



Liberation Theology and Its Utopian Crisis*

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ABSTRACT: Liberation theology developed as a theology that focused on the injustices lived by the poor. The 70's and the early 80's were the peak of liberation theology with the main production of its authors. However, the enthusiasm for this theology and its academic production began to decrease in the middle of the 80's. By exploring some theoretical elements of the first generation of liberation theology, we attempt to show that there is a crisis in the former liberation theology, and also that modern utopian reason is at the core of the origin of this crisis. Finally, this article critically analyzes the naive utopian belief in the emergence of ideal worlds in history and its influence on the vision of praxis in liberation theology as well as on modern social thought.

KEY WORDS: Liberation theology; Utopian reason; Praxis; Teleology; Modern social thought.

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La teología de la liberación y su crisis utópica

RESUMEN: La teología de la liberación se desarrolló como una teología centrada en las injusticias padecidas por los pobres. Los años setenta y los inicios de ochenta fueron el apogeo de la teología de la liberación con la producción principal de sus autores. Sin embargo, el entusiasmo por esta teología y su producción académica comenzó a disminuir a mediados de los años ochenta. Al explorar algunos elementos teóricos de la primera generación de la teología de la liberación, intentamos mostrar que hay una crisis en la teología de la liberación precedente, y también que la razón utópica moderna está en el corazón del origen de esta crisis. Finalmente, este artículo analiza críticamente la ingenua creencia utópica en la generación de mundos ideales en la historia, así como su influencia sobre la visión de la praxis en la teología de la liberación y sobre el pensamiento social moderno.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Teología de la liberación; razón utópica; praxis; teleología; pensamientos sociales modernos.

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The Context of the Crisis

Liberation theology was born as a theology that focuses on the situation of injustice and exclusion lived by the poor, claiming the necessity of praxis of transformation of the socio-economic and political capitalist structures that create poverty. It was born as a critical reflection on praxis in the light of the Word of God.¹ The influence of this theology started at the beginning of the 70's and reached its peak in the middle of the 80's.² However, a decline in its influence, particularly in its stress on praxis of creation of new structures—a new man within a just society, began at the end of the 80's.

In the Latin American theological context, there is a tacit—and sometimes explicit—general acknowledgment that there is a turning point on liberation theology. Certain concrete situations, historical events and authors' interpretations demonstrate the influence of this theology—particularly of its first generation with its aim of structural transformation—decreased in the Latin American Church context.

By the end of the 70's, the Church had several concerns about the way Marxist tools were used in liberation theology. These concerns were present in texts like the conclusions of the Third Latin American Episcopal Conference (Puebla, 1979)³, the Instruction *Libertatis Conscientia* (1986)⁴ and the Encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (1991).⁵

In this context, the paradigmatic text of these concerns is the *Instruction Libertatis Nuntius* (1984): it focuses on the risks of deviation from faith in liberation theology because of an insufficiently critical use of Marxist tools.⁶ In short, it claims that it is not possible to separate the parts from the complex Marxist epistemology, and then, even if theologians only take the analysis, they end up having to accept the entire ideology (as opposed to the core of the faith and the Church).⁷

¹ Gutierrez, *Teología de la Liberación: Perspectivas*, 38. In Gutierrez' words, "la teología como reflexión crítica de la praxis histórica a la luz de la Palabra...".

² Mo Sung, "Cristianismo de Liberación: ¿Fracaso de una Utopía?", 2-3.

³ Celam, "Documento de Puebla. III Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano" 543-545. In spite of the preferential option for the poor, Puebla condemned the doctrines which were against the integral promotion and liberation of the human person (in his earthly and heavenly dimensions), as in the Marxist collectivism.

⁴ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation *Libertatis Conscientia*" 4-5.17. This Instruction does not express a concrete condemnation of Marxism, but as a second part of *Libertatis Nuntius* it denounces that the modern movement of liberation ignores the transcendent vocation of the human person by reducing him to a purely earthly destiny.

⁵ John Paul II, "*Centesimus Annus*. Encyclical Letter" 41. This Encyclical denounced the elimination of man as person in the historical socialist countries.

⁶ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Instruction on Certain Aspects of the 'Theology of Liberation' *Libertatis Nuntius*".

⁷ *Ibid.*

Another situation that led to the decline of the influence of this theology was the lack of support of the pastoral praxis of liberation and Base Ecclesial Communities in the dioceses⁸. The bishops who led this pastoral practice in their dioceses—like Helder Camara (Recife 1964-1985), Leonidas Proaño (Riobamba 1954-1985), Pedro Casaldaliga (Araguaia 1971-2005) and Oscar Romero (San Salvador 1977-1980)—were replaced and the new ones did not continue the liberating concerns and practices of their predecessors.⁹

Later, and regarding the same concern about the lack of support of pastoral praxis, Pedro Trigo wrote a book with a suggestive title: *Is Liberation Theology Still Alive?* Its purpose was to explain the origin of what he calls the crisis of liberation theology in the middle of the 80's and also to assess the influence that this theology still has in the context of Latin American Church and social reality. For Trigo, the crucial point in liberation theology crisis was not the fall of the Berlin Wall, but the decrease of pastoral agents and liberationist bishops due to Roman Curia policies against the influence of this theology in Latin America.¹⁰

The lack of influence of the former liberation theology at the end of the 80's was interpreted by theologians in two ways: as a general crisis of liberation theology or as a decline—or even a positive evolution—of this theology.

Theologians like Jung Mo Sung and Carlos Angarita hold that there is a general crisis in liberation theology. They claim the fall of the Berlin Wall was the starting point of this crisis. However, their main contribution is to describe the broad spectrum of alternatives proposed by theologians and Christian liberation movements in Latin America.¹¹

⁸ Angarita, “Apuntes para Repensar la Teología de la Liberación en América Latina y el Caribe,” 38. Base Ecclesial Communities lived an internal dichotomy. They were caught between their commitment to the political struggle and their active presence in the ecclesiastical structure, which provoked the further loss of their influence in the Latin American Church.

⁹ Yet, according to Mo Sung, Base Ecclesial Communities are still alive and there are still Christian communities that have a pastoral praxis inspired by liberation theology (Mo Sung, “Cristianismo de Liberación: ¿Fracaso de una Utopía?”, 11).

¹⁰ Trigo, *¿Ha Muerto la Teología de la Liberación?*, 27-29.

¹¹ Mo Sung, “Cristianismo de Liberación: ¿Fracaso de una Utopía?” 1-15; Angarita, “Apuntes para Repensar la Teología de la Liberación en América Latina y el Caribe,” 31-39. According to these authors, the alternatives proposed by theologians and Christian liberation movements were the following: (1) Propose new topics (theology of indigenous, black, women) in order to avoid facing the socialist crisis. (2) Preserve the “metaphysical truth” of the teleological and historical presence of the Kingdom of God in spite of the evidences. (3) A transcendental critique of modern utopian reason by members of the Departamento Ecueménico de Investigaciones (DEI)— especially Franz Hinkelammert—taking into account the role of utopia is to orient and guide the praxis. (4) Focus on the concrete micro-social and interpersonal relationships between people, as well as considering the limits that history and human condition have for creating a more just society.

