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Towards a Liberating Latin American Ecclesiology:
The Local Church as a Socially and Culturally Transformative Historical Project

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Doctor of Philosophy
The University of Edinburgh
2014
The thesis is entirely my own work and no portion of it represents work done in collaboration with others. Neither has the thesis been submitted for any other degree or qualification.

Ryan Redding Gladwin
ABSTRACT

Because of the drastic changes (political, socio-cultural, and ecclesial) in Latin America since the genesis of Latin American Theology in the 1960s and 70s and the persistent and pernicious presence of poverty and injustice, it is imperative for theology to confront the present socio-cultural and ecclesial context. Through the development of a sociological and historical survey of Argentina during the past half-century, this thesis argues that the present holds little hope for a revitalization of the triumphalist, macro-social historical project of Latin American Liberation Theology, but instead demands an informed theological reflection on the micro-social. It also engages various Latin American theological perspectives (Liberationist, Progressive Evangelical, and Pentecostal/neo-Pentecostal) and argues that community is at the centre of their conceptions of transformation and that, accordingly, the local church is a potential transformative historical project. It examines this transformative potential through ethnographic and theological case studies of two local Baptist churches (Progressive Evangelical and neo-Pentecostal) in Greater Buenos Aires, Argentina, demonstrating that the present ecclesial context is diverse and contentious, but nevertheless a potential location of transformation. It contends that the local church is a fitting historical project for Latin American Theology as it functions as a bridge between the exilic present and the utopia of the Kingdom of God, between individual and social transformation, and between the hermeneutically-focused historical sciences and the emancipatory-focused critical social sciences. It concludes that the local church is a transformative historical project as a gathering community that seeks to be faithful and effective through non-violent confrontation, reconciling unity, and discernment.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAA</td>
<td><em>Triple A</em> or <em>Alianza Anticomunista Argentina</em> (Argentine Anticommunist Alliance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEM</td>
<td><em>Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry</em> document from the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BFMSB</td>
<td>Board of Foreign Mission of the Southern Baptists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEB</td>
<td><em>Comunidad Eclesial de Base</em> (Base Ecclesial Community)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEBA</td>
<td><em>Convención Evangélica Bautista Argentina</em> (Argentine Evangelical Baptist Convention)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CELA</td>
<td><em>Conferencia Evangélica Latinoamericana</em> (Latin American Evangelical Conference)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CELADEC</td>
<td><em>Consejo Ecuménico Latinoamericano de Educación Cristiana</em> (Latin American Ecumenical Council of Christian Education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CELAM</td>
<td><em>Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano</em> (Latin American Episcopal Conference)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CGM</td>
<td>Church Growth Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLADE</td>
<td><em>Congreso Latinoamericano de Evangelización</em> (Latin American Congress on Evangelization)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLAI</td>
<td><em>Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias</em> (Latin American Council of Churches)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNCE</td>
<td><em>Consejo Nacional Cristiano Evangélico</em> (National Evangelical Christian Council)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONADEP</td>
<td><em>Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas</em> (National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONELA</td>
<td><em>Confraternidad Evangélica Latinoamericana</em> (Latin American Evangelical Fellowship)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEI</td>
<td><em>Departamento Ecuménico de Investigaciones</em> (Ecumenical Department of Investigations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DNU</td>
<td>Decree of Necessity and Urgency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECLA</td>
<td>United Nations Economic Commission for Latin American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENTEL</td>
<td><em>La Empresa Nacional de Telecomunicaciones</em> (National Telecommunications Company)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEP</td>
<td><em>Fundación de Ayuda Social Eva María Duarte de Perón</em> (Eva Perón Foundation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTL</td>
<td><em>Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana</em> (Latin American Theological Fraternity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GBA</td>
<td>Greater Buenos Aires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IAPI</td>
<td>Instituto Argentino Para Intercambio (Institute for the Promotion of Trade)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMC</td>
<td>International Missionary Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISAL</td>
<td>Iglesia y Sociedad en América Latina (Church and Society in Latin America)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISI</td>
<td>Import Substitution Industrialization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JP</td>
<td>Juventud Peronista (Peronist Youth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LG</td>
<td>Lumen Gentium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEC</td>
<td>Movimiento Estudiantil Cristiano (Christian Student Movement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MISUR</td>
<td>Misión Urbana e Industrial (Urban and Industrial Mission)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MTD</td>
<td>Movimientos de Trabajadores Desocupados (Movement of Unemployed Workers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSTM</td>
<td>Movimiento de Sacerdotes para el Tercer Mundo (Third World Priest Movement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NMC</td>
<td>The Nature and Mission of the Church document from the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LALT</td>
<td>Latin American Liberation Theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAT</td>
<td>Latin American Theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAN</td>
<td>Partido Autonomista Nacional (National Autonomist Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDC</td>
<td>Partido Demócrata Cristiano (Christian Democracy Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PJ</td>
<td>Partido Justicialista (Justicialist Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBC</td>
<td>Sociedad de Beneficencia de la Capital (Capital Welfare Association)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YPF</td>
<td>Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales (Treasury Petroleum Fields)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCR</td>
<td>Unión Cívica Radical (Radical Civic Union)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNCTAD</td>
<td>United Nations Conference on Trade and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCC</td>
<td>World Council of Churches</td>
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Introduction

0.1. Introduction

The times demand of us a creative spark ... to create new ecclesial structures...¹

Gustavo Gutiérrez

In the socio-economic and political strife of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, theology in Latin America was interrogated and called to read the signs of the times.² What was needed was an awareness of historical reality and social context, which could lead to a theology in and for a revolutionary situation.³ Today, however, the once triumphant hope of Latin American Liberation Theology (LALT) and its robust declarations of an ecclesiogenesis⁴ and a new reformation⁵ have subsided and are now muffled by the triumphant declarations of the end of history.⁶ The primarily rural Comunidades Eclesiales de Base (Base Ecclesial Communities – CEB) movement has stagnated, and in most regions dwindled,⁷ not able to adapt to modern life in South America, where 82% of people now live in urban centres,⁸ and where pentecostalism⁹ and Spiritism have become the preferred religions of the poor.¹⁰ The


² Pope John XXIII and Vatican II popularized this idiom through its use in Gaudium et spes.


⁸ M. del Carmen Feijoó, and M. Caparrós, 'Irreversible, Ya Son Nueve de Cada Diez Los Argentinos Que Viven en Zonas Urbanas', Clarín (27 June 2007). Online: http://edant.clarin.com/diario/2007/06/27/um/m-01446412.htm (accessed 19 December 2012). This article cites that 90% of Argentines and 82% of South Americans live in urban zones, making South America the most urban region in the world.

⁹ When I use the term pentecostalism with a small ‘p’ I am referring to the kaleidoscope of pentecostal ecclesial traditions, culture, and practices among Classic Pentecostals, Charismatics, and
option of a liberationist historical project\textsuperscript{11} disappeared with the fall of socialism in Eastern Europe (1989) and the Soviet Union (1991), and the neo-liberal victory that ensued. The Exodus-like hope of liberation was replaced by realization of the exilic-like present amidst the opposition to the liberationist movement by national governments and church hierarchy. Gustavo Gutiérrez’s call for the poor ‘to take the reins of history’ has fallen flat. The confidence that history is progressively moving towards a just telos is precarious and the claim that all history is salvific seems to belie the continued and aggravated plight of the poor and oppressed in Latin America. So, Latin America lives in different times and, consequently, the question arises: do different times demand a new theology, and a new ecclesiology?

In this thesis, I will respond to the present Latin American reality and the call for a new theology. In particular, this project asserts that ecclesiology helps to direct and focus the entire theological task because the local church is a locus theologicus as an active nexus of transformation and Christian practice. Accordingly, this thesis is not simply a theoretical engagement of Latin American Theology (LAT), but a grounded attempt to engage Latin American ecclesiology through historical, sociological, and ethnographic readings. The purpose is to develop a liberating ecclesiology, guided, first and foremost, by ecclesial and socio-cultural reality.


\textsuperscript{11} In Chapter 3 there is a dedicated analysis of the liberationist historical project, which is typically referred to as a national (i.e., Argentina) project of socialism.
As mentioned above, the state of LAT continues to be one of crisis. The distance between the utopic hope of liberation and Latin American reality evokes a crisis of paradigms. This distance elicited a barrage of questions, to which LALT has struggled to answer. The study of the Latin American theological context has been further complicated in that, unlike in past decades when LALT was in vogue in the north transatlantic conversation, it has now become passé.

Ivan Petrella, an Argentine, has described what he avers are three main responses of LALT to this crisis: ‘reasserting core ideas’ (Gustavo Gutiérrez, Jon Sobrino), ‘reformulating or revising basic categories’ (Pedro Trigo), and ‘critiquing idolatry’ (Franz Hinkelammert). The difficulty with these liberationist reinterpretations is that they do not offer a clear way forward and, as Petrella indicates, they abandon a key point of classic LALT – the historical project. While clearly the failure to continue to utilize the historical project is understandable, given that it was focused on a failed socialist stratagem, the complete desertion of what Gutiérrez labelled the central tool of discernment and prevention against ‘idealism’ and ‘evasion’ hardly appears to be a step towards right theological interpretation. Indeed, change has not come via a liberationist ideology or a historical project, but


14 Miguez Bonino, Revolutionary Situation, p. 39.

15 Gutiérrez, A Theology of Liberation, p. 238.
through neo-liberalism.\textsuperscript{16} As Alistair Kee has stated, ‘unfortunately Liberation Theology is an essentially conservative force. Neo-liberalism is a progressive force. … Neo-liberalism therefore revolutionizes society. … It will destroy communities in its unseemly rush to transfer production to third world countries at the sniff of economic advantage’.\textsuperscript{17} LALT has not offered change but instead little more than a ‘religious interpretation of poverty’.\textsuperscript{18} While the reasons for this retreat are complicated and multifaceted, the failure of the liberationist project can by no means be imputed to LALT alone.\textsuperscript{19} Nevertheless, the response of LALT has not proffered a response that soundly responds to the social and culture reality of the Latin American context today.

The Brazilian Jung Mo Sung has reminded liberationists that the manner in which this crisis is resolved will ultimately influence the future possibilities of Liberation Christianity.\textsuperscript{20} In contrast to Petrella, he argues that liberationists have offered four classes of responses: change in focus (new themes – blacks, women, indigenous peoples); reaffirming the expectation of realizing utopia (Leonardo Boff and Benedito Ferraro); critiquing the idolatry of modernity (Franz Hinkelammert,\textsuperscript{16} The term neo-liberalism is often confused with and understood synonymously with globalization and globalism. However, it is important to differentiate between them. Ulrich Beck has spoken of globalization as ‘the processes through which sovereign national states are criss-crossed and undermined by transnational actors with varying prospects of power, orientations, identities and networks’, and globalism as the ideology of neo-liberalism that seeks to dictate how globalization is done, ‘the view that the world market eliminates or supplants political action – that is, the ideology of the rule by the world market’. U. Beck, \textit{What is Globalization?} (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), p. 11 and p. 9, respectively. Thus, neo-liberalism is a system that uses the ideology of globalism to justify a ‘free’ market that in turn, in theory, creates ‘free’ competition, which brings ‘freedom’ to individual humans. The primary role of government is to allow the market to operate freely. Milton Friedman and the Chicago School of Economics have been major proponents of this economic system and accompanying ideology. See Néstor Míguez, Joerg Rieger, and Jung Mo Sung, \textit{Beyond the Spirit of Empire: Theology and Politics in a New Key} (London: SCM Press, 2009), p. 14.


\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 32.


Hugo Assmann, Julio de Santa Ana, and the Departamento Ecuménico de Investigaciones school - DEI; focus on everyday life, in particular, micro-social and interpersonal relations. 21 Like Petrella, Sung sees promise in the critiques of ideology, but also recalls that LALT is ultimately rooted in the ecclesial experience and spirituality of Liberationist Christianity. This Liberationist Christianity is a socio-cultural movement that is not indebted to LALT or the CEBs for its livelihood, ‘but to the life testimony of persons who expressed their religious and spiritual experience in the social and political arena, as ‘meeting Jesus in the poor or oppressed person’. 22 This is to say that ‘the original source of Liberation Christianity is the spiritual experience’, 23 which is attuned to micro-social realities where the actual experience of crushing poverty is felt in lo cotidiano. 24 However, liberationists have generally not moved towards a more concise, micro-level understanding of liberation in local contexts, but, on the whole, have retreated more into the realm of speculative macro-level, social ontology. While there has been some development of the themes of the ecclesial community, 25 CEBs, and popular culture and religion,

21 See Desire, Market and Religion, pp. 144-45. When Sung speaks of a ‘Change in Focus’, he is speaking of the liberation move away from an explicit focus on socioeconomic poverty and the poor to other types of oppression and/or problems. For example, Leonardo Boff has turned his attention to the ecology and environment, many North American Hispanic liberationists have become consumed with an immigration identity, and radical feminists and queer theology have examined the possibility of sexual and gender liberation.

22 Sung, Desire, Market and Religion, p. 130.

23 Ibid., p. 152.

24 Spanish for ‘everyday’ or ‘daily’.

25 The term ‘community’ is not straightforward and has been used in a variety of ways in theology and sociology. However, the term will be used in three principal ways in this thesis. First, the simple use of the term ‘community’ by itself refers to the concept of, and/or socio-cultural reality of, meaningful and transformative human relationships that are formed over time between people who have something in common because they share space and place and a desire to make that space and place and their lives and relationships better. Community refers to a micro-social concept and reality that is contrasted with society. Community, unlike society, is a space and place that can permit individuals to interact with one another in a local context and form relationships in ways that transform community and the structures of society. (See C. Dykstra and D. C. Bass, ‘A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices’. In Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life, ed. M. Volf, and D. C. Bass (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 13-32. They develop a concept of Christian practices as social and historical activities that people do together over time. See also T. J. Gorringe, A Theology of the Built Environment: Justice, Empowerment, Redemption. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), p. 183-192. Gorringe develops the concept of true ecclesial community as beginning face to face, but focused on the entire oikoumene and as such sacramental for all human community and the world. He also asserts that it is at the local level that alienating structures of the larger society are ultimately confronted.) Second, the terms ‘ecclesial community’, ‘community of faith’, ‘community of believers’, ‘Christian community’, ‘gathering community’, and ‘assembling community’ are used synonymously to refer to the specific community of the local
liberationists have not rigorously engaged the realities of the community. Accordingly, there has been a tendency towards incredulous depictions of community and popular culture and religion, which new liberationist voices, such as Petrella and Sung, have readily criticized.\textsuperscript{26}

Moreover, LALT is not the only LAT\textsuperscript{27}, given the profound socio-cultural and ecclesial changes in recent decades. Evangélicos\textsuperscript{27} are no longer condemned to compete with one another to gather ‘the loose dust on the surface of Latin American Society’.\textsuperscript{28} They are now a formidable presence that has garnered large-scale numeric growth and social capital. Even in Argentina, which is not noted for having a particularly large percentage of evangelicals, such as in Guatemala, Chile, and Brazil, the evangelical presence has made its mark. Much of this growth has come through the rise of Classic Pentecostalism and neo-Pentecostalism, which in turn have modified large sectors of evangelicalism and helped form an expanding pentevangelical\textsuperscript{29} ecclesial culture and practice. While most evangelicals have not thought theologically about what they are doing (i.e., mission) or what type of church. The ecclesial community, unlike the more general use of the term community, is an intentional, voluntary community that is comprised of people who do similar practices together in the name of Jesus over a period of time in a common space and place. Third, the terms ‘neighbourhood’, ‘neighbouring community’, ‘wider community’, and ‘surrounding community’ are used synonymously to demarcate a space and place that is distinct from the local church and society. These terms refer to both the larger context of a local church and a localized space and place that people share and that allows them to interact over time. For a more detailed examination of the concept of community, see Chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{26} Petrella and Sung agree in their objection to the communitarian imagination that has been instrumental in the liberationist imagination of kingdom and utopia. Petrella believes that communitarian focused ethics fail to recognize the need for power structures from above to a changing society at large and also finds that one of its primary advocates – Pedro Trigo – simply reformulates old ideas while abandoning the historical project. See Petrella, \textit{Future of Liberation Theology}, pp. 5-8. Sung critiques communitarian concepts of liberation as hopelessly rooted in idealistic depictions of a classless society, which he finds prohibitive for forming midpoint organizational structures that serve to engage both the present reality and the Kingdom of God in its fullness. See Sung, \textit{Desire, Market and Religion}, pp. 100-28. This division between institutions and community is deeply embedded in his historiography, see J. M. Sung, \textit{Economía, Tema Ausente en La Teología de La Liberación} (San José, Costa Rica: Editorial DEI, 1994), pp. 119-66, 201. I will deal with this in more detail in Chapter 3. Petrella, \textit{Future of Liberation Theology}, pp. 5-8.

\textsuperscript{27} Spanish for ‘evangelical’. In Latin America, the term evangélico is a catchall term that, similar to the German Evangelische or the English Protestant, encompasses all types of Protestants, including Latin American pentecostalism. For that reason, I will use the terms ‘evangelical’ and ‘evangelicalism’ in this sense, unless otherwise note.

\textsuperscript{28} Miguez Bonino, \textit{Faces of Latin American Protestantism}, p. 53.

\textsuperscript{29} I use the term pentevangelical to refer to a culture and practice that self identifies as evangelical, but demonstrates the direct influence of pentecostalism, and in particular neo-Pentecostalism.
churches they are forming (ecclesiology), nonetheless, some evangelicals have, like LALT, made claims to be a genuine ‘Latin American’ Theology. Progressive evangelicals, for example, arose around the same time as LALT and have been self-reflectively writing articles, books, and holding conferences since the 1960s, as well as proving to be influential in global evangelicalism.  

In recent years, Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostals, although tentatively, have begun to develop theological voices that are representative of their social context and ecclesial traditions and experiences. Nonetheless, the mainstream academy has almost wholly ignored these evangelical Latin American voices, both old and new, in great part because of a lack of English translations of their work, as well as the lack of practical focus in their theological endeavour.

This thesis confronts the present Latin American crisis through a candid conversation on ecclesiology in Latin America. It responds to this crisis through listening to various Latin American theological voices, including those that are often ignored, such as evangelicals and pentecostals. As such, this thesis esteems to be a conversational partner with LAT and not simply a commentary on LAT. The hope is that this project serves as an impetus for more conversation on how Latin American ecclesiology and local faith communities can bring the current social realities of poverty, violence, and oppression to the centre of ecclesial practice. As such, this is a work of theology and ethics. It concerns asking theological questions about the church: What is the church and what should it be (theology)? It concerns asking

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30 The development of Progressive Evangelicalism can be read within the global ‘Mission as Transformation’ movement, in which certain Latin American voices – Orlando Costas, René Padilla, and Samuel Escobar – proved influential. For example, Costas, Padilla, and in particular Escobar were influential in the shaping of parts of the original Lausanne Covenant. See A. Tizon, Transformation After Lausanne: Radical Evangelical Mission in Global-Local Perspective, Regnum Studies in Mission (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2008), pp. 1-42. For one of the most detailed descriptions of the formation of Progressive Evangelicalism and its theology, see Sharon E. Heaney, Contextual Theology for Latin America: Liberation Themes in Evangelical Perspective (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2007).

31 For example, the Mision Integral (MI) movement, under the auspices of Samuel Escobar, Orlando Costas, C. René Padilla, and J. Andrew Kirk, is a pertinent example. For a text that examines these voices closely, see, S. E. Heaney, Contextual Theology for Latin America: Liberation Themes in Evangelical Perspective (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2007). For an MI view of ecclesiology, see C. R. Padilla, and T. Yamamori (eds.), La Iglesia Local Como Agente de Transformacion: Una Eclesiologia Para La Misión Integral (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Kairós, 2003). For an evangelical examination of the Base Ecclesial Communities, see G. Cook, The Expectation of the Poor: Latin American Base Ecclesial Communities in Protestant Perspective. American Society of Missiology Series 9 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985).
ethical questions about the church and the world: What does the church do and what should it do (ethics) in light of the present context? In line with LALT, this thesis is committed to transformational practice. It is a work that views theology as centrally concerned with the examination of actual practice as well as the formation of transformational practice that transforms communities and societies. This means that, similar to LALT, this thesis views the task of the theologian as a second step that follows practice. However, unlike the classic methodology of LALT as systematically espoused by Clodovis Boff in *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations*, this thesis does not accept the clear and definitive ontological and epistemological demarcation between praxis (liberating action) and theory (faith). LALT borrowed the dialectical pastoral method, *See, Judge, Act*, developed by Joseph Cardijn and systematized it according to a praxis-based epistemology. Praxis and the examination of praxis, first and foremost by the social sciences, were revelatory in and of themselves of liberating practice without faith or theology. As such, praxis for LALT is not informed *a priori* by theory (faith/theology), but instead liberating praxis is revealed *a posteriori* by praxis and the sociological examination of praxis. However, it is not self-evident what praxis epistemologically offers or even how praxis can be understood as liberating *a posteriori* without an *a priori* rootedness in an ethical tradition (i.e., a commitment to the preferential option for the poor because of the life, teaching, and crucifixion of Jesus). While the task of theology is a second step, it follows a practice that is informed by culture and tradition and accordingly does not have to wait for the social sciences to reveal the

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32 LALT has tended to speak of practice as *praxis*, so as to distinguish it from theory as in the Marxist tradition. I prefer the term ‘practice’ for several reasons. First, I do not believe such a clear demarcation can be made between ‘practice’ and ‘theory’ as has often been assumed in liberationist circles. Second, practice is a more versatile term and, thus, I will use it to refer to a host of social-cultural practices, both those that are consciously committed to transformation as well as those that are not, but are transformational nonetheless. However, like LALT, this thesis affirms that practice is transformative in that it is focused on the task of solidarity with the poor and marginalized and the transformation of cultural and social structures.

33 For the most systemized development of this, see Clodovis Boff, *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), in particular parts I and II. For Boff, theological theory, or first theology as he calls it, is concerned with the questions of the divine (Who is God?), while sociology is concerned with the questions of historical praxis (Is this transformative?). Each discipline, theology and sociology, has tools and languages specific to its task that should not be meshed; they are autonomous spheres.

34 For an excellent examination of this, see Zoë Bennett, “Action is the Life of All: The Praxis-Based Epistemology of Liberation Theology.” In *Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, ed. Christopher Rowland, (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007), 39-54.
‘real’ state of the world. This thesis will examine practice directly with theology as well as sociology and ethnography, with an *a priori* commitment to the praxis of Jesus Christ as determinative for defining liberating practice.\(^{35}\)

The project is novel in that it answers the above questions and examines practice by recuperating and reinventing the liberationist *historical project* and by focusing it on the local ecclesial community. It is focused on the micro-social level, while at the same time not ignoring the macro-social level. As such, this project acknowledges the *historical project* as an important tool for a liberating theology, while recognizing that the *genesis* of liberation theology is a liberating Christianity rooted in ecclesial culture and practice.

This thesis examines LAT through the lens of one context – Argentina – because it is through the engagement of the particular that a reliable statement for the universal – Latin American ecclesiology – arises. There is not ‘a’ Latin American ecclesiology, but this work is a theological statement concerning the many ecclesiologies within the context of Latin America through the eyes of one context. Argentina is a fruitful context for such contextual studies because it has not been the focus of a myriad of academic studies, as is the case with Brazil, Chile, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. This is due, primarily, to the lack of a large Argentine liberationist or CEB movement as well as lack of early pentecostal growth.\(^{36}\) Nevertheless, the recent profound changes in Argentina make it a context with particularities that help form a novel conversation about LAT.

0.3. Methodology

As a project committed to the analysis and transformation of practice, this thesis has certain methodological commitments. The project began, chronologically,

\(^{35}\) When I say that the practice of Jesus Christ is determinative I do not mean that the practice of Jesus is ‘unhistorical’ or ‘transcendent’ and thus applicable to all times. Instead, I mean that the praxis of Jesus is a historical practice that is determinative because it was real historical practice and continues to be real historical practice amidst ecclesial communities that continue to interpret and live this practice as the Body of Christ in their contemporary socio-cultural contexts.

\(^{36}\) Argentina did have a liberationist and CEB movement, but not to the same degree as in other contexts. Moreover, Argentine Roman Catholic liberation theology is unique in several ways because of the influence of Peronism. See Chapter 3. Also, unlike its neighbors Chile and Brazil, Classic Pentecostalism grew slowly in Argentina, see David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 73.
with the analysis of ecclesial practice, because of the commitment to a grounded and praxis-oriented theology that follows and is informed by practice. By ‘grounded’, I refer again to a theology, in line with LALT, that is committed to a methodology that sees theology as a second act that follows practice committed to transformative action. Accordingly, the project chronologically began with an ethnographic and sociological analysis of the Argentine ecclesial setting and practice and ended with an analysis and a descriptive and prescriptive ecclesiological statement. The project is also committed to personal and epistemological reflexivity\(^3^7\) in that I have sought to be aware of my own personal social location and beliefs, as well as my epistemological commitments, in the process of an investigation of other’s experience and practices and in the development of the thesis. Through a methodological triangulation that employs various methods of investigation, the research was conducted so as to secure an in-depth and valid understanding of the phenomena that are the centre of the study (Chapter 4): ecclesial practices.\(^3^8\) While the project began chronologically with the ethnographic examination of two ecclesial communities in Argentina, the written thesis develops thematically, so as to foreground the historical and theological context of the ecclesial case studies for the reader. This is to say, the written thesis has also been constructed in triangular fashion, with a tripartite engagement of history, ethnography/sociology, and theology.

This means that this thesis is also a work of practical theology in that it begins the theological process with the examination of human experience and practices. However, it is a practical theology that is not simply committed to a practical cognitive interest – the examination and understanding of practice – but also to an emancipatory cognitive interest – the transformation of practice.\(^3^9\) As such, it is a project for liberating truth, and a task that concerns history, ethnography,


\(^{38}\) Ibid., pp. 50-51, 67-71.

This search for truth is in part rooted in an *a priori* conviction that the particularity of Christian community has something determinative to say for theology and ethics: the local and particular are revelatory. Accordingly, the thesis seeks to describe and engage fully the context of the ecclesial in order to be a faithful and liberating testimony of truth. The goal of this project is not simply to understand practice but to produce practice: it seeks to form practice that is both faithful and effective through the examination of practice.

It begins with a historical and sociological analysis of Argentina (Chapter 1) and proceeds to a historical account of LAT, and in particular Latin American Protestant Theology (Chapters 2 and 3). Chapter 1 serves to demonstrate the present state of the social and theological crisis in Latin America where the possibility of a macro-social historical project has been precluded. Chapter 2 introduces LAT, focusing on three perspectives: Protestant liberationist, Progressive Evangelical, and neo-Pentecostal. The thesis readily engages Roman Catholic theological sources, but most closely engages these Protestant voices due to the limited scope of the thesis and the need to engage the theological and ecclesial context of the case studies (Progressive and neo-Pentecostal Argentine Baptist). So, for example, instead of focusing on the work of Leonardo Boff, who has written numerous texts on ecclesiology, the thesis more closely engages the work of the Methodist José Míguez Bonino, Juan Luis Segundo (who was a Jesuit but arguably one of the most ‘protestant’ of Catholic liberationists) and others.

Chapter 3 serves as an introduction to the place of community and micro-social projects in LAT. Through a focused engagement of Protestant liberationists, Progressive Evangelicals, and neo-Pentecostals, it begins to ask the question: is the local church transformative? This chapter also introduces three important debates in LAT that present challenges to the assertion that the local church is a historical project: 1) The division between the hermeneutical sciences and social sciences; 2) The conflict between popular religion and culture; and 3) The bifurcation between

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41 This is particularly true of his ecclesiology, see Chapter 3.
mass and minority religion. After this foregrounding, the thesis develops case studies (Chapter 4) focused around the examination of the concept of positive social change (transformation) and ecclesial practice. The central task of the case studies is to develop a thick narrative that intently listens to and analyses the theological conception of transformation and the transformative potential of ecclesial practice as expressed in the voices of two local ecclesial communities and their members.

Then, the thesis proceeds to a focused theological conversation (Chapter 5, 6, and Conclusion). In Chapter 5, the thesis returns to examine the concept of community and transformation, as well as the possibility of the local church as a historical project. Through an examination of the eclectic reality of the two local churches, the thesis posits that ecclesial practices can be faithful and liberating (efficacious) and that the local church is a nexus of transformation as a gathering community. The local church functions to bridge the chasm between personal transformation and larger social change, between the hermeneutical and social sciences, and between popular culture and a committed minority ethic and project. Chapter 6 continues the discussion of the church as a historical project and avers that as a gathering community the church is a nexus of transformation as it discerns, confronts, and seeks reconciliation.

0.4. Conclusion

Through an in-depth engagement of ecclesial practice and ecclesiology, this thesis seeks to offer a liberating theological vision amidst the continuing Latin American social and theological crisis. The work is unique in that it develops a theological conversation through close engagement with the social and ecclesial context of Latin America. It does not attempt to provide a panacea, but instead responds to the actual social-cultural reality of Latin America today, as read through the lens of Argentina. In line with LALT, it posits the novel assertion that the local church can function as a historical project for LAT amidst decades of failed macro-social historical projects. It seeks to examine the possibility of the local church, as a nexus of transformation and a historical project, that functions to bridge the chasms between personal transformation and larger social change, the hermeneutical and social sciences, and popular culture and a committed minority ethic and project. It accomplishes this
through development of grounded and original ethnographic and theological studies in the understudied context of Argentina. The thesis also constructively puts liberationist, progressive evangelical, and neo-Pentecostal perspectives into conversation with one another, resulting in a fresh theological statement that is rooted in social and ecclesial reality and, as a result, offers a challenge to LAT theology.
Chapter 1
The Creation of a Society of Exclusion

1.1. Introduction

Today, the talk of a socialist option does not come from bishops at CELAM,1 members of ISAL,2 or LALT texts, but instead from those who debate the reforms of the New Left (Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, Evo Morales in Bolivia, Rafael Correa in Ecuador, and Cristina Kichner in Argentina).3 The hopeful declarations of the ‘power of the poor’4 and the subsequent calls for the poor to be conscientizados5 and to take ‘hold of the reigns of history’6 have grown silent. No imminent, Exodus-like liberation has materialized; poverty has not subsided in Latin America. Instead of discussing the progression of history, liberationists have had to respond to accusations of the end of history.7 Nancy Bedford sums up the sentiment as such:

…the exhilarating sense of impending revolutionary change is long since gone. The category of ‘historical agents’ or ‘subjects’ applied to persons has fallen into relative disrepute. … The theory of dependence has become too blunt an instrument to measure reality. …

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1 Concilio Episcopal de Latinoamérica (Latin American Episcopal Council – of the Roman Catholic Church)

2 Iglesia y Sociedad en América Latina (Church and Society in Latin America) conferences started in the early 1960s and ran through the early 1970s. Although Protestants made up the largest constituency, these conferences were nonetheless ecumenical and instrumental in helping progressive Christians open up to Marxist social theory in the attempt to change the Latin American context. The ISAL conferences challenged the misconception that LALT was a Roman Catholic invention.

3 The last decade in South American, in particular, has witnessed the resurge of a pseudo-socialist vision through the influencing presence of Hugo Chavez, Evo Morales, and Rafael Correa.


5 This is a term that liberationists borrow from Paulo Freire and his arguments laid out in Pedagogy of the Oppressed (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970) and other works.


7 See, F. Fukuyama, The End of History and the Last Man (London: Penguin, 1992). This term has been in vogue since the publication of Fukuyama’s text and describes historical and philosophical reality. Historically, after the fall of communism, global capitalism and liberal western democracy have been left as the only viable options. Or, said another way, after the fall of the second world (the world of communism and socialism) now only the first world (the world of capitalism and liberal democracy) and the third world remain, and thus by default the third world must choose the model of the first world.
Perhaps the problem...is that as a result of globalization processes, reality has become so complex that – as anthropologist Néstor García Canclini puts it – David no longer knows exactly where Goliath is.⁸

In light of these changes, both detractors and supporters have been quick to declare LALT as passé, erroneous, or dead.⁹ In turn, LALT has struggled to respond to these critiques. However, many of the crass critiques of LALT have come from armchair radicals¹⁰ or entrenched antagonists who are uninformed about the history and present social reality of Latin America. The hopes of LALT and Liberation Christianity¹¹ for transformation were not dashed because of poor calculation, but because they suffered severe military, ideological, political, ecclesial, and cultural oppression. As Marcella Althaus-Reid has noted, ‘any failure of theology of liberation is not related to Marx or Marxian analysis but to the people who live and die on the streets of Latin America’.¹² Moreover, the face of Latin American societies and cultures has continued to rapidly change in recent decades, some of the most prominent changes being the indelible shift to neoliberalism and the declines of Roman Catholicism amidst the significant growth among evangelicals, in particular pentecostalism.

The present chapter is a stern reminder that constructive criticism of LALT and LAT requires an understanding of Latin American history and the present moment through which Latin America progresses. Any theology that fails to engage the history and present context of Latin America will ultimately offer naïve critiques. The present context can metaphorically be described as a ‘wilderness’ or ‘exile’. This is due to the formation of a bifurcated (civilization vs. barbarity) socio-cultural context in the Spanish Americas through violent colonization as well as the

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continued pursuit of a mythic civilization at the expense of the barbaric periphery. The crisis that birthed LAT has challenged and continues to challenge LALT and other Latin American theologies is not the post-modern deconstruction of theological or philosophical metanarratives, but instead the deconstruction of human bodies through poverty and oppression from the onset of the Spanish Americas up to the present. When I speak of the present wilderness or exile, I am metaphorically alluding to the present Latin American reality where poverty and injustice abound and there is little hope of lasting and significant macro-social transformation.\textsuperscript{13}

In order to produce a focused historical and sociological examination of Latin America, this chapter will examine one particular country: Argentina. Beginning with the foundation of the nation, the chapter will detail the dualist narrative of civilization vs. barbarism that is deeply embedded in Argentine history and culture. Through an examination of the rise of liberalism, the chapter will trace the proliferation of this dualist narrative amidst the failed liberal historical project. Then the chapter will engage the rise and fall of Juan Perón and the Peronist historical project and the attempt to confront the Argentine duality. Then, through an examination of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, the chapter will demonstrate that the social and economic oppression of the last dictatorship and the onset of neoliberalism has resulted in an even more pronounced dualistic culture of exclusion that limits the possibility of a macro-structural historical project. Finally, the chapter will argue that the New Left has failed to turn back the effects of neoliberalism and that the present continues to be an exilic wilderness where the struggle to survive every day has birthed numerous micro-social and countercultural movements.

1.2. The Rise of a Liberal Nation: The Liberal Project and the Pursuit of Civilization through Barbarism

In the Genesis creation narrative, the Spirit hovers over the waters and the formless void, when suddenly, God speaks this chaos into a creative, ordered existence. Herein lies the mythic, primordial polarity between chaos and the ordered

\textsuperscript{13} See Chapter 5 for a more in-depth examination of the themes of wilderness and exile. Also, see G. Baum, \textit{Essays in Critical Theology} (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1994), pp. 35-51. In this chapter entitled 'David Tracey: Pluralism and Liberation Theology’, Baum concludes that the present time is an exilic wilderness.
creation. The founding myth of Argentina is a mutated Europeanization of this creation myth. The ‘liberal’ Domingo F. Sarmiento’s *Facundo: Civilization and Barbarism* is the quintessential example. In his creative non-fiction work, Sarmiento depicts Juan ‘Facundo’ Quiroga as the archetypal *guacho* and *caudillo*. This *criollo*, provincial, federalist, barbaric, and chaotic foil is directly contrasted with Sarmiento, the narrator and main character, who is the prototype for all that is Northern European and American, urban, Unitarian, liberal, ordered, and civilized.

Writing from exile due to the rise to power of the *caudillo* Juan Manuel de Rosas, Sarmiento encapsulated the battle for national identity and culture in his work. Jorge Luis Borges would much later return to this dualist theme. Speaking of the choice between European refinement — *la cultura decente* — and the ‘South American’ destiny of atavism, desire and violence, Borges lamented the death of liberalism amidst the invasion of a recapitulated barbarism — Peronism. This duality of

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14 In fact, this is a myth rooted in the colonial experience of declaring the indigenous populations as barbarian, sub-human, or as natural slaves that needed to be ruled by civilized Europeans. In the colonial period, this line of argument was very much rooted in Aristotelian divisions between types of humans, such as masters and slaves. An apposite example is the Valladolid debate in 1550-1551 between Bartolomé de las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda. See O. E. González, and J. L. González, *Christianity in Latin America: A History* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 42-47; and J. F. Schwaller, *The History of the Catholic Church in Latin America: From Conquest to Revolution and Beyond* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), pp. 61-62.


16 Name for a cowboy in South America’s Southern Cone.

17 The name for the ‘strong men’, in the initial decades after independence, who took central places of power in the emerging republics of Latin America. They tended to use populist rhetoric to appeal to the masses and sustained their power over large regions through their ability to maintain social order with militias and popular support. Today the term is often used to refer to an autocratic leader. See, González and González, *Christianity in Latin America*, pp. 132-33.

18 Spanish word for a caste in colonial-based caste system of the Spanish Americas. It was originally used to indicate those who were from European descent, or slightly mixed descent, but born in the Spanish colonies. However, it generally has come to mean that which is native to the Americas, whether a person, animal, or food.


20 Spanish for ‘The Decent Culture’.

civilization vs. barbarism stands at the mythic beginning and the veritable exclusionary present of Argentine history.

The roots of this narrative of bifurcation can be traced back to the moment of alterity and confrontation when Columbus happened upon the island of Guanahani en route to the East Indies. The social, cultural, political, and religious Iberian *Reconquista* Christianity arrived with Columbus and the *conquistadores* in the Americas and shaped the subsequent encounter between two worlds, forming the dominant narrative of Latin America. The violent evangelization and Christianization of Latin America was rooted in the myth and politics of centrist Christian Empire, standing against the imposing barbarian periphery. The stratification of society, the mercantilist organization of global politics and economics, and the formation of symbols, narratives, and practices of a Christianized culture all imposed a narrative of a European, civilized centre over against a barbarous, indigenous periphery.

Argentina, like most Latin American nations, arose out of the wave of liberalism that swept through the Americas in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the wake of the revolutions in France and the North American colonies. Liberalism is an ideology firmly embedded in the thought of Western Europe’s Enlightenment and tenders a hope of spiritual and political emancipation rooted in a tripartite liberty: individualism, property, and security. Individualism represents a right to life, autonomy, and participation in a society established by a democratic government and a written constitution and limited by a system of checks and balances. Property is indicative of the fundamental human right to possess. It is also the collective motor of human activity and wealth. Security represents the protection of human individual rights such as equality, the freedoms of speech, press, assembly,

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22 Columbus called the island San Salvador, which is part of the archipelago of the Bahamas, but the original indigenous name was Guanahani. Columbus happened upon the island because he was intending to sail to India according to erroneous calculations of Paolo dal Pozzo Toscanelli.

23 This was a type of Christianity that was formed on the myth that Spain had been intrusted with the divine task of the defense of the Catholic faith from Muslims, Jews, and heretics. It was formed during the long drive to remove the Moors (Muslims) from the Iberian peninsula. See González and González, *Christianity in Latin America*, pp. 2-3.

24 All translations are mine, unless otherwise noted. Pasquali, *La Instauración Liberal*, p. 10. In the North American context we can think of the Lockean ideal of natural rights – life, liberty, and property – immortalized in Thomas Jefferson’s *Declaration of Independence*. 
and religion, and the right to property against despotic and arbitrary power. These ideals were ultimately filtered through a narrative of centre-periphery in which the bearers of freedom were civilized Europe and North America, while the barbarous others were relegated to the periphery. Emancipation was not extended to all. In the words of one of the Argentine fathers of liberalism, Juan Bautista Alberdi, ‘everything that is not European is barbarous’. Civilization was the euphemism of advancement and barbarism was its foil.

The great irony is that barbarism was ultimately not the indigenous and criollo culture depicted by Sarmiento’s Facundo; instead, it was the centrist means through which liberals developed and instituted the liberal historical project. Alberdi, who influenced the framing of the Constitution of 1853 through his Bases y Puntos de Partida para la Organización de La República Argentina (1852), wrote that, ‘to govern is to populate’. The liberal governments that ensued followed this model by attempting to eradicate the caudillo, guacho, and indígena by dominating the provinces and the Patagonia in the name of civilization. José Hernández’s poetic feat Martin Fierro represents a collective lament of the loss of the guacho life. Under the lead of Domingo F. Sarmiento, president from 1868-74, Argentina persisted with European immigration and modernization: in 1869 (first census in Argentina), 1,736,923 residents; in 1895, 3,956,060 residents; by 1914, 7,885,237 residents.

25 Pasquali, La Instauración Liberal, p. 10; González and González, Christianity in Latin America, pp. 106, 125, 140.

26 Fittingly, the Argentine constitution under the influence of Alberdi and the Generation of 37 borrowed some 84 of its 107 articles from the US Constitution. Although Alberdi was not present at the physical writing of this constitution, his influence nonetheless was significant.

27 Rodriguez, Civilizing Argentina, pp. 11-28.


30 While not all liberals called for the eradication of the indigenous population, the barbarous policies of liberalism reached its heights with General Julio Argentino Roca and the ‘conquest of the desert’. He decimated the indigenous population of the Patagonia and would be rewarded with election to the presidency with the Partido Autonomista Nacional (PAN) party.

residents. In like manner, Sarmiento founded Argentina’s public school system on the model of the United States. The liberal project aspired to import the European model of production and trade, the protection of markets dominated by the private sector and the development of raw materials for export to the North. The centre prospered and wealth flowed into the country and into the hands of the Argentine elite, inspiring the European saying, ‘rich as an Argentine’. However, the barbarous margins did not benefit from the liberty and rights of the liberal project. Moreover, the project itself collapsed with the crashing of the export-based economy during the Great Depression. The Argentine bifurcation persisted amidst an exclusionary wilderness.

1.3. Peronism: Confronting the Duality

The rise of Juan Perón represented a unique catalyst for popular participation and hope for transformation like no other in the history of Argentina, so much so that it continues to be a powerful presence today. He actually came to power through a confluence of events: the crisis of the national project of liberalism, the growth of historical revisionism, the influx of European working class immigrants that arrived in previous decades, the growth of Catholic integrismo, the mobilization of the working class, and the collective desire to return to party democracy. His ascension was not simply an extension of the prior dictatorial regime, a mindless

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32 Ibid., p. 54. Not surprisingly, it was Sarmiento who administrated the first census.
34 Historical Revisionism was a new school of historical analysis that began in the 1930s during the crisis of liberalism. Having close ties to nationalism, it challenged the liberal historiography that painted Argentina as an evolutionary development of the liberal, urban, civilization model as depicted in Sarmiento’s Facundo. Revisionists presented the Latin-Catholic-Federalist tradition as embodying real Argentine culture and subsequently reinterpreted deprecated caudillos, such as Rosas and Facundo, as national heroes and defenders of Argentina and its essential culture. See M. Plotkin, Mañana Es San Perón: A Cultural History of Perón’s Argentina, Latin American Silhouettes (Wilmingto n, DE: SR Books, 2003), pp. 8-10.
35 Catholic Integralism was a movement similar to Italian Fascism that espoused anti-democratic, anti-communist, anti-liberal, and anti-imperialist sentiments and a Catholic nationalist and corporatist ideology. It gained significant support among right-wing Catholics, including part of the church hierarchy. See Plotkin, Mañana Es San Perón, pp. 14-16.
fascism, or a pathological populism, but the result of a complex confluence of events that resulted in a victory in what was arguably the cleanest democratic election in Argentina to date (24 February 1946).\(^{36}\) Perón, a colonel in the Argentine Army under the dictatorship of 1943-1946, benefited from his position as Minister of Labour under that regime. His work to incorporate labour unions and syndicalism into the national political scene brought him favour with the working class. It was this rapport with the working class, or *los descamisados*,\(^{37}\) that would eventually prove vital in his rise to the presidency.

Peronism and its political party, *Partido Justicialista* (PJ), grew out of a concerted effort to restructure society through an incorporation of the working class and the development of an Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) economic strategy. Perón gained control of one of Argentina’s most oligarchic industries, export agriculture, and established a single, state-run agricultural purchaser and exporter. He nationalized the central bank by paying off its billion-dollar debt with the Bank of England\(^{38}\) and helped create a period of steady growth in industry and Gross Domestic Product (GDP).\(^{39}\)

Nevertheless, the aspirations of Perón extended well beyond forming a working class party. For Perón, the *Justicialista*\(^{40}\) vision involved the entire nation; it encompassed all of *el pueblo*.\(^{41}\) The Peronist use of the term *pueblo* was not an Argentine neologism, but with Peronism it came to represent a nationalist vision rooted in Argentine history and extending boldly into the future. While the concept *el pueblo* was clearly founded on an integralist and historically-revisioned ideal of a primordial, Federalist, and *criollo* community, nonetheless it was addressed to all

\(^{36}\) See Plotkin, *Mañana Es San Perón*, p. 199.

\(^{37}\) Spanish for ‘the shirtless’. A condescending term assigned to the supporters of Perón because of their poor, working class status, which Perón used affectionately to speak of his supporters.

\(^{38}\) The bank, which had been created in 1935, had large amounts of frozen British funds.

\(^{39}\) Buchrucker, ‘Interpretations of Peronism’, p. 15.

\(^{40}\) The political party that grew out of Peronism was the *Partido Justicialista* (PJ Justicialist Party) and encompassed only a portion of the greater movement. In fact, the PJ party was only officially constituted in 1973, amidst the return of Perón to Argentina.

\(^{41}\) Spanish for ‘the people’.
Argentines. Perón spoke fondly of representing *el pueblo* and referred to his opposition as *el anti-pueblo*.

*El Pueblo*, as Perón astutely recognized, was as much a social construction of contemporary culture as it was a latent autochthon reality. He understood its conceptual power in the formation of a cultural-historical project. Mariano Plotkin remarks that, ‘the impact and resilience of Peronism cannot be explained solely in terms of improvement in the living conditions of the working class’.  

Arguably, the changes instituted by Perón can be measured quantitatively through statistical sociological analysis: increase in worker wages, changes to health care, and the extension of the welfare state. However, the change materialized in Peronism extended into the realm of the qualitative and anthropological. The nationalist Peronist project was intimately coupled to the formation of this Peronist culture. Celebratory days, symbols, terminology, historical revisionism, Peronist textbooks and curriculum, and quasi-religious ceremonies are but a few examples of this component of the Peronist historical project. His iconic wife, Eva Duarte Perón, became a central part of the Pero

Not all Argentines were convinced, including the traditional oligarchic business class, the defenders of the liberal educational system, and much of the middle and higher classes. The Peronist project also encountered resistance from part of the Catholic hierarchy and the military. While these institutions at first offered their support to Perón, they would stubbornly protect their own autonomy from the Peronist project and resist what they saw attempts to peronize their institutions. 

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43 Ibid., p. 45.

FEP’s contributions invaded a space traditionally filled by the Catholic Church.\textsuperscript{45} This created a rift, which eventually turned into an open conflict that ended with Peron’s excommunication\textsuperscript{46} and in time a military coup and exile. The fall of Perón marked much more than one more failed attempt at democracy, but was, as Ernesto Sabato reminds us, the revelation, once again, of the deep-seated Argentine dualism:

That night of September 1955, while the doctors, landowners, and writers noisily celebrated in the living room the fall of the tyrant, in a corner kitchen I saw that the Indian women who worked there had their eyes full of tears; and although during all those years I had mentioned the tragic dualism of the Argentine people, in that moment it appeared to me in the most moving way.\textsuperscript{47}

Juan Perón’s ascension to power and decade of dominance (1946–1955) profoundly transformed Argentina’s political culture and economic system. Some historians speak of the ‘Peronist Revolution’,\textsuperscript{48} while others have disparagingly described it as ‘pathology’.\textsuperscript{49} The library of scholarship inspired by Peronism, the most studied Latin American popular movement, has done little to dispel the reality of its ‘exasperating’\textsuperscript{50} nature and history. Nevertheless, whether Perón is lauded as a saviour or vilified as a dictator, he and the movement he began, Peronism, incorporated previously excluded sectors of society, ultimately altering the fabric of society.\textsuperscript{51} While the Argentine duality was not overcome, Peronism nevertheless

\textsuperscript{45} The FEP expansion brought it into conflict with ecclesial systems of social care. Moreover, the FEP would directly challenge the Catholic Church when Perón replaced Catholic religious education in public schools with the spiritual counseling of the FEP. See Plotkin, \textit{Mañana Es San Perón}, p. 154 and Robben, \textit{Violence and Trauma}, p. 16.


challenged this division, offering a hope to many that would not die even under the oppression of a dictatorship.

1.4. The War to End Barbarism: The Neo-liberal Project amidst Dictatorship, Domination, and Democracy

The coup that removed Perón called itself the Revolución Libertadora and began its revolution by closing the Congress, deposing the judges of the Supreme Court, and severely oppressing organized labour and the political parties with the intention to root out the barbarism. Amidst this oppressive environment and in the absence of Perón and an organized PJ, the unions and their leaders became the principal voices for Peronism, a platform they would not easily abdicate. The deep dualist divisions in Argentine society now began to appear within the ranks of Peronism. The left wing of Peronism radicalized in response to the oppressive measures of the dictatorship and because of the catalysts of the Cuban Revolution (1959) and the Argentine Cordobazo (1969), resulting in the formation of groups such as the Juventud Peronista (JP) and the Montoneros. In ecclesial circles, priests that had intentionally moved into villas to live among their poor parishioners were the impetus for the development of a novel Argentine liberation theology focused on a teología del pueblo. This theology asked whether it was possible to theologize about ‘Peronismo y Cristianismo’ and favoured

52 The momentous Cordobazo, a large-scale violent uprising of workers in Cordoba against the anti-labour actions of the dictatorship, gave new life to popular movements in Argentina and, for some, credence to use violence.

53 A group founded by young Peronists in the wake of the coup that removed Perón from office. The JP would be violently oppressed and would also eventually resort to violent resistance.

54 The Montoneros formed around 1970, following an ideology that interpreted the Peronist vision in socialist terms and called for explicit violent resistance. They would carry out numerous high profile bombings and kidnappings and would advocate a foquismo (Spanish for focalism) model of resistance similar to that used in Cuba.

55 Argentine word which, depending on the context, can mean ‘slum’, as in the present case.


57 C. Mugica, Peronismo y Cristianismo (Buenos Aires: Editorial Merlin, 1973). One of the leading voices was Father Carlos Mugica, who was assassinated in the precursory events of the Dirty War by the right-wing death squad Alianza Anticomunista Argentina (Triple A, AAA). Mugica was representative of the Argentine liberationist movement and was not a Marxist, but nonetheless incorporated certain socialist ideals. Juan Carlos Scannone and Lucio Gera were the two leading
anthropology over the social sciences. Evangelicals, typically viewed as ‘foreign’ and ‘liberal’ by both Peronist and Marxist ideology, tried to maintain themselves on the fringes of the social tensions.⁵⁸

The hope of the resurrection and continuation of the Peronist project came to an impasse on 20 June 1973. A crowd of over three million⁵⁹ gathered to await Perón’s arrival by plane after 18 years of exile. A leftist Peronist, Héctor José Cámpora, was the newly elected president of the republic, and hopes were high for a radical Peronist project. However, these hopes evaporated as bullets cut through the crowd, killing at least 13 and injuring around 380. José López Rega, Perón’s personal secretary and soon to be Minister of Social Welfare and founder of the infamous Triple A⁶⁰ hit squad, had intentionally placed the gunmen to fire on leftist Peronists.⁶¹ Perón choose the right over the left, civilization over barbarism, and, as was and would continue to be the case, defended civilization with barbarous violence and oppression. One year later on 1 May 1974, Perón would congregate one last time with the crowds in the Plaza de Mayo. On this occasion he was not welcomed with jubilant cheers but instead with accusing jeers: ‘What’s wrong, what’s wrong General, is the popular government full of gorillas?’⁶² This time, the left, the JP and the Montoneros, left the Plaza de Mayo in droves, turning from crowd mobilization to armed resistance and foquismo.⁶³ When Perón died two months later on 1 July

voices of Argentine liberation theology, which would eventually prove instrumental in a shift in LALT. See chapter 3 for a more in depth discussion.

⁵⁸ The Catholic-Nationalist-Traditionalist identity of Peronism was not congenial with other religious traditions, such as Protestantism and Judaism. This would only begin to change with the rupture of Perón’s relationship with Catholic hierarchy. See Caimari, Perón y La Iglesia, p. 266-85; M. Maróstica, ‘Pentecostals and Politics: The Creation of the Evangelical Christian Movement in Argentina, 1983-1993’ (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1997), pp. 54-56.

⁵⁹ There are conflicting accounts of how many people gathered, between two and four million. See Robben, Violence and Trauma, p. 69.

⁶⁰ The right-wing death squad Alianza Anticomunista Argentina (Triple A, AAA), which was founded by José López Rega, the Welfare Minister under Juan Perón during his third presidency.

⁶¹ For the most detailed account, see H. Verbitsky, Ezeiza, Colección Memoria y Presente (Buenos Aires: Editorial Contrapunto, 1985). The newspapers reported contrasting depictions of what occurred. Robben, Violence and Trauma, pp. 68-70.


⁶³ Foquismo was the model used widely by armed revolutionary groups in the 1960s and 1970s, following the model of the Cuban Revolution and Che Guevara’s lessons concerning
1974, his widow, and the vice president, Isabel Martínez de Perón, took the presidency and ushered in a harder turn to the right. In a twist of irony, Isabel, the first female president in the Western Hemisphere and a Peronist, began the neoliberal project and the Dirty War in Argentina.\textsuperscript{64} Under the careful tutelage of José López Rega, she ordered the military to repress and then ‘annihilate’ the guerrilla threat.\textsuperscript{65}

The economic policy of Isabel Perón marked a clear shift from a nationalist, reformist economy of classic Peronism to neo-liberalism. The infamous \textit{El Rodrigazo}, named after her Minister of the Economy, Celestino Rodrigo, was a group of policies aimed at making an emphatic move from a nationalist, reformist economy to neo-liberalism. It froze wages and severely devalued the peso by more than 100%. The effects were rapid and profound: prices and unemployment soared, and the economy, after 11 years of growth, plunged into recession.\textsuperscript{66} Amid the havoc brought on by neo-liberal economic strategy, violence escalated and unions broke with Peronism and organized crippling strikes. The national political system fell into disarray and Isabel was deposed and arrested on 27 March 1976 at the hands of what was to prove to be the most vicious dictatorship in Argentine history. The liberal and business elite gave the military their blessing and the Catholic Church hierarchy consecrated the coup by welcoming the junta with a mass.

The United States, under the leadership of President Gerald Ford and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger,\textsuperscript{67} and the IMF lent their support. Indeed, much of Argentine society, as with the seven coups before, accepted the measures as one more necessary evil to restore economic and social stability. The junta decreed the commencement of \textit{El Proceso} (Process of National Reorganization), a plan to revolutionary warfare. The method proposed that focused, hence \textit{foquismo}, small groups of revolutionary forces could awaken the masses and act as a catalyst for pushing forward the pre-revolutionary conditions that existed in Latin America. J. Comblin, \textit{The Church and the National Security State} (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), p. 178; Robben, \textit{Violence and Trauma}, p. 96.

\textsuperscript{64} The dictatorship used the euphemism ‘Dirty War’ to justify their use of oppressive violence.

\textsuperscript{65} Robben, \textit{Violence and Trauma}, p. 175.

