Faith from the Underside of History: Three *Evangélico* Responses to the Plight of the Poor in Brazil

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ABSTRACT

This essay presents three significant Protestant responses to the plight of the poor in Brazil. There is a presupposition that all ethical and theological endeavor is an act of response to a previous action, and part of a dialogue that takes place between different people and different realities that not only encounter each other, but which also deeply affect and transform each other. These constant encounters and dialogues provoke transformations both in the realities encountered by moral agents, and in the moral agents' responses to those realities. Any Christian social ethics coming from a given reality of suffering and oppression must take that context seriously, and must respond to the needs that present themselves to it. It ought to be an ethics of response – one that engages its surrounding context in dialogue. The encounter with the poor and oppressed other has the power of bringing with it a conversion to those involved in that encounter. These eye-opening and life-transforming encounters with those who experience living on the underside of history can liberate the church and reshape theology.

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KEYWORDS

Social Ethics, Brazil Evangelical Church, Poor People.

A fé da perspectiva do lado de baixo da história: Três respostas Evangélicas à situação do Pobre no Brasil

RESUMO

Este artigo apresenta três respostas protestantes significativas à situação do pobre no Brasil. Há uma pressuposição básica de que todo empreendimento teológico e ético é um ato de resposta a uma ação prévia e parte de um diálogo que acontece entre as pessoas e as diferentes realidades que não somente se encontram, mas também se transformam. Estes encontros constantes e diálogos provocam transformações tanto nas realidades encontradas pelos agentes morais como nas respostas dos agentes morais àquelas realidades. Qualquer Ética Social Cristã que deriva de uma dada realidade de sofrimento e opressão deve levar seriamente em conta este contexto e responder às necessidades que lhe são apresentadas: uma Ética de resposta e engajada no diálogo com seu contexto de inserção. O encontro com o outro pobre e oprimido pode gerar a conversão daqueles e daquelas que estão envolvidos neste encontro. O encontro com os vivem no reverso da história pode libertar a Igreja e dar uma nova forma à Teologia.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Ética Social, Igreja Evangélica Brasileira, Pobres.

In this essay, I call attention to three significant Protestant responses to the plight of the poor in Brazil. I suggest that the three Brazilian Protestant responses to the plight of the poor that I show in this essay complement each other. Combined, they offer important insights to those working in the field of social ethics in Brazil.

Throughout this essay, there is a presupposition that all ethical and theological endeavor is an act of response to a previous action, and part of a dialogue that takes place between different people and different realities that not only encounter each other, but which also

deeply affect and transform each other.[2] These constant encounters and dialogues provoke transformations both in the realities encountered by moral agents, and in the moral agents' responses to those realities. The argument undergirding this whole essay is that any Christian social ethics coming from a given reality of suffering and oppression must take that context seriously, and must respond to the needs that present themselves to it. It ought to be an ethics of response – one that engages its surrounding context in dialogue. The encounter with the poor and oppressed other has the power of bringing with it a conversion – a deep spiritual transformation – to those involved in that encounter. Joerg Rieger has pointed out how these eye-opening and life-transforming encounters with those who experience living on the underside of history can liberate the church and reshape theology.[3]

From the outset, I acknowledge that the *Evangélico*[4] faces I mention here do not intend to represent all Protestant churches and their

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[2] By using the language of response and dialogue, I draw on the thinking of Martin Buber, Emmil Brunner, Emmanuel Levinas, H. Richard Niebuhr, Enrique Dussel, Paul Lehmann, and Richard Shaull, even though I do not directly refer to some of these thinkers in this essay.

[3] See Joerg Rieger, "Introduction: Watch the Money", in **Liberating the Future: God, Mammon and Theology** (ed. Joerg Rieger; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1998), 1-13, esp. p. 4.

[4] In Latin America, the words *Evangélico* and *Protestant* are often used interchangeably. *Evangélico* - the Spanish/Portuguese term for 'evangelical' - is the word used by most Latin American Protestants for self-identification. As David Stoll has noticed, ten percent or more of the Latin American population identify themselves as *Evangélicos*, with that percentage going substantively up in Brazil, Chile, and most of Central America. See "Introduction: Rethinking Protestantism in Latin America," in **Rethinking Protestantism in Latin America**, ed. Virginia Garrard-Burnett and David Stoll (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1993), 2. Pentecostalism co-exists within Latin American evangelicalism. In the case of Brazil, around 70 percent of the 20 million Protestants in the country belong to Pentecostal or charismatic churches. In its most common usage, the word *Evangélico* in the Brazilian context functions simply as a substitute for the word 'Protestant.' It is in this general sense that I use the word *Evangélico* here.
See Paul Freston, **Evangelicals and Politics in Asia, Africa and Latin America** (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 11.

relation to the poor in Brazil. I believe, however, that they are a fair representation of those Brazilian Protestants who have been open to meet the poor face-to-face, and to meet the Divine through them.

I begin this essay by offering a brief justification for the need that Christians theologians have in a place like Brazil to do theology from the perspective of the poor, of the needy, of the marginalized. Following that first part, I identify three different faces of Brazilian Protestantism, and discuss their responses and contributions to empower those who are suffering, and to transform the situation in which they live. I use Richard Shaull, a North American theologian who lived in South America for twenty years, as an exemplar for the kind of responsible and dialogical Christian theologizing I am proposing here. I suggest that his praxis and theological ethics might function as an interface which brings the three different faces into conversation with each other.

The Transforming Impact of a Face-to-Face Encounter with the Poor

Liberation theologians in Latin America have offered an original contribution to theological ethics by asking how one can talk about God in a context of extreme poverty and oppression. The issue of the primacy of the poor – or the preferential option for the poor – has become one of major importance to those working in Latin America.[5] In light of that insight, the best way to know what God is doing in Latin America today is to get closer to the poor and listen to them. Any Christian social ethics in Latin America, then, is one that seeks to respond to what God is doing in that context, and which seeks to join God in God's work among the poor.

For all those who live in the poorer parts of the world, there is an inescapable social reality before which all our theologizing must

[5] This is, for instance, the basic assumption guiding Gustavo Gutierrez's argument in his major work **A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation** (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1973).

be done. In that context, theology is to be done face-to-face with the poor. It is morally unacceptable to look away from the dehumanizing reality of extreme poverty and suffering surrounding our lives. As one lives in an historical context where one meets scandalous poverty and injustice on a everyday basis, one learns to see the world from a different perspective. Thus, those of us doing theology from Latin America must join Dietrich Bonhoeffer when he says,

> We have for once learned to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled – in short, from the perspective of those who suffer.[6]

This perspective from the underside of history was crucial in the development of Latin America liberation theology. Leonardo and Clodovis Boff start an introductory book on liberation theology by describing some shocking scenes in northeastern Brazil.[7] They told those stories to show why the starting point of Latin American theology is exactly "the perception of [such] scandals ... which exist not only in Latin America."[8] They continued then to affirm that Latin American liberation theology is mainly concerned with those who are starving in the world, with those who are living in absolute poverty, with those who do not even have access to the most basic medical care or to regular water supply, with those who are illiterate.[9]

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[6] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "After Ten Years," in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Writings Selected with an Introduction* (ed. Robert Coles; New York: Orbis Books, 1998), 114. This is one of the favorite quotes of Bonhoeffer among Latin American liberation theologians. Gustavo Gutierrez quotes it in an essay called "The Limitations of Modern Theology: on a Letter of Dietrich Bonhoeffer," in idem, **Essential Writings** (ed. James B. Nickoloff; New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 42.

[7] Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, **Introducing Liberation Theology** (trans. Paul Burns; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987), 1.

[8] *Ibid.*, 2.

[9] *Ibid.*

Liberation theology's starting point is the reality of "com-passion," of "suffering with" the oppressed.[10] This is the "vital environment," the reality that all Latin American liberation theologians must take into consideration when developing all the important themes of their theology.[11] Jurgen Moltmann has affirmed that in his contact with Latin American liberation theology he learned that "any good Christian theology knows in which context, in which *kairos*, in which community it must be situated."[12]

One of the most important contributions made by Latin American liberation theology is that in order to do theology from the perspective of the poor one has also to have a strong and vivid commitment with that reality. In other words, liberation theology in Latin America calls for "a living link with a living practice."[13] Methodologically, Latin American liberation theology teaches us that it is only after one is able to "do liberation" that one can "do theology."[14] From that perspective, theology is mainly defined as "critical reflection on the praxis of liberation."[15] There is a primacy, and urgency, for praxis. *Orthopraxis* becomes more important than *orthodoxy*. That is what leads Clodovis Boff to state, "Faith is first and foremost, although not exclusively, *orthopraxis*."[16]

It is important to notice, however, that Liberation theology itself did not create this understanding of Christian faith. In fact, it emerged as a result of the encounter between Christian theology and poverty in the Latin American context. Michael Lowy has shown that there is a liberationist Christianity that precedes liberation theology and

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[10] *Ibid.*

[11] See Jon Sobrino, "Teologia Desde la Realidad," in **O Mar Se Abriu: Trinta Anos de Teologia na America Latina** (ed. Luis Carlos Susin; S. Paulo, Brazil: Ed. Loyola, 2000), 153-170.