There are current theologians who also hold a more nuanced interpretation of the decline of liberation theology. A vindication of Latin American theological tradition that did not explicitly support the socio-economic and political approach of the first generation was present in the environment of the Latin American Continental Congress of Theology¹², which was held in 2012 with the presence of the most representative figures of liberation theology.

The decline of the influence of former liberation theology in Latin American Church can be seen in two striking facts present in this Congress. The first was the introduction of new topics related to theologies of genre, black, indigenous, eco-theology and even postmodern liberation theology.¹³ The second can better explain the first. The fact that most of the speakers avoided relating Latin American theology to Marxism and some of them even avoided the title *liberation theology* when they were naming the Latin American theological tradition. Such was the case of outstanding theologians like Jorge Costadoat, Luis Carlos Susin and Leonardo Boff.¹⁴

One may wonder if this behaviour was related to a conscious concern of the speakers about possible Roman Curia warnings for the use of Marxist categories in the Congress. However, if they were not afraid of these pressures in the past,¹⁵ why

¹² This Congress was held in Sao Leopoldo, Brazil, from 8 to 11 October, 2012. Theologians as Gustavo Gutierrez, Leonardo Boff, Jon Sobrino, Victor Codina and Jung Mo Sung attended.

¹³ Geraldo de Mori claims that the presence of new topics of liberation theology in this Congress of Theology (like cultural and religious pluralism in talks such as “Las Iglesias en el Continente 50 Años después del Vaticano II: Cuestiones Pendientes”, by Victor Codina, and “*Extra Pauperes Nulla Salus*”, by Carlos Mendoza) is evidence of the influence of Postmodernity in current Latin American societies. For him, these new liberationist topics emerged from the postmodern concern for the protection of those who live in vulnerability and those who are socially excluded because of their political, religious or sexual options (De Mori, “La Théologie de la Libération à L’heure du Pluralisme Culturel et Religieux,” 61-71).

¹⁴ Jorge Costadoat changes the name “liberation theology” for the broader name “theology born in Latin America after the Council” (Costadoat, “Conversando con Jorge Costadoat, S. J. Congreso Continental de Teología”). Luis Carlos Susin speaks about the emergence of new subjects different from the worker, such as women and homosexual people (Susin, “Nuevos sujetos y dialogo de culturas”). Leonardo Boff affirms that there is not a Marxist liberation theology, but only a liberation theology. It is not Marx, but Moses and Jesus’ God—father of the poor—the main influence in liberation theology (Boff, “El Lugar y el Papel de la Teología en los Procesos de Cambio del Continente en el Contexto Mundial. Congreso Continental de Teología”).

¹⁵ There were two important answers of liberation theologians to two Vatican actions: the first one is a defense of liberation theology regarding the instructions *Libertatis Nuntius* (1984) and *Libertatis Conscientia* (1986), by Pablo Richard, “Declaración Pública sobre la ‘Instrucción’”, Gustavo Gutierrez, “Teología y Ciencias Sociales”, and Leonardo Boff, “¿Liberación como Teología o como Acción Práctica?”. This answer is also present in Juan Luis Segundo, *Teología de la Liberación. Respuesta al Cardenal Ratzinger*. The second one is the book *Bajar de la Cruz a los Pobres. Cristología de la Liberación* (2007), organized by Jose Maria Vigil and written by some liberation theologians (Leonardo Boff, Victor Codina, Jose Comblin, Pedro Trigo, Jung Mo Sung among others), in order to support Jon Sobrino after the notification

would they be afraid at that point? It seems the rise of new topics and the dismissal of Marxism is due to something more than a simple concern about possible retaliations.

In sum, Vatican warnings, the lack of support of pastoral liberation praxis and the same liberation theologians' concerns about the use of Marxist tools and instrumentals had an impact on the decline of influence of the former liberation theology. However, none of them were so crucial to explaining the origin and the nature of the ongoing crisis of this theology.

For most theologians, pastoral agents and ecclesiastical authorities, the collapse of historical Sovietism was the main influence in the development of this crisis.¹⁶ Theologians who speak about this crisis agree that this idea is commonplace in the diverse Church contexts.¹⁷

Certainly, the collapse of historical Sovietism is an important influence on the crisis of former liberation theology; however, its influence is not central but attached to the main cause of the crisis: a naïve trust in the human praxis as a teleological process of creation of *ideal worlds*. Thus, the origin and nature of the crisis is not mainly caused by an external event, but by the naïve utopian rationality which is present in liberation theology. A critical analytical approach to the theoretical and methodological elements present in liberation theology will contribute to the subsequent development of this affirmation.

The Dialectical Relationship Between Salvation and Human Liberation

In 1971, Gustavo Gutierrez wrote his book *Teología de la Liberación: Perspectivas*.¹⁸ It is the cornerstone of liberation theology according to its main theologians.¹⁹ In this book there is a crucially famous question that is fundamental in order to understand

of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith about his books *Jesucristo Liberador: Lectura Histórico-Teológica de Jesús de Nazaret* (1991) and *La Fe en Jesucristo* (1999).

¹⁶ Trigo, ¿Ha Muerto la Teología de la Liberación?, 7; 17.

¹⁷ Mo Sung, "Cristianismo de Liberación: ¿Fracaso de una Utopía?", 8; Angarita, "Apuntes para Repensar la Teología de la Liberación en América Latina y el Caribe," 31-32; Codina, "Las Iglesias en el Continente 50 Años después del Vaticano II: Cuestiones Pendientes".

¹⁸ In this article we will follow the edition published by Ediciones Sígueme (1975). This choice is due to two factors: the strong influence that this book already had over Latin American theology in the middle of the 70's; and that the main concerns of the Church about liberation theology only arose at the end of the 70's.

¹⁹ In fact, the Continental Congress of Theology, in Brazil (2012), was organized as a celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the publication of this book and of the fiftieth anniversary of the inauguration of the Second Vatican Council.

the epistemology of this theology: “What has been the relationship between salvation and the process of human liberation throughout history?”²⁰

According to Gutierrez, there must be a connection between both of them—final salvation and human liberation. This intuition of the dialectical relationship between salvation and human liberation is present in the writings of the first generation of liberation theologians. However, there would be two complementary and sometimes intermingled positions about this relationship:²¹ there is an affirmation of the pre-eminence of the final salvation over any historical experience of liberation in the first one—supported by authors like Marc Luyckx, Vincent Cosmao, Juan Carlos Scannone and Leonardo Boff²²—whereas the second one—supported by authors like Clodovis Boff and Gustavo Gutierrez—holds that a historical structure of liberation, related generally to historical socialismo, is a necessary process towards the final salvation.²³

There are three striking points in these texts of the first generation of liberation theologians: the first one is that all of them were written before the fall of the Berlin Wall and the worldwide imposition of Neoliberalism. The second point is that all of them were written into a certain kind of millenarian theology influence, which implies a teleological expectative of both a final salvation and a human liberation.²⁴ The third

²⁰ Gutierrez, *Teología de la Liberación: Perspectivas*, 193.