\textsuperscript{66} See Svampa, \textit{Sociedad Excluyente}, p. 22.

constrain civil unrest, nullify organized labour, disband the democratic party system, and suppress all opposing voices. The intention was not to find a conciliatory end to the social stalemate, but ‘to cut the Gordian knot with a sword’. 68

In this case, the sword was double-edged. The junta wielded one edge with the rhetoric of national security to justify overt military action, covert state terrorism, and torture to expunge all ‘cancerous’ opposition. 69 Again, the Argentine national myth proved efficacious: just as the creation myth, which brought order out of chaos, and the liberal Argentine myth presented history as an evolutionary move from barbarism to civilization, ‘the military perceived…Argentine history as a struggle between primitive and advanced cultures’. 70 The present struggle was a clash of cultures between communist ‘primitivism’, i.e. barbarism, and the true destiny of Argentine civilization. The military envisioned itself as the liberator of Argentina and the saviour of its independence. However, it became clear that the intentions of the junta went well beyond security and stability, being more millennial and apocalyptic. 71 The ultimate threat was the cultural and social battle for the very heart and soul of the Argentine Republic and Argentine people. This was a dirty, total war fought on all fronts to extirpate not simply subversives but the very culture of subversion and barbarism. While the epicentre was the Argentine nation and the background was a conflict between neo-liberalism and communism, this was ultimately a Manichean, apocalyptic battle between civilization and encroaching barbarism. The junta launched some 340 clandestine detention centres, chupaderos, where people were ‘sucked’ out of existence. In El Proceso some 30,000 individuals disappeared, with thousands more tortured, creating a culture of fear and apathy.

The junta wielded another edge: national economic necessity. Under the direction of de facto president Jorge Rafael Videla and his appointed Minister of the


69 The junta frequently spoke of the cancer and sickness that infected the Argentine social body. Ibid., pp. 215-16.

70 Robben, Violence and Trauma, p. 172.

71 The passage of time has shown that the subversive threat was never as immanent as declared and, in fact, their defeat was already imminent before the coup. See Comblin, The Church and the National Security State, pp. 178-79; Robben, Violence and Trauma, p. 171; Romero, A History of Argentina, pp. 218-19.
Economy, José Martínez de Hoz, *El Proceso* initiated a sweeping socio-economic restructuring. The Videla-Martínez de Hoz plan instituted a market-guided economy, which ‘was not the product of impersonal and divine forces’, in the way of Adam Smith’s invisible hand, but of, ‘state intervention to repress and dismantle the actors in the corporative game, to impose rules facilitating the growth of the victors, and even to transfer to them, through…the state, the resources of all society that made possible their consolidation’. The knot had been cut and the future path of Argentina had been paved. As Guillermo O’Donnell has commented,

In Argentina, one of the consequences of the multiple repressions that Videla, Martínez de Hoz and others had inflicted was that they heavily loaded the dice against a good part of the society that had been paralyzed by the state and the brutal class vengeance. From that point on, there was never a lack…of very skilled players that would win again and again against the interests of the popular and middle class sectors…

Faced with mounting economic hardships and a growing recognition among the people of the extent to which the junta had gone to protect society, the iron grip of the dictatorship began to slip. After the calamitous Malvinas-Falkland Islands War, Argentine society began to awaken from its slumber of fear, confusion, and suppression. Voices no longer willing to cower in fear invaded public space. Defiant mothers of the disappeared took to the Plaza de Mayo and, along with others, grew bolder and more defiant. A collective will for a return to democracy gripped the nation, with great portions of the population pinning their hopes on free elections to solve any and all problems. Sensing a loosening of enforced proscription, the political parties began to organize themselves and prepare for a return to a democratic electoral system of government. In particular, Raúl Alfonsín, a tireless voice for human rights, effectively renovated the *Unión Cívica Radical* (UCR) and brought a convincing message of hope, openness, and democratic change. He won

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75 The organization began with a group of mothers who decided to protest the disappearance of their children after searching for them to no avail. They began in April of 1977 by putting scarves on their heads and circling the Plaza de Mayo once a week, a practice they have maintained for more than thirty years.
the election and a euphoric crowd of over a million celebrated his inauguration on 10 December 1983. The crowds anxiously awaited the fulfillment of promises to re-establish civil liberties, to curtail the military, to bring human rights violators to justice, to restore the liberal education system, and to tackle the deep economic issues. Alfonsín proved sincere, working tirelessly to free the education system from authoritarianism, to push forth legislation for the legalization of divorce\textsuperscript{76} and equal child custody rights for women, and to create the Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas (CONADEP). Expectations were high, indeed, too high. The entrenched dominant sectors of society, the military, Roman Catholic Church, and the transnational business sector, which had benefited from the dictatorship, were outwardly supportive of democracy. However, fearful of losing their political and economic power, they resisted Alfonsonín’s policies and greatly curtailed his success. For example, the military insisted that the Dirty War was a necessary evil and subsequently resisted submitting to an elected government.\textsuperscript{77} Likewise, the neoliberal path that had been paved under the dictatorship’s \textit{El Proceso} proved to be insurmountable.\textsuperscript{78} Dogged inflation (700\% by 1984),\textsuperscript{79} escalating foreign debt, and tensions with unions effectively tied Alfonsonín’s hands. In a true demonstration of democratic virtue, Alfonson called for the presidential elections to be moved up by

\textsuperscript{76} The Roman Catholic hierarchy vehemently opposed this, spearheading street protests led by the patron saint of Argentina, the Virgin of Luján. Nevertheless, a divorce law was eventually passed in 1987.

\textsuperscript{77} The findings of the CONADEP, the Nunca Más (Never Again) report, were indisputable, even for the military’s most ardent supporters. Nevertheless, the military refused to admit any wrongdoing and declared itself, using just war arguments, justified in their actions during a ‘war’ against subversion, only acknowledging limited uses of excessive force. The subsequent judicial proceedings first condemned the military’s action as an institution as unjustifiable and delivered harsh sentences to most of the junta leaders. That was the easy part; the next step opened a floodgate of civil and criminal litigation and the military began to resist. Alfonson attempted to mitigate problems by pushing through legislation, an End Point law that would put a limit of two months on all further prosecution, and a Due Obedience law that would effectively give amnesty to lower rank officers who committed crimes while obeying orders. Nevertheless, given the mandatory conscription at the time, the military had support in certain sectors and there were rebellions and threats of bombings and a coup. The result was a failure to submit the military to the government and a growing sense of disillusionment concerning the limits of democracy.

\textsuperscript{78} Romero, \textit{A History of Argentina}, p. 222.

five months so as to avoid another coup, leaving office after presiding over Argentina during the infamous ‘lost decade’.

However, this was not the end, but simply the beginning of the neo-liberal project. The Peronists returned to power with the election of the flamboyant Carlos Menem. He surprised both Peronists and the country, bursting onto the scene as a *renovador* Peronist with ambiguous promises of a ‘productivity revolution’, ‘huge salaries’, and an elusive ‘neither privatist or statist’ third way plan. He preached an *aggiornado* populism that ironically, as Edgardo Kvternik has noted, was ‘anti-collectivist’. This was a novel call to *el pueblo* that sought to simultaneously energize the traditional Peronist working class, as well as to reach the productive business sector.

In time, his *aggiornado* populism revealed itself as another steady dose of neo-liberalism. Some Peronist scholars have argued that Menem took his first steps of conversion out of ‘necessity’, given the precarious economic situation. He confronted hyperinflation, huge budget deficits, a contracting GNP, and a seemingly globalized neo-liberalism. Months after he took office, the definitive victory of global capitalism was confirmed with the fall of the Berlin Wall. In response, under the guise of economic emergency, Menem deepened Argentina’s commitment to

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80 A group of Peronists who arose in the wake of the loss to Alfonsín and the UCR in 1983 and who attempted to ‘renew’ (renovar) the party through the creation of internal democratic procedures to select candidates. The idea behind this was to effectively remove the dominance of union leadership to handpick candidates. The *renovadores* were not a homogeneous group and Menem’s victory assured his dominant role in defining the direction of the renewal.

81 See Chapter 3 for discussion of third way ideology in LALT. In recent years, the emersion of the New Left has sparked talk of a third way. For a more recent discussion focused on the Brazilian context, see J. Petras, ‘Whither Lula’s Brazil? Neoliberalism and ‘Third Way’ Ideology’, *Journal of Peasant Studies* 31 (2003): 1-44.


83 Menem repeatedly used the ideological concept of ‘necessity’ to push forward sweeping changes. and V. Palermo, and J. C. Torre, *A La Sombra de La Hiperinflación: La Política de Reformas Estructurales en Argentina* (Santiago de Chile, CEPAL, 1992).

84 The same month Menem took office and accepted neo-liberalism as the only viable option, Francis Fukuyama published the article, ‘The End of History’, which would serve as the basis for his book *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin, 1992). This text has been repeatedly quoted to confirm a fatalistic acceptance of the globalized reality of neo-liberalism.
neo-liberalism, making the country a flag bearer of the Latin American neo-liberal revolution of the 1990s.85

The effects of these changes transformed the social fibre of society and, as shall be seen in Chapter 4, the fibre of ecclesial communities. Argentina’s mythic dualism has become more and more a reality with the diminishing of the middle class and the further consolidation of social, political, and economic capital in the hands of the upper classes. This trend commenced with the Dirty War and the Videla–Martina de Hoz economic transformation. The return to democracy under Alfonsín demonstrated the irreversibility of the metamorphosis and the loss of the possibility of incorporating the lower classes into the national political and economic system. The 1990s and the era of Menem served to extend this metamorphosis, particularly to the middle class through its division and contraction.

During the 1990s, Maristella Svampa comments, ‘from a political and cultural point of view…the high class strengthened its ontological security, that is, its confidence in class, as it found its historic adversary, Peronism, an unexpected ally’.86 Before the dictatorship, the poorest 40% of the poorest families received 16.9% of total income; by 1989 this had been reduced to 11.7%. In contrast, whereas the wealthiest 10% received 31.6% of total income in 1977, by 1989 they received 41.6%.87 Argentina went from being one of the countries with the greatest distribution of wealth, to being one of the countries with the worst wealth distribution.88 This consolidated even more power and capital in the higher classes at the expense of the diminishing middle class and growing lower class. This also

85 See the introduction in Peronism and Argentina, p. xii. It was Menem and Alberto Fujimori of Peru who served as the face of neo-liberalism in Latin America; G. Agamben, State of Exception (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
86 Svampa, Sociedad Excluyente, p. 118.
88 D. Míguez, ‘Opio Rebelde: Los Programas de Rehabilitación de Adictos en La Argentina’, Pentecostudies 4 (2005): 1-23 (8). It has a Gini coefficient of 0.39 in 1975 and of 0.54 in 2000. The Gini coefficient is a statistical measure of wealth dispersion developed by the Italian statistician Corrado Gini in 1912. The coefficient range is between 0 and 1, with 0 representing perfect equality and 1 representing perfect inequality.
served to further displace the lower class by robbing it of its accumulated symbolic capital.

To compound problems, Menem’s neo-liberal policies sought a strategic dismantling of the welfare state. The public health system, school system, and housing systems deteriorated rapidly, all amid unprecedented growth in private health care, schools and universities, and the expansion of exclusive ‘country’ communities. The growth of income inequality in recent decades can be directly correlated with the widening educational, healthcare, and housing divide. As the wealthy have continually moved to private schooling, health care, and security, public services have further suffered. This has also lead to a widening spatial and cultural gap between classes. The issue of security is a poignant example because it has become one of the most desired ‘goods’ in Argentina. For the higher classes, the answer to security has been auto-segregation, private security, country-style living, and private education. As a result, contemporary Argentina boasts a ‘parallel army’ of private security firms hired to protect those who can pay for it. Beatriz Sarlo in her *Instantáneas* sums up the sentiment of Argentina’s contemporary dualist society: ‘In one way or another, they fear us. We also fear them’.

**1.5. The Crisis of 2001: Micro-social Options amidst the Neo-liberal Wilderness**

In the closing days of December 2001, thousands of Argentines streamed into the streets to the accompanying sound and beat of the *cacerolazo*. They made their way to the Plaza de Mayo in central Buenos Aires, like so many crowds before

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89 Exclusive gated communities that have grown up in Gran Buenos Aires. See M. Svampa, *Los Que Ganaron. La Vida en Los Countries y en Los Barrios Privados* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2001).


91 Svampa, *Sociedad Excluyente*, pp. 309-10, n. 29. Svampa details that there are twenty-two thousand more private security guards in Argentina than in the combined Federal and Buenos Aires City police forces.


93 This word is an etymological construction of the Spanish word *cacerola*, meaning stew pot, and the derivative suffix *azo*, a pejorative term of augmentation. Literally, the term means ‘exceedingly large stew pot’, however, it is commonly employed to refer to street demonstrations where pots and pans are used to create an exceedingly loud noise.
them, to proclaim their disgust with yet another government. A failing economy, growing unemployment and poverty, and the suffocating limits of the infamous *corralito* had awakened Argentina’s middle class from its apathetic slumber. They took to the streets to join the *piqueteros*, loosely organized groups of unemployed workers who had been protesting in the streets since the early 1990s. This was not altruism or solidarity with the poor, but an awakening to a crisis that had become personal with the active declassing of large sectors of the middle class. Nevertheless, the hopeful chant of, ‘*Piquete y cacerola, la lucha es una sola*’, arose from the streets and plazas. Was this finally the moment when the banal declarations, ‘*El pueblo unido jamás será vencido*’ would be fulfilled in the streets of Buenos Aires?

A civic coup ensued, forcing the radical (UCR) president, Fernando de la Rúa, and his Minister of the Economy, Domingo Cavallo, to resign. The same fate...

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95. The term is the diminutive derivative of *corral*, meaning corral or animal enclosure. It is used here to refer to a specific economic policy devised by the Minister of the Economy Domingo Cavallo, under the presidency of Fernando de la Rúa, to prevent a run on the banks in 2001. At the time, the value of the Argentine peso was fixed with the US dollar and, in anticipation of a crisis, some informed Argentines and, predominantly, large companies began to make large withdrawals from their accounts in US dollars in order to move the funds outside the country. The *corralito*, which was instituted on 1 December 2001, severely limited the amount that could be withdrawn from accounts (originally 250 pesos per week) and made it obligatory to make withdrawals in pesos, which were no longer fixed to the US dollar and were severely devalued. Even after the limited victory of the renunciation of President Fernando de la Rúa, the *corralito* was not rescinded and, in fact, was exacerbated to a *corralón*, when dollar denominated accounts were forcibly converted into peso denominated accounts, causing substantial loss to account holders. Interestingly, in 2011, the Peronist President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner instituted a similar policy that greatly limits the amount of dollars that can be bought and sold.

96. The name *piquetero* is derivative of *piquete*, meaning picket. The movement, principally a conglomeration of unemployed, lower income individuals that have banded together, began in 1996 in the province of Nuequén in the wake of massive layoffs during the process of privatization of the formerly state owned YPF oil company.


98. ‘The people united will never be defeated’ is a common phrase used by leaders of popular movements and politicians in Latin America.
would befall the successive Peronist government of Adolfo Saá that lasted a mere ten days. The clear victory of the protests inspired triumphal declarations, reminiscent of the declarations of the ‘power of the poor’ of theologians of liberation, but again, time would prove them to be hyperbole. The corralito became the corralón, constituting the ‘largest bank robbery in history’, and the lower class swelled with the growth of Argentina’s ‘new poor’. In time, the middle class that remained returned to desiring la cultura decente, and the lower classes of the new and old poor to the lonely piquetes. The shouts of unity and solidarity dissipated. Juan Perón had predicted, ‘The year 2000 will find us united or subjugated’; he was off by a year.

Nevertheless, amidst the crisis, some signs of hope of transformation arose amidst the unity engendered in collective subjugation. The unemployed organized and picketed (piquete). Amidst money shortages, trueque networks arose to respond to monetary shortages. Neighbourhoods began to meet in the streets to form assemblies, local churches, both Catholic and Evangélica, opened soup kitchens and shelters for the hungry and homeless, and unemployed workers took over factories.

99 Since universal suffrage, the Radicals (UCR) and Peronists (JP) have dominated national elections and a civic coup by both parties represented a strong repudiation of the Argentine political party system.


101 The word is an etymological construction of the word carrol and the pejorative suffix of augmentation on. It refers in this instance to the economic policy taken under the presidency of Eduardo Dualde to forcibly change the Argentine dollar bank accounts into devalued peso accounts.

102 These are the words used by Steve Hanke to speak of the almost 18 billion dollars that were confiscated from Argentines with the revoking of the Convertibility Law of 1991, which tied the value of the peso to the US Dollar and obrigated the Argentine government to guarantee it. See S. Hanke, ‘Argentine Bank Robbery’, Wall Street Journal (21 March 2003).


105 Trueque means ‘barter’ in Spanish and since the mid 1990s there has been a steady rise in barter networks across the country. They reached a high of some 2 million participants in 2002.
and became their own bosses. The hope of change replaced the fear of the present in small but significant ways. Below, I will examine briefly these micro-social options in light of their transformative potential, with the exception of the churches, which will be discussed in case studies of chapter four.

After the privatization of the state-owned YPF Oil Company in 1996 and subsequent layoffs, workers blocked the closest main route and held a picket (*piquete*), giving birth to the *piquetero* movement, mentioned above.\(^{106}\) When asked about the roadblocks, *piqueteros* have consistently responded that it is the only way for them to make themselves heard. Unlike labour protests in the past, the *piqueteros* are not employed workers or unions members striking for higher wages or better health care; instead, they are unemployed workers with families trying to be heard.\(^{107}\) This movement has continued to grow: in 1997 there were roughly 77 roadblocks; in 2002 there were almost 3000 roadblocks; in October 2011 alone, there were 321 roadblocks.\(^{108}\) The movement represents an option for the unemployed to organize and make their voice heard.

The middle class neighbourhoods were also affected by the unemployment, loss of savings, and growing insecurity that the crisis brought. In response to these problems, neighbourhoods began to form *asambleas*.\(^{109}\) They represented a form of localized, direct democracy amid deep apathy for the institutional democratic system. These assemblies insisted on the removal of all politicians and judges that permitted economic crisis: *que se vayan todos*.\(^{110}\) Each assembly was autonomous and resisted...
incorporation into the formal political institutions.\textsuperscript{111} Closely connected to this movement was the Factory Recuperation Movement in which workers sought to take over and run their former factories. Again, these were principally autonomous organizations that operated on a factory-by-factory basis. For example, in some cases the factories were taken over to serve a function for the neighbouring community, including that of housing.\textsuperscript{112} The role of local churches also cannot be overlooked. During the crisis of 2001, they became the cafeterias of the hungry and provided social services for the poor, given that much of the welfare state had been dismantled in the decades leading up to this crisis. In all these instances, community organizations responded to significant, localized problems.

With soaring unemployment and a lack of money, people looked for other ways to buy and sell, and survive and so arose a barter system. Initiated in 1995 with a barter club of roughly 60 members, the system grew to over 500 markets with more than 320,000 members in 1999. After the collapse of the formal market in 2001, the barter market exploded, rising to more than 6000 barter clubs, with more than 6 million members,\textsuperscript{113} becoming the most extensive in the world.\textsuperscript{114} In essence, an alternative market was brought alongside the monetary market in the absence of pesos and employment.\textsuperscript{115} People discovered that the market is a social construction and not simply an extension of the State. The existence of an informal market is nothing new in Argentina, given that the black market accounts for roughly 40\% of the contemporary Argentine labour force.\textsuperscript{116} This intricate system is another telling example of the creative micro-social project of survival that has had a lasting impact on society at large.

\textsuperscript{111} Sitrin, ‘Fueling the Flames of Dignity’, pp. 255-56.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., pp. 258-60. See Chapter 4 for further development of this theme in the contextual study on Centro Comunitario Renovado.
\textsuperscript{114} Svampa, Sociedad Excluyente, pp. 145-46.
\textsuperscript{115} The shortage was due both to the lack of employment and the national government’s inability to print more pesos, first because the peso was tied to the dollar and then to avoid inflation.
1.6. The Failure of the New Left and Continuation of the Wilderness

In recent years there have been developments that mark a shift away from neo-liberal ideology. A New Left has arisen, as represented by Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, Evo Morales in Bolivia, Rafael Correa in Ecuador, and, to a lesser extent Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff in Brazil. In Argentina, the New Left came to the forefront with the rise of Nestor Kichner (2003-2007) and Cristina Fernandez Kichner (2007-2011; 2011- ) and the formalization of new Peronist personalism known as Kichnerismo.117 Nestor Kichner (2003-2007) proactively worked to bring stability to the Argentine economy, reengage the working classes and organized labour, and to begin reversing privatization and the erosion of the welfare state.

Although the rise of New Left governments has inspired hope among many Latin Americans, the results have been contradictory. While social mobilization through non-institutional collective action, non-conventional direct action, and direct governing participatory structures have inspired triumphalist declarations of radical direct democracy (horizontalidad) and popular revolution,118 at the same time, Kichnerism has cemented a new Peronist hegemony through the infiltration and co-option of many of these creative and promising movements through an extensive network of clientelism.119 The results of the incorporation of organized labour and the piqueteros have been the consolidation of Peronist power more than positive social change. So, the piquetero movement has become vilified by large expanses of the population.120 Likewise, although labour, unemployed workers’ organizations, and popular movements have been incorporated into national politics, divisions


between labour unions and the working classes has resulted in an increase in strikes and protests.\textsuperscript{121} While unemployment has fallen significantly since the crisis of 2001, the divide between the rich and the poor has grown.\textsuperscript{122} The present has not undone the sins of the past and a neo-liberal wilderness remains, where each person is left to defend for herself.

1.7. Conclusion

The temptation is for those in the North Atlantic theological circle to assume that the present wilderness is due to the failure of LALT. However, to assume that failure is endemic to LALT, without acknowledgment of the inordinate suppression faced by the leftist leaning movements, and the profound socio-cultural changes in Latin America in recent decades, is only naïve and reckless. Moreover, as detailed in this chapter, the civilization vs. barbarism bifurcation is deeply rooted in Argentine and Latin American colonial history and mythology. The crisis that birthed LAT and continues to challenge Latin America and her theologies is not the postmodern deconstruction of metanarratives, but instead the deconstruction of human bodies through poverty and oppression. The liberal project, which accompanied the birth of the Argentine republic, aggravated and substantiated this division. The original Peronist project made strong gestures and attempts to try to change this bifurcation and to include the excluded, but it ultimately failed, falling prey to the same bifurcation. The subsequent projects, even the much acclaimed New Left, have ultimately had to submit to the rules and paths made by neo-liberalism. There are rays of hope from micro-social movements such as the piqueteros, assemblies, and alternative economies, such as barter networks and employee owned factories, but even these options face great difficulty in the wilderness of the present. This is the reality that LAT and the church in Latin America must face. It is this reality, not the failed metanarratives of Marxism or modernism, that threatens the existence of the excluded, and it is this reality to which LAT and the Latin American church must


respond. As J. C. Torre has said, ‘under the present circumstance, the experience of being in the political wilderness seems likely to become a prolonged if not permanent one…’\textsuperscript{123} Accordingly, as José Comblin wrote decades ago, ‘The dilemma is giving birth to a new action that has not yet received a suitable name. Some authors suggest the “theology of captivity”. They are not without good reason’.\textsuperscript{124}


\textsuperscript{124} See Comblin, \textit{The Church and the National Security State}, p. 38.
Chapter 2
Latin American Theology

2.1. Introduction

The past chapter served as a historical and sociological introduction to contemporary Argentina. Through an examination of Argentine political, cultural, and sociological history, the chapter detailed the dualist and exclusionary national myth and reality of Argentine society, noting the successive failures of macro-social historical projects. The question was raised: can micro-social historical projects offer promise in the present time of wilderness? This question is profoundly theological as well as historical, concerning not only the transformation of the social and historical, but also the formation of a utopic vision to guide, direct, and feed this endeavour. For this reason, it is imperative to first examine the historical and theological roots of LAT and its complicit relationship with the successive failed historical projects. This chapter commences with an examination of the development of LAT and the novelty of its most celebrated flag bearer – LALT – and the importance of the concept of the historical project within this theological movement. The chapter then examines the emergence of LAT from a Protestant perspective, detailing three specific types of Latin American Protestant theologies: Protestant Liberation Theology, Progressive Evangelicalism, and neo-Pentecostalism. While clearly these three perspectives do not offer an exhaustive depiction of LAT, they nonetheless are representative of three viable Latin American evangelical theologies of transformation.

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1 This is not to exclude Catholic perspectives. It is impossible to talk of LAT without engaging Catholicism because of the intimate historical relationship between church and state, which is reflected not only in the ecclesial setting but also in the culture at large. As such, Latin American Protestant theology has developed in intimate relationship with Catholicism, whether in an open ecumenical discourse or an outright rejection.

2 My selection of these theologies is not contrived, but because they represent the three active voices that have developed theologies of transformation. For example, in speaking of how conservative evangelicalism responded to the sweeping effects of fundamentalism, José Míguez Bonino has spoken of the ‘two ways’ that have developed in the ‘heart of evangelical piety’: neo-evangelicalism (i.e., progressive evangelicalism) and pentecostalism. See Miguez Bonino, Faces of Latin American Protestantism, pp. 48-51. I have opted for the term progressive evangelicalism over neo-evangelicalism, because this term is more descriptive and has been appropriated by many in this constituency. I have opted to speak of ‘neo-Pentecostalism’ instead of pentecostalism because I am referring to a certain sector of pentecostalism. Many socially conscious, classic Pentecostals fit well under progressive evangelicalism, whereas this is not the case with neo-Pentecostals.
2.2. The Emergence of Latin American Theology

The Christian church has a longstanding debt with Latin America: four and a half centuries of Roman Catholicism and one of Protestantism have not produced even the least amount of creative thought that these peoples have the right to expect from those who claim to have received the mission to announce the Word of God to all men. The scarce amount of literature produced until recent years has done nothing more than translate, reproduce or imitate that of other latitudes, as if there was nothing in the Latin American man and circumstances to evoke, even at the very least, a new vocabulary to communicate the message of Christ.  

So laments José Míguez Bonino in the preface to the Spanish version of Rubem Alves’ *A Theology of Human Hope*. Rubem Alves served as a ‘precursor of themes and methodologies that would then be taken up by Catholic theologians of liberation’ and Míguez Bonino signalled that this theological development represented the payoff of the accrued debt: LAT was emerging. Although the first voices of LAT, such as Bartolomé de las Casas, emerged in concert with the violent colonization and Christianization of the Americas, it was only in the 1960s and 1970s that a cacophony of theological voices attempted to enunciate an autochthonous and liberating Latin American Theology. However, this process was not unified and all fronts demonstrated conflicts and divisions. Although LALT arose to represent *the* Latin American theological voice for north-transatlantic-academic circles, because of its scholarly prowess, other lesser-known voices also existed. Indeed, even speaking of *a* LALT or *a* LAT as a homogenous body of theological

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5 Escobar, *La Fe Evangélica y Las Teologías de La Liberación*, p. 61.

6 Gustavo Gutiérrez and Enrique Dussel have been influential in documenting the long history of LAT. Gutiérrez founded the Instituto Bartolomé de las Casas and wrote numerous books bringing the nascent LAT to light, one of which is *Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993). Dussel is LALT’s historian, as demonstrated with his well-known text, *A History of the Church in Latin America: Colonialism to Liberation* (1492-1979) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981). An excellent concise development of Latin American Christianity that details the development of LAT is González and González, *Christianity in Latin America*, p. 3-4, 42-46, 240-68.
thought is misleading.\textsuperscript{7} Instead of \textit{a} Latin American Theology, there are varying Latin American theologies; instead of \textit{a} LALT, there are varying liberationist perspectives.

In ecumenical circles, the 1950s and 1960s witnessed a move away from ‘ecclesiocentrism’ and a reformulation of the relationship between \textit{church} and \textit{mission}. Ecumenical conferences, such as the World Council of Churches (WCC), and magisterial councils, such as Vatican II, emphasized that mission preceded and defined the church. LALT, in like manner, argued that the task (i.e., mission) of the church was not self-revelation or self-sustainment, but participation in and revelation of God’s liberating plan of salvation. The Catholic liberationist Hugo Assmann aptly summarized this sentiment:

The Church is wholly ‘mission’: that is, related to kingdom, which is already foreshadowed in the one history of world salvation. It does not possess in itself (in sociological terms, in its intra-ecclesiastical structures) the point of reference needed to establish the criteria for redirecting its service to the world.\textsuperscript{8}

José Míguez Bonino, in parallel fashion, has asserted that the ‘material principle’ of the many faces of Latin American Protestantism is mission.\textsuperscript{9} It goes without saying that evangelicals, of varying stripes have, ‘done theology starting from an acute awareness of mission’.\textsuperscript{10} Samuel Escobar summarizes concisely the evangelical

\textsuperscript{7} René Padilla goes so far as to say that liberation theology does not exist, but instead the term refers to loosely varying theologies that share some characteristics, C. R. Padilla, ‘Liberation Theology: An Appraisal’. In \textit{Freedom and Discipleship: Liberation Theology in an Anabaptist Perspective}, ed. D. S. Schipani (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), p. 34.


\textsuperscript{9} Bonino, \textit{Faces of Latin American Protestantism}, pp. 121-31. Here he states that all types of Protestantism (Evangelical, Pentecostal and Liberal), except for the ethnic/immigration churches, demonstrate mission as the binding principle of unity and purpose.

sentiment: ‘A church that is not a “church in mission” is not a church at all’. This is a realization that all Latin American Christianity is missionary, the result of European and North American mission, but also that mission supersedes the church in the present. Mission precedes and exceeds the church, calling it to the realization that being church does not concern simply the mimicking of a set of actions, but participation in a new reality and life, which is proclaimed and instituted in Christ.

This general inquiry of mission gave way to more specific questions: where, what, and how is this mission? The concepts of contextualization and transformation proved constructive for defining the ebb and flow of mission. Together, the ecclesial thematics of mission, contextualization and transformation

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11 Escobar, George Orwell’s Nightmare, cited in Heaney, Contextual Theology for Latin America, p. 213.


13 I use the term ‘transformation’ instead of ‘liberation’ because it better encompasses the breadth and depth of the intense focus on positive change (individual, communitarian, and social) in LAT. The term will be defined in more detail in chapter 5.
provided hermeneutical lenses through which to read the historical reality of the turbulent 1960s and 70s. LAT was a theology concerned with the transformation of the context of Latin America. The appearance of intentional Latin American theologies resulted again from the shift from ecclesiocentrism to mission and the subsequent Freirean-like step of conscientización. Cognizant of the Latin American reality and the scandalous presence of systemic poverty, Latin American theologies attempted to provide a prophetic call to eradicate these injustices through an unabashed contextualized lens: theology from and for Latin America. The parallel call for transformation has served and continues to serve as a leitmotif of mission-minded Latin American theologies. This transformation is an extension of mission, coming before and through the church, and is focused on the context of Latin America, offering both a critique of the local milieu as well as an appreciation. It was necessary to develop a ‘Latin American’ theology for Latin American problems. In this respect, contextualization and transformation are two sides of the same mission-minded Latin American theological coin.

2.3. Latin American Liberation Theology

The social advent of LAT and LALT is rooted in the context of geopolitical and localized contextual and social changes during the second half of the twentieth century. In the 1940s, a theological-ideological process of ‘atomization’ began in

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14 J. Sobrino, *The True Church and the Poor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), pp. 84-124. Sobrino speaks of the need for a church that is *of* and *for* the poor, demonstrating a particularization and contextualization of Latin American ecclesiology.

15 Academia eventually enshrined and condemned LALT with the name of ‘contextual theology’, relegating it as a peculiar ‘elective’ on the fringe of mainstream theological discussion. For a positive outlook on this categorization, see G. Mannion, ‘Liberation Theology’. In *The Routledge Companion to the Christian Church*, ed. G. Mannion, and L. S. Mudge (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), p. 424. On the other hand, Ivan Petrella has sharply critiqued this categorization because it tends to reduce LALT to one particular theology (theology for Latin America) focused on a particular context and committed to defending its particularity (Latin American, Black, Hispanic, Mujerista theologies) through conversations mediated through the historical hermeneutical sciences. In contrast, he argues that LALT offers a universal reading of the world through the social sciences and a subsequent commitment to transform the world. While I appreciate Petrella’s important critiques of the dangers of basing theological discourse on the historical hermeneutical sciences (see I. Petrella, *Beyond Liberation Theology: A Polemic* (London: SCM Press, 2008), pp. 78-112), I believe he far too easily removes himself and theological discourse from its own subjectivity and particularity. Although he is aware of this danger, see Petrella, *Beyond Liberation Theology*, pp. 131-34, nonetheless he consistently argues for a universal theology defined by God’s universal affirmation of human life – the God of Life – without an open acknowledgement of the historical particularity of the revelation of this God of Life (i.e., the Calling of Abraham, Exodus, Incarnation, etc.).
Latin American Protestantism and escalated through the 1960s and 1970s. Rapid urbanization and industrialization helped reveal the realities of foreign dependency as well as the existing Iberian inheritance of feudal structures. Dependency theory, conscientización, and liberation were part of the lexicon of the epoch and a self-critique of colonial and neo-colonial relationships was heard in most sectors of society. The failure of neo-liberal developmentalism and the subsequent rise of labour unions and popular struggles across Latin America in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s provided hope. In Argentina, the movements of nationalism and historical revisionism reached new heights under Juan Perón and filtered into all sectors of society. The new ‘power of the poor’ awakened many out of their complacency, bringing to light the realization of structural poverty, oppression, and violence. This placed the historical churches in a precarious position: they would have to ‘take sides’ either for the status quo or for the new popular movements, for the poor or for the rich, for life or for death. Liberationists consciously constructed a theological perspective in light of the decision to say ‘yes’ to the ‘mission of transformation’ of the new popular movements.

An overriding claim of advocates of LALT was that it was a novel theology. However, many of these declarations proved to be representative of over-exuberance. For example, although the term preferential option for the poor is rooted in the rise of LALT, it is a concept that has a long-standing history in Christian thought. As


18 Raúl Prebisch, an Argentine economist, was instrumental in the development of the Singer-Prebisch Thesis, an Import Substitution Industrialization economic strategy, and the structuralist economics school of thought, all which served as predecessors to dependency theory. This theory harshly critiqued the liberal developmentalism model of the prior decades and advocated a nationalist economic approach in the hope of there being more economic, autonomous Latin American nations. The theory proved influential in the development of LALT, more so than the Marxism that overshadowed it, as well as progressive evangelical thought. See W. D. Mignolo, Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 54-55.

19 Term and concept popularized by Paulo Freire in Pedagogy of the Oppressed.

20 Gutiérrez, The Power of the Poor in History.

noted by Carter Lindberg, ‘one of the theological problems that arose in the sociology of the early church was not poverty but wealth’. 22 The early church and later splinter groups, such as the Waldensians, could make verifiable claims to have proclaimed a *preferential option for the poor* long before LALT. 23 The sixteenth century Anabaptists could claim to be predecessors to other LALT particularities, such as the use of a hermeneutic of suspicion 24 and reading history from the ‘periphery’, long before Juan Luis Segundo explained the liberationist hermeneutical process 25 and Gustavo Gutiérrez laid claim to Bonhoeffer’s prison scripted exhortations to read history from the ‘underside’. 26 Nonetheless, ‘the real novelty of liberation theology consists in the development of a rigorous discourse on the theological element present in socio-economic liberations’. 27 The novelty of LALT is the claim that socio-economic liberation is salvific.

The liberationist entreaty for the incorporation of socio-economic liberation into soteriology came as a direct result of a definitive anthropological turn in a theology that was coming to terms with modern post-Christendom in Latin America and the realities of poverty, social-class division, and economic dependency. Reading reality through the social sciences, liberation theologians produced a


23 Gustavo Gutiérrez demonstrates this in his work to uncover the seeds of the Latin American preferential option for the poor in the words and deeds of figures such as Bartolomé de las Casas. See G. Gutiérrez, *Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993).

24 L. V. Rutschman, ‘Anabaptism and Liberation Theology’, *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 55 (July 1981): 255-70. While Rutschman argues that the Anabaptist hermeneutical circle did not have the same order as that of LALT, nonetheless the process seemingly existed.


sociologically informed reading of the Latin American context that called for liberating praxis.28

Given his seminal text, *A Theology of Liberation*, and his instrumental role in the clarification and codification of early liberationist concepts and terminology, the work of Gustavo Gutiérrez serves as an apt point of departure for speaking of the novelty of LALT.29 In *A Theology of Liberation*, Gutiérrez notes that, ‘one of the great deficiencies of contemporary theology is the absence of a profound and lucid reflection on the theme of salvation’.30 He argues for a new soteriology by asking the question, ‘what relation is there between salvation and the historical process of the liberation of man?’31 His response is unequivocal: salvation is ‘the communion of men with God and the communion of men among themselves’32; it is ‘the inner force and the fullness of [the] movement of man’s self-generation which was initiated by the work of creation’.33 As such, to work for liberation in the world through the building of community and a just society is to participate in God’s work of creation and ‘it is also to save’.34 Conversely, it means that salvation concerns the *totality* of humanity – spiritual, physical, psychological, historical, social, and cultural – and all humanity. For Gutiérrez, salvation is not particular to the church, but instead it is a universal call to all humanity to be saved and to work for communion with God and

28 Early LALT, or what I call the first line of LALT in Chapter 3, took the anthropological turn via the social sciences – typically dependency theory and/or Marxist social sciences. The expressed goal was to both read and produce a transformative orthopraxis, much like the young Marx’s exhortation in his critique of Feuerbach that the task of philosophy was not to interpret reality but to change it.

29 Gustavo Gutiérrez is often called the ‘father’ of liberation theology, which is a misnomer. For example, Richard Shaull, a Presbyterian, wrote his *Encounter with Revolution* in 1955 and one of his students, Rubem Alves, published his *A Theology of Human Hope* in 1969. Likewise, LALT did not begin at the Medellin CELAM but before through the ecumenical ISAL (Church and Society in Latin America) think tank that begin after the First Latin American Consultation on Church and Society held in Lima, Peru in 1961 under the sponsorship of the WCC. While this think tank was predominately Protestant, it would be Catholics, helped by recent declarations of Vatican II, that would come to dominate the liberationist voice. Gutiérrez was one of the early and dominant voices, painstakingly defining and codifying central concepts in his seminal work – poverty, freedom, liberation, orthopraxis, history, historical project, etc. – that put the name liberation theology on the map of academic theology.

31 Ibid., p. 45.
32 Ibid., p. 151; he also paraphrases this statement on p. 159.
33 Ibid., p. 159.
34 Ibid.
one another. There is only one history – a ‘Christo-finalized history’ – and not a dichotomized history of the ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’, and thus, ‘the historical destiny of humanity must be placed definitively in the salvific horizon’. Gutiérrez brings the process and struggle for liberation into salvation history, effectively baptizing as salvific all work for liberation and a just society, i.e., salvation history is history. Nevertheless, while Gutiérrez argues that salvation is universal, he nevertheless disavowingly particularizes and dichotomizes the plan of salvation by hinging the forward movement of history on the poor, a Marxist-proletarian-like class that takes history to its just end.

Gutiérrez proceeds to a second question, that of a new ecclesiology. While Gutiérrez does not develop an explicit ecclesiology in A Theology of Liberation, or in any of his works, he nevertheless argues for a ‘new ecclesial consciousness and redefinition of the task of the Church in the world’. Likewise, he speaks of ‘the life, preaching, and historical commitment of the Church’ as a ‘privileged locus theologicus’. However, instead of an ecclesiocentric view, he seeks to redefine the mission of the church as participation in salvation for all humanity and the church as a sacrament to the world. He revises a more traditional understanding of sacrament as that which dispenses grace, with the original significance of sacrament as the revelation of mystery. Just as Christ sacramentally revealed the mystery of God’s salvific plan (Col. 1:26), so the church as sacrament is ‘the efficacious revelation of the call to communion with God and to the unity of all mankind’. In essence this means that the Church, should ‘prophetically denounce’ that which goes against God’s plan of salvation and ‘conscientizacion-ly evangelize’ through announcing God’s liberating plan of salvation. In the Latin American context, this means ‘denouncing’ oppression and ‘announcing’ to the oppressed the need to ‘take hold of

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36 Ibid., p. 301.
37 J. B. Nickoloff, ‘Church of the Poor: The Ecclesiology of Gustavo Gutiérrez’, Theological Studies 54 (1993): 512-35. Nickoloff attempts to elucidate Gutiérrez’s ecclesiology, which although it appears in the background of all his writings, is never comprehensively explained.
38 Gutiérrez, A Theology of Liberation, p. 225.
39 Ibid., p. 11.
40 Ibid., p. 259.
the reins of history’ and be the ‘masters of their own destiny’.\textsuperscript{41} Effectively, this argument translated in both a redefinition of salvation and the mission of theology and the church so that they are indelibly tied to liberation.

Liberation, according to Gutiérrez, is a complex process with three interconnected and interdependent levels of meaning: the political, historical, and social.\textsuperscript{42} This liberation becomes ‘historically concrete in three distinct but profoundly interrelated ways: the creation of a just and humane socioeconomic and political order, the emancipation of human consciousness from self-concern to solidarity with others, and our redemption from sin for a communion of love’.\textsuperscript{43} Nickoloff continues:

In Gutierrez's view, God's saving activity (third level) alone unifies the threefold liberation process, and thus grounds authentically Christian political praxis (first level). But it is the ‘humblest’ (second) level – utopia – which correctly and fruitfully mediates the relationship of political praxis and redemption from sin.\textsuperscript{44}

Liberation is an interconnected, threefold process that is ‘unified’ in God’s saving activity in Christ; it is salvific and ‘finds its deepest sense and its full realization in the saving work of Christ’.\textsuperscript{45} However, liberation is also ‘mediated’ through utopia. \textit{Utopia}, according to Gutiérrez, is good and ‘leads to an authentic and scientific knowledge of reality and to a praxis which transforms what exists’.\textsuperscript{46} Unlike \textit{ideology},\textsuperscript{47} which is simply irrational and empirical, utopia\textsuperscript{48}, the second level, is ‘the historical plan’, the ‘proper arena for cultural revolution … [and] the permanent creation of a new man in a different society characterized by solidarity’,

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., pp. 114-15. The words ‘take hold of the reins of history’ are a favourite catchphrase that Gutiérrez uses in this text.

\textsuperscript{42} Gutiérrez is not consistent in how he names the three levels: political, historical, social (p. 36); political, historical, and social (p. 176); economic, social, political (pp. 235-36). This definition of liberation is Gutiérrez’s most significant and enduring contribution to LALT.

\textsuperscript{43} J. B. Nickoloff, ‘Church of the Poor’, p. 514.

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., p. 515.

\textsuperscript{45} Gutiérrez, \textit{Theology of Liberation}, p. 37.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., p. 235.

\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Ideology} is a tricky term among liberationists. Some use it negatively (Gustavo Gutiérrez and early Hugo Assmann) and others use it both negatively and positively (Juan L. Segundo).

\textsuperscript{48} Gutiérrez, \textit{Theology of Liberation}, p. 235.
that is ‘the place of encounter of political liberation and the communion of all men with God’. Utopia is the liberating historical project that mediates that relationship between liberation from sin and political liberation and insures that they are united in praxis. Or as Gutiérrez says:

The mediation of the historical project of the creation of a new man assures that liberation from sin and communion with God in solidarity with all men – manifested in political liberation and enriched by its contributions – does not fall into idealism and evasion.

While Gutiérrez is noted for his instrumental role in the codification of LALT, it is José Míguez Bonino that succinctly defined the concept of historical project:

‘Historical Project’ is an expression frequently used in our discussions as a midway term between a utopia, a vision which makes no attempt to connect itself historically to the present, and a program, a technically developed model for the organization of society. A historical project is defined enough to force options in terms of the basic structures of society. It points in a given direction. But frequently its contents are expressed in symbolic and elusive forms rather than in terms of precise technical language. ... It is in this general sense that we speak of a Latin American socialist project of liberation.

The astute reader will note that there is a terminological tension between Gutiérrez and Míguez Bonino. Gutiérrez painstakingly attempts to recuperate the term utopia and define it over and against ideology – the first leading to ‘authentic and scientific knowledge of reality and to a praxis’ and the second which ‘does not rise above the empirical, irrational level’. In contrast, Míguez Bonino defines

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49 Ibid., p. 237.
50 Ibid., p. 238. The italicized words indicate a change in translation of the term proyecto histórico from historical task to historical project. Ivan Petrella has brought this to light in The Future of Liberation Theology, p. 23, n. 94.
52 Gutiérrez, A Theology of Liberation, pp. 234-35.
utopia as ‘a vision that makes no attempt to connect itself to history’. Yet, the disparity is not as considerable as it may appear. Míguez Bonino sought to make a clearer distinction between utopia and an actual historical project, whereas Gutiérrez is committed to the recuperation of the term utopia and does not make such a definitive distinction. Reflecting on Gutiérrez, Míguez Bonino argues that, ‘utopia stimulates science by putting forward a project which goes beyond the present horizon and demands the creation of new instruments and new hypotheses’, thereby bringing Gutiérrez in line with his own argument. Likewise, Gutiérrez suggests that, ‘The historical project … is the proper arena for the cultural revolution. That is to say, it is the arena of the permanent creation of a new man in a different society characterized by solidarity’. The concept of a historical project enables the move from amorphous ideas and visions of community, society, and utopic language, to actual structural and sociological change. The historical project serves as a tool to focus praxis on a viable liberation project, to hone theological terms by providing definitions for amorphous terms (i.e., liberation) through sociologically mediated historical reality, and to protect against the idolatrous threat of blinding ideologies. It aids the theological task in averting the treacherous waters of bipolarity – individualism and oppressive collectivism – and debilitating futuristic, premillennialist, and realized eschatology. It also serves to place a locus theologicus in human historical reality that unites salvation and eschatology with concrete human effort for justice and liberation. It was this willingness to speak in specific terms of the utopic work for the Kingdom of God that distinguished LALT from European political theology, as well as from liberalism and developmentalism.

53 Miguez Bonino, Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation, p. 38.

54 Ibid., p. 71.

55 Gutiérrez, A Theology of Liberation, p. 237. The italics have been used to note a change in translation. Ivan Petrella has rightly suggested translating Gutiérrez’s proyecto histórico as ‘historical project’ and not as ‘historical task’, as has been the case in the English translations of the text. Petrella, The Future of Liberation Theology, p. 16.

56 Ivan Petrella has spoken of historical projects as serving four functions: they 1) were the way LALT concretely sought liberation; 2) gave meaning to theological terms (e.g., liberation); 3) differentiated between groups that appeared the same but ultimately had different ideologies and practice; 4) combated idolatry. The Future of Liberation Theology, p. 10.

Both Gutiérrez and Míguez Bonino made a direct connection between utopia and the historical project and socialism. At the time that they wrote these words there was an avid hope in certain circles that Latin America would take a socialist turn, which, as we learned in Chapter 1, was vehemently opposed and repressed by national security regimes. Beyond the question of historical anachronism, the correlation of the historical project with a national socialist project poses a challenge for ecclesiology. Ultimately, this socialist, historical project is located beyond the confines of the ecclesial setting and in a universal, macro-social praxis. Although this project surmises the possibility of unifying faith and politics and ‘secular’ political liberation and ‘sacred’ liberation from sin, it nevertheless is an extra-ecclesial matrix where structures of society at large are transformed. The micro-social and the pressing issues of lo cotidiano do not necessarily find a ready place in the traditional Marxist reading of the historical project. Moreover, it is important to recall that this macro-social and universal project is ultimately particularized by Gutiérrez, who claimed it is the poor who have the ‘power’ to take hold of history to ‘announce’ and ‘denounce’ and bring forth real liberation. However, where is the place of the micro-social in this project? Or, as I shall examine in Chapter 3, where is the place of community and the local church in this project? In like manner, where is the engagement with actual ecclesial culture, belief, and practice? Although Gutiérrez avers that the church participates in the historical project as it ‘denounces’ opposition to political liberation and ‘announces’ that liberation from sin is holistic and integral, like most of LALT, he fails to engage the realm of the ecclesial as it is experienced in lo cotidiano. This is problematic because, as noted in Chapter 1, the successive historical projects of Argentina have failed to bring transformation and have ultimately contributed to the formation of an exclusionary society.

While the above-mentioned questions will be addressed later, it is necessary at this point to focus on the question of the Latin American Protestant theology and

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58 Míguez Bonino, Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation, pp. 38-40.
59 Spanish for ‘the daily’ or ‘the everyday’.
60 In The Brazilian Popular Church and the Crisis of Modernity, Vásquez has developed a cogent critique of the Brazilian Popular Church and its failure to respond to the needs of the everyday in the modern context.
its responses. What follows is a brief introduction to three prominent theological perspectives that make claims to be both Latin American and transformative.

2.4. Protestant Liberation Theology: Liberal Project

In 1916 North American and European missionaries in Latin America from the historic denominations (Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Disciples of Christ, Anglicans, and the American Baptists) met in Panama in a collective spirit of Panamerican positivism.\(^\text{61}\) Statements such as the following were indicative of this spirit:

I firmly believe that to extend the Reformation to the Latin American world in an intelligent and vigorous way is to provoke the struggles of conscience in which the strong characters so necessary for the aggrandizement and the salvation of the republics are forged and tempered; it is to take [to the Latin American people] the vivifying breath of the freedom thus conquered by the people of the North.\(^\text{62}\)

The Panama conference was a historic moment for Latin American Protestantism, despite the continent having been denigrated at the Edinburgh Conference of 1910.\(^\text{63}\) Missionary Protestantism had arrived in Latin America at an opportune moment, some half a century following independence (1810-1825)\(^\text{64}\) and the victory of Latin American liberalism. While Protestants did not bring liberalism to Latin America (i.e., a North American neo-imperialist presence\(^\text{65}\)), they were instrumental in the

\(^{61}\) At an earlier meeting in New York in 1913, the Foreign Missions Conference of North America convened a conference on the Christian Work in Latin America: Panama 1916. This theme would remain for the subsequent regional conference in Lima, Peru; Santiago, Chile; Buenos Aires, Argentina; Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Barranquilla, Colombia; Havana, Cuba; and San Juan, Puerto Rico. See Regional Conferences in Latin America (New York: Missionary Education Movement, 1917).


\(^{64}\) All the Spanish-speaking colonies, except Cuba and Puerto Rico, gained independence during this period.

\(^{65}\) Jean Bastian has spoken of this as the conspiracy theory argument; see ‘The Metamorphosis’, p. 34; and Historia del Protestantismo en América Latina (Mexico City: Casa Unida de Publicaciones S.A., 1990), p. 187. David Stoll has also examined this in Fishers of Men or Founders of Empire? The Wycliffe Bible Translators in Latin America (London: Zed, 1982); and ‘¿Con Qué Derecho Adoctrinan a Nuestros Indígenas? La Polémica en Torno al Instituto Linguístico de Verano’, América Indígena 44 (1984): 9-24. One poignant example of a Catholic Marxist who
development of a liberal, democratic, modern option over and against traditionalism, conservatism, and hegemonic Catholic Christendom. The Panama conference was a conundrum of sorts because it expressed a liberal, Pan-American Protestant vision for Latin America and its people, even though it was dominated by North American missionaries and held in a country representative of a North American neo-colonial Panamericanism. The Panama conference ultimately represented the possibility of collectively working towards a liberal Latin American project hand-in-hand with the missionary effort for evangelism. One conference statement suggests that the ‘primary duty of the evangelical movement in Latin America today is to preach a constructive message and to render a constructive service’.

It was from within liberal, historic Protestantism that Protestant Liberation Theology arose. Protestant liberationists, such as José Míguez Bonino (Methodist) and Rubem Alves (Presbyterian), called for a revitalization of the liberal project. In his article, ‘Protestantism in Latin America’, Rubem Alves argues that the most urgent need in Latin America is ‘to build a society of human brotherhood … [and] not simply … solving our economic contradictions’. It is Protestantism, Alves posits, that has the utopian potential to form this society of human solidarity. This is critiques Protestantism is liberationist Hugo Assmann in La Iglesia Electrónica y Su Impacto en América Latina (San José, Costa Rica: Editorial DEI, 1987).

While Bastian does not posit that Protestantism is synonymous with liberalism, he does say that the prior existing ‘liberal radical minorities’ in society were ‘rebaptized’ under the flag of Protestant denominations ‘following negotiations between missionaries and dissident religious liberals’. Moreover, for Bastian, only with the legal and military enforcement of liberal principles was it possible to speak of Latin American Protestantism. Bastian, ‘The Metamorphosis’, pp. 37, 45. This is the basic thesis that Bastain has consistently developed, see Los Disidentes, Sociedades Protestantes y Revolución en México, 1872-1911 (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica and El Colegio de México, 1989); and Protestantes, Liberales y Francmasones: Sociedades de Ideas y Modernidad en América Latina, Siglo XIX (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica and the Comisión de Estudios de la Historia de la Iglesia en América Latina (CEHILA), 1990).

The choice of Panama as a site for the conference was emblematic, given that it had only seceded from Colombia some thirteen years before (1903) with the help of the US, which was in the process of building the Panama Canal. For this reason it is important to recall the different types of Panamericanism that existed at the time. There was a Panamericanism begun by Simon Bolivar, as well as Panamericanism developed in the United States under the guise of the Monroe Doctrine. Míguez Bonino speaks of these in Faces of Latin American Protestantism, p. 10. See also Costas, Christ Outside the Gate, pp. 63-64.

because Latin American Protestantism is a religion of disruption that calls into question the Latin American structures of the ‘Church-Civilization synthesis’ formed under the colonialism of Counter Reformation, Tridentine Catholicism.

Accordingly, Latin American Catholics feared and persecuted Protestantism not because it was a religious alternative, but because it bore in its veins the utopian potential of the French and American Revolution and the religious conceptions of the liberal ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity. Whether the emphasis is on human liberty or the priesthood of all believers, Protestantism has utopian potential because its protesting core calls into question the structures that inhibit individual and collective communion with God. However, this utopic potential was sapped by the insipid individualism and dualism in fundamentalist and revivalist Protestantism. For Alves, it is conversionist, Right-Doctrine Protestantism that undercuts the potential of Liberal Protestantism. Míguez Bonino argues that liberal Protestant utopianism failed because it did not integrate its project with its theological self-understanding. While liberal Protestantism envisioned the potential of Protestantism to transform Latin American social structures, it failed to integrate this vision with theology and ecclesial practice. He writes, ‘If the liberal vision led them to design a socially committed missionary model, missionary soteriology obliged them at once to downplay it’. Moreover, it failed to spread this vision into local churches. Also, liberal Protestantism did not sufficiently address its inconsistencies concerning the different visions of liberalism and Panamericanism, failing to reflexively realize its own indebtedness to North American and British interventionism as well as the

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71 Alves posits that Protestantism represents a religious conception of liberal ideals, but it would be more accurate to speak of these liberal ideals as secularized religious concepts rooted in Protestantism, see Ibid.
72 Alves follows Karl Mannheim in his distinction between utopia, an intellectual structure which functions to transcend reality and breaks ties with the existing order, and ideology, an intellectual structure that transcends reality but functions to inhibit change and preserve the existing order. See Alves, ‘Protestantism in Latin America’, p. 4, n. 4. He also borrows from Paul Tillich and his Protestant Principle in his, ‘Protestantism in Latin America’, pp. 7, 11. See also, R. A. Alves, Protestantism and Repression: A Brazilian Case Study (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), chapter 1–3. Finally, see Miguez Bonino, Faces of Latin American Protestantism, pp. 17, 130.
73 Alves offers a contextual study and critique of Right-Doctrine Protestantism in Alves, Protestantism and Repression.
oligarchical roots of Latin American liberal democracies. Nevertheless, Miguez Bonino, like Alves, sees merit in the heritage of utopian Protestantism and calls for a contemporary reinterpretation and revitalization. Now tempered by the failures of the 1960s and 1970s and the realization of the isolated liberal presence in the contemporary ecclesial setting, Miguez Bonino no longer argues for ‘taking sides’ but instead for a ‘strategy of patience’. While liberal Protestantism has had its contradictions, both Alves and Miguez Bonino call for a revitalization of the utopian Protestant project, but one forged from the margins and in protest of the oppressive present.

2.5. Progressive Evangelicalism: Misión Integral

Progressive Evangelicalism, like LALT, is rooted in the context of geopolitical and localized social struggles during the second half of the twentieth century. Ideology and theological tension came to a head with the heightened hopes and fears generated by the Marxist option with the onset of the Cold War and the success of the Cuban Revolution. As Protestants began to ‘take sides’ for or against radical change, splits occurred along theological and ideological grounds. The rift had in fact been long in the making, occurring as an extension of the ‘Great Reversal’, the division between evangelism and the social gospel.

