality of the poor in which their voices, culture, and beliefs are integrated into this combat. This is important in order to avoid a \textit{top down} action that dismisses the reality of the poor and their voices. João Biehl and Adriana Petryna, with the motto, \textit{When People Come First} (which is also a title of a technical book edited by them on global health), present a proposal of seeing social realities and their relations with health from a \textit{people-centered perspective} with an anthropological view that produces “an ethnographic critique of the contemporary global health enterprise.”\textsuperscript{23} They suggest integrating different approaches to global health, such as sociological, economical, ethical, biological, governance, and human rights. It is a comprehensive framework with theoretical and empirical investigations that prioritized the respect for the dignity and singularity of people and brought our attention to their struggles

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 320.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 323.
and visions. Biehl and Pertryna aim "to advance methodological and analytical frameworks that focus on people and the dynamism of social fields." The challenge is to affirm a "crosscutting framework that integrates health, development, and social justice" in a way that does not dismiss the cultural particularities of each social group. The preferential option for the poor fits well in this project and contributes to maturing this framework because it leads to the inclusion and participation of the poor in the development of health strategies in public health from local systems. In addition, liberation ethics and its dialectical process of mutual learning are concrete ways of interacting with the poor to empower them and to learn from their knowledge. This framework creates effective strategies to promote healthcare actions able to respond to local challenges and to engage locals in the decision-making process.

10.2 Health/Health Care As A Social Good and A Human Right

Completing this framework, there is health/health care as a human right which is a perspective that can stand up against a global neo-liberal market responsible for making health care a commodity. In addition, health/health care as a human right adequately engages with the perspective from below that is people-centered. Studies in health in Latin America, for example, affirm: “Human-rights-based approaches are characterized by a focus on the underlying social determinants of health and an emphasis on the principles of accountability,

---

24 Ibid., 15.
25 Ibid., 19.
meaningful participation, transparency, and equality and non-discrimination.”

Latin America is a region where many countries (18) have incorporated the right to health care into their constitutions and another five include “social protection for health as a basic tenet of the health system.” Additionally, this region has experiences of promoting health and public health care that elevate the health status of their populations, especially for marginalized groups, such as the indigenous and black social groups.

The concept that health care is a right has led Latin America to develop policies to achieve universal health care. This makes the continent a laboratory to study mechanisms to implement health care as a right.

Despite some success, especially in countries that opt for a single public health system, such as Brazil and Cuba, health inequalities and systemic fragilities are still persistent.

The resistance to accepting health care as a human right is a factor that damages public strategies of universal converge and inter-sectorial actions to address population health. Even countries that have, in their constitutions, the right to health care, suffer the influence of neoliberal policies responsible for opening free markets in health care and for working against this right. The battle is constant and requires an ongoing development of the anthropology of suffering and liberation.

---


27 Ibid.


ethics to support a human rights framework against the commodification of health care. Therefore, I will present arguments from two perspectives that support health care as a human right. I call this, *philosophical and theological wings*.^{30}

**A. The Philosophical Wing for Justice in Health Care**

I begin by saying that health/health care as a human right is a way to deliver health care and to promote well-being that responds to the demand of justice and human flourishing. Health/health care is a good that must be met in order to allow the human being to develop. It sustains a twofold dimension of justice: health care is a consequence of social justice, and health sustains equalities of social opportunities.

According to Amartya Sen, discussing health equity requires integrating health in a broad discussion on social justice. He says:

> Health equity has many aspects, and is best seen as a multidimensional concept. It includes concerns about achievement of health and the capability to achieve good health, not just the distribution of health care. But it also includes the fairness of processes and thus must attach importance to nondiscrimination in the delivery of health care. Furthermore, an adequate engagement with health equity also requires that the consideration of health be integrated with broader issues of social justice and overall equity, paying adequate attention to the versatility of resources and the diverse reach and impact of different social arrangements.^{31}

---

^{30} I call them *wings* because they are important for the debate on justice in health care, so they must be incorporated in the dialogue I am promoting. But they are not enough to make this debate fly in a concrete form if they do not have a body that sustains these wings. The wings without a body are insufficient. The body is the reality of the poor and their active participation. Philosophical and theological arguments apart from the reality of poverty and the participation of the poor are at risk of being only abstractions without concrete actions and healthcare strategies. I argue that these wings are important in a dialogical perspective, but they must be completed with the participation of the poor in a process of mutual learning and historical praxis. A method for this process in health care will be developed in the next chapter.

Sen’s argument leads me to address issues of equality and justice before I discuss justice in health care. Health/health care must be a human right to meet the needs of the poor. Ways for creating justice begin with issues of equality and social participation. Many theories seek to create justice for equal people who live in an unequal society. This raises a big debate about equality. Some believe that equality is the starting point to create justice. Others think that equality is not possible and justice allows certain levels of inequalities. In addition, others affirm that in an unequal and unjust society needs some unequal social actions to create justice and to lead society to equality.

John Rawls, who utilizes the social contract political theory in his book *A Theory of Justice* (1971), affirms that justice begins from the least advantaged one in society. He has an intuition that when people do not have any knowledge about their lives and futures – a situation that Rawls describes as the original position behind the veil of ignorance – they will choose two principles of justice to structure society. These principles will be those which meet the primary needs of all human beings.

32 Rawls’ theory of justice has a great impact on justice discourse in Western societies, especially in the U.S. where individual just desert, property rights, and minimal state interference in market game are strong values. On the other hand, there is Robert Nozick a political philosopher who reacted to Rawls. You can see his theory in his book *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Oxford, UK & Cambridge, USA: Blackwell 1974). Nozick presents an entitlement theory that justifies just desert and holding wealth grounded in John Lock’s argument of proviso. Nozick affirms that the property right is part of self-ownership. Everyone can hold what he has as a result of fruits of his labor. Justice has to respect property rights that are a result of just desert. Human labor gives value to things. One who creates a natural thing receives a value; he has right to be owner of this thing and its fruits because it is a result of his labor. If someone makes a lot of money with his labor, he has the right to hold this wealth, and a state cannot take part of his wealth due to a pattern of distributive justice. This would be a kind of “slavery” because part of one’s labor would not belong to him. Nozick defends a minimal state in which the State (government) does not interfere in property rights to promote distributive justice. A just distribution of wealth has to preserve everyone’s property rights. Distributive justice should not be achieved by taxation, but rather by voluntary actions of those who hold their property rights. The State only has a function of protecting property rights and the transactions between individuals in order to avoid violence, fraud, theft, and so on.
They are the principle of maximal or equal liberty and the Difference Principle.\textsuperscript{33} They meet the primary goods that, according to Rawls, are liberties, opportunities, and income/wealth. Behind a veil of ignorance, people make a pact in which there is an agreement about these two principles of justice. This pact or social contract occurs among people who are equal and are under the same social conditions and ignorance.

The original position is an intuition; Rawls knows it does not describe any current or past social order. It is an abstraction in which he wants to prove the fundamental value of his two principles of justice as a basic social agreement to structure society. These principles ground justice as fairness because the difference principle allows some unequal social action to “the greatest benefit to the least advantaged.” This leads the unfortunates to access primary goods and a fair equality of opportunity.

Rawls gives priority to the right over the good. Right, to him, is to create conditions for persons to pursue the good.\textsuperscript{34} These conditions are rights to have access to primary goods that will be guaranteed by principles of justice, as a result of a social agreement. In this basic social structure, there is no space for an individual’s just desert. The promotion of justice must begin from the least advantaged person, according to the difference principle. Rawls allows political and

\textsuperscript{33} John Rawls, \textit{A Theory of Justice} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 60; 82.

\textsuperscript{34} According to Rawls, giving priority to the right over the good means that justice is not about promoting goods of individuals (such as pleasure), but it is to do the right thing. Hence, the right thing to do is to be fair. This means that a society cannot sacrifice some people for the welfare of others. Therefore, a society must create opportunities based on everybody’s right to access primary goods. If an individual or a marginalized group is not accessing these goods, the society must create policies to provide opportunities to them. Rawls, \textit{A Theory of Justice}, 11-12, 131.
social actions that include certain limits to liberty and inequalities if these actions are to promote societal benefits and everyone’s advantage.

Moving from the broad social context to a specific context of health and health care, Norman Daniels supports the thesis of fair equality of opportunity and tries to apply Rawls’ theory of justice in health care. According to Daniels, socio-political principles and decisions have an impact on health care. He searches for a theory of justice for health care and moral principles that provide a general framework for public policy decisions. He affirms that a theory of justice in health care is necessary to ground health care as a right. However, “a more comprehensive account of distributive justice for health care”35 is essential to show that health is “of special moral importance because it contributes to the range of exercisable or effective opportunities open to us.”36 Therefore, health has a special importance because “meeting health needs allows people to choose among the life plans they can reasonably pursue, given their talents and skills.”37 Social justice is necessary to create resources available for people to meet their health needs.38

37 Ibid., 77.
38 According to Daniels, “Health needs are those thing we need in order to maintain, restore, or provide functional equivalents (where possible) to normal species functioning (for the appropriate reference class by gender and age). Though our account of health was conceptually narrow, health needs are a broad, divers set:

1. Adequate nutrition
2. Sanitary, unpolluted living and working conditions
3. Exercise, rest, and such important lifestyle feature as avoiding substance abuse and practicing safe sex
4. Preventive, curative, rehabilitative, and compensatory personal medical services (and devices)
5. Nonmedical personal and social support services
Daniels presents health care as a special social good among other goods because it meets health care needs. He develops a “theory of health care needs” that has two central purposes: 1) “to illuminate our sense that health care is special and should be treated differently from other social goods;” 2) “[to] provide a basis for distinguishing the more from the less important among the many kinds of things health care does for us.” He argues that health care is a special good because one must have one’s health care needs met to live in a *species-typical functioning*. In his words: “Health care needs will be those things we need in order to maintain, restore, or provide functional equivalents (where possible) to normal species functioning.” Without a normal species functioning, one cannot participate in a fair equality of opportunity. Daniels posts health care needs inside of Rawls’ theory of justice, specifically in his index of primary goods. He says: “I urge the fair equality of opportunity principle as an appropriate principle to govern macro decisions about the design of our health-care system.” Therefore, health care as a right is based on the fair equality of the opportunity principle.

*B. The Theological Wing for Justice in Health Care*

In the theological wing to ground my argument that health/health care must be delivered as a human right, I will present Lisa S. Cahill’s proposal, which is based upon a retrieval of Aquinas’ account of natural law. In the book *Global Justice*,

---

40 Ibid., 41.
Christology, and Christian Ethics, Cahill suggests an updated natural law able to respond to the challenges of justice in a globalized and postmodern society. In her revision of natural law, Cahill proposes an approach from human existence that has moral values shared among different cultures. She stresses the basic goods that humans need to flourish as well as equality as a basic human characteristic. Theological and biblical sources support this approach. She writes: “To biblical and theological traditions, ethics brings the identification of basic goods that all require and the reinforcement of basic human equality as a fundamental guide to moral action.” Basic goods and basic human equality, therefore, are essentials for human flourishing. This shapes an “ethics of common nature and humanity,” and is a powerful call for a justice in the world which addresses not only human relationships in society, but also ecological concerns. This is a natural law in which cultures share the need for the same goods and values, but in different ways, that is, according to different priorities of goods in each culture. At the practical level, local contexts and histories lead cultures to apply natural law in a way that they answer their requirements of justice under the influence of historical and social location.

“Human nature includes human characteristics, human goods, and basic human equality or equal respect.” Hence, natural law has three basic spheres of morality that are known in all cultures and constitute their goods: the preservation of life, procreation and education of children, and cooperative social existence. In

42 Ibid., 248.
43 Ibid., 251.
44 Ibid., 252.
other words, the human being “seeks for self-preservation... seeks sexual
intercourse, then nurture and education of their offspring... and seeks to know the
truth about God and to live in society.” Basic goods are those which lead the
human being to fulfill the natural law in its three spheres of morality. Therefore,
“recognition of basic human goods is necessary for any program of social justice in a
global era.” Additionally, equality must be pursued because it recognizes the
humanity of the other, empowers the other, and includes the other in social political
participation. Justice and equality stress a common humanity that leads to freedom
and relationality in which all are responsible for each other and the common
environment.

Along with basic goods, equality is a key concept for Cahill’s revision of
natural law. It requires a commitment that is only possible if it is grounded in
compassion and solidarity. She affirms: “A sincere and lasting personal commitment
to equality requires a movement of compassion or solidarity in which one
recognizes the other as not only like oneself, but as eliciting and claiming the
practical respect that we ourselves desire and believe we deserve.” The challenge
is also to move from this personal commitment to political, social and economic

---

45 Ibid., 258.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid., 253.
48 Cahill uses Martha Nussbaum’s list of basic goods necessary to constitute a life with
dignity. To achieve basic goods for minimal human dignity, Nussbaum affirms it is necessary that
people be empowered in “central capabilities,” namely they are: life; bodily health; bodily integrity
senses, imagination, and thought; emotions; practical reason; affiliation; other species; play; control
over one’s environment. See: Martha Nussbaum, Creating Capabilities: The Human Development
49 Cahill, Global Justice, Christology, and Christian Ethics, 265.
commitment in which equality becomes a principle based on solidarity and responsibility for leading public decisions.

At the end, she indicates that knowledge of natural law requires an inductive epistemology because of the practical nature of moral knowledge. But “both the basic goods and knowledge of them must develop inductively and communally.”

Natural law ethics is inductive, but it also “requires prior dispositions to know reality, persons, and goods truthfully and in their right relationships.”

Both the philosophical and theological “wings,” illustrated by the approach I chose from these disciplines, stress that health/health care is a human good that is necessary for human flourishing. Without health and health care assistance to restore human functioning there is no possibility of human lives with dignity and a natural development and realization. Therefore, health/health care is a social good necessary for human flourishing and this makes it a human right. Health/health care as a social good that must be delivered as a human right offers a powerful rationale for global health equity which emphasis that social and economic rights must be met in order to enjoy civil and political rights. At the same time, it shows that human rights abuses – which include, as an abuse, health care as a commodity, because it denies assistance to millions of people in the world – promote structural violence that perpetuates poverty and inequalities.