²¹ We make this distinction between both positions in terms of a methodological clarification. However, it was not unusual that the same liberation theologians fluctuated between both positions—as in Gutierrez’ case.

²² Luyckx, “La teología de la liberación”; Cosmao, “La salvación a la luz de la teología de la liberación”; Scannone, “La teología de la liberación: caracterización, corrientes, etapas”; and Boff, *Teología desde el Lugar del Pobre*. In general terms, their position implies the pre-eminence of God’s final salvation over any institutional human praxis of liberation and therefore, God’s final salvific action in history is taken for granted.

²³ Boff, *Cartas Católicas sobre o Socialismo*; Gutierrez, *Teología de la Liberación: Perspectivas*. The second position also applies the perspective of pre-eminence of the final salvation over historical liberations. However, it asserts that the final salvation will be carried out through a historical structure of liberation, which is mainly related to the emergence of historical socialisms into the world by human effort. The belief in the historical emergence of a socialist society can be found in the Basic Ecclesial Communities (the titles of the inter-ecclesial meetings of Base Ecclesial Communities in Brazil were focused on the expectative of a Kingdom of God which was coming very soon: “Comunidades eclesiales de base: pueblo de Dios en busca de la tierra prometida” [1986]; “Comunidades eclesiales de base: pueblo de Dios en América Latina en camino de liberación” [1989] and in the theologians who supported two streams of action: theology from the praxis of the revolutionary groups and theology from the historical praxis.

²⁴ Victor Codina and Benedict XVI related liberation theology to a theology of Millenarianism. The Pope was denouncing the limitations of a theology that—he said—was focused on an unflinching faith in the armed revolution as a historical process towards the final and imminent liberation of human beings (Benedict XVI, “Liberation Theology was Mere ‘Millenarism’ that Would Have no Justification Today”;

point is that the obligatory liberation throughout human history was not carried out. And then, liberation theologians from both positions—arguing the pre-eminence of the final salvation over any historical experience of liberation or claiming the need of a historical structure of liberation—were expecting the arrival of the Kingdom of God into history and a neoliberal worldwide order arrived instead.

The first element to understand these striking points is the teleological character of the former liberation theology. The connection between final salvation and human liberation suggests that the traditional trust in the unfailing salvific plan of God is made equivalent to the trust in human praxis as a teleological process of liberation of human history. Thus, in this context, the human history of liberation is understood in teleological terms.

At the beginning of this article, when assuming Mo Sung and Angarita's proposal, we described the alternatives taken by liberationist groups and theologians after the fall of the Berlin Wall.²⁵ In general terms, some alternatives preserve a teleological point of view about liberation throughout history, whereas others try to avoid a critical analysis of the disconfirmation of the traditional liberation teleology by assuming new topics and theological perspectives. Nevertheless, neither in any of these second alternatives to the crisis of liberation theology, nor in the first ones, is there a concrete critical approach to the original teleological point of view of liberation theology.

Considering the fact that both alternatives to the crisis of liberation theology uphold the final redemption of history, it is therefore necessary to make an analysis of the main and most important influences in the development of this teleological thought, so as to later understand its influence on the present crisis of liberation theology.

For the first purpose, there are certain elements that could lead us to understand the usefulness of further elaboration of the teleological perspective in liberation theology: the particular kind of millenarianism of liberation theology and the emergence of liberation theology into a modern inductive method.

Liberation Theology and Its Particular Kind of Millenarianism

To start with, the answer to the question “What is the relationship between salvation and the process of human liberation throughout the history?” in liberation theology

whereas Victor Codina wondered—at the same time that he was reading his paper during the Continental Congress of Theology (2012)—if there has been a naive millenarianism in this theology (Codina, “Las Iglesias en el Continente 50 Años después del Vaticano II: Cuestiones Pendientes”).

²⁵ See the description of the four alternatives in Footnote 11.

was carried out by assuming certain kind of millenarian teleological eschatology which took final salvation in history for granted.²⁶ Certainly, there is an undeniable relationship between millenarianism and liberation theology. Both systems claim that there will be, sooner or later, an unavoidable presence of the Kingdom of God in history.²⁷ In both of them, there are different emphases on the active or passive role of the human praxis in the emergence of this Kingdom. However, the link between millenarianism and liberation theology is more of a correlation than a link of causality.

On the one hand, millenarian movements, millenarian theologians, and even the paradigmatic text of Rev 20:1-6, do not play a direct role in the elaboration of the main liberation theology thesis about historical liberation throughout history.²⁸ On the other hand, this lack of direct influence is due to the different rationalities that are present in the origin of each one of them. Millenarianism, in its premillennialist approach, is focused on a supernatural action of God in history that will inaugurate a thousand years of God's Kingdom,²⁹ and then, it is mainly an apocalyptic thought in

²⁶ It is important to consider a distinction between two kinds of millenarianism: "There was a general agreement in millennial theology that the world was to be transformed by the second coming of Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth [...]. There were differences of view, however, between those Christians who believe that Christ's second coming would precede the millennium (premillennialists) and those who thought that the second advent would follow the millennium (postmillennialists). From these differences stemmed others. The premillennialists were predisposed towards the establishment of the millennium by divine, cataclysmic action, whereas *the postmillennialists were prone to think the Kingdom of God would come gradually as the result of Christian, human instrumentalities*" (Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism*, 4) (italics are ours). This distinction is important to circumscribe the influence of millennial theology into liberation theology. In this sense, we claim that the teleological approach in liberation theology could be considered more postmillennialist than premillennialist due to the active role of liberationist believers in the historical advent of a Kingdom of justice and equality.

²⁷ Libanio, "Esperanza, Utopía, Resurrección", 505-507. For Libanio, there is a particular contribution of liberation eschatology to the hope in the final advent of the Kingdom of God. According to him, theological hope emerges as a contribution in a situation which overcomes the limits of utopian thought: the human unviability of a situation. Utopian thought arises in situations which demand a change, a transformation of reality; nevertheless, there are situations of human unviability, in which there is no room for a utopian idea of change. It is in such contexts that Jesus' resurrection emerges as a hope that goes beyond the limits of human history, which are the limits proper of utopian thought.

²⁸ Yet, in these liberationist sources, there are some tangential mentions of some of the theologians of the early Church who favored millenarian thought, such as Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Papias, and Hippolytus of Rome. Gustavo Gutierrez names Tertullian in his analysis of the religious freedom in the early Church (Gutierrez, *Teología de la Liberación: Perspectivas*, 226); John Sobrino quotes Justin and Hippolytus in his studies about the classic problems of Christology (Sobrino, *La Fe en Jesucristo*, 328; 365-366; 396-397). Nevertheless, these theologians are not mentioned when liberationists support the idea of a final salvation throughout history. Moreover, later millenarian theologians, such as Joachim of Fiore or Thomas Muntzer, are never mentioned in any of these liberationist sources.