As mentioned above, the social transformative aspirations of many liberal-minded Protestants were not clearly connected to their soteriology, eschatology, and ecclesiology, meaning that the dominant mind-set of the churches remained conservative. The waves of evangelical missions that arrived after the First World

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75 Ibid., pp. 17-25.
76 Ibid., p. 23.
78 D. O. Moberg, The Great Reversal: Evangelism Versus Social Concern, 1st ed., Evangelical Perspectives (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1972), pp. 30-34. Although Moberg did not coin the term, the credit for this goes to Timothy L. Smith; however, Moberg did popularize it through this text.
79 Miguez Bonino, Faces of Latin American Protestantism, pp. 13-14, 17.
War and, in particular, the Second World War further complicated this strained disconnect by providing an influx of fundamentalist and premillennialist theology that categorically rejected the social gospel and openly espoused anti-communism and anti-Catholicism. Whereas liberal-minded Protestants struggled to connect their social aspirations and theology, fundamentalists offered a common-sense language and theological hermeneutics that engaged the ecclesial setting and disdained active social engagement. This ‘missionary invasion’ not only brought ecclesial competition, it also coloured the eschatology and soteriology of Latin American evangelicalism, to the point that many lost what Jürgen Moltmann has called the ‘other side of reconciliation’. The mission of the church no longer concerned a project of social transformation through education, but instead an ecclesiocentric and conversionist evangelization.

The rising tension became open division between the first *Conferencia Evangélica Latinoamericana* (CELA I) in Buenos Aires in 1949 and CELA II in Lima in 1961, resulting in the emergence of two types of Latin American Protestantism: ecumenical and conservative evangelicals. In the wake of CELA I, a sector of ecumenical evangelicals began to form organizations that emphasized the Christian social witness: *Movimiento Estudiantil Cristiano* (MEC), *Iglesia y Sociedad en América Latina* (ISAL), *Misión Urbana e Industrial* (MISUR), and *Consejo Ecuménico Latinoamericano de Educación Cristiana* (CELADEC). ISAL, in particular, further effected division among Protestants while associated evangélicos ecuménicos engaged with Catholics and radicalized, eventually

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82 Escobar, *La Fe Evangélica y Las Teologas de La Liberacion*, p. 56.
garnering the label of liberationists. In response, conservative evangelicals began to move away from CELA and look for ways to form new organizations. In 1969, the year after the renowned Roman Catholic Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM) in Medellín, Colombia, two lesser-known Protestant conferences convened in the Colombian capital Bogotá: CELA III, now almost explicitly ecumenical, and CLADE (the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association sponsored the Latin American Conference of Evangelism). Out of these grew permanent organizations that embodied the divide: ecuménicos – Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias (CLAI) and conservatives – Confraternidad Evangélica Latinoamericana (CONELA). In the former, it was clear that liberationists/liberals did not marshal significant support even among ecumenical/historic evangelicals. In the latter, it was clear that not all conservatives were fundamentalists and categorically rejected social engagement. A case in point was the powder keg decision by the CLADE I conference organizers to distribute a gratis copy of Peter Wagner’s, ‘Teología Latinoamericana: ¿Izquierdista o Evangélica’. Wagner, a perennial controversial figure in global evangelicalism, was at the time a missionary in Bolivia and would go on to be a Fuller Theological Seminary professor, a Church Growth Movement (GCM) champion, and an eventual leader in the controversial New Apostolic Reformation. This book personified for the progressive sector of conservatives the heavy-handed tactics of the missionary movement where North Americans threaten the autonomy of the national churches by telling the natives what to say and do: to demonize the radical left through claims that it ‘was betraying the gospel to

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83 Escobar, ‘La Fundación’, p. 12. The ISAL organization was based in Montevideo and published the journal Cristianismo y Sociedad.

84 Míguez Bonino admits that ‘most evangelical churches did not participate in their [liberationist] movements, nor were they accepted or supported by a sizable part of church memberships (nor at times of the leadership) in the very churches from which they came’. Faces of Latin American Protestantism, p. 44.


Marxism’. Wagner wanted to protect the ontology of the church from fusing with ‘any human program of social transformation’, but in the end the book simply contributed to another split in Latin American evangelicalism.

In response, a new evangelical position emerged that was committed to being evangelical, biblical, socially responsible, and contextual (i.e., Latin American). This was a moment of conscientización in line with the times, a realization of the need for the church to respond to the reality of poverty and structural oppression through the lens of a Latin American ‘evangelical’ theological perspective. The result of this stance was the founding of the Latin American Theological Fraternity (FTL) in 1970 and the development of the progressive evangelical vision – Misión Integral – that distanced itself from ISAL and the burgeoning liberation theology movement, as well as fundamentalists and conservatives who patently rejected social engagement.

The FTL, which some have called a radical evangelical or neo-evangelical movement, emerged as a third way between liberationists and fundamentalists. The Colombian Baptist Harold Segura depicted its advent in these terms:

Misión Integral…is a mature youth in the fullness of her fourth decade. From evangelical fathers and a cradle of theological conservatism, it was born with the duty of being a mediator between two sisters of the same family that until then had remained distant: evangelization and social responsibility. As in the narrative of the…writer Robert Louis Stevenson, they were two spinster sisters who decided never to talk to one another and, although living in the same house, had a dividing chalk line separating their two domains.

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88 Cited in Segundo, *Liberation of Theology*, pp. 134-38. Segundo offers a sharp critique because of Wagner’s assertion that the church can transcend ideology.

89 Spanish for ‘Integral Mission’. René Padilla claims that he coined the phrase, which has become a key theme for the FTL and progressive evangelicalism. C. R. Padilla, interview by author, El Tigre, Argentina (20 December 2008).

90 Tizon, *Transformation After Lausanne*, pp. 59-64.


Progressive Evangelicalism has attempted to set the clock back before the ‘Great Divorce’ and to move it forward with a vision of contextualization, social transformation, and Integral Mission. Unlike liberal Protestantism, it offers a progressive vision of social engagement intimately connected to theology and biblical hermeneutics that is accessible to the ecclesial setting. Baptists have figured prominently in the FTL: C. René Padilla, Samuel Escobar, Orlando Costas, Pedro Savage, Pablo Deiros, Oscar Pereira, and Roland Gutiérrez. Míguez Bonino has aptly noted that the FTL ‘recovered an evangelical tradition, linked especially to the Anabaptist movement…’.  

They have proven to be influential in global evangelicalism. Padilla and Escobar, along with eight other FTL members, challenged the Evangelical Lausanne Movement to include ‘social responsibility’ and ‘contextualization’ in the Lausanne Covenant (1974). The presence of Fundación Kairós, co-founded and led for many years by C. René Padilla, and its printing division, Ediciones Kairós, have proven to be influential among progressive evangelicals. In light of the crushing defeat for liberationists at the hands of national security regimes and neo-liberal programs and their failure to garner active support among evangelicals of all stripes, this movement continues to represent a significant progressive voice for and among evangelicalism.

2.6. Pentecostalism and Neo-Pentecostalism: Transformative Possibilities

Pentecostalism has long flourished on one side of the mountains [Chile] and languished on the other [Argentina], at least until very recently. Although Pentecostalism began a century ago in Argentina (1909), the context proved less receptive than Chile and Brazil. In the waning days of Juan Perón’s popular support...
during his second presidential term, Perón, who had risen to power on the back of organized labour and conservative Catholic integralist sectors, faced the challenge of an escalating struggle with the Catholic Church and began to reach out to religious groups he had earlier ignored and/or suppressed. For example, he met with and granted permission to the North American Pentecostal Tommy Hicks to preach in large venues in 1954.\textsuperscript{99} Some scholars have argued that it was the deflation of the socio-religious imagery of Perón as a charismatic messiah of the poor and the cult of Eva Perón\textsuperscript{100} that ‘pre-empted’ Pentecostalism in Argentina.\textsuperscript{101} Whether or not this is the case, Hicks aided in altering Pentecostal identity and infusing confidence into a religious sector that had long perceived itself as marginalized and peripheral.\textsuperscript{102}

Nevertheless, the mass gatherings of Hicks in 1954 and Billy Graham in 1962 did not produce large-scale numerical growth among evangelicals. Pentecostalism, for its part, persisted on the fringes of society and of evangelicalism in Argentina. Until 1967, the largest denominations continued to be representative of missionary churches from the second wave of evangelicalism:\textsuperscript{103} Lutheran Missouri Synod, Seventh-Day Adventists, Baptists, and Plymouth Brethren.\textsuperscript{104} This changed with the rise of neo-Pentecostalism in the 1980s.

A clear point of transition was the rise of businessman-turned-evangelist Carlos

\textsuperscript{99} N. Saracco, ‘Peronismo y Pentecostalismo: Sustitución del Liderazgo Carismático Durante La Caída de Perón (1954)’, Religión y Sociedad en Sudamérica 1 (1992): pp. 43-55; Caimari, Perón y La Iglesia Católica, pp. 254-60. Hicks apparently visited Perón, even praying for his healing once; there are also claims that the government brought some sick individuals to Hicks in order for them to be healed.

\textsuperscript{100} Caimari, Perón y La Iglesia Católica, pp. 260-65; Plotkin, Mañana Es San Perón.


\textsuperscript{103} As opposed to the earlier ‘ethnic churches’, ‘resident’ alien (Daniel P. Monti and Jean Meyer), ‘immigration’ (Pablo Deiros, Damborena, and Hans-Jurgen Prein), or ‘transplanted’ (Christian Lalive d’Epinay) churches. See Miguez Bonino, Faces of Latin American Protestantism, p. 80; Enns, Man, Milieu, and Mission, p. 178.

\textsuperscript{104} Enns, Man, Milieu, and Mission, p. 178.
Annacondia, who founded his *Mensaje de Salvación* organization at an auspicious moment. On the same day as the sinking of the warship *General Belgrano*, in the waning hours of the Malvinas-Falkland Islands War, Carlos Annacondia began his first mass evangelism and healing crusade. He preached ‘power evangelism’ and divine healing and utilized spiritual warfare and *liberación*. He offered a message of freedom, free choice, and empowering deliverance – ‘Jesús te ama, salva y sana’ – a message tailored for a voiceless society that was keenly aware of the palpability of evil. Along with Annacondia, Omar Cabrera (Fundación Visón de Futuro), Héctor Aníbal Giménez (Ondas de Amor y Paz), and others used entrepreneurial guile and charismatic style to navigate the turbulent, deregulating financial and culture markets of Latin America’s lost decade (1980s). Then in the 1990s, the decade of Menem’s neoliberal project, neo-Pentecostalism further

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105 Spanish for ‘Message of Salvation’.

106 On 2 May 1982, a British Submarine torpedoed and sank the Argentine war ship. The official death toll was 323, over half the Argentines killed in the entire war, although early reports were that more than 700 Argentine servicemen had been killed. Argentines call them the Malvinas Islands and the British call them the Falkland Islands.


109 Spiritual deliverance that is akin to what has traditionally been called exorcism.


infiltrated Argentine evangelicalism with the help of the *unción*\textsuperscript{112} and the continued creative incorporation of strategies of marketing, consumption, and production.\textsuperscript{113} Claudio Freidzon and others used their theatrical preaching and a host of tactical and strategic practices – the anointing, spiritual warfare, inner healing, *liberación*, prosperity gospel, and the Apostolic Vision\textsuperscript{114} – in the diffusion of pente evangelical culture and practice, which in turn has altered the theology and practice of various denominations, Argentine Baptists being a quintessential example.

The impact of neo-Pentecostal growth in Argentina is hard to ignore. While only 4% of the population was evangelical in 1987,\textsuperscript{115} over 9% of the population is evangelical today.\textsuperscript{116} Some 65% of the registrations for new religious groups with the National Registry of Religions of Argentina occurred between 1981 and 1993, and 68% of these corresponded to evangelical churches.\textsuperscript{117} This growth principally corresponds to Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostals, for between 1985 and 1992 the amount of Pentecostal churches in Buenos Aires increased from 62 to 120.\textsuperscript{118}

This growth transpired in parallel fashion to the pentecostalization of evangelicalism. In Argentina, it was ultimately neo-Pentecostals, and not traditional Pentecostals, that helped fashion a pente evangelical culture and practice that facilitated this evangelical shift. This novice culture and practice is rooted in a neo-Pentecostal *Weltanschauung* that views the world through the pseudo-biblical narrative of confrontation between the powers of good and evil. This culture and

\textsuperscript{112} Spanish for ‘anointing’. For a more in depth look at the anointing, see Chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{113} Algranti, *Política y Religión*.

\textsuperscript{114} There are various names for this movement. In the context of the churches that are the focus of the studies in chapters 4-6, the movement was called the Apostolic Vision.

\textsuperscript{115} Anderson, *Historia de Los Bautistas*, p. 165.

\textsuperscript{116} E. D. Dussel, ‘¿En Qué Creen Los Argentinos?’, *Clarín Sociedad* (28 December 2008). This article cites the most recent Argentine National Census. Although only about 10% of the population is *evangélico*, it is important to note that they make up 61.1% of those Argentines that regularly attend a religious service and nearly half of those Argentines that claim to practice religious faith in an ecclesial institution. See also S. Rubin, ‘Cada Vez Hay Menos Católicos y La Gran Mayoría No Va a Misa’, *Clarín* (27 August 2008). Online: http://www.clarin.com/diario/2008/08/27/um/m-01747183.htm (accessed 9 January 2013).


practice represent both an inclusion of popular religion, an incorporation of a pseudo-biblical apocalyptic worldview, and an intensified protraction of a confrontation with the pantheon of popular Catholic religious expression. Carlos Annacondia introduced to Argentina a type of evangelism and conversion that was no longer concerned simply with individual decisions of faith, but also a cataclysmic and apocalyptic power confrontation with Satan and the demonic forces. Accordingly, neo-Pentecostalism provides a theological and biblicist framework that engages both the world in hope of transformation and ecclesial practice. However, the growth and expansion of neo-Pentecostalism is also complicit with the expansion of neoliberalism, deregulation, and privatization in Argentina during the 1980s and 1990s.

2.7. Conclusion

This chapter briefly discusses the development of LAT. It directs careful attention to LALT and its novelty as a theology that incorporates socio-economic transformation into salvation. Special attention is dedicated to the historical project and how it served as a crucial tool for LALT, while at time same time raising

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119 Here I refer to a biblicism that works upon certain proof texts and confuses individual interpretation of the Scriptures with the Scriptures themselves. Such biblicism ignores the social and historical context of the author and reader and the presence of tradition. Indeed, to assert that there is no tradition except the self-evident Scriptures is to ignore one’s own tradition and ideology that is instrumental in the interpretation of Scripture.

questions about LALT’s failure to engage the micro-social and *lo cotidiando*. The chapter then engages three Latin American Protestant theologies of transformation: liberationist, progressive evangelical, and neo-Pentecostal. Their historical development and complicit relationships in various historical projects are detailed. Chapter 3 will return to the discussion of the liberationist historical project and ask where the role of community is in this project and then examine the place of the local ecclesial community in each of the three Protestant perspectives.
Chapter 3

The Locality of Transformation: Community and Latin American Theology

3.1. Introduction

In Chapter 1 we examined the emergence of LAT against the backdrop of failed projects and noted its central development of the historical project, a concept committed to macro-social transformation. In critiquing these successive failed macro-social projects, I have argued that, in the present context, the hope of liberating transformation cannot be divorced from the micro-social. I have outlined several micro-social alternatives in the exilic present, such as community assemblies, piquetero movement, barter system, and churches and ecclesial organizations. In Chapter 2 we examined the emergence of LAT and three Protestant theologies of transformation: LALT, Progressive Evangelicalism, and neo-Pentecostalism. In this chapter we will continue the theological conversation through exploring the question, where is the locality of liberating transformation? In this chapter I will argue that the ecclesial community is this locality because it is a nexus and locus theologicus of transformation. The chapter will establish this through demonstrating that the concept and experience of the ecclesial community is foundational for the development and practice of transformation for these three theologies. However, while the priority of the ecclesial community as a nexus of transformation is revelatory, it is not without its challenges. After establishing the foundational role of the ecclesial community, I will proceed to examine three significant challenges in LAT to a community-focused social ethics: the cultural and linguistic turn in theology, popular culture, and the mass/majority bifurcation. These three challenges, I aver, represent both challenges and opportunities for a theology of transformation.

3.2. Community at the Centre of Latin American Liberation Theology

We will begin the conversation of transformation with LALT, the prima facie Latin American ‘Systematic’ Theology1 and the prominent Protestant voice of José

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1 To speak of LALT as a systematic theology is a dubious assertion because LALT encompasses theological voices from many different contexts. Indeed, the attempt by some liberationists to systematize LALT was never completed and serves as a perilous attempt to codify a theology, which espoused itself as ‘second step’ of reflection upon an ever-changing world. The dynamism of which I have spoken above stands in direct opposition of attempts to systematize;
Míguez Bonino. The work of Míguez Bonino is significant because he demonstrates a profound commitment both to liberation and to Christian unity.\(^2\) As noted in Chapter 2, he developed the concept of the historical project during the early stages of LALT and demonstrated a commitment to the ecclesial community.\(^3\) We will commence with his chapter entitled ‘Love and Social Transformation in Liberation Theology’ in which he revisits the theme of the historical project, as well as the themes of love, transformation, and community.\(^4\)

He begins the essay by challenging the accusations against LALT as a theology that is exclusively preoccupied with macro-social conditions and only belatedly concerned with the theme of spirituality. He counters that the intensified interest in spirituality in LALT in latter years does not represent a digression, but instead a return to a foundational theme. Given the presence of spirituality in the genesis of LALT, for example Gustavo Gutiérrez dedicated a section of his *Theology of Liberation* to the subject,\(^5\) and the constitutive role of ecclesial experience and spirituality in the rise of LALT,\(^6\) Míguez Bonino’s argument is a valid one. He goes on to suggest that LALT’s spirituality signals a dialectical interdependence between


\(^4\) Míguez Bonino, ‘Love and Social Transformation’.


\(^6\) For an excellent historical examination of the theme of spirituality in LALT, see Mario Aguilar’s chapter on Pedro Casaldáliga in *The History and Politics of Latin American Theology*, vol. 2, pp. 135-49.
social and personal (macro and micro) liberation. It is this spirituality, according to Míguez Bonino, that gave birth to concern for the poor and it is the ‘concern for the poor and poverty [that] leads to ... macro-social analysis...’

LALT emerged in correlation with contextualization and conscientización, the realization of the existence of systematic poverty and oppression and the development of tools, such as the social sciences, to examine these macro-social realities. Its view of reality is shaped by the mediation of the social sciences and a concept of transformation that is tied to mass popular movements and the historical project. Unfortunately, the historical failure of the churches to support the popular movements led him to an ecclesiological pessimism. Subsequently, his search for a renewal of theological language and practice bypasses the ecclesial commitment in favour of a commitment to the historical project and a new language of love: love as solidarity.

Nevertheless, Míguez Bonino posits that Christian participation in the liberation project is ultimately dependent on an a priori commitment to community. His belief in an incarnated community-in-solidarity was in turn rooted in his belief in an incarnate God. It was precisely this belief in incarnated community and an incarnate God that undergirded his active conversation with atheists and Marxists. Indeed, here he demonstrates that his commitment to community ultimately moves beyond an exclusive Christian participation, speaking of Marx’s own denunciation of Christian love as dependent on a latent biblical utopianism. He even claims that the declarations of Argentina’s most famous Marxist, Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara who believed that a revolutionary is consumed by love, is rooted more in a latent, culturally informed Christian consciousness than his commitment to Marxism. This political spirituality is not simply an individual, voluntarist commitment to a historical project; as Guevara illustrates, it is a political discipleship with communitarian and ecclesial roots.

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7 Miguez Bonino, ‘Love and Social Transformation’, p. 121.
8 Miguez Bonino, Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation. This entire text can be read as an ecclesiological discourse (p. 154) and an attempt to re-envision ecclesiology
Even though Míguez Bonino never explicitly confessed a communitarian liberation ethics, he suggested the possibility of an ecclesiology that defines the ecclesial community as the crux of the liberationist historical project. For example, realizing the arduous task of forging a macro-social historical project and forming a politically committed spirituality, he speaks of a radical voluntarism that is dependent on a profound religious, social, and political experience. This ‘experience of mutual love, which seeks expression in a political order congruent with the personalization-in-community that it has experienced’,¹¹ is more than the adoption of ideology, because it is a conversion to love, that is to be in solidarity with others. Nevertheless, this conversion is not bereft of ideology, or belief, or history, or culture. Its relatedness ‘to a specific historical situation’ entails not only participation in a macro-social project, but also indebtedness to socio-cultural traditions and practices rooted in the experience and hope of a community of solidarity. It necessitates a relational and communal empiricism, which informs the social and cultural experience of the individual, converting a posteriori into a radical commitment to a larger historical project. Ultimately, his commitment to liberation is a confession of faith in human community as the centre of ‘transformation’ and the ‘social and psychological locus’ where ‘mutual love and solidarity’ and new symbols and language are formed.¹²

His faith in love-in-solidarity via the historical project ultimately depends on his faith in an incarnate God and incarnate human community. For example, in this essay, he attempts, like most liberationists, to define love-in-solidarity in concrete and historical terms, moving past static theological expositions of human nature (e.g., doctrine of creation or natural law) to a dynamic love of humans in solidarity with one another. However, he does not find this answer through the social sciences or a quantitative reading of society, but instead returns to the foundational concept of community. He does not offer the street protests and popular manifestations (i.e., popular movements), but a theology rooted in the concrete ecclesial experience. He writes,

¹² Ibid., p. 123.
Common celebration, reflection, and action are the cradle of a new personal identity. The nonperson claims and is given ‘the word’, the right to speak and be heard. He or she becomes a subject of decisions. … The Holy Spirit builds the *ekklesia* as such as persons come and celebrate together. Thus one’s personal identity is not created over against ‘the others’ but together with them.\(^\text{13}\)

Christian community, for Míguez Bonino, is a transformative space that offers the possibility of the unity of personal and social eschatology; it is a place where personal identity and social commitment can be interwoven in the formation of a community of mutual love and solidarity. Christian community is the creation and reflection of the Triune God and the *genesis* and *telos* of human existence: belief in God is belief in community. The ecclesial community, in particular, provides a space for the formation of the radical individual, for communal commitment, and for the recreation of symbols and narratives. Individualism and the equally destructive suppression of the individual by a popular religious or collectivist historical project are averted through individual commitment to community-in-solidarity.\(^\text{14}\) It is in the community-in-solidarity where non-persons living in the permanent flux of sociological and psychological anomie can potentially be formed into *concientizados* individuals. It is the reality of a community-in-solidarity that serves to avert premillennialism and a realized eschatology through a commitment to the unfolding present. Finally, the ecclesial community serves as a reminder that human beings are not totally depraved; rather, in the renewing power of the Spirit they can work towards building communities and a society that are, however imperfectly, clear incarnations of the Kingdom.

### 3.3. Community at the Centre of Progressive Evangelicalism

Progressive Evangelicalism, as discussed in Chapter 2, arose as an attempt to reconcile conservative evangelicalism and ecumenical/liberal/liberationist evangelicalism. In the beginning it sought to develop a Latin American evangelical theology and overcome the division between evangelism and the social gospel, known in the ‘Great Reversal’.\(^\text{15}\) The term refers to the early twentieth century

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\(^\text{13}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{14}\) Ibid., p. 127.

\(^\text{15}\) Moberg, *The Great Reversal*, pp. 30-34.
reductionism of nineteenth century evangelical understanding of mission from an inclusive practice that included preaching and social action to a narrow practice of personal evangelism. As René Padilla has stated, ‘the theory and practice of integral mission are an attempt to correct the distortions of…two extremes [evangelism and social responsibility]… integrating evangelism with other elements of mission’. This has implied both an affirmation of Scriptural authority and a commitment to active contextuality. In the first instance, this was not a matter of rote biblicism, but instead a Christologically mediated contention that the Scripturally attested praxis of Jesus Christ is normative for Christian ethics and discipleship. It was a question of which historical praxis, that of Jesus and the church or the historical practice of the present, is afforded prioritization in a hermeneutical hierarchy. The problem with conservative evangelicalism is not the affirmation of sola scriptura, but the unbiblical digression from the praxis of Jesus due to its soteriological reductionism. This Great Reversal marks a failure to hold together the biblical imperative that mission concerns both faithful discipleship of Jesus and effective social contextualization. This affirmation, of course, stood in direct contention with certain liberationists, such as Hugo Assmann, who affirmed historical praxis as a normative text, while questioning the historical relevance of Jesus. While progressive


18 For one of the clearest descriptions of this, see J. A. Kirk, Liberation Theology: An Evangelical View From the Third World (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1979), pp. 185-211. Kirk, an evangelical Anglican and founding member of the FTL, argues for a reversal of the methodology of LALT and for placing the Scriptures (i.e., revelation) as the point of departure for the theological process. Kirk hopes to free the Scriptures to confront the present, instead of being a mediation of the present through the social sciences. However, his argument runs the risk of narrowly limiting revelation to the Scriptures, although he does move beyond biblicism by affirming Jesus Christ as the ‘ultimate point’ of revelation (p. 195). The problem with this position is that the
evangelicals by no means repudiated the social sciences or historical praxis as a valid text in the hermeneutical process, they did actively balk at the objectivist claims of some liberationists concerning *praxis*. For progressive evangelicals, the Scriptures (i.e., the *praxis* of Jesus) are objective and authoritative. In contrast, present historical *praxis*, while hermeneutically constructive, is not objective and sits on a lower rung in the hierarchy of evangelical hermeneutics: historical praxis must be interpreted through the lens of the *praxis* of Jesus.  

19 Orlando Costas spoke of the gospel as *praxis* and Andrew Kirk asserted that Jesus Christ is the ‘hermeneutic of faith’ and the ‘foundation of all theological discourse’.  

20 In essence, progressive evangelicals wanted to say that there is little that is novel in Marxism, and that liberationists have simply ‘relearn[ed] from Marx what was always true for biblical epistemology: namely, that knowledge is not gained speculatively but obtained through obedience in concrete historical action’.  

In the second instance, progressive evangelicals affirmed that the proclamation of, discipleship to, and witnessing to the gospel does not occur in a vacuum but in a social and cultural context. The *praxis* of Jesus was embedded in a socio-cultural and historical context and does not pass historically unmediated into the present. The founding document of the FTL explicitly speaks of the need for a contextualized ‘Latin American’ gospel, which demands that Latin Americans ‘undress the message [of the gospel] of foreign clothes’. This implies that while the present does not provide an authoritative revelatory *locus theologicus* to rival that of the revelation of Jesus Christ, nonetheless, the present demands a *praxis*-oriented hermeneutics that can contextualise the gospel. The gospel can only be correctly preached if it engages the context of the proclaimer and the hearer, which in turn

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19 Heaney, *Contextual Theology for Latin America*, pp. 94-106. This is most clearly represented in the founding document of the FTL, the Cochabamba Declaration, which is primarily dedicated to affirming the centrality of Scriptural authority. Míguez Bonino, *Faces of Latin American Protestantism*, pp. 48-51. For nuanced representation of this in direct conversation with LALT, see Padilla, ‘Liberation Theology: An Appraisal’; and Costas, *The Church and Its Mission*, pp. 251-53.  


21 Kirk, *Liberation Theology*.  

implies that the theological process is not, as Kirk argues, a one-way street from *sola scriptura* to transformation. Contextualisation is not simply a process of shaping a transcendent message so that it is intelligible to the present, but is instead a reciprocal receiving and shaping of a previously and continuously contextualised gospel. There is no unmediated revelation that enters naked into this world; the gospel always arrives clothed and demands re-clothing. The Word of God was incarnated in human flesh and culture (John 1:14), specifically that of a Jew, and even the earliest recorded reflections on the *praxis* and message of Jesus in the Scriptures demonstrate a culturally infused interpretation and application coming from within the context of ecclesial communities. While the *praxis* and message of Jesus transcends the limits of each historical moment and speaks to the present as the Word, it only does this from within history and culture. The message of the original, particular *praxis* of the Jewish Messiah who challenged the centres of power is discerned in the present in the context of the local church that gathers in the name of Jesus and seeks to be his disciples and emulate his *praxis* through the Spirit. On the one hand, contextualisation involves the undressing of the gospel of the cultural and political baggage of empire and the centres of power that have attempted to repeatedly co-opt the mission of God, so as to reunite the church with the *praxis* and message of Jesus. On the other hand, contextualisation involves the dialectic interface between the present context and present *praxis* of the church, a local gathered body of believers, and the historical and cultured witness of Jesus, as attested in the Scriptures and lived in the church (tradition). This is a multidirectional (interaction between the Scriptures, tradition, and the local church in its context) and not a unidirectional (Scriptures dictating to the present) process. The FTL’s assertion that the gospel needs new Latin American clothes is ultimately an open recognition that the gospel is never bereft of socio-cultural clothing and the process of contextualization is a complex process of giving and receiving.

This undressing and redressing of the gospel to which progressive evangelicals refer, I assert, does not occur in the context of Latin America, an ill-defined social and cultural location, but instead in the context of local and

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communitarian experience and tradition. The gospel is translated and contextualized in the context of communal relationships set within, but not eclipsed by a larger social context. It is here that the gospel perichoretically receives its tango and samba, responding back to the ‘missionary’ gospel that has come from the centres of power. This is to say, it is within the context of the ecclesial community and Trinitarian-inspired relationships between individuals in the local church that the gospel is contextualized and takes on aspects from the local culture. It is here that the story-informed concept of faithfulness is defined in the attempt to follow the example of the praxis of Jesus in a lived, local reality. Nevertheless, although mission has been at the forefront of progressive evangelicalism’s theological articulation, the recognition of the ecclesial priority of mission has been strangely absent. While Costas explicitly acknowledged the ecclesial role in the reception and preaching of the gospel, progressive evangelicalism as a whole has only more recently developed an ecclesial consciousness in the midst of plumbing the vision of Misión Integral. 

Ironically, in the rejection of the CGM within conservative evangelicalism and the converse development of an integral conception of mission, progressive evangelicals diluted the priority of the local church in mission. Similar to the critiques of liberationists concerning quantitative ecclesiocentrism, progressive evangelicalism’s critique of CGM’s numerology has not aided evangelicalism in abandoning its penchant for underdeveloped ecclesiology. This is problematic because mission must be continually reinterpreted and contextualised in the ecclesial community because the local church is the actual place of those who profess to follow this Jesus. So, Costas aptly reminds us, it is the community of faith itself that serves to critique a reductionist gospel such as that of the CGM:

> the proclamation of the kingdom carries within it the invitation to participate in the life of the kingdom now in the community’s experience of faith. Without the community, which stands behind the proclamation and receives those who are called, the numerical

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25 Padilla and Yamamori (eds.), *La Iglesia Local Como Agente de Transformacion*.

element becomes merely a consumer production.  

3.4. Community at the Centre of Neo-Pentecostalism

If progressive evangelicalism is an attempt to right the wrongs of revivalist and conservative evangelicalism, then neo-Pentecostalism is a protraction of revivalism and conservatism and a formidable development of Latin American pentevangelical culture and practice. 28 Neo-Pentecostalism represents an intensification of Pentecostalism’s materiality of salvation. 29 Human physical health and wellbeing are not accessories to the gospel, but indelibly intertwined into soteriological narratives and ecclesial practices. However, neo-Pentecostalism also represents an intensification of conservative evangelicalism’s interpretation of mission as conversion and church growth, a protraction of the CGM. It is here that neo-Pentecostalism, in contrast to liberationists and progressivists, can speak of an avant-garde ecclesial practice that has firmly challenged the model and practice of conservative missionary evangelicalism. From the onset of the preaching of Carlos Ancacondia, Argentine neo-Pentecostalism has grown through the proliferation of novel pentevangelical ecclesial practices and culture: power evangelism, spiritual warfare, inner healing, liberation, anointing, the Apostolic Vision, and Contemporary Christian Music. Alongside these powerful cultural practices, neo-Pentecostalism offers an effective accompanying weltanschauung that provides a bridge between the premodern and postmodern in the present late capitalist age. The tactical practices mentioned above are rooted in a cosmology that views the physical world as intimately intertwined with a contentious and dualistic spiritual reality that is divided between warring forces of good (God) and evil (demonic). As Wilma Davies has commented, neo-Pentecostals have ‘recreated a meta-narrative based around the

27 Costas, Christ Outside the Gate, p. 47.
28 See my chapter, R. R. Gladwin, ‘Charismatic Music and the Pentecostalization of Latin American Evangelicalism’. In The Spirits of Praise: Music and Worship in Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity, ed. A. Yong, and M. Ingalls (State College, PA: Penn State University Press, forthcoming). Note that this article is directed at a North American audience and that I have opted to speak of neo-charismatics instead of the preferred term ‘neo-Pentecostals’ of Argentine sociologists of religion.
cosmic story of Spiritual Battle’. The transformative potential of neo-Pentecostalism ultimately does not rest in its ability to challenge the ideology of neoliberalism or the unbiblical anti-social gospel tendencies of theological conservatism, but in its ability to mobilize large masses of evangelicals through shared culture and practice. Indeed, neo-Pentecostalism is known for its ideological myopia and tendency towards stubborn biblicism, but nonetheless it has changed the face of large sectors of evangelicalism and formalized a theology of transformation. As a representative protraction of the CGM, it is a movement with an intent focus on numbers and conversion, including technologies that utilize functionalist anthropology and neo-colonial cartography to identify potential obstacles to transformative growth. However, unlike ecumenical, progressive, and conservative evangelicalism, neo-Pentecostalism is ‘post-denominational’ and its growth has come through dependence on mass gatherings, megachurches, big name preachers, and a standardization of powerful practices. It has helped create a pentevangelical culture that has altered denominations. Rolando Perez speaks of ‘de-territorialized churches’ where the penteevangelical culture and liturgy of the masses breaks ecclesial patterns that were formally determined in local churches. In Argentina, one notable example is the reconfiguration of the transdenominational church in the


31 The CGM was moreover an anthropologically and sociologically driven movement; however, its ideological commitment was to a functionalism that justified the status quo in the name of ecclesial growth. See Costas, The Church and Its Mission, p. 147.

32 P. Deiros, El Protestantismo en América Latina (Nashville, TN: Editorial Caribe, 1997). Deiros dedicates three chapters to a historical depiction of Protestantism in Latin America and then elaborates in the remaining four chapters on where he believes the direction of the church is going. This text clearly demonstrates Deiros’ project of providing a history for the neo-Pentecostal experience and an interpretation of the mission of the church. See pp. 114-20 for a dedicated discussion of postdenominationalism. For a more recent discussion, see P. Deiros, ‘Repensando La Misión de La Iglesia en Argentina’ (Lecture presented at the Retiro Nacional de Pastores, Villa Giardino, Córdoba, Argentina, 14-17 June 2010). Peter Wagner also employed ‘post-denominational’ to describe the New Apostolic Reformation movement, but has since decided not to continue using the term because of its pejorative connotation, and its failure to encompass all churches. Interestingly, Wagner claims that Deiros preferred this term; see Wagner, Churchquake!, p. 38.

33 Maróstica, ‘Learning From the Master’.

city. This movement, which shifts the focus away from the local church to an apostolic network or the church of the city, has been influential in some Argentine Baptist churches. However, as the neo-Pentecostal Baptist Carlos Mraida makes clear when he states, ‘the modern Church need[s] to recover the biblical meaning of location, in direct relationship to the strengthening of unity’.\(^{35}\) For Mraida, this postdenominational and transcendent renewing of unity marks an ontological shift towards the expressed spiritual core of the ecclesial:

The Church is a spiritual event, while denominations are a social event. The Church is cross-culturally valid, while denominations are culturally limited. The Church must be biblically understood and evaluated. Denominations are sociologically understood and evaluated.\(^{36}\)

Similarly, this spiritual unity implies the transcending of the local and micro-social to the messa- and macro-social. An apt example of this is the growth of the Apostolic Vision and, subsequently, new ecumenical networks. So Mraida avers that the focus on transformative mission is not the local ecclesial community, but, as indicated by the names of the New Testament epistles, the church of the city: namely, Rome, Galatia, Philippi, Corinth, and … Buenos Aires. The Apostolic Vision team has become the governing core of numerous renovada Baptist churches. For some congregations this has implied submission to an extra-congregational leader (apostle), thereby calling into question the congregational governance and autonomy of the local church.

Nonetheless, at the centre of the neo-Pentecostal success are certain practices that are significant because of their diffusion within the context of local churches. Although, clearly, mega-preachers and megachurches have been crucial in the growth and proliferation of neo-Pentecostalism, it is the diffusion of the powerful practices and the accompanying cultural-imbedded weltanschauung in countless ordinary churches that have marked its true success and strength. As such, this ultimately does not indicate transcendence of the local, social, or denominational, but


\(^{36}\) Ibid., p. 191.
instead a deep interdependence with the local. Time will tell if these new ecclesial bonds will institutionalize, creating a new denominationalism. Much the same could be said for the neo-Pentecostal materiality of salvation, because again it is in the context of the local ecclesial communities that the practices, testimonies, and communal bonds are reinforced and the space is opened for healing, prosperity, and liberation. For example, an individual learns to believe in the possibility of healing through listening to testimonies in the ecclesial community and is healed through believing and taking part in a specific practice (laying-on-of-hands) in a specific part of a service. Indeed, the meteoric success of Carlos Annacondia cannot be completely credited to his style and rhetoric, but also to his localized, contextual validity and his ability to involve local churches in his campaigns. The failure of Tommy Hicks, Billy Graham, and other mass evangelistic campaigns prior to Annacondia to have lasting impact in Argentina was due to great extent to the inadequate incorporation of local churches.\textsuperscript{37} Even the formation and calling to ministry of individuals such as Annacondia cannot be understood apart from a formative, local communitarian experience.\textsuperscript{38} So, even here, the local ecclesial community continues to demonstrate its powerful presence.

3.5. The Problem with a Communitarian Focused Project

The state of Latin American ecclesiology, I have argued, is one of crisis. On the one hand, there are the voices of classic LALT that have struggled to answer the questions\textsuperscript{39} that have arisen concerning a) the loss of hope in the socialist \textit{historical project} after the fall of communism in 1989, and b) their \textit{exile} status as a result of a sustained opposition to the liberationist movement within the church hierarchy and national governmental bodies. On the other hand, the question of what constitutes a church continues to be difficult to define, given the pentecostalization of large

\textsuperscript{37} Maróstica, ‘Pentecostals and Politics’, pp. 171-82. Maróstica argues for the importance of the local church in the national movement, in the day-to-day life of the people, and in the formation of the movement. See also, Gladwin, ‘Charismatic Music and the Pentecostalization of Latin American Evangelicalism’.

\textsuperscript{38} Annacondia, ‘Power Evangelism, Argentine Style’, pp. 58-60.

sectors of Latin American evangelicalism and Catholicism and the influx of new ecclesial bodies that challenge traditional ecclesial definitions. In response to this *exilic* reality, newer liberationist voices, such as the Argentine Ivan Petrella and the Brazilian Jung Mo Sung, have recently attempted to categorize the responses of liberationists,\(^\text{40}\) so as to depict the general failure of LALT and its retreat from concrete historical practice to a spirituality of liberation.\(^\text{41}\) Petrella, in particular, offers a sharp critique of LALT and what he deems its complete failure to move beyond restatements and reformulations. He suggests that to move beyond these ungrounded restatements LALT needs to recuperate the *historical project*, which serves as a guiding mid-point for theology between the present, oppressive reality and the utopian future. Sung likewise offers a critique, but also more openly recognizes the merit of a limited, yet significant, theological response amid the struggle for survival. However, Petrella and Sung are in agreement in their objection to the communitarian vision that has been instrumental in the liberationist imagination of kingdom and utopia, as well as in progressive evangelicalism and neo-Pentecostalism. Petrella believes that communitarian-focused ethics fail to recognize the need for large-scale power structures from above to change society at large.\(^\text{42}\) Sung critiques communitarian concepts of liberation as hopelessly rooted in idealistic depictions of a classless society. The concepts ultimately prohibit the formation of organizational structures that can serve as midpoint engagements between the present state of the world and the Kingdom of God in its fullness. In spite of this, can the ecclesial community function as a bridge and nexus of transformation, a space and place for formation of liberating ideology and praxis? Or, is the ecclesial community a source of oppression and blinding ideology?

\(^{40}\) Ivan Petrella argues that there have been three main responses: 1) ‘Reasserting core ideas’ (Gustavo Gutiérrez, Jon Sobrino), 2) ‘Reformulating or revising basic categories’ (Pedro Trigo), and 3) ‘Critiquing idolatry’ (Franz Hinkelammert); see Petrella, *The Future of Liberation Theology*, pp. 2-10. In contrast, Jung Mo Sung avers that there are four classes of responses: 1) Change in Focus (new themes – blacks, women, indigenous peoples, homosexuality, sexuality), 2) Reaffirming the expectation of realizing utopia (Leonardo Boff and Benedito Ferraro), 3) Critiquing idolatry of modernity (Franz Hinkelammert, Hugo Assmann, Julio de Santa Ana, and the Asociación Departamento Ecuménico de Investigaciones – DEI), and 4) Focus on everyday life, in microsocial and interpersonal relations; see Sung, *Desire, Market and Religion*, pp. 144-45.

\(^{41}\) Sigmund, *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads*, pp. 181ff.

\(^{42}\) Petrella, *Future of Liberation Theology*, pp. 5-8, 148; Petrella, *Beyond Liberation Theology*, p. 136, n.75.
Before proceeding, it is important to go beyond simplistic declarations – i.e., community is important for Latin American theologies – and to engage the possibilities and pitfalls that arise when speaking of community and transformation in the Latin American context. For reasons of constraints, in the present chapter we will return to engage the most prolonged and systematic of the three theologies of transformation: LALT. In like manner, we will engage three issues that have represented continual challenges as well as opportunities for LALT and for the question of the community as a nexus of transformation: 1) The Cultural and Linguistic Turn, 2) Popular Culture and Religion, and 3) Mass vs. Minority methodologies of religion.

3.6. Cultural and Linguistic Turn and Paradigmatic Shift: The Tension of Latin American Liberation Theology

From its beginnings, LALT was both a challenge to and an endorsement of the possibility of the ecclesial community as a nexus of transformation. It offered a vision of social transformation that excluded the ecclesial as a nexus of transformation in its historical project; at the same time, it lent support to the CEB movement and other types of localized mobilization. This demanded a new language of liberation, marking a linguistic turn of sorts. This linguistic dispute centred both on the possibility of describing the present historical reality and the conscientización of the masses for the creation of a new social reality. For Assmann, LALT was a theology that espoused a hermeneutics defined by an examination of the text of social and historical reality and by participation in the revolutionary process of liberation. Hermeneutics was a process of transcendence as defined by the interpretation of and participation in changing social reality. Today, the voice of Assmann has been renewed most clearly in the work of Ivan Petrella and Manuel Mejido. On the other hand, Rubem Alves, while not denying the social-embedded construct of language, expressed reticence concerning the objective and emancipatory potential of the social sciences, arguing for the formation of a new culturally induced language and hope. For Alves, language and social structures were humanity’s first tools, invented in response to biological needs and, as such, are socially determinative of human life; however, it is culture that provides the
possibility of moving beyond the realist survivalism of premodern technologism (e.g., axes, knives, and primitive social structures) and modernist technologism (e.g., materialist social sciences, technocracy, and oppressive capitalist social structures). Culture, ‘the union of love and power … the power of love assuming a social form’, is definitive for humanity, making it possible for the pursuit of joy, happiness, beauty, and love. Alves, a Protestant theologian, desired a transformative teleology beyond brute materialist survivalism indicative of the reductionism of the early Assmann. He writes,

> It is important to feed his body, but that does not suffice. The heart must be happy. What man creates must have more than its obvious practical function. Gross national product and economic growth are not enough. Bread must be more than bread. Production must bring joy and psychic satisfaction. It must be sacrament.

Clearly LALT is an attempt to read accurately and change the social context. In the pursuit of a new *concientizado* language, LALT mirrors the paradigmatic linguistic and cultural shift in the historical, philosophical, and hermeneutical sciences. However, as noted by Assmann and Alves, LALT’s desire for a new liberating language has been fraught with tension, precisely because of the resistance of many to the paradigmatic linguistic shift that bestows language with ‘primordial ontological, epistemological, and methodological status’. Mejido’s work is a recent and vociferous recapitulation of the assertion that a paradigmatic linguistic shift occurred in LALT. This shift, he argues, was rooted in the divide between the historical-hermeneutical sciences (linguistic and culture theories) and the social sciences (sociology, economics, etc.). For Mejido, the embracing of the

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44 Ibid. This passage sits amid a discussion by Alves on Karl Marx, who he argues was not ‘a crude materialist that reduced life to economics’, but instead critiqued capitalism based on its reduction of production to monetary significance and resultant isolation of workers from the ‘creative’ task, ensuring that work is psychosomatically fulfilling and not simply the satisfaction of physical needs. Here I believe Alves provides a better option than Assmann’s crude materialism. The same could be said of the assertions of Ivan Petrella and Manuel Mejido (mentioned below) and their critique of the historical hermeneutical sciences, which border on Assmann’s objectivist optimism of the social sciences.

philosophical and linguistic narratives of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Hans-Georg Gadamer represent a dubious shift in theology, the end result being a shift away from a theology concerned with transforming the social to one concerned with the formation of culturally formed identities and a plurality of particularities. Mejido’s own historical narrative depicts this shift was already under way at Puebla in 1979, given the embracing of the concept of an integral, culturally informed liberation at the conference. Although he acquiesces that the original intention of this shift was to integrate both sociological and symbolic-cultural analysis, he asserts that symbolic-cultural analysis ultimately displaced the socio-analytical. Juan Luis Segundo, one of the first outspoken voices concerning the turn in LALT, offers a more gracious and historically informed reading than that of Mejido. Reflecting on the first two decades of LALT, Segundo speaks of the emergence of two liberation theologies with different focuses, methodologies, presuppositions, and therefore, different pastoral consequences. According to this narrative, LALT, as an intellectual and social endeavour, was not born in the favelas and villas or the CEBs, but among middle-class university students, concerned clergy, and progressive intellectuals. Here, even the most ardent voices for a popular ‘church of the poor’, such as Jon


48 Enrique Dussel also spoke of more than one type of LALT, although he saw merit in the development of a LALT rooted in popular culture and practice. See Dussel, “Transformaciones de Los Supuestos Epistemológicos de La “Teología de La Liberación”.

49 It is also important to note that Segundo argues that the preoccupation with the poor began with the democratization of the universities and the incorporation of students into leadership, a process that began in Argentina and eventually spread to almost all Latin America; see J. L. Segundo, ‘The Shift Within Latin American Theology’, Journal of Theology for Southern Africa 52 (1985): 18-19. See also A. T. Hennelly, Theology for a Liberating Church: The New Praxis of Freedom (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1989), p. 60.
Sobrino, agree.\textsuperscript{50} Similar to Mejido, Segundo asserts that in the 1970s a shift began to occur from the original intellectual approach to a second popular approach, which with time enjoyed the support of formidable theologians such as Gutiérrez, Boff, and Sobrino.\textsuperscript{51} Both Mejido and Segundo concur that the nascent steps of this movement began in Argentina with the emergence of\textit{ teología del pueblo} in the work of Lucio Gera, Juan Carlos Scannone, and others.\textsuperscript{52} Here, the development of a school of thought among Peronist-leaning Roman Catholic Argentines signalled a shift from a reductionist, social-analytical, Marxist theory to an integral, cultural, and anthropologically oriented analysis of popular culture.\textsuperscript{53} Similar steps can be traced in Brazil with the theologizing of the CEBs as the renewal of the church as it\textit{ se hacía pueblo}.\textsuperscript{54} While Mejido is correct in his recognition that Scannone and others were indebted to popular philosophy and the anthropological and cultural sciences, his assertion that they have simply exchanged a, ‘reductionist economism’ for a

\textsuperscript{50} Jon Sobrino, writing from the context of El Salvador, also recognized the university roots of liberation theology. Of course, Sobrino has gone on to be one of the principal advocates of the second wave of liberation theology, defending the poor as a \textit{locus theologicus} and the place of the ‘true church’. See Sobrino, \textit{The True Church and the Poor}, pp. 21-22; and Segundo, ‘The Shift Within Latin American Theology’, p. 28.

\textsuperscript{51} Hennelly asserts that Boff’s \textit{Ecclesiogenesis} and Gutiérrez’s \textit{The Historical Power of the Power} are indicative of this turn; see Hennelly, \textit{Theology for a Liberating Church}, p. 58.


‘reductionist culturalism’ fails to account for the emancipatory intentions and possibility of opting to stand in solidarity with existent popular movements, such as Peronism. The move to embrace Peronism at that moment, namely during Peron’s exile in 1960s and early 1970s, was not a natural one for those in the university and/or the Catholic Church, given Peron’s stance against the autonomy of the university system and the erosion of the political and social alliance with the Catholic Church in his second term. Nevertheless, the realization that Peronism had profoundly infiltrated the lower and working classes and persisted and galvanized during the 1960s resulted in re-acceptance of Peronism among certain sectors of Catholicism. Pertinent examples are the villero priest movement, the formation of the Sacerdotes para el Tercer Mundo, and the subsequent Document of San Miguel in 1969. It was from this commitment to popular movements that Juan Carlos Scannone spoke of the need to incorporate cultural and symbolic analysis into the theological process. This gave birth to a novel Argentine version of LALT called teología del pueblo, which is noted for preferring anthropological analysis over sociological analysis, in particular Marxist, because, in part, of its interaction with the anti-marxist Peronism. In a sense, this was a turning from a theological foquismo, intended to incite the masses into conscientización and mobilization, to an examination of popular culture as a radical popular practice and movement. There was a correlated shift from class to pueblo and from bourgeoisie and proletariat to civilización and barbarie, which Mejido sharply critiques. Nonetheless, this critique ignores that el pueblo and the bifurcation between civilización and barbarie continue to be powerful cultural and socio-economic constructions and denominators. The effort to emancipate the periphery and to bring it to the centre of theological focus cannot proceed without the culture and practices capable of responding to, redefining, and transforming the Argentine bifurcation. Community, although not a panacea, nevertheless is a socio-cultural space that can make possible the formation of cultural practices that can bridge this division between the historical-hermeneutical and social sciences.

56 This document was an Argentine interpretation of the Medellin CELAM conference.
57 See Mugica, Peronismo y Cristianismo.
3.7. Popular Culture and Transformation

What culture and practices constitute a liberating, popular Christianity? Clodovis Boff and Jorge Pixley in the *Bible, the Church and the Poor* dedicate a chapter, ‘The Poor and Their Liberative Practices’, to the task of addressing this question.\(^{58}\) They aim to document and analyse the emergence of liberating practices of the poor on the ‘continent’ (i.e., Latin America). It is a treatise in social ethics that attempts to measure both the instrumental and ontological merit of popular culture.\(^{59}\) They present a process of liberation defined as ‘integral’ and objectively political, and a new effectual, localized politics that is contrasted with the futile party politics of liberal democracies and the elitist class politics of the Marxist-Leninist vanguard. Here the linguistic shift mentioned above is noted, as Boff and Pixley develop a concept of liberation and politics closely connected to popular practice and culture, although without a rigorous engagement of the culture or communities that engender this culture. For example, see the abbreviated version of a comparative table below:\(^{60}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concepts of Liberation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>New</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Politics: social life in general</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agent: organized people</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership: internal and autonomous to the people</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of Leaders: animator</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Methodology: from the bottom to top</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Methodology: from the top to bottom</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^{58}\) C. Boff, and J. V. Pixley, *The Bible, the Church and the Poor: Biblical, Theological and Pastoral Aspects of the Option for the Poor*, trans. P. Burns, Liberation and Theology Series, vol. 6 (Kent: Burn & Oates, 1989). This book is important in the LALT library and represents an ecumenical (Boff, a Catholic, and Pixley, a Baptist) effort to demonstrate in a systematic fashion the importance and scriptural and theological warrant for the preferential option of the poor. The text is divided into three sections: biblical, theological, and pastoral reflection on the need for the church to be a church of and for the poor.

\(^{59}\) Boff and Pixley speak of a ‘new ethics of struggle’ in *The Bible, the Church and the Poor*, pp. 202, 210-14.

\(^{60}\) Ibid., p. 203.
In essence, Boff and Pixley offer a redefined and expansive conception of politics, which is focused on community and on effectual action in the daily lives of the poor. It marks a meritorious step, an overt recognition of *lo cotidiano* politics and the presence of structures of power that are determinative in the formation of relationships. Politics is not defined narrowly as the work of governments or political parties (liberal democracy) or revolutionary movements (Marxist vanguardism and foquismo), but instead as integral: politics is ‘life in society taken on consciously’. These popular, integral politics are a project for the masses, not the elite. The agent of liberation is no longer class, a mobilized proletariat, but *el pueblo*, signifying again a political organization as defined by and for the people and not an institutional system. Leadership and methodology are, in theory, down-up practices, which Boff and Pixley, not surprisingly, directly contrast with Leninist elitism. These politics entail all parts of life, from religious celebration, to street parties, to protest, to party elections. Nevertheless, they caution against subsuming the variety of human life into politics, which they reason elicits reductionist anthropology and apathy to formalized political organization and mobilization.

This transition to popular politics entails both a conceptual change as well as the realization and celebration of a liberative ontology of popular culture and practice, which Boff and Pixley subdivide into two categories: a) diverse communal and not explicitly political practices, such as resisting exclusion, survival guile, and autonomous community action, and b) overt and organized political practices, such as protest, organization, party politics, and armed resistance. This dichotomy demonstrates an attempt to distance popular culture, and its inherent culture of freedom, from the demands of political effectiveness. In this, they demonstrate an affinity for the linguistic and aesthetic descriptions of liberation and the power of popular culture. Like Scannone and Gera and the subsequent work of US Latino/a theology, such as Roberto Goizueta and Orlando Espín, Boff and Pixley assert that

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61 Ibid., p. 204.

the liberating nature of the afflicted culture, religion, and practices of the poor cannot be reduced to economic instrumentality, but instead is ontological: popular culture is liberating because it is popular culture. Of course this represents a dramatic turn in LALT because it was this economic instrumentality (the direct correlation between salvation and socio-economic liberation, see Chapter 2) that distinguished LALT as novel. Instead, the culture and practice of the poor now become pseudo-sacraments, serving to facilitate the poor’s transcendence over the afflictions of lo cotidiano. This liberating transcendence is the ‘ontological excess’ that imbues the daily struggle for existence with meaning and depth and potentiates the daily struggle for isolated instances of socio-political liberation. This teología del pueblo serves to correct reductionist tendencies of early LALT, because as Daniel F. Pilario and Roberto Goizueta have noted, ‘Liberation theology’s direct link with social transformation makes “it susceptible to the modern tendency to define human action as production or technique, that is, as a means to some external end – in this case, the end of liberation”’.  

Robert J. Schreiter, however, has astutely noted that the depiction of a unified pueblo is ‘romanticist’ and ‘misleading’, because it ignores the diversity of the people of Latin America: there are many pueblos that exist in this mythic pueblo. For example, is there a place for the Latin American evangelical experience in a popular culture so rooted in a historical Catholic hegemony? Likewise, Boff and Pixley, in line with the title of the foreword that boldly begins their text – ‘The Poor Will Save the World’ – offer a prime example of a triumphalism that developed in certain circles of LALT, which threw the net of liberative declarations concerning popular culture far and wide through the whole continent. As a result, the qualitative analysis of popular practice is far from rigorous, but instead is based on ‘personal observation, not taken from learned studies of the subject – which have yet to be

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65 See M. Grechi’s foreword in Boff and Pixley, *The Bible, the Church and the Poor*, p. ix.
made’. Likewise, ‘honoring the poor’s vibrant celebrations and warm interpersonal relations as “authentic praxis” and, at the same time, rejecting as ‘instrumentalist’ their daily struggle…to transform society’, as Pilario notes, ‘amounts to confining them to their miserable conditions’.  