[12] Jurgen Moltmann, "Teologia Latino-Americana," in *O Mar Se Abriu*, 227.

[13] Boff and Boff, *op. cit.*, 22.

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] Roberto Oliveros, "History of the Theology of Liberation," in **Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology** (ed. Ignacio Ellacuria and Jon Sobrino; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993), 12.

[16] Clodovis Boff, **Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations** (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987), 37.

repeatedly requires a refreshed look at the lives and experiences of those Christians, which become the starting point of any relevant theological and ethical reflection in Latin America.[17] Liberation theology emerged from within that liberation Christianity. It appeared as the theological "expression of a vast movement that emerged at the beginning of the 1960s, well before the new theological writings."[18]

As David Tombs states, "Whether a recognizable movement called liberation theology persists or not, the issues that it dealt with will continue to remain just as pressing as before. The terminology may vary but Christian theology will need to keep faith with and build upon the ethical, methodological and epistemological principles of liberation theology if it is adequately to engage with these issues in the new millennium."[19] Therefore, even if the language used by liberation theologians during the sixties and seventies might seem sometimes outdated, new forms of liberating social ethics need to be developed to respond to the new challenges are now conveyed to us.

Both Protestantism and Catholicism came to Latin America as foreign religious systems, as part of the modern project which Enrique Dussel calls "the invention of the Americas."[20] This project tried to eclipse at several levels our identity, including our thinking. However, in the encounter with the poor, with the outcast, some Christians – both Catholics and Protestants – experienced a radical transformation of

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[17] See Michael Lowy, **The War of Gods: Religion and Politics in Latin America** (New York: Verso, 1996), 34.

[18] *Ibid.*, 32.

[19] David Tombs, "Latin American Liberation Theology Faces the Future," in **Faith in the Millennium** (ed. Stanley E. Porter, Michael A. Hayes, and David Tombs; Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 58.

[20] Enrique Dussel**, The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of "the Other" and the Myth of Modernity** (trans. Michael D. Barber; New York: Continuum, 1995). Dussel holds that although the gestation of modernity took place within Europe itself, it just came to birth in the confrontation of Europe with the Other. "By controlling, conquering, and violating the Other, Europe defined itself as the discoverer, conquistador and colonizer of an alterity likewise constitutive of modernity." In other words, "modernity dawned in 1492 and with it the myth of a special kind of sacrificial violence which eventually eclipsed whatever was non-European" (p. 12).

being converted to the poor. To start with, their understanding of God was changed by this experience of a face-to-face encounter with the poor. God, in Latin America, was no longer an immutable God. In Latin America, God has become a relational God who reveals God's self in the midst of the human crises, and whose only immutability resides in God's love and God's justice. As one faces the poor, one has to consider their social-historical context when speaking about God.[21] When one takes one's own social location seriously, one finally realizes what Gustavo Gutierrez beautifully expressed, "I feel God differently."[22] In Latin America, in their daily encounter with the poor, some Christian theologians have become aware that human beings get to know God in the context of a particular historical situation. The knowledge of God in those empirical situations has led them to a different praxis on behalf of justice. They have learned that "to know God is to do justice."[23]

In its first years Brazilian liberation theology predominantly developed among Roman Catholic priests and theologians. Most Brazilian *Evangélico churches* have over the years identified themselves over against the background of Roman Catholicism. Along with that anti-Catholic sentiment, a strong individualism has also characterized the majority of Brazilian Protestants.

In spite of that, some Brazilian Protestant groups, in their daily face-to-face encounter with the poor, experienced a kind of social conversion, which led them to act in response to the plight of the poor in a way to strive for justice. Different faces[24] of Brazilian Protestantism

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[21] As Juan Luis Segundo puts it, "God's revelation comes to us in the cultural situation of the oppressed" (**The Liberation of Theology** [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1982], 30). The same can be said about the Bible, and any other doctrine. Segundo speaks of the hermeneutical circle as the "continuing change in our interpretation of the Bible which is dictated by the continuing changes in our present-day reality, both individual and societal" (*ibid.*, 8).

[22] Gustavo Gutierrez, **The God of Life** (London: SCM Press, 1991), xv.

[23] Robert McAfee Brown, **Theology In a New Key: Responding to Liberation Themes** (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), 90.

[24] The way I use the word 'face,' here, follows José Miguez Bonino, in his work **Faces of Latin American Protestantism** (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), and entails a certain unity in the midst of diversity, which

have produced different responses to the cry of the poor. None of them is complete, but as one takes all the different responses into consideration, one can see that they complement each other and, together, can lead to a more significant Christian action to produce a more just and egalitarian society.

The Different Faces of Brazilian Protestantism

José Miguez Bonino uses the analogy of the face to identify the different manifestations of Latin American Protestantism. He identified four different faces of Latin American Protestantism: a Liberal face, an Evangelical face, a Pentecostal face, and an Ethnic face.[25]

American liberal Protestantism migrated to Latin America along with the American 'manifest destiny.' It was part of an effort to intensify the economic relationship between the U.S. and the Southern countries by encouraging the entrance of 'enlightened modernity' into South America. Immigration and the modern education of the elites were some of the strategies used to achieve this goal. In fact, this effort was not unilateral. There were also political and social struggles in South America, which demonstrated the dissatisfaction of some minorities that confronted the authoritarian political culture dominated by Roman Catholicism, in the attempt to found a bourgeois modernity based on the equality of a participatory and democratic society.[26] Therefore, American liberal Protestantism allied itself with the Latin American sectors that impelled the struggle for liberal modernization through the formation of 'free associations' of various kinds. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the impact of this alliance between liberalism and Protestantism could already be noticed in Latin American societies.

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enables one to speak of the *Evangélico* or Protestant faith in the singular, even though there are different manifestations of this faith.

[25] See *ibid.*

[26] *Ibid.*, 3.

However, the liberal ideal of transforming Latin American societies through the creation of schools for the elites ended up in failure.[27] Instead of liberating the masses, this kind of Protestantism encouraged Latin Americans to emulate the North-American way of life. The liberal Protestant face saw its own success as the only way for Latin America to gain true freedom. Protestantism was conceived as the avant-garde of true, socially progressive, modernizing and participatory democracy.[28] This kind of Protestantism is also called historical Protestantism, in Latin America.[29]

From within this Liberal face of Latin American Protestantism, however, a group of young Christians began to raise their voices protesting against injustice, and calling for a more just society. For the first time in Latin America a Protestant voice raised the banner of social justice. The beginning of this progressive Protestant movement can be traced back to the creation of the Setor de Responsabilidade Social da Igreja in the Brazilian *Evangélico* Confederation, and to the development of the Student Christian Movement in Brazil, in the late 1940s. A movement made of young Christian leaders began to call for active militancy in social and political liberation movements and, along with Catholic partners, created the ethos in which liberation theology was born in the late 1960's.[30]

The second face of Latin American Protestantism mentioned by Miguez Bonino is the Evangelical one. The evangelicalism that was brought by American missionaries to Latin America had been influenced by the two great awakenings. Among the characteristics of the second great awakening was its concern with social reformation. The British evangelists of the second awakening "took upon themselves, along with the moral improvement of society, the cause of abolition of slavery

[27] *Ibid.*, 17.

[28] *Ibid.*, 18.

[29] Pablo A. Deiros, "Protestant Fundamentalism in Latin America," in **Fundamentalisms Observed** (ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 149.

[30] See Alan Neely, **Protestant Antecedents of the Latin American Theology of Liberation** (Ph. D. diss., American University, 1977), vi and following.

and the struggle against poverty."[31] But, this emphasis was reversed in the kind of North American evangelicalism that was predominantly exported to Latin America. As Miguez Bonino points out, "toward 1916 Latin American missionary Protestantism was basically 'evangelical' in accord with the model of American evangelicalism: i.e., "individualistic and Christological-soteriological in a basically subjective key, with [great] emphasis on sanctification."[32]

The Evangelical face, from the second decade of the twentieth century on, became the most influential stream of Brazilian Protestantism, affecting, in various degrees, all of Latin American Protestantism.[33] Despite its inherited individualism, it became a vehicle of social participation for the marginal groups that came into sight in Brazil as a result of the modernizing changes occurring within that society.[34] Two things, however, rendered evangelicalism incapable of promoting any significant structural change: First, its congenital individualism rendered evangelicalism unable to understand the Brazilian social reality, and, so, incapable of understanding structural violence as well as of participating in the process to transform it; Second, missionary evangelicalism, influenced by fundamentalism and its rigid dogmatism, still had difficulties appealing to the real needs of the masses, being incapable of overcoming the problems of class exploitation, machismo and racism, which afflicted the Brazilian grassroots.