The philosophical and theological wings are arguments against this abuse and show health/health care as a human right which requires the realization of other human rights. These arguments correspond

---

50 Ibid., 267.
51 Ibid.
52 Paul Farmer, Jim Yong Kim et al., Reimagining Global Health, 268.
to the commonality of all humans who are fragile by their natural condition. In order to make these arguments operational and involving the participation of the poor in the decision-making process, the interrelationship between social justice and justice-in-health requires a perspective from below to address poverty, ill health, and structural violence in a dialectical process of mutual learning.

10.3 Justice in Health Care in the Key of Liberation

A liberation approach is characterized by a perspective from below grounded on the preferential option for the poor. This option is an existential commitment that leads us to be in the company of the poor. Hence, we walk with them to be free from the social forces responsible for preventing them from accessing necessary goods to flourish. The preferential option for the poor is an immersion in the world of the poor, the sick, their social reality and hope, and God’s love for the least.

Gustavo Gutiérrez affirms this existential commitment is a movement from a spirituality rooted in Jesus Christ to an option for being in solidarity with the poor. Among the poor, the challenge is to show God’s love for them under the structural violence that makes them victims of injustice. God’s preferential love for the poor is the heart of the Gospel. It is an option that leads us to be with the poor against poverty and oppression. Gutiérrez emphasizes that theology is a historical announcement of the Gospel within a concrete situation, and in a way that is relevant for daily life. Therefore, we show God’s love for the poor, being with them,

and struggling with them for justice and liberation. Being with the poor is the first and essential step in showing God’s love for the least. In the company of the poor, we suffer and walk with them. The preferential option for the poor is a movement of conversion that guides us to live in solidarity.\textsuperscript{54}

On the one hand, the option for the poor is a theological concept and an existential commitment that leads us to the reality of the poor and to engage with them working for social justice and justice in health care. It is an act of sensitive courage in which we humble ourselves to contemplate the faces of those who are suffering and join them in a movement of compassion and liberation. On the other hand, it also provides the foundation for an anthropological approach to global health is crucial to population health. First of all, an anthropology deeply rooted in the human condition, as the anthropology of suffering that leads to the \textit{movement of recognition and compassion}, is the foundation for human co-responsibility for care for one another, which leads to a human rights approach to health care. Second, anthropology as a social science provides crucial understanding and tools to promote population health. This is the central thesis of Merrill Singer and Pamela I. Erickson in their book \textit{Global Health: An Anthropological Perspective}. According to them, global health focuses on population health\textsuperscript{55} and has the mission to meet the health needs of all people in the world.\textsuperscript{56} This focus and mission require “a shift from vertical to horizontal global health strategies and a commitment to ending

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 10.
\end{flushright}
global poverty. The anthropological perspective provides a people centered and community-based approach that makes this shift possible by listening to people and their experiences, and understanding the relationship between culture, beliefs, and health.

The preferential option for the poor, from liberation theology, and the people-centered approach, from anthropology that puts people in the first place, shape a framework in global health committed to the experience of the poor and their voices. This framework of being with the poor and listening to them allow us to know the reality, the dramas, and the needs of the poor from a perspective that a defender of a “health market” can never have. Those who make health a commodity do not see the faces of those who are excluded from this market. The excluded do not exist for market defenders as human faces with stories, such as the one I told at the beginning of this chapter. The poor are only numbers and, as such, do not provoke solidarity. This cold health market must be broken by beginning to hearing the poor and value their lives more than any commodity. The way to break the market logic and the vertical approach to global health is literally to join the poor in their reality, and there establishes a harmonic relationship able to create a dialectical process of mutual learning. This process opens learning from the poor, at the same time that the poor are engaged in a path of their empowerment to be agents of transformation. Health care strategies will rise from this process.

Paul Farmer is an example of fighting for population health from below. He testifies what he has learned from liberation theology and how he lives this learning

---

57 Ibid.
as a physician. He affirms that he learned from Gutiérrez a hermeneutic of hope in which hermeneutics is *praxis* based on solidarity and generosity. The preferential option for the poor became the foundation of his praxis among the poor.\(^{58}\) He affirms that listening to the poor is not easy, but rather it is hard and often painful. Listening to the poor is the way to be in their company and to start struggling together against poverty. He says: “As long as poverty and inequality persist, as long as people are wounded and imprisoned and despised, we humans will need accompaniment – practical, spiritual, intellectual.”\(^{59}\)

Based on his experience as a physician among the poor in countries, such as Haiti, Mexico and Rwanda, and inspired by liberation theology, Farmer develops the term *pragmatic solidarity*. It echoes a sensitive courage in the sense that both highlight our feeling of pity before the suffering of the other, which must then be embodied in practices able to respond to the suffering of those who are victims of unjust pain, especially the one consequence of structural violence. Farmer says:

Pragmatic solidarity is different from but nourished by solidarity per se, the desire to make common cause with those in need. Solidarity is a precious thing: people enduring great hardship often remark that they are grateful for the prayers and good wishes of fellow human beings. But when sentiment is accompanied by the goods and services that might diminish unjust hardship, surely it is enriched. To those in great need, solidarity without the pragmatic component can seem like so much abstract piety.\(^{60}\)

---


\(^{59}\) Ibid., 24.

\(^{60}\) Farmer, *Pathologies of Power*, 146.
Farmer also stresses the link between spirituality and justice. The poor have a spirituality incarnated in their reality and their struggle for justice and health. Liberation theology helps to understand this spirituality of the poor and its liberating power. It is a spirituality that is social and calls us to conversion. Furthermore, the preferential option for the poor is necessary to show that our spirituality must lead to a social praxis that cares for the poor and the sick, and addresses structural violence as well.

*Justice in health care in the key of liberation* integrates this spirituality and existential commitment into global health activism for promoting population health. *From below, with a people-centered approach, we can see the faces of those who are suffering because of structural violence that prevents them from enjoying good health and accessing health care.* This chapter examined perspectives of justice (whether in philosophy or theology) that sustain health care as a human right are *per se* insufficient to lead a comprehensive and concrete human rights framework in health care. But they must be part of the dialogue because they have elements to contribute in the process of building just health. I engaged this dialogue from the perspective of the poor. I also presented an experience of a physician who has led a group that addresses health issues in the company of the poor. Among the poor, it is possible to see concretely what health care as a human right means: a vision that goes beyond any theory of justice and equality and, at the same time, re-orients approaches to justice to listen to the voices of those who are at the bottom of the world, the poor. The next, and final chapter, will develop concrete steps explaining
the method of the dialogical process of mutual learning among the poor, in healthcare actions and advocacy for just health.
Chapter 11

POPULAR EDUCATION AND PUBLIC HEALTH: A COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH FOR HEALTH CARE ADVOCACY

There is no neutrality in history. No one can please God and the Devil at the same time. When the biblical narrative reports Jesus’ encounter with the Devil in the desert, the Devil tempted Jesus to accept the world’s wealth and power in exchange for worshipping him. Saying yes to this temptation would betray God and the mission of proclaiming the Good-News to the poor. Making the choice to be faithful to God and the historical mission in the midst of the poor, Jesus denied not only the Devil, but also the world powers sustained by wealth and domination. Jesus went against the status quo responsible for dismissing the life of the poor, and grounded by their misery. In the Lukan narrative, right after Jesus renouncing the temptation of the status quo (Lk 4: 1-13), he announced his choice and the agenda of his mission, as the one who had been anointed by God and was guided by the Spirit to proclaim the good-news to the poor, heal the sick, and free the oppressed (Lk 4: 16-18). Jesus’ decision and historical action were not neutral, but rather a preferential option for the poor and their justice.¹

With a clear choice, based on the foundation that has been developed until now, I will present the dialogical process of mutual learning in the method to be used among and with the poor. I begin this from the point where Simone Weil left

off and Paulo Freire started. Both thinkers critically engaged with the Marxist perspective of praxis by showing that the process of liberation needs theory-practice together in a historical movement from below. Let us understand what this means before I focus on the framework of mutual learning for a community-based approach in health care.

People gathered in social movements and grassroots communities commonly say that if you are not on the side of the poor and the oppressed, you are on the side of the oppressor. In addition, some leaders of these groups stress that “neutrality” is to take the side of the oppressor for the status quo.² It is obvious that one cannot advocate for justice and social transformation without touching elites and their status quo, sustained by the luxury of holding excessive wealth in the midst of an immense population are starving and dying because of the lack of basic needs. A choice for justice is to take a side in history for those who are at the bottom of society, the poor. A choice for a new world requires an option for the poor and the recognition of their knowledge and historical power. The poor are experts in the human condition because their suffering/malheur reveals the fragility and contingency of the human existence. Only the historical praxis of the poor with their partners who, impelled by an act of sensitive courage join with them (as Jesus did), can transform the world.

The word “praxis” is not used here casually. Praxis is not a synonym for practice. Praxis is a Greek word that gained a living meaning in contemporary

² Helder Camara, Essential Writings, ed. Francis McDonagh (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 44.
philosophy with Karl Marx.³ It implies theory and action together. Although this meaning was already present in the classical Greek philosophers’ use, praxis gained a strong signification with Marx and his historical materialism. In his perspective, human beings build history with their action through struggles between classes. The human individual is a creative-self who constructs his/her existence using the material determinants around him/her.⁴ In order to build a new society, the oppressed class must have a revolutionary praxis in which a strong theory with social action, move the oppressed towards their liberation.

Although Simone Weil does not engage in a discussion of praxis directly, her philosophy stresses the need of praxis in the historical movement of the oppressed towards liberation and justice. She is a critic of Marx’s historical materialism, in the sense that the class struggle is not sufficient to explain the development of history. Marx’s system also ends up believing in a-material force, a spirit that leads a historical movement to perfection. According to her, although Marx did not accept the hidden spirit of Hegel who affirmed that the history of the world is the history of this spirit in the world, he replaced the spirit with matter as a historical force, attributing matter to what is proper to the spirit.⁵ With the advent of industrialization, productive forces became the historical material impulse. And for Marx, capitalism transferred the spirit of progress to things, inverting the subject-object relationship. So productive forces became a kind of divinity that even Marx

³ For a good vision of Marx’s works that allow you to have a minimal understanding of his system, see: Karl Marx: Selected Writings, ed. David McLellan, 2nd ed. (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).
⁴ Karl Marx, “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts,” in Karl Marx: Selected Writings, 91.
⁵ Oeuvres, 282.
did not anticipate Consequently, he no longer realized that not only the owners and managers of capitalist companies oppress the workers, but also socialist movements that have the same productive force inside them.⁶ Following Weil’s reading of Marx, he recognized that the human being is responsible to construct history, and created a method of knowledge and action united, but he never applied it. This method is based on the principle that the human being creates its own history, but inside determined conditions, guided by material needs. So it is necessary to understand these conditions to transform and to organize them in order to shape a mode of production that favors human flourishing. This requires praxis, *theory-action*, by human persons, especially those at the bottom, in Weil’ and Marx’s philosophy, the workers.⁷ Marx did not realize that the communist society could also be under the domination of productive forces and, together with its heavy bureaucracy, would oppress the workers by, first of all, preventing them from contemplation. This breaks praxis and workers become, once again, an instrument without freedom and justice.

Weil is critical of Marxism and many socialist movements and parties of her time that used the workers as a mass for revolution.⁸ (She opposed vanguard movements.)⁹ These kinds of movements denied theory to the workers, the knowledge and awareness of all social and historical conditions. Consequently, the workers had only action and their action became simply a claim for better wages

---

⁶ Ibid.
⁷ Ibid.
⁸ OC II 2, 145-146.
⁹ Oeuvres, 1070.
manipulated by their leaders.\textsuperscript{10} This is a scenery of illusion which will not result in real transformation because it will only change oppression from private owners to state bureaucrats, and maintain the same oppressive productive force.\textsuperscript{11} To change it, Weil asserts the need of workers, the oppressed to have theory and action together since the revolution until always.\textsuperscript{12} Only this union of theory and action can free the human being and make a people/workers into subjects who will control forces of production and not be their instruments. Liberty begins in the union between theory and action that leads to a new social organization in which the productive force does not crush the bodies of workers.\textsuperscript{13}

History is a human construction. There is no historical determinism.\textsuperscript{14} The lack of theory, knowledge prevents those who are oppressed and marginalized from seeing that their condition is not a result of historical fatalism. Here it is important to give a short explanation of the term theory. Neither Marx nor Weil examined theories to refer to theory and action together in a narrow sense of theory as a theoretical system of systematized ideas. Actually, they do not refer to a theory in their writings, but rather knowledge and even, especially Weil, contemplation. She uses theory in a very Platonic sense of contemplation of knowledge, and truth. For her, true freedom is when the human being builds his/her own life and destiny in

\textsuperscript{10} Oeuvres, 1044-45.

\textsuperscript{11} Oeuvres, 283.

\textsuperscript{12} In her terms, this is contemplation that acts. And it is proper to Weil that contemplation-action is guided by a supra-historical reality, that is, supernatural justice, as it was discussed in Chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{13} Oeuvres, 290-291.

\textsuperscript{14} Marx and Weil differ from each other on the human responsibility of building history. While Marx says that men and women fulfill this responsibility by their own historical movement of a creative-self, Weil asserts this is an attitude of contemplation-action guided by the supernatural.
which “the material conditions that permit him to exist are exclusively a work of his thought guiding the effort of his muscles.”¹⁵

In order to change realities of oppression, it is necessary that people have theory and practice, contemplation and action, knowledge and historical movement toward liberation. This is praxis, which enables revolutionary transformation. Aware of the lack of theory among the workers and their manipulation by some parties, Simone Weil decided to leave her academic career and joined the workers, the most oppressed group in France before WWII. She labored as they did and, in her free time, taught them.¹⁶ Weil assumed the task of bringing knowledge to the oppressed workers; this became one of her existential commitments. This practice was interrupted by the war and her premature death. Her experience was not very successful, as one can realize in many of her writings.¹⁷ First of all, the fragility of her body and the difficulty that she had to work mechanically without thinking, a requirement in handling machines to increase production, made her a unproductive worker and caused a few accidents.¹⁸ Second, Weil had difficulty in keeping the interest of the workers in her intellectual instructions. Perhaps her high intellectual mind and formation gave her difficulty in expressing herself in a way that was understandable by the workers, who had low and no education. Her short life did not give her enough time to review these initial experiences and to develop a

¹⁵ Oeuvres, 217.