²⁹ Schwarz, *Eschatology*, 322.

which God is expected to perform explicit actions in the world and in human history.³⁰ On the contrary, in liberation theology there is an active role of the human being in the emergence of the Kingdom of God in history: the human praxis.

We could even say that liberation theology is closer to millenarianism in its postmillennialist approach and its idea that the Kingdom will come gradually by the use of human instrumentalities. In fact, the Christian hope focused on a final judgement (Matt 25:31-46) and the emergence of a “new heaven” and a “new earth” (Rev 21:1) were taken by liberation theology from a postmillennialist perspective in terms of a theology that considered both, God and men’s salvific and liberationist actions, as necessary and complementary.

However, there is a methodological inversion between both approaches—the postmillennialist approach and liberation theology approach—in their starting point. On the one hand, the starting point of postmillennialism is a theological approach to the final salvation by the human action which would be secularized by modern political and philosophical thoughts.³¹ On the other hand, the starting point of liberation theology would be the reality of the poor and the use of the instrumental of social sciences in order to elaborate a critical theological reflection on the praxis of transformation of that reality.

Liberation theology was born into the context of the Modern rationality of social sciences.³² Its research method is inductive and its point of departure is the concrete experience of the human being in a situation of poverty, marginalization and exclusion in Latin America.³³ Thus, its eschatology of the advent of the Kingdom of God throughout history is closer to the teleological perspective present in the modern reason than to the millenarian hopes in a supernatural advent of the Kingdom of God in history. In this sense, we could say that, methodologically, if

³⁰ “Millennialism, also called millenarianism, is the hope that this imperfect world will pass away and that a new, perfect world will replace it. Millennialism is a subset of apocalypticism.” (Murphy, *Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World*, 23).

³¹ “Modern revolutionaries such as the French Jacobins and the Russian Bolsheviks detested traditional religion, but their conviction that the crimes and follies of the past could be left behind in an all-encompassing transformation of human life was a secular reincarnation of early Christian beliefs.” (Gray, *Black Mass: How Religion Led the World Into Crisis*, 1).

³² It appears, at the end of the 60’s in Latin America, with the dismissal of New Christendom’s emphasis on developmental theories, the assumption of the thesis of Dependency theory and the further use of Marxist instrumental as a heuristic tool for the critical analysis of the historical reality.

³³ Liberation theology, as a critical reflection (second moment) of the historical praxis (first moment) in the light of the Word of God, used new analytical and hermeneutical tools from the social sciences, in order to elaborate an approach to the historical reality of poverty and exclusion in Latin America.

millenarian thought was secularized by modern social thought,³⁴ liberation theology was a new theologization of the teleological thought that was present in modern social thought.

In sum, liberation theology contains a certain kind of millenarianism that would believe in a human liberation in history and which would be influenced by the teleological perspective, which is present in modern social thought.

Liberation Theology and Its Inductive Method

Gutierrez's liberation theology emerged out of the same inductive method of the Second Vatican Council,³⁵ but it also offered some particular developments in order to show the intrinsic link between sacred and profane histories.³⁶ Whereas the Council stressed the idea of communion by the analysis of the relationship between revelation and salvation in a humanist perspective,³⁷ Gutierrez stressed the idea of liberation by the analysis of the relationships between creation-liberation-salvation into the perspective of the dialectic God³⁸ and human action.³⁹

³⁴ “Joachim’s [of Fiore] Trinitarian philosophy of history re-infused medieval Christianity with eschatological fervour, and versions of his three-phase scheme reappear in many later Christian thinkers. Taken up by a radical wing of the Franciscan order, Joachite prophecy inspired millenarian movements in southern Europe [...]. The division of human history into three ages had a profound impact on secular thought... (Gray holds this influence is present in authors as Hegel, Marx, Comte and in the ideology of Nazism).” (Gray, *Black Mass: How Religion Led the World Into Crisis*, 9).

³⁵ The Council used an inductive method with the support of rational reflection and human sciences to understand the complexity of the modern world. This implied an epistemological change from a division between the sacred and the profane realities to the acknowledgement of the intrinsic link between them. In particular, *Lumen Gentium* expounds the tandem revelation-salvation in the perspective of communion and creation of the people of God: first Israel and later the Church—made up of Jews and Gentiles (*LG* 9). In this way, the Council was opening to the possibilities for the creation of new theologies, which took the human being and its socio-historical reality as a point of departure for its reflections.

³⁶ Gutierrez, *Teología de la Liberación: Perspectivas*, 199.

³⁷ Paul VI, “Second Vatican Council II Closing Speech”. Here, Paul VI said the Church had its own type of humanism, in which the knowledge of man was a prerequisite of the knowledge of God.

³⁸ Gutierrez, *Teología de la Liberación: Perspectivas*, 201-203. For Gutierrez, the historical and liberating experience of the Exodus is the criterion of the later understanding of the creation-salvation relationship. In this perspective, creation would be understood as the first salvific act of God by which he creates human beings in order that they may become his children (Eph 1:3).

³⁹ Gutierrez, *Teología de la Liberación: Perspectivas*, 203-206. According to Gutierrez, the narratives of creation (Gen 2:4-16; Isa 51:9-10) are linked to the theological experience of liberation from Egypt and, at the same time, this liberation is considered the creation of a new people: Israel (Isa 41:20; 43:7; 45:8; 48:7). However, the experience of liberation from Egypt is a political action that implies a human praxis (Ex 3:7-10) with the aim of creating a new order of justice (Isa 42:5-7).

In this dialectic praxis, final salvation and historical liberation are necessarily intermingled. In fact, final salvation is not just related to a new “real life” after this historical life, but it is an intrahistorical reality of liberation from any alienation, which transforms and brings plenitude to human history.⁴⁰ Accordingly, human history becomes the process towards the fulfillment of the divine promise of salvation.⁴¹

Both liberation theology as well as Latin American pastoral theology incorporated the “see, judge, and act” method⁴² in their analyses of the socio-economic and political causes of the situation of exclusion and poverty suffered by vast amounts of people in the continent.⁴³ The point of departure of this theological method is the “see” moment that focuses on the description of the structural socio-economic and political situation of injustice lived by the people in Latin America. Meanwhile, the “judge” moment relates to the interpretation of this Latin American situation of injustice in the light of the Word of God. Finally, the “act” moment focuses on pastoral orientations for the transformation of these situations of poverty and exclusion according to the perspective of the faith.⁴⁴

The particular contribution of liberation theology was to appropriate this method in a more complex way by using what Clodovis Boff calls “mediations”: the socio-analytical, the hermeneutical and the practical mediations.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Gutierrez, *Gutierrez, Teología de la Liberación: Perspectivas*, 206. For Gutierrez, the liberation from Egypt is the paradigm of historical liberation from misery and alienation.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 212.