The evangelical denominations became so influential in Latin America that they lent the name 'evangelical' to almost all other Protestants in the continent – most of which began to be identified as simply *Evangélicos*. Evangelical Christians are usually conservative in doctrine and firmly committed to zealous proselytism in the name of

[31] Miguez Bonino, *op. cit.*, 29.

[32] *Ibid.*, 40.

[33] *Ibid.*, 17. Only in the 1990s the significance of that Protestant face in Latin America was surpassed by the Pentecostal face.

[34] Ronald Glen Frase, **A Sociological Analysis of the Development of Brazilian Protestantism: A Study in Social Change** (Ph.D. diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1975).

the gospel.[35] Velasquez Filho defines evangelicalism as the theological movement that accentuates the experience of conversion or new birth as the starting point of the Christian life, as well as a return to the Bible as the only rule of faith and conduct.[36]

This puritan-pietistic evangelical ethos was the bedrock for a kind of faith marked by a "legalistic morality, a fervid and exclusionary emotionalism, and of more recent origin, a pronounced sympathy for political candidates and positions on the right wing of the Latin American spectrum,"[37] which rather reinforced the status quo. Most Brazilian evangelical churches became a conservative political force, having given for instance religious legitimacy to the right-wing military dictatorship that ruled the country between 1964 and 1985. However, in the midst of this predominant conservatism, a group of Brazilian evangelicals more open to seeing the reality surrounding their lives gave birth to a politically progressive evangelical movement, which developed its own response to the cry of the oppressed in Latin America.

The Pentecostal face of Latin American Protestantism represents its most recent and popular manifestation. Pentecostalism has been influenced by the same kind of conservative theology that influenced the Evangelical face. However, as it grows mostly among the poor, Pentecostalism has also developed a peculiar response to their suffering, as we will see below.

The Ethnic face of Brazilian Protestantism refers mainly to churches that were planted in the country to assist immigrants in their own language and culture. These churches – mostly German in origin – have become geographically limited to the southern part of the country, where there is a predominance of German immigrants, and have not

[35] Elizete da Silva, **Cidadãos de Outra Pátria: Anglicanos e Batistas na Bahia** (Doctoral diss., Universidade de São Paulo), 601.

[36] Procoro Velasques Filho, "Deus Como Emoção: Orígens Históricas e Teológicas do Protestantismo Evangelical," **in Introdução ao Protestantismo no Brasil** (ed. Antônio G. Mendonça and Prócoro Velasques Filho; Sao Paulo: Edições Loyola, 1990), 80-81.

[37] Pablo Deiros, *op. cit.*, 152.

spread much outside its own ethnic group. It is, therefore, beyond the scope of this paper.

Antônio G. Mendonça[38] identifies three general types of Brazilian Protestantism: the Protestantism of Immigration, composed by those who came in the first half of nineteenth century as Lutherans and Episcopalians; the Protestantism of mission (Congregationalists, Methodists, Presbyterians and Baptists), and the Pentecostals.[39] Mendonça's Missionary Protestantism encompasses Miguez Bonino's Liberal and Evangelical faces. According to Mendonça, all the American missions that established themselves in Brazil were moved by two motives: First, "they were genuinely concerned with evangelization, beginning with the salvation of the individual"; second, "they brought with them the ideology of manifest destiny, with its democratic and republican principles as part of the messianic convictions of the U.S. nation."[40] Whereas the first motive made them go all over the country preaching individual salvation and establishing congregations, the second one led them to invest heavily in education, with the intent of influencing both the intellectual and political elites with their liberal ideals.

These Protestants lived in two different worlds: the world of the bourgeoisie, the dominant classes, composed by liberal intellectuals and landowners, which were sympathetic to the ideals of progress and liberty brought by the Protestant missions, but who never actually joined them; and the world of the lower classes, characterized by messianic-millennialist ideals. These lower classes absorbed the missionary Protestant preaching, which portrayed life as a pilgrimage in the world, and the hope for a life of blessing in the *celeste porvir*.[41] This worldview explains the reasons for the generalized indifference shown by most Brazilian Protestants towards any action, whether social

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[38] Antônio G. Mendonça, "Evolucao Historica e Configuracao Atual do Protestantismo no Brasil," in **Introdução ao Protestantismo no Brasil**, 12-13.

[39] *Ibid.* See also Orivaldo P. Lopes, Jr., "Protestantism in Brazil and the Cause of the Poor," unpublished article, 2000, 2.

[40] Mendonça, *op. cit.*, 15.

[41] Antônio G. Mendonça, **O Celeste Porvir: a Inserção do Protestantismo no Brasil** (São Paulo: Edições Paulinas, 1995). 'Celeste Porvir' means *celestial future*.

or political, that may come out of their religious beliefs. They learned to live as citizens of two worlds: one is secular, where they exercise their economic activities; the other, is the close 'family of faith,' the sphere in which they live out their faith.[42] Therefore, this kind of Christian faith does not prompt the believers to social action.[43]

Because of its general parochial mentality, strongly influenced by the evangelical mindset brought to them by North American missionaries, most Brazilian Protestants have never been able to make a synthesis that could be adequate to the Brazilian cultural environment. Their attitude towards society have tended to be defensive.[44]

However, new ecumenical spaces began to emerge in the beginning of the twentieth century. These new ecumenical spaces gave birth to a number of important autonomous ecumenical organizations in the country. Erasmo Braga (1877-1932), was one of the most important Brazilian Protestant intellectuals in the first half of the twentieth century. Born into a Presbyterian family, Braga was a pivotal figure in the ecumenical movement in Latin America. Braga's main concerns related to the nature of Brazilian Protestantism and the foundations of Protestant education in Brazil.[45] For him, the Protestant faith should be able to combine its elements with some Latin American ideals in order to become a pivotal agent of social change and a perpetrator of moral and political progress, which would culminate in the establishment of a full democracy in the region. Therefore, a Protestant formation was essential, since it would assist people in the development of moral responsibility in both the individual and social realms.

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[42] *Ibid.*, 384.

[43] *Ibid.*, 385.

[44] Brazilian sociologist Waldo César affirmed that the Protestantism established in Brazil brought with it the marks of sectarianism and individualism. That results in an acculturation that has no relation with the historical formation of the Latin American peoples. See Waldo César, "Situação Social e Crescimento do Protestantismo na América Latina," in **Protestantismo e Imperialismo na América Latina** (ed. Waldo César; Petrópolis: Vozes, 1968), 7-36, esp. p. 12.

[45] Luiz Longuini Neto, **O Novo Rosto da Missão** (São Paulo: Ultimato, 2002), 96.

Despite all the contributions that ecumenical Protestants such as Braga made to Brazilian education and development, it is clear that until the beginning of the 1950s, Brazilian Protestantism was "the product of imported theology, church polity, and social ethics."[46] For the most part there was no political activity, except when it became necessary to defend issues such as religious freedom and other church interests, and the common belief was that only through individual conversion and through the Christianization of society one could bring about structural changes. This attitude began to change during the 1950s, when political and social involvement began to be advanced in some Protestant quarters as an inescapable Christian duty.

The Ecumenical Response

The kind of Protestantism that has prevailed in Brazil has not been concerned in developing a Christian social ethics.[47] Rubem Alves developed a typology to study Brazilian Protestantism, and concluded that the predominant type of Protestantism in Brazil was a "Protestantism of righteous doctrine," characterized by pietistic spirituality, literalistic understanding of the Bible, and an intrinsic individualism.[48] According to Alves, the ethics of this type of Protestantism "is individual, not social ... Social ethics, therefore, is not an essential part of this Protestant universe. These Protestants can say all that they have to say without referring even once to the need for social transformation."[49] This world-view understands society simply as the sum of individuals. Therefore, it is only necessary to transform individuals in order to change society.

The predominance of a more individualistic and otherworldly *Evangélico* faith in Brazil has overshadowed the contributions that have

[46] Alan Neely, *op. cit.*, 143.

[47] See Rubem Alves, **Protestantismo e Repressão** (São Paulo: Ática, 1979), 216ff.

[48] The other two types of Alves's typology are "Protestantism of the sacrament" and "Protestantism of the spirit." Nevertheless, he only develops one type, the "Protestantism of righteous doctrine." See *ibid.*, 35-37.