¹⁶ She did that in a few experiences working in a car factory and on a farm. See: Simone Pêtremen, La Vie de Simone Weil 2: Avec de Lettres et D’Autres Textes Inédits de Simone Weil (Paris: Fayard, 1973), 7-56.

¹⁷ Oeuvres, 141-143; AD, 74-75.

method of teaching the oppressed, less educated people. But her ideal of bringing knowledge to the oppressed by joining them and recognizing their historical power is precious. As presented in an earlier discussion of Weil’s anthropology, this ideal was based on a conception that the unfortunates have the power to change history. They are neither a mass to be manipulated nor blank minds to be filled with dominant ideas. They are experts in the human condition and have knowledge. But they need to be empowered in their reality to be agents of historical praxis towards liberation. The voices of the poor presented in this dissertation prove this. These voices demonstrate the wisdom and historical power that can be found among the poor. At the same time, they reveal their limitations as a cry for an act of sensitive courage from people who can do as Weil did and join the poor in order to begin a dialectical process of mutual learning able to create praxis from below.

The last chapter developed a human rights framework for health care grounded on an anthropology of suffering and a liberating ethics. The historical praxis of the poor is a liberation ethics of those who are experts in the human condition. The poor know the impact of poverty on their health and the damage of a lack of healthcare assistance in their lives. Through empirical knowledge, they know that health care must be a human right. They know the negative consequences when health care is treated as a commodity. Thus, based on their experiences, the poor have a privileged role in ethical analysis and public actions which make them the first authorities to advocate for health care as a human right. They act to obtain this right, action that begins with their cry of pain and suffering, and extends to communitarian organizations to address health needs of the destitute sick and
advocate for public health care. Many of these actions, especially the ones for broad and quality public health, fail. Others achieve some success. They stop in their own limitations and barriers of a system led by a dominant minority that refuses to look at those who are suffering. This minority not only prevents the poor from having access to basic needs, but also prevents them from having knowledge and critical consciousness of the reasons for their poverty. It is an oppression that also intends to control the minds of the oppressed because an ignorant people do not threaten the status quo of the elite.

The poor have their historical power. They are experts in the human condition with a knowledge rooted in their culture, tradition, suffering, and daily struggles. This made them the first advocates for public health care as a human right as well as for global health. They have the practice of advocacy and solidarity among them. But in many regions of the world, this practice must become praxis. Hence, people who have a technical knowledge must join the poor in a movement of recognition of their faces to begin a dialectical process of mutual learning. This process will create critical consciousness and ways of popular action, that is, historical praxis.

Simone Weil did not develop a method of helping the oppressed to achieve knowledge/contemplation able to free them by the union of theory and praxis. But she inspired others who tried to continue where she left off. Certainly, the one who did this best was Paulo Freire from his experience of literacy of adults in the
Brazilian Northeast.\textsuperscript{19} Freire with his \textit{pedagogical method of education for freedom} provides concrete elements for developing the dialectical process of mutual learning with the poor. Freire’s method is a synthesis of the human experience of a being who contemplates the world to know it and to construct its history. His method of an experience of praxis of humans who “exist in the world which they are constantly re-creating and transforming.”\textsuperscript{20} In the world, every person has the vocation of humanization, but the reality of oppression has dehumanized the life of the poor. It distorts and denies the human vocation through injustice, exploitation and violence against the oppressed.\textsuperscript{21} Then, this creates a myth of historical determinism in the mind of the oppressed in order to support the privilege of the elites and injustice. Affirming that the way to humanize the world is through a process of liberation, Paulo Freire developed a dialogical method of education for critical thinking towards freedom. This is a process of \textit{conscientização}\textsuperscript{22} that engages people in the historical process as subjects against “destructive fatalism.”\textsuperscript{23} Freire stresses that the human being is historical because it creates history by a transformative activity

\begin{quotation}
\textsuperscript{19} Weil’s influence in his thought is clear, even with explicit quotations. See, for example, when Freire quotes Weil in \textit{Educação Como Prática da Liberdade}, 3rd ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1971), 58.


\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 43.

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Conscientização} is a word created by Paulo Freire. Sometimes it appears as \textit{conscientization} in English. \textit{Conscientização} means to achieve a stage of critical consciousness of the historical reality where individuals, especially the oppressed are inserted. \textit{Conscientização} includes a clear knowledge of the human vocation in the world, as a historical being who creates and recreates the world, who transform the social reality through his praxis. Freire says: “\textit{Conscientização} represents the development of the awakening of critical awareness.” Paulo Freire, \textit{Education for Critical Consciousness} (New York: Continuum, 2005), 15. Education should be a dialogical action that creates \textit{conscientização} in which people become subjects and agents of their history and not passive receptors of the culture of a dominant elite.

\textsuperscript{23} Freire, \textit{Pedagogia do Oprimido}, 32.
\end{quotation}
of reflection and action, that is, praxis. Dehumanization occurs when people cannot embody this praxis because of oppression and, consequently, are ignorant of the historical process and its mechanism of repression. **Conscientização** is the way to develop critical thinking to empower people as agents of social transformation. **Conscientização** “introduces or begins to introduce women and men to a critical form of thinking about their world” and raises an awareness that a new attitude before historical material conditions is possible.

This brief introduction of Paulo Freire’s thought provides a concrete way to engage in the education of the poor in order to help them to develop critical thinking and be agents of liberation through their historical praxis. His thought and method affirm the immanence of history without denying the transcendentality of the world. Material and transcendent realities are together in human history. He provides conciliation between the creative-self of Marx and the contemplation-action, with the supernatural in the world, of Weil. Beyond this philosophical debate of praxis, Freire’s method offers us a real path to engage the poor in the dialogical process of mutual learning. Consequently, it provides a form for the poor to engage in health care advocacy as a human right. Therefore, my main goal now is to create a framework for the dialogical process of mutual learning in health care based on praxis from below. As nobody creates anything *ex-nihilo*, Freire’s method will be the main inspiration with the community-based approach experience of *Pastoral da Saúde* and its activism for public health care in Brazil.

---

24 Ibid., 127-128.

25 Ibid., 104.

From now on, I will focus on developing a community-based approach of popular education of advocacy for public health care as a human right. This will suggest a practical framework for public health and global health activists and the engagement of the poor to act together promoting population health and health care. In addition, it will also be a community-based framework for health workers to join the poor in their professional practices with the participation of the poor, as agents of health. Of course, this community-based approach of popular education is dynamic, especially in its application. Therefore, it must to be informed by and adapted according to different realities and cultures. The experience of *Pastoral de Saúde* in Brazil will serve as a starting point for this community-based approach. I will briefly examine *Pastoral da Saúde*, as a case study, and then move to my proposal of popular education for health care advocacy and population health promotion.

To achieve this goal, I will follow the *see-judge-act* methodology. First, in order to prevent me from being vague, I will present the public health care system in Brazil and *Pastoral da Saúde* activism. Second, I will discuss some essential points of Freire’s account of popular education based on dialogue for critical thinking. Then I will show Catholic Social teaching on dialogue, including the CELAM’s perspective that has been deeply influenced by Freire. This second part will illuminate the first one by providing elements for concrete actions in public health activism and magisterial support for doing so. Finally, using the structure of *Pastoral da Saúde*, I will develop a scheme of action from below, steps for a community-based approach.
Before I proceed, I must clarify the expression *popular education*. *Popular education* and *popular educator* are commonly used in Latin America, and their meaning is well known. However, the common understanding of *popular* in English might lead to misconceptions. Popular education is a free translation of the Portuguese expression *educação popular* (or *educación popular* in Spanish). Both Portuguese and English versions are similar because of their Latin root *populus*. However, the meaning of *popular* is very different. *Populus* is a singular word that means *povo* (in Portuguese) or *pueblo* (in Spanish). *Povo/pueblo* (as I explained in Chapter 7) is singular to express a specific population of individuals united by a common identity. *Popular* is what comes from the *povo*. In the Latin American context, especially in Brazil, popular means something that is for and from the poor, who best represent the *povo*. Therefore, popular education – that is performed by popular educators in the company of the *povo* – is for the poor and with them, especially those who did not have an opportunity to go to school and are illiterate. In addition, popular education is political education in order to create an environment in which people can develop a critical consciousness. Paulo Freire developed a method of popular education from his experience of literacy of adults in the Brazilian Northeast.\(^\text{27}\)

\(^{27}\) The goal of popular education is not only to teach the poor how to read and write, but also establishing a inter-subjective communication between teacher and student in which both learning from one another in a dialogical way, mediated by the world, that is, the reality of students, their experiences and struggles. This dialogical action leads to a critical consciousness, a critical thinking, needed to empower the poor to be Subjects of history in a liberating praxis. Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, 36-49.
One question now is: who can be a popular educator? The answer is everybody, due to the principle that this education is dialogical. But there are people who are coordinators: those who have some technical knowledge and skills, and join the poor. They form dialogical groups of popular education. Later, other people from these groups will become coordinators and create new ones. Popular education is a process of multiplication, a historical praxis. In health care, people with health knowledge such as health professionals, public and global health activists, intellectuals, and community organizers, initiate this work of popular education for critical consciousness and praxis in communities marked by health inequalities. This is a liberating ethics because it is praxis from below, because it is an action with the poor and from their reality and their appropriation of world, towards liberation and justice in health care.

11.1 Brazilian Experience: Public Health System, Popular Participation, And Pastoral da Saúde

Public health care in Brazil is a major political debate since the beginning of the 1900's, at the time of the first public health movement known as Revolta da Vacina. Since then, many different approaches were adopted until the creation of SUS – Sistema Único de Saúde (Unified System of Health) in 1989. The Brazilian

---

28 This appropriation of the world is the hermeneutical lens of the poor that appropriates and re-reads everything that relates to them, including texts and contexts. See the discussion of this hermeneutic on the Prolegomenon of a Project.

public health system, SUS, was an achievement of the Brazilian people gathered in grassroots social groups led by the health reform movement. Universal coverage became a positive constitutional right that should be provided by the government. SUS is grounded on the principles of universality, integrality, and equity. It is a national integrated system with decentralized management and deliberative popular/social participation through local, state, and national health councils. The popular participation is present in the three levels of government involved in the decision-making processes affecting public health as well as a social mechanism used to verify that political decisions are being implemented. SUS focuses on primary care and health education from community-based actions. It is a system that serves the entire population of Brazil directly and indirectly, but approximately 75% are SUS dependents.

In health care, Brazil can be proud of having a public health system with universal coverage and social control by popular/social participation. But structural violence still has an impact on this system and on the lives of those who are poor.

---


31 A study of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBCE) found that 27.9% of Brazilians have some kind of complementary health care through private insurances. This can vary from full coverage to some specific healthcare services. See: IBGE – Coordenação de Trabalhos e Rendimentos, *Pesquisa Nacional de Saúde 2013: Acesso e Utilização dos Serviços de Saúde, Acidentes e Violência* (Rio de Janeiro: IBGE Press, 2015). http://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/visualizacao/livros/liv94074.pdf (accessed June 19, 2016). Structural violence in health care in Brazil begins with private insurance. For example, insurance companies promote a segregation of the population and a mentality that public health is for those who are poor. Consequently, fewer people engage in the participatory mechanism of SUS’s management, as to what is essential to make this system work. See: Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil, *Campanha da Fraternidade 2012: Fraternidade e Saúde Pública – Texto-Base* (Brasília: Edições CNBB, 2011), nos. 124-132.
Many issues prevent SUS from fully achieving its intended purpose. All of these are connected to structural violence. For example, governmental political decisions favor private insurances and hospitals, and cut funding from public health to distribute this money in areas that have a potential for economic growth. However, it is a fragile economic growth because it promotes inequality by keeping the poor in their poverty without adequate health care and quality education.\(^\text{32}\)

SUS is organized to solve most health demands in primary care through community-based centers and healthcare teams who interact directly with families in their homes and communities. This is called the Family Health Program.\(^\text{33}\) The system begins from the simple to the complex in order to promote population health and to decrease the need for inpatient and high medical specialties. It is a community-based model rather than hospital-centered one. Here lies one of the major challenges for SUS, because the culture is still oriented by the hospital-centered model of curative character. Despite the fact that the community-based approach is accepted, the insurance company lobby, which is hospital-centered and emphasizes high-tech specialized medicine, creates an atmosphere of competition between public and private health care. This conflict prevents the public system from consolidating and improving the community-based system that prioritizes a people-centered model of care in interconnection with society. At the base of this conflict are two different perspectives of healthcare delivery, namely, as a

\(^{32}\) In short, other problems in SUS are management and lack of resources, such as health professionals, structures, and medical supplies.

commodity or as a human right. The commodification of health care focuses on diseases and is *top-down*, that is, private health companies have a product to offer (health care) and people are consumers who purchase it when needed. There is no popular participation in the decision-making process in health care, such as allocation of resources, public health measures for population health, and immunization programs. Everything is decided by the need of the health market in the logic of supply and demand. This approach excludes all those who have no economic power to buy this healthcare commodity.

The human rights approach to health care is grounded on the logic of human need and flourishing. It is people-centered and requires broad social participation in the decision-making process in health care. Although vulnerable to economic fragilities, the human rights approach makes health care a right recognizing its need for human flourishing and a base for socio-economic development.\(^{34}\)

A human rights perspective in health care demands a community-based approach with significant participation of people, especially those who are at the bottom of society, in decision-making processes and strategies of health care and health education. As an achievement of grassroots social movements (described in Chapter 9), SUS is a system of universal coverage granted as a social right and supported by popular/social participation. This participation is essential for SUS if it is to work as structured and to improve its services. Popular/social participation takes place through health councils with deliberative power at the local, state and

\(^{34}\) Previous chapters showed data and arguments supporting the human rights approach, and the anthropology of suffering and liberation ethics as two foundations for health care as a human right rising from the communality of the human condition and actions from below.
federal levels. The popular representation at these councils is divided into three major social sectors: public authorities constitute 25%, health workers constitute 25%, and the final 50% is made up of those people who use SUS. Since anyone can be a member of SUS, this sector, directly and indirectly, represents almost 100% of the Brazilian people. This 50% sector is usually made up of community leaders from popular movements, such as volunteers from Pastoral de Saúde, members of social movements, and people from local communities. These people usually come from poor backgrounds and social realities. Unlike public authorities and health care workers, most of them do not have the technical skills and critical knowledge necessary to play a role in decision-making processes. Consequently, they do not take an active role in these processes. They can be easily manipulated by public authorities and are very vulnerable to the lobby of the private sector. This reality is a problem in itself and becomes an even greater problem in a country such as Brazil where political corruption is such a powerful force. Though theoretically, SUS has democratic representation in decision-making processes, in practice, representatives in the health councils do not act democratically. Inequalities in social status and educational training make equal participation in dialogue unlikely.

