

Liberating Hermeneutics: The Intersections of Pentecostal Mission and Latin American Theology in the Margins¹

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Latin American Liberation Theology and Hermeneutics

A Hermeneutic of Suspicion and Retrieval

In a general sense, all Liberation theologies employ some aspect of a Liberationist hermeneutic.³ The Liberationist hermeneut attempts to demonstrate how the framework of interpretation of the dominant culture continues to suppress those on the margins. In this way a “hermeneutic of suspicion” seeks ‘to penetrate beneath their surface-function *to expose their role as instruments of power, domination and or social manipulation.*’⁴ Liberationists all utilize a “hermeneutic of suspicion.” Often, Nietzsche, Marx, and Freuds’ works are adapted critically in

¹ A version of this paper was presented as a luncheon conversation with Jürgen Moltmann at the Society for Pentecostal Studies and Wesleyan Theological Society Third Joint Meeting, Durham, North Carolina, March 13-15, 2008. Former edited and published version see *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 31.1 (2011) ,pp. 65-80.

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³ Anthony Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1980), p. 410. Thiselton observes that the Liberationists share three common traits. He writes: First and foremost, they construct critiques of the *frameworks of interpretation* which are used or presupposed in dominant traditions. ... These frameworks transmit pre-understandings and symbolic systems which perpetuate, it is argued, the ideologies of dominate traditions. Second, liberation, black, and feminist approaches offer alternative *re-interpretations of biblical texts from the standpoint of a particular context of experience and action.* ... Third, each approach seeks *critical* tools and resources to unmask those uses of biblical texts *which serve the social interests of domination, manipulation, or oppression*, to expose them as what they are. Each claims to embody some *critical* principle, by means of which to reveal the unjust goals and bases of manipulative interpretative devices and procedures (his italics). I would add that the “principle” cannot be understood as right theory leading to right practice but must be appreciate as praxis—action and reflection leading to further action connected to living within community.

⁴ Thiselton, *New Horizons*, p. 379.

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order to analyze the narrative of society’s powerful.⁵ Identifying the power structures is only a partial task of a Liberationist hermeneutic. Liberation theologians must provide an alternative yet appropriate reading of Scripture.⁶ Because Scripture serves a primary means for Christian liberation, they will also employ a “hermeneutic of retrieval.”

Liberation hermeneutics seeks to unmask uses of biblical passages which serve the interests of the dominating power or cultural structures. The concern is to reveal the *inappropriate* ways scriptures are woven into predominate ideological narrative of a society—a difficult and risky task when the contemporary society at large understands itself to be a “Christian nation.”⁷ Those, who draw upon the scriptures to support an inappropriate narrative, are consciously and unconsciously appealing to God to substantiate such coercive narratives. Furthermore, Liberation theologians recognize that all interpretive readings are culturally dependent and inherently contain socio-ideological perspectives. This would be true of their interpretive readings, which they acknowledge. The interpretive method, practices and the readings are ideologically biased. Hermeneutical strategies reflect the biases of those using them. They challenge the so-called neutral-scientific reading of Scripture and offer it as further evidence of a manipulative ploy of the powerful.

⁵ Thiselton, *New Horizons*, pp. 46-7. See Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Great Britain: Barns and Oats; Maryknoll, NY, 1987), pp. 27-28. Boff writes that ‘liberation theology uses Marxism purely as an *instrument*. ... liberation theology freely borrows from Marxism certain “methodological pointers” that have proved fruitful in understanding the world of the oppressed, such as: the importance of economic factors; attention to class struggle; the mystifying power of ideologies, including religious ones’, (their italics) p. 28.

⁶ Scripture with a capital “S” refers to the canonical Bible as a whole whereas scripture or scriptures with a small “s” refers to the various stories, passages, etc, that make up the Bible.

⁷ Some Liberationist, especially but not exclusively Feminists will deconstruct both the horizon of the text, the text, and contemporary horizon of the readers. For example, See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 10th Anniversary Edition, 1994), pp. xii-xlii, ‘Introduction to the Tenth Anniversary Edition: Remember the Struggle’ for a succinct summary of Fiorenza’s feminist epistemology and interpretive practice.