[49] *Ibid.*, 216 (my translation).

been made by small groups of Brazilian Protestants for the promotion of social justice and social transformation in the Brazilian context.[50] Starting in the 1950s, there have been some Protestant attempts to develop a Christian social ethics in Brazil. A group of young ecumenical Protestants linked with the Setor de Responsabilidade Social of the Confederação Evangélica do Brasil tried for the first time to establish a dialogue between the Brazilian Protestant church and the larger society.[51]

The Confederação Evangélica do Brasil was created in 1935 as a result of the work of people such as Erasmo Braga, and by the influence of the ecumenical world conferences. It was intended to be a testimony of the unity of the Protestant churches in Brazil and to represent the *Evangélico* voice before Brazilian society at large. But it was among young Protestants, both in the movements of *juventude* within the Confederação and in the student Christian movement in the beginning of the 1950s, that a genuine preoccupation with the social responsibility of the church vis-à-vis the rapid changes taking place in the world was developed, and that the theme of social responsibility and social change became part of the agenda of Brazilian Protestantism. In its origins, there was no coherent theological articulation of the movement.[52]

Both the Setor de Responsabilidade Social da Igreja and the Student Christian Movement played a very important role in the development of a progressive social ethics in Brazil that anticipated many of the later claims of liberation theology. These two initiatives also contributed to the formation of a continent-wide movement called Church and Society in Latin America, known by the initials ISAL. The Brazilian section of the Christian Student Movement, known as the União Cristã de

[50] See Paul Freston, *op. cit.*, 11ff.

[51] This movement would be displaced by the military coup d'etat in 1964, but even after that, it played a very important role in resisting the right-wing military dictatorship that ruled Brazil for twenty-one years. See, for instance, James N. Green "Clergy, Exiles, and Academics: Opposition to the Brazilian Military Dictatorship in the United States, 1964-1974," **Latin American Politics and Society** 45: 1 (February 2003): 87-117.

[52] Interview with Waldo César, Rio de Janeiro, July 8, 2003.

Estudantes do Brasil (UCEB), declared to be "a movement allied with those who work in favor of radical changes in the basic social structures as the indispensable and inevitable condition for the humanization of Brazilian life."[53]

Richard Shaull came to Brazil in 1952 as a Presbyterian North American missionary who intended to work with the Christian student movement in Brazil, and taught at the Presbyterian Seminary in Campinas. Because he paid attention to what was going on among these young Brazilian *Evangélicos*, he became such an important figure in the history of Brazilian Protestantism.[54] Shaull, on the other hand, was profoundly impacted by the Brazilian reality allowing it to reshape his own theology.[55]

As Rubem Alves affirms, Shaull was the first one to teach us, Brazilian Protestants, about the social responsibility of the church.[56] He affected an entire generation of young Protestant thinkers in the 1950s and 1960s. For the first time in Brazilian Protestantism, the social changes taking place in the larger society were being taken seriously.

Up to the late 1950s, the theology that nurtured the Brazilian Protestant churches was not only foreign in its character, but it was also passed on to Brazilian students at Protestant seminaries as being simply "the theology."[57] The kind of theology taught at Brazilian seminaries at

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[53] "Dos Años de Un MEC en Revolución," **Testimonium** 10 (Marzo 1964): 32. Quoted by Neely, *op. cit.*, 163.

[54] Leão Neto categorically affirms that the action and work of Richard Shaull represented a watershed for Latin American theology, and that his vision of the action of God in history served as the foundation for the formulation of the theological response to the situation of oppression of the poor in that continent, which later was known as liberation theology. See Reynaldo Ferreira Leão Neto, "Richard Shaull: O Profeta da Revolução," in **Pastoral & Mística** (ed. Jacy Maraschin; São Bernardo dos Campos, SP, Brazil: IMES, 1995), 83-108, esp. p. 85.

[55] See Richard Shaull, **Surpreendido Pela Graça** (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2003), 243ff.

[56] Rubem Alves, "... Su Cadáver Estava Lleno de Mundo," in **Religião e Sociedade** 33 (2003): 87.

[57] That is, a theology of absolute and universal character, which did not allow any modifying adjective. Anything done differently would not be considered proper

that time was orthodox and dated. Neither in Brazil nor anywhere else in South America was there room for a local or contextual theology at that point. Richard Shaull was the first Protestant thinker in Brazil to strive for the development of a contextual theology and ethics that took seriously the socio-historical location of those doing theology in Brazil. By doing that, Shaull "was, without knowing, sowing the seeds of liberation theology."[58] As Carl-Henric Grenholm says, despite being a North American theologian, Shaull "can be regarded as a representative of a more radical Latin American Protestantism."[59]

Shaull came of age as a mature theologian during his years in Brazil.[60] He allowed the Latin American social context to inform his theology and ethics in unique ways, to the point that he became able to incorporate a Latin American flavor into his theological thinking even after he left Brazil in order to teach at Princeton.[61] If, on the one

theology. As Jovelino Ramos says, when he was a seminarian at the Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Campinas in the late 1950s, theology was a matter of memorizing and quoting dead people: "The more dead they were the better," he says ironically. Richard Shaull introduced to his Brazilian students and co-workers the top theologies of the time, that is, the thought of the many of the best theologians of that historical period, such as Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Emil Brunner, Reinhold Niebuhr, Jacques Maritain, C. H. Dodd, and others. Furthermore, he was not interested in the reproduction of these theologians' thought by the students, but in their capacity to dialogue critically and ask questions to these theologians in light of their own historical context. See Jovelino Ramos, "Você Não Conhece o Shaull," in **De Dentro do Furacão: Richard Shaull e os Primórdios da Teologia da Libertação** (ed. Rubem Alves *et al.*; Vozes: Petrópolis, 1985), 27.

[58] Rubem Alves, "... Su Cadáver Estava Lleno de Mundo," 93.

[59] Carl-Henric Grenholm, **Christian Social Ethics in a Revolutionary Age: An Analysis of the Social Ethics of John C. Bennett, Heinz-Dietrich Wendland and Richard Shaull** (Upsala: Verbum, 1973), 210.

[60] The process of his spiritual and theological formation that started at Princeton, as a seminarian, and continued during his Colombian experience and his graduate studies with Paul Lehmann, was deepened and transformed during the decade of experience and reflection in Brazil. "[In Brazil] the heart of my faith and Christian life was developed in extraordinary ways" (Shaull, ***Surpreendido Pela Graça***, 245).

[61] The transformation he suffered through his experience in Brazil defined the terms of his presence and action as a professor at Princeton Theological Seminary in the years that followed his return to the United States. See *ibid.*, 246.

hand, Shaull's experience in Brazil deeply affected his theology and spirituality, on the other hand, the theology that he developed during his years in Brazil became also a watershed for Brazilian Protestant theology.[62] Through his thorough engagement and immersion in the Brazilian context, Shaull was able both to transform and to be transformed by that context.

An Interface for the Three Different Faces of Brazilian Protestantism

Shaull never systematized his theological thinking into a new theology, although he pointed to new forms of doing theology. His main contributions to Brazilian theology and ethics, however, can be seen in the way he responded to the new challenges brought to him by the historical situation in which he was immersed. That way of responding theologically to the reality around him became a reference to the new religious movements emerging at that point in Brazil.

Shaull was one of the first theologians in Latin America to emphasize the primacy of praxis in theology.[63] He never approached any issue only intellectually. He was always asking his interlocutors the question, "Well ... so, what should we do, then?"[64] Moreover, he contrasted the church-centeredness dominant in Brazilian Protestantism with an openness to looking for the meaning of God's action in the world, in the midst of complex historical events. In addition, Shaull understood that the ecumenical movement should strive for the unity of all peoples, instead of the unity of the church. Therefore, he was aware

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[62] Eduardo Galasso Faria, **Fé e Compromisso: Richard Shaull e a Teologia no Brasil** (São Paulo: Aste, 2002), 143.

[63] *Ibid.*, 144. See also Julio de Santa Ana, "A Richard Shaull: Teólogo e Pioneiro Ecumênico – um testemunho reconhecido," in **De Dentro do Furacão**, 37; Julio de Santa Ana affirms, "... Shaull helped us to understand the primacy of praxis" (my translation).

[64] See Rubem Menzen Bueno, "Ah, Ah! Bem, e Então ... Como, a Ver, Richard Shaull Pensava e Agia," **Religião e Sociedade** 33 (2003): 95-96.

of the fact that dialogue with other cultures and between the church and the larger society was crucial to the ecumenical movement both in Brazil and elsewhere.

Shaull was able, thus, to overcome the artificial divisions between church and society. According to Rubem César Fernandes, Shaull was someone paying close attention to what was going on around him, and he was always open to having face-to-face dialogue with every group of people with whom he engaged.[65]

An attitude of never crystallizing his theological thinking into any closed system made Shaull capable of dialoguing with many different social realities. The main conversational partners of Shaull during his life and ministry were the poor, whose appeal demanded from him a praxis of revolution and liberation. From his first encounter with the Latin American poor, in Colombia in 1942, to the end of his life, he privileged the poor as the main bearers of God's word to the rest of the world, and he sought to listen to what God was saying to him through the poor. However, Shaull also dialogued with all the others whom he came across during his ministry. In Brazil, he was the first Protestant to engage a group of Roman Catholics in continuous and serious conversation. He also engaged communism, adopting its dearest word – revolution – into his own vocabulary, giving it theological meaning. Although living then back in the United States, Shaull also engaged the Christian Base Communities that emerged in Brazil during the 1970s and 1980s. Finally, at the end of his life, he engaged Pentecostalism, recognizing that through the Pentecostal poor God was speaking to the historical churches.