A reified reading of popular culture ultimately creates an inverted form of elitism that mirrors the high culture and religion, which popular religion disdains. Thus, hidden behind the façade of the ‘popular’ can in fact be a hegemonic and elitist reading of culture that demands a hierarchy that fails to challenge the system that sustains these hierarchies in the first place. Finally, the argument that popular culture is ontologically liberating is both circular – el pueblo is liberating because el pueblo is liberating – and deceptive because the sweeping project of detailing popular practices throughout a nation or continent is destined to be lost in generalities, with no clear ontological grounding. Instead, popular culture, even in a limited social context is ambiguous and both oppressive and liberating. For example, Boff and Pixley offer descriptions that, in some instances, are unhelpful generalities (e.g., the poor love self-adornment, they use humour to escape affliction, the poor feel love with a special intensity) and, in other instances, are damaging stereotypes (e.g., ‘simple people enjoy being in crowds’, ‘the poor throw themselves into festivals … with rowdy intensity’).  

Advocates of the first line of LALT have offered sharp critiques. Assmann commented that the concept of el pueblo is not effectual without proper critical analysis. Segundo noted that, ‘sadly, …liberation theology stops being suspicious

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67 Pilario, *Back to the Rough Grounds of Praxis*, p. 503. Pilario also argues that Goizueta’s reading of Aristotle is faulty and, as Alasdair MacIntyre (*After Virtue*) and many others have argued, it is also possible to argue that Aristotle has an instrumental understanding of practice, which views the act of doing practice as serving a purpose beyond itself (e.g., virtues, social transformation, etc.). It is also important to note that popular religion can divide as well as unify. Goizueta follows numerous Hispanic theologians, writing in the North American context, who present a unified image of Hispanic popular religion, which is clearly not the case.
68 Boff and Pixley, *The Bible, the Church and the Poor*, pp. 215-18.
when its gets close to el pueblo’. It is this failure of reflexivity that has cemented a tendency towards essentialism and speaking of popular culture as if it had a monolithic, homogeneous ontology. For Míguez Bonino, el pueblo is comparable to the biblical term laos, which can refer either to a non-specific group of people (a crowd) or a specific group of people (the people of God). Herein lies the conflictive nature of popular religion and culture: it has the potential for resistance and transformation and an alienating conformity.

### 3.8. Mass vs. Minority Religion

Is liberating potential hidden in the pining of the oppressed masses or the potentiality of a committed minority? This is a directive question for the reflective task of identifying the potentiality of a community-informed theological conception of transformation. Through his criticism of the linguist/popular culture turn, as well as his consistent engagement of the mass-minority bifurcation, Segundo helps answer this question, and as such offers a lens through which to engage the question of masses and minorities.

Segundo depicted popular religion as repressive and openly critiqued the

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74. This is a reoccurring theme in his voluminous theological corpus. See J. L. Segundo, Masas y Minorías en La Dialectica Divina de La Liberación, Los Cuadernos de Contestación Polemica (Buenos Aires: Editorial La Aurora, 1973); Segundo, The Liberation of Theology, pp. 183-236; Candelaria, Popular Religion and Liberation, p. 69.

75. Segundo, The Liberation of Theology, p. 186.
‘magic’ of sacramentalist symbols and systems.\textsuperscript{76} His critique, however, was not a carte blanche rejection of popular religion as an opiate of the people; he consistently recognized the potential of religion as a catalyst to ‘unsettle’ people and as an agent of cohesion to ‘disestablish’ a group from the status quo.\textsuperscript{77} Popular religion and culture can, as Alves has argued, provide the imaginative possibility of change. As such, the problem with popular religion for Segundo is not that it is popular, but that it magically defines procedures and practices solely according to divine efficacy with little or no regard for human and historical agency.\textsuperscript{78} This unhistorized reading of faith ultimately masks the repressive tendency of popular religion. This is in part due to the ideological perception that masses constitute transformation, which wholly ignores the importance of minority efforts of human and historical agency.

Segundo argued, in Leninist fashion, that potential liberation projects begin with the efforts of committed minorities, not the mobilized masses. He openly questioned the revolutionary potential of the proletariat, stating that ‘the proletariat is something different from what Marx thought, precisely because it is a mass’.\textsuperscript{79} Instead, following the thought of Nikolai A. Berdyaev,\textsuperscript{80} he advocated a Christian Leninist vanguard movement, an uprising of revolutionary Christian professionals that possess a revolutionary consciousness. It would be this vanguard minority with a ‘revolutionary consciousness’ that would ultimately lead the fight against the tendencies of the masses and the ‘syndicalist conscience’.\textsuperscript{81} Segundo was not looking to broker a third way option with a national government but instead form a radical, minority presence that would disrupt the majority. In terms of Argentina, this would have placed Segundo in firm opposition to Peronism and its use and abuse of the concept of el pueblo and its alliance with organized labour. For Segundo, to accept

\textsuperscript{76} Segundo does not move entirely away from the sacraments, but nonetheless openly critiques a failure to connect them to direct human and historical action. See J. L. Segundo, \textit{The Sacraments Today, A Theology for Artisans of a New Humanity}, vol. 4 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1974).

\textsuperscript{77} Segundo, \textit{The Liberation of Theology}, p. 186.

\textsuperscript{78} Candelaria, \textit{Popular Religion and Liberation}, p. 114.

\textsuperscript{79} Segundo, \textit{Masas y Minorias}, p. 20.


\textsuperscript{81} Segundo, \textit{Masas y Minorias}, p. 20.
Peronism was to fail in the push for more thoroughgoing structural changes.

Segundo deplored the mass-minority divide that was foundational for classist social theory and he even questioned the sociological and ontological existence of groups such as the mass or minority. In like manner, he questioned the use of terms such as *el pueblo* and *popular*. In fact, he balked at what he termed the ‘semantic problem’ and ‘verbal terrorism’ of many liberationists that stigmatized the minority as elitist.\(^\text{82}\) The ‘terrorist’ and ‘semantic’ politics of which he spoke exchanged the pejorative ‘mass’ for ‘majority’ or ‘popular’ and ‘minority’ for elitist and sectarian. Minority religion has consistently been depicted pejoratively as sectarian, elitist, and foreign. An apt example is the consistent use of the moniker of ‘sect’ in the CELAM documents, including at the ground-breaking Medellin,\(^\text{83}\) to speak of Protestants.

However, for Segundo, the liberating project concerns a committed minority. Citing that the Scriptures continually distinguish between ‘the few’ and ‘the crowd’ (e.g. Matt 7:14; Matt 9:37; Matt 22:14; Luke 12:32; Mark 10:45), he concludes that the gospel is clearly not for masses.\(^\text{84}\) However, he disputes the labelling of the gospel as elitist, in ‘terrorist’ fashion, because it ultimately places demands on a committed minority that is concerned with the ‘liberation of humanity – of the masses’.\(^\text{85}\) The church is, to cite Moltmann, an ‘exemplar minority’, not a ‘privileged minority’.\(^\text{86}\) This is not to say that the minority imposes an ethic on the masses by rules, laws, or through the construction of a society based on minority ‘exigencies of the gospel’, but instead that these demands should convert into the creation ‘of a

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\(^{85}\) Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology*, p. 231.

\(^{86}\) Quoted from Segundo, *Masas y Minorias*, p. 55.
minority character in each and every human being’. So it seems, the problem of the masses is not that they are masses, but that their proclivity is to a mass consciousness. The mass-minority dilemma, according to Segundo, is inherent in human existence, a tendency in each and every individual towards mass and/or minority consciousness and conducts (i.e., ethics). So it follows that revolutionary consciousness is not determined by a socially determined ontology (class), but instead by potential in every person to resist mass tendencies. Here, the ecclesial roots of his concept of a committed minority are clear: He advocates for a committed minority, which has the potential to transform the ‘mass consciousness’ of the masses, thereby inciting social change. As such, he subverts the transformative potential of the church because of his unified understanding of history, combined with Teilhard de Chardin’s evolutionary concept of history. The committed minority cannot bring about historical and social change without the masses. The gospel is concerned with the masses, indeed the entire creation, but ultimately offers a call for committed minorities that can excite and transform the consciousness of the masses and boldly proclaim in deed and word God’s plan of salvation. The church, as such, is for all, but not of all. In this respect, Segundo is profoundly Protestant, recognizing like Luther that the ‘world and the masses are and always will be un-Christian’. Beyond this, he assumes that the masses are not only unchristian but also not committed to the transformation of all things: individuals, social structures, and built and natural environments.

3.9. Conclusion

In this chapter, we began with an earnest question: where is the locality of liberating transformation? I sought to demonstrate that community is a foundational concept and transformative space for LALT, Progressive Evangelism, and neo-Pentecostalism. I observed that LAT, in particular LALT, has presented challenges to an understanding of the local ecclesial community as a liberating historical project:

88 Ibid., p. 218.
90 Martin Luther, cited by Bornkamm, *Luther’s Doctrine*, 7.
cultural and linguistic turn, the polemic of popular culture, and the mass/minority bifurcation. The question that remains is whether the ecclesial community can serve as an historical project to bridge the gap between the social and the historical hermeneutical sciences, between active incorporation and critique of popular religion and culture, and between the ethics of a committed minority religion and the liberation of masses. In short, can the ecclesial community bridge the Argentine bifurcation between civilization and barbarism?

LAT needs to discuss the communal locality and particularity of popular religion. The assumption that mass represents *el pueblo* or *lo popular* is fundamentally flawed, because supporting the ‘popular’ ultimately implies some level of elitism, or in the positive phrasing of Segundo and the Free Church tradition, ‘a dedicated minority’. Here the concept of ‘popular’ developed by Daniel Míguez and Pablo Semán and employed by Nestor Míguez, Joerg Rieger, and Jung Mo Sung, proves helpful. According to Míguez, Rieger, and Sung, ‘The popular … may be a majority or [it] may not be. Massiveness is not what characterized it; rather, it is characterized by its place in the social structure’.91 This place is the location of those who have limited social capital and little direct access to instrumentally valuable resources, and who form practices of conformity and confrontation, practices which are formative both collectively and individually.92 This implies a dedicated minority, a culturally informed historical project that signals a break with the past. Can the local ecclesial community provide such a space as a nexus of transformation?

This is the question that will best be tested in the examination of the ecclesial community itself, which is the focus of Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, we will return to the questions raised here concerning community and challenges and opportunities that exist in *lo cotidiano* of Argentina today.

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Chapter 4

Case Studies

4.1. Methodology

This present work is a task of theology, ethics, and ethnography, a task that pursues the truth. It is centred on the conviction that the particularity of Christian community has something determinative to say for theology and ethics: the local and particular are revelatory. It is also centred on the conviction that the particularity of Christian community is liberating: the ecclesial community is a possible nexus of transformation. So far we have examined the topos of Latin American social reality through the Argentine context and LAT through three significant theologies of transformation (LALT, Progressive Evangelicalism, and neo-Pentecostalism). The present chapter seeks to examine ecclesiology through the lens of actual local Christian communities.

My methodology, thus far, has been historical and theological; in this chapter, I will turn to a focused examination of the micro-social, local ecclesial setting through a collaborative ethnographic and theological examination. I have opted to use a thematic organization beginning with a historical and sociological examination of Argentina and historical and theological engagement of LAT, in order to reveal the historical narrative behind the ecclesial communities; however, the nascent process of reflection began with an ethnographic study. Ethnography is an apt tool for theologians and ethicists concerned with social and ecclesial reality because ethnography is a practice concerned with particularity. It is concerned with the search for truth, as Christian Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen have said, in ‘embodied habits, relations, practices, narratives, and struggles’. The present study seeks to define transformation within the context of embodied practice and narrative and to discuss the possibility of ecclesial practice as a locus of transformation.

93 Swinton, and Mowat, Practical Theology and Qualitative Research, pp. 10-11; Fetterman, Ethnography: Step-By-Step, pp. 1-2; Forrester, Truthful Action, pp. 16-19.

While some North Transatlantic voices have averred emphatically that theology is a social science *per se* and that ecclesiology, more specifically, is the sociology of theology, in actuality theology and ethics *per se* have struggled to produce grounded narratives that move beyond the subjectivist and domineering ponderings of the academic theologian and their social location. Ecclesiology, without grounding in a close examination of the Church in its locality, frequently reveals the inner profundity of the theologian rather than the community called Church. As a result, there is a burgeoning field in Christian theology and ethics that is opening a two-way discourse between ethnography and ecclesiology, a conversation that does not show contempt for the social and anthropological sciences, nor ignores the importance of theological interpretation and ecclesiological focus.

The movement to interpret reality was one of the driving reasons behind the search for and eventual birth of LAT, which sought to examine praxis through the social sciences before proceeding on to the theological, in route to the transformation of praxis. In this project, I will proceed in a similar trajectory, although with ethnography in more direct dialectic conversation with theology than the hemmed off sociological and theological methodology suggested by first-line liberationists and elucidated by Clodovis Boff. While quantitative analysis is not disdained and at times is readily incorporated to spatially locate an ecclesial community within its meso- and macro-social contexts (see Chapter 1 and 5 in particular), I have opted for an ethnographic and qualitative reading because I aim to reveal the particular in the ecclesial communities. It is my belief that culture, language, and community


97 C. Boff, *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987). As Zoë Bennett has commented, Boff presented theory (theology) and praxis as ‘irreducible orders’: ‘theology criteriology and pistic criteriology are different – the former is epistemological, the latter existential’. See Bennett, ‘Action is the Life of All’, p. 46.
practices have the potential to transform the social context. The social sciences tend to prioritize the macro and the quantifiable at the expense of the more diffuse realities of the micro and qualifiable. Instead, it seems, to quote Clifford Geertz, a ‘thick narrative’ is necessary in order to speak honestly about ecclesial structure, culture, and practice in its locality. The central aim of the study that follows is to develop a thick narrative that intently listens to and analyses the theological conception of transformation and the transformative potential of ecclesial practice as expressed in the voices of two local ecclesial communities and their members.

As already anticipated in Chapter 2 and 3, these studies will examine in conjunction with LAT the missional and transformational convictions, culture, and practice of the local church. In particular, my goal in the following contextual studies is to define ‘positive’ social change (i.e., transformation) within the lexicon and epistemology of the ecclesial urban context of Greater Buenos Aires (GBA). I seek to determine the potentiality of the local church as a micro-matrix of transformation (i.e. a liberating historical project) through the examination of ecclesial practice. The following studies are qualitative in focus because my intention is to produce an integral reading of the ecclesial communities, which is diachronic and synchronic as well as sociological, cultural, and theologically informed.

4.1.1. Process of Choosing the Ecclesial Communities

The early objective was to develop two contextual studies, one in a Roman Catholic community, and one in an evangélico (Protestant) community. The initial criteria for the selection of the ecclesial communities were the following: a) noted for involvement in the larger neighbouring community and social activism, b) located within GBA, c) located either in or in close proximity to areas of poverty, d) have an active outreach to and incorporation of those living in poverty, and e) willing to participate in the research. Upon entering the context and after my initial assessment, I concluded that several additional criteria were necessary. First, my accommodation during most of the research was located roughly thirty kilometres north of downtown.

Buenos Aires and I was limited to traveling on foot or public transportation. This eliminated the selection of some ecclesial communities in southern GBA (e.g. Villa 15, more popularly known as Ciudad Oculta) or in central Buenos Aires (e.g. Villa 31). Second, the ecclesial communities needed to be located in relative proximity to one another in order to facilitate travel.

I dedicated a portion of my time to identifying potential ecclesial communities for my case studies. The staff members of the progressive evangelical non-profit organization Fundación Kairós proved invaluable. Elisa Padilla, the daughter of noted evangelical theologian C. René Padilla, and director of Fundación Kairós helped me identify potential local churches and introduced me to key leaders within these ecclesial communities. Early on, I decided to alter my case-study plan because the heterogeneity in the Protestant ecclesial context was more extensive than I had expected. Although I was well aware of the kaleidoscope of Latin American Protestantism, I was surprised by the thorough pentecostalization of large sectors of evangelicalism and the production of a formative pentevegalical culture. I decided to account for this heterogeneity, opting to develop two Protestant contextual studies, instead of one. I chose Protestant churches from the same denomination (Baptist), although representative of different theological ideologies and ecclesial structures (progressive evangelical and neo-Pentecostal). This proved fortuitous and offered a rich comparison of the profound social, cultural, and historical division that has occurred in evangelicalism with the onset of neo-Pentecostalism in Argentina in the 1980s. It also produced a narrative of the changes at the core of Argentine Baptist churches through the pentecostalization of a significant sector of the denomination.

I made contact with all three ecclesial communities and received permission through the pastors (neo-Pentecostal), pastoral teams (progressive Baptists), and priest (Roman Catholic) to conduct the contextual studies. I was granted Level I clearance by the University of Edinburgh Research Ethics Assessment Committee to conduct the research. I sought and procured written permission for all interviewees to use their interviews for the purpose of this work. After completing the first round of contextual studies and further examination and interpretation of the data, I made the decision not to include the contextual study of the Roman Catholic community. This was for three reasons: 1) given the constraints of a doctoral thesis, the scope of the
project would have been too large; 2) the amount of material I had to transcribe, analyse, and interpret was simply too voluminous; 3) the data garnered by the contextual studies in the Baptist communities was of a higher quality because I was more readily received in those churches and was subsequently able to develop more in-depth interviews and participant observation. I am holding the data from the Roman Catholic case study and it could potentially be used later as part of a future research project.

4.1.2. Perspective

I entered the studies of these ecclesial communities with both emic and etic perspectives. I grew up in the evangelical sector of North American United Methodism and have been involved with the free-church tradition since early adulthood (Anabaptist and Baptist). I served in pastoral ministry in evangélica churches in various parts of Latin America. I have had personal experience with charismatic evangelicalism. I am married to an Argentine and have an acute understanding of Argentine Spanish as well as Argentine culture and history. The language and practice of the two churches were not foreign to me. This emic perspective was helpful for quickly gaining the confidence of the two Baptist communities and I was readily accepted as a hermano as well as a researcher. Nevertheless, I was born and raised in the United States, a world away from Argentina. I clearly entered the ecclesial communities as a foreigner and, moreover, as a researcher. This etic perspective, however, was not expressly a liability but a creative space for participant observation.

4.1.3. Process of Analysis

My method of examination of these ecclesial communities is a form of triangulation, the use of various methods of investigation to secure an in-depth and valid understanding of the phenomena that is the centre of the study. I first...
attempted to interpret the ecclesial community and its practices through different lenses: the ethnographical lens (sociological, cultural, and phenomenological) and the theological lens, both of which interpret practices according to their many layers of meaning and impact. Second, my methodology is triangular in that it employs different methods of investigation: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and historical and sociological data collection. I spent six weeks in each ecclesial community during November and December 2008, and then more limited interaction during a seven-day visit in December 2009. I actively engaged the ecclesial communities through participant observation, attending worship services, small groups, prayer groups, leadership meetings, and outreach ministries.

I conducted seven interviews in Renovado and nine in Julieta. I interviewed two well-known theologians in Argentine Baptist circles. The interview schedules were developed before beginning the case studies, and were edited several weeks into the studies in order to better focus on the particular contexts of these ecclesial communities. I developed interview schedules appropriate for three levels of interviewees: Lay Leaders (Level I), Official Local Ecclesial Leaders (Level II), and Ecumenical and/or Hierarchical Ecclesial Leaders (Level III). See Appendix II for examples of the interviews schedules. At Julieta, I conducted seven Level I interviews and two Level II interviews. At Renovado, I conducted five Level I interviews and two Level II interviews. In the Roman Catholic community, I conducted six Level I interviews and one Level II interview. I also conducted three Level III interviews: Dr. C. René Padilla, Dr. Pablo Deiros, and one leader from the Roman Catholic tradition. See Appendix III for charts that detail information about these interviews. All interview names have been changed except those of Level III interviewees because they gave me permission to use their names. All interviewees were over the age of eighteen and were active members and leaders in the ecclesial communities. I explained the intent of the study, and I received written permission to use the interviews in my research. I continued contact with the interviewees in order to aid in the interpretation process. I chose a semi-structured interview schedule because this format provided both continuity as well as freedom to investigate the particularities of the ecclesial communities and interviewees. I employed an inductive and multileveled qualitative approach that developed the case studies as
bounded systems: bounded by time, place, and utilization of multiple sources of information.\textsuperscript{101}

I collected historical and sociological data on the local churches and their contexts. This was composed of written and oral information concerning the ecclesial communities themselves: interviews, newspaper articles, pamphlets, websites, and published texts, magazines, and journals.

The triangular process of analysis began before I formally visited the ecclesial communities and continued through the process of writing up Chapter 4 and 6. I maintained written and digital field journals and notes for documenting observations and initial interpretations of this observation. A draft of the interviews was developed before starting the contextual studies and edited several weeks into the case studies, so as to better focus them on the study of these ecclesial communities. The interviews were all audibly recorded with a digital recorder. Transcription assistants and I transcribed the interviews. I worked with NVivo software and Circus Ponies Notebook software to code the interviews, participant observation notes, and analysis, and to work for a grounded theory of understanding of the ecclesial communities’ conception of transformation in relation to communal practice. I translated from Spanish to English selected quotations of the analysis. I have been meticulous in attempting to assure that the studies are truthful and faithful to the ecclesial communities.

4.2. History of the Social Context of the Ecclesial Communities

The economic, religious, political and power struggle between Buenos Aires – the historical embodiment of Argentine civilization – and the rest of the country – the provincias – is key to understanding Argentine history. The Manichean civilization-barbarian bipolarity depicted by Sarmiento continues to torment the Argentine collective memory. The presumptuous capital city, fittingly named the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, has continued to dominate the Argentine national

psyche and imagination. It is the largest city and the economic and political capital of the nation.

Mitre, part of the first band of GBA, is the first partido exiting the capital towards the north. To the unaccustomed eye, the division is virtually unrecognizable due to urban sprawl. It is a city where opulence and destitution are juxtaposed like a pair of unruly and irreconcilable neighbours. Home to presidents, business executives, sports and movie stars as well as industrial workers, squatters, and slum dwellers, the city is a tribute to humanity’s self-proclaimed triumphs and greatest failures.

Noted in 2008 as the best municipality in Greater Buenos Aires, its western neighbourhoods are home to the presidential palace, Quinta de Olivos, and exclusive waterfront homes, high-rise condos, gated communities, and large homesteads. A satellite view from above on a clear day would reveal the shores of Río la Plata and a multitude of swimming pools, backyards, parks, and green spaces where los que ganaron live and play. This is symbolic of its lavish beginnings under European rule as a home to estancias gifted to some twenty families that had gained favour with the Spanish crown and the re-founder and vice-royal of Buenos Aires, Juan de Garay. These families ploughed their fertile fields and became part of the burgeoning agribusiness on the pampas outside the city and came to dominate the early history of Buenos Aires and Argentina.

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102 The name of this partido has been changed for reasons of anonymity.

103 Partido (meaning ‘part’ or ‘division’) is the name for the second level of administration division in the Province of Buenos Aires. Although the partidos of Buenos Provinces surround the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, the city is not part of any province and instead is the capital and an autonomous area and political division. The partidos are further divided into barrios; in the case of Mitre there are nine. In the rest of the Argentine Provinces the name for this political division is departamento (department). From here on I will employ the English term city.

104 In 2008, it was named the municipality with the best quality of life in Greater Buenos Aires.

105 Spanish for ‘those that won’. I borrow the term from the title of Svampa’s text, Los Que Ganaron. While her work refers more to the relatively recent development of the ‘countries’ of northern GBA that I mentioned in Chapter 1, a correlation can be made to longstanding neighbourhoods of privilege in western Mitre.

106 In Spanish of the Southern Cone this means ‘ranch’.

107 Earlier attempts at establishing a settlement had been thwarted by resistance from the indigenous population, including the original founding of the city by Pedro de Mendoza in 1536.
The city was named after a former Argentine politician and it grew slowly. By 1905, the city was officially named a *partido*, although it had a mere 5000 inhabitants. By 1938 it boasted some 70,000 inhabitants. Gone were the expansive lots of farming land, given up to urban sprawl. Growth was steady and by 2001 it was the eight-largest municipality in the nation, with over a quarter of a million inhabitants in 33.77 square kilometres.  

Today, the Acceso Norte snakes its way through the heart of northern GBA, part of a metropolitan area second in population only to São Paulo, Brazil in South America. It is the northern artery to and from Buenos Aires. The route, part of the famous network of highways that runs almost completely from the US-Mexican border to Buenos Aires, bears the name Pan-American Highway, which harkens back to the days of the liberal historical project, the infamous Monroe doctrine, and the transition from colonialism to neo-colonialism. It slices Mitre almost evenly down the middle, marking a clear distinction between the east and the west ends. It is also a clear demarcation between los que ganaron (east) and the working and lower classes (west).

The southwestern extremity of Mitre is a world away from its eastern neighbour, as far as barbarism is from civilization. This corner of urbanized Argentina reflects the Roman architectural and engineering footprint – a sea of cement, from street to rooftop. Instead of green spaces and shade trees, the area contains factories, industrial centres, low-income housing, and occasional slums. Mitre has one of the highest rates of employment, of homes with potable water, and of home ownership in GBA and some of the lowest numbers of *villas* and squatter towns in the northern *courbano*. Nonetheless, most of its industry and areas of low-income housing and poverty are concentrated on its western edge. This periphery borders the *partido* of Urquiza, the largest, most populated, and

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109 In all of the *courbano*, including the southern and poorest, zone there are around 1033 *villas* and squatter towns, with over a half million inhabitants. Wynarczyk, Costantino, and Monteira, *Desarrollo Humano y Sociedad*, p. 68.

110 The name of this *partido* has been changed for reasons of anonymity.
industrialized partido of northern GBA. Although nobly named after the liberator of Argentina, Urquiza is home to almost half of the villas and squatter towns in the northern GBA.\textsuperscript{111} This region as a whole is the heart of the industrial zone of northern GBA: 71\% of all the companies in this region are found in these two partidos.\textsuperscript{112}

The two Baptist communities that are the focus of the contextual studies are representative of the Argentine narrative of civilization and barbarity. Iglesia Cristiana Evangélica Bautista Julieta, located on the northeast corner of Mitre, is surrounded by the famously wealthy barrios of Zárate on the west, La Floresta\textsuperscript{113} on the north, and the Río la Plata on the east. Private guards in kiosks are on almost every corner, and the neighbourhoods are full of large houses with spacious yards and lush trees. The church building is located in a residential area, with locally focused specialty shops and cafes. On the opposite edge of Mitre is Centro Comunitario Renovado, which borders the major north-south thoroughfare Avenida de los Constituyentes. It is a sea of cement surrounded by industrial parks and low-income housing. These are two ecclesial communities located in different contexts and from similar and yet vastly different theological traditions. Both have distinguished themselves as ecclesial communities committed to working for the ‘transformation’ of the surrounding social context. Their attempts and reflections on transformation provide a base from which to speak of the locality of transformation and how it is formed in and through the local community called church.

4.3. Centro Comunitario Renovado\textsuperscript{114}

4.3.1. First Impression

My first visit to Renovado was on a Saturday morning. Entering the church building, the first person I met was Luz,\textsuperscript{115} a cook for the Saturday lunch which was

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., pp. 64-65. Urquiza has some sixty-nine villas.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., p. 105. Urquiza has by far the most with 3684 and then Mitre with 2141.
\textsuperscript{113} The names of these two partidos have been changed for reasons of anonymity.
\textsuperscript{114} Revived/Renewed/Revival Community Centre. The word renovado is used in Argentine evangelical subculture to refer to churches that have been affected by the charismatic/Neo-Pentecostal movement.
\textsuperscript{115} I have changed the names of all interviewees to maintain anonymity.
offered free of charge to the surrounding neighbourhoods. I was received with an outpouring of hospitality: a warm smile, friendly conversation, fresh pastries, and cold juice. While I waited for the pastor to arrive, Luz shared her testimony of how she came to the church eight years ago and how she began serving in different ministries. During this conversation, Pastor Ricardo walked in, wearing his non-service dress – jeans and a t-shirt – that failed to set him apart as clergy. At first glance, I thought he was a man from the surrounding community who had come for the free Saturday meal.

Pastor Ricardo is a big man, both in size and personality. Although unassuming in appearance and dress, straight away it becomes clear that he is convinced that God has called him to work in Ponti. Whether recounting the story of how the church developed out of a response to the needs of delinquent youth, or how God is ‘liberating’ people through literacy, academic support, and inner healing programs, it is apparent that Ricardo is a man with dedication and focus. This dedication is writ large in his life because he, like so many Latin American evangelical pastors, is bi-vocational: a computer science teacher and pastor. He has a contagious sense of humour and laugh, the type that makes you want to laugh along even if you missed the punch line. This humour and laugh, I observed, were linked to his years working on the west side of Mitre, formed by learning to laugh in order to survive amidst pain and suffering. For example, he chuckled while telling me he was able to obtain some twenty government grants and funds from the World Bank and the United Nations Development Program to purchase everything from refrigerators to education material for the ecclesial community’s social outreach programs. He is a puntero of sorts, delivering desperately needed items and programs in exchange for an opportunity to share the reason for the service: Jesus Christ. His actions show he knows the wisdom of Jesus’ saying, ‘Be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as

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116 The name of this barrio has been changed for reasons of anonymity.

117 Literally Spanish for ‘pointer’ but probably better pronounced as ‘broker’. It is a term usually used to refer to the neighbourhood broker who distributes food, clothing, and money for local development projects in exchange for political favours, such as votes, presence at protests, formation of street barricades.
doves’ (Matthew 10:16), because it takes that to survive long-term on the west side of Ponti.118

In many ways, Ricardo is the heart and soul of Renovado church. He is the pastor, key administrator, fundraiser, and cheerleader; he is a prophet, priest, and king, who has empowered a small church to have a tremendous impact on its social setting. His dedication to the ‘details’ of the wider community – educational, housing, nutritional, and spiritual needs – is replicated in the ecclesial community, as Angelina commented, ‘I see that the church has his heart …’.119 However, as an impassioned and dedicated pastor and community leader, Ricardo can at times be heavy-handed. While few openly commented on conflict in the church or criticized the leadership, Magdelena, a middle-aged woman who is a long time leader, commented that, ‘the pastor has a personality that is quite strong’ and that, ‘there are people here that … do not like that way’.120 Nevertheless, Ricardo likely would not be bothered by such a description, for he believes that at times this is what is needed to push an ecclesial community and its ministries ahead.

Location of the Ecclesial Community’s Building

Renovado’s facilities are located on La Avenida de los Constituyentes, on the southwest corner of Mitre, in one of this partido’s largest barrios, which is 4.4 km² and home to over 27,000 inhabitants.121 It is the heart of the principal industrial zone in northern GBA. La Avenida de los Constituyentes is a line of demarcation between Mitre and its neighbouring partido Urquiza. Routinely, just north of the church, neighbours from Urquiza pile rubbish a meter high in the middle of Constituyentes so that the more reliable Mitre rubbish removal services will take it away.

Two blocks south of the church sits the only significant green space in the western half of Mitre. Since 1885, it has been the property of the Argentine military and home to Batallón 601, one the infamous chupadero detention centres during the

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118 Interview no. 3. I do not use interview numbers to represent any coherent order (chronology, significance, etc.) but instead simply for reasons of differentiation.

119 Interview no. 2.

120 Interview no. 4.

121 Wynarczyk, Costantino, and Monteira, Desarrollo Humano y Sociedad, p. 55.
1976-1983 dictatorship\textsuperscript{122}, and the site of the infamous \textit{cara pintadas} military rebellion in 1988.\textsuperscript{123} Today the residents of Ponti see a high block wall over which only the tops of the trees are visible. It is throwback to a time when fear ruled through dictatorial mandate. It is also a reminder that open space, parks, and trees are still out of reach for Argentina’s urban working class and poor.

According to Ricardo, the church sanctuary is located in the former home of \textit{El Guachito Gil Carnicería}.\textsuperscript{124} El Gaucho Gil is a legendary, Robin Hood-like figure, who allegedly stole from the rich to give to the poor.\textsuperscript{125} Although not recognized by the Catholic Church, in popular folklore el Gaucho Gill has become a saint and hundreds of thousands of pilgrims annually visit the main shrine dedicated to him in the province of Corrientes.\textsuperscript{126} Small shrines dedicated to the saint are littered throughout the country, typically in places of poverty, such as the one five blocks north that sits in front of one of the numerous \textit{retomadas}\textsuperscript{127} factories dating to the crisis of December 2001.\textsuperscript{128} As such, for pastor Ricardo, Gauchito Gil is a force with which to be reckoned. He recounted for me in detail how he and church members had to free the former butcher shop of malignant forces and the spirit of

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\textsuperscript{123} This area of land, at present a green space for the Argentine military, has long been a bone of contention between the \textit{partido} of Mitre, which argues that they have patrimonial rights to it, and the national government. Not surprisingly, the neo-liberal Peronist Carlos Menem signed a presidential decree to sell the land for some 40 million US dollars to build a commercial and upscale housing zone. Since then there have been attempts to move forward with plans to build some low income housing as well as to dedicate a part for green space, but nothing has come to fruition. ‘Vía Libre Para Lotear El Batallón de Villa Martelli’. \textit{Clarín} (4 January 2005). Online: http://edant.clarin.com/diario/2005/01/04/laciudad/h-04902.htm (accessed 11 January 2013).

\textsuperscript{124} \textit{Carnecería} is Spanish for ‘butcher shop’.

\textsuperscript{125} The legend is loosely based on the life of Antonio Mamerto Gil Núñez, who was born in the 1840s and died on 8 January 1878, which is the day annually venerated in his honour. According to the legend, Gauchito Gill was caught by the authorities, tortured and hung from an algarroba tree but before dying told one of his aggressors that the aggressor’s ill son would be healed if he begged Gill to save him. The narrative of this miracle would, in time, make Gauchito Gill a venerable, although unofficial, saint.


\textsuperscript{127} Spanish for ‘retaken’.

\textsuperscript{128} In the days and months following 19 and 20 December 2001, recently unemployed workers took over the factories of their former employers. In many cases they refused to leave and in some they were able to make the factories function again under the administration of the factory workers themselves.
Guacho Gil. They prayed and engaged in spiritual warfare, even battling a possessed electrical wire that attempted to strike them like a snake.

Today, the Renovado community reaches out through various ministries to those who have made their home in the retomada factory dedicated to Gaucho Gil. This is fitting because Ricardo and Renovado see themselves as a replacement for Gaucho Gil and Argentina’s ‘popular’ religion and culture. In speaking of his success in securing money from the World Bank for the church ministries he wryly joked, ‘the World Bank robs us from the one hand, and gives us back in the other’. The metaphor is revealing: he sees himself and Renovado as alternatives to the Argentine Robin Hood, taking from whomever they can in order to give back to those in need.

From the street, the church is similar to a myriad of storefront evangelical churches throughout Latin America. If not for the large sign indicating the name of the ecclesial community, the building could be confused with the neighbouring auto repair shop. The premises do not demonstrate an architectural design that tells a story of the divine through mortar and coloured windows, as do the steeples and spires of cathedrals, but announces its purpose through a dominating functionality in line with its industrial and lower class neighbourhood. Large storefront windows on either side of the front door each respectively declare with taped-on letters ‘Salvation’ and ‘Adoration’. Ricardo explained to me that this was the result of a prophecy that was given in the church that their windows would be salvation and their doors adoration. The words transform the industrial space into a place of worship and Christian service. During the week, the sanctuary becomes a classroom for the after-school program and adult reading program, hosts the men’s cell group, and functions as a mess hall for the soup kitchen. Pinned to the walls of the main room, where the services and events are held, are pictures, international flags, and announcements of weekly events, and Scripture verses, such as Isaiah 60:18. Located behind the storage

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129 See Chapter 3 and 5 for more detailed examination of popular culture within the context of LAT.

130 When he speaks of ‘robbing’, he is referring to the torrid relationship that Argentina has had with the World Bank and the general perception among many Argentines that the crisis in Argentina has been caused, at least in part, by the international banking organizations.
bins is the kitchen from which children, the poor, and the elderly are fed each and every week.

4.3.2. History of the Ecclesial Community

Renovado began as an outreach ministry of an Argentine Evangelical Baptist Church. The ‘mother church’, as it is frequently called, is over fifty years old and is situated off the main east-west thoroughfare in the heart of the middle section of Ponti. Twelve blocks away sits Renovado in the heart of the industrial centre and lower income sector. The ecclesial community began in 1996 when Ricardo offered to help several adolescent boys who committed an armed robbery and dumped their gun inside the school. Ricardo knew the boys and interceded for their families before the principal of the school to prevent their expulsion. The boys and their families lived in the neighbourhood where Renovado is now located and their grandmother, who had become a Christian through one of the evangelistic campaigns of Carlos Annacondia, suggested that the mother church begin a ministry in that vicinity. Renovado began as an after-school and English teaching program in the spring of 1996 on Magdelena’s mother’s patio. Even in the beginning, evangelism and transformation were a prime focus, with each lesson ending with a reflection from the Bible.

A year later, the burgeoning ecclesial community met with a neighbourhood representative because, as Ricardo noted, it is ‘always, in these places, necessary to work with a puntero, … a person that has contact in the community and [knows] what … the community needs’. ¹³¹ The puntero informed them that there were many in the neighbourhood who worked with Transporte Olivos, a company dedicated to refuse collection, street cleaning, and green space maintenance.¹³² Many of these workers could not read and write and did not even know the names of the streets they were cleaning. As Ricardo stated, ‘it was a concrete need. It was … what they needed. We got qualified … and after that the literacy centre began’¹³³. The program

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¹³¹ Interview no. 3.
¹³³ Interview no. 3.
was born as a response to the needs of local families, and it expanded through the direction of local needs.

4.3.3. Concept of Change

It does not take long to realize that Renovado, as an ecclesial community, is focused on transformation. It is central to its communal ethos, identity, and culture, and evident in their ecclesial and personal practice, language, and integral ministries. This transformation is enacted on different planes – spiritual, emotional, psychological, linguistic, and economic – but it is the biblically inspired narrative of confrontation with the principalities and powers of evil that ties together the levels of interpretation. It is not by chance that every service in Renovado begins with at least ten minutes dedicated to intercessory prayer and spiritual warfare, and concludes with at least twenty minutes of ministry time with more spiritual warfare, healing, and the anointing.

While the prayers of the community of Renovado were focused on the transformation of the entire neighbourhood, transformation as a task of the local church is focused on the individual. In interviews on social change and transformation, church members concurred that transformation is the term used in the ecclesial milieu to speak of positive change. For example, when asked to define social change, Angelina answered: ‘it is difficult … because, for me, all change comes from the Lord, that is, I can’t side with the people of the world that say, “… it is because of the president”’.\(^{134}\) Pastor Ricardo repeated this view by saying that ‘transformation is in the human being’ and ‘a changed heart can generate a social change’, whereas ‘social change [are] the things that are generated by this [the heart?]’.\(^{135}\) Likewise, in the words of Andrés, ‘transformation … comes from oneself, from inside’.\(^{136}\) Thus, it becomes apparent that social change flows from the transformation of the individual person, but it is secondary and dependent on inner transformation.

This became even more apparent in the conversation about the social and

\(^{134}\) Interview no. 2.
\(^{135}\) Interview no. 3.
\(^{136}\) Interview no. 1.
infrastructural changes in the neighbourhood in recent years. Ricardo clearly acknowledged that infrastructure changes were made by the municipality and province: ‘it is a program … on the one hand … in the physical [vs. the spiritual], … which is done by the province or the municipality …’ On the other hand, he continued, ‘what we have to do is to change the persons’, a task that he clearly sees as connected to, but not necessarily congruent with, larger social change. While laughing, he told a story about people who used to lived in a villa but now live in public housing:

There are believers that maintain their apartment beautifully. And other people have an apartment that is a filthy mess. … They continue to live as if they were in the villa…and I believe that this [teaching people to take pride in their surroundings] is the role of the church.137

Several interviewees from both ecclesial communities used this image of a Christian taking care of his house.138 Magdelena answered the question ‘What is good change?’ by speaking of the apartment project: ‘They made dignified homes’, she said, ‘the houses are precious!’ She credited God for this change, although the municipality actually carried out the work. Nevertheless, she spoke of the need for individual transformation and instruction because, ‘if you do not teach the people, they do not … take care of [their apartments]’.139

Clearly a dichotomy exists between social change enacted by the municipality and transformation as a task of the local ecclesial community that is focused on the individual. The ecclesial community acquiesces that social change is beyond the realm of the work of the church, or at least beyond the direct focus of the mission of the local church. Ricardo said, ‘social transformation is without the Spirit’, something that consists solely of human effort and is not effective. He offered the example of the Peronist initiative to give apartments with parquet floors to families. According to him, many of whom received the apartments supposedly ripped up these floors for firewood to make an asado:140 ‘you have to teach people to

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137 Interview no. 3.
138 Interestingly, this same comparison was made in two interviews at Julieta as well. Interview no. 4 and 11.
139 Interview no. 4.
140 Spanish word used for Argentine style barbecue.
use things and not just give them to them’. His point is clear: social change is incomplete without an inward, spiritual transformation.

For Andrés, transformation begins with the individual but extends to the social through the formation of community. He made this explicit in defining social change in communitarian terms: ‘Social change are [sic] the friendships that one … sees. When I met Jesus, I accepted him into my heart … [and] I made new friendships’. For Andrés, these new friendships are not the same as transformation, but they are nevertheless linked to, and a result of, personal transformation. More specifically, Andrés spoke of transformation as a change in his way of thinking: ‘It turned me around completely, a different way of thinking’, he said, ‘before I thought of bad things … but not anymore’. The theme of a change of mentality figured prominently among those interviewed. As already mentioned, changes in mental outlook were implicitly referenced when explaining the difference between transformation and social change in relation to the care of their homes. Apostle Antonio, the pastor of Renovado’s mother church, explicitly made this point in citing Romans 12:1-2:

in the first place, it [transformation] occurs through a change of mentality. … You see when the Word says ‘…transform your understanding?’ Transform the manner of thought so that the manner of living is changed.

For Andrés, it is precisely this mental transformation that has enabled the ecclesial community. He stated, ‘before it was hard for me to speak with people [because] I was timid’, but after coming to church ‘I started to open up, I started…to learn to talk’. Nevertheless, Andrés, like the others interviewed, failed to move beyond a personally and/or communitarian focused mode of transformation to explain the realization of wider social transformation.

Although those interviewed generally failed to explain the connection between individual and community transformation and transformation of the larger

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141 Interview no. 3.
142 Interview no. 1.
143 Interview no. 7.
144 Interview no. 1.
social setting, they all approved of social change (i.e., new housing projects, food distribution programs, educational programs, etc.). All interviewees supported Renovado’s social ministries and commented that they were important. These were not passing comments because Renovado has had an estimable record of developing integral and sustaining programs with the help of outside funding. Their ecclesial community’s efforts upstage many larger churches and organizations. Nevertheless, the ecclesial community members failed to articulate how the local church directly engages or enacts this change in the greater social and cultural realm. They have a deep understanding of transformation that moves beyond improving education and employment; however, it is also constricted, failing to challenge deep-seated structural issues that obstruct good education and employment. The same interviewees that commended the socially oriented ministries of the Renovado, resoundingly affirmed that these social work programs were not essential facets of ecclesial ontology.

Apparently, there is a dichotomy between what is being said and what is being done, or alternatively, the theological framework of Renovado limits the expansion of the concept of transformation.

As the ecclesial community failed to speak of the social ministries as essential parts of ecclesial ontology, so the ecclesial community did not clearly articulate whether or not the local church should work with other churches and organizations to bring about social change and transformation. Many supported the notion, but there were concerns. This is astounding, considering that many of Renovado’s programs are actively funded by non-ecclesial organizations. Andrés, for example, insisted that the church does not work with anybody to put up lights and improve the neighbourhood, but instead prays that God will transform the neighbourhood. While he saw that there were possible situations where the church could work with the municipality, he believed that the municipality likely would not want to work with evangelicals. As mentioned above, Angelina directly attributed social transformation to divine providence. She affirmed the role of extra-ecclesial

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145 Andrés was the only person to make a connection, although not direct, between the ecclesial community and social transformation. Interview no. 1.

146 The vast majority of interviewees affirmed that a church is ‘church’ even if it does not have social ministries that reach out to the larger community. See Interviews no. 1, 2, 3, 5, and 7.

147 Interviews no. 1, 2, 3, and 7.
organizations to enact this change, but nonetheless affirmed God’s sovereignty: ‘the government [of] the country has to provide the means…but without the Lord, sometimes, it cannot be done’. This guarded recognition of God’s transforming action in and through humanity – individuals, communities, and organizations – opened the door to speak of the role of extra-ecclesial bodies – community organizations, NGOs, and the government – and the church’s relationship with them. The sheer difficulty of the task of social transformation in Ponti demands the recognition that the task extends beyond the means of the local church. Pablo Deiros, a well-known renovado Baptist leader, who is the director of the International Theology Baptist Seminary and co-pastor of one of the largest Baptist churches in the country, stated that ‘when we talk about transformation, do not forget that in Latin America, particularly in Argentina, this means the church doing what one supposes the state should do’. For Deiros this is problematic because local churches do not have the economic capacity to do this: ‘if I expect the local church to do what the state does, I am crazy, because I [speaking as a pastor] do not have the resources that the state has’. However, Angelina does not find this to be an excuse for quietism at Renovado; she asserts that the church should not be ‘waiting for people that do not know the Lord, waiting for the government’, but instead should be ‘joining up with the government to help’. Indeed, Angelina admitted that the church is not where it needs to be: ‘…we are still a little too inactive…we lack…more fire’.

This reticence to affirm the role of the local church in larger social movements persisted in questions concerning the piquetero movement of recent decades. Only one interviewee acknowledged that the local church could, in some instances, be involved in the piquetes. Instead, the general perception was that the piquetero movement has a tendency towards violence, larceny, clientelism, and

148 Interview no. 2.
149 Interview no. 18.
150 Interview no. 18.
151 Interview no. 2.
152 Interview no. 7. The Apostle Antonio, pastor of the mother church, mentioned that if he were a pastor in the notorious Villa 31 he would be up on the highway protesting with the people of the surrounding community.
deception and, as a result, is fruitless. However, interviewees were far more positive when asked in general about protesting, revealing that participation in protests was not the issue but rather the piquetero movement. Nevertheless, all interviewees, without exception, mentioned the importance of prayer as a viable alternative to protesting; for example, Angelina cited the annual event when evangelical pastors and leaders gather to pray for ‘transformation of our country’ in front of the Presidential Palace. The gathering is co-sponsored by the local partido pastoral council lead by Apostle Antonio, the head pastor of the mother church of Renovado. Andrés offered the even more vivid example of the tumultuous events surrounding the 2001 economic crisis. Once when he was attending a service at Renovado, looters broke into the corner market across the street. Although Andrés became excited when he spoke about how it would have been ‘triumphant’ for the church to take to the street, he recalled that no one from the church went out that night or any other night. Instead, as he said earlier, ‘The church only prays and intercedes, nothing more than that …’. 

This could be interpreted, simplistically, in line with the early work on Pentecostals in Chile and Brazil, such as Emilio Willems and Christian Lalive d’Epinay, where Classic Pentecostals were depicted as escapist and a-political in their formation of a transitional and survivalist identity in response to socio-cultural anomie. The interviewees of Renovado failed to make a clear connection between Christian belief and practice and their conceptions of transformation and transformation of the social realm. The individually focused transformation is fundamentally limited in its ability to interact with the larger social realm. As Andrés noted, the church only prays and intercedes, nothing more. However, as shall be detailed below, ecclesial practices – ministries developed in response to specific

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153 Interview no. 2.

154 See ‘Oración Por El País Frente a La Quinta de Olivos’, La Prensa (25 October 2009). This annual event is organized by the organizations Argentina, Dios Te Bendice, the Pastoral Council of [Mitre] and the Federation of Pastoral Councils of the Province of Buenos Aires.

155 Interview no. 1.

social needs, as well as expressly liturgical activities – demonstrate that the community does in fact engage the social realm at both the individual and community levels.

4.3.4. Ecclesial Practices

In this section we will examine the ecclesial practices of Renovado. First, we will survey Community Worship, which I use here to speak of the place and time of the primary community worship experience. In the case of Renovado this happens twice a week, on Tuesday and Saturday evenings in their multipurpose sanctuary. Then we will examine specific central ecclesial practices (Baptism, Holy Meal, Prayer, Spiritual Warfare, Anointing, Apostolic Vision, and Integral Ministries), some of which frequently occur during the central time of communal worship and others that do not. The intention of this section is to engage the ecclesial practices of this community so as to produce a true and faithful narrative of the community that analyses the transformative potential of central ecclesial practices as expressed in the voices of this local ecclesial community and its members.

Ecclesial Community Worship

The focal point of the liturgical space of Renovado is the wooden pulpit, centred on a small stage approximately five inches high, five feet deep and fifteen feet long. Directly behind and above the pulpit hangs a dark wooden cross set against shiny, purple and blue satin curtains that adorn the right section of the back wall. The other half of the wall is a conglomeration of filled-beyond-capacity storage bins. Entering into the storefront sanctuary, the well-used plastic chairs set out for worship services immediately draw the observer’s eyes to the right, to the centre of the sanctuary space where sits the pulpit, an area rug, and a cross. On the pulpit is a painting of three sequential images depicting a man with a heavy red bag slung over his shoulder, emerging from the left and walking to the right. In the background on the left is a simple green landscape with a grey, cloudy sky. As the figure approaches the cross, which bisects the entire work from top to bottom, he stoops lower and lower, until dropping the burden on the ground at the foot of the cross. The other half of the painting, to the right of the cross, by contrast, portrays a warm scene with light emanating from the cross out to a bright, blue sky and a flowered field, where an
empty-handed man walks erect and dressed in shiny, white clothing. The message of the image is clear: the cross is the place of transformation.

All services begin and end within the nucleus of transformation, on and around a multi-coloured area rug that sits on the right in front of the pulpit. This section of ground stands in contrast to the rest of the uncovered, hard, stone floor. Those who arrive for the beginning of the service, usually six to twelve people, circle around under the instruction of a leader for between five to fifteen minutes. Often holding hands, they pray, intercede, and do spiritual warfare. The prayer time is free and glossolalia can be heard along with petitions for ‘anointing’, ‘healing’, ‘liberation’, the ‘binding’ of demons and Satan, and the ‘loosing’ those who are trapped. At times the mood is solemn or sad; at other times the sanctuary is filled with shouts of jubilation.

Although the ecclesial community services appear at first to lack a set liturgy, both the weekly Tuesday night (8:00 pm) and Saturday night (8:00 pm) services demonstrate a general homogeneity. While there is not a set length for community gatherings, the services last roughly one hour and forty-five minutes, excluding the extended period of ‘ministry’ after the conclusion. While there is no set Order of Service, I was able to piece one together from observation.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Standard Order of Service157</th>
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<td>Opening Prayer</td>
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<td>Prayer (for the Sermon)</td>
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<td>Sermon</td>
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157 This Order of Service is a composite of all the services I attended except one (22 November 2008), because that was a special event and was not representative of a typical service at the church. Although the ecclesial community does not use a set Order of Service, almost all of the services follow a similar order, with very few exceptions. The exceptions tend to be added moments dedicated to prayer, testimonies, or Scripture reading.
Worship through Music
Ministry Time (with Prayer)

The services begin with a Scripture reading, usually by Pastor Ricardo. After the Scripture reading, a shorter time of leader-only led prayer begins, invoking more references to spiritual warfare, healing, and anointing. Following this, the congregation takes part in worship through music. Although a drum-set sits to the left of pulpit, the music is typically played digitally through a laptop computer attached to a stereo system; the lack of live instruments does not seem to hamper the atmosphere. Those gathered sing along with the words projected onto a white screen via an overhead projector and an old desktop computer. The first song rings out, ‘Padre quiero estar dónde tú estás…’, and the second, ‘Abre hoy los Cielos’. The songs sounded familiar, and I soon recalled that they were from an album produced by the praise and worship ministry of Claudio Freidzon’s Rey de Reyes church. On other nights, the repertoire is more varied but demonstrates the influence of Argentine neo-Pentecostalism and of pentevangelical worship leaders, such as Marcos Witt and Jesus Adrian Romero. The shadow of Argentine neo-Pentecostalism under the likes of Omar Cabrera, Carlos Annacondia, and Claudio Freidzon has spread far and wide. The worship style is free, aided by the music, projected lyrics, freestanding plastic chairs, the leader’s encouragement, and a communal expectation of a personal encounter with God. Renovado is clearly not a traditional Baptist congregation.

Like many Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches, Renovado reserves a central role for testimony. Ricardo believes that the testimony is a fundamental part of Christian formation, particularly when working among the working class and the poor. ‘The topic of sharing testimonies’, he said, ‘is important because this generates faith in the people. Especially here, where the people are simple; they have to have something practical’. I heard testimonies before, during, and after the services, during interviews, during preparations for the Saturday soup kitchen, the after school

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158 Spanish for ‘Father, I want to be where you are …’
159 Spanish for ‘Open the heavens today’.
160 Interview no. 3.
programs, and on the street while waiting for a bus. Although testimonies can be given anytime throughout the service, they are typically reserved for after the first set of songs. Common testimonial themes were health and work; for example, one entry in my field notes recounted this testimony:

One sister shared that her prayer request had been answered concerning a supervisor at the factory where she works. This supervisor mistreated the workers and spread rumours of labour cuts. The sister spoke of needing to depend on God and not being able to do anything but pray, revealing a robust faith but also a sense of helplessness. However, the business owners found out about the exploits of this employee and s/he was replaced by a new supervisor who treats the personnel better.

When it is time for the message, the community opens their Bibles to hear the Word of God, as interpreted and articulated by the preacher. The raised and central placement of the podium, the preacher’s prayer for help in preaching the Word, the request for the congregation to open their Bibles to read a passage, and the space afforded the preacher to speak without interruption, all ensure that the sermon endures as a central practice and mark of the church. Ricardo is the main preacher, but there is also participation from lay preachers, both male and female. The sermons typically focus on a personal relationship with God and issues of health, economic difficulty, illness, depression, and spiritual oppression. For example, Ricardo preached on a Tuesday evening on the theme of the anointing, using the passages Isaiah 43:3-4 and Psalm 16:2. Drawing from the psalm, ‘I said to the Lord, ‘You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing’, Ricardo defined the anointing as a complete turning over of oneself to God. He argued that all believers have the Spirit, but not all have the anointing, a personal experience that all should desire. Here he makes a clear theological distinction between his message and the traditional Pentecostal insistence on the unrepeatable and necessary experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. He spoke of anointing as a continual confrontation with our ‘rebellious hearts’, and the theme of breaking old habits was a mainstay in his sermons. On a different night, Ricardo offered a similar exhortation: ‘You have to declare it in the spiritual [realm] but you have to do your part in the flesh. It takes time to break habits’. Interestingly, unlike many Neo-Pentecostal churches in Latin America, prosperity gospel theology did not have a strong presence. Although
prosperity was openly regarded as something to be desired, the goal, in the words of Ricardo, ‘is not being rich, but … [having a] balanced and ordered life’.

Although preaching is central to the service, it is only one part of the overall message, which also incorporates testimonies, prophecies, and prayer. The average sermon is only one quarter of an almost two hour long service.\textsuperscript{161} Ministry and prayer, not preaching, are the culmination of the service. The times of prayer, as noted in the template Order of Service above, are the nucleus of Renovado’s communal practice and identity, accounting for almost forty percent of the service time.\textsuperscript{162} Clearly, this demonstrates a transition from more traditional Baptist practice, which emphasizes first and foremost the preaching of the Word.

This preponderant emphasis on prayer is directly connected to the community’s concept of transformation as a battle with the forces of evil, conversion, formation of a new family, healing (mind, body, and soul), and empowerment in the anointing. It also substantiates the numerous affirmations among those I interviewed that prayer is the principal reason that their neighbourhood had changed through the efforts of the church. The communal testimony was that the neighbourhood had gone from being a place of ‘darkness’ to a place of ‘light’ because of the faithful prayers of the community.

\textit{Baptism}

Renovado is a community that is difficult to define ecclesiologically and sacramentally. The reformers’ trope of ‘word’ and ‘sacrament’ simply does not apply. While the preaching of the word has a central role in the life of the community, the traditional sacraments, or the ordinances in the Believers Church

\textsuperscript{161} Roughly 25%.