Participation is a great challenge to every society that seeks to be truly democratic. Participatory democracy requires that everyone in society has the necessary competencies and skills needed to play a role in the public arena, including an educational background sufficient to empower people to participate fully in the public sphere. When people do not possess the knowledge necessary to be active participants, they cannot play an active role in the public arena. As a
consequence, the system for decision-making ceases to be democratic. SUS has legitimate organs for people’s participation in the decision-making process; these include health councils and conferences. These organs support SUS’s community-based model, centered on people. However, the lack of interest and skills of people from poor communities are barriers for effective participation and social control. Therefore, it is essential to have a historical praxis among these communities, in which a process of mutual learning is created in order to empower marginalized people to engage in effective social participation. The process of mutual learning is popular education in which we also learn from the poor and help them achieve skills needed for effective sociopolitical participation. Consequently, a historical praxis is built from below. Hence, I underscore some elements essential to social and pastoral processes designed to empower the poor by providing them opportunities to raise their voices and necessary conditions to participate in decision-making processes related to public health care in the Brazilian context.\textsuperscript{35}

The Brazilian public health care system (SUS) requires popular/social participation in the formation of health care policies and in the monitoring of their implementation. The World Health Organization (WHO) describes the participatory model used in Brazil by saying:

\begin{quote}
In Brazil, participatory approaches to decision-making relevant to health have been inspired by the social movements that drove the establishment of the universal health system as well as subsequent improvements in primary health care.\textsuperscript{35}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{35} Although I am focusing on Brazil, this model of mutual learning of popular education can be applied in any context. Local adaptation is part of its nature once it is built upon the voices and experiences of the poor. The Brazilian context has the advantage of a public health system that favors popular participation, a result of the grassroots movements. Where there is no such mechanism, the first step leads to the creation of spaces for democratic participation.
health care and social protection. The 1988 Brazilian constitution established health — including the right to participate in health governance — as a human right for all. This commitment provided the space for institutionalizing public participation at the municipal, state, and national levels. Participation through health councils at each of these levels (including municipal health councils in 5564 cities, where half the councilors represent health system users) is supplemented by regular national health conferences. Innovative models such as participatory budgeting have also been implemented in some jurisdictions.\(^{36}\)

As legal mechanisms of participation, the mission of health councils and conferences of health are to make decisions and to take actions related to public health, to approve budget allocations, and to debate and approve executive proposals. These councils also are mechanisms of social control that is used to monitor the implementation of decisions. The conferences of health are called on periodically to debate health issues at state and national levels. According to a common agenda and a platform of policies, they decide priorities for a given period of time.\(^{37}\)


\(^{37}\) Associação Paulista de Medicina, *SUS: O Que Você Precisa Sabe Sobre o Sistema Único de Saúde* (São Paulo: Atheneu, 2010), 121-137.
On the one hand, popular/social participation requires a structure of democratic participation in decision-making processes as well as the monitoring of the implementations of public policies. WHO affirms that this participation is essential for sustainable governance. Sometimes the government itself creates a number of barriers that undermine participation. It is necessary to breakdown these barriers in order to create a culture of participatory democracy. “Governments can help overcome these barriers and create conditions that are conducive to the participation of empowered communities in making decisions that affect their
health in the context in which they live.”38 In order to advance popular/social participation in a democratic sense, it is necessary for the government to take action by creating a new culture of participatory democracy through legal mechanisms and structures that allow an interaction between “communities and civil society on the one side and governments on the other.”39 Brazil took this important step in creating SUS. By doing so, the Brazilian health system should be strengthened since it created the conditions for the democratic participation of all members of civil society.

On the other hand, popular/social participation needs people who have the characteristics to play a role in decision-making processes in health councils. This is a problem in the Brazilian system because 50% of members of health councils are people from communities that use SUS. The majority of these people come from underprivileged realities and have had limited access to education. Without an education that enables them to think critically, and a basic minimum knowledge of public health, these people are only symbolic participants in health councils. Consequently, popular participation is undermined. In this regard, the Brazilian government has failed. Given this reality, it is necessary to promote health for the general population by empowering the poor to acquire the skills to play a role in this arena, thereby, raising their voices as the first authorities in human suffering and advocates for public health care as a human right. This goal is achieved in a process of mutual learning through popular education. The social ministry of

38 World Health Organization, Closing the Gap, 2.
39 Ibid.
Pastoral da Saúde in Brazil is a successful experience of a process of empowerment and collective actions toward public health from below. It has established a structure that allows a network of popular education to provide the resources needed for democratic participation in the decision-making process in public health.

The Pastoral da Saúde

Social ministry is a way that the Catholic Church has contributed to promote human rights and social justice. This ministry is illumined by the Gospel and Catholic Social teaching. It embodies different forms and practices, according to specific contexts and local issues. In Latin America, especially after Vatican II, Catholic Social ministry assumed a historical praxis from the experience of basic ecclesial communities (explained in Chapter 3). Advocacy for public and universal health care has been a part of this social ministry that the Brazilian Catholic community embodies in the practice of Pastoral da Saúde.40

The Catholic Church has a long history of social ministry in Brazil. After Vatican II, inspired by fresh air from the council, the Brazilian Church began a dynamic activism for justice among the poor. The Conferences of Latin American Bishops (CELAM) of Medellín (1968) and Puebla (1979) provided clear directions for the Church’s mission in Latin America, a mission grounded on the Gospel and

---

40 Literally, Pastoral da Saúde means Pastoral of Health. In the English language, especially in the US context, Pastoral of Health is called Pastoral Care. However, Pastoral Care does not correspond to the meaning and activism of Pastoral da Saúde in Brazil. The main difference is in regard to their focus. Pastoral Care focuses on the sick. It provides counseling and spiritual assistance for the sick and their families. Pastoral da Saúde includes this kind of assistance to the sick and their family, but this is only one aspect of its ministry. Pastoral da Saúde focuses on the community and, from a community-based approach, develops a social ministry in public health care, population health, and health education. See: Coordenação Nacional da Pastoral da Saúde, A Pastoral da Saúde e o Controle Social no SUS do Brasil (Uberlândia: Pastoral da Saúde Nacional Press, 2010).
motivated by the preferential option for the poor.\textsuperscript{41} The social ministry of the Catholic Church in Latin America was a clear option for a Church among the poor and their struggle for justice.\textsuperscript{42} The basic ecclesial communities were popular expressions of this Church of the poor as a \textit{new way of being church}. The Conference of Puebla confirmed this expression and its heart, the preferential option for the poor.\textsuperscript{43} CELAM’s most recent conference in Aparecida (2007) highlighted that this option “is a peculiarity that marks the identity of the Latin American and Caribbean Church.”\textsuperscript{44}

In Brazil, this expression of \textit{being Church of the poor} was also embodied by the social ministry, known as \textit{Pastoral Social}.\textsuperscript{45} Many social ministries appeared in the Catholic Church to address social concerns, such as working conditions, urbanism, agrarian reformation, housing, education, infant mortality, gender inequalities, immigration, unemployment, political reform, and public health care. In the middle 1970s, \textit{Pastoral da Saúde} began as a development of the Pastoral of the Sick (or Pastoral Care). The Pastoral of the Sick was a ministry to be in solidarity with the sick and to provide the sacraments. The shift to \textit{Pastoral da Saúde} began at

\textsuperscript{41} The social ministry of the Catholic Church in Latin America, guided by the Conferences of CELAM, was discussed in chapters 4 and 6, especially the relevance and centrality of the preferential option for the poor.

\textsuperscript{42} Although this has never been unanimous in the Church, nor free from internal conflicts.

\textsuperscript{43} Puebla states: “The Conference of Puebla reiterates, with a renewed hope in the vivifying strength of the Spirit, the statement of the II General Conference that made a clear and prophetic preferential option for the poor in solidarity, nevertheless mistakes and interpretations that some made and misrepresent the Medellín spirit, ignorance and hostility of the others. We affirm the need for conversion of the entire Church into a preferential option for the poor in order to promote an integral liberation.” Puebla, no. 1134.

\textsuperscript{44} Aparecida, no. 391.

\textsuperscript{45} Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil, \textit{A Missão da Pastoral Social} (Brasília: Edições CNBB, 2008).
the time of the Brazilian movement for re-democratization along with the movement for health reform. So \textit{Pastoral da Saúde} and the Catholic Church became voices for public health care and universal coverage, together with other grassroots groups led by the movement for sanitation reform. As a result, the Unified Health System (SUS) was created.

Since then, \textit{Pastoral da Saúde} has been developed and now it is organized in three dimensions that gather more than one hundred thousand people working as volunteers. \textit{Pastoral da Saúde} aims to serve the poor and sick in their spiritual, physical, mental, and social needs. In order to respond to these challenges, three dimensions – \textit{solidarity}, \textit{communitarian}, and \textit{sociopolitical} – were created as areas of actions to promote dignity and justice in health care.

- \textit{The Solidarity Dimension} aims to show the solidarity of the ecclesial community with those who are ill by providing spiritual, emotional, and humanitarian support. The Solidarity dimension has, as its goal, being a Samaritan presence (Lk 10, 25-37) for those who are suffering in their homes, communities, and healthcare institutions in order to promote comfort and dignity. Those who work in this dimension also advocate for patients’ rights.

- \textit{The Communitarian Dimension} focuses on actions from a communitarian setting to promote health education and to be a bridge between healthcare centers and families. The goal is promoting health by education and encouraging people to engage in public health activism. This dimension addresses the social determinants of health, and emphasizes the need for primary care and prevention. It is an activism from the local community to the larger society. The communities, such as basic
ecclesial communities, parishes, and communal centers, become centers of popular education for health in two ways. First, communities provide primary care assistance by volunteer health workers. Second, these centers are spaces of popular education for people acting in health councils of the public health system.

- The Sociopolitical Dimension focuses on public health. It advocates for justice in health through the role of Pastoral da Saúde agents in the political arena, especially in health councils and conferences. It advocates for public policies on behalf of a fair allocation of resources that prioritize the health needs of the poor. It also monitors the implementation of public policies through social control and ensures bioethical reflection.46

The Latin American bishops adopted this model of Pastoral da Saúde and issued a document that states the objective of this social ministry: “Evangelizing with a renewed missionary spirit the world of health, grounded in the preferential option for the poor and the sick, and participating in the construction of a society that serves life with justice and solidarity.”47

Pastoral da Saúde agents have worked hand in hand with the community-based centers for primary care and in health councils. Pastoral da Saúde also has a representative in the National Council of Health, part of the Brazilian Ministry of

46 About the dimensions of Pastoral da Saúde in Brazil, see: Coordenação Nacional da Pastoral da Saúde, A Pastoral da Saúde e o Controle Social no SUS no Brasil, (Uberlândia: Pastoral da Saúde Nacional Press, 2010). These dimensions were assumed by the CELAM that present them as a guide for all Pastoral Health in the Latin America. See: Conferência Episcopal da América Latina e Caribe, Discípulos Missionários no Mundo da Saúde: Guia para a Pastoral da Saúde na América Latina e no Caribe (São Paulo: Centro Universitário São Camilo Press, 2010).

Health. Despite many difficulties and barriers, these agents have served as a connection between the sick, especially the destitute ones, and society. Theirs is a work of supporting families, education and inclusion of those who are poor and ill in their local communities in order to facilitate the process of social integration and the empowerment of poor people and their families. Although this work is humble, it has produced much fruit in places where Pastoral da Saúde exists. It is a beautiful mission in which the community lives solidarity as a social virtue. Ecclesiastically speaking, it is a ministry that originated from below, that is, from the experience of the poor gathered in small communities and was recognized and supported by the bishops.

Pastoral de Saúde in Brazil seeks to promote health through actions with and on behalf of the People of God in a collaborative way involving the whole society. It is defined as “an action of evangelization of all People of God committed to promoting, caring, defending, and celebrating life according to the liberating and salvific mission of Jesus in the world of health.”48 Moreover, Pastoral de Saúde seeks to participate in collective creative construction of a new society stressing the preferential option for the poor and the sick through the promotion of justice and solidarity.49

Although Pastoral da Saúde has highly educated members with technical skills in health care, the great majority of its members and activists are people with low education from poor communities. As Comblin said, these are the people (povo)

---

48 Ibid., no. 89.
49 Ibid., no. 69.
who shape the *Church of the Poor*; a people who lives in solidarity and struggle for justice, supported by faith lived in community. They have achieved many things, but there is still a long way to go, especially in the current context of Brazil, marked by division, corruption, economic crises, and the fortification of neoliberal policies. This national context has strongly affected the public system, and many of its achievements are at risk. Therefore, the sociopolitical activism from those who are experts in the human condition and in the impact of neoliberal policies on public health is essential for the protection of SUS, for maintaining acquired health rights, and for the expansion of this system towards universal coverage and effective health care assistance.

SUS has legitimate institutions of popular/social participation. *Pastoral da Saúde* is in these institutions through its agents who represent the people, especially the poor. However, these agents have limited education in public health, a limitation that is also present among the most *Pastoral de Saúde* agents regardless of the services they are performing. This shows the urgency to establish a process of mutual learning in which a popular education can lead these agents (and many others who want to join this struggle) to be aware of the big picture of public health in Brazil. In addition, this process is also an education in skills needed for a more effective participation by the poor in the decision-making process in health care.

*Pastoral de Saúde* assumes a popular approach in health care. Its activism starts from below at the grassroots communities. There is already popular education in *Pastoral de Saúde* groups, led by its own members. It is a demanding

---

step beyond education, a step that can have the presence of more people with technical skill in order to create a space of mutual learning and critical consciousness, able to empower the poor to be active agents in decision-making processes. The poor are the great power behind Pastoral de Saúde in Brazil. They form communities in order to care for each other in their struggle for justice in public health. Their faith sustains their action, providing hope, sensitive courage, and values to support one another in their suffering and struggle for liberation. However, unmet basic needs and lack of education prevent the poor from having a more powerful role to play in the public arena. Mindful of these realities, those who have technical skills and believe that health care is a human right (and recognize the suffering face of the unfortunates) must join the poor, so that together they create a process of mutual learning and social transformation.