Shaull is a good exemplar and a good partner of dialogue for the three faces of Brazilian Protestantism. For the Ecumenical face, Shaull is a natural conversational partner, since he was an important actor of this movement in the 1950s and early 1960s. For the Pentecostal face, he also becomes a natural conversational partner, due to the work he did in the last part of his life and ministry among the poor Pentecostals in Rio de Janeiro.

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[65] Undated interview quoted by Eduardo G. Faria in **Fé e Compromisso**, 145.

But what to make of the Evangelical face? No direct historical connections can link Shaull to the evangelical progressive movement that emerged in Brazil in 1970. However, one can still make the case that Shaull is also a conversational partner for the Evangelical face for two main reasons. First, the Evangelical face, emerged as a response to the challenges made by both the ecumenical movement and the liberationist movement in Brazil in the early 1960s. The appeal of both of these movements required that the evangelicals, who up to that point had shown no sign of any social concern, sought for a biblical response to the situation of extreme poverty and injustice in Latin America. This was the situation that gave birth to the Latin American Theological Fraternity (FTL) in 1970.[66] The evangelical response, embodied in the FTL, emerges in search for a biblical response to movements that, in their view, were far to the left and had accommodated to secular language. From this reactionary beginning, the Evangelical face has moved into a more consistent dialogue with other movements in the last two decades,[67] and it has adopted some of their terminology into its own vocabulary.[68] If one takes into consideration that Shaull's theology and

[66] See Carlos Queiroz, "A Missão Integral no Brasil," unpublished paper, from Carlos Queiroz's personal files, p. 1. FTL stands for the Spanish Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana.

[67] In the last Latin American Congress of Evangelization, which took place in Quito, Ecuador, in 2000, this dialogue was made more explicit, as members of the Latin American Council of Churches, from a more ecumenical inclination, were invited to contribute with papers for the congress, and to dialogue with more evangelical theologians from the FTL. See, for instance, the important work that came out of these efforts, **Unidad y Diversidad del Protestantismo Latinoamericano : el testimonio evangélico hacia el tercer milenio: Palabra, espíritu y mission** (ed. José Miguez Bonino; Buenos Aires: Kairos, 2002).

[68] An emphasis on social justice and transformation – a theological emphasis on the Kingdom of God as the basis for the struggle for justice – is present in several writings of this movement. See, for instance, Orlando Costas, **The Church and Its Mission: A Shattering Critique from the Third World** (Wheaton, III.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1976). In several of his writings, Costas, one of the main theologians of the FTL, makes numerous references to Rubem Alves, and some direct references to Shaull. See esp. Orlando Costas, **Theology of the Crossroads in Contemporary Latin America: Missiology in Mainline Protestantism, 1969-1974** (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1976). One

ethics was influential in the beginning of both the ecumenical and the liberationist movements that provoked an evangelical response, one can come to the conclusion that Shaull might also be a good conversational partner for the Evangelical face of Brazilian Protestantism.

Furthermore, Shaull never gave up entirely the evangelical faith in which he was nurtured both during his childhood and during his youth.[69] Although he gave different meanings to old words, Shaull kept using important words for the evangelical movement in his theological vocabulary to the end of his life. For instance, Shaull always emphasized the need for a biblical faith, and took "biblical authority" seriously, without coming close to a fundamentalist understanding of biblical authority. Shaull also spoke of "discipleship"[70] – another dear word for many evangelicals in Brazil – as an important component of being a Christian. Finally, more emphatically at the end of his life, Shaull used the word "conversion" very often to speak of spiritual transformations he underwent throughout his life, as well as of spiritual transformations that Christianity should experience if it intended to be relevant to the contemporary world.[71]

The centrality this use of the word "conversion" took in his theological and ethical development in his final years, and the fact that

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can deduct, then, that this evangelical theological movement in Latin America was in conversation with Shaull, or with those who Shaull directly inspired and influenced.

[69] His experience of reading the Bible led him to conclude that he could be a disciple of Christ only if he offered to Him all his life and energies. The intensity of this experience in his adolescence strongly affected Shaull's way to deal with the privations faced during the Great Depression, and his faith-life as well. See Shaull, **Surpreendido Pela Graça**, 22.

[70] Dietrich Bonhoeffer's books **The Cost of Discipleship and Life Together** made an indelible impression on Shaull, helping him to find a spiritual language as he dealt with the need to understand and describe what it meant to be a faithful Christian in the social context that he found in Latin America. As Shaull recognized, these books occupied a central place in his spiritual journey, and they offered a crucial contribution to the development of his spiritual life. See Richard Shaull, **Surpreendido Pela Graça**, 88.

[71] See, for instance, Richard Shaull, "The Third Conversion," **The Other Side** 33/2 (1997):32-34.

he uses this word to signify transformations that not only he but the church itself must undergo as they encounter the poor over and over again, are meaningful factors in providing an interface for the three faces of the *Evangélico* movement in Brazil, as it struggles to properly respond to challenging ethical demands.

The Evangelical Response

A second attempt to respond to the claim of the poor from a Protestant perspective in Brazil came from an evangelical movement, which gained visibility through the development of the Latin American Theological Fraternity.[72] A group of evangelical theologians gathered to create a forum where they could encourage a contextualized theological reflection in Latin America from what they considered to be a more biblical and mission-oriented perspective. That was an attempt from Latin American evangelicals – theologically conservative, but politically and socially progressive – to respond to the challenges posed by the Latin American reality of poverty and injustice to the evangelical faith. They came to understand that social responsibility and evangelization were both part of the mission of the Christian church in Latin America, and they developed a neo-evangelical theology that they called "theology of the holistic mission." In the First Latin American Congress of Evangelization in 1966, Samuel Escobar, who would be one of the founders of the Latin American Theological Fraternity in 1970, already said eloquently:

> There is sufficient basis in the history of the Church and in the teaching of the Word of God for us to categorically affirm that the concern with the social aspect of the Christian witness in the world does not imply the abandonment of the fundamental truths of the Gospel; on the contrary, it means to take to the last consequences the teachings regarding God, Jesus Christ, human existence, and

[72] See Samuel Escobar, **La Fundacion de la Fraternidad Teologica Latinoamericana: Breve Ensayo Histórico** (undated manuscript emailed by Samuel Escobar to the author in 2003).

> the world, which form the basis of this Gospel. ... We sustain that an evangelization that does not take account of the social problems and that does not announce the salvation and sovereignty of Christ within the context in which those who listen to it live, is a defective evangelization, which betrays the biblical teaching and does not follow the model purposed by Jesus Christ, who sends the evangelist.[73]

Despite the theological conservatism of this movement, it has been able to dialogue with the larger society, showing genuine concern with the social structures that promote injustice and exclusion in their society.

Because of its strong emphases on personal piety and biblical authority, on one hand, and its intentional engagement in the struggle for social justice, on the other, this movement advances a holistic view of mission which can prevent polarization between evangelization and social action. At its best, this movement could rethink Brazilian Evangelicalism, helping to expand the word *Evangélico* to mean anyone who is committed to the Gospel, that is, "to Christ and to justice."[74]

As Oscar Campos affirms, liberation theology challenged traditional Catholicism and at the same time stood in sharp contrast to traditional evangelicalism, especially as represented by dispensational evangelicalism.[75] As a result of this, "some evangelical theologians chose to enter into dialogue ... in an attempt to consider the challenges posed by liberation theology. They were motivated not only by theological reasons but also by contextual issues, which they felt evangelicals could no longer afford to ignore."[76] Thus, a 'contextual evangelicalism' emerged in Latin America proposing a more contemporary evangelical theology of the mission of the church.

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[73] Samuel Escobar, *A Responsabilidade Social da Igreja*, **Tópicos do Momento** 3 (São Paulo: Vida Nova, 1970), 7-8.

[74] Roberto Barbosa, "The Gospel with Bread: An interview with Brazilian Pentecostalist Manoel de Mello," in **Mission Trends 2, Evangelization** (ed. Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky; New York: Paulist Press, 1975), 145-154.

[75] Oscar A. Campos R., **The Mission of the Church and the Kingdom of God in Latin America** (Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2000), 2.