\textsuperscript{162} It was difficult to determine the exact time dedicated to prayer in and around the services, due to several circumstances. First, given the extemporaneous nature of the services, prayer is found sprinkled throughout the services, sometimes longer and easily measurable and at other times short and difficult to record. Second, at the end of the service there is a time of prayer and ministry. This typically began right before the end of the service and then continued on for at least twenty minutes after the close, when those who desired could leave. Due to the late hour of the end of the service (usually around 10:00 pm) and issues of security and travel, I had to leave after only twenty minutes, whether or not the time of ministry had ended or not. In actual fact, the ministry time often goes on for much longer. Nevertheless, I recorded only twenty minutes of prayer/ministry time for each service, meaning that the amount of time cited is actually higher.
tradition,\textsuperscript{163} do not exist as such. Even the community’s own self-identity is confusing; it is ‘functionally’ a church community, but politically and spiritually an ‘annex’ or ‘branch’ of the mother church.\textsuperscript{164} This bewildering configuration extends to the practice of the ordinances. When I first visited Renovado, baptisms were only held at the mother church. Ricardo had expressed interest in having baptisms held locally at Renovado because he wanted to form more community identity: to ‘give a special touch to this place because that will help the people to feel they form part [of something]’.\textsuperscript{165} When I visited a year later, Ricardo proudly said that they had held their first baptisms in early 2009.

The interviews revealed that there was no consensus in the community concerning the significance of baptism. Those, like Angelina, emphatically questioned the correlation of transformation with baptism: ‘No! Baptism does not change people. …The water does not save anybody’; ‘it is a step of obedience’.\textsuperscript{166} In like manner, Ricardo said, ‘Baptism is an act of faith and it is symbolism’.\textsuperscript{167}

Antonio, the pastor of the mother church, had this to say about the ordinances: ‘For me they are important from a theological point of view because Jesus proposed them…and it is important to obey him’, but baptism does ‘not carry any grace in and of itself’. He made a clear distinction between ordinances and sacraments, the second being transcendental and imbued with grace. However, it is not that he does not believe God imparts grace through socio-religious acts, but instead that grace is not parted \textit{ex opere operato}. ‘The work of God’, he stated, ‘and the transcendence … he has over the life of each person depends to a great extent on whether each person wants to take it or not’. So, he continued, ‘God is a gentleman and … does not assault or force anyone’, because sharing in his transcendence depends on believing that God is ‘capable’. The receiving of grace is not \textit{ex opere operato} through a sacrament, but instead according to the disposition of the individual believer. This

\textsuperscript{163} Baptists typically speak of ordinances – baptism and communion – and not sacraments, placing the emphasis on submission to commands and not on the instrumentality of grace.

\textsuperscript{164} Interview no. 7.

\textsuperscript{165} Interview no. 3.

\textsuperscript{166} Interview no. 2.

\textsuperscript{167} Interview no. 3.
serves to make each person a priest and opens up all time and space to be sacraments. He stated,

If I give it [a moment that appears to lack transcendence] transcendence, God can give life to this [moment].

Luz and Magdelena also spoke in voluntarist sacramental terms. Luz spoke of baptism as a significant, empowering event because it was a personal decision. Magdelena, who had been baptized as a child, also affirmed this when speaking of her adult baptism: ‘It changed me personally because I decided to be baptized’.

For others, baptism is sacramental and transformative in and of itself. Andrés, who openly expressed frustration with having to attend services at the mother church without reciprocal visits, described baptism as transformative: ‘Baptism is…to leave behind the old clothing and…put on new clothing’. However, unlike Ricardo, Andrés sees baptism as more than a symbol; it is something that changed his way of talking, thinking, and acting. Miguel, who had not yet been baptized, also saw transcendence in baptism itself: ‘Baptism…is very good in order to be more cemented in the way of … God and to have more liberation…’

Holy Meal

As with Baptism, Renovado does not have a regular practice of the Santa Cena. According to Pastor Ricardo, the community does it ‘periodically’, which means ‘one or two times a year’. He openly recognized this is as a deficiency, again for reasons of identity formation. While the Lord’s Supper is held monthly in the mother church, a limited number of regular attendees from Renovado attend services there. The complex ecclesial border between the mother church and Renovado fogs the community’s identity and practice.

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168 Interview no. 7.
169 Interview no. 4.
170 Interview no. 1.
171 Interview no. 6.
172 Spanish for ‘Holy Meal’.
173 Interview no. 3.
Considering the inconsequential place of the Lord’s Supper, it was not surprising to find that most interviewees’ responses were brief. Miguel, who had never taken communion, struggled to even muster a response. He commented on what he knew, the obvious contradiction between what is said and the elements themselves. ‘They say the bread and wine’, he noted, ‘but … you drink a little juice’. He then expressed embarrassment for his paucity of understanding, lamenting, ‘I do not know how to explain it’.174 Ricardo, in good pastoral fashion, remarked on the existential (it is ‘communion with God’), dutiful (it is ‘fulfil the mandate of God’), and commemorative aspects of the practice (it is to ‘wait for his return’).175 For Andrés, the Lord’s Supper is also an expiatory experience, but highly personal and evocative: ‘I believe the Holy Meal … [is] reconciliation with God, …like starting a new communion once again … with God’.176 Magdelena spoke of it as a time of reflection and remembrance: ‘The Holy Meal is to remember him and to remember … that … if there is something in your life … you need to surrender, surrender it’.177 Luz, fascinatingly, spoke of the practice in sacramental terms that moved beyond personal reflection, demonstrating a latent Catholicism: ‘It is like receiving a part of Christ that purifies me’, she said, but then quickly distanced herself from her Catholic past by clarifying that she did not intend to directly correlate the bread with the body of Christ as was the case when she ‘used to take the host’.178 Nonetheless, this direct expiatory experience with the crucified Christ is real even today for Luz, long after becoming an evangelical.

If one thing is clear concerning the Holy Meal at Renovado, it is that there is no concise, collective theological understanding of this practice; instead, there are varying individual, experientially-mediated confessions. Nevertheless, most find the Lord’s Supper to be an experience in which exists the possibility of communion with God and forgiveness. Although, for most, the Holy Meal is not an ex opere operato sacrament, it is, nonetheless, a sacramental opportunity for an encounter with the

174 Interview no. 6.
175 Interview no. 3.
176 Interview no. 1.
177 Interview no. 4.
178 Interview no. 5.
divine through the personal and subjective disposition. Returning to the comments of Apostle Antonio, the Lord’s Supper can be sacramental because personal disposition serves to make transcendent ‘a common moment that appears to lack transcendentence’. 179

During my sojourn at Renovado I never had the opportunity to witness or partake of communion in a formal, sacramental sense, 180 nevertheless, I did partake of a weekly Holy Meal that makes the everyday transcendent. Renovado uses their sanctuary as a soup kitchen each and every Saturday morning. The context that gave birth to this ministry was the crisis of December 2001. Two months before that on 15 September 2001, under pelting rain and hail, between 250,000 to 400,000 evangelicals met at the Obelisk on the avenue 9 de Julio. This was a prodigious moment for evangelicals, a demonstration of their gains in social capital over the past few decades. It was the first evangelical mass gathering of this size in the history of Argentina and the first time they had gathered in mass at such a significant public space. The Obelisk is in downtown Buenos Aires and is the site of the first raising of the Argentine flag in the city, as well as being a contemporary site for protests and celebrations. Exuding the confidence of a sector no longer content to cower on the fringes of society, they filled the airways with the sounds of contemporary praise and worship music, demanding religious equality and critiquing the national augmentation of poverty, unemployment, and violence. 181 They also collected twelve tons of food while declaring: ‘Children and elderly are sacrificed, future and hope, on the altar of the insatiable idol of man and usury. The consequences of this sin are in plain sight: a society where the poor and the excluded multiply’. 182 In the wake of

179 Interview no. 7.

180 I distinguish sacramental, the possibility of a transformative encounter between the human and the divine in a social practice, from sacramentalist, the affirmation – ex opera operato – that a social practice that has been removed from the mundane and made into a de facto sacred event.


182 Statement by organization - Consejo Nacional Cristiano Evangélico (CNCE) – that organized the event. See Wynarczyk, Ciudadanos, p. 331.
the crisis of December 2001, many evangelical churches opened their doors to respond to the exponential increase in poverty and hunger.

Renovado stood among this contingent, opening their sanctuary doors of ‘Praise’ and ‘Adoration’, inviting in any and all to eat at their soup kitchen. With time, the evangelical zeal for feeding the hungry and clothing the naked waned. However, Renovado persevered offering food to the hungry long after churches closed their provisional soup kitchens. Now, more than ten years later, the community prepares and shares a meal each and every Saturday. At the end of the meal, after all have left, the volunteers sit down and eat. The day I attended, my first at Renovado, Argentines, Paraguayans, Peruvians, Chileans, women and men were all at the table. We prayed, broke bread, and ate lunch and drank juice. The disposition of those present was to love those in need; the bread, the juice, and the fellowship of the everyday were transubstantiated.

**Anointing**

La unción (the anointing)\(^{183}\) is, along with prayer and spiritual warfare, one of the foundational ecclesial practices in Renovado. As noted above, Pastor Ricardo often exhorts the community to seek anointing and every service ends with a time of ministry which facilitates this pursuit. Ricardo spoke openly about his first encounter with a power infused faith through attending the power evangelism campaigns of Carlos Annacondia in the 1980s, and his experience of anointing at the renewal meetings of Claudio Freidzon in the 1990s. He recounted how he, Apostle Antonio, and others met to pray for four years for the arrival of the anointing.

The Argentine renovación\(^{184}\) began in 1992 with Assemblies of God pastor Claudio Freidzon and the Rey de Reyes Church\(^{185}\) in the wealthy neighbourhood of Belgrano in northern Buenos Aires. The most well known account claims Freidzon made a trip to the United States to meet Benny Hinn after having read his books *Good Morning Holy Spirit* and *The Anointing*. During this visit, Hinn prayed for

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183 While the term *unción* (anointing) was not new to the Spanish language, after 1992 it became a theological and phenomenological term that referred to a specific experience.

184 Spanish for ‘renewal’, the common term used to describe the movement that began in 1992 and the churches that received la unción.

185 Spanish for ‘King of Kings’.
Freidzon to receive the anointing, which he subsequently brought back to his church. From there, the anointing spread far and wide.\(^{186}\) Although the anointing renewal came well after the advent of neo-Pentecostalism, it served to incorporate other pre-existing neo-Pentecostal practices such as spiritual warfare, liberation, inner healing, prosperity gospel,\(^{187}\) and the Apostolic Vision.\(^{188}\) As Hilario Wynarczrk has argued, the anointing has become the power base and foundation of the Argentine neo-Pentecostal power structure and practices.\(^{189}\)

While Freidzon and Rey de Reyes Church functioned as the epicentre of the renewal, the movement also spread to the oldest Baptist church in Argentina, Del Centro, in October of 1992.\(^{190}\) This proved fortuitous because it incorporated two key Baptist leaders: co-pastors Carlos Mraida and Pablo Deiros. Del Centro, Mraida, and Deiros were instrumental in spreading the anointing among Argentine Baptists, in scripting of a theological interpretation of the anointing, and in making subsequent ecclesiological and hierarchical changes that were palatable for some Baptists.\(^{191}\) In


\(^{187}\) I have included Prosperity Gospel in this taxonomy of Argentine neo-Pentecostalism although I do not think it consistently applies to the Renovados Argentine Baptists. I am well aware that some have argued that Deiros and Mraida are proponents of the Prosperity Gospel, see A. Piedra, ‘Teología de La Gracia y Teología de La Prosperidad: El Desafío Permanente de Las Teologías Populares’, Universidad Bíblica Latinoamericana. Online: http://esepa.org/dmdocuments/tgraciaatprosperidad.pdf (accessed 11 February 2013); and Hong, Una Iglesia Posmoderna. However, while it may be possible to make an argument that these individuals are proponents of a soft prosperity gospel, I would argue that this does not apply to all neo-Pentecostal Baptists. The present case study stands as an example.


\(^{190}\) Del Centro was founded by the Baptist Pablo Besson in 1883.

\(^{191}\) The process of the interpretation of anointing among Baptists was fraught with tension, direct conflict, and division. On the one hand, avid supporters, such as Deiros and Mraida, used the
1993, *Del Centro* organized and sponsored an evangelistic campaign in conjunction with Annacondia based in downtown Buenos Aires.\(^{192}\)

The effects of the anointing movement among Baptists has been mixed. On the one hand, it contributed, at least momentarily, to increased denominational growth. The first year of the anointing (1992-1993), Baptists grew by 16%. Nonetheless, the growth was not sustained in subsequent years (1993-1997, 2.05%) and even this growth trend must be read within the larger context of evangelical growth since 1982. For example, Baptists grew by an average of 5.35% between 1982 and 1989 and only 4.25% from 1992-1997.\(^{193}\) On the other hand, clear divisions arose as, by some estimates, over half of Argentine Baptist churches

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central Baptist publication *El Expositor* to make their argument for the validity of the anointing experience. See C. Mraida, ‘La Nueva Vieja Unción’, *El Expositor Bautista* 84 (1992): 1-2; Interview no. 18a. On the other hand, there was an array of detractors: 1) Critiques questioning the emotional and individualist focus of the experience; 2) Critiques that the experience threatened to displace the authority of the Scriptures. See M. Breneman, ‘El “Avivamiento” Espiritual en La Argentina en Perspectiva Bíblica’, *Boletín Teológico* 29 (1997): 65-82; S. O. Libert, ‘La Teoría del del “Big Bang” y Las Señales de La Unción’, *El Expositor Bautista* 84 (1992): 25; J. León, ‘El “Avivamiento” Espiritual en La Argentina en Perspectiva Psicológica’, *Boletín Teólogo* 29 (1997): 64. 3) Critique of the experience as threatening Baptist theological moorings, which understood the indwelling of the Spirit to occur at conversion, because the anointing resembled Pentecostalism’s baptism of the Holy Spirit. Out of this critique grew a new organization, the *Asociación Bautista Argentina* (http://www.bautistas.org.ar/qui_identidad.htm. 4) Critique of the historicity of revivalism, noting it as a recent phenomenon rooted in the Great Awakenings of 18th and 19th centuries and its failure to extend the notion of revival to the larger social and cosmological reality. Progressive evangelicals such as René Padilla, Jorge Leon, Mervin Breneman, and Nancy Bedford were vocal proponents of this critique. See the conglomeration of articles in *Boletín Teológico* 28, no. 68 (1997). In response to the initial tension, the denominational Committee of Theological Matters convened and produced the *Documento Sobre la Unción* (Document on the Anointing) in 1993, which demonstrated a compromise but by no means a consensus. Four years later (1997) the debate continued and they called an *Encuentro Nacional de Dialogo y Reflexión* (National Meeting for Dialogue and Reflection). However, although Baptists agreed that the Holy Spirit enables a transformation in the Christian, division still persisted concerning how the anointing, a unique and punctual experience, fits into Baptist polity and practice. See Alexander, ‘Revival and Renewal’, pp. 44-48.\(^{192}\)

\(^{192}\) Interview no. 18a. According to Deiros, the campaign lasted thirty-two days and the result was ‘one thousand four hundred and fifty decisions of faith’ and ‘800 people went through the liberation tent’. Former leader of deliverance ministry for Annacondia, Pablo Bottari would serve in El Centro Baptist, demonstrating both an incorporation of Annacondia’s spiritual warfare style of evangelism and the novice unción experience.

became *renovada* churches, signalling a profound shift in ecclesial practice and polity.\(^ {194}\)

The personal experience of Ricardo and Renovado fits into this larger *unción* movement as well as the *renovación* among Argentine Baptists. This is another reminder of the profound pentecostalization of Argentine Baptists in recent years.\(^ {195}\)

Back on the southwest corner of Mitre in Renovado, the anointing continues to hold a central place in ecclesial life and practice. As mentioned above, the anointing in Renovado is not the Pentecostal Baptism of Spirit, but a subsequent and repeated pentevangelical experience of God’s empowering for Christian living and service. It is empowerment for the transformed life and transforming service.\(^ {196}\) So each service in Renovado fittingly ends with a pursuit of the Spirit’s anointing and healing.

*Prayer*

Prayer is the lifeblood of Renovado. It is central to transformation within communal life, and is a weapon with which to confront the forces of evil. Prayer dominates each service and can be found in any and all ecclesial activities. It begins, leads, and ends cell groups, commences the Saturday soup kitchens, and guides the children during their educational supplementary classes. Prayer also functions as a power base for other significant practices and beliefs, such as conversion, spiritual warfare, integral healing (mind, body, and soul), and anointing.

An often repeated and defining communal testimony recounts how the neighbourhood went from being a place of ‘darkness’ to a place of ‘light’. Andrés candidly spoke of the changes: ‘This was a messed up neighbourhood’, he said, ‘the neighbourhood totally changed. From darkness … the light came’.\(^ {197}\) Andrés’ wife,

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\(^ {194}\) Interview no. 7. The Apostle Antonio made bold claims about the spread of the anointing, claiming that most Baptist churches became *renovada*. Deiros made a similar affirmation that between 75-80% was a realistic number, although noting the level of influence differs from church to church; Deiros, Interview. Buenos Aires (23 December 2009). Unfortunately, no one has developed a study to date that offers statistics concerning the number of Baptist churches that were affected by the anointing and *renovación*. For the most extensive study to date on this period in Argentine Baptist history, see Alexander, ‘Revival and Renewal’.


\(^ {197}\) Interview no. 1.
Magdelena described the previous state of the neighbourhood in even more detail: ‘It was all villas’, she said, motioning to show the specific area, ‘before there were huts…[and] every two out of three would burn down because there was [a] mess of wires. Besides, the filth, the smell…was…repulsive’. However, with prayer came transformation: ‘There is a church … that intercedes for the neighbourhood…[and] we would go out to pray with all the people…on the corners. … This changed a lot’. These changes are not simply spiritual or superficial, but include the results of gentrification. ‘Now we have apartments, we have…lights everywhere’, he observed.

This common narrative of the surrounding community as a dark place was not, as it may sound, poetic license, but instead a spiritualized commentary on the actual lack of an electrical system and street lamps. Light came to the neighbourhood with the opening of the municipal public housing project aimed to eliminate villas. Apparently, it was the municipal bulldozers that brought change to the neighbourhood. The role of Renovado in this project was little more than helping to dig some ditches for the sewer and water system. Nevertheless, Andrés states that the change materialized ‘because of prayer’. He emphatically stated, ‘I believe God touched…the neighbourhood … He blessed the neighbourhood…’. For Magdalena, God ‘prospered the neighbourhood’. This prosperity can be seen today in the presence of functioning water, an electrical system, apartment buildings, and lights over the formerly dark streets. Prosperity is also a reality for Andrés and Magdalena, who now have their own home. Prayer as such is not confined to the limited religious sphere but engages all spheres of social reality – the cultural, political, and economic.

The all-encompassing role of prayer in the life of neo-Pentecostals is rooted in their Weltanschauung. The neo-Pentecostal cosmos is that of the creation myths of the Old Testament: the heavens, the earth, and the abyss. These three levels of the

198 Interview no. 4.
199 Interview no. 1.
200 Ibid.
201 Interview no. 4.
202 German for ‘worldview’.
cosmos are interconnected, and it is here that beings from the heavens (angels) and from the abyss (demons) intermingle with humans and other creatures on the earth. The canonical and non-canonical narrative of the fallen angel (Satan) and his cohorts registers strong in this narrative. In neo-Pentecostal political theology the gods of nations, regions, and cites are fallen angels and/or demons. These demons seek to destroy what God has made and to bind individuals, communities, and nations. A more typical evangelical narrative of Christ as expiatory sacrifice is juxtaposed with the narrative of Christ as victor over Satan and his cohorts.

From this neo-Pentecostal cosmology a form of tactical prayer has developed. Prayer becomes the medium through which the individual and the ecclesial community confront the oppressive principalities and powers of darkness that are at work in society and the world. This prayer is not a form of apolitical escapism, but instead a vital vehicle of translation and transposition between the narrative of the Scriptures and present reality, between the popular religious worldview and modern society.

Prayer is a vital tool to navigate and effect transformation in the confluence of the pre-modern, modern, and postmodern worlds in the present day society of exclusion in Argentina. The neo-Pentecostal Weltanschauung simultaneously engages the modern and pre-modern worlds of much popular religion in Argentina. On the subject of spiritual warfare, Wynarczyk has stated:

*spiritual warfare* does not stand in opposition to the logic of popular beliefs or against the spiritual etiology of the inherent illnesses of a part of popular knowledge and psychology. It does not produce a change in the system of thought, …but a persistence of cultural

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203 Although a theology of fallen angels is only developed in non-canonical literature (I En. 1-39), there is a hint of this in both the OT (Is. 14:30-20) and NT (Lk. 10:18; Rev. 12:3-8; II Pt. 1:19). Furthermore, there is a long and significant tradition of demonology in Christian theology with one of the high water marks being Augustine’s *City of God*.

204 Again, neo-Pentecostals have some canonical evidence on their side (Dan. 10:12-13, 20-21) as well as theological tradition including Augustine, Justin Martyr, and others. For the most in depth discussion of Pentecostal political theology and the question of the principalities and powers to date, see Yong, *In the Days of Caesar*, pp. 122-33.

205 Based on passages such as Mark 10:48 and II Timothy 2:5-6 and positing that Jesus is the ransom to release the captives from the clutches of the evil. Some comparison could also be made to Gustaf Aulén’s more modernized model of *Christus Victor*, who brings liberation from bondage. See G. Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*, trans. A. G. Herbert (New York: MacMillan, 1969).
patterns redefined by a Christian discourse. *Spiritual warfare* does not say that el Pombero and San la Muerte do not exist but that they live and work in Resistencia and Corrientes, are employed by Satan and we should expel them in order to liberate those territories.  

As such, confrontational prayer engages popular religion by rejecting it; therefore, prayer can generally function as a form of protest through which the ecclesial community can engage the world around it. Responding to the question concerning the validity of protest for the ecclesial community, Angelina stated that ‘protesting is not prohibited, but also there were moments [when] our church…goes to the Presidential Residence to pray’.  

She recognizes a valid time and place for protest, but stresses that the ecclesial community is involved already in a type of protest: prayer at the presidential palace. She continued stating that just as they get together sometimes to pray for the country, you can also go out to appeal for something. And I think in this moment we are seeing a lot more of going [out] to bless the country, … because they entered into congress…and] they have plans to do what we did in the Quinta at the Obelisk.  

For Angelina, this is not a casual engagement, but a calling on the Lord, who, ‘in the spiritual [realm]… is breaking chains’. Andrés made a similar association between prayer and protest: ‘I believe that the church should go out [to protest]…[because] there is a lot of insecurity … But, prayer has power, and … the church prays’.  

At one level, prayer is evidently an excuse to not ‘go out’ and ‘protest’, but it is also presented as a viable and powerful alternative. This confrontational prayer is a type of protest that engages the world, often through direct action. For example, large-scale prayer meetings, such as the massive meetings at the Obelisk in downtown Buenos Aires of more than 100,000 evangelicals in 1999 and between 250,000 and

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207 Interview no. 2.  
208 Angelina refers to the Obelisk in the middle of the 9 de Julio Avenue in downtown Buenos Aires. Although not as significant historically for public protests as the Plaza de Mayo, it nevertheless is a central plaza and public space where protests are often held and local and national football team victories are celebrated. It was also the site of the first massive gatherings of evangelicals. Ibid.  
209 Ibid.  
210 Interview no. 1.
give some credence to the assertion that prayer is a viable alternative to protest. In these settings, evangelicals, as a whole, petitioned for equal treatment with Catholics under Argentine law and for measures to combat corruption and poverty. Prayer is more than mere symbolism, it is also a tactical practice of engagement.

**Spiritual Warfare, Inner Healing, and Liberation**

As detailed in Chapters 1-3, liberation was a buzzword in the sixties and seventies; however, only in rare cases did it penetrate into the popular vocabulary of the evangelical ecclesial setting. In Renovado, the term was used to refer to spiritual, emotional, and psychological healing, rather than to LALT. For Pastor Ricardo, liberation, ‘is healing that God does in the life of a person’. Healing, in his words, is ‘to renounce bondage that can be from [a] spiritual inheritance, from our ancestors, or…what one used to practice’. As mentioned above, prayer is the central tool of the spiritual warfare movement. Inner healing also falls under this rubric and is best classified as a subcategory of the spiritual warfare movement. Ricardo spoke about the inner healing program he instituted with his wife at the church. He described it as a combination of the ‘traditional’ curriculum that deals with the ‘4 Doors’ – a reference to the text by well-known neo-Pentecostal Baptist pastor and self-help author Bernardo Stamateas – and working to heal past emotional and psychological pain and breaking ‘spiritual inheritances’ and ‘curses’. The theory of the ‘doors’ postulates that demons enter ‘people, communities, ethnic groups, and cultures through “sins and traumas, individual and

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211 Wynarczyk has called this event ‘the true baptism by fire of evangelicals in public space as a movement of protest for the distribution of the benefits of society’. Wynarczyk, *Ciudadanos de Dos Mundos*, pp. 299-325.

212 Arguably the same could be said for Catholics as evidenced by the observation and interviews I did in a Catholic community.

213 Interview no. 3.


215 Interview no. 3.
The doors to spiritual oppression can be individual – sickness, sexual abuse, bitterness – or collective – massacres of indigenous communities, ethnic oppression, the occultism or corruption of national leaders, such as José López Rega. While this may sound like a hopeless dichotomy, this would be an overstatement. For example, in the same conversation concerning inner healing, Ricardo spoke of using the ‘secular’ text *Women Who Love Too Much* and the need to teach women to love themselves and recognize that they do not exist simply ‘for men’. Moreover, he spoke of ‘education as a liberating tool’ and referred to the church’s academic assistance and reading programs.

However, clearly prayer, spiritual warfare, inner healing, and liberation cannot be directly exchanged for direct social action. Has prayer and spiritual engagement with the demonic powers changed the neighbourhood? Although spiritual warfare and inner healing offer opportunities for transformation and a spiritual interpretation of the political, they also fail to engage fully the socio-political reality in its complexity. As detailed by Andrés above, at certain times and places prayer and spiritual warfare have served as alternatives to direct action. Even Antonio acknowledged that ‘we…have prayed an infinity of times to break these things, and…for one reason or another, they remain, because it is something strong’. He also asserted that ‘one thing is prayer and another thing is working for transformation’. However, beyond this there is also a need for reflexivity in these practices to better discern and analyse how they are hurting as well as helping. There is potential for transformation in these practices, but the neo-Pentecostal Weltanschauung fails to effectively engage and discern socio-political reality. In the end, it would be fair to say that spiritual warfare, inner healing, and liberation are not forms of escapism, but are possible practices of engagement and reflexivity.

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217 Antonio made this accusation against López Rega, Interview no. 7.
219 Interview no. 3.
220 Interview no. 7.
221 I would argue that there is a possibility of developing practices of confrontational prayer that are divorced from the heritage of colonialist cartography and imperialist militarism that is usually
Apostolic Vision

Again, one of the difficult questions concerning Renovado is its ecclesial ontology: is it a church? The preaching of the word is central but the traditional sacraments, or ordinances in the Baptist vernacular, are not. However, it is not the improper institution of the sacraments that ultimately poses a challenge to Renovado’s ecclesial ontology, but the Apostolic Vision/Apostolic Paradigm.²²² The Apostolic Vision has become a source of contention among Argentine Baptists through the larger pentecostalization of Latin American evangelicalism and the renovación of a sector of Argentine Baptists during the 1990s. These renewed Baptists have taken an active role, exercising key leadership positions in the Argentine Baptist Convention and its educational institutions. Not surprisingly, there are now Argentine Baptist pastors who are noted leaders in the development and formation of almost all of the practices incorporated into what Wynarcyk has called the neo-Pentecostal ‘power base’ of the anointing: on spiritual warfare, Eduardo Lorenzo;²²³ on Spiritual Deliverance, Pablo Bottari;²²⁴ on inner healing, Bernardo Stamateas;²²⁵ and on the Apostolic Vision, Pablo Deiros and Carlos Mraida. All of the practices have brought profound changes to ecclesial practice and polity, but it is

the case with the spiritual warfare and correlated Spiritual Mapping movement. See Holvast, ‘Spiritual Mapping’, or the published book, Spiritual Mapping in the United States and Argentina.

²²² Pablo Deiros uses the term ‘New Apostolic Paradigm’, see ‘El Avivamiento Espiritual en La Argentina en Perspectiva Histórica’, and ‘The Roots and Fruits of the Argentine Revival’, pp. 29-55. C. Peter Wagner prefers the term ‘New Apostolic Reformation’, see The New Apostolic Churches, p. 18; Churchquake!, p. 38. The interviewees in Renovado preferred the term ‘Apostolic Vision’ and for that reason I have opted for that term.


²²⁴ Pablo Bottari was the director of Deliverance Ministry under Carlos Annacondia and then became staff member of Del Centro Baptist Church in the wake of the renewal movement. He has spoken widely about his methods of deliverance, see P. Bottari, ‘Dealing with Demons in Revival Evangelism’. In The Rising Revival: Firsthand Accounts of the Incredible Argentine Revival - and How it Can Spread Throughout the World, ed. C. P. Wagner, and P. Deiros (Ventura, CA: Renew Books, 1998), pp. 75-90.

the Apostolic Vision that has challenged some of the central moorings of Baptist’s Free Church identity and theology.

While most in the ecclesial community understand Renovado as a ‘church’, Pastor Ricardo and Apostle Antonio emphatically stated that it is an extension of the mother church. Ricardo described Renovado as a functioning church, but affirmed that it is ultimately part of the mother church because of the Apostolic Vision. Unlike the church growth missionary models of the past when the mother church would eventually recognize a church plant as a ‘church’, based on some preconceived set of organizational criteria, such as number of members, economic autonomy, mature leadership, the Apostolic Vision offers no such possibility. Renovado will always be an annex and never, officially, a church. This generates a myriad of ecclesiological questions, such as: can an ecclesial community be a church? Indeed, this question reminds us of the ponderings of Leonardo Boff and others concerning the CEB movement, which is precisely why numerous progressive evangelicals decried the Apostolic Vision as an emphatic movement towards Roman Catholicism and clericalism.226

Examining the Apostolic Vision reveals the profound changes that neo-Pentecostalism has brought to Baptist practice and polity. This Apostolic Vision is built upon a twofold strategy: 1) to reinstitute a hierarchy of pneumatic gifts and a hierarchy of spiritual power and authority, and 2) to forward a view of mission that transcends the local through unity.

First, the Apostolic Vision reinstitutes the apostolic gift and the hierarchy of charisms listed in Ephesians 4:11-13 (especially 4:11). In the Argentine context, this restoration of spiritual gifts is a natural extension of the anointing, the empowerment of the Holy Spirit for Christian service. According to its proponents, the apostle functions as a pastor of pastors, exercising spiritual power and authority over

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believers and churches that recognize this authority in a ‘voluntary’ manner. Accordingly, apostolic authority concerns, as Deiros notes, ‘spiritual leadership, spiritual, and not administrative, spiritual [authority] that transcends the local’. For Mraida, the apostle is not an ‘ecclesiastical official’, but instead the recognized leader of a grassroots and organic network of churches, ministers, and leaders. As such, the apostle is not authoritarian, a neo-Pentecostal caudillo; the apostle’s authority derives from his or her character and anointing from God. He or she is a ‘spiritual’ authority, according to Deiros and Mraida, that is ‘not imposed, but recognized’.

Nevertheless, the Apostolic Vision is primarily concerned with social power and authority. Whether in the local church or in inter-ecclesial cells developed under the authority of apostles, the authority is both political as well as spiritual. Eduardo Lorenzo, a neo-Pentecostal Baptist, made this crystal clear when, as president of CEBA, he declared that, ‘the vision of [the] government of the church does not go through the people, but through the Holy Spirit, through those that God placed in the flock as pastors’. So it seems that the spiritualized terminology of the Apostolic Vision conceals a realpolitik that usurps power from the lay people and institutes a pentecostalized magisterial form of government. For Renovado, this means that they will never become a church and never have the opportunity to actively represent themselves as an ecclesial community, other than through key leaders such as Ricardo.

Second, the Apostolic Vision is focused on transcending the local through ecclesial unity. Mraida argues that the modern church needs ‘to recover the biblical meanings of location, in direct relationship to the strengthening of unity’. For

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228 Interview no. 18a.
229 Mraida, ‘Unity as a Sign of Revival’, p. 188.
231 Conglomeration of churches and their pastors (and leaders) under the spiritual authority of an apostle.
232 Lorenzo, ‘Tiempo de Transición. ¿O Transacción?’.
233 Mraida, ‘Unity as a Sign’, p. 186.
Mraida, the Scriptures reveal the location of the church as the city. In language reminiscent of Calvin and his magisterial vision for Geneva, Mraida argues that the ‘biblical concept of the church of city’ dictates that ‘there is only one presbytery in each city’ composed of pastors from different congregations, which form the one church of the city. Renovado, as an extension of the mother church, is under the direction of the apostle. The reorganization of the local church according to the hierarchy of Ephesians 4:11-13 and the movement of the church’s ‘location’ from the congregation to the city, or the local ecclesial community to the mother church, has ultimately meant an end to the Baptist congregational model. In short, the Apostolic Vision has abolished the assembly, where members have a voice and vote for the governing of the local church, in favour of a pseudo-charismatic-episcopal ecclesiology. The implications of this are ultimately ontological and political. As Mraida clearly states, the church as an ontological reality is not present in the local church and/or denominational organizations but is present, instead, in the eternal, spiritual reality of the church:

The Church is spiritual event, while denominations are a social event.
The Church is cross-culturally valid, while denominations are culturally limited. The Church must be biblically understood and evaluated. Denominations are sociologically understood and evaluated.234

Clearly, the Apostolic Vision model complicates the model of church as a gathered community and instead proposes a transcendent ontological reality united by spiritual, apostolic authority.

Integral Ministries

If it is true, as I have stated above, that Renovado is replacing Gauchito Gil on the southwest corner of Ponti, then it is not only due to prayer and spiritual warfare, but also to the ministries developed with monies from provincial and municipal government agencies and the World Bank. Renovado’s after-school and adult reading programs began on the front porch of a convert of Carlos Annacondia, and, in those early years, the program’s location changed repeatedly, until finally in 1999 they began renting the present building. Soon after moving, Ricardo and

234 Ibid., p. 191.
Renovado won their first grant, a significant economic support from the *Red de Apoyo Escolar y Educación Complementaria*\(^{235}\) of the province of Buenos Aires. This allowed them to extend the after-school program from one day a week to five and to hire qualified teachers. Today, the program serves fifty-four children from one to five o’clock in the afternoon, Monday through Friday. Now, with the help of the *Programa Adolescentes del Ministerio de Desarrollo Humano*\(^{236}\) and the *Consejo Provincial de la Familia y Desarrollo Humano*\(^{237}\) of the Province of Buenos Aires, the ecclesial community has developed a scholarship program to pay the minimal student fees which some families still cannot afford. With the help of the *Programa Aprendiendo a Enseñar*\(^{238}\) from the National Ministry of Education, they have four tutors on site to work with the children. They eventually received more money from the province and with this began an adult reading centre and hired a teacher to give classes. Today, they work in conjunction with the organization ALFALIT and the *Programa Nacional de Alfabetización del Ministerio Educación Encuentro*\(^{239}\) offering adult reading courses and primary school classes. They offer occasional classes on English, on overcoming addictions, sewing, carpentry, and computation, and access to a library with over three hundred volumes. In addition to operating the soup kitchen, mentioned earlier, Renovado has also started a program that provides free legal advice. As Ricardo shared, ‘the idea is…to dignify the human being through education, …preparing them to have a more dignified life’\(^{240}\)

4.3.5. Conclusion

The ecclesiological ambiguity of Renovado is a conundrum. It is functionally a church, but, according to its mother church, it is more akin to a *CEB* and is not a

\(^{235}\) Network of School Support

\(^{236}\) Adolescent Program of the Ministry of Human Development

\(^{237}\) Provincial Council of the Family and Human Development

\(^{238}\) Learning to Teach Program

\(^{239}\) Encounter National Literacy Program of the Ministry of Education

\(^{240}\) Interview no. 3. Outside of Ricardo, none of the interviews had a developed understanding of integral as informed by the progressive evangelical Integral Mission movement. Indeed, those who recognized the term spoke of this in more general and individualistic terms as indicating ‘all areas’ (Interview no. 1) or ‘all parts’ (Interview no. 2) of the individual, without making a connection to the larger social realm and/or the creation at large.
church. It is also a local church that does not follow traditional ecclesial and sacramental structures and practices. Strategically placed to confront the difficult realities of today’s urban poor, it serves as a community puntero that engages popular Catholic religion (i.e., Gaucho Gil) through confrontation and integral ministries. This strategic engagement is centred on an ecclesial narrative of the neo-Pentecostal Weltanschauung and of powerful transformative practices, such as prayer, spiritual warfare, inner healing, liberation, and anointing. Prayer, in particular, is not an add-on practice; it is the foundation for the practice of worship, healing, and engagement with the world. The presence of these practices at the expense of other traditional practices – preaching, the Lord’s Supper, and baptism – signal a profound ecclesiological shift due to the influence of pentecostalism. Nevertheless, this amorphous community is an intentional place of transformation, as depicted on the pulpit image and experienced in prayer, healing, and the anointing in each and every service. Despite profound differences concerning the genesis and ontology of transformation, the ecclesial community is committed to being a place of transformation and to engaging in practices that facilitate transformation. The question is whether the change they see is indeed transformational and whether this ecclesial community provides examples of how to go forward in the present state crisis.

4.4. Iglesia Cristiana Evangélica Bautista Julieta

4.4.1. First Impression

Julieta is one of the smallest and least populated barrios of Mitre, a mere 1.6 km² and home to only 12,222 residents. It boasts a coastline along the River Plate that serves as a reminder of the long, turbulent Argentine history. Its shores were home to a battalion set up to defend against the first British invasion in 1806, which was an attempt to expropriate the then Spanish colony that was on the verge of

241 Julieta Evangelical Christian Baptist Church
243 The literal, modern translation of Río de la Plata would be Silver River, being that Plate, once a common synonym of silver, fell into disuse.
independence. It was these same shores that would attract the *porteña*\textsuperscript{244} aristocracy during the early twentieth century. They arrived and built lavish homes, one of which gave the *barrio* its name – a grand home constructed and dedicated to an aristocrat’s daughter. Today, the mansion and only a few of the stately homes remain, but the name and exclusivist history continue. It is home to *los que ganaron* and boasts an exclusive bilingual (English-Spanish) school named after a former US President, a small ecological reserve, and many comfortable homes off sleepy streets lined with trees and guarded by private security.

The first Sunday I visited Julieta, I was greeted warmly and introduced to the entire congregation. The order of the service was customary, until the time of open discussion at the end of the service. Carlos, a short man in his early fifties who once was a drug addict and is now the director of a drug rehabilitation house, stood up to speak. He offered a testimony with his raspy voice, marked by years of chain smoking. My research journal from that morning notes:

Carlos shared a testimony on his 33rd birthday, which was not his real age, given his greying hair and deep creases in his face and neck. He clarified that this birthday was a celebration of the day he was shot and left for dead by the police. He continued to mention the tumultuous term ‘security’ and how it was behind the *gatillo fácil*\textsuperscript{245} that left him for dead. For Carlos, the elusive desire for security of the middle and upper classes produces fear and not security.

At the time there was a heated debate in Argentina over lowering the age of criminality from eighteen to fourteen years of age in an attempt to mitigate the rise in violent youth crime.\textsuperscript{246} For Carlos, this option was yet another *gatillo fácil* that failed to solve the root problems of violence. After he finished, a short discussion concerning another issue ensued, only to be followed by one of the deacons of the church offering a rebuttal. This deacon, Germán, is of direct German descent and is a second-generation engineer who works for a large European based construction company. He sends his children to an exclusive bilingual (German-Spanish) school.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{244} Term for someone from Buenos Aires.
\item \textsuperscript{245} Argentine Spanish for ‘trigger happy’ and refers to the oppressive practices of the government or law enforcement who would shoot opponents, or in this case delinquent youth.
\item \textsuperscript{246} ‘La Polémica Por La Imputabilidad de Los Menores de 16’, *El Clarín* (22 November 2008); H. Cappiello, ‘El 2% de Los Jóvenes Están Acusados de Homicidio’, *La Nación* (22 November 2008).
\end{itemize}
and lives in a spacious house with a large backyard and a swimming pool. My journal entry from that morning continues:

After thanking Carlos for his work among the poor, Germán proceeded to chide him for putting words into the mouth of others. He defended a notion of security that is based on a desire to protect one’s family, arguing that this type of security did not have to imply what Carlos had suggested. The moment was tense.

This was a microcosmic moment, representative of Argentina and its social insecurities, which are rooted in its mythic narrative of the civilization/barbarism duality. The serene streets of Julieta are only a neighbourhood away from dehumanizing poverty. Their serenity is protected from human tragedy night and day by an army of private security.

The pursuit of security, one of the most desired goods, is endemic in Argentine society.\footnote{Svampa, \textit{La Sociedad Excluyente}, p. 81. In Chapter 3 and 4 I will address the frequently overlooked desire for security among the lower classes.} As mentioned in Chapter 1, for the higher classes, the answer has often been one of auto-segregation: private security, secluded living spaces, and private education. This has split the middle class into different sectors: those who can and those who cannot afford security. Julieta is a testament to the ‘parallel army’\footnote{Ibid., pp. 309-10. Svampa details that there are twenty-two thousand more private security guards in Argentina than in the combined Federal and Buenos Aires City police forces.} of private security hired to protect those who can pay for it.

\textit{Location of the Ecclesial Community’s Building}

Traveling to the Julieta Evangelical Baptist Church from downtown Buenos Aires is best done in a forty-plus-minute bus ride that takes you past some of the most well known parks, shopping strips, and hangouts in northern Buenos Aires and GBA. The walk from the bus stop to the church building takes you eastward toward the riverfront, down quaint streets lined with sidewalks, maple trees, grass, and private security kiosks on every other corner. The church building is situated off one of the many residential streets of the neighbourhood. The edifice is reminiscent of
many Believers Church\textsuperscript{249} structures, noted more for their functionality than their architectural flair. The sanctuary, inside and out, has the appearance of a small alpine lodge. The façade is triangular, due to a high-pitched tin roof, not unlike many churches built in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s. A large portion of the sanctuary is new, after a fire destroyed a large portion of it in 2005. The lower quarter of the façade is whitewashed, stuccoed block, and the upper three quarters is exposed, stained wood, similar to many homes in the barrio.

The underlay of the roof and two walls of the sanctuary are stained wood. Like the façade, the front and back walls are whitewashed stucco on the bottom quarter and wood on the top three-quarters. The interior, like the exterior, is appealing but simple, with very few overt religious symbols other than a roughly hewn cross in the front right-hand corner.

4.4.2. History of the Ecclesial Community

Julieta began in 1963 due to the efforts of three men. One of these men, pastor Santos, served as the first head pastor and eventually became a principal proponent of spiritual warfare, spiritual mapping and other neo-Pentecostal strategies and, in turn, the president of CEBA. After his departure, Julieta was without a pastor for an interim period until the appointment of a new pastor who had recently graduated from seminary. Apparently, conflict arose over complaints in the congregation that this new pastor was not sufficiently preparing his sermons. Several deacons confronted the pastor and the conflict escalated, leading the assembly to make a decision to form a team of pastors between three and five persons. This model of a pastoral team composed of several \textit{ad honorem} pastors and one paid pastor was maintained throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Interestingly, this period was repeatedly called the ‘golden period’.\textsuperscript{250}

The community’s statutes still stipulate that there should be at least three pastors. In the 1980s, pastor Gabriel took over the roll of the one paid pastor of a

\textsuperscript{249} Here I employ the definition of Donald Durnbaugh in \textit{The Believer's Church}, 2nd ed. (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1985), pp. 32-33, instead of the more amorphous ‘Free Church’ terminology.

\textsuperscript{250} Interview no. 12 and 13.
pastor team. During his sixteen years as pastor, the leadership model of the church changed from that of a team of pastors, of which one was paid, to that of one full-time paid, head pastor. The church went through a crisis during the last period of Gabriel’s pastorate and the crisis grew after his departure, eventually leading to a large number of individuals and families leaving the church. In turn, this caused a financial crisis and the ecclesial community decided to return to the prior leadership model and to appoint four non-paid, volunteer pastors. Although there are mixed feelings over the viability of this model, it does fit the communitarian ethos that pervades Julieta.

4.4.3. Concept of Change

The concept of change in Julieta proved particularly difficult to decipher, in great part because Julieta is not a homogeneous community. On an average Sunday, individuals and families from many different barrios, cities, nationalities, and social classes are present in the service. The ecclesial community’s members come from numerous denominational traditions: Roman Catholic, Nazarene, Plymouth Brethren, Methodist, Lutheran, Anglican, Pentecostal, and Baptist. It is also an ecclesial community located in an upper middle-class neighbourhood, but with an enduring commitment to the development of ministries in the impoverished areas of GBA. Julieta has developed a robust *apoyo integral* program. It has three volunteer-

251 Interviews no. 11, 13, and 14.

252 Interviews no. 13 and 16. Both Roberto and Germán mention the presence of some that do not approve of the model. Germán even said that some do not believe there is currently a pastor because of the model.

253 I do not mean by this, in a philosophical or theological since, *communitarianism*. Communitarianism, as construct of late modernism, is philosophical or theological response to liberalism, with its assertions on the autonomy of the individual and rationally based morality. Communitarianism, instead, posits that there is not a universal rational ethic, but instead only community based ethics. All moral arguments are ultimately based in a community tradition. Alasdair MacIntyre’s later work, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), is a good example of this and has proven influential in theology and the development of virtue ethics. The problem with communitarianism in theology is that it often narrowly assumes that one can speak of ‘the’ Christian community and ‘a’ Christian tradition, when in fact there are many traditions. This is problematic because there exists the dangerous temptation to believe that the reification of one’s own socially and cultural located tradition is ‘the’ tradition, closing the door to others traditions and, typically, leading to a reading of one’s own tradition that lacks reflexivity.

254 Spanish for ‘Integral Support/Aid’.
run integral ministries that reach out to different impoverished neighbouring communities, and they actively support the organization Nueva Vida.

As an extension of its vision, Julieta has attempted to integrate individuals and families from different socio-economic and cultural contexts into the ecclesial community. Recent conflict has polarized and heightened the different perspectives. Ideology and class play pivotal roles in how people define change. For some, transformation demands social change by challenging class identity and social constructions as well as the formation of new ideological commitments, such as an evangelical preferential option for the poor. For others, transformation principally changes the individual.

Most of those interviewed tended to make a distinction between social change and transformation, but the terms were related. Some of those interviewed spoke of transformation as a comprehensive term under which other types of change should be catalogued: social transformation, social change, change, and conversion. Germán explained that ‘transformation is a broad term that includes an inner world, [and] an outer world’. Later, he began to clarify his conception of change: ‘transformation or social transformation … would be synonyms; social change and social transformation are synonyms.’ Juan, a theology student in his early twenties from southern Argentina, similarly spoke of transformation as ‘something quite broad’. He spoke of ‘all types of transformation’, but prioritized Jesus as representative of true salvation and integral transformation. Germán also defined the term by speaking of different types of changes. He defined the term, enunciating each phrase while reflecting, as if to examine the structural integrity of his words:

There are distinct optics. One…is to return to…or get close to the form for which God designed humans to function. It is a change to a place where relationships with other people are in equilibrium; …it is a consequence of the process of conversion. There are other [optics]…not associated with conversion but they are good changes.

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255 There is one couple that receives a small stipend to support their leadership of an integral ministry, but all the others involved are volunteers.

256 Interviews no. 8, 9, 12, 14, and 16.

257 Interview no. 16.

258 Interview no. 12.
When...people realize through negative political experiences that democracy does not mean only voting but also participation.\textsuperscript{259}

Again, similar to Juan, Germán prioritized Christian transformation by placing even the ‘good changes’ that are not directly correlated with conversion into the Christian narrative of sin and redemption:

I believe the human being...[is] a being that functions in society [and] because of...sin we begin to stop being beings that function well in society. ... I believe there are healing processes. One of these is when we met the Lord Jesus and return to being...more like the Lord has created us. In the social aspect...it is a good social change.\textsuperscript{260}

Both singularly expressed the priority of Christian transformation by relating it first and foremost to personal conversion. Juan, who became a Christian in his late teens and came from a family where he suffered domestic violence, spoke openly of his conversion and subsequent transformation: ‘I believe I had a transformation ... through the gospel’.\textsuperscript{261} This conversion, however, was the direct result of the efforts of others, namely their ‘companionship’, prayers, ‘love’, and demonstration of a different ‘reality’ that encouraged Juan to seek a ‘different future’. Germán, by contrast, did not speak candidly of his own conversion, recalling instead feelings of envy upon hearing testimonies of ‘profound’ transformations at Julieta. His testimony was not ‘spectacular’ like those of others who overcame family problems, substance abuse, and other struggles. In speaking of this difference, he noted his upbringing in a stable, middle-class family as distinct from many who had dramatic testimonies. Instead, he spoke of his baptism as a type of ‘confirmation’, a culmination of being brought up in the church from a young age. Nevertheless, although the dramatic testimonies were not his own, they were formational practices, vis-à-vis the ecclesial community. The epistemological beginning of the transformation for Germán is the personal encounter with Jesus in conversion. However, this transformation is almost immediately exteriorized as transformation changes the individual and the individual’s relationships with others. Transformation begins with the family, which Germán considers to be in the realm of the personal,
and creates an ‘equilibrium’ of relationships that then extends outside the family, bringing social change. Interestingly, although he grew up in the church and described his conversion as the result of a process, he failed to account clearly for the role of the ecclesial community in conversion, *a priori*. Although the ecclesial community was always there, its presence is somehow too obvious to account for his conversion or possibly his individualist conception of conversion does not allow for a sacramental and mediatory role for the ecclesial community. Instead, the ecclesial community and social transformation come after conversion, *a posteriori*. In contrast, Juan recounted a more dramatic conversion, but which occurred through direct interaction with the ecclesial community. He made a clear connection between personal transformation, the ecclesial community, and social transformation (good social change):

[The] Kingdom has various values; the most powerful...are justice and peace. … [Jesus] promises that at some point he will return and will establish that kingdom in a perfect form. … The local communities should make that scale of values visible. … The church is not the Kingdom of God, but the church should live with that scale of values. Well, I believe that social change begins there.262

Juan’s vision of conversion is clearly shaped by his eschatology, and the ethical imperatives that the coming of the Kingdom put on the already—but-not-yet-present. It was the experience of the ecclesial community and the taste of the ‘scale of values’ of the Kingdom, *a priori*, that lead to his conversion. It is not surprising that this young man, who grew up amidst domestic violence and experienced a different reality in the local church, signals justice and peace as the core values of the kingdom. Carlos was even more explicit. One day as Carlos drove me around, he responded, almost shouting, between puffs on his ever-present cigarette:

For me the context of the church was what changed me. I believe that...God acts through his power from the Holy Spirit, but he manifests it through the community that accepted me as who I was. … Nobody cared for me. I was the one that they would talk: ‘This one will never change! … They would throw me out of all the dance clubs … The church did the exact opposite: they received me; they treated me well. The church was a transcendental point that God used to

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262 Interview no. 12.
For Carlos, God is clearly involved in human history and works in and through human community. The ecclesial community was and is a place of transcendence, a place of encounter with God and conversion. The church is not transcendent because of its other worldly ontology; it is not an *ex opere operato* sacrament, but instead a sacrament constituted by human effort and divine grace. Instead, it is transcendental because it is an ecclesial community that imbibes grace through embodying the values of the kingdom in human time and space - in communal flesh. It is transcendental because it is a place where drug addicts, victims of abuse, and delinquents are welcomed instead of being thrown out. For Carlos, transformation must necessarily be communal: ‘I believe that transformation exists. … It concerns building a community’.  

But this means that transformation cannot be individualist. Indeed, for Carlos, individualism is an insidious cancer that is the ‘great triumph of capitalism’, making it difficult to form ‘social cohesion’ through shared experiences and ideals. The church, according to Carlos, must confront this because transformation, as demonstrated by Jesus, takes place in and through the ecclesial community and is not limited to the individual. He stated: ‘The greatest beneficiary of the Father was the Son…but he came to construct…a communitarian space in which all are transformed…towards a more just vision’.  

Marcos, who used to live at Nueva Vida, when the focus was on young adult males, spoke vividly of the importance of an ecclesial community. Similar to Carlos, Marcos came from a past of drug abuse and in Nueva Vida found a safe place to live and grow. Accordingly, he envisioned change coming to *villas* through the founding of numerous *Nuevas Vidas*.  

Juan offered a vision of social change that was intimately tied to the ecclesial community. For one, ‘social change begins’ in the ecclesial community as this community makes a commitment to the justice of Jesus, which means that the church should challenge social difference. Juan says this may sound communist, but it is faithful to Jesus and the words of the apostle Paul in Galatians 3:28 that there ‘is
no longer slave nor free, rich nor poor’.

His communitarian vision is eschatological and utopic, pointing to the coming of the Kingdom in its fullness. The movement towards the kingdom, which he evokes, is not a spatial or chronological, but ethical and social.

Cristian, a nineteen-year Paraguayan who came to Argentina to pursue culinary studies, voiced a similar vision of social change. His ecclesial background is the Evangelical Free tradition in Paraguay and, unlike Juan and Carlos, Cristian has no formal theological training and genuinely struggled to answer certain questions. He tended to answer guardedly, at times seeming to say what he thought I wanted to hear. Nevertheless, his depiction of social change closely resembled the communitarian vision of Juan and Carlos. ‘For me the best society is’, he said, ‘being able to understand each other and to live better, to not have social classes’.

For others, positive change is more particular and immediate. Sabrina, a middle-aged woman whose face bears the signs of physical labour, stress, and poverty, first came to Julieta over twenty years ago. She arrived through the efforts of one the present pastors, Roberto and his wife, who, at the time, were intentionally living in a villa. Sabrina recently returned to the church and has begun working with Carlos and Nueva Vida. She and her family have long struggled economically and some of her children, who are teenagers and older, have legal and substance abuse problems. She spoke with a deep, raspy, but soft voice: ‘Good change for me [is]…that the project of the bakery is successful. That would be a change’. This project, which entails installing bakery equipment at the Nueva Vida building, is a change for Sabrina. It represents possible employment and the hope of a more stable life. When I asked her why she became involved in this initiative, she responded forthrightly that it was because she needed work. Her reincorporation into the ecclesial community and decision to serve was not the result of a metaphysical or existential experience, but instead was determined by material and physical necessity. Nevertheless, she described transformation with terms that did not evoke the immediate, physical and economic, but instead the metaphysical and personal.

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267 Interview no. 12.
268 Interview no. 10.
Transformation implies a complete personal change, which is intimately connected to a change in one’s ‘way of thinking’; indeed, for Sabrina, ‘you make a 90-degree turn when you meet God’.  

Sara, a descendent of immigrants from England and New Zealand and a woman of formidable inner strength, spoke similarly of transformation. She grew up in an upper middle-class family, studied theology at ISEDET seminary and married a fellow theology student. As a young woman and mother, she served with her husband as a missionary with the Methodist church in Bolivia. Now, in her late sixties, she shared openly with me the deep pain she suffered when her husband left her and their three children while they were serving in missions. Her subsequent return to Argentina to raise her children as a single mother and the loss of her son in a car accident, demonstrate that she is no stranger to tragedy and anguish. Nevertheless, for her, these apparent misfortunes have taught her to trust in God, even amidst adversity. She recounted a story of transformation involving a friend of hers in Bolivia that paralleled the image of individual transformation and economic stability of which Sabrina spoke. The friend, a North American, non-Christian social worker, shared that he could see the positive results of Christian faith in the lives of the people he worked with: ‘When I arrive at a house, before I enter I know if the people are Christian or not. There, lives are changed: they fix their house, put up curtains, [and]…enjoy life.’ Here, Sara used an image repeated in both Julieta and Renovado: Christian faith is demonstrated in a clean, orderly, and economically secure home.