On the one hand, the experience of recognition leads to sensitive courage to join the poor in their reality, to see their faces, to listen to their voices, and to learn from their empirical knowledge. On the other hand, popular education for critical consciousness, as Paulo Freire suggests, is a way to empower the poor to be agents in decision-making processes related to public health. Now, let’s discuss Freire’s method in order to use it in public and global health activism from below.

11.2 Freire’s Popular Education and Dialogue for Critical Thinking

The presentation of narratives is an essential point in this dissertation. They are the voices of the poor that have been presented from encounters with humble people in different parts of Latin America, especially Bolivia and Brazil. Listening to
these voices is a movement of openness to learn from them, to recognize the faces of the unfortunates and their knowledge. It is also the beginning of a process of mutual learning, a process grounded on the recognition of the other, compassion, tolerance, and dialogue. Popular education is a praxis of mutual learning among the poor towards liberation. Being a popular educator is a vocation that some individuals discover in an experience of encountering the other. Here is a narrative of this discovery.

Once I heard from a young man from Brazil how he discovered that his vocation was to be a teacher and a popular educator. He said that when he was attending college, he had a professor who marked him forever. He was a second year student in the philosophy program at a Catholic university when he met this professor in a course of epistemology. On the one hand, he was fascinated with classical philosophy, especially Plato. On the other hand, he was extremely active among social movements in his country, where he said he found people who introduced him to revolutionary readings, especially Marxism. The classes in epistemology helped him to read critically any kind of texts, philosophical, scientific, journalistic and so forth. They also taught him to organize his knowledge in logical and coherent ways. It was a dense course that required from him many hours of studies to follow the professor’s lectures. However, he shared that he was not totally satisfied with these classes because he questioned himself: *It seems the only valid knowledge is this epistemological one. It is for a very small elite. Don’t the poor have any valid knowledge?* This questioning stemmed from his experience among the poor in social movements. Then, in an unexpected occurrence in the second half of
this course, the professor said: *It is now time to study the popular culture,* the formation of its knowledge, and its historical power. First, the young man said the professor presented Antonio Gramsci, the first philosopher who recognized that popular culture has knowledge and introduced concepts such as fragmented knowledge, knowledge of resistance, and organic intellectual. Then, he said enthusiastically, *We began to study Paulo Freire and his 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed.'* This study addressed his doubt. He noted that the poor have an epistemology. It is a fragmented and non-systematic knowledge, as Gramsci affirmed. But it is a knowledge that must be recognized because the poor have something to say and to teach us. Paulo Freire provided this young man with what he had missed in his classes of epistemology and his activism among the poor: a way to engage in a productive dialogue with the poor and the ability to lead them to build knowledge which would empower them to become agents of their own history.

This narrative shows the way of a young person discovering his vocation to work with the poor as a popular educator. This happened between his studies, when he acquired technical skills, and his experience among the poor and social movements, where he saw the face of the unfortunates, their suffering and struggle for justice. He found Paulo Freire who provided a way to effectively engage the poor in a process of mutual learning. The reality of public health and its social determinants described before (especially in Chapter 9), and the socio-pastoral action of *Pastoral da Saúde* in Brazil are points of reference to support the argument that if the poor and their community leaders are to participate as social agents in

---

51 Recall what I stated about the meaning of “popular” in the Brazilian context.
public health decision-making processes, then popular education is essential to their empowerment. So it is necessary that more people, in general, and theological/healthcare ethicists and health professionals, in particular, discover their vocation to work with the poor as popular educators. Certainly, Freire is the one who best developed a concrete way to create a praxis of popular education, sustained by an anthropological base and liberation ethics. Freire’s proposal of popular education for critical consciousness offers us a means to empower the poor to take an active role in the sociopolitical arena. Freire’s insights provide a praxis of mutual learning that can establish a critically-minded popular health education program that supports the poor in becoming agents in decision-making processes and social control in public health care. The work of Paulo Freire promotes the empowerment of the poor by advancing education for social transformation. By developing a profile of the liberating educator, Freire asserts a method of working with the poor to transform reality with them. The popular educator recognizes that the poor have something to offer and not only something to learn. He/she recognizes the power of the poor in history.

Freire’s method is an educational one that involves a collective construction of knowledge and not a mere transmission of information. He often criticizes the traditional model of education that he describes as “banking education” because it sees students as recipients who have nothing to offer. This type of education reproduces the dominant mentality and supports oppression and marginalization.\textsuperscript{52} In contrast to banking education, Freire presents a model of “liberating education”

\textsuperscript{52} Paulo Freire, \textit{Pedagogia do Oprimido}, 80-81.
that encourages students to use their creativity in a concrete context and through a
dialogical relationship between teacher and student; it challenges them to recreate it. "Liberating education, which problematizes, cannot be the act of depositing, or narrating, or transferring, or transmitting information and values to students, mere passive according to the banking education, but rather [liberating education] consists in an act of cognition."53

The context in which people live and their social reality, at both the micro and macro levels, are indispensable to the learning process. Paulo Freire wrote from a context of unjust social reality where resources to meet basic needs and access to a good education were lacking. Such a lack prevented the poor from developing their lives and achieving dignified existence. Therefore, a liberating education is necessary to empower people to struggle to re-create their context and to transform the social reality.

According to Freire, the practice of liberating education involves three essential principles. First, liberating education requires an anthropological vision that is based on an integral conception of the human being and a dialectical view of history. The ontological vocation of every person is to humanize her/himself.54 While it would seem logical that human beings should be human, such logic does not prevail when there are human relationships and social structures that dichotomize55 human beings and destroy the integrity of their lives. Oppression

53 Ibid., 94.
54 Ibid., 40.
55 Freire refers to the dichotomy between objectivity and subjectivity in human existence. He affirms: "One cannot think of objectivity without subjectivity." An oppressive reality denies the subjectivity of the oppressed/workers by making their being only a "thing" that acts to move a
dichotomizes the oppressed who live in such a way that everything seems to be historically determined, that is to say, poverty exists and nothing can be done to change that fact. If you are poor, just keep doing what you are doing because there is nothing you can do to change your tragic reality. If you are working, just keep on working and do not question why you are working in such terrible conditions because nobody can change those conditions. In one of his late work, against this sense of fatalism, Freire says:

We cannot reject the struggle for the exercise of our capacities and our rights to decide. In this way, I insist that **history is possibility and not determinism.** We are conditions beings, but not determined beings. It is impossible to understand history as possibility if we do not recognize human beings as being who make free decisions. Without this form of exercise it is not worth speaking about ethics.56

Strange as it may seem, the humanity of the oppressors is likewise dichotomized. They, too, share a deterministic view of history that influences their lives. In order to secure their good life, they must avoid being attentive to those who are below them in terms of social status. Freire asserts that a liberating education is able to overcome this dichotomy and lead humankind to an experience of full humanization where all people are the subjects of history and capable of recreating system of production. The authentic human action is a construction grounded on a liberating consciousness. Moreover, subjectivity cannot deny liberating actions. Therefore, overcoming this dichotomy is a process of liberation in which an objective action is united with a subjective consciousness of the oppression and its impact on individual and social lives. Freire, *Pedagogia do Oprimido,* 50-51.

56 Freire, *Pedagogy of the Heart* (New York: Continuum, 1997), 37. In a previous work, Freire affirms that transforming history is a human task. “The objective social reality, that does not exist by chance but, as a product of human action, is neither transformed by chance. If human beings are products of this reality and if it, in an inversion of the ‘praxis,’ turns back upon them and conditions them, transforming the oppressive reality is a historical task. It is the task of humankind.” Freire, *Pedagogia do Oprimido,* 51.
the world. He also affirms that human beings can only experience such integral liberation when the poor are in a position to lead because the power of the poor in history is the power to liberate themselves and their oppressors. This liberating education requires confronting the dualistic consciousness within the oppressed, both as individuals and as a community, who have the oppressor’s mentality in themselves and, at the same time, desire to be free. The oppressed “suffer a duality that is installed in the inner life of the self.”\(^{57}\) This causes them to act in the same practices of their oppressors, “between saying words and not having voice, castrated in their power to create and recreate, in their power to transform the word. This is the tragic dilemma of the oppressed, that their pedagogy must confront.”\(^{58}\) The role of the oppressed in the process of transformation is unique and substantial to overcome this dualism that Freire affirms: “Therefore, it is only the oppressed who, by liberating themselves, can liberate the oppressors.”\(^{59}\) In summary, the goal of Freire’s pedagogy is to empower the poor to be subjects of history so as to experience their full humanity by becoming fully human.

Freire’s second principle for liberating education involves paying attention to the context, that is, to the places where the poor actually live. For Freire, liberating education requires reading the “word” in the “context” of the world. The micro and macro contexts are interconnected. From within the micro context, we can see the effects of the oppressive power that the macro context has on the lives of the poor. Popular education occurs when the lives of the poor interact dialectally with the

\(^{57}\) Paulo Freire, *Pedagogia do Oprimido*, 47.

\(^{58}\) Ibid., 48.

\(^{59}\) Ibid., 60.
contexts in which they find themselves. Education for critical consciousness, as a practice of freedom, is not a decontextualized infusion of information; rather, it is a collective construction of knowledge in a specific context.

The social reality in which the poor live is extremely relevant to the processes of humanization and social liberation. By becoming more aware of their reality and the causes of their oppression, the poor begin to relate facts that enable them to understand that the reason for their poverty is not historical determinism or God’s will. Rather, it is a result of unjust social relations, oppression, and marginalization. (In health care, for example, they realize that all lobbying of the private sector for the commodification of health services is interested in dismantling public health to create more space for insurance companies which respond to the market interest rather than to the needs of the poor.) Little by little, from the perspective of their micro reality, the poor begin to understand that their poverty has historical causes and it is possible to act in history to struggle against these causes. The poor come to realize the dialectical movement of history and their role as agents in the historical process. As Freire notes: “Critical consciousness is integrated with reality... 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.”

Freire’s third element for liberating education involves recognizing that the poor possess knowledge and have power in history. Popular education is not a few intellectuals going into a slum and imposing upon the poor their theories of how to

---

transform the world. Avant-gardism submits poor people to the ideals of a leader who has the last word and who comes from outside the popular classes.\textsuperscript{61} This only serves to keep the poor in a dichotomized existence with no recognition of their positive contribution as agents. As Antonio Gramsci noted, popular classes have their own knowledge that is fragmented, scattered and yet resistant to the dominant culture.\textsuperscript{62} Popular education involves interaction with this knowledge in a process of mutual learning in order to rebuild the world.

Mindful of these three principles of Paulo Freire, it is important to note that popular education is a process of creative, collective construction that occurs among the poor within their context, suffering, and struggles. Likewise, it is important to observe that the popular educator is one who joins the poor and acknowledges their full humanity in a dialogical relationship inside the liberating process from below. Dialogue is not something that will occur after the liberation. Rather liberation is only possible through a dialogical action of cooperation in which “Subjects meet to transform the world in cooperation.”\textsuperscript{63} Dialogue is active participation and raises critical consciousness. The popular educator does not have the whole truth or the solution to all of the world’s problems. He or she has some technical skills or scientific training that must interact with the empirical knowledge of the poor in a process of mutual learning and collective construction of the world. As Freire notes:

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{61} Id., \textit{Pedagogy of the Heart} (New York: Continuum, 1997), 78.
\textsuperscript{63} Freire, \textit{Pedagogia do Oprimido}, 227.
\end{flushright}
“Dialogue is the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world; therefore, it is not restricted by the relationship I-you.”

If this dialogical method is to work authentically in popular education, certain requirements must be met. First of all, those using this method must believe that human beings can always recreate the world and, in the process of doing so, become more fully human. “There is no dialogue without an intense faith in humankind, faith in their power to make and remake, to create and re-create, faith in their vocation to be more fully human.” Other requirements are love, humility, and hope. All of these are necessary for dialogue “to be built in a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is the obvious consequence.”

In addition, dialogue is a relationship of communication and intercommunication that is entered into by persons who are subjects/agents. In popular education, the poor are subjects/agents who build their knowledge in dialogue among themselves, with educators, and with the social reality. “Communication implies a reciprocity which cannot be broken.” Through this reciprocity the popular educator encourages the poor to engage in a dialogical process and bring to it all of their experiences that are connected to the topic they are discussing. Every resource the poor have is a welcomed contribution to the

---

64 Ibid., 109.
65 Ibid., 112.
66 They are virtues that guide relationships among the members of the community and their historical praxis.
67 Ibid., 113.
dialogical process. “Thus during communication there are no passive subjects”\(^69\) because it is characterized by a dialogue that values the knowledge of the poor. This knowledge is not systematic, but it is, for example, present in narratives and experiences of life that the poor bring with them. “In the relationship between communication and dialogue the Subjects engage in dialogue and express themselves through a system of linguistic signs.”\(^70\)

In thinking about Freire’s vision for liberating education and endeavoring to meet the contemporary challenge of empowering the poor to participate more actively in health councils (as per the Brazilian public health system), it is important to recognize that there are many ways to engage the poor in dialogical processes of learning about public health. The poor usually have a great deal of experience using the public health care system.\(^71\) Frequently, they are in need of healthcare services for themselves or for someone in their families or community. Popular education related to public health care begins by allowing the poor to express themselves and discuss their experiences of contact with SUS (or any healthcare service). On the basis of such dialogue, those who seek to be liberating public health educators have access to a wealth of materials that allow them to see the social problems and inequalities in health care from a new hermeneutical lens. Such awareness leads us to seek out possible structural or systemic causes, to think of ways to redress this

\(^{69}\) Ibid.

\(^{70}\) Ibid., 125. Linguistic signs are narratives, stories, and common words that acquire particular meanings for specific communities. People from a community use these signs to express themselves, to appropriate the context around them, and to understand their reality, including social and personal dramas and struggles.