[76] *Ibid.*

Contextualization is the paradigmatic word of this movement, to replace either revolution or liberation. The main difference is that it claims to start its theological reflection from the biblical text, and then move into the Latin American context, to be able to understand it. All their theological arguments are preceded by detailed exegetical work on the biblical texts.[77] Some of these progressive evangelicals are openly socialists, but they seem to lean more towards a social democracy, built by democratic and pacifist means, rather than by violent revolution.

Orlando Costas was one of the leading FTL theologians who developed a theology of contextual evangelization and mission in Latin America. In his major works, Costas stressed liberation themes, whereas always striving to incorporate the missionary thrust and the evangelistic passion of the evangelical perspective into the discussion.[78] As he did that, he also sought to engage the missiological and ecclesiological contributions coming from mainline and ecumenical theologians as well as from liberation theologians, in general. One of Costas's most significant views was his understanding that in its origins the gospel was proclaimed and received at the peripheries of the world and that it is being perceived and proclaimed today from the vantage point of the periphery of the Americas. He pointed to the fact that when liberation theologians today insist on "the political dimensions of the gospel and on the necessity of theologizing out of commitment to the concrete historical situation of the downtrodden, they are in fact calling us, at this point, back to the heart of biblical theology."[79] It is only by taking that context seriously that evangelization becomes prophetic and apostolic at the same time. Costas offered an important contribution to bringing Latin American evangelical theology closer to the theme of liberation by showing the importance for evangelicals to develop a biblical response

[77] See, for instance, C. René Padilla, **Mission Between the Times** (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1985).

[78] See, for instance, Orlando Costas, **Christ Outside the Gate** (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1982), and idem, *Liberating News* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989).

[79] Orlando Costas, **The Church and Its Mission: A Shattering Critique From the Third World** (Wheaton, III.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1976), 245.

to the suffering of the poor in Latin America. His writings have strongly influenced many Brazilian progressive evangelicals.

Other important theologians representing this more radical evangelical movement in Latin America have also contributed to keep an open dialogue with other responses to the plight of the poor. Trying to put this movement in conversation with the Catholic Base Communities, William Cook praised Pope Paul VI's definition of evangelization in terms of the total human needs, as he said, "Evangelization will not be complete until there takes place dialogue ... between the gospel and the personal and social lives of people in the concrete... . [It] must keep the whole man and all men (sic) before its eyes and must communicate to them suitably and adequately a particular vigorous message in our time on liberation ... always in the context of the global plan of salvation."[80]

This Evangelical movement reaffirmed the conviction present in both liberation theology and ecumenical Protestantism that praxis is the element by which the validity of any theological reflection should be judged. As Samuel Escobar put it, "The real test of the validity of all theological reflection comes when it has become specific by application, on the ethical level."[81]

The Evangelical face also emphasizes the Kingdom of God as an important dimension of the proclamation of Christ's gospel. In a critical conversation with Marxism, Escobar calls on Latin American evangelicals to rediscover the dimensions of the Kingdom of God in their lives.[82] He goes on to mention which these dimensions are: (1) The ethical dimension of the Kingdom, with its content of peace, justice and love, presenting a different possibility for human relationships with one another, with nature, and with the Creator;[83] (2) a critical dimension,

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[80] Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 29, 38. Quoted by A. William Cook Jr., "Base Ecclesial Communities: A Study of Reevangelization and Growth in the Brazilian Catholic Church," **Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research** (July 1980): 116.

[81] Samuel Escobar, "The Kingdom of God, Eschatology, and Social and Political Ethics in Latin America," **Theological Fraternity Bulletin**, Argentina (1975:1): 1.

[82] *Ibid.*

[83] *Ibid.*, 28. Here Escobar speaks not only of the alternative kind of relationships offered within the community of faith, but also of its public testimony, as a prophetic

with its warning against making any social order sacred, be it the status quo or the revolution; (3) an apologetic dimension, with its emphases in pointing out the accomplishments of the Christian faith in Latin America in terms of health care and education, for example; and (4) a dimension of hope, which again advises against passive conformity disguised as realism or else spiritualized, and calls for social and political action in the hope of the Kingdom.[84]

Rene Padilla, also emphasizing the topic of the Kingdom, speaks of the relation between the church and the Kingdom. For him, the church's vocation is to live in "between the times," that is, in an incomplete eschatological reality that is only a pallid reflection of the Kingdom.[85] He says, "The tension between the present and the future, between the 'already' and the 'not yet', belongs to the essence of the Christian faith. The Kingdom of God is both a present reality and a promise to be fulfilled in the future."[86] Thus, the church reflects the tension between the 'already' and the 'not yet' of the Kingdom of God, being both eschatological and historical; a fruit of the 'already' and the 'not yet' of the Kingdom.

The church, as a messianic community, is also seen as the community of the Spirit, because, for Padilla, it is the Holy Spirit who is "the agent of eschatology in the process of fulfillment."[87] Through the Spirit, the Kingdom of God that was made present among human beings beginning with Jesus continues to act. And the church is seen as a sign of the Spirit's acts in human existence. The church, as the body of Christ, is the sphere in which the life of the new era of the

voice challenging the status quo. He says, "If in Latin America we do not give social and political content to the good that we want to live and share with others, we will be limited to passively accepting that which the social group in which we move considers 'good', and our justice will be no better than that of the Scribes and Pharisees" (*ibid.*, p. 34).

[84] *Ibid.*, 38.

[85] C. René Padilla, "The Kingdom of God and the Church," **Theological Fraternity Bulletin** no. 1, 2 (1976): 1-23.

[86] *Ibid.*, 2.

[87] *Ibid.*, 6.

Kingdom initiated by Jesus operates through the Holy Spirit, which imparts that new life. The charismatic gifts of the Spirit, imparted within the church, makes possible for it to become an instrument for the fulfillment of God's redemptive purpose.[88] The church is an organism, whose members are unified by the action of the Spirit. It is the Spirit who is the author of the communion that binds the members of the *koinonia* together, the one who makes the life of the Kingdom present in the church, and also who empowers the church to proclaim the "Gospel of the Kingdom."[89] From that, Padilla concludes that the mission of the church is not the multiplication of churches, but rather the manifestation of the Kingdom that has come in Jesus Christ. As the sign of the 'already' of the Kingdom, the church manifests through its actions the fellowship (*koinonia*) and the service to the world (*diakonia*) that characterize the Kingdom. As the sign of the 'not yet,' the church confesses the sovereignty of God, thus avoiding the absolutization of either its own structures or of the structures of the society in which it exists. So, it sets limits to its "loyalties to the powers that hold sway in the kingdom of men (sic)," being able to prophetically criticize all the passing societal structures, on the basis of the hope of the Kingdom.[90]

Padilla's emphasis on the eschatological relationship between the kingdom and the church, mediated by the action of the Spirit, opens his theology to dialogue with both the ISAL and liberation theology, which have emphasized the historicity of the Kingdom of God, and also with Pentecostal spirituality, whose emphasis lays on the work of the Spirit in the day-to-day life of the poor, and on the democratic distribution of the charismata. Padilla is very appreciative of the liberationist emphasis on the preferential option for the poor. Nevertheless, Padilla is concerned that as both liberationist and ecumenical thought focus on the structural transformation of society, they might have neglected the need for personal transformation. He quotes Leonardo Boff saying that

[88] *Ibid.*, 7.
[89] *Ibid.*, 8.
[90] *Ibid.*, 13-14.

as one emphasizes the structural character of social sin and the need for a grace that is also social and structural, there is always the risk of neglecting the need for personal conversion.[91] According to Padilla, Boff highlights that the political dimension of the Christian faith, which is so necessary today, cannot absorb all its richness, which must also find other expressions in the process of liberation, such as the mystical, the liturgical and the personal expressions.[92]

On a continent where evangelical churches are growing and getting more involved in the social and political spheres, it is no longer possible to continue to neglect the important theological contributions that are being made by these progressive evangelicals. They might have the means that is lacking today in several other mainstream theologians, to renew the concerns with social justice and liberation by using a language that can be understood and accepted within these growing churches.

One can also make a clear connection between this kind of evangelicalism and both the ecumenical progressive Protestantism that preceded it and liberation theology. FTL was born from a reaction to these two movements, but it has incorporated several of their key themes in its theological reflection, and it has opened space for direct dialogue between evangelical, ecumenical, and Pentecostal theologies in Latin America. Because of these connections, this movement can be an important bridge to connect the contributions made by the ecumenical Religion and Society movement represented by ISAL, and the current situation in Brazil, which is one of Pentecostalization of the historical churches, and also of the movement of churches that previously kept themselves apart from society into the public realm.

The contributions of both the ecumenical movement and the progressive evangelical movement can be of substantial help as a new spirituality is on the stage, also seeking to play a public role in Brazilian society.

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[91] See C. René Padilla, "La Nueva Eclesiologia en America Latina," **Revista de la Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana** vol. 18, no. 24 (December 1986): 224; see also Leonardo Boff, **Igreja: Carisma e Poder**, 3d ed. (Petropolis: Vozes, 1982), 40-41.