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A Christian Liberationist theologian's goal is to present alternative readings of scripture through the use of a critical hermeneutic in order to bring liberation to those on the margins.⁸ The liberation hermeneutic of suspicion and retrieval's ultimate concern is 'to integrate biblical interpretation into an agenda of personal conversion and social transformation.'⁹

Latin American Liberation theologians begin from their concrete experience of the oppression of the poor. They utilize some critical strategy in the rereading of Scripture in order to retrieve from the Scripture liberation for the oppressed. However, like all liberation readings they begin with the present experience of oppression. Leonardo and Clodovis Boff write:

The Liberation theologian goes to the scriptures bearing the whole weight of the problems, sorrows and hopes of the poor, seeking light and inspiration from the divine word. This is a new way of reading the Bible: The hermeneutics of liberation.¹⁰

The Latin American Liberation theologian begins with the experience of unjust poverty. The clear emphasis upon the poor results from a thorough understanding of the socio-economic situation of the poor in Latin America. It is not enough to be sympathetic from a safe distance. One must live among the poor in order to have true "com-passion." The person utilizing a Liberationist hermeneutic must experience the poverty, the humiliation and economic deprivation of the poor. Solidarity with the poor is coming along side by entering into the lived experience of unjust poverty. Only after a substantial period of experiencing this poverty can one

⁸ The interpretive 'exegetical' method(s) are typical and generally accepted ways of interpreting Scripture, yet through the experience of the oppressed.

⁹ Sandra M. Schneiders, 'Feminist Hermeneutics' in Joel Green (ed.) *Hearing The New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation* (Grand rapids: Eerdmans; Carlisle; Paternoster Press, 1995), p. 349.

¹⁰ Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, p. 32.

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then begin to do theology as a Liberation theologian.¹¹ From this lived experience emerges a continuous dialogue between old ways of understanding and new ways of living. Liberation Theology draws upon the spirituality of the poor's transformative encounter with the Lord Jesus. The desire to imitate the historic Jesus in their present reality creates possibilities for personal and social transformation.¹² The ability to imitate the historic Jesus in the present context is through living in the Spirit. 'Liberation is an all embracing process that leaves no dimension of human life untouched, because when it is said and done it expresses the saving action of God in history.'¹³

A Theological Hermeneutic of Pastoral Praxis

Gutiérrez writes, "Theology does not produce pastoral activity; rather it reflects upon it. Theology must be able to find in pastoral activity the presence of the Spirit inspiring the action of the Christian community."¹⁴ Theology is a secondary reflection upon the spirituality of the Christian community's journey with God. Latin American Liberation exegesis is closely connected to the pastoral practice of ministry in an ecclesial base community. The community, often lead by informed priests or laity, searches the Scripture in order to find meaning for their present situation.¹⁵ The community must participate in the responsibility of bringing about both

¹¹ Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, pp. 3-5, 22-24. See also, Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988, Revised Edition), for his definition of the poor, pp. xxi-xxii.

¹² See especially, Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 'Liberation and Salvation', pp. 83-105.

¹³ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *We Drink from our own Wells; The Spiritual Journey of a People* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984, eight printing 1994), p. 2.

¹⁴ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, p. 9.

¹⁵ For one Liberation theologian's presentation of the role of the Base Communities participation biblical interpretation, see Carlos Mesters, 'The Use of the Bible in Christian Communities of the Common People' in Norman K. Gottwald and Richard A. Horsley (eds.), *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press and Great Britain: SPCK, 1993), pp.3-16. For an important introduction with English

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personal and communal liberation. The Scripture plays a primary role by offering guidance, inspiration and transformative moments for the communities’ participation in God’s salvific mission of liberation within human history.¹⁶