\(^{71}\) This is clear in Chapters 7 and 8, when the voices of the poor were literally presented.
unjust social reality, and to discover ways of actively engaging in the struggle to creatively and collectively construct a better system. This dialogical process is based upon a relationship in which the object is understood collectively.

Paulo Freire says: “True communication is not, in my opinion, the exclusive transfer or transmission of knowledge from one Subject to another, but rather his co-participation in the act of comprehending the object.” Freire affirms that it is not an “exclusive transfer or transmission of knowledge” because he knew very well the existence of knowledge that comes from outside the poor. In the context of health care, knowledge from outside is greatly needed, particularly with regard to information about the organization of healthcare systems, healthcare services, and technical terms related to health and health care. This knowledge is also important and necessary for taking action in decision-making processes. Freire’s method does not seek to eliminate or exclude such information, but it does seek to guarantee that when this information is presented to the poor, it is explained in a manner that they can understand and appropriate it for themselves.

Finally, the Freirian notion of epistemological curiosity shows the dynamism of the dialogical method in the process of mutual learning. Curiosity is an element of human existence and development. Through curiosity a baby begins to discover the world. This curiosity gradually loses its relevance in a context of oppression and lack of access to basic tools necessary for its development, such as education. This

---

72 Ibid., 126.
73 The loss of epistemological curiosity is a result of the action of oppression on marginalized groups. This oppression, in Freire’s terms, forces the oppressed to move inside dualism, in which the mentality of the oppressor becomes part of their self. Consequently, the oppressed see their lives as a static reality, a historical determinist that does not depend on them to change. This is the destruction
leads to a posture of complacency and a vision of historical determinism. The creative-self is damaged because the context of oppression and scarcity destroys the harmony between theory-practice. However, as curiosity is a human quality, it does not disappear totally. So Freire observes that the poor maintain a naïve curiosity that must become a critically-minded epistemological curiosity. “Dialogic experience is fundamental for building epistemological curiosity.”

Such curiosity involves thinking critically about everything and everyone – those with whom we have contact and all that happens in our daily lives, especially in our social reality. Curiosity becomes more and more epistemological throughout the process of popular education. As we build knowledge dialectically, our critical consciousness is shaped towards the harmony between theory-practice in a historical praxis.

_Dialogical Method and Catholic Social Teaching_

A human rights framework in health care must be supported by those who are experts in human existence and know in their own flesh the impact of lacking healthcare assistance or its commodification. They are the poor, the unfortunates. Those who are not technically part of this marginalized and vulnerable group must join them, and create a process of mutual learning within historical praxis. The dialogical method, fed by the recognition of the other and a movement of sensitive courage, is a concrete way to engage in the process of mutual learning from below.

---

Footnote:

74 Freire, _Pedagogy of the Heart_, 100.
This is a prophetic perspective of popular education and participation in decision-making processes in health care and public, global health activism that raise the voices of those who are voiceless.

Dialogue is not an easy task. Although dialogue seems to be an existential necessity for human beings, engaging in a true dialogue requires an honest effort from one interlocutor to interact with another in mutually reciprocal relationship among equal subjects. This requires openness to listen to the other without prejudgments and with a disposition to learn. Dialogue is an encounter among people in “an act of creation.”\textsuperscript{75} In a dialogue, people are active agents who, mediated by their contexts and perspectives, create and recreate their world. So it is a collective action of creativity and growth. An authentic dialogue, in which one does not attempt to dominate the other, is an “act of liberation” for both interlocutors who address the world “which is to be transformed and humanized.”\textsuperscript{76}

Dialogue as an act of liberation must begin with the presupposition that all people, regardless of who they are, where they come from, and their age, have something to offer and a potential to engage in a creative dialogue to build the world. Paulo Freire says: “Dialogue cannot exist, however, in the absence of a profound love of the world and for people. It is not possible to name the world, which is an act of creation and re-creation, if it is not infused with love. As the foundation of dialogue, love is, at the same time, dialogue itself.”\textsuperscript{77} In his book \textit{Educação como Prática da Liberdade}, he adds: “Born of a critical matrix, dialogue

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{75} Freire, \textit{Pedagogia do Oprimido}, 110.
\item \textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 109.
\item \textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 110.
\end{itemize}
creates a critical attitude. It is nourished by love, humility, hope, faith, and trust. 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. Only dialogue truly communicates.”

Mutual trust must be the base of the process of learning among the poor. This shows how important the anthropology developed in Part I is: the recognition of the face of the poor and their suffering reveal the fragility of the human condition. This guides a movement of compassion and opens to praxis with the poor, a liberation ethic. All this is an experience of love on which the dialogue is built. Just as Freire says, without a profound love for people there is no dialogue. This requires a tremendous movement of humility, hope, faith, and trust as virtues that foster authentic, tolerant, and critical dialogue.

The Christian tradition also offers lights to illuminate experiences of establishing a liberating and creative dialogue, a foundation of popular education. Therefore, the Catholic Church can play a significant role in this mission, especially in Latin America.

Vatican II was conducted in a spirit of dialogue. This was essential for its fruits to flow to the Church and the world. One of the most important impulses for this spirit of dialogue was the courage and humility of Pope John XXIII who engaged the entire Church in a dialogue to rethink herself and her mission in the world. Then, the brightness of Pope Paul VI provided form to this dialogue with the Encyclical Ecclesiam Suam where he presented dialogue as the method of the

---

Christian apostolate rooted in four characteristics: *clarity, meekness, confidence, and prudence*. Dialogue has also been a key element of Pope Francis’ pontificate. He usually begins his texts and documents with an affirmation that he is offering a reflection to “enter into dialogue with all people.” In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Guadium*, Francis argues that social dialogue is important to construct peace. He says:

> Evangelization also involves the path of dialogue. For the Church today, three areas of dialogue stand out where she needs to be present in order to promote full human development and to pursue the common good: dialogue with states, dialogue with society – including dialogue with cultures and the sciences – and dialogue with other believers who are not part of the Catholic Church.

And in his Encyclical *Laudato Sí*, Francis stresses: “Today in view of the common good, there is urgent need for politics and economics to enter into a frank dialogue in the service of life, especially human life.”

CELM’s meetings also opted for following this spirit of dialogue, especially the Conferences of Medellín (1968) and Puebla (1979). Medellín encouraged a liberating education based on critical dialogue because this is what “Latin America needs to redeem itself from unjust servitude and, above all, from its own egoism.” Puebla affirmed that the Catholic community must be a “bridge of contact and

---

79 ES, nos. 81-82.
80 LS, no. 3.
81 EG, nos. 238-258.
82 Ibid., no. 238.
83 LS, no. 189.
84 Medellín, 117 [4.8].
dialogue.” Then it added: “In an attitude of sincere listening and welcoming, in this contact and dialogue we must address issues that are raised from their [the poor] own temporal environment.”

Aparecida (2007) also embraced dialogue as a way of announcing the good-news and denouncing social sin, “a dialogue from different cultural worldviews: celebration, inter-relationship, and revival of hope.”

The Latin American bishops who participated in the general conferences of CELAM chose to use popular education as a means for enabling the Church to engage with the poor in developing ever greater degrees of social participation. The final documents of the general conferences of CELAM recognized that the poor lacked education and that the work of conscientização was a necessary form of pastoral engagement among the poor. The document of Puebla, for example, presented strategies for popular education as a pastoral directive: “To promote popular education (informal education) in order to revitalize our popular culture, use should be made of picture and sound media that creatively bring out the profoundly Christian values and symbols of Latin American culture.”

Puebla also encouraged the Christian community to assume its social responsibility for broad-based dialogue through its involvement in all aspects of civil society.

More recently, CELAM’s bishops gathered in Aparecida (2007) also encouraged the pastoral engagement of the Church in popular education as a means.

---

85 Puebla, no. 1226.
86 Puebla, no. 1227.
87 Aparecida, no. 97.
88 Puebla, no. 1047.
89 Ibid., no. 1048.
for upholding its social commitment to the poor. The final document states that it is necessary “to promote more effective ecclesial ways in order to prepare the lay people to assume their social commitment and intervene in social issues.”

According to the Document of Aparecida, the role of the Church in society must be oriented by the poor. If it is to be liberating with a structured social ministry, it must focus on the poor and those who are excluded. In addition, Aparecida requires a creative ministry that finds ways of supporting people in the public arena and in the decision-making process.

The Catholic Church in Latin America has a tradition – that began with the basic ecclesial communities in the 1950s – of popular education rooted in CELAM’s documents and in the experiences of socially engaged grassroots communities. (Paulo Freire has strongly influenced this ecclesial tradition of popular education, not only by his books, but also through his engagement in popular education inside Christian communities. Freire also had a direct influence in CELAM’s documents, being one of the hands who wrote the draft of Chapter 4 for the Document of Medellín.)

In Brazil, the social ministry of the Church has contributed a great deal

---

90 Aparecida, nos. 400-402.
91 Ibid., no. 400.
92 Ibid., no. 399.
93 Ibid., no. 401.
94 Ibid., no. 402.
95 Ibid., no. 403.
96 This fact is well known in Brazil; but I had this testimony in 2007 from Fr. Julio Munaro, MI in an interview. Fr. Munaro was secretary of the Brazilian Conference of Religious Life (CRB) when the Conference of Medellín occurred (1968). He attended this conference as a peritus and was part of the education commission when he worked with Paulo Freire on a draft about education in Latin America. This interview was taped and is now in the Library of the Saint Camillus University in São Paulo, Brazil.
to the social development of the country through socially oriented pastoral initiatives and social ministry, especially the Pastoral Sociais, such as Pastoral da Saúde.

Catholic social teaching, whether from the Petrine ministry or from the Latin American bishops, supports popular education and offers a rich source for developing this praxis among poor communities. Dialogue sustained by love is at the heart of Freire’s method of popular education for critical consciousness. Love sustained Jesus’ approach to dialogue with the unfortunates, showing God’s love and rescuing their dignity. Love is the principle and the foundation to foster and sustain the encounter among women and men to engage in acts of liberation and creation of the world. Love is the principle of popular education in its movement of recognition of the other who suffers, and the action of teaching-learning mutually. This is a liberating education in solidarity, prophetic praxis that makes the advocacy for public health care as a human right to include the voices and the faces of those who are marginalized.

11.3 A Framework of Popular Health Education: A Community-Based Approach For Public Health Care Activism

After presenting the organization of the public health system and Pastoral da Saúde in Brazil, I examined Paulo Freire’s dialogical method of popular education.

---

97 This is an expression chosen by Marinho Condini to define the pastoral practice of Dom Helder Camara, a Brazilian bishop who worked with the poor for their liberation. See: Marinho Condini, *Fundamentos para uma Educação Libertadora: Dom Helder Camara e Paulo Freire* (São Paulo: Paulus, 2014), 29.
This method is a historical praxis from below that embodies the process of mutual learning stressed in the previous chapters. I also showed that Catholic social teaching has dialogue as one of its fundamental orientations. Hence, CST provides bases for an ecclesial social ministry of popular education grounded on dialogue. This education was assumed as essential for pastoral/social practices of the Church in Latin America in the meetings of CELAM. These meetings generated documents that have fostered the social ministry of Catholic communities in Latin America, especially the historical praxis of the poor gathered in basic ecclesial communities. Consequently, popular education acquired a liberating character in the actions of these communities from their experience of faith, solidarity, and hope. They have developed social activism in many areas that demand justice and the defense of the poor. *Pastoral da Saúde* is one of these social activisms in the area of health/health care. This pastoral is grounded on Jesus’ merciful ministry to the sick and the poor. It is also fostered by Catholic social principles, incorporating the perspective that health care is a human right, as stated by Pope John XXIII and is present in the Latin American Guidelines for *Pastoral da Saúde*: “Health care is a fundamental right that States must guarantee, and all people must access it, without privilege or exclusion.” In addition, *Pastoral da Saúde* clearly argues against the commodification of health care and the tendency of States in “privatizing [health] services, harming and de-protecting the poorer.”

---

98 PT, no. 11.
100 Ibid., no. 35.
Having as base the Brazilian experience in public health and, above all, the praxis of *Pastoral da Saúde*, I suggest a step by step, concrete framework of popular education for sociopolitical advocacy and participation in decision-making processes in health care. This framework is directly inspired in Paulo Freire’s dialogical method and is a liberating praxis of mutual learning towards justice in health care from below. It is a democratic way of learning and participation with those who are experts in the human condition and understand the consequences of lack of health care assistance in their lives.

First of all, the most important aspect of this process of mutual learning is to be people-centered and from the community where the unfortunates live. Many experiences in public health care have shown that a community-based approach is the one that works best to respond to local healthcare challenges.101 This approach involves the participation of people who feel empowered and committed to the development of their community and its well-being. In addition, a community-based approach favors integration and dialogue between health professionals, policymakers, and locals in a way that all have voices. Consequently, the local reality is better understood and the conditions of people’s lives (especially the poor) are considered relevant for health therapies and actions to address social determinants of health. Subsequently, policies are created in a democratic-participatory way. This

creates an atmosphere of collaboration, responsibility, and trust. Health systems must build legitimate institutions able to support and develop community-based approaches. The councils of health and the *Programa Saúde da Família*\(^{102}\) are institutions of SUS in Brazil that prioritize the active participation of the community in decisions and health therapies. Taking advantage of these institutions, *Pastoral da Saúde* makes the community the foundation of its praxis: “The community is the main manager and promoter of people’s health. It must easily access knowledge of promotion, prevention, and education in terms of health, social control, and public policies.”\(^{103}\)

In summary, popular education is a community-based approach that aims to empower people to adopt a prophetic praxis from their reality to liberation and justice. *Pastoral da Saúde* is an expression of this praxis: a Brazilian experience raised from the Catholic social ministry that can be used as reference for other experiences around the world. This dissertation has shown that an anthropology of suffering that reveals the fragility of the human condition along with a liberation ethics are the foundations for a framework that can sustain health care as a human right and a social activism (or praxis) for global public health. The poor are experts in this anthropology and liberation ethics in their reality of suffering and struggle.

---

\(^{102}\) The *Programa Saúde da Família* (Health Program of Family) is the community-based strategy of SUS towards an ongoing promotion of health and defense of the lives of citizens. This program is based in community-based units of health that provides health care, especially primary care, to small regions. A group of *Programa Saúde da Família* has, at least, one doctor, one registered nurse, two assisted nurses, and four up to six community-health agents. Each group provides integral health care with quality and ongoing observation in units of health care, houses, schools, prisons, daycares, communitarian places etc. *Associação Paulista de Medicina, SUS: O Que Você Precisa Saber Sobre o Sistema Único da Saúde* (São Paulo: Atheneu Press, 2010), 197.