[92] *Ibid.*

The Pentecostal Response

Both the Ecumenical and the Evangelical faces of Brazilian Protestantism have tried to respond to the needs of the Brazilian people, each one using its own language and speaking from within its own specific framework. Both have revealed a strong concern with the church's role in the struggle for social justice in Brazil.

Most recent studies on Latin American Protestantism, however, have stressed the Pentecostal movement and its impressive growth. Pentecostalism is the fastest growing religious movement in Latin America, and much attention has been devoted to discuss its impact upon society at-large. This movement has been portrayed many times as either tending to be supportive of the status quo, or as being merely an indirect force encouraging a democratic spirit and capitalist development at the personal level, while keeping a complacent or corporative attitude in the public sphere.[93]

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[93] The two classical studies of the boom of Latin American Pentecostalism are Christian Lalive D'Epinay, **Haven of the Masses: A Study of the Pentecostal Movement in Chile** (London: Lutterworth Press, 1969), and Emilio Willems, **Followers of the New Faith: Culture Change and the Rise of Protestantism in Brazil and Chile** (Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967). For Lalive D'Epinay, Pentecostalism, in spite of its growth, ultimately keeps its members alienated from the socio-political sphere, leading them to avoid more direct involvement in political and social struggles. Therefore, he did not see this charismatic form of Protestantism as a significant force for social change . Emilio Willems, on the other hand, detected some ways by which Protestantism, especially in its charismatic vein, might be a positive factor for socio-political change. He envisioned an indirect influence through the shaping of the region's political culture and the personal values of the people. Willems identified an egalitarian element in the Pentecostal communal experience. Contrasting with Lalive D'Epinay, Willems saw the rise of Pentecostalism as a 'symbolic protest' that rejected the traditional hierarchical social order that prevailed in Latin American societies and instilled a more democratic ethos into new generations of Latin Americans. He did not expect, however, this form of Protestantism to actively engage the political arena. These two arguments have, in varied forms and to different extents, reappeared in the works of several scholars studying Latin American Protestantism more recently, such as Jean-Pierre Bastian, Cecilia Mariz, David Stoll, David Martin, and Francisco Rolim.

Pentecostalism is the most visible and popular face of Brazilian Protestantism today. It presents some signs of hope in the sense that it has been very effective in its capacity to engage Brazilian popular culture, but it also presents some concerns, when it functions simply as a religion of substitution, which absorbs the old hierarchical structures of traditional Brazilian society, becoming incapable of transforming them.

One can better understand the potential for social change in Pentecostal spirituality when one focuses on the Pentecostal symbols and experiences, rather than on the Pentecostal ecclesiastical structures. The Pentecostal experience, which is basically marked by the receiving of the Holy Spirit by the believer, offers a new language for the poor to cope with the afflictions of poverty in their everyday lives. Most testimonies given by poor Pentecostals show that the essence of their evangelical faith is divine power, i.e., a kind of "spiritual strength [that] can be harnessed for secular purposes."[94] The Pentecostal God is a God who is present in their daily lives making God's power available to contemporary believers as it was available to the disciples at the Pentecost event two thousand years ago. This is a belief that by itself has the potential to reorganize the lives of the wretched of society and empower them. In Pentecostalism, everyone can be commissioned and empowered by God, and everyone can have a voice. For the Pentecostal believer, God has chosen the poor and the destitute of the earth to speak about the goodness of God in all languages.[95]

Richard Shaull and Waldo César noticed that in Pentecostal discourse the theological emphasis has shifted from the evangelical eternal salvation and otherworldly concern to offering solutions to problems of everyday life.[96] Thus, César and Shaull challenged non-

[94] R. Andrew Chesnut, "Born Again in Brazil: Spiritual Ecstasy and Mutual Aid," in **On Earth as it is in Heaven** (ed. Virginia Garrard-Burnett; Wilmington, Del. : Scholarly Resources, 2000), 220.

[95] Frank D. Macchia, "Discerning the Spirit in Life: A Review of *God the Spirit* by Michael Welker," **Journal of Pentecostal Theology** 10 (1997): 23.

[96] See Waldo César and Richard Shaull, *Pentecostalismo* **e futuro das igrejas cristãs. Promessas e desafios** (Editora Vozes - Editora Sinodal, Petrópolis, 1999).

Pentecostal Christians to interact with Pentecostalism in order to discern a new paradigm for the Christian experience and understanding of the gospel.

Shaull, in particular, affirmed that in his own interaction with Pentecostalism in the shantytowns of Rio de Janeiro he was profoundly transformed, both theologically and spiritually.[97] He argued that since the symbolic world of the poor has been impregnated by a pentecostal spirituality, all those who take seriously the preferential option for the poor must pay attention to what God is doing among the poor.[98]

According to Shaull, the Pentecostal response to the movement of the Spirit is in line with the biblical witness to God's particular concern for and presence among the poor.[99] Pentecostals have become the church of the poor in our day. Their discourse is not about the option for the poor, but is a discourse of the poor refusing to accept poverty. Thus, Pentecostals are in a better position today than other Christian churches to hear, understand, and respond to God's revelation, since God reveals God's self in a special manner to those who are marginalized or excluded. Therefore, listening to the Pentecostal voice becomes an imperative for Christian theology and ethics, especially for those who take seriously the hermeneutical advantage of the poor – those who understand that the poor "occupy a privileged position as interpreters of God's self-revelation."[100]

Furthermore, Brazilian Pentecostals are becoming increasingly involved in diverse struggles for societal transformation.[101] A new social consciousness is emerging as a result of the situation in which they live. Pentecostals are not only making a tremendous contribution to the reorganization of the individual lives of men and women in Brazil, but are also engaging in creating new forms of community and social life. Several social movements that are emerging in Brazil nowadays, dealing

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97 Richard Shaull, "From Academic Research to Spiritual Transformation: Reflections on a Study of Pentecostalism in Brazil," **Pneuma** 20/1 (2001): 71.

98 César and Shaull, *op. cit.*, 118ff.

99 Shaull, "From Academic Research to Spiritual Transformation," 75.

100 *Ibid.*

101 César and Shaull, *op. cit.*, 265ff.

with issues of race, gender, human rights and environmentalism, have the active participation, and sometimes the leadership, of Pentecostals. In face of this new situation, Shaull challenged both Pentecostals and non-Pentecostal Christians to work together in order to use the resources of the Spirit that is at work to empower the poor and to develop new strategies for action, which will eventually contribute to the emergence of a new and more just order.[102]

Brazilian Pentecostalism might be pointing to new steps in the struggle of liberation. The challenge of both mainline Protestantism and liberation theologians today is to respond to this new reality by providing fresh biblical and theological reflection on the "hermeneutical advantage of the poor." The encounter between those concerned with social justice and charismatic Protestants becomes essential for the development of any social ethics that intends to be significant for the lives of the oppressed in Brazilian society today. In order for that to take place, it is required of those who approach this new reality an attitude of reverence and humility – that is why Shaull, in fact, talks about undergoing a true conversion as one encounters the Pentecostal poor.[103]

Willing to learn from the "Pentecostal Other," one becomes able to enter the symbolic world of the poor and realizes that in this realm of the Spirit, in the midst of all struggle for life, they have come to know "the presence of the Holy Spirit in all aspect of their lives." That discovery allows them to realize a new way of life, in which they live in integral relation with others, with nature and with the Divine.[104] All these Pentecostal experiences take place in community. And this communitarian experience of God's work makes things that seem to be impossible become possible repeatedly. For those caught in difficult situations, it makes miracles happen, restores broken family relationships, and breaks the addiction of those imprisoned by alcohol or drugs. In short, there is a re-structuring of life in community that brings empowerment and improvement in their situation. All this happens in

[102] *Ibid.*, 291.
[103] Shaull, "The Third Conversion," 32-34.
[104] Shaull, "From Academic Research to Spiritual Transformation," 78.

the midst of and over against the background of demonic forces that surround them. But, given the presence of the Spirit among them, these Pentecostals live their lives "oriented toward the future, the coming of the Reign of God," whose signs are already present among them in the manifestation of God's Spirit.[105]

According to Shaull, these Pentecostals, as much as the Base Communities did earlier, are challenging us today to read the biblical story with different eyes.[106] They invite those whose minds have been shaped by the culture of modernity to face a strange reality, which is not only predominant in the Pentecostal environment, but which was also the reality from which the biblical stories were written. For him, when one engages this new reading of the biblical story and fully enters the realm of the Spirit, one's life and world "are set in the context of a divine reality which is compassionate, centered on a God who suffers with those to whom a full life is denied and acts to change their situation. To know this God means to be empowered to do justice, to be totally committed to the transformation of life and the world in the direction of the kingdom of God."[107]

Brazilian theologian Antonio Magalhães states that one of the challenges for western Christian theology today is to overcome the marginal role of the Spirit in the construction of the theological method. For the first time in Western Christianity, emerging charismatic movements can play an important role in the restructuring of the church, as well as of Christian practices.[108] Kwame Bediako, a Ghanaian scholar, has also emphasized the need for western theology to interact with the ancient culture of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. For him, "the quality of twenty-first-century Christianity as a whole will depend on the quality of that interaction."[109] Brazilian Christianity has the privilege

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[105] *Ibid.*

[106] *Ibid.*, 79

[107] *Ibid.*

[108] Antônio Carlos de M. Magalhães, "Teologia do Espírito Santo." Unpublished paper emailed by Antônio Carlos de Melo Magalhães to the author.