⁴² It would be in *La Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne* (JOC), founded by Joseph Cardijn in 1925, that the method of “révision de vie” was presented as a symptom of the use of an inductive method in order to think and develop a Christian practice, which more specifically focuses on the transformation of the world through personal vocation. This method would be used later in texts like *Mater et Magistra*, *Gaudium et Spes*, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* and *Populorum Progressio*. Its methodological structure was also present in Latin America: in the Second and Third General Conferences of Latin-American Bishops in Medellín (1968) and Puebla (1979), in the pastoral work of the different dioceses and in the courses of revision of life in the Base Ecclesial Communities.

⁴³ It is also important to stress that other methods have been used in liberation theology, like Carlos Mesters’ methodology, which involves a reflection on the lives and actions of the poor through a popular approach to the Bible in three moments: reflection on reality [pre-text], the study of the Bible [text], and the communitarian experience of faith [con-text] (cf. *Flor sem defesa*, 1983), and the hermeneutical circle methodology by Juan Luis Segundo, which is focused on an hermeneutical analysis of the relationships between faith and ideologies using, to some extent, the perspective of Marx’s critique of ideologies (Segundo, *Liberación de la Teología*). However, it is our aim to be focused on the “see, judge, and act” method from the perspective of social sciences in liberation theology, in order to understand the influence of the modern social thought in the teleological perspective of liberation theology.

⁴⁴ Biord Castillo, “Ponderación Teológica del Metodo Ver-Juzgar-Actuar,” 6. According to Biord, the contribution of this method to Latin-American theology was to offer concrete tools for a pastoral praxis oriented to the transformation of Latin-American reality.

⁴⁵ Boff, “Epistemología y Método de la Teología de la Liberación,” 101.

Certainly, the particular tasks of each one of the different mediations consider the same ones of the other Latin American approaches to the method. For Boff, the socio-analytical mediation is focused on the reality of the world of the poor and oppressed,⁴⁶ the hermeneutical mediation is a reading of this structural situation to the light of the Word of God,⁴⁷ and the practical mediation is related to the transformation of the world of the poor, in order to create a new liberated world. However, in liberation theology there is an intermingled relationship between the three mediations of the liberationist method. This implies that there must be a relation between the structural description of reality (socio-analytical mediation), the interpretation of this reality in the light of the Word of God (hermeneutical mediation), and the praxis of transformation of this reality (practical mediation).

The liberationist approach to the structural situation of poverty and exclusion is already present in the three moments—or mediations—of the method, whereas the approach to the structural situation of poverty, in the traditional uses of the method, is mainly carried out in the “see” moment. The reason for an approach to the reality of poverty and exclusion in structural terms relates to the specific use of the instrumental of the social sciences in its inductive approach to reality. If in the traditional “see, judge, and act” methodological structure the “see” moment focuses on a description of the environment in which the person is living, in the liberationist method the “see” moment is based on a socio-analytical approach to reality in structural terms by using the tools of Dependency theory and those of a Marxist analysis of reality. There is a general acknowledgment between liberation theologians about the use of these two tools of the social sciences in the socio-analytical mediation of the method of liberation theology. This acknowledgement is explicitly present in authors like Clodovis Boff and Enrique Dussel.⁴⁸

As a result, the praxis of liberation theology also entails the structural approach to the situation of poverty in Latin America. In this sense, this praxis must be political and also implies a faith, which leads to political commitments.⁴⁹

Dependency theory was the first instrumental of social analysis of the Latin American actuality used in liberation theology.⁵⁰ This theory was used by Latin

⁴⁶ Ibid., 101.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 107.

⁴⁸ Boff, “Epistemología y Método de la Teología de la Liberación,” 101-104; Dussel, “Teología de la Liberación y Marxismo,” 121-132.

⁴⁹ Boff, “Epistemología y Método de la Teología de la Liberación,” 112.

⁵⁰ McGovern, *Liberation Theology and Its Critics*, 118. Dependency theory is a counter-theory to the model of Developmentalism, which was prevailing in the 50’s, and its attempt to explain the reasons

American scholars⁵¹ as an adequate instrument for analyzing the conflicting relationships that were present in the structural situation of poverty and exclusion experienced in Latin America.⁵² Liberation theologians used the tools of analysis of Dependency theory to assert the Latin American situation of poverty and exclusion was caused by structures of dependency; and so then, the character of liberation theology was introduced as a proposal for the liberation of the poor from this situation of dependency.⁵³

The use of Dependency theory, with its emphasis on the structural analysis of the nations' dependency as a theoretical framework in liberation theology, explains why the praxis of the political level of liberation was privileged to the praxis of the anthropological and theological levels, as explained by Gutierrez.⁵⁴ However,

of the underdevelopment in Latin America by taking into account the successful economic experience lived by the United States and Europe. Arthur McGovern offers a brief summary of the main thesis of Developmentalism: "According to this model, Latin America faced the same problems that Europe encountered before its industrial revolution [...]. To achieve development, underdeveloped nations must break out of traditional mores, adopt a profit incentive, and discover newer ways to become productive [...]. Advanced industrial countries had all passed through a necessary 'takeoff' stage in their drive toward maturity. Underdeveloped nations would have to do the same, and they needed certain preconditions for the takeoff to occur. Development was taken to mean primarily economic growth, and to achieve growth, constraints and obstacles (e.g., traditional cultural mores) must be overcome." (Ibid.).

⁵¹ Dussel, *Historia de la Iglesia en América Latina*, 318-320.341. For Dussel, the tools of Dependency theory were present in the Latin American theology since theologians began to use critical approaches to the reality of poverty which led into the emergence of liberation theology. These uses of Dependency theory were present in groups like the group of Colombian priests "Golconda" (1968) and the second general Conference of the Latin American Episcopate in Medellín (1968).

⁵² According to McGovern, there are two types of Dependency theory. In its former and stronger view, it tries to explain the causes of the existence of underdeveloped and developed countries by arguing that in the world system, the role of the underdeveloped countries is to provide natural resources, while the role of the developed countries is to provide technology and—at the same time—create economic, cultural and politic spheres of dependence in the underdeveloped countries. In its nuanced version, this theory takes into account the internal factors in the countries that also led to the situation of dependency in Latin America (McGovern, *Liberation Theology and Its Critics*, 135-136).