\(^{103}\) Conferência Episcopal da América Latina e Caribe, *Discípulos Missionários no Mundo da Saúde*, no. 104.
for justice. But they have limitations that show the need for a dialogical process of mutual learning with those who have technical skills. These become the first popular educators or coordinators of groups that act as advocates of health care as a human right, and participate in the decision-making process.

Here now is a suggestion from where we may begin this dialogical process of mutual learning in a community-based approach toward sociopolitical actions in health care, as a human right.

**Phase 1:** Engaging in the local reality, interacting with locals, and researching about their reality in order to understand their struggle, narratives, own vocabulary, worldview, traditions, habits, common experiences, most common diseases, and healthcare issues (including the organization of local and national system, its strengthens and limits). Formal studies are recommended to get information about the reality, especially regarding health systems and indicators. But informal gatherings, observations, conversations, and encounters with locals that allow sharing experiences are essential to understand the reality and its people. (If there is no group of health advocates, such as *Pastoral da Saúde* groups, invite people and create one. Informal contact with locals is important to create an environment of trust and to identify those who want to act in health care.)

---

104 These Phases of Popular Education in Health Care is inspired in Paulo Freire’s methodology of popular education for literacy of poor people. See: Freire, *Education For Critical Consciousness*, 43-49.
From this research and experience, select issues, topics, and key words to debate with members of your group. It is crucial to select issues and words that locals can easily recognize, through their experiences.

Encouraging free debates on the selected topics. The coordinator should listen more than talk. He/she must welcome everything that comes from locals, their experiences, narratives, frustrations and hopes. Nothing must be ignored. It must value the “beauty in the people’s language” \(^{105}\) that expresses their suffering and wisdom.

This phase is fundamental to understand local cultures, the imagination and point of view of locals, and the way they handle health issues and other problems that impact individuals’ and community’s lives. In addition, it is the moment to establish trust, companionship, and common responsibilities.

**Phase 2:** Select concrete health/healthcare issues that affect the community from the previous research (they could also be social determinants of health and diseases). It is important to present these issues in a language they understand with no difficulties. Present cases, real examples from the community, concrete facts, stories; things that are connected to their existence and context.

**Phase 3:** This is the phase of “the creation of the codifications” \(^{106}\) in which questions as a search for the reasons of health issues faced by the community are

\(^{105}\) Ibid., 43.

\(^{106}\) Ibid., 45.
raised. These questions create a critical consciousness. People begin to be aware of
the causes of their health vulnerability, understanding the impact of social
determinants in their health status, and the social injustice that prevents them from
flourishing. From the perspective of health professionals, they understand why
some health therapies do not work in specific contexts, realize the relation between
therapies and the living conditions of their patients, note the significance of culture
and habits in the way locals handle their health issues, and consider the voices of
locals in the process of defining therapies. Considering these factors creates
participation and leads to establishment of health therapies and services that are
more effective and respond to local challenges.

Questioning is essential in searching for understanding the causes of health
issues. Questions must be simple and connected to real concerns: Why are people
here getting sick? Why did your neighbor die young? Do you know his disease? Do you
think that the polluted river that crosses your neighborhood brings mosquitos
responsible to make people sick? Is drug addition a problem here? Do many people die
young? If so, why? Do you know someone, a friend or a family member, who died very
young? If so, what happened? When someone is sick what do you do? Does the
community help? Do you think that one person who lives in a poor house and has no
job is at more risk of getting sick than a person who lives in a good house and has a
good job? Why? Are the children going to school? Is there a relation between going to
school and health?

Questions must be created in a way that people care able to identify their
realities. Coordinators must avoid asking questions only based on their own social
and epidemiological studies. But they are encouraged to relate these studies to local examples to help people recognize the problem and feel how it touches their lives and community.

From these questions, answers will be researched as a natural following up. People must be encouraged to present their ways of addressing the issues they raised. In addition, they will search for new ways to address the causes of their diseases and living conditions. Initially, many ideas will appear. Some will be very naïve or unrealistic, others will be very pragmatic. All suggestions must be welcomed. Coordinators should never prevent people from expressing their opinions and ideas. These will be the material used to build a new knowledge along with the technical material brought by the coordinators. They should not impose their own visions or previous knowledge about what they consider to be the causes of health and social issues and possible solutions. All this must be a collective awareness and construction. However, coordinators or those with technical skills can suggest elements from their studies and expertise to clarify issues and to help modulate possible ways to address them. Again, all technical knowledge must be presented in a simple language and in a dialogical perspective toward the better understanding and critical consciousness of locals. So concepts can be presented, such as social justice, commodification of health, structural violence. Other concepts are developed from this dialogue. As a result, a common language is created and becomes a force for the social activism and proposals of public policies in health care.
**Phase 4:** Search for concrete actions and ways to address health issues raised in the previous phase. These actions must embody some of the answers considered before, and must be concrete, real actions in which the group gets actively involved. This is important. Otherwise, there is a risk of everything remaining in the universe of abstract ideas. It is necessary praxis. To help in this process, questions are again a good starting point: *What can we do to address these issues that we recognize? How can we concretize these solutions we have considered? What can we do to get more people involved in this struggle to address the health issues in our community (city, state, or country)?*

Encourage people to present some actions (if they have any) that are already in place, that is, what has been done. (In a case like the Brazilian one, *Pastoral da Saúde* has a rich experience that must be valued. In other realities, locals also have small experiences that cannot be dismissed. Local wisdom must always be listened to and empowered.)

It is important to search for available tools, that is, in place resources needed to act. Also, it is necessary to consider needed resources that the community does not have.

This is the phase for thinking about how the group can acquire needed resources. Encourage the search for partners to strengthen actions and to get new resources. Forming partnerships with NGOs and other civil organizations including governmental institutions that also struggle for health care as a human right and social justice are valuable.
Identify ways of sociopolitical participation, such as health councils in the Brazilian public system. One of these would be recruiting other health professionals who want to engage in this praxis, and creating ways of interaction between them and local communities.

Identify new leaders from the community who can motivate the members of the group and spread their actions. Leaders must be committed people who value local strengthening, such as faith, hope and solidarity, and who understand that every action and social transformation must be a collective construction. (New leaders will also be future coordinators who will create new popular groups.)

Phase 5: This is “the elaboration of agendas, which should serve as mere aids to the coordinator, never as rigid schedules to be obeyed.”¹⁰⁷ Agendas are a tool that organizes actions and establishes goals. In this community-based approach of popular education and historical praxis, two kinds of agendas may be useful:

A. Agenda of group meetings: to organize the practice of the group of studying, sharing of experiences, learning, thinking of problems, and developing ways to address issues. In addition, these meetings also create an experience of community in solidarity and fraternity. This is core for motivation, supporting, and encouragement. They can also incorporate liturgical celebrations that embody the faith and spirituality of locals in an atmosphere of ecumenism and inter-religiosity (the experience of basic ecclesial communities in Latin

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 45.
America is a good example of these meetings that incorporate liturgical celebrations without any exclusion). These meetings must always occur inside local community and their culture. They must be organized according to local imagination in an open space of recognition of local identity.

B. Agenda of sociopolitical action: This is a platform of specific actions and when/where they will take place. This agenda establishes how some actions will be concretized, when, where, and who will be involved. Examples of this agenda are: protests; promotion of multirões de saúde; participation in health councils or other spaces of popular/social participation; meetings with health professionals and other civil and professional groups in order to create a fruitful dialogue with them and common activities; courses on public health, health education and prevention for the broad community; course of political awareness, and many other actions that correspond to the local reality, its needs, and the cultural imagination.

Phase 6: This is the preparation of easily understood materials to help the broader community have an adequate vision of their health and social issues. At the same time, a set of materials will be also a tool to spread awareness of local issues and

---

108 Multirões de saúde is a practice of gathering health professionals in a place where they can provide free basic healthcare services and orientation (especially primary care) to individuals and families from the local community.
what everybody can do to move toward better public healthcare services and living conditions. In addition, this material will also support health education, especially prevention.

These materials could be items such as cards, folders, or brochures that provide essential information for the community. They must be attractive, with a lot of illustrations, and in an easy/common language in which people can understand quickly and see their reality reflected there.

Another set of materials must be created to use in popular education groups, such as booklets, handouts, and audio-visuals. At this time, all these materials will be created by the group that has been engaged in the dialogical process of mutual learning. This material will reflect the local reality, culture and knowledge, and will be a service to the group itself, to other groups, and to the broader community.

Finally, all phases are a harmony of a unique process of historical praxis grounded on dialogue from critical consciousness. There is no such division: education and then practice. From the beginning, the community is developing a historical praxis. Popular education occurs while people are acting to transform their reality. Once being educated in critical consciousness is a social transformation, a liberation ethics in which the people find a space where the dignity of their identity is recognized, and from where the praxis of re-building their world and constructing their history occurs.
CONCLUSION PART III

An anthropology of suffering and liberation ethics give a privileged place to the faces of the poor and their experience in community. These are realities of pain, oppression, limitations, but also of solidarity, courage, faith, and hope. The recognition of this paradoxical reality, an experience of God’s love, is an encounter with the suffering faces of those unfortunates who reveal the real human condition and show that liberation begins from the irruption of the poor gathered in community. This is the foundation to establish a concrete way to struggle and to support systems and actions that approach health care as a human right interconnected with other socio-economic areas and rights. Many may see it as a utopian goal – and it is – but this is a utopia of a movement from the poor in which they walk forward in solidarity and compassion. It is a utopia fed by a historical praxis in twofold journeys: the journey of the poor who irrupt as a historical community to walk forward to achieve this utopia. This journey is painful, with many frustrations and disappointments reflected in the faces of those who are poor, oppressed, and marginalized. However, the main mark of this historical movement is the compassion among a poor who, gathered in communities of faith and hope, never give up. The second journey is the one of utopia itself, a journey of perseverance and hope. A utopia is not a static target, but rather a dynamic ongoing construction. Approaching one utopia is to see it move further. It is to find new challenges, to engage in new struggles, and to commit to new responsibilities. This is the utopia of the kingdom of God, preached by Jesus, a dynamic historical
construction within a human movement strengthened by faith, hope, and love embodied in the experience of community.

Part III presented a movement from the insufficiency of abstract theories to the historical praxis from below to create a movement of recreation of the world. The poor are the main agents of this movement, a liberation praxis from the center of human existence and condition. The community, where the poor find a space of recognition of their identity and dignity, is the locus of encounters and transformations. The poor are not innocents and free from moral perversions. In other words, they are not free at all. The oppression is not only from outside because of structural violence and other socio-economic mechanisms of exploitation, but it is also inside the poor once the oppression breaks the harmony of theory-practice (praxis). Consequently, many poor think that to be free, achieving social transformation, is to be as the rich, or being part of the dominant class. This would be to maintain the same structure of preventing people from flourishing. In the community, especially in the moments of feasting, celebrations and also when groups gather to help someone who is sick (or in other deep need), the poor have an epiphanic experience of freedom through solidarity and recognition of their dignity. It is also an experience of empowerment because the poor realize they have a historical power. Of course, this experience has limits and the poor will not change the world in one day. They need partners who can help them understand the meaning of this epiphany, that is, their power in history to engage in the journey towards the utopia of the kingdom of God.
Chapter 10 examined health care as a human right showing a perspective from below. This is not an isolated framework that dismisses philosophical and socio-economic theories of justice in health care. Rather, it is a framework of dialogue and praxis that stresses the hermeneutical locus and the main agents of recreation of the world. And Chapter 11 provided a body for this framework with concrete steps for a process of mutual learning from below, a dialogical process of critical consciousness and liberating praxis in health care. It is a historical praxis from the poor and their *epiphanic experience* in community.

Finally, I end Part III bringing an element that is part of communities’ gatherings in Latin America: the music. All community gathering is a liturgical experience. (Originally, liturgy was used to elaborate and/or celebrate a public work for the good of the citizens in a city. The classical Greek meaning of the word *leitourgia* is public service, originated from the word *laos*, people.)¹ The gatherings of people in basic ecclesial communities have always been animated by *músicas populares* (songs that are very well known among poor people and with lyrics expressing their social reality and faith). Through these songs, the poor see themselves in the lyrics, recognizing their culture and traditions. These songs also raise consciousness of social issues faced by the community and offer an experience of faith, joy, and hope. All this is likely an encouragement to struggle for liberation from a community in solidarity that encounters God in its own history.

I bring here two songs (*músicas populares*) that display the richness of their lyrics and their revolutionary power in the epiphanic experience of the poor gathered in communities in Latin America. These songs are from the Brazilian context of basic ecclesial communities and *Pastorais Sociais*. The first one is an encounter with God in the suffering faces of the poor throughout the entire continent. This song presents the sufferings and dramas that the singers can see within their community, families and themselves. At the same time, the song reveals that this reality of oppression is occurring over the entire continent; when the local community sings it, they express their solidarity with suffering people in all corners of Latin America. In addition, they sing hope, they see lights; the mystery of God in their historical reality of suffering. Composed by Zé Vicente, the title of this song is *Pelos Caminhos da América*. Here is a short passage:

*On the paths of America, there are much pain, much tears, clouds, mysteries*
*There is delight that involves our walk*
*There are crosses on the roads, stones stained by blood that point out where freedom is.*

(...)  
*On the paths of America, there are mothers crying, like crazy. Before they lose their voices, they will find.*  
*Their dead children, who were taken away on a violent night. Although they kill the day, these mothers never will be silenced.*

The second song, also written by Zé Vicente and named *Baião das Comunidades*, expresses the suffering of marginalized people gathered in a community opens for all who do not have a place or want to love, as a way to *walk*.

---

for a new society. This song shows what community means, a place of new people... a people, seed of a new nation... living the love. This community welcomes everybody and seeks to find those who are marginalized to invite them to celebrate the trust. The guests are: city and rural workers, the indigenous, the black, the women, the children, the young and old people, the street artists, the unemployed, the fishermen and all who are outcasts. They are all groups of people who are in this community celebrating their faith and hope, as the lyrics says:

We are new people living the union
We are people, seed of a new nation [sic]
We are new people living the love
We are community, people of the Lord [sic]
(...)
We are going to invite Oneide, Rosa, Ana and Maria
A woman who struggles daily and nightly and borns the love
And gathered in the altar of freedom
We are going to sing the truth, going to step the pain [sic].