As is often pointed out, Liberation readings do not follow the same distancing approach as the historical critical methods, or even the more North American “evangelical” appropriation of historical critical exegetical methods. Instead of looking for the authorial intent of a passage in its past historical context with all the specialization of the academy, the pastoral leader as one in the community looks for textual meaning relevant to present life situations of the readers. The communitarian reading finds points of comparison between their experience and the experiences of characters of scripture, in particular those who are marginalized. Most often the focus is on the Prophets and Gospels, with special attention given to the Lukan narrative as a continuation of the themes of exodus and liberation.¹⁷ The goal is to hear the Word of God, consistent with the past word of God centered upon the historic Jesus. The close reading of Scripture in the ecclesial base community is a practice that desires to be in continuity with early Christianity and at the same time recognizes the readers’ present social and economic context as an important contribution in

translation of actual exegetical practice and readings of Base Communities see Christopher Rowland and Mark Corner, *Liberating Exegesis: The Challenges of Liberation Theology to Biblical Studies* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1998). Concerning the vitality and necessity of the base communities for liberation see Guillermo Cook, *The Expectation of the Poor: Latin American Basic Ecclesial Communities in Protestant Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985).

¹⁶For an expansion upon this important dimension of liberation from a Pentecostal perspective see Ricardo E. Waldrop, “Misión Trinitaria e Historia Salvífica: Una Perspectiva Pentecostal”, a paper presented at the Simposio Internacional Jürgen Moltmann, at the Universidad Evangélica Nicaragüense, Managua, Nicaragua, October 2006 and forthcoming in English as “Trinitarian Mission and Salvation History: A Pentecostal Perspective” in S.J. Land, R.D. Moore, J.C. Thomas, eds., *Passover, Pentecost and Parousia: Studies in Celebration of the Life and Ministry of R. Hollis Gause* (JPTS; Blandford Forum: Deo Publishing, forthcoming)

¹⁷ The theme of the Exodus in liberation has been developed by Jorge Pixley. See his *Exodus* (New York: Abingdon Press, 2004), in the *Global Bible Commentary* series.

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the production of textual meaning.¹⁸ The reading/hearing of Scripture is the primary means to interpret life, because Scripture is not an object or artifact in need of being interpreted.¹⁹

Gutiérrez writes, “We approach the Bible from our experience as believers and members of the church. It is in light of that experience that we ask our questions.” “We indeed read the Bible, but we can also say that the Bible ‘reads us.’” This practice often leads those asking questions to reformulate the questions in light of the Gospel.²⁰

With similar pastoral concerns, Boff writes;

Liberation hermeneutics reads the Bible as a book of life, not as a book of strange stories. The textual meaning is indeed sought, but only as a function of *practical* meaning: the important thing is not so much interpreting the text of scripture as interpreting life “according to the scriptures.” Ultimately, this old/new reading aims to find contemporary actualization (practicality) for textual meaning.²¹

The goal of interpretation is wholistic transformative action because textual meaning can only be understood in and through contemporary actualization. The Liberationist reading views the Bible as a semiotic language and the contemporary actualization as the new speech-act. The context in which to hear Scripture is not the past historical cultural setting in which Scriptures were generated but in the present context of oppression. It is in the present context that Scripture speaks as the liberating Word of God. The Liberationist hermeneutic ‘is a hermeneutic that favors *application* rather than explanation’ from the present perspective of the poor.²²

¹⁸ For a concise explanation of a praxis methodological approach to the interpretation of Scripture, see J. Serverino Croatto, *Biblical Hermeneutics: Toward a Theory of Reading as the Production of Meaning* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987).

¹⁹ See, Christopher Rowland and Mark Corner, *Liberating Exegesis*, chapter two, “Foundation and Form of Liberation Hermeneutics”, pp.35-84.

²⁰ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *We drink from our own Wells*, p. 34.

²¹ Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, p. 34.

²² Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, p. 33.

González points out that Hispanic readers of Scripture are 'looking at the same landscape' (that is the Bible) but from the perspective of the marginalized. We are seeking 'an interpretation *of the Bible*, and not simply our experiences whether good or bad.' The perspective is one shaped by marginalization, suffering and poverty.²³ The poor see things that others ignore or, simply cannot see.