For Sara, transformation encompasses more than personal confession; it also includes family and the ecclesial community. She spoke vividly of conversion as being only one part of a large process that involved the family and the local church. Carlos, surprisingly, employed a similar metaphor in describing his work with Nueva Vida and the women who live there. This is interesting considering their ideological differences. Whereas Sara openly expressed reservations about LALT, Carlos readily cited liberationist terminology and spoke reverently of Third World Priests such as

269 Clearly Sabrina intended to say 180-degree turn. Interview no. 9.
270 Interview no. 11.
Carlos Mugica who was assassinated in 1974 by the Triple A. Nevertheless, when Carlos gave me a tour of Nueva Vida during my first visit, he spoke of the importance of teaching personal and domestic hygiene as a part of Christian Discipleship. My research journal entry from that day reads as follows:

Carlos shared that one of his chief tasks is to help women to leave behind the *villa* mentality and to begin thinking about themselves and their children instead of simply waiting on their man. ... Fascinatingly, Carlos directly related this work to being church. In fact, he said that Nueva Vida ‘is church’ and that teaching the women these skills is part of ‘making disciples’.

In contrast to these communally mediated images of transformation, Jorge, one of the current *ad honorem* pastors, commented that transformation is not confined to economic and educational changes. ‘Transformation of which the gospel challenges us’, he commented, ‘goes further than that’. Transformation does not ignore these realities, ‘but it goes further than securing a house, food, or a good education’. He cited the example of John Wesley and the Methodist movement and its influence in England: ‘the taverns closed, the brothels closed’. So, he concludes, ‘The church is an agent of revival’ because ‘when the church does not succeed in...impacting the society, the society impacts the church’. While Carlos argued for a more sociologically, culturally, and particularly focused transformation, vis-à-vis the ecclesial community, Jorge expressed the need for a transformation that goes beyond education and economics and which is intimately tied to the work of the Spirit and the Word of God. He affirmed that the Spirit and the Word are the two things the church uniquely has, meaning that transformation incorporates the spiritual as well as the economic and social. However, he displaces the role of humanity and the local ecclesial community by envisioning transformation as something determined by the Spirit and beyond the realm of the local church. His

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271 Refer to Chapter 1 for an explanation of the Triple A.

272 Interview no. 14. Clearly he interprets that influence of Methodism in England through the eyes of the Halévy Thesis. See, E. Halévy, and E. I. Watkin, *A History of the English People in 1815* (London: Penguin, 1937). In this highly influential text Halévy argues that England was saved from the violence of the French Revolution in great part because of the Methodist movement. In the wake of this declaration, there have been a myriad claims, most exaggerated and unfounded, that Methodism socially transformed England.
understanding of the beginning of Methodism is spiritualized and anachronistic, making the assumption that the Methodist movement begun by John Wesley in the 1730s is directly comparable to the revivalism of the 1830s and later. As such, it is not surprising that Jorge fails to mention the ‘methodical’ system of meetings, bands, and societies employed by Wesley and the Methodists to foment spiritual and social change. Jorge reduces the anthropological role in spiritual renewal and social change, leaving little space for the ecclesial community and community practices in a larger Spirit-led revival and social change.

The understandings of transformation present in Julieta are not necessarily antithetical, but there are inherent tensions. Unlike Renovado, where there is a more clearly defined ideology and worldview that is formative for a collective understanding of transformation, Julieta lacks a consensus worldview. Some, such as Jorge, would be open to the narratives of confrontational spirituality that appreciates the gifts of the Spirit and engages the principalities and powers. Others, such as Carlos, Roberto, and Pedro, are resistant to these narratives and see transformation as an extension of human as well as divine effort. Likewise, the logus theologicus of transformation differs form individual to individual. While Carlos and Juan, and even Cristian to some extent, present a communitarian model of transformation, Germán and Jorge present transformation as principally a result of God working in the individual (Germán) and in society through his Spirit and Word (Jorge). Moreover, while Sara and Sabrina speak of transformation in highly personal and tangible terms – a change of mind, clean houses, new jobs – they did not make the explicit and direct connection to the ecclesial community. The heterogeneity of the ecclesial community was clearly evidenced in its inability to articulate a consensus understanding of change.

Ecclesial Community Conflict: ‘Putting Words into My Mouth’

The spat between Carlos and Germán during the sharing time on my first Sunday morning at Julieta, as I had surmised, proved revelatory. The hermeneutical dispute over ‘security’ that ended with Germán accusing Carlos of ‘putting words

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273 Essentially, Jorge has confused North American Methodist and Holiness Revivalism and the second Great Awakening (1830s) with the original Methodist movement of North American revivalism and the Holiness movement and the efforts of Francis Asbury and others.
into my mouth’, was suggestive of themes that would arise repeatedly in interviews and conversations concerning conflict in the ecclesial community: security and communication. At some point this ecclesial community, which has diligently worked to embrace varying theological ideals and strived to be an integral and inclusive ecclesial community, allowed communication to break down. Like any conflict, it has numerous layers and transpired over a long period of time. The culmination was an assembly at the end of 2006. Juan, who was a recent arrival at the church, mentioned that he was alarmed when, during the customary process of voting to allow him, a non-member guest, to attend, he was informed that if a ‘delicate situation’ arose he could be asked to leave. According to Juan, well over one hundred people attended the assembly, which is more than the twenty-or-so that now attend. Apparently, Juan was right to be alarmed because the assembly began with open confrontation and did not stop; there was shouting, accusations of hypocrisy, and division. Germán also alluded to the raucous assemblies, and noted that it was a problem that they were not more careful in how they communicated with each other.

In analysing the situation closer, I found three general and interrelated causes of the conflict. First, there was ideological division. Julieta, as an ecclesial community steeped in a progressive evangelical vision, had for decades taught and attempted to embody the gospel call to serve the poor through the development of integral ministries. Many embraced this wholeheartedly, understanding the call to the gospel as implying ‘good news for the poor’ and ‘liberation for the captives’ (Luke 4:18-19) – an evangelical preferential option of the poor. As an extension of this, the ecclesial community fostered a vision of doctrinal and social ‘heterogeneity’ and integration. On the other hand, a significant number of members and leaders understood the gospel message in more individualistic and spiritualized terms, a residue of the founding years of Julieta as well as the influence of greater evangelical sub-culture. While the ecclesial community strived to be incorporating and heterogeneous, there was, at the same time, division and it eventually came to a head. Carlos, for example, believes that the day one of the then pastors, who incidentally later moved to the United States, declared from the pulpit that ‘The time of the poor is over. The moment has arrived for us to take care of ourselves’, was a watershed
moment. This marked, for Carlos, a divide that would lead to a large portion of the ecclesial community leaving. Roberto also signalled this declaration as an example of how during the time of Pastor Gabriel a space had been opened up for a middle-class-friendly theology.

A second cause that was repeatedly mentioned was the model of pastoral leadership. Some supported the one pastor model, which had been put in place after the exit of two pastors, under direction of pastor Gabriel. For them, the multi-pastor model does not function well, and they prefer to have one central leader. Germán, although voicing support for the present pastors, noted the difficulty of a democratically and congregationally led church, saying that at times it is preferable and more practical to have one leader. Others wholeheartedly supported the prior and present team pastoral model. These differing ecclesiological hierarchical models were accentuated when Pastor Gabriel formed a pastoral support team. Unlike the customary practice of selecting church leaders individually, the team was voted on as a group. Moreover, clear stipulations were not made concerning the role of the pastoral team, and over time, some began to be concerned that it was taking on more of an administrative role instead of an advisory role. In effect, the pastor and his team began to usurp the power of the congregation. For some, such as Roberto, this single pastor model also failed to effectively deal with issues before they escalated into larger problems. Jorge, while not citing the pastoral model, also mentioned that the failure of the church to deal with conflicts and the subsequent breakdown of spiritual wellbeing and relationships within the ecclesial community.

Third, some believed that the conflict was connected to the national crisis of 2001. Ideological positions clearly became polarized, in part, because of this crisis. The exclusionist society inherent in Argentine culture, which had been exacerbated by the last military dictatorship, imploded in 2001. The neo-liberal vision of Carlos Menem (1989-1999) took the country down the road towards widespread privatization of social services and the entrance of multinational funds (IMF) and companies. The fallout of 2001 was the impoverishment of a large section of the middle class and a consolidation of wealth in a smaller percentage of society. As the gulf between the rich and the poor grew and the middle class divided, tension and division correspondingly grew in Julieta. Roberto felt that the crisis should not be
wholly blamed on the ecclesial community; the crisis in Argentine society was also at fault. In essence, the church functioned as a microcosm of the wider culture, with class and ideological conflict occurring in its midst. What is interesting about this conflict is that it has been heated, and ‘unity’ has been tested precisely because a sector of the church has refused to allow the church to shirk from its call to serve among the poor. Indeed, the hermeneutical struggle over security demonstrates this trend. The dilemma of security has long been a central issue in Argentina, dominating the ideology of past dictatorships and more recently, democratic elections. Any leftist Peronist could have said the words of Carlos that morning, and Germán’s rebuttal could have come from one of the many middle-class Argentines that are fearful of the threat of violence. During the time of crisis the camps of ‘rich’ and ‘poor’ and ‘right’ and ‘left’ built up. The heterogeneous theological character – a ‘unity within diversity’ ethos – of the church eroded. In the words of Jorge:

At one time the church accepted the different visions…and we were all brothers and sisters the same. But in a certain moment, and because…of various situations, this stopped.

Carlos gave his candid opinion about the crisis, making reference to the neighbourhood of Julieta where he lives with his family:

the community in which I live is a community where individualism, consumerism, and selfishness are the standard in this time of crisis in Argentina … As I worked in the poor neighbourhoods…they continually had less…and those on the other side, in Julieta, continually [had] more … In the moment of the crisis they would say, ‘Argentina is in crisis, Argentina is in crisis!’ I would say, ‘Son of a Bitch…in my neighbourhood you can’t see a crisis!’

Clearly, Carlos’ statement is hyperbolic, refusing to admit that for some in the middle class the crisis was real. Nevertheless, he signals one of the most egregious effects of the crisis: the mutation of care for self and family into exclusionism and


275 Interview no. 14.

276 Interview no. 8.
fear. This change has presented a challenge for Julieta. Germán, in his rebuttal to Carlos that morning, hoped that care of self and family did not have to imply violence or exclusionism, but this can only occur, it seems, through the formation of strong communal ties.

A closer examination of the ecclesial community reveals that while a middle-class ideological conflict was occurring, clear divisions existed between classes in the church. This was not immediately self-evident in the interviews and/or observation because the poorer families in the church tended not to voice their opinions in the large community gatherings. Indeed, only Lucho and Carlos spoke on a consistent basis, and it is interesting that both were repeatedly criticized for this. For some, Lucho’s interjections after the sermon, usually concerning poverty and the poor, were incessant and divisive. Roberto shared that Lucho had recently failed to receive the mandated percentage of votes to become a deacon, and that, since Carlos’ one term as deacon, no one with a background of poverty has served in upper-level leadership positions (deacon or pastor). Likewise, the poorer members of the church tended to sit in the backbenches of the church, separated from the rest of the congregation who were seated in chairs. This self-assigned segregation symbolically speaks volumes about the embodied habits of the poor in Julieta. The battle for community is more than ideological; it is also a conflict of culture and social divisions that impose themselves on the ecclesial community despite their laudable, though faltering, attempts at integration.

4.4.4. Ecclesial Practice

In this section we will examine the ecclesial practices of Julieta. First, we will survey Ecclesial Community Worship, which I again use to speak of the place and time of the primary ecclesial community worship experience. In the case of Julieta this happens once a week on Sunday morning in the sanctuary. After exploring this, we will proceed to examine the specific central ecclesial practices (Baptism, Holy Meal, Preaching, Integral Ministries, and the Assembly), some of which frequently occur during the central time of communal worship while others that do not. The intention of this section, as in the past case study, is to engage the ecclesial practice of this local church so as to produce a true and faithful narrative of the ecclesial
community that analyses the transformative potential of central ecclesial practices as expressed in the voices of this local ecclesial community and its members.

Ecclesial Community Worship

The Sunday service at Julieta is an expressly communal activity. It is a local gathering of believers with the intent to commune with one another and with God. It is active in that the service is participatory, an event performed by the ecclesial community onto itself and to God, and not by clerical or professional leadership to the ecclesial community and to God. Almost ten different individuals direct the service, including women, men, foreigners, and children. Considering the average attendance is between forty and sixty persons, this means that almost twenty percent of the congregation is actively involved in directing the service each week. Moreover, the different functions in the service are rotated from week to week, including the task of directing the overall service. The only uniform functions, filled by the same persons week to week, are the musicians (guitar, bass guitar, and violin), the children’s time leaders, and the Sunday school teachers. There is also a long space of time left for open discussion, when anyone is permitted to speak, respond to the sermon, or request prayer.

The service has a very relaxed and inviting feel. There is no stage or raised pulpit; all, including those who direct the service, are on the same level, which fosters an egalitarian spirit. The service is programmed to begin at 11:00 a.m. on Sunday morning, but usually begins five to fifteen minutes late. There is not a set order of service but, for the visitor, there is feeling of organization and direction, as can be seen in the composite Order of Service below.

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277 The time of sharing is rotated biweekly with the Lord’s Supper. The Lord’s Supper is also a communal event that it usually entails a short reflection, time of prayer and a time of sharing, similar to other weeks but more brief. Almost 20% of the time of all services is dedicated to open discussion.

278 This Order of Service is a composite of all the services I attended. Although the ecclesial community does not use a set Order of Service, surprisingly, almost all of the services follow a similar order, with very few exceptions.
Standard Order of Service

Welcome and Opening Prayer
Worship through Music
Greeting / Announcements
Children’s Time
Offering / Prayer
Sermon
Open Time of Sharing and / or Lord’s Supper
Worship through Music
Benediction

As in most evangelical churches, the worship of God through music is important at Julieta. Unlike a large sector of evangelicalism, Julieta has not been profoundly influenced by the transposition of the culture and practice of Latin American Charismatic Music. This type of music demonstrates strong influences from North American Contemporary Christian music and is typically a Latinized version of adult contemporary pop music. It is usually played with guitars, drums, and electric pianos and is used in congregations or mass gatherings. Under the influence of mega-worship leaders such as Marcos Witt, a theology and practice of praise and worship has developed that closely ties the theological concepts of praise and worship to the time of music and singing that is led by a praise and worship leader. This praise and worship music is focused on use in congregations and mass

279 See Gladwin, ‘Charismatic Music and the Pentecostalization of Latin American Evangelicalism’. In that chapter, I define the term Latin American Charismatic Music broadly as encompassing both praise and worship music focused on congregational and mass gatherings, as well as the numerous and varied types of popular listening- and dance-style music (cambia, salsa, merengue, rock, etc.). Here, I am only talking about the praise and worship music.

280 The most poignant example of Latin American Charismatic Music is Marcos Witt, whose songs have been widely used in Latin American evangelical churches since the 1980s. He has also written several books on worship and praise. See M. Witt, Adoremos (Miami: Editorial Caribe; Editorial Betania, 1993); and ¿Qué Hacemos con Estos Músicos? (Miami: Editorial Caribe; Editorial Betania, 1995). He has his own record label (CanZion Producciones) and founded a praise and worship (Instituto CanZion) school, which has branch sites in Latin America, the United States, and Europe. Witt, the son of North American missionaries to Mexico, has functioned as a ‘praise and worship leader’ archetype, developing his own theology of praise and worship as well as becoming an example of a successful music entrepreneur. His teachings have been influential in the standardization of praise and worship leaders as pseudo-priests that lead people into God’s presence. In 2006, Witt has brought controversy to evangelicalism in Argentina for his participation an ecumenical service with the archbishop of Buenos Aires, Jorge Bergoglio, who is now Pope Francis, the first Latin American pope. For a more detailed examination of Witt, see Gladwin, ‘Charismatic Music and the Pentecostalization of Latin American Evangelicalism’.

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gatherings and has become standard in much of evangelicalism through the influence of Charismatics and neo-Pentecostals. As opposed to denominational hymns, Latin American Charismatic Music has been able to do something that was not possible before: a standardization of evangelical music. Although Julieta has not been greatly affected by the culture and practice of Latin American Charismatic Music, it is not immune to its influence. A good number of songs in the ecclesial community’s Cancionero and instruments used to play (guitar, drums, and electric piano) are representative of Latin American Charismatic Music. Moreover, I heard one of Marcos Witt’s songs – Enciende Una Luz – during my time in the ecclesial community. Nonetheless, the culture of worship and praise that places inordinate focus on the preparation of the musical group to minister to the congregation does not exist in this ecclesial community. Instead, corporate singing is important, filling an eighth of the service time, but not predominant. Julieta has no praise and worship leader; instead, the person leading the service that day also conducts the songs. Depending on who is leading, this functions better on some Sundays than on others. Here some of the drawbacks to the explicit communitarian model become clear. The service, while relaxed and open to lay involvement and leadership, does not flow as well as in some local churches where professionals – music leader, master of ceremony, and preacher – direct. Julieta is not preoccupied with the performance of the service, and as a result, its unrehearsed style is staccato at times: long pauses between different moments in the service and transitions between songs. But, then again, Julieta does not desire to reproduce the legato of Handel or Bach but rather the staccato of the Spirit in Acts 15:1-23 and I Corinthians 14:26-40. In their song the marcato note is communalism, not professionalism.

The musicians do not stand in front of the pulpit, at the centre of the worship space, but instead are seated inconspicuously among the rest of the congregation. The times of worship through music could be described as unrehearsed and moderately lively. Julieta is not pentecostal and corporal participation – clapping, dancing, raising hands, and shouting – are neither encouraged nor discouraged.

\(^{281}\) Spanish for ‘song book’. The ecclesial community organized and printed a softbound text, which is simply entitled, Cancionero Iglesia Cristiana Evangélica Bautista Julieta. It has 318 songs on 173 pages and an accompanying index. The title page quotes Psalm 100:4-5, which is fitting considering the prolific used of the Psalms in the book.
However, the use of a songbook instead of an overhead projector does limit some types of movement. There are a few that do participate by clapping and raising their hands, but the majority do not. The songs themselves were varied, but a large portion were based on passages from the Psalms. They were almost completely bereft of allusions to the Holy Spirit, marking a clear difference with Renovado. However, this is not surprising considering the scant references to the Holy Spirit in the rest of the service and corporate life of the ecclesial community. Surprisingly, only a few songs touched on the theme of the Kingdom of God, justice, poverty, and/or the vision of Misión Integral. Granted, this is due more to the church’s evangelical heritage, which offers few songs that incorporate these themes into their lyrics, than with the intentions of the ecclesial community. Interestingly, the congregation demonstrated greater melody and rhythm with older hymns sung *a cappella* than with the instrument-led contemporary praise and worship songs. This was a bit perplexing, given the large diversity in age among those who attend. In short, the style of music and corporate participation places Julieta somewhere between the traditional Baptist churches and contemporary pentecostal culture and music.

Prayer is not a predominant feature in Julieta’s service. Although, as noted in the order of service, there are moments of prayer throughout the services, the prayers are very short and do not take up a significant amount of time. Prayer is usually a participatory exercise: people pray in silence while one person leads, rather than

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282 Only two songs during all the services I attended mentioned the Holy Spirit.

283 Unlike Renovado, Julieta does not actively address the Holy Spirit and makes very few references, but instead the music, songs, prayer, and conversations tend to address God the Father and Son. A telling example of this is that in the interviews I conducted only two people made explicit reference to the Holy Spirit. One was Carlos who commented that he believes that God works through the Spirit in power, but then directly clarified that the Spirit is manifested through the ecclesial community. On the other hand, Jorge, whose ecclesial background is in the Wesleyan tradition, made explicit references to the Spirit and in support of openness to practice of the gifts of the Spirit, recognizing that Julieta is not open to this. Moreover, he affirmed that that Spirit along with the Word are transformative and that in the Spirit the church has a power that no other institution has.

284 See Gladwin, ‘Charismatic Music and the Pentecostalization of Latin American Evangelicalism’. In this book chapter I focus on the development of Charismatic Music and its influence in the formation of a pentecostal culture. I also critique this music precisely for its failure to develop reflections on the Latin American social context and critiques of poverty and injustice.

285 My calculations determined that less than 1% of the services are dedicated to prayer. However, being that prayer was interspersed throughout the service, I was not able to account for all prayer and thus the percentage could be higher.
simultaneously and collectively as in the neo-Pentecostal Renovado. Prayer also does not actively incorporate the body; there was little or no movement with the hands, legs, or hands. Prayer is recognized as important for the Christian and the life of the church, but it is not an overt tool to directly confront the powers of evil and oppression. While there may be some in the ecclesial community who accept the neo-Pentecostal worldview, it is clearly not a dominant theme and is not openly expressed in corporate gatherings.\(^{286}\) It is not only in the service that prayer is not central, because very little time was dedicated to active prayer in ministerial group meetings and other functions of the church. The Wednesday prayer meeting is one of the most poorly attended weekly events in the church.\(^{287}\) This is not to say that prayer is not important at Julieta; nonetheless, it is not a dominant community practice.

The high point of the service is what would stereotypically be expected from a church in the Protestant tradition: the Word. Typically there are two sermons: the children’s time (a mini sermon) and the sermon. Between the two, preaching is the major focal point of the entire service. However, unlike some traditions where the sermon is time for professional clergy to teach lay people, Julieta demonstrates a sincere communalism. Preaching rotates on a schedule among the deacons, pastors, and lay people as organized by the liturgy team. Both sermons are focused on a set passage of Scripture, as per the rota prepared by the liturgy team. The sermons do not follow a lectionary, but instead follow an exegetically focused teaching method that progresses through a set book of the Bible. The text was the Gospel of Luke during my sojourn there. The preachers employed conceptual, theological, sociological, and philosophical ideas and images, demonstrating academic rigor. Moreover, as mentioned above, there is time dedicated to open sharing, when those in attendance can comment on the sermon. For example, one Sunday morning Carlos commented on a sermon, saying that he did not care for the sermon’s emphasis on the importance of the ‘father figure’ for Christian families, noting the absence of a father in the lives of many in the congregation. Sara responded to Carlos ‘that the

\(^{286}\) Juan shared that there are some in the church that speak of spiritual warfare and other neo-Pentecostal practices, however these themes never arose in any of my interviews.

\(^{287}\) There were only six people when I attended and Pastor Jorge made specific reference to this unfortunate reality, which he believes is partly to blame for the conflict in the ecclesial community.
church needs to be a father’, to these persons. This format of community rebuttal enables the ecclesial community to dissect and debate what has been discussed, although it can cause friction.

To better illustrate the worship service traditions of Julieta, here is an extended entry from my research journal from one Sunday:

The service began with an invocatory prayer and then progressed to singing songs from the songbook. After a short time of singing, scripture reading and prayer, the children gathered in front of the pulpit, becoming the focal point of the gathered congregation. The theme of the children’s time was discrimination and utilized the passage Luke 17:1-19 about the ten lepers whom Jesus healed. Interestingly, the passage was contextualized and contemporized through the references to Argentine discrimination, such as calling persons from poorer communities negros, or Paraguayans paraguas, or Bolivians bolitas. The children actively participated in answering questions.

After this, there was another time of singing, then the offering and finally the sermon. Before the sermon, the children were dismissed for Sunday school. Natalia, a female deacon and the spouse of Pastor Lucas, preached on Luke 17:1-19. The sermon began with a canonical comparison of Luke with the other gospels, highlighting its distinguishing features. She spoke of the focus in the gospel on women, foreigners, and children and the prerogatives of the Christian life: forgiveness, service, faith, and salvation.

After the sermon, there were announcements, followed by the Lord’s Supper. Two other female deacons led the ordinance. One shared a poignant testimony of a sister who took the bread from communion to a sick family member in the hospital and who was healed. They shared the passage of John 6:33-36. The service then ended with a short prayer of benediction.

**Baptism**

Christian baptism is the immersion of the believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience that symbolizes the faith of the believer in the crucified, buried, and resurrected Saviour and also the death of the believer to

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288 Spanish for ‘umbrella’, but can be used in Argentina to refer to Paraguayans, although it is not always negative.

289 Spanish for ‘little balls’, but can be used in Argentina to refer to Bolivians in reference to their tendency to be smaller than most Argentines.
sin, the burial of the old life and resurrection in the new life of Christ. It is a testimony of faith of the final resurrection from the dead. Being an ordinance of the church, it is the preceding requirement to be a member and to participate in the Lord’s Supper.

This statement from Julieta’s statute explicitly places baptism at the forefront of ecclesial self-understanding. Baptism is an act of obedience and a symbol of the believer’s faith. It is a commitment and a symbol, but it is also a rite of passage. It is the entrance, spiritually, symbolically and socio-politically, into the ecclesial community. Spiritually, baptism represents inclusion into the body of Christ (I Cor. 12:12-13). Symbolically, baptism is the rite of passage into the ecclesial community and is a sign of the prior existing faith, commitment to obedience, and testimony of the believer. In a sense, baptism is not transformation, but a symbol of transformation, like smoke is to fire. Socio-politically, baptism is the key qualification for becoming an official member of the local community of faith, with the powers and rights this entails. Non-members have no vote in the governing assembly; members do and credobaptism is required for membership. Baptism constitutes full inclusion into the ecclesial community.

Many in the ecclesial community spoke in terms strikingly similar to the community statute. For Cristian, baptism is a ‘mandate’ of God that brings growth to the life of the believer, indicating clearly it is an act of obedience. Sara spoke of baptism as a ‘beautiful testimony’ that declares, ‘I no longer live for myself but for Jesus Christ’. Germán asserted that baptism is a testimony that serves a human need by symbolically marking a milestone. Speaking like a sociologist of religion, he described baptism as a rite of passage ritual that forms the individual and helps form community identity. It is a testimony and a symbol, a time when you confess the transformation that God has enacted in your life. Indeed, for Germán, he personally found this symbolic rite of passage continues to serve him even in the present: he has many times said to himself, ‘I am somebody that has gone through the waters, and I told everyone that is [sic] present that I want to continue.’

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290 Statute of Julieta Evangelical Christian Baptist Church, Article 2.7.
291 Interviews no. 10.
292 Interviews no. 11.
293 Interview no. 16.
with the statute of the church that clearly states that one must be baptized as an adult to be a member of the local church, he nevertheless spoke of the personal significance of ‘voluntarily’ choosing to be baptized in contrast to the experience of being baptized as an infant in the Lutheran church. Roberto also had reservations about demanding *credobaptism* for membership for people who were baptized as children, commenting that it would be better to simply encourage them to be baptized. Juan also spoke of baptism as a ‘ritual of initiation’ and a symbol of the ‘change in his life and a death to himself in deciding to follow Jesus as demonstrated in “going under the water”, “dying to the old self, to my old values” … and coming out of the water, “being born again”’. 294

While baptism is spiritually and symbolically significant, it is not necessarily transformative. In speaking of the ordinances, or ‘testimonies of transformation’, Jorge stated: ‘they are not transformations in themselves but are evidences of a transformation, that the Lord is operating’. 295 For Jorge, to connect the ordinances directly to transformation is a hollow sacramentalism that turns transformation ‘into rites and into empty and useless religiosity’. Similarly, Roberto affirmed that ordinances are ‘important’ but doubts that they are transformative. He cited the example of people who have been baptized and subsequently left the church, concluding, ‘I do not see it as something magical’. 296 Marcos was more blunt when asked if baptism had changed him: ‘No, therapy and people around me changed me. When you are a sick asshole [referring to me], you have to go to the doctor’. 297

However, baptism is more than a personal symbol, because as a rite of passage it is intimately connected to the ecclesial community. Roberto said, ‘It has…a communitarian value’. He continued stating that it is ‘an exterior testimony’

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294 Interview no. 12.
295 Interview no. 14.
296 Interview no. 13.
297 ‘Asshole’ is a translation of the amorphous Argentine term ‘boludo’. Etymologically it is a slang term that comes from *bola* (ball), referring a person with large testicles. However, the connotation is not positive such as the English ‘to have balls’ or ‘to be ballsy’ or the Spanish ‘*tener cojones*’ or ‘*tener pelotas*’, which refer to having courage. Instead, it has a negative connotation and refers to someone who is dumb: a fool, jackass, asshole, or idiot. However, the term is, oddly enough, frequently used as a word of endearment between friends, as it is the use in this phrase. Interview no. 15.
and ‘a sign for all’ that says, ‘I want to change my life. I want to live according to other values, another kingdom’. As a communal practice it goes beyond mere symbolism and represents ‘commitment’ on the part of the believer to the ecclesial community. Moreover, at some level it represents a change in status, personally and communally: a transformation. Cristian interestingly noted this by commenting that the newly baptized have ‘more opportunities in the church’ and ‘with God’. Juan, in like manner, affirmed that baptism forms a sense of belonging to a local ecclesial community and that, as a Baptist, baptism allows him to become a member and make decisions with other members. Thus, becoming a member implies being able to partake in decisions and the possibility of becoming a leader; it implies political change. Clearly, baptism implies a change - sociologically, politically, and ethically. For Sabrina, unlike most, this is manifest: ‘Baptism is transformation, the entire transformation of a person; it is a way to take away the sin we have on top of us. It is like…being born again’. 

Perhaps it is Carlos that best illustrates the complexity of the practice of baptism. He affirmed that baptism is a symbol, but he also affirmed that it transcends the symbolic because it is paradigmatic for the creation of ‘community identity’. Speaking of both the Lord’s Supper and baptism, he said that they communally represent a commitment to follow Christ in his suffering because ‘they are important for building this community identity’. To demonstrate this, Carlos shared a beautiful example of this with the testimony of the miracle of baptism. Lucho, the member of the church who came from an impoverished background and frequently utilized, to the chagrin of others, the open fellowship time to share testimonies from the perspective of the poor, met and befriended an old homeless man. Contact began with Lucho taking food, talking, and reading the Bible to this old man. In time, the old man began to attend Julieta and to participate in activities. The miracle of

\[298\] Interview no. 13.
\[299\] Interview no. 10.
\[300\] Interview no. 9.
\[301\] Interview no. 8.
baptism transpired when this old man, Milagros, was baptised. Carlos retold the testimony of Milagros’ baptism as follows:

[We were] all happy…because the old man Milagros from the street – the alcoholic, thrown away, abandoned…arrives with a white tunic and passes through the waters of baptism. And after…I said, ‘Where is he going to go? [Will he go back] to sleep at the door of the Catholic Church…waiting for someone to throw him a piece of bread? Is the Kingdom of God so unequal, where you go in your car…and this old man…goes to the street?’

There and then Carlos made a decision: ‘So I brought him to Nueva Vida’, and ‘the old man lived with us until he died’. This story is poignant because it implies that the significance of baptism extends beyond mere symbolism; it is sacramental and a sociological, political, and ethical imperative. Baptism is sacramental and transformative. This is a point to which I will return in Chapter 6.

*The Holy Meal*

The Holy Meal is a bimonthly communal practice in Julieta and, according to their statute, it is ‘is a symbolic act of obedience through which the members of the church, eating the bread and the wine, commemorate the death of Christ and anticipate his second coming.’ Typically, the Holy Meal comes near the end of the Sunday morning service. Unlike many evangelical churches and churches of the magisterial tradition, a pastor or priest does not expressly institute the Holy Meal. The organization and exercise of this practice is under the direction of a lay-led liturgy team, who are also responsible for the planning and direction of the entire Sunday service. The liturgy team chooses the person to direct the Holy Meal as well as two ushers to help facilitate the distribution of the elements. Any active member is eligible to direct the Holy Meal and all attendees are eligible to serve as ushers. The practice usually consists of a Scripture reading, a short oral reflection given by the leader, a time of personal reflection and prayer, possibly aided by the playing and/or singing of a song, and then the prayer for distribution of the elements. The communal identity and organization of Julieta clearly extend to the understanding and practice

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302 Spanish for ‘miracle’.
303 Interview no. 8.
304 Statute of Julieta Evangelical Christian Baptist Church, Article 2.7.
Nevertheless, the ecclesial community clearly does not have a unified interpretation of the Holy Meal.

While the vast majority of Julieta spoke of the communion as a symbol, in line with the official statute of the church, there was no consensus concerning the interpretation of the symbol. Cristian, who spoke openly of how he felt included in the ecclesial community through participation in communion as an usher, clearly identified the Holy Meal as a ‘symbol’. He confessed that his practice subjectively functions to help him believe, building up his faith when he is ‘spiritually’ well and convicting him when he is ‘spiritually’ ill. For Germán, it is not something necessarily transcendental, but is instead a ‘practical’ moment to remember what Christ has done and to do self-reflection. It does not change a person, but it does serve as a practical reminder of something humans need because of their propensity to forget. Roberto affirmed that the ordinances are important, but he sees the Holy Meal more as a reminder of the testimony and decision for baptism than as transformation. For Jorge, baptism and the Lord's Supper do not transform but instead are ‘testimonies’ of transformation. He warned against a tendency in the church to turn things into ‘rites’, turning communion and baptism into acts done to alleviate the conscience and effectively making them obstacles to genuine transformation.

While most adamantly challenged the suggestion that communion is transformative, some did speak of it in this manner. Sara shared that for her it is a transcendental experience, ‘a moment when I get closer to the presence of God’, and not simply a symbol. She brazenly stated that ‘in spite of her Plymouth Brethren heritage’, she believes in ‘transubstantiation’. She cites that in the early church, the elements were taken to those who were sick and great miracles occurred, because they, like us, ‘eat the life of Jesus’ and ‘receive more of … [Jesus’] cleansing through the blood’. While directing the Holy Meal one morning, she shared a testimony of someone in the ecclesial community who was healed by partaking of the elements. For Sara, this practice can undoubtedly bring about transformation.

In line with the Believer’s Church tradition of referring to what are called the sacraments in the magisterial traditions, the Julieta statute states: ‘The congregation observes the two ordinances of Christ, fulfil his teaching, exercise the gifts, right, and privileges given by the New Testament and seeks to complete the great commission of the Lord’, Article 2.6.
because people change when they truly meet Jesus. Similarly, Sabrina spoke of the transformative nature of the Holy Meal. As others, she spoke of the Lord's Supper as a time to remember what Jesus has done, particularly his last supper with his disciples, but she also affirmed her belief that it does change you as you receive the ‘blood and the bread’ of Christ.

Some moved beyond a personal focus, commenting on the communal aspect. Cristian, for example, recognized it as a communal practice that ‘we all do’ together. Juan spoke of the Lord’s Supper as a multi-layered symbol, but he also noted that it was more than that: it was a commitment. For Juan, it was a symbol in that it was a time of remembrance. Juan recalled that this remembrance was first rooted in the Passover when Israel remembers its liberation; Christians, in turn, remember what God has done in the Exodus and in Christ. The blood represents the redemption and cleansing that is in Christ. The body represents what Christ has done and we, as the church and as Christ’s body, are to be like Christ. However, it also concerns commitment. Jesus ‘gives the example of life’ and demonstrates a new way of living, although Juan notes, this is only brought through the redemption that he offers us through his blood.306 The bread, as the body, is a symbol of how far we must be willing to go: ‘Jesus went to the cross’. So, in taking the Holy Meal we are taking Jesus’ commitment as our own; we are becoming part of this body of Christ that should be, ‘reflecting the values of the kingdom’. Juan also alluded to the need to seek social justice as an extension of the practice but failed to integrate this into his more in-depth reflections. Assessing his own context in Julieta, Juan directly stated that the way it is practiced in Julieta is ‘very poor’ because it is ‘only a symbol’.

**Preaching**

As an ecclesial community firmly rooted in the Believers Church tradition, Julieta does not speak openly about the administration of sacraments, but it does unreservedly affirm the other half of the Reformers’ trope – the preaching of the Word. The high point of every service is undoubtedly the preaching of the Word. Typically there are two sermons, the children’s time (a mini sermon) and the sermon, 306 This can be directly compared with the common critique of Pelagianism.
which together make up almost half of the service. However, the sermon is not a performance of ordained professionalism or charismatic clericalism; instead, preaching is a lay-led exercise. Again, Julieta demonstrates a sincere communalism. The liturgy team, a group of assembly-appointed lay leaders makes the preaching rotation from among the deacons, pastors, and the rest of the congregation. The sermons do not follow a lectionary but instead follow an exegetically focused teaching method that progresses through a chosen book of the Bible. The liturgy team chooses the book and the division of texts for each week in conjunction with the deacons and pastors. As mentioned above, the Gospel of Luke was the focus of the sermons during my time at Julieta.

The preaching itself could be described as highly exegetical. Considering that few of the preachers on the rota have received formal theological training, the level of conceptual, theological, sociological, and philosophical ideas and images demonstrated academic rigor. Preachers often spoke of the historical and literary context of passages and clearly dedicated time and effort to developing their sermons. On several occasions, the preachers made reference to the original languages of the texts (Hebrew or Greek) and offered varied interpretations of terms.

The experience of the sermon extended beyond the simple act of preaching into a time of open sharing. While this time after the sermon is open to any and all comments, frequently the comments focused on the sermon. Here, the communitarian ethos and practice is again evident as the ecclesial community is given an opportunity to openly respond to the Word. For this reason, it may be better to speak of the service as being completely dominated by preaching because even this time is typically an extension of the sermon.

It is important to note that here, as in other instances, the communitarian ethos and practice faltered. As already noted, not all comments are welcome, although they are in essence permitted. Lucho’s commentary from the back row is often denigrated, and it is clear that, although preaching is a lay led exercise, it is not an exercise that typically incorporates the poorer sectors of the church. Roberto

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[^107]: Over five Sundays, the sermons averaged 44% of the entire time of all the services combined. Removing one Sunday when the sermon was abnormally short to allow for the assembly meeting, the sermons were 47% of the service times.
mentioned, for example, that his wife, a deacon, is an accomplished preacher but that she has not been asked to preach recently because of her direct confrontation with the congregation concerning matters of social class division. Although few preachers have received formal theological training, all those who preached during my stay had received at least an undergraduate university degree. Clearly the preparation of a coherent exegetical sermon demands a certain level of intelligence and academic training (analytic reading and writing), making the practice of preaching inaccessible to those that sit in the back row. They can listen and respond to the Word, but rarely speak the Word.

*Integral Mission and Ministries*

In this section we will first examine the concept of integral and then the significant integral ministries that Julieta has developed. This will take us back to the conversation of Julieta’s concept of change and will in turn help us to better understand and interpret these central communal practices. Julieta is an ecclesial community that has deeply ingested the theology and ideology of the *Integral Mission* movement.\(^{308}\) During what some call the ‘golden years’,\(^ {309}\) two formidable figures of the FTL served as pastors. Even today, books published by one of the key publishers of titles concerning Integral Mission, Ediciones Kairós, are available for purchase in the sanctuary, and *integral* and *integral mission* are in the common parlance of the ecclesial community. It is not by chance that the ecclesial community has named its substantial, socially-oriented outreach programs *apoyo integral*\(^ {310}\) ministries, a clear indication of the effort to inculcate this vision into the structure, organization, and life of the community. Nevertheless, even here, in the incubator of Integral Mission, there is no consensus over the interpretation of the terms *Integral* and *Integral Mission*.

The phrase *apoyo integral* was used repeatedly in Julieta to refer to the three volunteer-run weekly ministries that reach out to three different impoverished communities. One of these ministries is the multifaceted program that works with

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\(^{308}\) See Chapter 2 for a more in depth description of Integral Mission.

\(^{309}\) Interviews no. 12 and 13.

\(^{310}\) Spanish for ‘integral support/aid’.
families who are descendants of the Guaraní Indians and live on one of the numerous islands formed by the convergence of the Paraná River and Uruguay River in the River Plate Delta. Each Saturday, a group from Julieta travels by car and then by boat to the island. Over the past twelve years that program has provided educational support for children and currently serves more than twenty-five students. They have constructed a community centre and have sponsored other types of outreach to the surrounding community. The second is a weekly educational program in a working-class neighbourhood in another city in northern GBA. Each Saturday, volunteers from Julieta travel to the neighbourhood and use a small, local Pentecostal church to offer educational support to about ten children and adolescents. Some of the volunteers also dedicated time outside this program, attempting to integrate some of these students into the youth group at Julieta. The third is a recently founded program for children in a slum area in GBA. Volunteers run a Saturday horita feliz\textsuperscript{311} for children, with the hope that a more extensive program can be developed to meet educational, economic, and other related needs of children and their families.

The church also supports the organization Nueva Vida. Julieta provides volunteers and economic support that covers half the salary of the organization’s director, Carlos. Nueva Vida is what remains of the efforts to work in another working-class neighbourhood in past decades. At one time the church sponsored a social worker to work in that neighbourhood as the leader of a start-up ministry. In time, they founded a drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre that eventually disconnected from the church and became an independent, for-profit organization. This, in turn, led to the founding of Nueva Vida.

Although Julieta demonstrated an estimable array of integral ministries, defining the term integral was difficult. The word integral was used interchangeably with a variety of others terms, such as ‘all’, ‘whole’, ‘inclusive’, ‘heterogeneous’, and ‘diversity’. Pastor Jorge affirmed that the ‘integral gospel … deals with all aspects in the life of a person … physical, psycho-spiritual, work … family development, study’\textsuperscript{312}. Carlos concurred, commenting that integral in sociological

\textsuperscript{311} Spanish for ‘fun hour’; it is the name frequently used in Argentine evangelical circles to refer a kids’ club.

\textsuperscript{312} Interview no. 14.
terms ‘is to understand the integrality of my neighbour’ because ‘my neighbour … has a soul, a spirit, but also has a head, body, necessities, [and] ambitions …’.

Likewise, Carlos asserted that the church as a community must also embody the integral nature of mission as ‘heterogeneous’ and not ‘homogenous’ in relation to class and race. Juan spoke of the importance of ‘diversity’ and ‘heterogeneity’ of the church in its many functions as it submits to the Lordship of Christ. And Sara, defending the sovereign and providential nature of God, pointed to the source of this integrality, said, ‘God shows us in the Old Testament that he is a holistic … [and] integral God. Everything that he taught his people was to integrate life’. Clearly, Julieta has inculcated the teaching of Integral Mission, that mission is an extension of Missio Dei, God’s all-encompassing mission to the creation. The term ‘integral’ resonates in sermons, community discussions, and common parlance and is enshrined in the community statutes that declare that ‘salvation is the redemption of the integral man’.

In particular, the term ‘inclusive’ functioned as a synonym for ‘integral’. Carlos spoke of the ‘inclusive church’, which contrasts with the ‘exclusivist society’. Society is exclusivist because, for Carlos, ‘the goods of earth are for all … from a piece of land, to food, to natural resources’, but there is ‘a group that says, “no, this is ours and you are left out”’. This is not a modernist epidemic, but something that has plagued humanity since its inception because, in the words of Carlos, ‘there were always some that controlled the cake and would throw crumbs to the rest, so that the rest would follow them because of the crumbs’.

While this communitarian view is particular in focus, it is nevertheless firmly founded in an eschatologically informed ecclesiology, which reads the local church in light of the immanence and transcendence of God’s Kingdom. The reign of God, the community of the Kingdom, and the Kingdom of God were not passing themes at Julieta, but were mentioned time and again by the majority of those interviewed, as

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313 Interview no. 8.
314 Interview no. 11.
315 Article 2.4. Appendix A.5 also mentions the term ‘integral’.
316 Interview no. 8.
well as in sermons, discussions, and the community’s statutes. Carlos spoke of Jesus’ declaration that the Kingdom of God is here and interpreted this to mean that those who ‘participate in the community of the King, … in some way … try to build the Kingdom, which is a kingdom of justice’, because, ‘if justice is not the prime motor of the kingdom, we [are] already robbed of the Kingdom’.

Germán also confirmed inclusivism as a central tenet of identity at Julieta. Moreover, he directly correlated it with ‘integral’ as he commented on the comprehensive use of the idiom after offering a comparison from his own profession, civil engineering:

> The word integral – the transformation of a person we are talking about is an integral transformation —does not leave anything outside; it is inclusive and not exclusive, that is, it includes everything.

Although there was general agreement that ‘integral’ implied inclusivity and that the Kingdom of God is foundational, the discussion of the problem of poverty revealed that there were different ideologically driven interpretations. Juan, for example, clearly advocated the mission of the church as being concerned ‘with the human necessities that arise in a specific social context’, noting in particular the presence of ‘poverty’ in Argentina. Jorge also recognized the necessity of the contextualization of mission according to local needs.

However, while arguing for the priority of poverty in the catalogue of integral human necessities to be addressed by mission, Juan nevertheless noted that there are also diverse forms of service in the body of Christ, according to the diversity of

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317 Interviews no. 8, 11, 12, 13, and 16. This was a theme inherent to the ecclesial community’s identity because none of my interview schedules concerned questions about the kingdom. All the interviewees mentioned it unprompted and this included individuals on both sides of the ideological aisle (e.g., Carlos and Germán). Carlos mentioned the term more than twenty times, Juan some fifteen times, and Germán only twice. On November 9, 2008 my research journal notes from Sunday service record that the sermon reflected on Luke 17:20-37 and the second coming of Christ and the already and not yet presence of the kingdom. Finally, Julieta’s community statutes has a section explicitly dedicated to the kingdom (2:9) as well as a references to the kingdom in section 2:13 on Stewardship (‘According to the Scriptures, Christians should contribute cheerfully, freely, regularly, and systematically to the advance the kingdom of God.’) and in Appendix A called ‘The Church that We Hope For’ (A.1 ‘We long for a Church that sees itself as a sign of the Kingdom of God …’)

318 Interview no. 8.

319 Interview no. 16.
needs. Speaking from personal experience, he noted that at times he has served among the poor, and at other times, he has helped those who serve among the poor. So, he concluded that not everybody in the ecclesial community can serve directly among the poor at all times. Thus, although Juan clearly affirms that poverty informs the focus on integral mission, he recognizes that not everybody serve in the same way.

Germán also recognized a diversity of ministries in the church. However, his interpretation of ‘integral’ and ‘inclusivity’ implied an ideological shift that moved beyond a binding communitarian ethos, focused on the justice of the kingdom, to an ethos and practice that affirmed the primacy of an individualistic interpretation of calling. This in turn fostered a critique of the prioritization of needs of the poor. Both Germán and Juan noted a necessary division of labour in the ecclesial community, but he further codified this division by creating ontological categories defined according to ‘calling’. Some are called to serve among the poor; others are not. As mentioned above, he uses the terms integral and inclusive synonymously and defines God’s mission as mission for all. However, he expanded the reach of inclusivity by insisting on the inclusion of those who are in good financial positions, noting that they also have needs. He spoke about his own life and his interactions with fellow workers in a multinational company. He criticized the universal application of agrarian and communitarian ecclesiological models in which all material possessions are held in common and where all are required to work in jobs directly involved with the ecclesial community. He believes this requires individuals to leave the place where God has placed them, eliciting again the concept of ‘calling’ and applying it to himself and his career as a civil engineer. Germán directly criticized Carlos for being exclusivist by insisting that, ‘only this political orientation is in agreement with Christianity’. Nevertheless, for Germán, the conundrum is not integral mission, which he insists is inclusive, but an exclusivist and narrow interpretation of mission as ineluctably tied to ‘political orientation’ such

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320 Interview no. 16. Germán spoke of the Bruderhof communities in Germany and other parts of the world as an example of an agrarian ecclesial community where everybody held things in common. In his opinion, this type of ecclesial community does not function in a modern, urban context such as GBA where each person has a different type of job and cannot directly depend on the land to provide many of his needs.

321 Interview no. 16.
as the preferential option for the poor. He went so far as to claim that these attitudes have damaged the ecclesial community and caused conflict. Juan similarly mentioned that he had heard some individuals express discontent with comments from Carlos and others about the poor that they felt represent a form discrimination against the middle class.

There is still disagreement in Julieta over the central, binding theme of integral mission. However, it is important to note that the two individuals I interviewed who still live in poverty, Sabrina and Marcos, failed to employ the term ‘integral’ and Sabrina could not articulate a definition of the term. This raises questions concerning whether the concept of integral mission is determinative for the formation of community identity throughout the entire ecclesial community or only in and among the educated, middle and upper middle classes. Pastor Jorge offered a perspective that helps to tie the different and contrasting threads together. He spoke of the integral and inclusive nature of the ecclesial community in relation to economic inequality, asserting that the church needs to be ‘a model, integrally … in the economic area’. Julieta, he averred, in some respect, represents ‘a countercultural model’. Because its pastors are ad honorem, the church is free to dedicate more than 50% of its income to support missions, by which he means the integral aid ministries of the church, half Carlos’ salary, and a small stipend for one of the pastors named Lucas and his wife Natalia, who is a deacon, for the work they do in leading the outreach programs on the island among the indigenous community. Jorge asserted that the church, in its multifaceted and integral nature, is already functioning as an example of an inclusive community, though it could do more. Nevertheless, similar to Germán and Juan, Jorge spoke of a time when the church demonstrated greater ‘plurality’, ‘tolerance’, and ‘humility’. The future of Julieta’s pursuit to fulfil the integral mission seems to sit somewhere between recuperating a past golden age and forging a new future, in which the inclusive mission binds instead of breaks the ecclesial community.

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322 Germán never specifically mentioned the term ‘preferential option for the poor’, but insinuated it.

323 Interview no. 14.
Assembly

As mentioned above, Julieta is intentionally communitarian. First and foremost, leadership is broadly shared and, at least in theory, accessible to all. The community statute clearly states that pastoral leadership and care is ‘a shared ministry’ of a ‘pastoral team’ composed of three to five persons. Of the four current pastors, none has been ordained officially by the CEBA; each has simply been recognized by the ecclesial community, being nominated and then confirmed by a quorum vote of three quarters of the assembly. Moreover, there is a long history of pastors who were previously members of the local church being confirmed as pastors. Unlike in many other evangelical ecclesial communities, the pastors are not the key administrators of the church but instead serve as pastors by attending to the ministries in which they were serving before being confirmed as pastors. The pastoral care of the congregation is not the express domain of the pastors, but is a task shared with the deacons. Also both the pastors and the deacons work together to define the vision of the ecclesial community.\footnote{Statue of Julieta Evangelical Christian Baptist Church, Article 3. It speaks of the deacons and pastors ‘encouraging councils of dialogue, communion, prayer, and celebration’ with the expressed goal of ‘fostering the vision of the church’. However, Jorge spoke of the church traditionally and amicably having various visions, which were a reflection of inclusivity.} There is no limit to the number of deacons; presently there are eight and each must be confirmed for a three-year term by receiving sixty-six percent of the congregational vote. Along with the pastors, they make up what is called the ministerial team, which meets biweekly. There is a robust level of leadership among the congregation that extends into the numerous ministry teams: liturgy team, integral aid ministries, drama group, women’s group, youth group, young adult group, and prayer meeting. These leaders are confirmed annually by receiving a simple majority of votes from the assembly. Regular members of the congregation lead the Holy Meal. The liturgy team, not the pastors or deacons, plan and orchestrate the services, and sermons are preached by those who the ecclesial community has appointed to the preaching rota. Indeed, it is difficult to find an official member of the church who is not involved at some level of leadership. Juan noted that at the yearly assembly meeting when leaders are confirmed, someone who is not involved in leadership and on the ballot can scarcely be found to count the ballots. Julieta does not have a \textit{sacerdotium in sacerdotio}, but
instead has long attempted to embody the reformation doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.

As Baptists, Julieta has also traditionally valued certain Baptist freedoms – the autonomy of the soul and congregational autonomy – as well as a congregational form of government. As a free and autonomous church, Julieta has traditionally been on the fringes of CEBA, not fitting the mould of the self-proclaimed traditional Argentine Baptists (as represented by the recently formed *Asociación Bautista Argentina*) or with the renovation movement that has changed many churches since the 1990s. They have tended to be more progressive and inclusive than many of their Baptist brothers and sisters.

In addition, in a day and age when the assembly has come under attack among *renovadas* Baptist churches, Julieta has continued to place the assembly form of government at the centre of its identity. The ecclesial community has regular quarterly assembly meetings as well as provision for exceptional meetings, which are usually called to deal with a specific issue. The assemblies encourage open conversation: ‘all participating members have the right to speak and vote, asking to speak with a raised hand…’ A coordinator, who is part of the ministerial body, and a secretary lead each assembly. Apart from the assembly, the worship service also fosters an environment that encourages open conversation (e.g., the time dedicated to sermon response and community sharing each Sunday). All are free to comment and are generally encouraged to speak. The same could be said of the ministerial team meetings, in which leadership is shared and exercised broadly. Nonetheless, this inclusive, pluralist, and democratic model of community interaction and government has not always been easy to sustain. Although inclusiveness and open communication have been at the heart of Julieta’s congregational ethos, exclusiveness and accusations have also filled the air. Germán and Juan both clearly mentioned that the assembly was the site of heated and divisive exchanges and votes. For Germán, this suggests that democracy, although an exemplary model, may be too ambitious a goal for the ecclesial community. Jorge cited that at times in past years

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326 Statute of Julieta Evangelical Christian Baptist Church, Article 6.11
some have said things in a ‘bad manner’, creating further division, but he still defended the church as an assembly where all can share as a ‘strength’ rather than a ‘weakness’.

However, their communitarian ethos has failed to translate at some points into communitarian practice. Some interviewees expressed concerns over the inclusivity of the ecclesial community in relation to the selection of leadership. Both Carlos and Roberto expressed doubt over whether members from lower social classes would ever be appointed to key positions of leadership. Carlos spoke from personal experience as a former deacon who has never again been nominated. For Roberto, it has been hard to accept the limits of the ecclesial community and the reality of the power and unwillingness of some to accept others as equals. He also cited the example of Carlos as well as Lucho, who has worked hard in the church and was nominated to be a deacon but did not receive enough votes. As mentioned above, Lucho talks of the poor frequently in the open time of sharing, and that offends some people. Furthermore, both Carlos and Roberto noted that although Julieta challenges machismo and women serve in leadership, the ecclesial community has failed to date to name a female pastor. Julieta’s intentions for an inclusive community are estimable, but it has struggled to confront the effects of its divisive and exclusionary social context.

4.4.5. Conclusion

Julieta has a profound communitarian ethos and practice, as expressed in its statutes, the building’s architecture, sermons, hierarchical structure, and ecclesial practices (assembly, Holy Meal, etc.). It is an ecclesial community where opportunity for participation, inclusion, and incorporation are professed and practiced. However, it is this pursuit of an inclusive and integral ecclesial community that has served as both a source of cohesion and division. As an ecclesial community that meets in an exclusive neighbourhood, but actively engages surrounding communities on the periphery through integral ministries, it has attempted to bridge the Argentine chasm between civilization and barbarity. However, it is this same engagement that caused it to become a microcosm of Argentine social tensions and fears. This division has played out on the level of interpretation of central concepts.
such as integral, transformation, conversion, and inclusivity as well as central practices such as the assembly, open discussion, prayer, and integral ministries. Indeed, there is not even a consensus on when and how transformation begins and what the role of God and the ecclesial community is in transformation. So, although there is a professed community affirmation of central core beliefs, there are a variety of interpretations and applications of those beliefs. For example, concerning the meaning of ‘integral’ and ‘inclusivity’, some in the ecclesial community have interpreted the terms in contradictory manners (Carlos vs. German). Accordingly, while most affirm the ecclesial community’s active engagement of the periphery of society, support is withdrawn when those on the periphery begin to find their own voice at Julieta. It seems that Julieta is somehow, paradoxically, a testimony of faithfulness and failure and integration and disintegration.
Chapter 5

The Local Church as a Transformational Historical Project

5.1. Introduction

The focus of the last chapter was the engagement of the present ecclesial setting through the development of case studies of two ecclesial communities: Renovado and Julieta. In those studies we closely examined the history and social setting of each ecclesial community, the ecclesial communities’ concepts of change, and their ecclesial practices. The present chapter engages these case studies by putting them into direct conversation with LAT, asking the question, can a church be a transformational historical project? The chapter begins with a brief reminder of the present exilic wilderness of Latin America and Latin American ecclesiology. It then confronts the three challenges to a community-oriented social ethics that have been raised in Chapter 3: the social and historical sciences divide, popular religion, and mass/minority divide. After establishing the ecclesial community as a potential nexus of transformation, the chapter proceeds to define transformation through engaging the concepts of transformation revealed in the case studies of Renovado and Julieta and through reflection on potential transformational ecclesial practices. Finally, the chapter proposes that transforming ecclesial community must have practices that are faithful and efficacious, and that the local church as a ‘gathering community’ is a fitting historical project.