⁵³ Authors like Leonardo Boff, Hugo Assmann, and José Míguez Bonino, used the stronger version of Dependency theory that blamed Latin American underdevelopment on Northern development; whereas, there were later qualifications to this approach, and even to Dependency theory as a whole. Gustavo Gutierrez took up the qualifications made by Cardoso in his nuanced version of the theory and, finally, he would abandon Dependency theory in his 1988 "Introduction" to *A Theology of Liberation*; Leonardo Boff used the stronger view of André Gunder Frank's theories, but later he expressed skepticism about Franks' revolutionary type of breakaway, and then, he recognized the need to work for change within the system (Boff, *Liberating Grace*, 77); Vincent Cosmao also realized that the situation of domination-dependency was more complex and it was a consequence of both, internal and external factors (Cosmao, "La Salvación a la Luz de la Teología de la Liberación," 179-180).

⁵⁴ Gutierrez, *Teología de la Liberación: Perspectivas*, 238. For Gutierrez, there are three levels of liberation: (1) Political: As liberation of the people from the political and economic structures which oppress them. (2) Anthropological or psychological: As liberation of the human being from those things that do not

Dependency theory does not offer a clear proposal about how a new kind of Latin American society could be.⁵⁵

The dialectical and conflictive analysis of reality in Dependency theory would lead liberation theologians to the dismissal of any capitalist system, but it was necessary to look for an alternative to the current system and its internal logic and historical unfolding. Together, the analysis of the structures of dependency, the critical reflection on the social exclusion and the commitment to a praxis of changing structures, would motivate the approach of liberation theology towards Marxist instruments.⁵⁶

The main distinction in the use of both tools of analysis—Dependency theory and Marxist analysis—is related to their particular influence over the liberationist method. Liberation theologians used Dependency theory to explain the position of Latin America in the world economy, and then, this tool of analysis was reduced to the sphere of the analytical mediation of the method. On the other hand, they would complement Dependency contributions by using insights from Marxism about praxis, class struggle, and the role of ideology as per their inner national situations.⁵⁷ Moreover, these insights of Marxism would be present in the theoretical development of the three mediations of the liberationist method in some of the most important liberation theologians.⁵⁸

let him or her take on his or her own destiny. (3) Theological: As liberation of the person from sin by communion with God. For Gutierrez, these three levels of liberation are interdependent, and all of them are already present in all the experiences of liberating praxis.

⁵⁵ According to McGovern, João Batista Libanio holds in *Teologia da libertação* (201ff.) that Dependency theory offered no direction for creating new structures and, at the same time, it oversimplified the problem of dependency and even involved a kind of Manichaeism with its dual perspectives of center-evil and periphery-good (McGovern, *Liberation Theology and Its Critics*, 137); whereas, Gutierrez claims that, from the perspective of dependency - even if this theory does not expressly name it, a new kind of state, different to the capitalist one, is necessary in order to achieve a real structural liberation in Latin America (Gutierrez, *Teología de la Liberación: Perspectivas*, 125).

⁵⁶ There has not been a homogeneous use of the Marxist instruments in liberation theology. According to Dussel, it could be held that, in a broad sense, the dialectical materialism in its mechanic and immanent philosophical analysis of history would be generally denied by liberation theologians. Moreover, liberation theologians, like Gustavo Gutierrez, Juan Luis Segundo, and Leonardo Boff, do not assume the dialectical materialism of Engels, Lenin or Stalin, but a more “humanist” Marx by Gramsci, Marcuse or Bloch. This Marxist “humanist” perspective that is focused on a social criticism of the reality is the one used by these theologians in order to elaborate a scientific approach to the causes of poverty and exclusion in Latin America (Dussel, “Teología de la Liberación y Marxismo,” 124-126).

⁵⁷ McGovern, *Liberation Theology and Its Critics*, 120-125.

⁵⁸ On the one hand, from the perspective of the socio-analytical mediation, the concept of class struggle, as a “fact” that is already present in the Latin American reality and that implies a mandatory option for the poor, is present in Gustavo Gutierrez’s works, *Teología de la Liberación: Perspectivas*, and *Marxismo y Cristianismo*, and in Ricardo Antoncich, *Los Cristianos ante la Injusticia: Hacia una Lectura Latinoamericana*

In sum, the tools used to analyze the Latin American situation, borrowed from the social sciences, led liberation theology to the proposal of a necessary praxis of transformation of the structures of injustice and exclusion by the creation of a new kind of social and political structure. On the one hand, Dependency theory shows the need of structural liberation from the economic structures of dependency in which the Latin American society is immersed by creating a non-dependent society—even if this theory does not explicitly mention how this society should be. On the other hand, the Marxist analysis of reality shows the need of changing the current capitalist society of exclusion through the creation of a new kind of socialist Latin American society, where a new man would emerge.

As a result of the intermingled relationships between analysis of reality and praxis, the liberationist praxis of transformation of the socio-economic and political structures led to a latent teleological perspective, which is similar to the one that is already present in modern social thought. A teleological perspective by which this thought proclaims the advent of ideal worlds that would be “incarnated” in the society of free men, the anarchist society of spontaneous order, and the perfect bourgeois society. Consequently, the former liberation theology not only possessed the same advantages, but also the same limitations of modern social thought.

Liberation Theology and Modern Utopian Thought

Taking into account the last affirmation, we will first analyze the naïve utopian rationality present in modern social thought, and subsequently the utopian crisis present in this thought and in the former liberation theology.

Modern Social Thought and Its Utopian Crisis

There is a certain utopian naivety that covers modern social thought—like the liberal, anarchist and soviet ones, the belief that the emergence of *ideal* and *perfect worlds* into concrete history will be carried out.⁵⁹ This veil of utopian naivety dismisses the limitations of the empirical approach to reality.

de la Doctrina Social de la Iglesia. From the perspective of the hermeneutical mediation, theologians like Pablo Richard, “Teología en la Teología de la Liberación,” Juan Luis Segundo, *El Hombre de Hoy ante Jesús de Nazaret*, and Franz Hinkelammert, *Las Armas Ideológicas de la Muerte. El Discernimiento de los Fetiches, Capitalismo y Cristianismo*, see a connection between the Marxist critique to religion and the prophetic critique to idolatry in the Old Testament. On the other hand, from the perspective of practical mediation, liberation theologians, like Leonardo Boff, *Gracia y Liberación del Hombre: Experiencia y Doctrina de la Gracia*, Juan Luis Segundo, *Fe e Ideología*, and Ignacio Ellacuría, “Utopía y Profetismo,” take the Marxist vision of praxis that implies the denial of capitalist society and the proposal of a certain socialist society, which would be founded according to the Latin American culture and experience.

⁵⁹ Hinkelammert, *Crítica a la Razón Utópica*, 13.

For Hinkelammert, human beings approach reality from their experience—which is a product of their action. Through this experience, humans realize that reality transcends one's action, and then, that one's actions are limited. Thus, the knowledge obtained by the experience of human action is always limited, and thusly, the only way one can attempt to grasp the totality of reality is by using abstract and symbolic knowledge which is based on a principle: the impossibilities of human action.⁶⁰

However, the problem with empirical sciences and modern social thought is that when they dismiss the fact that abstract and symbolic thought departs from the impossibilities of human action, then they claim that they can reach teleologically ideal realities (the perpetuum mobile, the immortal man, unlimited knowledge, and so on) and *ideal worlds* (the perfect bourgeoisie society, the anarchist society of spontaneous order, the communist society of free men) by this action.⁶¹ And then, the naivety of empirical sciences and modern social thought is to dismiss the limits of concrete human reality in exchange for trusting in scientific instruments or in the institutionalized relationships of the market or the state.