The community is shaped by individuals who have their own experiences, mentality and dramas. These do not disappear in the communitarian celebration, but rather an individual feels the hospitality that welcomes his/her own personal reality. Singing a música popular is an aesthetic experience that incorporates the individuality of each person in a moment of faith, awareness, joy, and hope being part of a community of solidarity. The impact and consequences of this aesthetic experience is not measured by any scientific models, but are visible in the lives of the poor and those who join them in a historical movement of mutual learning and recreation of the world.

3 The full song is available online at: https://www.letras.com/ze-vicente/905011/ (accessed October 27, 2016).
FINAL CONCLUSION: SUFFERING – HEALTH – HOPE

This dissertation was written with a free and passionate spirit: free to fly throughout the world of knowledge from the reality of the poor to the intellectual creation of the transcendental spirit, with passion for the earth and her little ones who are suffering because of injustice. This freedom and liberty led me to travel searching for meaningful encounters where I was able to contemplate the faces of those who have been victims of injustice, seeing the real suffering of the world in their faces, opening my ears to listen to their voices and my spirit to learning from them. In other words, freedom and passion are needed to listen to the cry of the poor.

This work is a result of a few years of systematic investigation with a passionate heart and a curious mind. This investigation was based on one university, specifically in a doctoral program, and from there it expanded to parts of the world where I could contemplate the suffering faces of those who are victims of injustice and are dying prematurely because of preventable and treatable diseases and the lack of health care. Therefore, this study had to exceed the barriers of a university, its library and laboratories, to encounter the unfortunates and bring their voices to an interdisciplinary debate in ethics and justice in health care. In order to present these voices, their knowledge and appropriation of the world, I had to begin this study with an epistemological prolegomenon to authorize the hermeneutical lens of the poor into this academic debate and present their historical praxis as a liberating ethics.
Going beyond the systematic investigation, this dissertation is also a result of an existential journey in the Americas, especially in its Latina/o world, in an experience of faith, hope, and praxis with the poor. This experience has been an encounter with God and the human being in which I realized the immanent presence of the supernatural in the natural reality where the suffering of the unfortunate reveals the fragility and contingent nature of the human being. Just as Simone Weil said, the unfortunates, simply because *malheur* has touched their lives, are experts in the human condition. This is an anthropological knowledge that reveals the fragility and finitude of all human beings on earth. At the same time, it requires an answer that the poor, organized in communities of faith and hope, provide through liberation praxis, and that we can provide and help them in their limitations through a preferential option for the poor. Assumed as an existential commitment, this option – motivated by a process of recognition and compassion, and embodied by an act of sensitive courage – guides us to join the poor and create a dialogical process of mutual learning, a praxis towards social transformation and healthy justice.

In this conclusion, I will neither present a summary of my findings nor develop something new. Honestly, this conclusion is not necessary because this entire work is a harmonious symphony in itself and as such it must be read only one body. Technically, however, I need to present a conclusion that functions to say I concluded this work and, at the same time, indicate where this work will go. This second part is most interesting because it intends to expand the dialogue into the
academic field and to concretize applications of the suggestions and methods developed here. Let us focus on this second part.

First of all, this dissertation was not written to have independent chapters or parts. Remembering the metaphor of the house presented in the introduction, this study is a house whose walls do not make sense if they are not sustaining the house. Of course, when one sees a wall of an unfinished house, he/she knows it is a wall or something that would be used in a house, but there is no house. This wall can be read. Perhaps he/she understands it, but it will be a very limited comprehension and open to many speculations, such as ‘maybe this wall would be for the front door of the house,’ ‘maybe it would be for a bed room or a living room,’ and so on. The chapters of this dissertation function in the same way. One can only read Chapter 1, for example, because he/she sees the contents and has an interest in Simone Weil. He/she will probably understand some aspects of Weil’s thought, and learning something new, but he/she will leave with many unanswered questions in his/her mind because he/she will not have understood how this piece functions to support the entire house.

The concepts used in this study are also very important and precisely chosen. All words are the bricks of the walls, and each wall has keystones, the concepts with precise meanings. That is, their meanings go beyond the common use of these concepts or expressions. For example, they are: transcendental spirit, supernatural and natural realities, rootedness, malheur, suffering, structural violence, option for the poor, irruption of the poor, dialectics, praxis, popular education and community-based approach. These are concepts not created by me. Their specific meanings are
familiar to those who are in a particular field. Sometimes I played with these terms expanding their meanings based on the hermeneutical lens of the poor and their re-creation of the world. Other concepts were created (or appropriated) and developed by me, e.g.: *process of recognition and compassion, epistemological boundaries, companionship, love-service, inclusion from below, sensitive courage,* and *process of mutual learning.*

Because of my international experiences of encounter with different cultures and the primary formation of my mind in Minas Gerais, Brazil (land of storytellers), my writing style may sound very different to many of my readers, especially those who read this text from an academic perspective, waiting for a specific dissertation genre. Although I did not write a novel, my style has a novelist way characterized by two things. The first is the stories presented in this work. They are narratives that revealed the voices and knowledge of the poor. The second is a kind of suspense where I announced concepts, and my reader had to struggle to understand their meanings. For example, the concept of dialogical process of mutual learning was announced in the introduction, but the reader had to wait until Chapter 11 to see what this meant. However, reading only Chapter 11 is not enough to understand this concept because it is an ongoing construction throughout the entire dissertation.

In addition, my philosophical education also played a role in my writing. I developed arguments in a logical construction that validates the syllogism, instead of keeping a common linguistic form. For example, Chapter 9 was written in a logical parallelism of propositions: argument 1 – argument 2 – argument 1b – argument 2b – conclusion. Combining these two styles, novelist and philosophical, makes my
text pleasurable to read, especially when there is a story, and yet complex when there is epistemological argumentation. But the goal of this was to build a sustainable work that could:

- authorize the voices of the poor and their knowledge;
- examine the reality marked by poverty, suffering, and lack of health care;
- develop an anthropology of suffering and present a liberation ethics in an interdisciplinary dialogue including the voiceless; and
- create a liberating framework of community-based actions for sociopolitical activism and justice in health care.

Now this work has the challenge of being exposed to criticism and embodied in historical praxis. I want to open this new phase with a few suggestions in two dimensions: the implication of this study for scholarship and the concretization of its framework.

Although I wrote this text while being a part of a theology department, this study is interdisciplinary, with disciplines ranging from philosophy to theology to public health. Therefore, the implications of this study are broad. It contributes to different areas and, at the same time, shows how positive interaction among disciplines is important in addressing issues of health inequalities and in promoting population health. First of all, this study has methodological implications for theological and global public health approaches. I developed a new methodology to see, to analyze, and to address health inequalities and population health. This method has epistemological foundations originating from the human experience of suffering (anthropology of suffering) and ethical foundations raised from the
historical praxis of the unfortunates in their daily struggles and community organizations (liberation ethics). Although this study began with an epistemological presentation of its method, the starting point of this methodology is the reality of the poor with their suffering faces and voices. This reveals the immanent condition of the human being as a contingent and finite being. Moreover, this orients us to engage with the poor in their reality because they, as people who suffer the accidental malheur, are experts in the human condition. Methodologically, this recognizes the knowledge of the unfortunate and legitimates their voices in the academic debate and their participation in processes of decision-making in the public arena. Consequently, the hermeneutical lens of the poor becomes a new paradigm to understand social injustice and to guide actions in public health.

Introducing the voices and the experiences of the poor to the theological method (what is not new per se) and public health (the new is when these two areas are combined and addressed from the perspective of the poor) into the just health debate and praxis exposes their suffering, creativity, knowledge, and limitations. All of these are to be seen in their narratives and experiences in meeting basic goods, such as health care. As part of this study, the poor are more important than any sociological and epidemiological analyses. However, there is no competition between these sources, rather a dialogical process of mutual learning with practical implications in the life of a concrete community. Yet methodologically, this dissertation presented a new interdisciplinary way to create a productive dialogue able to include different agents, subjects, and disciplines, integrating participatory field research and community-based actions. In short, it is a new method of research
and a dialogical method of community-based praxis in order to raise sociopolitical consciousness and to delivery health care.

This study also has implications for specific areas of scholarship. Here I name four: anthropology, Simone Weil’s studies, theological ethics, and bioethics and public health.

(1) The anthropology of suffering was formed from two theoretical interlocutors: Simone Weil and liberation theology. It was grounded in one context: the reality of the poor, their suffering, and perspective. This anthropology has implications for the philosophical-theological anthropology that usually does not address issues of suffering from a social justice perspective. My study fills a gap, that is, the dismissal of the voices of those who are the first and foremost victims of social injustice and institutionalized violence. I developed an anthropology of suffering from the expertise of those who have in their flesh the weight of the human condition of fragility, explicitly revealed by their social suffering. Furthermore, these voices are in dialogue with the theoretical analyses of the human condition, namely Weil’s and liberation theology’s ideas as well as the narratives of the voiceless confronted with sociological studies. This occurs in a movement to support health care as a human right and a framework of a community-based approach of delivering health care in a process of mutual learning.

(2) The anthropology of suffering also contributes to Weil’s studies by developing an aspect of Weil’s philosophy that has been minimally addressed: her anthropology of natural and supernatural character centered on the experience of
malheur and rootedness. Of course, my reading of Weil’s anthropology could be seen as controversial because I interpreted her thought from the perspective of the poor in our current time. But it is an interpretation in coherence with the philosophical, political, and mystical dimensions of her thought and existential choices.

(3) The anthropology of suffering is also a liberation ethics with implications for theological ethics. Liberation theology has already been deeply marked by an anthropological choice as its starting point for doing theology in the midst of the poor and their experience of faith, solidarity, praxis, and hope. However, liberation theology has not yet systematized a liberation ethics grounded in an anthropology of suffering in which the voices of the poor are heard as narratives with expertise in the human condition. This dissertation also fills this gap by engaging the voices of the poor and their hermeneutical lens in theological ethics and its branch of social ethics towards justice in health care. Therefore, the Catholic social ethics tradition has been appropriated and re-read by and from the poor, through their concrete experience of suffering, faith, and hope, and their historical praxis, including their knowledge, power, limitations, and failures. Furthermore, this study presents a liberating framework of a dialogical process of mutual learning from the reality of the poor, the theological locus for a liberation ethics.

(4) Finally, this study has implications for bioethics and public health studies and actions. As a formal discipline, bioethics began in the second half of the twentieth century. Ethics in research with human subjects was its first major interest, and then it began to focus on clinical issues. Only later, a few bioethicists risked addressing ethical issues in public health. But bioethical studies have shown
very little interest in social justice issues and public health, especially as bioethics has been developed in the USA. Global public health is almost unknown to bioethicists. In terms of Catholic bioethics, the connections between bioethics and social justice issues are slowly developing, although they exist, especially motivated by Catholic social teaching. This dissertation stresses the relevance of considering a bioethics that goes beyond clinical issues, and the need to emphasize the relationship between social justice, health inequalities, and population health. My study fills the gap that allows many bioethicists, secular or Catholic, to de-socialize bioethics studies. In addition, my text not only shows the relevance of social justice for bioethics, but it also introduces the poor to this debate, giving voice for the voiceless.

In public health, whether for a national health system or global health actions, I developed an anthropological foundation for sustaining health care as a human right. In addition, this study presents a concrete framework of activism for global and public health as a human right, and a method of healthcare delivery from a community-based approach that integrates professionals, activists, community leaders, and the poor in a historical praxis of a dialogical process of mutual learning. It is a method that now has the challenge of being applied, tested, and improved.

The question in mind now probably is: “How can we apply this framework and community-based method of mutual learning?” Adaptation and integration in different local communities and contexts are proper to the nature of this method, and a part of its dynamism. This method does not tell people what they must do to engage in liberating actions and to achieve social justice and health care assistance
as a human right. But it is a way to integrate people in particular realities, to help them dialogue and then, to develop strategies and actions in the political arena toward their own challenges. From below, in the micro reality, an organized community with critical consciousness and social commitment moves toward the macro reality, one that has a sociopolitical character in local, state, national, and international levels. As a result, the voices of the poor, their experiences and suggestions, are able to navigate at all these levels.

People – leaders who recognize the suffering face of the poor and have sensitive courage – are challenged to appropriate this framework and method and to test these guidelines wherever they are serving. Moreover, making this framework/method public and available to community-organizers, religious leaders, healthcare professionals, and popular educators, among others, is a way to suggest a framework that may help their activism, mission, service, and professional practice. Governmental and non-governmental organizations also must understand this framework/method in order to be challenged to realize experiences aimed at the empowerment of the poor and justice in health care.

Now it is time to move the work in a new direction, to the next level, from the writing process and the creation of this study to the application of its findings and framework. I am the first one responsible for starting this movement. However, I am not its only author. Many people are part of its authorship. This study is in itself a result of a dialogical process of mutual learning among the poor. Although there are many technical studies and analyses in this work, it shows the cry of the poor for life with dignity, opportunities, and justice in health care. The cry of the poor is the
sound of a Liberating Incarnate God who reveals, in the suffering of the unfortunates, the human condition of fragility and contingence. The cry of the poor is present in the irruption of the poor in history, the locus of liberation ethics and the hermeneutical lens to read reality and recreate the world. Now, grounded on the faith and hope I found in many of my interlocutors, it is my duty to work for this process to gain a sociopolitical form, including the academic and ecclesial arenas, in the midst of communities, in companionship with the poor.


_____.*Malheur et Compassion Chez Simone Weil.* *Cahiers Simone Weil* 1 (1986): 75-86.


____. “The Option For the Poor Arises From Faith In Christ.” *Theological Studies* 70, no. 2 (May 2009), 317-326.


____. “The Task of Theology and Ecclesial Experience.” *Concilium* 176, no. 6 (1984): 61-64.


Keenan, James F. “Four of the Tasks for Theological Ethics in a Time of HIV/AIDS.” Concilium no. 3 (2017): 64-76.


_____.


_____.


_____.


_____.


_____.