5.2. The Narratives of Exodus and Exile in the Present Wilderness

It is not the task of a transformative ecclesiology to concern itself only with testimonies of victory, but also with crucifixion and failure. While armchair theologians have vociferously critiqued LALT for its apparent myopia in the post-1989 world, Chapters 1 and 2 have demonstrated that Latin America went through drastic and oppressive changes in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s. Indeed, the post-1989 world signalled the blooming of neo-liberalism in Argentina, which aggravated an already precarious situation. The poor were re-crucified and the middle class dwindled with the rise of Argentina’s ‘new poor’. Even the efforts of the New Left have offered few signs of transformation, providing little more than a vacuous
wrangling over *el pueblo*. A decade of the newest flavour of a personalist Peronism – *Kichnerismo* – has managed to reverse some of the savage privatizations of the 1990s, but has failed to bring lasting transformation amidst a stubborn dependency on clientelism, a culture of contradictions, and overt authoritarianism. The Argentine bifurcation of civilization vs. barbarism continues in the present exclusionary context.

In 1975, Leonardo Boff declared that ‘there is no longer a place for the euphoria of the decade of the 1960s, when it was possible to dream of a spectacular escalation of the popular liberation’. Indeed, by the 1970s there was already a chorus of voices calling for a theology of captivity in light of the unlikely success of the popular movements and increasing pressure from repressive dictatorial regimes. Enrique Dussel, in unison with Boff, spoke of ‘a time of political captivity, of prudence and patience’. The signposts were clear that the future was not one of victory, but imminent repression. As José Comblin commented in 1973, ‘With President Allende’s death and the military pronouncement in Chile … and the self-destruction of Peronism in Argentina … the possibility of liberation and revolution disappeared for Latin America for a long time’.

Many liberationists have derided the imagery of captivity or exile as destructive. However, others, such as Rubem Alves, consistently develop the theme.

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2. Boff, *Teología del Cautiverio*; Comblin, *The Church and the National Security State*, p. 38; F. J. Hinkelammert, ‘El Cautiverio de La Utopía: Las Utopías Conservadoras del Capitalismo Actual, El Neoliberalismo y La Dialéctica de Las Alternativas’, *Pasos* 50 (1993): 1-19. The original version of Alves ‘From Paradise to the Desert’ appeared in 1975 in the Italian version (*La Nova frontier della teologia in America Latina* by Queriniana, Brescia). It is not surprising that it was the Brazilians who were at the forefront of developing a theology of captivity and exile while other Latin Americans still focused on liberation, given that Brazil already had more than a decade under the grip of a right wing military dictatorship (1964-1985) by the time the other countries in the Southern Cone began to follow the same path (Chile in 1973, Uruguay in 1973, and Argentina in 1976). For some other examples of the discussion of exile and captivity, see Comblin, *The Church and the National Security State*, p. 38; M. A. Brun, ‘Théologie de l’Exil’ (Ph.D. diss., University of Strasbourg, 1987); and Hinkelammert, ‘El Cautiverio de La Utopía’.


For Alves, the exile is not a negation of liberation; instead, it is an opportunity for imagination, for hope, and for the rebirth of culture. Alves criticises Marxism for its reductionist, materialist anthropology and its denigration of imagination and culture. While Alves openly affirms that culture and society are tools to provide for humanity’s primal need of survival, he consistently asserts that humanity’s existence is more than biology and sociology. The present state of social and cultural exile and impotence is, for Alves, the soil of change, for ‘Magic [imagination] is a flower that grows only in impotence’. In other words, while captivity brings sorrow, it also brings the opportunity for transformation.

In the present setting of confusion and angst, it is the testimony of unity, defined not simply by faithfulness, but also by encounter and conflict with the present socio-cultural reality, that offers hope of transformation. Indeed, traversing the Argentine social, historical, and ecclesial context has revealed that triumphalist theologies and ecclesiologies that profess otherworldly ontologies of peace and prosperity fail to confront the present context. The present strife is tangibly real and the church, if it is to be a nexus of transformation, cannot insulate itself from poverty and social conflict. However, a theology of exile, while helpful, is not sufficient. Instead, as Antonio González has suggested, there is a need for theology to maintain the Scriptural narratives of exodus and exile in creative tension. A transformative LAT is a theology that can maintain a creative tension between the reality of the exile of lo cotidiano and small steps towards transformation.

In the previous chapter, the studies of Julieta and Renovado Baptist Churches revealed that the efforts to transform the social realm have ultimately produced conflict in the midst of the ecclesial community, a conflict mirrored in the greater society. This, of course, should be of no surprise, given that José Míguez Bonino and other liberationists have long spoken of the tension surrounding concepts of unity and the commitment to social transformation. However, the recognition that unity is

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5 Alves, Tomorrow’s Child, p. 81. Alves uses the word ‘magic’ as synonym of imagination.

6 Antonio González serves as a contemporary reminder that the complete abandonment of the narrative of the Exodus is dangerous, as is also the failure to recognize the exilic present. A. González, The Gospel of Faith and Justice, trans. J. Owens (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), p. 11.

7 See J. Míguez Bonino, ‘Fundamental Questions in Ecclesiology’. In The Challenge of Basic Christian Communities: Papers for the International Congress of Theology, eds. S. Torres, and J.
not necessarily agreement is not an affirmation of Marxist class theory; rather it expresses a commitment to a community and to a task that seeks the reign of God on earth. As we sojourn through the present Latin American context that sits between exodus and exile, it is crucial to recall that in the Hebrew Scriptures the Exodus and Exile presuppose *un pueblo* that is rooted in the calling of Abraham to be a priestly nation for the nations. As such, the ecclesial community is a conglomerate of peoples and it is called out as a community for all people. The ecclesial community is formed by the memory of and the present experience of the Exodus and Exile, which prepare the community to walk between the present (exile) and the hope of the kingdom (exodus).

5.3. The Problem with Community

Having noted the profound difficulty of the present social and ecclesial setting, we turn back to the correlated challenges of a social ethic focused on the community as a nexus of transformation mentioned in Chapter 3: social and historical hermeneutical sciences divide, popular religion as liberative or oppressive, and the mass/minority divide. These three issues, I have argued, represent both possibilities and challenges. The question before us is this: can the local church, in light of the present wilderness, be a nexus of transformation?

As we noted earlier when investigating the thought of Míguez Bonino, he has a dipartite commitment to the historical project and his faith in human community. As previously noted, the historical project should actively serve as a tool to ground theological methodology and language—e.g., love, justice, preferential option for the poor, liberation, and popular—in the concrete and historical commitment of love as

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8 The conversation between Anabaptism and LALT has been very fruitful in bringing this to light. Anabaptists have sought to remind liberationists that the Exodus must also be read in light of the calling of Abraham and the formation of a people. Several examples are J. H. Yoder, ‘Exodus and Exile: The Two Faces of Liberation’, *Cross Currents* 23 (Fall 1973): 297-309; Yoder, ‘The Wider Setting of ‘Liberation Theology’’, *The Review of Politics* 52 (Spring 1990): 285-96; D. S. Schipani, *Freedom and Discipleship: Liberation Theology in an Anabaptist Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989).
solidarity. The historical project created a place\textsuperscript{9} and a space\textsuperscript{10} for individual and collective commitment, and the subsequent formation of radical identity, serving as a dynamic tool through which to navigate the treacherous waters of bipolarity; between individualism and oppressive collectivism; between personal and social soteriologies; between unrealized and realized eschatologies; between depraved Augustinian-Calvinist hamartiology and naively optimistic Pelagianism/liberal humanism. To this catalogue, I suggest adding that the historical project should function to demythologize the Latin American foundational, bifurcating myth of civilization vs. barbarism.

In Chapter 2 we can recall that José Míguez Bonino clearly defined the historical project as a ‘midway term between a utopia…and a program, a technically developed model for the organization of society’. It was a crucial theological tool because it enabled the move from amorphous concepts such as community, liberation, and utopia to actual structural and sociological change. However, in Chapter 3 we examined how Míguez Bonino, when faced with the conundrum of naming the place and space for the radical voluntarism necessary for an individual commitment to a liberating historical project, he turned to the ecclesial community and not the historical project. The ecclesial community validated the incarnating character and ontology of God and served as a place and space for the formation of the individual in her own individuality within the context of a commitment to love in solidarity, i.e., a transformational historical project. It was the ecclesial community and its narratives and practices that served as fodder for the radical fire of the Spirit of love in solidarity. The immediate context of personal transformation is the ecclesial community, which, although located in and impacted by a larger socio-cultural context, nonetheless prospectively serves as a place and space for the formation of personal and communal subjectivity. This, in turn, can challenge and transform cultural practices and social structures. An ecclesial community that is transformative does not subsume subjectivity, but instead potentializes it.

\textsuperscript{9} By ‘place’, I mean a physical place that allows for chronological development of practices over time.

\textsuperscript{10} By ‘space’, I mean a socio-cultural space that is both a product of the larger social context and a construction in tune with and against this context.
Simply stating that the ecclesial community is transformative, while a profound confession of faith, does not solve the conundrum of how to form a radical voluntarism, given that ecclesial communities are not ontological oases of transformation and social justice, free from the biting sandstorms of the present socio-cultural deserts. Instead, if the ecclesial community is to be transformative, it must be a dynamic transforming (transformed and transformative) community.\footnote{I am assuming the term ‘transforming’ denotes that transformation and gathering are dynamic processes, and that the gathering community’s ontology is not static (i.e., transformed or gathered). While the gathering community is transformed, it is only this in being in a constant state of transforming. Thus, the gathering community is transforming in that it is transformed and being constantly transformed and providing opportunities for transformation.}

The ecclesial community’s potentiality as a nexus of transformation is not buried in codified, magic sacramentalism, \textit{ex opere operato}, but in a pneumatologically infused socio-cultural reality. This is a dynamic social reality that is constructed over again and again. The regenerative and creative ontology of transformation and the constantly changing social and cultural context demand that the project of transformation be repetitive. However, this repetitiveness is not static monotony, but ludic participation in the Spirit’s work of reconstitution and sanctification. Thus, the ecclesial community changes in tune with the continuously changing social and cultural context, but it is transforming in responding to change by confronting oppressive practices and structures through recreation of ecclesial community and practice.

5.4. \textit{Defining Transformation in the Context of the Ecclesial Communities}

Now that we have reiterated the importance of the community as a nexus of transformation, we turn back to the contextual studies to explore again how the ecclesial communities understand positive change, Although the term ‘liberation’ was the hallmark of LALT, it is not a formative concept in most local ecclesial communities. In Julieta and Renovado, of those who spoke of liberation, only one person actually related it to LALT. Instead, ‘transformation’ was the overarching term and concept used to speak of profound positive change which is an extension of salvation. We will review how each ecclesial community spoke of liberation and transformation into order to gain some clarity concerning the concept of
transformation in relation to ecclesial practice.

In Renovado, the term liberation was referenced occasionally in services but in no way akin to the liberation of LALT. Instead, the term that was typically used to speak of positive and all-encompassing change was transformation. While liberation referred to a specific experience and ecclesial practice, transformation more broadly referred to all types of change and was directly related to salvation. Liberation is a type of transformation, but transformation cannot be reduced to liberation. For example, Magdelena, the only person in Renovado to speak of liberation without prompting, recounted her process of inner healing.\textsuperscript{12} This was not uncommon, given that the interviewees generally spoke of liberation as a personal experience that occurred within the context of the church and was akin to inner healing.\textsuperscript{13} Like inner healing, liberation concerns breaking curses, spiritual bondage, and psychological and/or psychosomatic healing. Unlike inner healing, it concerns freedom from powers, spirits, or past curses outside or beyond the individual (i.e., socio-political domains, such as cities, provinces, nations, and regions). However, when individuals spoke of change on a communal, city, or national level they did not speak of liberation but instead of transformation. While liberation implied freedom from evil spirits or curses and touched on the socio-political, it was ultimately part of a larger process of transformation. Inner healing and liberation are duplet ecclesial practices and tools for individual freedom. Apostle Antonio commented that liberations – freeing individuals from the oppression of evil spirits – have been a constant presence in the church since its foundation.\textsuperscript{14} The neo-Pentecostal Baptist Pablo Deiros spoke openly of the double pastoral ministry of inner healing and liberation and a standardization of the practice of liberation.\textsuperscript{15} Pastor Ricardo marked clear

\textsuperscript{12} Interview no. 4. All other interviews in Renovado only mentioned liberation with prompting.

\textsuperscript{13} Interviews no. 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, and 7. During my sojourn in Renovado, I never witnessed a liberation, I was given verbal testimonies of this experience and practice.

\textsuperscript{14} Interview no. 7. Interestingly, Antonio referred to the writing of John White as proof of the inherent presence of signs and wonders in the church. See J. White, \textit{When the Spirit Comes with Power: Sign and Wonders Among God’s People} (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988).

\textsuperscript{15} Interview no. 18. Pablo spoke of the development of these ministries in his church through the appointment of a person, Pablo Bottari, as the head of the liberation ministry. So, we are clearly talking about a concrete field of practice, ministry, and theology that has even been developed with theory. Bottari, for example, has written how-to texts on liberation/deliverance; see Bottari, ‘Dealing
soteriological boundaries for liberation, stating that it is one thing to be forgiven from sins and another to be freed from the bondage of sin. Although he did not realize it, Ricardo directly challenged the restrictive Anselmian satisfaction theory of the atonement, which is a dominant soteriological narrative among conservative Latin American evangelicals. Moreover, his words imply that salvation also concerns liberation from, and victory over, the oppressive results of sin, alluding to an understanding of atonement seemingly close to what Gustaf Aulén famously named the Christus Victor model of the atonement. It is precisely this second aspect of salvation, freedom from bondage that is applied to the practices of inner healing and liberation. Accordingly, Carlos Annacondia frequently declared in his tent revivals: ‘Jesús te ama, salva y sana’. It is clear that both liberation and inner healing are transformative, in that they are extensions of salvation, but they are each part of the larger all-encompassing category of transformation. In the context of Renovado, liberation is a healing, a personal experience or series of experiences, that occurs as a direct extension of salvation and in the context of an ecclesial community and shared ecclesial practices.

In contrast, at Julieta there was not a shared practice of liberation. It was a term that was never mentioned in ecclesial community meetings or services and only by interviewees after prompting. On the one hand, some found the term unnerving or confusing. Germán commented that, ‘it was a term that he does not use much in a practical sense’. Jorge made a clear distinction between liberation and salvation, noting that liberation is freedom from demonic oppression, but not salvation. Sonia, with Demons in Revival Evangelism’, and especially P. Bottari, *Free in Christ: Your Complete Handbook on the Ministry of Deliverance* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 2000).

16 I am aware that it is anachronistic to assign these terms to Anselm and that there is also a growing body of literature attempting to free Anselm from the blame that has been heaped upon him. Moreover, I realize that the penal-substitutionary language is better equated with the work of Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, and others. Nonetheless, I find the typology of Gustaf Aulén is helpful for reasons of organization. See Aulén, *Christus Victor*.


18 Interview no. 8.

19 Interview no. 7.

20 Interview no. 14. Juan, in contrast, was the one person in Julieta that made a connection between liberation and soteriology, simply stating that he felt in his life that he had been ‘liberated from sin’. In conversations with Juan he shared with me that he had gone through a process of inner
who came from an impoverished background, candidly said: ‘I don’t know’. On the other hand, Carlos spoke succinctly of liberation as freedom from social and psychological oppression, from simplistic reasoning that accepts there are only two options – liberal democracy or military dictatorship. The radical former drug addict was the lone interviewee in both ecclesial communities that spoke of liberation in explicit socio-political terms akin to that of LALT. For the rest, liberation was either insignificant or a specific existential experience within a larger process of transformation. To them, it was ‘transformation’ and not ‘liberation’ that best encapsulated personal and social change.

As detailed in the previous chapter, succinctly defining positive change in the ecclesial communities was a difficult task. Amid a cacophony of expressions, transformation emerged as the preferred term to express favourable change because it is a theological concept with a broad expanse. While a few interviewees consciously noted the expansiveness of the term, the vast majority unconsciously used the term to speak of the many facets (physical, psychological, spiritual, communal, social, political) and levels (micro, meso, macro; personal, communal, social) of change. In both ecclesial communities there was an overwhelming sentiment that transformation existentially and epistemologically begins with the individual. For example, numerous interviewees stressed the priority of individual conversion within the panorama of transformation, making transformation contingent on conversion, a priori. In essence, there is an established ordo salutis; transformation is a one-way street flowing outward from the personal. Angelina from Renovado helps reveal the evangelical angst that surrounds salvation. Remember that Angelina struggled to define social change, bluntly commenting on her reticence towards the term, ‘because … all change comes from the Lord’. This implied a healing in the first Baptist church he attended in his hometown in southern Argentina. This could be the root of his correlation between liberation and atonement, but he made no such connection himself. See Interview no. 12.

21 Interview no. 9.
22 Interview no. 8.
23 Interviews no. 7, 13, 16, Pablo Deiros, Interview no. 18 a, 18 b.
24 Interviews no. 1, 2, 3, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 16, 17.
25 Interview no. 2.
proclivity for a theologically-infused term directly connected to divine action. So it seems, the *ordo salutis* reveals that transformation is contingent on conversion because it is contingent on God, the epistemological and existential priority of conversion apologetically guards against Pelagianism. Transformation is deeper and broader than human attempts at social change because it is divinely conceived. Conversely, transformation is rooted in conversion because only God saves and humanity is transformed by faith alone. While this certainly safeguards the personal and divine nature of salvation and transformation, it also hampers the usefulness of the expansiveness of transformation.

The priority of God as the source of all that is good, i.e. transformation, is not detrimental to a robust understanding of transformation in and of itself. Instead, the problem is, as Juan L. Segundo has suggested, with a closed notion of the hallmark of the Reformation: justification by faith alone. Segundo, it is important to note, was no enemy of conversion: he argued that *justification by faith* can and often has led to a disregard for human effort in God’s salvation plan. As noted in Chapter 3, this was precisely one of the reasons that Segundo was so critical of the magic of popular religion and magical conceptions of the sacraments: they failed to connect the ecclesial with direct human and historical action. This is not a novice debate, but a return to the struggles of Chalcedon and the Reformation over the nature of the incarnation.

We have actually been tarrying at the door of the ethical dilemma of whether there is an Aristotelian division between *poiesis* (skilful production) and *praxis* (virtuous action). Are social ethics mediated by an overbearing teleology (efficacy) or a virtuous intentional action (faithfulness), or can we speak of efficacious faithfulness? This also means that we are tarrying at the door of sacramentology: are sacraments efficacious because of divine action or because of the disposition and/or right action of the priest, individual believer, or the ecclesial community? This dilemma will not be put to rest in the few pages that follow, but I do desire to call attention to the momentousness of the questions before us, lest we be tempted to

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26 As we shall see later in this chapter, Segundo was one of the most avid supporters of the importance of conversion among liberationists. Indeed, conversion was fundamental to his argument for the priority of the minority responding to the call to liberation.
assume that the particularity of this project – the two corners of the *partido* Mitre – has no application to the ‘c’atholic church.²⁷

5.5. *In Search of Faithful and Transformative Practice*

Now that we have established that the ecclesial community is a possible nexus of transformation and that transformative practice incorporates both the divine and the human, it is now time to analyse some examples of transformative practice. This is a question of sacramentology, as mentioned above, because it is one area where Christian theology has closely wrestled with these questions of transformation. However, sacramentology has not traditionally been a major focus for LAT. Progressive evangelicals and neo-Pentecostals have had very little to say and LALT has a contentious record with engagement of the sacraments. For example, Hugo Assmann complained:

> The susceptibility of Christian media to verbal magic…is an established fact: we are easily tempted to a ‘presence through the word’, devoid of follow-up action. The roots of this inclination to a mere verbal debauch are probably to be found in the material base (infrastructure) which, historically, conditioned the ideological superstructure of the Church – the understanding of power that conditioned the notion of efficacy of the word, seen at its height in the *ex opere operato* sacramentalism removed from its real historical preconditions…²⁹

While Leonardo Boff is arguably the liberationist who has most closely engaged the general question of ecclesiology and sacramentology and paid a hefty price for it,³⁰ we will focus on the work of the Uruguayan Juan L. Segundo because of his close

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²⁷ I denote the small c of ‘c’atholic to make clear that I am referring to the universal church.


²⁹ Assmann, *Theology for a Nomad Church*, p. 46.

engagement with the sacraments. Although Segundo touches on the sacraments in various parts of his writings, it is in his *The Sacraments Today* where he most intently engages the theme. Not surprisingly, he argues that the traditional sacraments are a form of ecclesial magic and control, which counter the true sacraments of *praxis*. Similar to Assmann, Segundo searches for the historical efficacy of the sacraments, but he ultimately fails to move beyond sacramentalism. I use this term in line with the North American John Howard Yoder who made a clear distinction between sacramentalism and sacramental social processes. Sacramentalism, according to Yoder, pulls out a set of practices from daily life (e.g., eating bread) and gives them ‘by gracious degree, a distinctive meaning, one best served by accentuating the distance between the special meaning and the ordinary one’ so that ‘the bread no longer looks or tastes like the bread one shares with children and guests and that is owed to cousins and to the beggar’.

For Yoder, the need for a separate theology of sacraments (sacramentology) implies the removal of social practices from the realm of reality, when what is needed is a marriage of sacrament and socio-cultural processes. The words of the priest and/or the self-determined repentant receiver may be determinative for the liturgical efficacy of the Eucharist, but that does not make the Eucharist a liberating social practice. Who made the wine and the bread and who drinks and eats them? Is it ‘real’ bread and drink to fill hungry brothers and sisters’ stomachs? So, like Segundo, Yoder concludes that a sacramentalist reading of the sacraments will not arrive at transforming community, or economics; instead one needs ‘to start over from somewhere else’.

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32 Segundo, *The Sacraments Today*, p. 101. Leonardo Boff makes a similar critique of the sacraments as instruments of control exerted by a clerical class over the laity; see Boff, *Church, Charism and Power*.


Sacraments Today, relates that the Eucharist as sacrament/sign fails ‘to flow into any real community’. It is the failure to embody community that is the crux of the sacramental crisis. While Segundo offers scathing critiques, he offers no new Eucharistic or social practice, but only frustration and circular postponement. Instead, he offers a circular argument that sacramental and liturgical reform can only occur after the experience of ‘authentic Christian community’. He argues that in the early church believers would not have seen the sacraments as ‘something useful or … necessary for eternal life’, but rather ‘spontaneous gestures in a community that was in possession of eternal life’. However, this simply makes community the sacrament and creates a new communal sacramentalism. The ecclesial community is not sacramental and transforming, if it does not have practices that are both sacraments (faithful practice) and transformative praxis (efficacious social practice). The relationship with sacramental practices is dynamic and the ecclesial community is transforming as it continually critiques, reshapes, and renews its practice, but the ecclesial community does not exist without practice and tradition creatio ex nihilo. The practice must always be faithful to a given and received tradition to be efficacious.

The diffuse and varied nature of the ecclesial practices of Julieta and Renovado present a challenge to my intention to speak of practice that unifies sacramentality (faithfulness) and is transformative (efficacious). Nevertheless, I offer two examples – the Holy Meal (Renovado) and Baptism (Julieta). I decided to choose these ‘traditional’ Christian sacraments, not to defend the traditional marks of the church or to produce an orthodox catalogue of practice, but instead to

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35 Segundo, Sacraments, p. 38.
36 He says that, ‘what is plaguing us is not a crisis over the sacraments but a crisis over the coherence and meaningfulness of the Christian community’. Ibid.
37 Ibid. Here he expresses chronological priority of ecclesial community over the sacraments (i.e., the ecclesial community came before the sacraments) as well as the ontological priority of the ecclesial community over the sacraments.
38 Ibid., p. 42.
demonstrate the ‘untraditional’ dialectic movement of transformation. Indeed, although space does not permit, I could have chosen several non-traditional practices (e.g., the anointing, the assembly, and inner healing), which arguably are instrumental in the collective and individual identity and subjectivity formation of the ecclesial communities.

5.5.1. Renovado: The Holy Meal

At Renovado, they did not offer developed and systemic descriptions of the Lord’s Supper, but, for the most part, individual and experiential confessions. Nevertheless, it is clear that most at Renovado find the Lord’s Supper an experience of communing with God and finding forgiveness. While there is little talk of symbols and much focus on personal reflection and experience, the Holy Meal is a sacramental moment. As previously noted, Antonio spoke in sacramental terms, saying that ‘a common moment that appears to lack transcendence’ can become transcendent through faith and expectation in God. These words are revelatory: during my sojourn at Renovado, I never had the opportunity to witness or partake of a communion in a formal, sacramentalist sense, but nonetheless I did partake of a weekly Holy Meal that makes the everyday transcendent. Each Saturday morning a team of volunteers prepares and serves a meal to anyone and everyone who desires to come through the doors of ‘Praise’ and ‘Adoration’. After the meal has ended and all the guests have left, the volunteers sit down with pastor Ricardo and commune and eat together. The day I attended, Argentines, Paraguayans, Peruvians, Chileans, women and men accompanied me at the table. We prayed, broke bread, and ate lunch with juice. The disposition of those present was to love those in need, the bread and juice and fellowship of the everyday was transubstantiated, and the Holy Meal was shared and eaten.

5.5.2. Julieta: The Miracle of Baptism

The Miracle of Baptism occurred in Julieta some years ago. Lucho, who came from an impoverished background and frequently utilized the open fellowship time

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40 I distinguish ‘sacramental’, the possibility of a transformative encounter between the human and the divine in a social practice, from ‘sacramentalist’, the affirmation – ex opere operato – that a social practice that has been removed from the mundane of life and made into a de facto sacred event.
on Sundays to share testimonies from perspective of the poor, met and befriended an old homeless man. As the story goes, this man, Milagros, would sleep on the steps of the local Catholic Church and beg for food and money nearby. The interaction began innocently enough. Lucho would take Milagros some food, talk to him, and read him parts of the Bible. Then followed an invitation to attend Julieta and in time Milagros, although still homeless, became a regular attendee. Finally, the old man took the step of further commitment and was baptized. His baptism was not like others, as Carlos recounted. Indeed, it was a miracle, because this was the baptism of Milagros. Carlos, commenting on the signification of the term ‘integral’, vividly shared the testimony of Milagros:

[We were] all happy, we cried, because the old man Milagros from the street – the alcoholic, thrown away, abandoned – arrives with a white tunic and passes through the waters of baptism. And after, … I said, …‘this man, where is he going to go? To sleep at the door of the Catholic Church?’ because he would sleep at the door of the Catholic church waiting for someone to throw him a piece of bread … ‘Is the Kingdom of God also so unequal, where you go in your car, with your family…and this old man…would go to the street!?’ … So I brought him to Retoño. … The old man lived with us until he died.\(^\text{42}\)

The story of Carlos is poignant because it implies that the significance of baptism extends beyond mere symbolism, because it is sociologically and ethically imperative. The baptism of Milagros constituted a transubstantiation; the local church became the confessed body of Christ through receiving (gift) and responding (task) to the marriage of the sacramental and the socio-cultural: a ‘baptized’ Milagros can no longer sleep in the street while others sleep in their beds. Carlos realized that his and the ecclesial community’s own subjectivity and identity were indelibly tied to that of the potentializing of the subjectivity of Milagros. Clearly the narratives of ecclesial faithfulness and the confessed and repeated ethics of the kingdom were influential in Carlos’ realization of the ecclesial community’s obligation to a newly baptized brother. However, Milagros, like Lucho’s lone and often criticized voice, was an imposition from the periphery on the centre of the ecclesial community. Milagros, the disciple of Lucho, was another silent imposition from the marginal

\(^{41}\) Spanish for ‘miracle’.

\(^{42}\) Interview no. 8.
back row on the centre. The periphery and the popular imposed themselves through this miraculous baptism on the ecclesial community and demanded a response.

5.5.3. Faithful Sacraments and Efficacious Practice

In both ecclesial communities I noted the priority of conversion; nevertheless these two practices offer no distinguishable ordo salutis, but rather a dialectical process of transformation. In the case of Julieta, an ordinance transcends symbology, becoming a sacramental space and place for communal discernment and formation of unity through confrontation. The demands of baptism and the narrative of Christ and the Kingdom community are directly connected to the reorganization of the ecclesial community in order to meet the daily physical needs of others. This sacrament is a Eucharistic (εὐχαριστία) social process; baptism is a socio-cultural practice that begins to break down divisions through the formation of new bonds of unity. Both Milagros’ submission to Christ and to the ecclesial community in baptism and Carlos’ response of thanksgiving are acts of obedient faithfulness. But they are acts of an effective imposition of the periphery on the centre. The sacramental gift is the Spirit’s imposition on the centre, and the centre’s response of thanksgiving is the task of being with those on the back row, the periphery. Lucho, the lone and often criticized voice from the silent back row, befriended Milagros and invited him to Julieta. Similar to his almost weekly petitions to remember the poor, Lucho’s invitation to Milagros was another silent imposition of the margin on the centre. The periphery and el popular quite literally imposed themselves on the ecclesial community, demanding a response. In the case of Renovado, the punctual and spatial response provides a space for the formation of a ‘new’ sacramental practice. The weight of the present overcame the paucity of neo-Pentecostal reflexivity; the augmenting periphery imposed itself on the communal centre. Lacking sociologically mediated concientización, pastoral observation and spiritual practices registered the obvious – one in four living in poverty after 2001 – and demanded a discerning response. However, the communal cafeteria has become part of the weekly rhythm and flow of Renovado, a continual dialectical opportunity for the periphery to disrupt the centre. Furthermore, it has become a Eucharistic moment when the effectiveness of responding to human needs is fused with the possibility of the Spirit’s outpouring
of grace and thanksgiving. It is also formative for communal identity and ethos, providing a space for fomenting subversive subjectivity that can counter the harmful effects of hierarchy and the unjust structures of society. Those present received (gift) and laboured (task) for a Holy Meal. The accompanying mood was one of thanksgiving (Eucharist) for a meal that was more than symbolic, but that provided real food for hungry bodies on the periphery. The ecclesial community se hizo pueblo in an efficacious and sacramental social act that embodies the kingdom feast of the last days. Thus, these two ecclesial communities, although not rooted in sacramentalist traditions, in essence, have sacraments: practices that open a space to the task and gift of transformation. However, transformation does not flow concentrically out from an ecclesial or sacramental centre, but instead reverberates in a tense dialectic between the centre and the periphery. Transformation is a two-way street: gift and task, effective and faithful, and socio-cultural and sacramental.

Could it be that the ecclesial community offers a transforming space and place that signals a tactical step towards bridging the bifurcations between the personal and social transformation, the hermeneutically focused historical and cultural sciences and the emancipatory focused critical social sciences, and the minority vs. majority interpretations of transformation? Moreover, a transforming ecclesial community, as exemplified in the two practices above, engages el popular while creating the space for the creation of practices of reflexivity. They signal the possibility of transforming practice that is culturally rooted in a tradition through constant reformation. Likewise, these practices represent tactical steps towards the deconstruction of fetishist depictions of community that conceal the existence of a periphery and centre, even in the heart of ecclesial communities. Community is no panacea, but meso- and macro-level projects are hopelessly anaemic without the centre of a transforming community. In this the community acts to potentialize the individual and the community itself for radical commitment.

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43 Here I borrow from J. Miguez Bonino, La Fe en Busca de Eficiencia (Salamanca: Ediciones Sígueme, 1978); and Davies, ‘Faith Seeking Effectiveness’. For a similar argument from Gustavo Gutiérrez in relation to love, see Gutiérrez, We Drink From Our Own Wells, pp. 107-13.

44 Here I wish to respond in passing to Jung Mo Sung and the critique he makes against envisioning the community as the focus of the historical project of LALT. For Sung, the contemporary world is dependent on institutions, not communities, and as such it is more important to
5.6. The Local Church as a Historical Project

I want to privilege the local ecclesial community as a locus of social transformation: a historical project for LAT. In the local context, the reality of oppression in lo cotidiano (unemployment, poverty, violence, racism, psychological trauma, and division) reveals misconceptions hidden by macro-level readings of history and society as well as magisterial readings of ecclesiology. Beginning with the local ecclesial community, that is an ecclesiology that moves from the local to the universal, we can offer a way to speak of community (el pueblo) that moves beyond cultural essentialism and fetishist depictions of community.45 In theological terms, it is in the realm of the local that human liberation and integration is ultimately ‘incarnated’ as the lives of individuals are transformed and integrated into an ecclesial community that is being transformed and is transforming. It is in the micro- and local that one can honestly speak of community and human integration, examine the concept of community and how it has changed in the modern Latin American context, as well as confront the oppression and poverty that are evidenced in the context of a local ecclesial community.

Precisely for this reason I aver that ecclesiology will only be liberating if and when it brings the reality of poverty, violence, and oppression to the centre of ecclesial practice. If the community of believers is to become a nexus where new humanity emerges through Christ in the power of the Spirit, then it must become an ecclesial community that actively confronts violence and oppression within and without. If it is true, as Gutiérrez avers, that the church should ‘denounce’ oppression and ‘announce’ the liberating and salvific plan of God for humanity, then the church must give credence to its words. This credence should not be substantiated simply in

focus on the meso- and macro-social levels of transformation; see Sung, Desire, Market and Religion, pp. 100-28. This division between institutions and community is deeply embedded in his historiography; see Sung, Economía, Tema Ausente en La Teología de La Liberación, pp. 119-66, 201.

45 For example, although Leonardo Boff closely develops the concept of community in Church, Charism and Power, he does not closely examine the pitfalls of community. Can community be oppressive? What are the ecclesial community structures and practices needed to have a liberating ecclesial community? These are questions never asked and/or answered sufficiently by liberationists because their historical project is concerned with the society (macro-social) and not community (micro-social). As such, the concept of community becomes a fetish, an idealist and utopic smallest unit of human society that is never examined for its own oppressive and violent tendencies.
creeds and dogma, but also in transformational social practices and orthopraxis. For example, could it be that the first question to ponder when examining the community’s Holy Meal is not when and how the bread and wine become the body of Christ, or whether or not the priest or the individual has a right disposition, but instead what it means to eat food in communion so that ‘there [are] no needy persons among them’ (Acts 4:34)? Still, such talk and questions will be mere rhetoric if not grounded in a conversation of real people and real food, and that, of course, demands a need to locate ecclesiology reflectively in a locality and proleptically in the fashioning of a historical project. For, as Jung Mo Sung instructs: ‘we must not forget, even when we get to this discourse, it will only be discourse, and that the spiritual power does not reside in the discourse, but in the experience which continually protests and talks back to the images of God and of the human being that are presented by theories’.46

In attempting to determine the location of transformation, I have argued that the local ecclesial community provides a transforming nexus that bridges the bifurcation between individual conversion and social transformation, between conversion and the renewing of the whole creation, between the methodologies of the historical, hermeneutical, and social sciences, between essential individual commitment to a radical project and ethics and a wavering commitment of mass religion. I have argued in Chapter 3 that three Latin American theologies – LALT, Progressive Evangelicalism, and neo-Pentecostalism – envision transformation through the conceptual use of the community but, at the same time, have failed to develop the communal ecclesiological space as the location of transformation. For liberationists, the historical project, due to the failure of the churches and the macro-social readings of transformation, was extra-ecclesial. Neo-Pentecostals, extrapolating the conservative evangelical insistence on transformation as conversion and utilizing a biblical-literalist spiritualized view of the world, have envisioned transformation as conversion, empowerment, and a cosmic battle with evil. Progressive evangelicals, in contrast, have consciously developed a vision of the local church as ‘agent of social change’47 and of Misión Integral, but they have failed

47 ‘La Iglesia Local’.
to develop a theology of transformation informed by reflexive engagement of ecclesial practice. Subsequently, their vision of social transformation is not directed by an ecclesiologically informed social ethics. As detailed above in the discussion of Juan Luis Segundo, there has been little dedicated examination of the practices of the church, and those examinations that do exist have failed 1) to critique ecclesial practice by offering a vision of alternative transforming practice, and 2) to engage complex ecclesial diversity and hybridity.

5.6.1. Defining the Central Role of the Local Church

There are compelling reasons for an ecclesiology that prioritizes the local ecclesial community as a *locus theologicus* and a defining historical project for LAT. Although there is significant ecclesial diversity and hybridity, as noted in the case studies of Julieta and Renovado, there is also a clear trend in the Latin American churches towards moving away from traditional hierarchical ecclesial models and practices and towards more participatory ecclesial models and practices. Indeed, in Latin America all Protestants, no matter their origin, have tended to be free/believer’s churches because of the historical hegemonic role of Catholicism. In fact, this trend is not limited to Latin America because the shift in the centre of gravity in the global church from the Northern Hemisphere to the Southern Hemisphere has also demonstrated a related shift away from the hierarchical ecclesial models of the dominant European magisterial traditions to what Miroslav Volf has called a growing ‘congregationalization’. The various free churches are the fastest growing churches among Protestants in the Global South and, in like

48 When I refer to the free church and believer’s church status with a small ‘f’ and ‘b’, I am distinguishing it from the historical Free Church and Believer’s Church traditions. I simply refer to those Protestants that have emphasized the importance of voluntarism (personal conversion, decision, and commitment) in the formation of the church body and have not maintained a Constantinian marriage of the church and state. This would include practically all Latin American Protestants, even those of the magisterial traditions (Lutherans, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Dutch Reformed, etc.), because there simply was not a place for another recognized church beside Catholicism. While in some contexts this may be changing, this was not the case when Protestants arrived. This sociological fact forced all Protestant churches to be free churches and believer’s churches, with an emphasis on new converts. While believers’ baptism is not shared by all the traditions, nonetheless, Catholic hegemony and the missionary-focus of most of evangelicalism made Latin American Protestants ‘believers’ focused. The one exception would have been some of the early immigrant ecclesial communities, who often did not pursue converts among the local Spanish speaking populations.

manner, even the most clearly hierarchical churches are demonstrating openness to local congregational participation.\textsuperscript{50}

Although, as I have argued, ecclesiology should begin with the local and particular, all ecclesiology ultimately engages and offers a statement for the universal and global church throughout the \textit{oikoumene}.\textsuperscript{51} Reflection on ecclesiology and ecclesial practice is by definition an ecumenical project. In like manner, if the intent of ecclesiology is to produce transformative practice and transform the larger social context through the local ecclesial community, then ecclesiology is inherently ecumenical because transformation concerns the interaction between ecclesial communities and the relation of the local church to the universal church and the world. While this project has focused on the study of two Argentine Baptist churches and enters into conversation with free church ecclesiology, it is important to heed the exhortation of Karl Barth from over five decades ago that being ‘a good Roman Catholic or Reformed or Orthodox or Baptist’ does not mean being ‘a good Christian’.\textsuperscript{52} So it follows, the development of a free-church-focused ecclesiology needs to be attentive to larger and historical ecumenical conversations, so as to offer a theology that speaks to the universal church, i.e. a good Christian ecclesiology.

Such conversations, however, are not straightforward because there are some inherent problems. First, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, the defining of the \textit{oikoumene} has roots in the imperialist cartographic defining of the civilized world. The concern is that the ecumenical conversation not impose a ‘civilized’ centre on the periphery but instead ‘ecumenically’ function to allow the local, global, and peripheral to respond back to the centre. Second, the believers’ churches have by and

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid, pp. 11-19. Volf makes a compelling argument for why Free Churches could be the churches of the future, demonstrating that even one of liberation theology’s most vocal critics, such as Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger), has recognized the trend towards Free Church ecclesiology in Roman Catholicism. In Latin America Catholicism, the most poignant example continues to be the CEB movement in the Catholic Church. Although the CEB movement is a far cry from what it once was, it nonetheless helped incite theological reflection and ecclesial transformation. Leonardo Boff has most clearly developed these themes. See L. Boff, \textit{Ecclesiogenesis}; L.Boff, \textit{Church, Charism, and Power}.

\textsuperscript{51} Gorringe, \textit{Built Environment}, p. 183-192. Gorringe affirms that although ecclesial community begins on the face-to-face level, it is always focused on the \textit{oikoumene} and thus serves as a sacrament for all human community.

large been at best ‘step-children of the ecumenical movement’, 53 uninvited guests who are asked to accept what is already before them at the ecumenical table. The modern ecumenical movement, for the most part, progressed with the assumption that ecclesiology of free churches ‘can be ignored with impunity’, 54 although free churches themselves hold part of the blame. Free churches, especially those among conservative Latin American evangelicalism, we may recall from Chapter 2, have gone to great measures to differentiate themselves from ‘ecumenical’ evangelicals. In like manner, even progressive evangelicals have purposefully figured more prominently in the evangelical Lausanne Movement than the WCC. Third, the ecumenical movement is itself in crisis, amidst the emergence of post-denominationalism and post-confessional Christianity and the declining numbers and social influence of the historic Protestant denominations. In Latin America, this crisis is even more acute, given that the historic denominations never held the social influence and power that they did in the United States and Europe and that conservative and progressive evangelicals have developed alternative ecumenical organizations.

Two of the most significant ecumenical documents on ecclesiology in the last three decades have been the WCC’s Faith and Order Commission documents *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (BEM) 55 and *Nature and Mission of the Church* (NMC). 56 BEM clearly demonstrates the difficulty that has existed between the ecumenical movement and free church ecclesiology. This document was adopted in Lima, Peru in 1982 but, unfortunately, did not directly engage the significant presence of free church Latin American evangelicals – conservative and progressive

54 Ibid., p. 20.
evangelicals and pentecostals. In fact, free churches, on the whole, feel they were left out of the development of BEM and, accordingly, BEM’s ecclesiology is representative of the traditions that dominated its development: the episcopal and magisterial traditions. For example, BEM clearly affirms the central role of the minister as a ‘priest’ and symbol and instrument of unity for the church in and through Word and Sacraments (Ministry 17). It is the minister who functions as the ‘ambassador’ of the divine action that initiates the Eucharist and ‘expresses the connection of the local community with other local communities in the universal Church’ (Eucharist 29). The document offers a eucharist-centred ecclesiology; it is in the ‘eucharist that the community of God’s people is fully manifested’ as the minister functions as the ambassador of the divine-initiated sacrament (Eucharist 19).

The problem with this minister-eucharist-focused ecclesiology is that it assumes a top-down hierarchy of the office of ministry and the sacraments as foundational for the church. Not surprisingly, BEM does not explicitly define the ontology of the church, but instead focuses on the office of ministry and the sacraments. However, free churches have a bottom-up ecclesiology that flows up from the ekklesia – a local, assembled confessing body of believers, meaning that it is the local church that constitutes the office of ministry and sacraments. Essentially we are talking about two different ecclesial ontologies. First, a top-down ecclesiology places the minister as the key link to unity with the universal church and guarantee of sacramental validity. The bottom-up free church ecclesiology sees ecumenism as a dynamic project of the local church as it engages other local churches and not as a doctrinal project of agreement between hierarchical leaders. Second, in the top-down ecclesiology, the presence of Christ in the church is mediated sacramentally whereas in the free churches Christ’s presence is not mediated but is directly accessible to the community and the individual believer. Third, the top-down ecclesiology asserts that the church exists because of certain objective activities whereas free churches assert that certain subjective conditions – the disposition of individuals and the community – are essential for the church to be the church.

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However, the Faith and Order Commission’s more recent NMC demonstrates a shift towards an ecumenical theology that more closely engages free church ecclesiological themes. This shift has come about because of the realization of the need to engage the free church traditions, from Baptists to pentecostals, because of their numerical dominance among Protestants, as well as a willingness among some of the free churches to engage in ecumenical conversations. The NMC, unlike the BEM, is an explicitly ecclesiological document, beginning with a clear definition of the nature (ontology) and mission (activity) of the church before proceeding to define the hierarchy and the sacraments. It also offers a profoundly Trinitarian theology that serves as the foundation for its ecclesiology, which provides an active space for free church ecclesial engagement. Through the development of an ecclesiology rooted in the nature (ontology) and economy (activity) of the Trinity, NMC demonstrates a theology that can readily engage the foundational free church concept of the church as a local gathering and community.\(^5\) On the one hand, the Trinitarian ecclesiology of NMC permits ecumenical theology to more readily engage the communitarian ecclesiology of the free churches. Instead of a condescending depiction of the free churches as sectarian and divided by their exclusionary ecclesiology from the magisterial churches, NMC opens the door for emphasizing the gathered community not as exclusionary but instead as a reflection of the communion of the Triune God. Indeed, as Roger Olsen has stated, ‘a community of equal persons bonded together by love can be a better analogy of the Trinity than can a hierarchy of powers’.\(^6\) On the other hand, as Miroslav Volf has made clear, a Trinitarian framing of free church ecclesiology serves to supplement the free church affirmation that the local church is the whole church, while at the same time avoiding a communitarianism that subsumes the entire universal church into the local church. For example, Volf argues that a Trinitarian-framed-free-church theology permits the following affirmations: 1. That the local church as a gathered community, which confesses Christ as the one Lord and Saviour present in the Spirit, is the whole church; 2. That the confession of


Christ as the one Lord and Saviour present in the Spirit also simultaneously connects a local church to all churches (gathered believers): past, present, and future. That the profession of Christ as the one Lord and Saviour demands that the church be open not only to all churches but also to all peoples. Indeed, one point where free church and Eastern Orthodox ecclesiologies converge is precisely in the conviction that the church is most fundamentally the body of Christ gathered in a particular place. So, I would argue, a Trinitarian ecclesiology forwards an understanding of ecclesial unity that is not primarily doctrinal but is instead economic and communal. It offers a unity that is dynamic and rooted in thecommuning and perichoretic economic movement of the Trinity and the living communion of the church in its locality – two or three gathered – and with all gathered believers in the oikoumene: past, present, and future. As a community rooted in the Trinity, as NMC makes clear, the local church is not simply a human construction, but instead a gift from the Triune Communing God (paragraph 9). In like manner, NMC, as Curtis Freeman has stated, also serves to help baptistic free churches reflect the giftedness of the church in their need for a ‘deeper sacramentalism’ that is aware that transformative practice is not simply a symbol but is a gift and a task. So, an ecclesiology that offers the local church as a historical project and principal locus theologicus for LAT does not have to be exclusionary or reductionist, but instead, if it has a Trinitarian framing, it can be both transformative and ecumenical. In the following section, we

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60 Volf, After Our Likeness, p. 154-58.
61 M. Volf, ‘Community Formation as an Image of the Triune God: A Congregational Model of Church Order and Life’. In Community Formation: In the Early Church and in the Church Today, ed. R. N. Longenecker (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), p. 217; V.-M. Kärkkäinen, An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical & Global Perspectives (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), pp. 17-25; J. D. Zizioulas, Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 2002), pp. 143-58, 247-60. Volf closely engages the work of Zizioulas in After Our Likeness, p. 73-123. I would argue that this is one place where Roman Catholic liberationists such as Boff and Segundo have failed, precisely because of the Western magisterial traditions insistence on the church being something above and beyond the local assembled congregation.

62 Freeman, ‘The Church of the Triune God’, p. 5.
will examine the concept of the local ecclesial community as a gathering community by engaging the sacramental practice of binding and loosing and gathering.

5.6.2. The Gathering Community

Now that we have established the ecclesial community as a worthy historical project and free church ecclesiology as valid in its focus on the local church as a locus theologicus, I will offer the ecclesiological vision of the church as a gathering community that binds and looses. This vision has grown out of the case studies of Julieta and Renovado, as both are gathering communities that have emerging sacramental practices (gift and task) that serve to form space and place for alternative transforming practice within an ecclesial context that is progressively more diverse, hybrid, and free church in orientation. However, in order to define binding and loosing, we will first briefly engage two foundational ecclesiological passages in the Scriptures. The passages of Matthew 16:18-20 and 18:15-20 have historically been informative for ecclesiology in the Western Church (Roman Catholics and early Protestants) and represent Jesus’ most explicit words in the New Testament concerning the ontology of the church. They also offer some Scriptural examples of transformative sacramental practices: binding and loosing and gathering. Matthew 18:20, ‘where two or three are gathered’, in particular, has been formative for the entire free church tradition. According to the following interpretation is ‘baptistic’ in focus, so as to offer an ecclesiological vision that engages the free church status of most of Latin American Protestants, such as Julieta and Renovado, while at the same time offering a transformative ecclesiological vision that is attune to the Trinity and engages the universal church. I will argue that they offer a vision for a gathering community that binds and looses that is relevant to the present Latin American ecclesial situation.

64 Freeman, ‘The Church of the Triune God’, p. 3; Volf, After Our Likeness, p. 136.

65 This is an open-ended term to refer to churches in the Free Church and Believer’s Church traditions, including Baptists, Brethren Mennonites, pentecostals, and others. Today, much of Latin American evangelicalism loosely fits into this. Even while not all would agree on the issue of believer’s baptism, there is a general acceptance that being part of the church begins with some type of voluntary commitment (e.g., conversion). For a discussion on the origins of ‘baptistic’, see J. W. McClendon, The Believers Church in Theological Perspective’. In The Wisdom of the Cross: Essays in Honor of John Howard Yoder, eds. S. Hauerwas, C. Huebner, and H. Huebner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 309-26; and J. W. McClendon, Ethics: Systematic Theology, Vol. I, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), pp. 17-34.
Matthew 16:18-20 and 18:15-20 mark the only two instances (16:18; 18:15) where Jesus utters the word church (ἐκκλησία) in the New Testament. The second pericope is located within the fourth (Mt. 18:1-35) of five discourses in the gospel (Mt. 5:1-7:27; 10:5-42; 13:1-52; 18:1-35; 23:1-25:46), which are generally accepted as symbols of Jesus as a new Moses, a fulfilment of the five books of the Torah. The focus of this section of Matthew is the identity of Jesus and discipleship, a costly messiahsip and discipleship that is addressed to committed minorities. Both pericopes, in conjunction with a parallel passage in John 20:19-23, centrally speak of binding (δέω) and loosing (λύω) as an ecclesial practice and sacrament. This practice of binding and loosing is not a novel invention of Jesus, but instead is rooted in the rabbinic tradition of obligating and freeing from the weight of the commandments. For example, Jesus, in rabbinic fashion, uses the same root (καταλύω - Mt. 5:17) of loosing at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount to clarify that he has not come to break-abolish-unharness the law, but to fulfil it and warn that anyone who ‘looses’ (λύω; Mt. 5:19a) one of these commandments (or teaches others to loose) ‘will be called least in the kingdom of heaven’ (Mt. 5:19).

The Johannine pericope depicts this practice as a pneumatologically infused charism, placing it directly in the context of receiving the Paraclete and clarifying that binding and loosing concerns confrontation (condemnation) and reconciliation (forgiveness). Moreover, the depiction of this practice as a divine charism – the ‘keys to the

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67 John 20:19-23 represents the giving of the Spirit as foretold in John 14-16. This non-synoptic narrative contrasts with the Lukan narrative where the Spirit is promised in Acts 1:5 and then received in 2:1-13 on Pentecost. In the Johannine account, the receiving of the Spirit is directly correlated with the forgiveness of sins. Yoder speaks of this and Matthew 18:15-20 as the closest that Jesus gets to describing the ontology of the church, see Yoder, *For the Nations*, p. 217. As Marlin Jeschke has argued, this passage is an example of Jesus charging his disciples with the continuing mission to proclaim God’s judgment and forgiveness, see M. Jeschke, *Discipling the Brother* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1973), pp. 48-49, as cited in T. N. Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology: Biblical, Historical, Constructive* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), p. 227.

68 Yoder, ‘Sacrament’, pp. 361-62. Whether or not the passage marks a Johannine ecclesial interpellation redactionistically inserted into a saying of Jesus is not of concern here, but instead the direct correlation between ecclesial ontology and Jesus’ teaching on binding and loosing.

69 Yoder notes that this practice is rooted in the rabbinic and not the Judaic priestly tradition.
kingdom of heaven’ (Mt. 16:19a) and the anointing of the Spirit – imbeds it in a narrative of sacramental faithfulness as well as socially efficaciousness. On the one hand, this represents a social practice for dealing with conflict and grievances. On the other hand, the practice transcends the space and place of the present: that which is bound or loosed on earth (the human) is bound or loosed in heaven (the divine). The order of command is clear, what is bound/loosed on earth will be bound/loosed in heaven. This practice is a sacramentally received (gift) from heaven as well as a completed task on earth.

Such an interpretation, of course, gives credence to the mediatory function that has been foundational for Roman Catholic scriptural justification of the See of Rome and the role of the priest. While Protestants have long, and I would argue rightly, contested a Catholic interpretation that eisogetically imposes the ecclesial and political structures of the papacy and priesthood onto Matthew 16:18-20, Catholics have been correct to emphasis the ecclesial significance of this passage. Roman Catholicism has not been wrong in noting the mediating role of the church that resides at the centre of this passage, but instead in collapsing and subverting this function to a clerical class and ecclesial hierarchy. Early Protestants – Martin Luther and Martin Bucer and numerous Anabaptists (Balthasar Hubmaier, Pilgrim Marpeck, Dirk Phillips, and Menno Simmons) – did not, like most Protestants today, ignore or disparage the passage as pseudo-popery, but instead offered interpretations that directly countered the Catholic interpretation. They spoke of this practice of discipline as well as the ‘Rule of Christ’, following the designation of Paul (‘law of Christ’) in Galatians 6:2, as practices that were foundational to the priesthood of all believers and ecclesial ontology. 70 According to John Howard Yoder, for Anabaptists the practice of redemptive discipline was the defining ‘mark’ of the church upon which other distinguishing practices and doctrine flowed, such as the baptism, the

70 The term and concept ‘Rule of Christ’ was not an Anabaptist neologism but inherited from Martin Luther and Huldrych Zwingli. Luther makes reference to the ‘Rule of Christ’ in relation to Mt. 18:15-18 in the German Mass (1526), and Huldrych Zwingli speaks of it in relation to I Cor. 14:29 (‘Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said’). In both instances, the congregation is understood as the locus of theological and political discernment and decision. J. H. Yoder, ‘The Hermeneutics of Anabaptists’, Mennonite Quarterly Review 41 (1967): 292, 301-307.
Eucharist, and non-violence.\textsuperscript{71} Baptism was a submission to community discipline, and the Eucharist was the culmination of baptism and one of the recurrent community opportunities for discipline and reconciliation. As such, for Yoder, ‘The community’s hermeneutic [and political] authority is binding, for that time and place; at the same time it remains permanently open to review if the same process of admonition again be initiated when another brother claims new light or reports a new offense.’\textsuperscript{72} The practice of binding and loosing is not simply for personal offences but, as supported by other similar texts, the intent seems to be that this is a communal process for all conflicts.\textsuperscript{73} It is the power of all believers in the gathering community to bind in judgment and loose in forgiveness, which involves confronting, reconciling, and discerning. Likewise, the complicit nature of ecclesial tradition and practice, as it submits the practice of redemptive discipline, opens the door to the periphery to challenge the centre and for the local to challenge the universal. So, while the gathering (two or three gathered) of Mt. 18:20 has tended to be the focus of the Free Church Tradition, this gathering in the name of Jesus also requires a continual reconstitution of the ecclesial community through confrontation of

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., pp. 304-06. Yoder demonstrates that for Conrad Grebel and Balthasar Hubmaier this practice chronologically preceded the development of thought of other practices (such as baptism, non-violence, and church-state divide) and was foundational to their justification. So baptism is reserved for those who can submit to communal discipline; non-violence flows from the assertion that only the congregation, free from violent and outside coercion, should discern and decide; and the church-state divide flows from the attempt to avert state coercion over the congregation. Yoder claims that for Grebel, the gathering of the ecclesial community to discern the will of God was the distinguishing mark of the church from which other interpretations and practice flowed. Ibid., p. 306. I am aware of those who contest Yoder’s interpretation of Anabaptists at this point and/or critique his depiction of discipline and discernment as foundational to all ecclesial practice as a reductionism of the sacraments to human social processes and of tradition to contemporary creative community discernment. See Finger, \textit{Contemporary Anabaptist Theology}, pp. 230-31; G. W. Schlabach, ‘Continuity and Sacrament, or Not: Hauerwas, Yoder, and Their Deep Difference’, \textit{Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics} 27 (2007): 171-207; P. Martens, ‘The Problematic Development of the Sacraments in the Thought of John Howard Yoder’, \textit{Conrad Grebel Review} 24 (2006): 65-77; P. Martens, ‘Universal History and a Not-Particularly-Christian Particularity: Jeremiah and John Howard Yoder’s Social Gospel’. In \textit{Power and Practices: Engaging the Work of John Howard Yoder}, ed. J. Bergen, and A. Siegrist (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2009). However, I find these perspectives miss that Yoder was not involved in sacramental reductionism, but quite the opposite, opening the door of faithfulness to effective transformation. Likewise, the accusations that Yoder is anti-tradition do not effectively examine the complicit nature of Christian tradition with the centre, that is Constantinian, colonial, and neo-colonial power. Yoder opens the tradition to creative community discernment and the possibility of the periphery challenging the centre.