In this context, the anti-utopian reasoning of neoliberal thought emerged as a threat to utopian reasoning. This thought moves from the modern teleological vision of *ideal worlds* that will advent in the future, to the claim that the *definitive world* is already present in the worldwide neoliberal order as end of history. The first step of development of this anti-utopian thought was present in Weber's naturalization of the market by reducing the economic relationships to the means-end rational action related to the connection between practical and formal rationalities.⁶²

The further elements of this anti-utopian thought are present in Karl Popper and Francis Fukuyama.⁶³ In Popper's thought, the anti-utopian stream has two moments.

- In the first moment, according to Hinkelammert, Popper considers the economic planning of socialism as the utopia of an infinite progress which is impossible,⁶⁴ and then, as an attempt to make heaven on earth that finally leads to the destruction of society.
- In the second moment, the only rational and logical alternative to this socialist utopia is an anti-interventionist policy that could potentially offer theories and techniques as the only approach to perfect economic equilibrium.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Ibid., 256-260.

⁶¹ Ibid., 186.

⁶² Kalberg, "Max Weber's Types of Rationality: Cornerstones for the Analysis of Rationalization Processes in History," 1158-1159.

⁶³ Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Vol. 2; Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*.

⁶⁴ Hinkelammert, *Crítica a la Razón Utopica*, 162.

⁶⁵ Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Vol. 2, 237.

In short, for Popper anti-utopian thought is not against thinking of *ideal worlds* as criterion for the analysis of concrete worlds, but it is against thinking about socialist worlds, which are considered as non-logical, irrational and destructive worlds.⁶⁶

The final and definitive step of this anti-utopian thought arises with Fukuyama's vision of the economic and politic liberal system as the end of history. Fukuyama sees this system as the most democratic and peaceful in the history of humanity and, therefore, as the final advanced state of humanity.⁶⁷

However, Fukuyama's proposal is not based on a claim of the end of violence and problems that are still present in democratic liberal systems around the world, but on the naturalist fallacy: the claim that the state has a nature like the human one and in which plenitude would be liberal democracy⁶⁸—in its politic and economic sphere. This is the final step of the teleological process of naturalization of the neoliberal system. There is no future world; the only new different world is already present with the emergence of the liberal democracies and the free market relationships.

In sum, the main consequence of the last part of this process of naturalization of liberal democracy and liberal economy in Fukuyama is the attempt to destroy utopian reason. The end of history is the denial of the imagination of *ideal worlds* and, therefore, the prohibition of *possible worlds* that could lead to better assurances of basic human needs. This threat to the utopian reason of modern social thought would also be present in the former liberation theology.

Liberation Theology and the Utopian Reason

Taking into account that liberation theology emerged in the context of modern social thought, we realize the main methodological element of this theology: the emphasis on praxis, is understood from the perspective of the tools of social sciences—and therefore, from the perspective of the necessary transforming experience of human action. In this sense, liberation theology, like modern social thought, is focused on a promethean image of the human being as one who is able to set up new and *ideal worlds* in history.⁶⁹ Thus, what is at stake with liberation theology is a kind of utopian thought, in teleological terms, which has its roots in the rationality of the

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, 262-263.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 138.

⁶⁹ The critical analysis of the promethean perspective of modern social thought is present in the liberationist thought of Franz Hinkelammert, *Hacia una Crítica de la Razón Mítica*, and in one of the most unapologetic critiques to liberation theology by André Vincent as a participation of liberation theology in the promethean ambition of the modern man (Vincent, The "Theologies of Liberation", 192).

Enlightenment, in the same way that liberal capitalism and historical soviet Marxism do.

There are some clues to the presence of this modern pretention of the emergence of *ideal worlds* and ideal human beings in history in Gutierrez's former thought in *Teología de la Liberación: Perspectivas*. He takes on the modern vision of man as master of his own destiny and he tries to support this vision by mentioning authors such as Kant, Hegel, Marx, Freud, and Marcuse.⁷⁰ Thusly, Gutierrez approaches the rationality of modern social thought by claiming that the human being, by his social praxis, can face the social injustices and can participate in the transformation of the social structures.⁷¹ This transformation of structures, according to him, implies a radical break from the *status quo* (capitalist society) and the option for a new socialist society.⁷²

Some other clues are present in the analysis of the liberationist praxis by Juan Carlos Scannone.⁷³ According to him, there have been four streams of action in this theological moment of the praxis:

1. Theology from the pastoral praxis of the Church through a liberating evangelization focused on the biblical and spiritual bases of liberation.
2. Theology from the praxis of the revolutionary groups, which uses Marxist analysis of reality—whose rallying call was “historical materialism”—, in order to support the revolutionary action (present in authors like Hugo Assmann and Christians for Socialism).
3. Theology from the historical praxis, which looks for the transformation of Latin American society, taking into account the Church's teachings and theological tradition (present in Gustavo Gutierrez's “a theology of liberation” and its further tradition⁷⁴).
4. Theology from the praxis of the Latin American people, which understands the people in an historical-cultural perspective, instead of based on class, in order to look for the fulfillment of justice.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Gutierrez, *Teología de la Liberación: Perspectivas*, 52-62.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 73-81.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 52.

⁷³ Scannone, “La Teología de la Liberación: Caracterización, Corrientes, Etapas,” 270-277.

⁷⁴ Gutierrez, *Teología de la Liberación: Perspectivas*, 26; 34. Most of the theologians who promoted this stream of praxis used the tools of Marxist analysis of reality and tools of Dependency theory as socio-analytical mediation of an approach to reality. In this tradition there are authors such as Leonardo Boff, Pablo Richard, and Enrique Dussel.

⁷⁵ Scannone, “La Teología de la Liberación: Caracterización, Corrientes, Etapas,” 273-277.

These streams of action are related to two modes of articulation: sacramental⁷⁶ and scientific.⁷⁷ And even if the first and fourth streams of action are more related to the sacramental articulation, and the second and third streams of action are more related to its scientific articulation, there is a common teleological perspective in all the streams of action: the belief that human praxis can lead us to the creation of a *new man* in history.⁷⁸

Considering this naïve idea of a praxis that claims that it could create perfect realities, we can assert that the former liberation theology suffered not only from the flaws of a modern teleological pretention: the certitude that the utopia of ideal worlds will be realized within human history, but also the threats of neoliberal thought to utopian reason.⁷⁹

Daniel Bell holds that Fukuyama's proclamation of "the end of history", as the assertion of the unabashed victory of economic and politic capitalism over socialism, has had two consequences in liberation theology. Firstly, it leads liberation theology into the denunciation of the brutal and oppressive consequences of the hegemony of this worldwide system;⁸⁰ secondly, it has mainly led liberation theology into a crisis that Bell considers a consequence of capitalist technologies of desire that co-opt all human desire—which, for him, are visible in those of the liberationist's such as the protection of rights and the discipline of politics as statecraft.⁸¹

⁷⁶ The sacramental articulation is related to different kinds of religious speeches (prophetic, pastoral, and revision of life) which, from their perspective of a spiritual discernment of the praxis, are used in the pastoral and popular liberationist environments as a first level of critique of the ideologies that distort the reality in general.