The liberating re-reading encourages the poor to act in ways others find unacceptable, challenging, troubling, or even noble. But it also presents readings which have been ignored or even unnoticed by European and American males.²⁴ Yet, the liberation reading is an insider reading of the Bible, a Christian communal reading by the poor for personal-communal transformation and new possibilities for social transformation.²⁵

The methodology of ecclesial base community Bible reading follows a threefold process of seeing, judging and acting.²⁶ By seeing, one starts with their experience of oppression and poverty. By judging, one asks question concerning their situation, coming to an understanding of the situation in which they exist. They connect their experience of oppression to the story of deliverance from oppression as found in the Bible. The oppressed then, act upon the Word for the transformation of human dignity and the transformation of social structures supporting

²³ Justo L. González, *Santa Biblia: The Bible through Hispanic Eyes* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1996), pp.11-30, 18.

²⁴ This way not be as an acute problem because of the influence of Liberation Theologies upon as well as from within the academy.

²⁵ For Gutiérrez, new possibilities can come into existence only in present historic praxis oriented to the future hope. This is the already and not yet eschatological nature of salvation; See pp. 11-12 93-97.

²⁶ The following is from Christopher Rowland and Mark Corner, *Liberating Exegesis*, p.38.

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oppression. In this way, reading is praxis, action-reflection upon the present situation in light of the Word of the Lord.²⁷

In sum,

The theology of liberation offers us not so much a new theme for reflection as a *new way* to do theology. Theology as critical reflection on historical praxis is a liberating theology, a theology of the liberating transformation of the history of humankind and also therefore that part of humankind—gathered into *ecclesia*—which openly confesses Christ. This is a theology which does not stop with reflecting on the world, but rather tries to be part of the process through which the world is transformed. It is a theology which is open—in the protest against trampled human dignity, in the struggle against the plunder of the vast majority of humankind, in liberating love, and in building of a new, just, and comradely society—to the gift of the Kingdom of God.²⁸

A Pentecostal Liberating Hermeneutic for Mission

Elsewhere we have suggested that a contemporary Pentecostal hermeneutic should speak in a liberating voice with a post-Christendom accent.²⁹ We based this upon the early spirituality of Pentecostals, their Bible reading method, their understanding of the *missio dei* and our concern that contemporary Pentecostal Theology must be shaped from the spirituality of those living in the margins.³⁰

²⁷ An appreciation of the hermeneutical circle is built into the practice, only the move is dialogical from present to the past via the text, and then a return to the present situation with a transformative reading of the text related to wholistic salvation.

²⁸ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, p. 12.

²⁹ In relation to the historic paradigms of mission, as Pentecostals, we agree with Alan Krieder and others that it is better understand it from three historic paradigms of pre-Christendom, Christendom and post-Christendom. See Alan Krieder, ‘Beyond Bosch: The Early church and The Christendom Shift’ in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 29:2 (April 2005), pp. 59-68.

³⁰ Kenneth J. Archer, ‘Pentecostal Hermeneutics: Retrospect and Prospect’ in *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* (Issue 8, April 1996), p.81; Kenneth J. Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic for the Twenty-First Century: Spirit, Scripture and Community* (Landon and New York: T&T International, 2004); Ricardo Waldrop, “La teología de la liberación: Un enfoque crítico” in *Pastoralia* 7:15; Richard E. Waldrop, *A Historical and Critical Analysis of the Full Gospel Church of God of Guatemala*, a dissertation submitted to Fuller Theological Seminary School of World Mission, Pasadena, CA, 1993.

The early Pentecostal hermeneutical practice functioned as a means of liberation for those who were marginalized by Modernistic culture and mainline Christianity. Pentecostals employed a hermeneutic of suspicion and retrieval. They were suspicious of all forms of Christianity that did not preach and more importantly live the ‘Full Gospel.’ Thus, they were able to retrieve from Scripture, stories that encouraged women to preach the Gospel, the wealthy to share their prosperity generously, the practice of peacemaking (pacifist lifestyle) and existed as an alternative ecclesial community within the larger society in response to the Lukan narrative (Acts 2; Luke 4).