[109] Kwame Bediako, **Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion** (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis; Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 161.

of providing a special place where modern and ancient religious values meet and blend with each other, and where the poor and oppressed are creatively discovering new meanings in their Christian experiences. Such a context challenges contemporary Christians to work creatively in order to generate a transformative social action in this environment. The actions of the Spirit reflect the actions and options of Jesus. Therefore, the presence of the Spirit in believer's lives is also the presence of the risen Christ who challenges them to walk as he walked, among the poor and outcasts, "not only sharing their burdens but so confronting the powers that are destroying their lives that we too run the risks of crucifixion."[110]

Some Pentecostals in Brazil are already aware of the contributions that non-Pentecostals can make to improve Brazilian Pentecostalism. They have learned that non-Pentecostal Christians can help by providing a balance between experience and theological reflection to Pentecostalism. One can think and experience God simultaneously. The two are not mutually exclusive.[111] The lack of this balance in many Brazilian Pentecostal churches makes them more vulnerable to neo-liberal ideologies disguised, for instance, as theology of prosperity.

Integrating the Different Faces to Respond to the Plight of the Poor

According to Roy May, a contextual Christian ethics has to do with relations and functions rather than with norms and rules.[112] It is a relational ethics, concerned both with the individual and the community, and having its starting point not in abstract ideas but in concrete situations, to which it intends to respond. Such an ethics "insists that the concrete realities, i.e., the context itself, are ethically

[110] Shaull, "From Academic Research to Spiritual Transformation," 84.

[111] Interview with Rev. Ricardo Gondim, pastor of the Assembléia de Deus Betesda, 08/04/2003.

[112] Roy H. May, **Discernimiento Moral: Una introducción a la ética cristiana** (San José: DEI, 1998), 65.

significant."[113] Norms and rule function only when they contribute to the common well-being, but they lose their meaning when the context or consequences of its applications make them oppressive.

Christian life in Brazil takes place in the midst of a number of encounters that Brazilian Christians, as moral agents, have throughout their lives with specific people and realities that surrounds them, and ultimately with God. Thus, Brazilian theologians and Christian ethicists do not see themselves in isolation, as reflecting abstractly on their own ethical quandaries. Instead, they see themselves in a constant and responsible conversation with several partners. The idea of responsibility here presupposes two things: relationship and a prior action to which human beings, as moral agents, respond.[114] This prior action, according to Emil Brunner, is God's revelation or self-communication through love, which requires from us a response in love.[115] This divine-human encounter, which Brunner interestingly characterizes as a face-to-face encounter between God and the human being as God's creature, only happens in the fullest when God's love is known in a human's responding love.[116]

Leónidas Proaño, an Ecuadorian bishop who was an important member of the activist wing of the Catholic Church that flourished in Latin America from the 1950s, has emphasized the importance of dialogue as an instrument for *concientización*.[117] Proaño affirms that there are some crucial conditions that enhance this attitude of dialogue, and which can overcome the anti-dialogue forces. First, real dialogue can only happen when there is no objectification of any of the parties involved. Second, a true dialogue between an "I" and a "Thou" is always searching for the third party, which is Christ for Christians. This search

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[113] *Ibid.*

[114] See H. Richard Niebuhr, **The Responsible Self** (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1978), 55ff.

[115] Emil Brunner, **The Divine-Human Encounter** (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1943), 65.

[116] *Ibid.*, 64.

[117] Leónidas E. Proaño, **Conscientización, Evangelización, Política**, 3d ed. (Salamanca: Ediciones Sigueme, 1975), 70-78.

for the third party requires an attitude of openness that allows the "I" to listen to find Christ, the third party, in the other's voice. Third, dialogue requires intelligibility, and clarity.[118] Fourth, true dialogue implies an attitude of humbleness before the other. This means that for Proaño there can be neither prejudice nor self-sufficiency toward the one whom I engage in dialogue. Fifth, true dialogue requires the "I" to trust the "other. The sixth condition for true dialogue to take place is love for the world and for the neighbor. Those who trust the "other" must love them, as well as the world, which is the environment where this encounter takes place. Finally, there has to be hope. There can be no dialogue without hope. In meeting the other, the person is perfecting herself, but since human beings are incomplete beings, hope is what makes them to move toward the desire to reach completeness.[119]

Very few people have met the Brazilian reality with such openness to learn from and listen to them and their claims as did M. Richard Shaull. Shaull referred to his encounters with the Brazilian reality as real experiences of conversion. He mentioned his late encounter with Pentecostalism as being his "third conversion."[120] In fact, he used the term *third conversion* not only to speak of the impact that his own encounter with the poor Pentecostals in Rio's shantytowns had on his faith, or of a personal experience of spiritual transformation, but also as a kind of metaphor to draw attention to current transformations taking place in worldwide Christianity. After referring to the Latin American base communities in the 1980s as a "second Reformation," in the second half of the 1990s Shaull became convinced that Christianity was now undergoing a third one as it encountered global Pentecostalism. For him, his encounter had the potential of presenting possible alternative

[118] *Ibid.*, 72. The word used by Proaño here is the Spanish *limpidez*, which carries the idea of honesty and openness.

[119] Paulo Freire is quoted as saying, "There is no dialogue, however, without hope. Hope is in the root of the incompleteness of human beings, toward which they move in a constant search for being more [than they are]" (*ibid.*, p. 75; my translation).

[120] Shaull, "The Third Conversion," 32.

futures for the Church.[121] Because Pentecostalism has spread in such a way among the poor, an encounter with the Pentecostal poor for Shaull meant a radicalization of an important tenet of liberation theology, namely the hermeneutical privilege of the poor. Pentecostals are among the new theological voices which he saw arising in Latin America. In that context, he challenged Christian theology to be creative and re-creative, and to play its role as a force to transform and re-create our logics.

If Christianity wants to be relevant to the plight of the oppressed today, it needs to mobilize those at the bottom of society and offer them the possibility of reacting to this powerful ego behind all kinds of exploitation and oppression that keeps them marginalized. In order to be able to play that role the Brazilian churches need to be open to see what the Spirit of God is doing around them. There is a need for a new kind of ecumenical effort, one that starts from below, and that is rather a movement of the people than of the institutional church. Despite all odds, evangelical and charismatic Christianity might be preparing the way for this kind of ecumenism from below, since it has, among other things, the potential to replace the European-North American accent, which has for centuries spoken as the voice of the church, with an accent that can voice the claims, concerns, and needs of 'third-world' Christians, who, because of the situation in which they live, have different priorities and different agendas.

Furthermore, this new ecumenical Christianity needs to be open to what the Spirit is doing elsewhere, especially among non Christian movements that have been able to function as prophetic voices in the current global order. By emphasizing the freedom of God's Spirit, a social ethics informed by a progressive charismatic spirituality can offer possibilities for new and creative ways of discerning what God is doing in the world, and of creating community and restoring justice.

The theme of the Kingdom or the society of God has been an important theme for progressive *Evangélicos* in Brazil of all nuances – Ecumenical, Evangelical and Pentecostal. It consists firstly in the idea

[121] *Ibid.*, 33.

of "harmonious relations between God and humans, between individual humans, between groups of humans, between humans and the creation order (both animate and inanimate), and between each individual human and himself or herself."[122] By harmonious relationships one does not entail an absence of confrontation and disagreement, but "relationships characterized by a genuine reciprocity or mutual exchange."[123] A Brazilian *Evangélico* social ethics today cannot avoid being an ethics of the Spirit, with potential to change profoundly the oppressive structures of human relations, and even the relations between humans and the environment.

By recovering the contributions that have been made by these three faces of Brazilian Protestantism as they meet the poor face-to-face, and by proposing their integration, I hope to encourage the development of a promising Brazilian Christian social ethics that can offer new alternatives to those struggling for a better society in Brazil, and in other similar contexts where poverty, injustice, exclusion, and despair still prevail.

[122] C. Stephen Layman, "The Kingdom of God," in **Readings in Christian Ethics**, vol. 1 (ed. David K. Clark and Robert V. Rakestraw; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1994), 32.

[123] *Ibid.*, 33.