⁷⁷ The scientific articulation uses the concepts of theology—including some philosophical ones—, social sciences and historical sciences in order to analyze in a more complex and structural way the historical situation of poverty. Besides, the scientific articulation elaborates a systematic critique of the ideologies that try to avoid, not only the understanding of the situation, but also the transformation of the structures that create this poverty.

⁷⁸ A promethean image that is used to claim that an ideal and perfect human being will emerge in human history.

⁷⁹ According to Petrella, one of the main problems in liberation theology was the lack of historical projects of liberation because of a gap between social sciences (reduced to the socio-analytical mediation) and theology (circumscribed to Christian tradition and the critique of idolatry); for him, the construction of these projects, within a less restrictive understanding of theology, must be seen as intrinsic to doing this theology (Petrella, *The Future of Liberation Theology: An Argument and a Manifesto*, 24-39). We agree that the lack of historical projects challenged the utopianism of liberation theology. However, we hold that the main problem of this theology was a naïve utopia that claimed ideal historical projects were possible within human history.

⁸⁰ Bell, *Liberation Theology After the End of History*, 10.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 43-44.

According to Bell, liberationist theologians like Leonardo Boff, Jon Sobrino, Pablo Richard and Franz Hinkelammert realized the unpleasant reality of the crisis of former liberation theology: the triumph of savage capitalism.⁸²

Finally, and considering the hegemony of the neoliberal system, the main challenge of liberation theology is not to face a disjunction between a naive utopia of a perfect society without classes or a realistic democratic Capitalist society; it is to face the presence of the anti-utopian reason present in neoliberal thought, in ways that are easier to see in liberation theology than in European traditional theological endeavours.

Towards *Possible Worlds*

At the beginning of this article, we brought up Mo Sung and Angarita's analysis of the alternatives taken by liberationist groups and theologians after the crisis of liberation theology which, according to them, were made more evident with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Socialist Bloc. They described the transcendental critique of modern utopian reason by members of the Departamento Ecumenico de Investigaciones (DEI) as the third alternative to the crisis. In this context, the main work of this alternative was Hinkelammert's book *Crítica a la Razón Utópica (Critique of Utopian Reason)*.

We already considered two main contributions of Hinkelammert's book to the analysis of utopian reason.⁸³ For the purposes of the final part of this article, we would like to depart from his delimitation of utopian reason.

According to Hinkelammert, a critique of utopian reason does not imply a dismissal of utopian thought and its proposal of *ideal worlds*—as set forth by the neoliberal anti-utopia; on the contrary, it implies a reappraisal of this thought in order to realize how these *ideal worlds* guide and orient the *possible worlds* we can create in

⁸² Ibid. For Bell, if liberation theology follows this same rationality of the capitalist deterritorialization of desire by dismissing the political role of the Church on behalf of the modern state as guarantor of justice and rights, then, this theology will succumb to the rationality of the struggle for particular group's rights in opposition to other individual or people's rights. Because of this alternative, for Bell, liberation theology is finally co-opted by the capitalist discipline of desire, in the same way that historical Marxism-Leninism was co-opted by capitalism.

⁸³ Hinkelammert, *Crítica a la Razón Utópica*, 13. The first contribution was to elaborate a critical reflection on the naive rationality of utopian thought present in modern social thought—like conservative, socialist, and anarchist thought—that claims it is possible to create perfect societies—ideal worlds—in human history. The second contribution was to critically analyze the apparent anti-utopian pretention of “newborn” neoliberal thought.

human history.⁸⁴ This critique is important as a means to overcoming this neoliberal anti-utopia, which is the main threat to the development of the utopian reason of socialist and even liberal thought.

Therefore, we can assert that a transcendental critique of utopian reason in modern social thought can offer us certain elements in order to understand how this modern utopian rationality works, and then it will offer some other elements to liberation theology, to theologically reappraise the relationship between final salvation and the process of human liberation throughout history.

However, this critique, which is focused on the institutionalized human relationships of modern social thought, cannot go beyond the boundaries of human possibilities. Even if the *ideal worlds* are part of utopian reason, this transcendental critique is not able to say anything about the world of human impossibilities.

Yet, the world of human impossibilities is still present. In this context, the role of theology emerges as the revelation of God's salvific action that lets us know the possibilities of liberation throughout history, in spite of our human impossibilities and teleological expectations.⁸⁵

This revelation of God's salvific action arises in the sphere of liberation theology as human relationships of liberation throughout history that reveal the presence of God. On the one hand, Hinkelammert sees liberation theology's contribution as a transcendental imagination of the relationships of mutual acknowledgement of our sensual reality as subjects of material needs.⁸⁶

On the other hand, it is only by the grace of God that we can carry out what is impossible for us as human beings: a relationality of liberation from the tendency of human relationships that so often lead to conflict and violence, in an attempt to protect human institutions—as can be seen in socialist and neoliberal systems. Thus, it is only by God's grace that we can orient these relationships towards two essential pillars: the love of one's enemy and the sacrificial offering of our lives for the sake of others.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 28-29.

⁸⁵ “La ocupación teológica del espacio teológico ocurre, con toda nitidez, recién cuando se ha pasado por la crítica de las ilusiones, sea del tipo de la ilusión trascendental o de la mitificación trascendental. Aparece entonces pura y simplemente la imposibilidad humana de realizar lo humanamente lo imposible, y, limitándonos aquí al análisis de la tradición cristiana, a partir del juicio constitutivo del espacio teológico aparece Dios como aquel para el cual es posible realizar eso que es humanamente imposible.” (Hinkelammert, *Crítica a la Razón Utópica*, 270).

⁸⁶ Ibid., 256. According to Hinkelammert, such imagination is present in the biblical texts of love to the neighbour (Luke 10:25-37) and communal supper (Luke 14:15-24).

Nevertheless, it is necessary to break away from trusting in the teleological character of modern social thought and its emphasis on the emergence of ideal worlds. This rupture can be carried out by orienting utopian thought towards an eschatological reflection, which above all, places humans into the perspective of already/but not yet presence of the latter times of our human history.

Therefore, some elements of liberation eschatology can be hermeneutical criteria for the vindication of humanity. It is in this sense that the human person can become the subject of praxis in the process of utopian reflection of the *possible worlds* that can be realized in human history.

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