Early Pentecostals, following the trajectory of their holiness and Wesleyan forebears, heard biblical stories, which emphasized concern for the poor and needy. They were concerned to spread the good news of the Gospel which meant that the Lord Jesus could deliver them from demonic influence, sickness and spiritual death. All who called upon the Lord could become faithful followers of Jesus. Hence they heeded the call to participate in the mission of God, which meant the liberation of humans from sin, sickness and Satan, thus creating a ‘haven for the masses.’³¹

The biblical stories, especially those related to Jesus and Acts of the Apostles reaffirmed their understanding of the Pentecostal story—that God was pouring out his Spirit in these last days upon the marginalized (Luke 4, Acts 2). Spirit baptism was God’s means of empowering

³¹ The language of ‘haven of the masses’ is typical of the social deprivation theory, used in analyses characteristic of early Pentecostalism such as Christian Lalive d’Epinay, *The Haven of the Masses: A Study of the Pentecostal Movement Chile* (London: Lutterworth, 1969) and Robert Mapes Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1979). While these analyses demonstrate the social location of early Pentecostal adherents, they are partial in their understanding of the early Pentecostal ethos. Early Pentecostalism was a liberation movement of, by, and for the poor. See Francisco Cartaxo Rolim, “El pentecostalismo a partir del pobre” in *Cristianismo y Sociedad 1988*:95. The so-called “social strike” practiced by early and mid-20th century Pentecostals cannot be fully understood apart from the harsh realities of life, social ostracism and their genuine self-understanding as the peculiar people of God in mission in the last days. For a critique of social deprivation as it relates to Pentecostalism, see also Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 2004, pp. 23-28.

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anyone—especially the marginalized—to become full-fledged participants in God’s Reign. Hence, the Pentecostal central narrative convictions of the Five-fold Gospel (Jesus as Savior, Sanctifier, Spirit Baptizer, Healer and soon coming King) provided a potent means for bringing unity, dignity and liberation to God’s people. Liberation, however, would have come as a result of being saved from Satan’s kingdom and out of fallen society, thus becoming a voluntary contrast community.

Early Pentecostalism emerged from the margins of society and continues to spread in the Global South of the majority world.³² The Pentecostal hermeneutical practice has certain similarities expressed by Liberationists—especially Latin American Liberation theologians.³³ Liberation theologians’ emphasis upon the poor and their ecclesiastical hermeneutical practice of base community readings that move from the present concrete experiential context to the biblical text (the opposite direction of the traditional historical methods) are important practices that intersect with early Pentecostal interpretative practices.

While differences do indeed exist, there are important points of intersection between early radical Pentecostal Theology and the more recent Latin American Liberation Theology.³⁴ A contemporary Pentecostal missional hermeneutic must embrace the same starting position as the Liberationist—the present context of the community. Both share a basic understanding that

³² See Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The coming of Global Christianity* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002).

³³ The inherent liberating impulse of Pentecostalism has also been connected with Feminist and African-American liberation theology.

³⁴ See Miroslav Volf, “Materiality of Salvation: An Investigation in the Soteriologies of Liberation and Pentecostal Theologies in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 26:3 (summer 1989), pp. 447-467. Volf argues that both traditions share a similar soteriology which he identifies as a “*materiality of salvation*” (his italics). He writes, “Salvation is not merely a spiritual reality touching only an individual person’s inner being but also has to do with *bodily* human existence” with is an essential not marginal to the understanding of both soteriologies, p. 448. We are concerned with hermeneutics and how it relates to mission of God. Volf further states that “it would be a worthwhile

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Scripture is to be read and heard in an ecclesiastical context. The ecclesiastical context is the local base community. The interpretive process is a grass roots communal activity.³⁵ The Pentecostal hermeneut must be entrenched within a Pentecostal community and in tune with the concrete realities of suffering, poverty and marginalization. This incarnational approach of being the people of God in solidarity with the suffering of humanity creates com-passion.

This compassionate practice affirms the Liberationist posture of living among the people, but in this case, it is a Pentecostal community in which the Spirit is discerned and the Scripture is heard in the present context and obeyed. Therefore, the experience of poverty will be a reality for most Pentecostals in the Global South. But the means of liberation will not come primarily from any particular reading of social reality whether capitalist or socialist. It will only come through the Spirit of Life in engaged Pentecostal witness for the spiritual and social transformation of the world.³⁶ As Eldin Villafañe demonstrates, Hispanic Pentecostal spirituality ‘seeks to extend its self-understanding as the community of the Spirit *in* the world and *for* the world, but not *of* the world.’³⁷

The Pentecostal community embraces certain practices found in the Acts-Gospels narrative in order to continue the ministry of Jesus through the empowerment of the Spirit which is related to the mission of God. Therefore, Pentecostal communities should not embrace

endeavor to compare the hermeneutic of liberation theology and the hermeneutic of pentecostal theology”, p. 448, footnote 4.

³⁵ See Cheryl Bridges Johns, *Pentecostal Formation: A Pedagogy Among the Oppressed* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993). This important work draws upon her critical reflection of the significant work of Paulo Freire, a Roman Catholic Latin American pedagogue, who pioneered the liberationist methodology of *conscientizacão* among the illiterate and poor classes of the continent.

³⁶ We especially appreciate Jürgen Moltmann theological contributions concerning God’s creative and redemptive work through the Holy Spirit. See his *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1993).

³⁷ *The Liberating Spirit: Toward an Hispanic American Pentecostal Social Ethic* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), p.193.

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violence or militarism as means for social transformation. But in keeping with the early pacifism of the movement, we should embrace New Testament Christianity as the means to creating alternative communities within the diverse socio-economic contexts in which she finds herself.³⁸ An engaged Pentecostal community will compassionately practice the politics of Jesus.³⁹

Early Pentecostals embraced a pacifist lifestyle because they believed this was how Jesus lived his life and how he wanted his followers to live their lives. Violence was never an acceptable means to changing the world systems.⁴⁰ Like Liberationists, these early Pentecostals read Scripture from their concrete situations and from a christological perspective with the expectation of hearing the Spirit. The Pentecostal christological perspective was summarized through the Full Gospel and they embraced nonviolence as a way of life.⁴¹ Early Pentecostals thought they were apolitical and attempted to protest society by creating a Christian community within it. They saw themselves as a separate community living within a fallen society. Thus a Pentecostal missional hermeneutic will always recognize that Christianity must not be confused with any national ideology or economic system. The Kingdom of God exists on earth within Christian communities and over against all human institutions, including the institutional church

³⁸ Kenneth J. Archer and Andrew S. Hamilton, ‘Anabaptism-Pietism and Pentecostalism: Scandalous Partners in Protest’ in *Scottish Journal of Theology* (forthcoming December 2009).

³⁹ See John H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971) which is now a classic on the understanding of the Gospel to be a call to live nonviolently. From a distinctively Pentecostal perspective, see Paul Alexander, *Peace, Power and Pentecost: Nonviolence, Nationalism and Militarism in American Pentecostalism* (Telford, OR: Cascadia Publishing House, 2007), and “Spirit Empowered Peacemaking: Toward a Pentecostal Charismatic Peace Fellowship”, *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* (2002:22).

³⁸ For additional Pentecostal resources on peacemaking, including quotations from early Pentecostal pioneers on the topic of pacifism, patriotism and militarism, see www.pcpf.org and www.thirdway.cc

⁴¹ Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, ‘We hardly need to say that any book of the Bible has to be read in a christological key-that is, based on the high point of revelation as found in the Gospels’, p. 35. One wonders then how some liberationists and to many contemporary Euro-American Pentecostals can justify the use of violence, if the Gospels are to be the lens and key for reading the rest of the Bible.

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and civil religion. For this reason, the Reign of God should not be confused with any particular nation or any particular Christian tradition.

A contemporary Pentecostal missional theology will share the Liberationists concern for praxis. It is not enough to be orthodox in beliefs. The community must also be concerned with orthopraxy and orthopathy.⁴² These concerns are rooted in the Pentecostal narrative tradition. The Pentecostal community goes to the Scripture with an expectation to hear a divine word for her situation. Thus there is openness to the Holy Spirit to speak in and through the sacred scriptures in order to find guidance and character formation, so that the members of the community may participate rightly in the *missio dei*. For Pentecostals, the very act of reading is a spiritual act of worship because the community reads Scripture in order to hear, encounter, and obey the Holy Spirit. Obedience is seen as an act of worship and witness.

In an effort to exemplify the kind of creative and progressive Pentecostal missional theology described in this paper, we will introduce briefly the pastoral praxis and theological reflection of Darío López Rodríguez, a Peruvian pastor and leading Latin American Pentecostal theologian.⁴³

Lopez draws primarily upon his pastoral ministry in the marginal neighborhood of Villa María del Triúnfo, comprised largely of the working class poor on the outskirts of Lima, Perú.

In his work, he uses the everyday struggles of his parishioners as points of departure for

⁴²See Samuel Solivan, *Spirit, Pathos and Liberation: Toward an Hispanic Pentecostal Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998); Kenneth J. Archer, 'A Pentecostal Way of Doing Theology: Method and Manner' in *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9.3 (July 2007)doi:10.1111/j.1468-2400.2006.00244.x

⁴³ See the following selection of works: *Los evangélicos y los derechos humanos: La experiencia social del Concilio Nacional Evangelico del Perú 1980-1992* (Lima: Ediciones Puma, 1998), *Pentecostalismo y transformación social: Mas allá de los estereotipos, las críticas se enfrentan con los hechos* (Buenos Aires: Kairos Ediciones, 2000), *El nuevo rostro del pentecostalismo latinoamericano* (Lima: Ediciones Puma, 2002), *La fiesta del Espíritu: Espiritualidad y celebración pentecostal* (Lima: Ediciones Puma, 2006), *Artisanos de la paz: Modelos bíblicos de reconciliación* (Lima: Ediciones Puma, 2006).

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developing his approach to wholistic mission. These include three interrelated classes of people who are treated as subjects and participants in the mission of God and not mere dispensable objects in the values of the neo-liberal economic system of the day. Children, women and immigrants comprise the three classes.⁴⁴

Lopez’ pastoral praxis moves him and his community to minister to neglected and vulnerable children, of which over 200 receive education and nutrition on a daily basis. People in the local church give of their time and means in order to provide this ministry. It needs to be pointed out that the children are considered part of the local church community. Lopez has stated many times that the most difficult theological questions that he is called upon to address come from the children. These questions serve as cues from which he is able to write and develop both local church curricula and his more sophisticated academic theological work.

Second, impoverished and abused women receive wholistic ministry. As a result, many of these women have become actively involved in community service and social advocacy organizations, further ministering to children and others in wider society. These women have organized protest marches to the government palace to demand fair and compassionate treatment for needy children in Peruvian society resulting in actual changes made to the laws governing the treatment of minors.⁴⁵

Third, many of the members of the local church, including Pastor Lopez, come from the ranks of the immigrant population of the indigenous cultures of the Peruvian highlands. The

⁴⁴ Darío López Rodríguez, *The Liberating Mission of Jesus: the Message of the Gospel of Luke*, translated by Richard E. Waldrop and under review for publication. ‘Solidarity with the marginalized, more than an interesting theological discourse or relevant ideological proposal, has to be an everyday experience that rests upon the risks of publicly identifying oneself with those who are socially and culturally marginalized. Consequently, to sit at the same table and break bread in fellowship with the disinherited of this world forms part of a missionary lifestyle’, p. 23.

⁴⁵ See “De excluidas a protagonistas: Mujeres pentecostales y organizaciones populares”, chapter 3 in *El nuevo rostro del pentecostalismo latinoamericano*.

Archer and Waldrop, "Liberating Hermeneutics."

indigenous people have suffered severely from the brutal attacks in recent years of the Shining Path guerrilla movement and the Peruvian army. These displaced peasants and farmers have found a refuge and a place of service at the Mount Sinai Church of God.

After many years of pastoral ministry, López was able to further develop his theological vocation. He completed a PhD through the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, where he wrote a thesis on the neglected topic of the evangelical church and human rights in Peru. This was the first of many theological literary works which adroitly integrates the complex issues of church and society in a way reminiscent of other Liberationists approaches. As has been pointed out above, he begins with the concrete social and political realities in which his parishioners are immersed. From their reality, Scripture is searched and the Spirit is sought for the empowerment for wholistic liberation in the mission of God. Their hermeneutical task is similar to the Liberationist methodology of action-reflection or better, seeing, judging, and acting.⁴⁶ Yet his community which is of, for, and by the poor have all the characteristic signs of a Pentecostal church. These include passionate anointed preaching, fervent communal prayer, expressive and lively worship, manifestations of the charismatic gifts, special prayer for healing of the sick and broken hearted, encouragement of women in pastoral leadership and active evangelism in the community resulting in daughter churches being established. For López, the rationale for such a missional community is the liberating mission of Christ Jesus as portrayed in the Gospels, and in particular, from a Lukan perspective (Luke 4). López demonstrates from the Lukan Gospel that,

⁴⁶ See his *The Liberating Mission of Jesus: The Message of Gospel of Luke*, which was written as a Bible study book. This work is 'an attempt to explain the message of the third gospel and proposes that the liberating message of Jesus has two non-negotiable main points: the universality of the mission and the special love of God for the poor and the excluded. The central thesis is an understanding of mission in terms of liberation as understood from a Lukan perspective of salvation which gives no place to the more modernistic dichotomy between the spiritual and the social or between the individual and community. Lopez interacts with current Latin American theologians' writings, such as José Míguez Bonino, Guillermo Cook, Gustavo Gutierrez, René Padilla and leading Lukan scholars, such as Hans Conzelmann, Joel Green, Philip Esler, not to mention the older traditional works and scholarly evangelical exegetical commentaries.

From the world of the poor, a holistic perspective of mission is woven which points toward the transformation of all things, to radical discipleship brought about by an unbreakable faith in the God of life, to the affirmation of the uncompromising value of human life as a gift from God, to peacemaking and to the affirmation of the dignity of all human beings as creations of God.⁴⁷

López emphasizes in his writings and in lifestyle a wholistic mission of salvation. He takes seriously both the so-called physical and spiritual dimensions of human existence. His practice of wholistic mission rightly blurs modernity's preoccupation with inward religion and outward politics by subverting both to the relationality of God's liberating salvation. Unlike most conservative Evangelicals and Pentecostals, he does not reduce the Gospel to spiritual, inward salvation and, unlike some doctrinaire Liberationists, he does not reduce the Gospel to economic and political salvation. Instead, these dimensions are held together in the liberating mission of the Spirit, and in the Son, on behalf of God's creation and especially humanity.

These themes run through López' many theological treatises which, although unknown to the English speaking world, have gained a substantial reading in Latin America. The work of López represents the cutting edge of a new generation of progressive Latin American Pentecostals which would be instructive to the increasingly institutionalized Anglo-pentecostal churches of North America.

In conclusion we have identified points of commonality between Liberationist praxis and Pentecostal missional theology through the common lens of a liberating hermeneutic emerging out of the margins. The points of intersection were: the shared contextual reading of scripture with the ecclesial community being the primary hermeneut, pastoral praxis with, by, and for the poor and marginalized sectors of society, the practice of wholistic mission and the primacy of the Lukan narrative for the understanding of the mission.

Archer and Waldrop, "Liberating Hermeneutics."

⁴⁷ López, *The Liberating Mission of Jesus*, p. 28