\textsuperscript{72} Yoder, ‘Hermeneutics of Anabaptists’, p. 305. I have added the word in brackets to clarify that this is not simply a question of hermeneutics but also of politics.

\textsuperscript{73} Mt. 5:23-24; 7:3-5; Gal. 6:1-10; Jas 5:19-20. Likewise, the personal statement ‘against you’ in Mt. 18:15 does not appear in various early significant manuscripts.
division, seeking reconciliation, and discerning in the Spirit. Thus, the assembling of
the church is sacramental, constituted both in heaven (as gift) as well as on earth (as
task).

The ecclesial community, I would argue, is a transforming project in being a
dynamic εκκλησία, an assembling (gathering) assembly that binds and looses:
confronts, reconciles, and discerns. In both Julieta and Renovado, sacramental
practices emerged that demonstrate the ecclesial communities’ continual need and
process of confronting, reconciling, and discerning. In Julieta, the assembly
discussion times after the sermon, and baptism serve to open up a space and place to
bind and loose, as the periphery confronted the centre through the words of Lucho
and the presence of Milagros. In Renovado, the neo-Pentecostal practices of binding
evil spirits and loosing individuals from oppression and the anointing create the
possibility of the formation of radical subjectivity and discerning reflexivity. In like
manner, the Saturday Holy Meal and the laudable social ministries create the space
and place for binding and loosing as the community confronts the grinding poverty
and social needs. The local church, however, is not an assembled utopia, a realized
kingdom, an a priori ontology of peace or justice, or a closed book of doctrine or
dogma; instead, it is a complicated and often divisive topia between this unjust
present age and the eschaton. As Leonardo Boff has declared, Christianity is a
religion of life in the present and not one simply of nostalgia for the past, precisely
because of the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection is utopia because the
resurrection puts an end to the utopic search for that which is not anywhere (ουτοπία,
no place), opening up the realization of hope and life in the topia of the present and
future. The gathering community is one such topia. The community is not a

74 L. Boff, Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology for Our Time, trans. P. Hughes
(Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978), pp. 35, 135-38. See also the discussion of utopia and kingdom
on pp. 280-82. I am aware of Míguez Bonino’s critique of Boff for making a direct correlation
between utopia and the resurrection. For the Argentine, utopia is too ambiguous a category to speak of
God’s promise and to make a connection to the resurrection runs risk of sacralizing utopia, which he
avers are purely human projects. See, Toward a Christian Political Ethics, p. 92. While Míguez
Bonino is right to make a distinction and to warn of the danger of sacralisation, he is wrong to speak
of utopia as a purely human creation. As Boff argues in Jesus Christ Liberator, all utopias – Plato’s
Republic, Thomas Moore’s Utopia, Campanella’s City of Sun, Kant’s Eternal Peace, Marx’s
Proletarian Paradise, Hegel’s Absolute State, Teilhard de Chardin’s Total Ammorization, the Tupi-
Guarani and Apapocuva-Guarani’s Utopias, etc. – all point to a divine as well as a human yearning, p.
134. Utopia is not the Reign of God but is an artist’s rendition, whether painted on the eaves of a
medieval cathedral or in the plans and aspirations of an ecclesial community.
panacea, inherently transformative because it is ‘community’, or ‘mass’, or ‘popular’. Transforming community seeks to avert the reification of popularism and communitarianism that is between oppressive elitism and localised Constantinianism. The community becomes topia for transformation in transforming and becoming popular in active gathering, a space and place where the periphery can challenge the centre that exists even in the heart of community. This gathering, as part and parcel to binding and loosing, is an opportunity for confrontation, reconciliation, and discernment. As such, the gathering community responds to the assertions of Leonardo Boff and Jung Mo Sung that it is fruitless to struggle for a community that is free of oppression and violence. While the topia of community will never be the utopia of God’s full reign, the alternative is not, as Sung suggests, the abandonment of the community as a hopelessly pre-modern possibility. In contrast, the gathering community is a topia for the formation of transforming practices, structures, and institutions. Moreover, the gathering community confronts the Latin American and Argentine dualist myth of civilization vs. barbarism, creating the space and place to begin the formation of a minority community committed to the liberation of the popular and peripheral. The ecclesial community is transforming precisely in becoming a space open to the periphery, challenging and binding the centre in and through the narrative of the one who was crucified on the periphery. It is transforming in its continual gathering and binding and loosing. This gathering and binding and loosing, however, are also not a priori sacraments of transformation. As Miroslav Volf has noted, ‘The church is an assembly, but an assembly is not yet a church’. Mutatis mutandis, the church is a community, but a community is not yet a church. This gathering is irrevocably linked to being an assemblage in the name of Christ. As they gather in Christ, they preach and participate in the outpouring of the Spirit, binding and loosing, and pursuit of the ethics of Kingdom (Acts 1:3; 8:12; 14:21-22; 19:8; 28:23). As a community, the church gathers in the name of Jesus and this narrative is formative in the reinstituting of (task) and receiving of (gift) the kingdom. This narrative helps to centre the community, but it centres it on the

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75 Boff, Ecclesiogenesis, p. 5; Sung, Desire, Market and Religion, pp. 121-25.
77 Ibid.
periphery – the story of the crucified – as a message from the periphery. The gathering community comes together in openness and creative conflict, reconciliation and discernment, serving to continually liberate the community and its narrative from the co-optive centres of power, and to re-centre the community on the peripheries.
Chapter 6

Ecclesiology From and Beyond the Periphery:
A Confronting, Reconciling, and Discerning Ecclesial Community

6.1. Introduction

In the last chapter we discussed the transformative possibility of the local church and ecclesial practice amidst the present exilic wilderness, positing that the local church is a nexus of transformation and a worthy historical project. More specifically, I gave examples of transformative practices that are sacramental and efficacious and averred that the local church is a transformative historical project as a gathering community. In this chapter, we will confront the diverse and hybrid Latin American ecclesial context, as demonstrated through the contextual studies, and the problems that arise with the creation of a catalogue of orthodox Christian practice or ecclesial marks. Instead, because of the diversity of the ecclesial context, I argue that the marks of a transformative church that can adjust to these changes are: 1) Non-violent Confrontation, 2) Reconciling Unity, and 3) Discernment.

6.2. A Worldly Ecclesiology: The Church as a Changing Community of Change

In order to understand transformation within the ecclesial context and to put forward the ecclesial community as a viable historical project for theology implies bridging the bipolarities mentioned in Chapter 3: micro vs. macro, individual transformation vs. social transformation, particular vs. universal, praxis vs. poiesis. It implies a dialectical movement between the development of ecclesiology as Christian social ethics and an incorporation of the praxis as found in the eclectic, divisive, and hybrid present ecclesial reality. Equally important is the incorporation of the daily and worldly into the ecclesial. However, as demonstrated in Chapter 3, there has been scant theological development by Latin Americans of the church as representative of an alternative ethics coupled with an examination of ecclesial practices. While there has been extensive examination of the sacraments, there has not been significant movement beyond ecclesial orthodoxy (the sacraments and/or word and sacrament) to engage the plethora of practices that have accompanied Pentecostalism and neo-Pentecostalism. Of course, almost from the beginning of
LALT, one liberationist branch has insisted on the examination of culture and the liberating qualities of popular religion. Nonetheless, this examination has not engaged closely the heterogeneity of popular culture – the *pueblos in el pueblo* – or the realities of the local ecclesial community. This project hopes to demonstrate that, when the practices on the periphery come to the centre of the church, a materialization of transformation occurs and orthodoxy is condemned by the materialization of orthopraxy.

6.3. The Marks of a Changing Church: Confrontation, Reconciling Unity, and Discernment

While the discussion of the creedal based *notae ecclesiae* may seem incongruous with a discussion centrally focused on two ecclesial communities that are heirs of the Free Church tradition, I believe reflecting, in passing, on the traditional marks of the church can prove helpful. The *notae ecclesiae* demonstrate the inherent risk of domination in attempting to identify ecclesiological essentials. The marks emerged in the move from the minority communities on the periphery to a Christendom sustained and indelibly tied to empire. With the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creeds\(^1\) an essentialist *notae ecclesiae* emerged: holy, one, catholic, and apostolic. Latin America is a context that was born out of the violent imposition of these *notae ecclesiae*, to the exclusion of all other Christian and/or religious traditions. The uniqueness of the church was imposed through imperialism and colonialism. The holiness and apostolicity of the church was the ‘civilization’ that condemned the ‘barbarism’ of the indigenous and emerging *mestiza*\(^2\) populations. At this same time, Reformers, who would take the first steps that would spell the eventual death of Christendom, added the correct preaching of the ‘Word’ and administration of the ‘Sacraments’ (the Lord’s Supper and baptism), and others, such as Luther or Menno Simons, added more.\(^3\) Centuries of erosion of Christendom

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1. The Apostles Creed speaks of the ‘one, holy, catholic’ church and the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed speaks of the ‘one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church’.
2. Spanish for ‘mixed blood’ and refers to the races that emerged from the mixing of European and indigenous populations.
3. Luther spoke of seven: 1) preaching the true word of God; 2) the right administration of baptism; 3) the right form of the Lord’s Supper; 4) the power of the keys; 5) the right calling and ordination of the church’s ministers; 6) prayer and singing in the vernacular; 7) suffering and
and the extension of modernism and secularism would finally bring to Christendom’s centre a realization of a world beyond the walls of the West and the widening of God’s mission to incorporate this world. Latin America is a continent whose Christianity is rooted in mission and it may be more apposite to speak of *notae missionis* than *notae ecclesiae*. But again, even this path offers little consensus. If the marks of the church tend toward insularity and violence and focus on the church’s ontology over against a barbaric world, then the marks of mission (*Missio Dei*) have a tendency to empty the church of its particularity while still failing to come to terms with Christianity’s imperial past. On the one hand, although God’s mission goes beyond the church and includes the entire created order, the church nonetheless maintains some sense of particularity in being a witness to this mission to the entire world. As Stephen Neill warned, ‘If everything is mission, then nothing is mission’, so the mission and marks of the church cannot be anything and everything. On the other hand, theologies of mission and the *notae missionis* still have deep roots in imperial and neo-colonial history, since mission to the Americas developed hand-in-hand with mercantilist and capitalist initiatives.

Although painful, we must recognize that the marking off of the boundaries of the church came as an extension of the marking off of the corners of the empire, an imperial cartography that declared the centre as orthodox and the periphery as heretical. Ambiguity, inherent in a way of life defined by following a crucified man, became the enemy of Christianity defined by imperial power. The sword and orthodoxy have long been bedfellows. Just-War theory gestated in Augustine’s

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6 An example is the Donatists. See R. D. Burris, ‘Where is the Church? The Sacrament of Baptism in the Teaching of Cyprian, Parmenian, Petilian and Augustine’ (Ph.D. diss., Graduate Theological Union, 2002).
condemnation of the peripheral Donatists, not in response to a threatening army. The attempts to catalogue the defining marks of the church have an imperial past, which still can function to shut off the valves of the apocalyptic, the pneumatic, and the peripheral.

In resisting the centre, I offer something more tentative than a catalogue of ecclesial marks or practices. This, I believe, is an ecclesiology that is more attentive and honest, and representative of ecclesial heterodoxy, diversity, and hybridity as well as informed by the case studies of Julieta and Renovado. Nancy Bedford reminds us that, even amidst a confusing ecclesiological reality, ecclesial practice is a ‘fecund resource for the reflection of LAT, since it makes possible a nexus between small narratives and the metanarrative of the Reign of God, between the “micro” and the “macro”’. In essence, Bedford foreshadows what I have spoken about as ecclesial practice, broadly speaking, as a historical project between the ‘micro’ and the ‘macro’ and the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’. Thus, while Julieta and Renovado both demonstrate contradictory trends – failure and effective faithfulness – they are nonetheless testimonies of small narratives and steps of transformation that attest to the Reign of God. While the project cannot be transposed from one context to the next, or be imported directly from the micro to the macro (i.e., from the ecclesial community to society), it nevertheless signals small transformative steps, that is narratives and social practices, that serve as forms of prophetic condemnation and resistance against the unjust and oppressive structures of society.

This chapter will now proceed to demonstrate that the local church can be theology’s historical project and that it is here that the questions – what is the church? (ecclesiology) and what is salvation? (transformation) – must first be answered. The proposal before us is an affirmation that the local church can be a nexus of transformation and an important tool in the theological task. The problem before us is deciphering how this proposal can be affirmed amidst the ecclesial heterogeneity, hybridity, and division as outlined in the last chapter. As noted in


Chapter 5, the ecclesial community is transformative in gathering and doing sacramental (gift and task) practices such as binding and loosing: confronting, reconciling, and discerning. This vision concurs both with the trends toward community-focused ecclesiology in ecumenical circles as well as the dominant free church presence among Protestants in Latin America and the world. It is also a vision that is informed by Julieta and Renovado because they are ecclesial communities that gather in the name of Jesus and have developed sacramental practices which provide space and place for confrontation, reconciliation, and discernment. Julieta demonstrates an overt communitarian ethos and practices such as the assembly, baptism, and an array of integral ministries that have created a space and place for a dialectic sacramental (gift and task) process of binding and loosing: open confrontation, reconciliation, and discernment in the community as well as with the surrounding communities and society at large. The baptism of Milagros is emblematic of this sacramental space and place of binding and loosing and the process of sacramental gathering. Renovado demonstrates a neo-Pentecostal ethos and powerful practices that create space and place for the formation of radical subjectivities and seek to bind and loose: confront, reconcile, and discern the surrounding neighbourhood as well as spiritual and social forces that oppress individuals, the surrounding community, and society. Likewise, the creative and exemplary development of social ministries have opened the ‘windows of salvation’ and the ‘doors of adoration’ for the surrounding community and its ever-present social ills to confront the community, as vividly seen in the unintentionally sacramental practice of the Saturday Holy Meal. Accordingly, I offer a theologically and contextually informed vision of the ecclesial community as a nexus of transformation and a historical project that confronts division, seeks bonds of unity, and engages in discernment.9

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9 Discerning is a complex task and is done in light of Scriptures, tradition, the life of Christ as revealed and empowered through the Spirit, and the present historical and cultural context.
6.3.1. Non-Violent Confrontation

Augusto Cotto was a radical Baptist and a social activist in Mexico and Central America before his untimely death in 1980. Among his memorable rhetoric is the bold declaration that the ‘local church is our battle trench’. While today, almost forty years on, these words sound almost vitriolic, I would, nevertheless, like to propose that Cotto was simply recognizing the obvious: the divisive reality of the church is akin to a cultural and social battleground. The present wilderness is a reminder that this division continues and the church as a historical project must confront these divisions. However, this confrontation, I aver, must be distinguished by nonviolence.

We are reminded that divisive reality is an undisguised revelation in the streets of Greater Buenos Aires, a continuing of the bifurcating, mythic narrative of civilization vs. barbarism. Only a quick glance is required to recognize, as Nancy Bedford details, the juxtaposition of the so called pre-modern, modern, and postmodern worlds: *cartoneros* with push carts (pre-modern) collecting old newspapers (modern) to be recycled (industry based on post-modern ecological consideration); and the juxtaposition of the so called haves and have-nots: burning tyres from the ubiquitous *piquete*, the overwhelming presence of private security, and the expanding pockets of poverty. These discoveries are not dependent on Marxist social theory or dependency theory but, as in the antecedents of the LALT movement, on simple, pastoral observation. Society remains a place of division and conflict, and ecclesiology remains a conflictive task.

Given this conflictive reality, I assert that a transforming church must espouse non-violent confrontation. The church and the theologian should not shy from the reality of conflict, both in the ecclesial community and the larger cultural setting of the local church. Being a gathering community implies confronting this conflict, but non-violently. Of course, the words of Augusto Cotto remind us that some liberationists openly advocated support of armed popular movements. Indeed, LALT

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10 Augusto Cotto died in 1980 under mysterious circumstances when he and another person went down in a small plane over the ocean; the plane was never found nor was the accident investigated.

was much maligned for this, although unfairly because these liberationists did not advocate violence, *per se*, but instead confronting existing violence in the oppressive social structures, and sometimes being willing to use violence.\(^{12}\) Other liberationists, such as Helder Camera and Rubem Alves, did not even go this far, and for this reason, informed critiques such as that of C. René Padilla have noted that it is simplistic to condemn LALT because it is ‘Marxist’ or ‘espouses violence’.\(^{13}\)

Nonetheless, I argue that a transforming community must confront non-violently and that this must begin in the heart of the ecclesial community. This implies an open recognition of power and the use of power in the gathering and forming an ecclesial community. All too often in the effort to confront division and violence, Christian practice is depicted as a habit of ‘power-limiting’, which wrongly assumes that ecclesial communities can exist without the exercise of power. It is not by chance that feminists have been vocal critics of communitarian ethics, because they well know that ‘giving up power’ is not the means to constituting an empowering and transforming ecclesial community.\(^{14}\) Indeed, it is within the context of communities and families where some of the worst atrocities of violence to women and children have occurred. There is no vacuum where the exercise of power does not exist, and for this reason a transforming ecclesial community must gather in a way that uses power to empower the periphery. Here again the Scriptures are helpful because they present the church as the assembly of believers that has conflict and confronts this conflict in the process of becoming a faithful ecclesial community (Acts 15:1-25 and I Cor. 1:10-17 are but two examples). Moreover, the Scriptures point to social practices beyond what we already reviewed in chapter four (Mt. 18:15-2) for the assembling so as to confront conflict (I Cor. 11:17-34, I Cor. 14, Eph. 6:10-18, Gal. 3:26-29).

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\(^{12}\) Yoder, ‘The Wider Setting of “Liberation Theology”’, p. 287. Yoder accuses many of these critiques of bad faith, recognizing that liberationists have been more restrained than non-pacifist neoliberal theologians in advocating violence.


Both Julieta and Renovado boast narratives of encounter and conflict that serve as living testimonies. This is explicit in Julieta and its attempts to confront issues of poverty, security, and class in the context of an ecclesial community in an upper middle class neighbourhood. While the story of Julieta is not simply that of transformation, but also of infighting, conflict, and sin, it is a genuine story and testimony on the way to redemption. The ecclesial communities’ particularities and mistakes are crucial to the task of the theologian because they demonstrate that transformation is imbued with divine grace along with the sweat of human effort, given as well as created. Conflict is also not foreign to Renovado, with the predominant thematic of the Christian life as a cosmic battle with principalities and powers. The concept and practice of battle is an intimate part of the neo-Pentecostal thought and practice. Here, amidst the confusing ecclesial and social realities, we can begin to move beyond ecclesiologies fixed merely upon the calcified concepts of worship, practice, and polity, because it is precisely the worldliness\textsuperscript{15} of the ecclesial communities that offers inklings of an ecclesiology of nonviolent confrontation.

\textit{Julieta}

Recalling the conflict in Julieta, I identified at least three apparent causes: ideological division, conflicting socio-theological understandings of ecclesial hierarchy and polity, and the infiltration of the socio-economic crisis in Argentina. Julieta is an ecclesial community sincerely dedicated to the formation of a heterogeneous ethos and culture and to confronting contexts of poverty and isolation. It has sought to incarnate an integral gospel and mission. For decades the ecclesial community has attempted to be a space for the integration of people from different socio-economic, cultural, and local contexts. However, the vision of integral mission and heterogeneity has limits, in part because of the arduousness of the task and the correlated resistance from within society and the ecclesial community itself. This came to a head amidst the seismic economic meltdown of 2001, and even a decade

\textsuperscript{15} This concept of ‘worldliness’ I borrow from Mary McClintock Fulkerson, \textit{Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 5-12. She uses the term to speak of the ambiguous reality of ecclesial communities. The worldliness of the church is demonstrated in its ‘habits and idiosyncrasies, its mistakes and its blindness, as well as its moments of honesty and grace’ (p. 6).
later the ecclesial community continues to experience aftershocks. The ideological division is still fresh. Germán, for example, quipped that he did not believe that ‘integration’ is the goal of Christians, refusing to believe that Christians ‘should all be the same and equal and share all their necessities’. Instead, for Gérman, integral implies inclusivity, which opposes the exclusive view that there should be a prioritization of the poor. Conversely, for Carlos, Antonio, and Roberto, integral is inclusive precisely because it implies commitment to work for integration with the poor. However, clearly the caustic complaints levied against Lucho, and his extended commentary during the open time of sharing, demonstrate that even after years of attempts at integration, there still exist clear lines of demarcation. These lines are clearly etched week after week as the poorer members of the ecclesial community assign themselves to the back row, a sad testament to inscribed bodily habits and failed integration.

Second, the hierarchical model is still a point of contention. The crisis has played a role in the move back to a more egalitarian model of *ad honorem* pastors, which is supported by the ecclesial community’s constitutional document. While some prefer the single head-pastor model, the inability to pay a pastoral salary has made the pastoral team model the most acceptable even for its detractors. So, what theological and ideological commitments failed to unite, economic reality has.

Third, Julieta serves as a reminder that ecclesial community is not formed *ex nihilo*, but is a heterogeneous and porous social and cultural construct, formed from within a larger cultural, social, and historical setting. Julieta serves as a testimony of the failure to maintain community conversation. However, the conflict that prompted this failure was unavoidable; the ecclesial community necessarily makes decisions concerning ideological debates and systems of power from within a particular social and historical setting.¹⁶ This is simply to state the obvious: Julieta is part of a torrid Argentine historical, social, and cultural reality.

The taciturn presence of poorer families sitting in the back row is a sign that speaks volumes of both a noble effort and failure. The silence bellows even when the audible, and often criticized, voices of vocal members such as Carlos and Roberto

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say nothing. The silence is a testament to the presence of the periphery even in the heart of community and the failure to empower this periphery through non-violent confrontation. The reality of being el pueblo de Dios is elusive amidst social and cultural divisions that exist even within the ecclesial community. At some point, the inner core of the ecclesial community began to heat as the intentional engagement of the indigenous community and lower income and poor neighbourhoods began to push the periphery in on this communal core. Eventually a boiling point was reached as old and new fears and ideological commitments impinged on the commitment to a heterogeneous community with a longstanding commitment to the disenfranchised. And it is here that the narrative of division in Julieta is estimable in that it represents an attempt, however tumultuous, to confront directly those ideological debates and systems of powers in society and to empower those on the periphery.

Renovado

In Renovado, confrontation is the ubiquitous modus operandi of transformation, part of the fabric of the neo-Pentecostal Weltanschauung. If we recall, neo-Pentecostalism, and individuals such as Carlos Annacondia, introduced a kind of evangelism and conversion no longer simply concerned with individual decisions of faith, but instead with a cataclysmic and apocalyptic power confrontation with Satan and the demonic forces. These novel, mass ecclesial practices represented both an incorporation of a pseudo-biblical apocalyptic worldview as well as an intensified protraction of a confrontation with the pantheon of popular Catholic religion. The founding narrative of Renovado pits neo-Pentecostal spiritual warfare against the popular Catholic saint Gaucho Gil. This popular saint is not simply a vacuous obstacle to conscientización, such as in the CEBs and Freriean methodologies, or magic, as in the words of Juan L. Segundo, but instead a powerful presence that must be confronted and exorcized. While the excesses of neo-Pentecostalism have been duly noted, the development of new ecclesial organizations, acquisition of social capital, and infiltration into national party politics demonstrate coalescence between ideology, practices of spiritual conflict, and large-scale manifestations. Moreover, attempts to examine the social realm (e.g., spiritual mapping and warfare), although hampered by a debilitating
dualism\textsuperscript{17} and the colonial heritage of racism and oppression,\textsuperscript{18} mark small ‘tactical’ steps in the direction of ecclesial practices that seek to discern and transform the social. In these practices there is potential for nonviolent confrontation and empowerment.

The community of Renovado also represents the attempt of a middle class ecclesial community to enter into the reality of a lower income and poverty-stricken neighbourhood, although distinct from the methods of Julieta. While the hierarchical model of Renovado has permitted much less open discussion, some disconformity persists. For example, Andrés has pondered why he should be expected to journey from the western tip of Mitre to the mother church for weekly services, while the opposite is not the case. Unfortunately, Renovado has failed to make a space to listen and discern these voices, in great part because of the hierarchical structure of the Apostolic Vision. The result has had negative effects on the formation of local leadership and local ecclesial identity, structure, and practice. Moreover, the reminder of Angelina that the strong character of Pastor Ricardo has chaffed with some individuals, leading to their departure from the ecclesial community, raises questions about the structures of power and authority. Pastor Ricardo has functioned as the source of energy for the ecclesial community, pushing the ecclesial community to do things that likely would not have been possible without his role as a virtuoso leader. Nevertheless, Ricardo’s rugged strength and caudillo-like ability to lead amidst the rugged elements of poor urban Argentina may also be his greatest weakness. As a caudillo leadership structure frequently runs the risk of implosion in the absence of the caudillo, so Ricardo’s failure to delegate and form solid lay leadership raises serious questions of whether the ecclesial community could survive without his pivotal role as the community’s prophet, priest, and king.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{17}This is a dualism of good and evil that transgresses the material and spiritual world.

\textsuperscript{18}Both spiritual mapping and/or cartography have failed to reflexively examine their Eurocentric and colonial and neo-colonial roots. See D. F. Pilario, ‘Mapping Postcolonial Theory: Appropriations in Contemporary Theology’, \textit{Hapag} 3 (2006): 10; and Holvast, ‘Spiritual Mapping’, pp. 208-26. While Holvast ties spiritual mapping to the ideology of Manifest Destiny, its roots as a type of cartography point all the way back to Eurocentrism and colonialism.

\textsuperscript{19}Ricardo openly noted his tendency to be on top of everything and spoke of his recent attempts, some twelve years after the founding of the ecclesial community, to delegate leadership. See Interview no. 3 and Journal Entry from 26 December 2009.
Ricardo’s benign dictatorship leadership style implies serious theological and political problems and contradictions. While the confrontation of spiritual, emotional, and psychological oppression is encouraged, the same cannot be said of the confrontation of ecclesial and spiritual authority. The trend of super-evangelists and pastors such as Carlos Annacondia and Claudio Freidzon have helped set a trend of shamanistic leadership that has generally precluded the confrontation of authoritarianism. The appropriation of a hierarchy of charisms has given ontological status to charismatic leadership, distinguishing it from the rest of el pueblo.

It is not surprising that the Apostle Antonio jovially and disparagingly dubbed the congregational meetings, traditionally known as ‘assemblies’, as ‘slaughterhouses’. Socio-political conflict depicted metaphorically as carnage reveals a desire for order and control, even at the expense of listening to the Spirit as she speaks in, through, and to the ecclesial community. Indeed, Antonio’s assertion that the politics of apostolic power are necessary to thwart conflict sounds eerily like the politics and theology of the National Security regimes. Nonetheless, Antonio argued that the ‘spiritual concept’ that directs the ecclesial community today is that God has called ‘determined people’ to lead the church and this means others have to ‘value and respect this call’ and ‘recognize the spiritual authority’ of these leaders. This terminology implies that the ‘calling’ constitutes ontological change, having direct ramifications in the sociality and political structure of the ecclesial community. This change is permanent: once an apostle always an apostle. This is fascinating and worrying because no such ontological change is assigned to other ecclesial practices, even those that have biblical warrant for such claims (e.g., baptism). Another apposite and revelatory example is Ricardo’s assertion that the ecclesial community does not regularly celebrate the Holy Meal because of ‘division’ in the ecclesial community.

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20 Bedford, ‘Tres Hipótesis de Trabajo en Busca de Una Teologia’.
21 Interview no. 2.
22 Interview no. 7.
23 Rubem Alves made a similar critique of Brazilian Protestantism in Protestantism and Repression.
24 A case in point is that Pastor Ricardo mentioned the importance of doing practices, such as baptism and the Holy Meal, for identity formation; however, in the end it is not the ecclesial community that decides but he and the Apostolic Vision team.
community. Thus, while Ricardo acknowledged the importance of baptism and the Holy Meal for identity formation, he believes that conflict can only be confronted once the ecclesial community is ready. In essence, the Apostolic Vision team decided that Renovado as an ecclesial community is not ready for these practices. While the role of baptism and other practices is not so clear, the ontological and political ramifications of the Apostolic Vision are very clear. The church has discarded the congregational model of governance and discernment in part because of the threat of conflict. The last ecclesial community wide decision was a vote to abolish community-wide suffrage in favour of the Apostolic Vision. So, ironically, the attempt to avoid the violent ‘carnage’ of the assembly has been instituted through violence to the periphery.

Neo-Pentecostalism provides supra-communal and personal practices that make possible the creation of new subjectivities and agency to form ecclesial communities and individuals capable of resistance to oppressive structures. The intent to focus on experience as a source and criteria of theological truth provides the possibility of radical praxis-oriented ecclesial tradition and theological methodology. Renovado has developed powerful practices for confronting perceived needs and spiritual barriers in its neighbourhood. However, these practices lack the reflexivity and the theory needed to critique their own indebtedness to oppressive structures of social, material, and economic power. Recall that neo-Pentecostalism and its methods of diffusion and organization are imbedded in the Latin American neo-liberalism project of the 1980s and 1990s. Revival and new

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25 This comes from a journal entry on a visit to Renovado one year after my original fieldwork on 26 December 2009.

26 Bedford, ‘Tres Hipótesis de Trabajo en Busca de Una Teología’, p. 47. Bedford notes the existential priority of neo-Pentecostalism but, as I have noted, does not interpret it as a possible connection for the formation of praxis-oriented theology and ecclesial experience.

27 For examinations of the Latin American religious market during the rise of neoliberalism, see Míguez, Spiritual Bonfire in Argentina: Miguez, ‘The Modern, the Magic, and the Ludic’; and for an examination of religious market throughout Latin America, see the work of Andrew Chesnut in Competitive Spirits and ‘Specialized Spirits’. Douglas Peterson speaks positively of global Pentecostalism’s ability to create ‘moral imagination’ and social capital amidst the Latin American religious market, but I aver that he does not sufficiently take into account its lack of social reflexivity. Peterson, ‘A Pentecostal Theology of Social Concern in Central America’; Peterson, ‘Latin American Pentecostalism: Social Capital, Networks, and Politics’, PNUEMA 26 (2004): 293-306; Peterson, ‘A Moral Imagination’. Amos Yong speaks of neoliberalism as ‘conducive to Pentecostal sensibilities’ (p. 20) and the tendencies in global Pentecostalism that promote a ‘sanctified consumerism’ (p. 19).
ecumenical possibilities arose after the ravaging of the public sector and the creation of a society of exclusion. Some practices even erode the possibility of constructive conflict. Likewise, the examination of the larger social setting produced by these practices tends to reduce human life to spiritual realities, failing to examine the social and cultural that are intertwined with the spiritual. For example, the ecclesial community retells the testimony of the lights coming to the neighbourhood, but there is scarce recognition of the economic, political, and social parameters involved in these changes. The ecclesial community has failed to develop robust practices of nonviolent confrontation.

6.3.2. Reconciliation: An Ecclesial Community of Reconciling Unity

In Julieta and Renovado, reconciliation is not a run-of-the-mill theological idiom. In my interviews only one person evoked the term without request. Andrés from Renovado, surprisingly enough, defined the Holy Meal as ‘reconciliation with God’, a time to repent of his bad thoughts and to ‘begin again a new communion with …God’. Nevertheless, the descriptions of transformation and unity often borrowed images of reconciliation typically concentrated, first and foremost, on individual reconciliation with God. What is interesting is that the general absence of direct reflection on reconciliation in Julieta and Renovado is also true of LAT (LALT, Progressive Evangelicalism, and Pentecostalism/neo-Pentecostalism). LALT produced only a paltry list of titles dedicated to the theme of reconciliation. This is not surprising, given the direct focus on social transformation in LALT and the theological tendency to speak of reconciliation in predominately individualist terms in evangelicalism. Likewise, the oppression and violence suffered by the masses

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28 Interview no. 1. He even described this as an act of washing himself. It is important to remember that Andrés’ exposure to the Holy Meal has not come directly through Renovado but instead the mother church through which he and his extended family first met Pastor Ricardo, leading to the founding of the original afterschool program on his mother-in-law’s patio.

29 Of course, at Julieta there was a large contingency of persons that spoke of transformation and reconciliation, although not in a way that implied challenging social structures and moorings.


31 Progressive Evangelicalism, which has most clearly engaged LALT, is noted for its defence of individual conversion and salvation in what many authors interpreted as the overly
under the guise of reconciliation aimed at an irenic maintenance of current social structures has served to make reconciliation an unsavoury soteriological bedfellow to the ‘liberation’ of LALT. Accordingly, LAT has generally been bereft of communitarian and social descriptions of reconciliation, preferring to speak of unity. While unity and reconciliation are not synonyms per se, nonetheless unity is contingent on reconciliation and reconciliation is in danger of individualist conversionism without unity. LALT is a profoundly ecumenical theology; 32 Progressive Evangelicalism is the result of the rejection of conservative evangelicalism’s manifest anti-ecumenicalism; neo-Pentecostalism’s vision of unity has emerged as part of a new ecumenicalism. However, how is it possible to speak of unity amidst ecclesial diversity and active social and cultural confrontation?

While many would presume that reconciliation and unity are the inverse of confrontation, the context of the churches demonstrates a much more complex reality. Unity, perhaps the most recited, misunderstood, and historically contested of the creedal notae ecclesiae, has long represented a theological aspiration in the bosom of the church. The Scriptures, particularly the entreated petition for unity in Jesus’ farewell discourse in John 13:1–17:26, 20-26 and in Paul’s 33 hymnic Philippians 2:1-11 and Ephesians 4:1-16, lucidly record the theological ideal of unity. However, the Christian canon also registers disparate accounts of a Jewish/Gentile divide in Acts 15:1-35, Ephesians 2:11-22, and Galatians 2 and socio-economic and cultic division in I Corinthians 1:10-17; 8:1-10:31; 11:17-34. These are enduring testaments that, while the Scriptures confess the church as one, collectivist tendencies of LALT. Neo-Pentecostalism arrived on the scene with mega-evangelist crusades aimed at individual salvation and liberation and have continued in this line.


33 The question of authorship is not relevant to the present argument and I simply use ‘Paul’ here to speak of the literature in the New Testament attributed to the Pauline tradition and not his literal authorship.
Christians have had to phenomenologically acknowledge that unity exists amidst division.

Since the enigmatic teachings of Ignatius of Antioch, an episcopal centred interpretation of unity and catholicity has existed, and since at least Irenaeus and Clement of Rome, interpretations that suggest a unity that is doctrinally and structurally focused on apostolic succession have existed. Then with Constantine came the shift towards unification of the church with empire and a circumscription of heterogeneous notions of Christian unity. In time, empire, and the system of domination fused unity and orthodoxy, defining unity by adherence and submission to the centre. Whereas Ephesians 4:11-22 envisioned unity as the breaking down of barriers of hostility through the fusion of pueblos into a new flesh and identity. Of course, this reveals the ‘spirit of empire’ and its co-option of, and ultimately inversion of, theology, ethics, and practice. Whereas the New Testament declares a unity read through the crucifixion, and which is a conquest over hostility and violence through the destruction of barriers (Jew vs. Greek, slave vs. free, and male vs. female; Gal. 3:28) and a creation of a new humanity that incorporates different cultures and classes (Eph. 2:14-16), empire inverts the gospel and declares a salvation and unity mediated through hostility, violence, and coercion. The creation of a new humanity comes not through the creation of new flesh out of many, but through the imposition of the centre over the periphery.

Latin American theology, both liberationist and progressive, arose out of a struggle with this concept of unity, out of an attempt to develop theology from and for the context of poverty and oppression. Neo-Pentecostal theology of transformation, while not arising from a conscious focus on social oppression,

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34 See, Ignatius of Antioch, ‘Letter to the Smyrnaeans’, IX-X. Ignatius is generally accepted as the first to have written an argument for ecclesial unity and catholicity centred in the presence of the bishop.


37 Miguez, Rieger, and Sung, Beyond the Spirit, pp. 93-95. They are correct in their suggestion that all empires have a spirit and a desire for justification through transcendence; I would extend this beyond macro-social (empire) to the micro-social (community). All social constructs demonstrate centres and peripheries and structures of power, and thus it is better to speak of a spirit of domination.
nevertheless arose confronting spiritual oppression and the formation of new organic relationships of ecumenism, cemented in shared ecclesial practices and subjectivities (conversion, the anointing, spiritual warfare, inner healing, etc.). This created a hope and anticipation of the evangelical potential to transform Latin American society. The ecumenical as well as liberation theologian Míguez Bonino has aptly noted that LALT arose out of the desire to express freedom from oppression alongside unity, which revealed that it is only through political, ideological, and theological manipulation that the church makes empirical claims to unity. The structures and doctrines of ecclesial unity are often tools of oppression rather than liberation, expressing, in the words of Gutiérrez, ‘a lyrical spiritual unity’, but signifying that the poor are often on the underside of unity as well as history. Herein lies one of the great contradictions of LALT, its failure to offer a consistent vision of the transformation of ecclesial structures. Indeed, this is possibly one of LALT’s greatest failures, given that the transformation of society as a whole was always well beyond its reach. However, unity for LALT, due to the failure of the churches to support popular movements, was ultimately a social and not an ecclesial matter. On the other hand, for evangelicals, unity has too often been a matter of adherence to doctrine and individual conversion.

Renovado

At Renovado, unity was not overtly depicted according to doctrinal underpinnings or creedal affinity. There were no citations of the marks of the church or the creeds but instead a confusing mixing and matching of incomplete and often contradictory images. Sifting through Renovado’s collective theological memory proved more an exercise in amateur mosaic than jigsaw. First, theological descriptions of unity on one pole proved more akin to what Walter Hollenweger has

38 Herein lie the great strengths of neo-Pentecostalism: the creation of widespread, popular ecclesial practices, and the concerted attention to the reformulation of ecclesiology. While the method and direction of neo-Pentecostalism can be critiqued, unlike LALT and progressive evangelicalism, it has succeeded in changing ecclesial structure and practice. LALT, even in its engagement of the CEB movement, spoke from afar whereas neo-Pentecostalism, without the digression to prove itself to the academy, spoke for what was actually occurring on the ground.


called pentecostal ecumenism. This pentecostal unity is based on shared communitarian experience and forms of communication. It is an oral and corporal theology and experience that provides the foundation for this unity, which according to Hollenweger, provided the possibility of a localized and universalized language of unity. It is dance instead of doctrine, song instead of systematics, and testimony instead of theology that provide this unity. Nevertheless, there are often open contradictions that exist within the milieu of this communitarian unity, and Renovado proved to be no exception. One of the recognized pentecostal contradictions – the caudillo style of leadership – was not only present, but further complicated by the Apostolic Vision model’s ontological categorization and political hierarchy.

Some members of Renovado described unity through the theological language they found most readily available, their communitarian experience, and oral and corporal theological expressions. Such depictions tended to directly envision the ecclesial community and communitarian relationships as the nexus of the formation and reformation of unity. Andrés most clearly expressed this in offering a practical and socially oriented definition of unity: ‘helping one another’ and working together. This collective and social depiction of unity interestingly coincided with his self-description of his integration into the local ecclesial community. It was the invitation to open up, clean up, and set up for worship that served to cement his integration into the ecclesial community:

…the pastor gave me the key [to the building]…I would clean the church, clean outside, but I was really transformed…I had my first love, you see?

This is significant because Andrés offered opening doors, sweeping, and cleaning as direct examples and ‘doctrinal definitions’ of unity. It is these formative ‘ecclesial’ practices that served both as keys to communal integration and as conduits of Andrés’

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41 W. J. Hollenweger, El Pentecostalismo: Historia y Doctrinas (Buenos Aires: Editorial la Aurora, 1976), p. 476. For Hollegwenger, it was this communitarian ecumenism and not the formalized ecumenical movement that provided hope for overcoming divisions of education, race, class, and nationality.

42 Interview no. 1.

43 Ibid.
own expression of ευχαριστία (thanksgiving) to God. He conveyed his desire to complete and participate in these menial tasks as direct instruments and reflections of personal transformation and incorporation into the ecclesial community. This is to say, sweeping and cleaning for Andrés are gracious sacraments and effective ‘ecclesial tasks’, akin to other traditionally recognized types of worship and service, such as the word and sacraments.\textsuperscript{44} These practices represent a fulfilment of the prophecy that the ecclesial community will be ‘windows of salvation’ and the ‘doors of adoration’, providing opportunities to approach God in contrition as well as form a grace-infused and unifying bond with God and others. Likewise, Andrés averred that the unity of the ecclesial community is positively or negatively reflected in the level of communal participation in such tasks. This is interesting because it is not the level of participation in the worship services or traditional (Lord’s Supper and baptism) or untraditional (anointing or spiritual warfare) sacramental practices, but sweeping and cleaning that serve to offer thermometric readings of ecclesial unity. So he concludes, there is a present lack of unity because he and others are not expressing their ‘first love’ through service. Magdalena made a similar conclusion; it is ‘God’s love’ that unites, a love she claimed to be able to see in her sincere brother and sisters. Again, like Andrés, she defined unity in communal terms and offered as doctrinal moorings such practices as helping and giving to one another. Unity is something that can be readily observed in certain practices that foment communal relationships.\textsuperscript{45} In essence, these practices are true to the Christian narrative that Andrés and Magdalena have learned – expressions of love and gratitude to the God of love – and efficacious acts that serve others in the ecclesial and surrounding communities.

However, it is important to note that community and unity are malleable concepts with elastic limits. These limits readily appeared in Renovado in contrasting narratives and structures of unity. While for many, unity is subject to communitarian contingency – unity is formed and expressed in and through communitarian relationships – there also exists a unity envisioned as a direct reflection of hierarchical order and structure. Angelina expressed this in terms that made no direct

\textsuperscript{44} Andrés also mentioned, although with little detail, that his participation in evangelism efforts also functioned to integrate him into the ecclesial community.

\textsuperscript{45} Interview no. 4.
reference to ecclesial order and hierarchy, but instead offered the terminology that she knew. She averred that Pastor Ricardo – his ‘heart’ – is the unifying agent of the church. This seems to be the case because Angelina makes little distinction between Ricardo’s identity and that of Renovado. The social disposition, and collective identity and calling of Renovado are verbatim extrapolations of Ricardo’s personal calling. Even Magdelena spoke in these terms, equating the calling of the church directly with those of Ricardo: ‘entering into the houses’. However, it is important to remember that this is the same heart and calling of Ricardo that Magdelena signalled sometimes extended out as a mano dura style of leadership. Nevertheless, although Magdelena does not sugar-coat her image of the pastor, she and others are prepared to sweep this mano dura aside; the ends justify the means as well as any epiphenomenal collateral damage.

If Angelina spoke of unity through explicit references to personal experience, others made the hierarchy of unity more explicit. Ricardo spoke of the importance of the Apostolic Vision model of leadership for spiritual authority and unity. Likewise, Apostle Antonio spoke candidly of pastoral unity, but never explicitly in terms of communitarian relations. Remember, for Antonio the congregational assembly was not an opportunity for community formation or discernment but a slaughterhouse, a ready source of division to be avoided at all cost. In Antonio’s description of the assembly there is no reference to worship or sacramental language with the assembly or even grace infused sweeping or cleaning. Instead, Antonio evoked unity when speaking of events focused on prayer or worship that had been organized by pastors. He offered examples of the recent and pertinent effort to create unity in prayer through pastoral meetings held in front of the presidential palace. Unity was not created through sweeping or cleaning, but instead through prayer and the efforts of

46 Angelina speaks of the different callings of pastors, such as teaching and social outreach, and assumes, as in the case of Ricardo, that the calling of the pastor determines the calling of the church. In essence, she assumes that the identity of Ricardo is, justifiably, determinative of the identity of Renovado as an ecclesial community. Interview no. 2.
47 Interview no. 4.
48 Spanish for ‘strong hand’. Phrasing mine.
49 Again the first steps of a National Security Ideology or Just War ideology are represented in these affirmations. For Angelina, it is better that a couple of individuals suffer and leave, than to confront issues such as structures of communal power.
pastors and the apostolic team. The pastor and the apostle become an ontological modus operandi of unity.

Along the same lines, Pablo Deiros and Carlos Mraida have developed a theology of the Apostolic Vision from within Argentine Baptists, which essentially claims that the charism of the apostle is centred on the creation of ecclesial unity. According to an eisegetical reading of Ephesians 4:11-13, the apostle is the highest rung of the ecclesial hierarchy and key to ecclesial unity. The Apostolic Vision, according to Deiros and Mraida, is specifically focused on transcending the local for the ‘unity’ of the mission of the church. Mraida argues that the modern church needs, ‘to recover the biblical meanings of location, in direct relationship to the strengthening of unity’.\(^{50}\) For Mraida, the Scriptures reveal the location of the church as the city. In language reminiscent of Calvin and his magisterial vision for Geneva, Mraida argues that the biblical image of the ‘church of the city’ dictates that ‘there is only one presbytery in each city’, made up of pastors from different congregations that form the one church of the city. The pastoral council serves to make the congregations conscious of their identity as one church and ‘assumes the authority and spiritual government of the city’.\(^{51}\) This has been occurring organically in Argentina, according to Mraida, in the wake of the 1990s revival.\(^{52}\) Nevertheless, no indications are given as to how they function or are organized hierarchically. The apostle is organically recognized as a spiritual leader of this network,\(^{53}\) precisely because his vision for unity and mission transcends the local. Although Mraida does not directly subsume the pastoral councils into the Apostolic Vision, the conceptual similarities nevertheless exist. The apostle is envisioned as a supra-denominational leader who binds the church in unity. This effectively moves the location of the church from the congregation to the city and beyond. The implications of this are ontological. First, the apostle takes on an ontology that separates him from other Christians. Deiros expressed it as follows:

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\(^{50}\) Mraida, ‘Unity as a Sign of Revival’, p. 186.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., p. 188.

\(^{52}\) He claims there were 200 or so pastoral councils/presbyters in 1998, Mraida, ‘Unity as a Sign of Revival’, p. 187.

\(^{53}\) These networks tend to be fluid and can have more than one apostle.
The apostolic gift is pure grace, however part of the apostolic gift is also having strategic ability in the kingdom, that is to say, to see where the church is going and where the church should be going. … The apostle has a vision of the unity of the church…that other servants of God do not have.  

Second, the composition of the church and unity are shifted, irretrievably, away from the ecclesial community. As Mraida clearly states, the church as an ontological reality is not present in the local church and/or denominational organizations but instead in the eternal, spiritual ecclesial reality:

The Church is a spiritual event, while denominations [and local churches] are a social event. The Church is cross-culturally valid, while denominations are culturally limited. The Church must be biblically understood and evaluated. Denominations are sociologically understood and evaluated.

A line has been drawn in the sand; in words reminiscent to the claims that the See of Rome, like Peter, has the keys to the church as its head (Mt. 16:17-19), the apostle holds the keys to unity. While Andrés informed us that the keys are more than symbolic and open up doors to new subjectivity and agency, his depiction of unity, nevertheless, was categorically different from that of the Apostolic Vision. For him, the gift of gracious community passes is transubstantiated through sweeping and cleaning, which is a type worship and a sign of unity. Of course, even the Apostolic Vision model of transformation presupposes ecclesial community for unity because shared ecclesial practices, liturgies, and subjective experiences form true bonds of fraternity. The problem with the neo-Pentecostal claims to unity is that the hierarchy of charisms and the diffusion of practices through mega-evangelists and pastors stifle the freeing potential of charismatic and popular experiences. The possibility of reconciling unity is traded for an apostolic hierarchy.

Julieta

In direct contrast to Renovado, there was a consistent affirmation in Julieta that doctrinal affinity, at some level, is necessary for ecclesial unity. Arguably, there are several reasons for this. First, despite decades of consistent progressivism, Julieta

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54 Interview no. 18.
continues to embody many of traditional evangelicalism’s inclinations in its worship and practice. The worship space is filled with profoundly cognitive exercises. Sermons dominate communal worship and are teaching exercises that demand intellectual rigour and reflection. The scant communal prayer is acutely unilateral (leader to a silent, pondering congregation) as well as a cognitive and reflective exercise. A modernist assumption of a correlation between faith and cognitive belief, whether conscious or not, seemingly underlies the intentions of many practices (preaching, prayer, communal discussion), where the instrumental outcome is comprehension and not expressly transformation. Second, Julieta is a predominantly upper-middle and professional class church. It demonstrates collective intellectual engagement of the Christian Scriptures and other theological readings. Third, Julieta has long valued the congregational assembly as well as communal discussion and decision-making, and the formation of spaces where doctrinal diversity can be expressed and respected. Furthermore, the ecclesial community also continues to mend the open wounds of communal conflict that glaringly brought to the surface the presence of different convictions. Hence, while almost all readily and consciously spoke of unity in terms of communitarian relations, there existed a central affirmation that certain common beliefs are necessary and that this dogmatic core is both received and debated. Individuals such as Carlos, Sara, and Roberto spoke of a dialectic unity that required certain commonly held beliefs, but also a profound commitment to integrality and ecclesial heterogeneity.

Carlos offered one of the most sophisticated descriptions of unity. He

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56 On the one hand, prayer at Julieta is communally participatory because it is led by an assortment of ecclesial community members. On the other hand, it encourages congregational passivity, failing to actively engage in simultaneous spoken and corporally acted prayer as in neo-Pentecostalism or even in responsive readings as utilized by many ecclesial communities in the magisterial traditions that possess a common book of prayer and/or liturgy.

57 Renovado directly contrasts with this reality. While clearly the fact of class and formalized education also account for some of the more theologically developed descriptions present in Julieta, it is also significant that Renovado clearly fits into the Pentecostal/neo-Pentecostal paradigms of experiential and corporal expressions of doctrinal belief. Renovado tends to encompass ‘doctrinal/practices’ whereas Julieta tend to encompass doctrinally reflections on practices. Of course, the demarcation is not quite that clean cut.

58 Recall that Julieta employs lay preachers, many of whom have formal theological training, that consistently preach exegetical sermons. Moreover, throughout its history it has been home to several formally trained theologians and biblical scholars and actively encourages engagement with progressive evangelical theological texts and materials.
affirmed that unity demands certain foundational agreements. Paraphrasing Ephesians 4:4-6, he spoke of foundational dogmas such as belief in ‘the same God, the same faith, the same baptism, the same hope’ as well as consistency with the gospel. These represent, for Carlos, a dogmatic base of unity for the ecclesial community and a binding catholic unity with other Christian communities and Christianity as a whole. However, for Carlos this does not rule out the presence of heterogeneity. Instead, he shrewdly recognized that these beliefs do not, in and of themselves, constitute unity or even agreement, but instead unity depends on a ‘common project’. Returning to his communitarian focused ecclesiology and soteriology, Carlos believes that ‘a community … that truly depicts community … is a common project’. The inner core of unity is ultimately concerned with convictions and communitarian commitments. The local church is united when it has a common and communitarian project which, according to Carlos, can either be predominantly inward (‘taking care of selves’) or outward (‘concerned with neighbour, the outside’) in focus. This is to say; even though unity is lived out in and through a common project, the project, nevertheless, must be ‘consistent with the gospel’.

The theme of a common project in the midst of ecclesial heterogeneity was a common sentiment that extended beyond Carlos. Sara, who offered a unique and conflictive ecclesial definition that borders on a spiritualist ontology, nonetheless

59 Here I borrow the concept of convictions as developed in the work of James W. McClendon and James M. Smith. McClendon and Smith argue that convictions are shared properties and persistent beliefs, ‘such that if X (a person or community) has a conviction, it will not easily be relinquished and it cannot be relinquished without making X a significantly different person (or community) than before’. See J. W. McClendon and J. M. Smith, Convictions: Defusing Religious Relativism, rev. ed. (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1994), p. 5. Convictions are certain of formative beliefs that are deeply rooted and make us who we are personally and corporately. In this chapter I will use the term as such to speak of deeply held beliefs of individuals and communities that are determinative for their identity and practice.

60 Sara offered a unique and problematic definition of ecclesiology. She detailed what she called her ‘personal theology’ as an affirmation that there is only one church, the church of Christ, and not numerous churches. Julieta is not ‘a’ church but simply Sara’s ‘congregation’ and ‘spiritual family’ and part of ‘the’ church. Although Sara’s ecclesiology almost completely subsumes the local church into a supra-natural ontology of ‘the’ church (representing a forfeiture of the local as an ecclesial reality that goes beyond even Argentine neo-Pentecostalism), she nevertheless envisions ecclesial and Christian unity in terms that demand intimate human and communitarian relations. Quite possibly she has taken this step to protect ‘the’ church from the messiness of ecclesial reality but whatever the reason may be, she offered no definition of unity that applied to the transcendent ecclesial level she pronounced, but instead only one directly applicable to the local.
affirmed unity as a heterogeneous reality with a common doctrinal core and a communal shell. She defined unity, citing John 17, as ‘being one with a brother or sister in Christ’ and seeing this sister ‘with the eyes of Christ’. However, although unity demands acceptance of the other, Sara was clear that it does not designate unmitigated sharing of personal opinions. Instead, unity also demands adherence to a common mission, what Sara termed ‘eternal goals’, and this in turn demands seeking a discerning consensus, what she called the crucial practice of ‘listening…to what the Lord is saying to us’. Thus, unity for Sara embraces diversity, accepting the other without attempting to change her, and has a Christological and doctrinal centre. Roberto spoke of a dialectic between commonly held beliefs and diversity. Accordingly, he described unity as a multiflorous reality, depending on the level of dialogue: intra-community, inter-community, inter-denominational, or inter-religious. On all levels there is heterogeneity – a respect for different traditions and doctrines – but also a commitment to form links of association. On the level of the community, unity demands formation for friendships and relationships, or the sharing of life together, as well as agreement on certain basic doctrines. There is diversity but also certain commonly held beliefs and, according to Roberto, it is the local ecclesial community that should determine these common convictions. Moving beyond one ecclesial community, differences multiply and can and should be transcended for the unification of churches for larger causes. One such unifying cause is ‘indisputably…the helping of…the excluded, the marginalized, the poor, [and] the needy in all sectors of society’. The disposition to ‘help the neighbour’ is a project that serves to unify on both the local and global levels; it can transcend and respect ideological differences, serving as a unique point of unification. Here Roberto comes close to the ecumenically ponderous words of Míguez Bonino: ‘Identification with the poor in their struggle is not a “danger” to our identity as Christians. It is, on the contrary, the only way to “identify” with Christ and consequently to reach our

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61 Interview no. 11.
62 Interview no. 13.
63 Roberto has wrongly assumed that ‘helping the needy’, a preferential option for the poor, can necessarily transcend difference, because even agreement on this point necessitates a subsequent question: how does one best serve the poor? Here, ideology, tradition, and conviction enter once again in the process of discernment, because even a preferential option for the poor demands prior epistemological assumptions and a narrative tradition.
true Christian identity’.

Juan spoke openly of the existence of diversity and heterogeneity in the church and how unity is not necessarily agreement but is instead sharing life and working together. This deep-seated unity, for Juan, is essentially healthy relationships based on love formed in spaces of ardent interaction and sharing. He avers that unity exists in subgroups and not in the congregation as a whole. Similar to others, Juan clarified that unity is more than communal relations, but it also concerns a sharing of common beliefs and commitments. Like Sara, he placed Christology at the centre, suggesting that unity is the submission of the diverse social and cultural realities of the ecclesial community to the Lordship of Christ. Reminiscent of Jürgen Moltmann, Juan asserted that unity is concerned with the unity of the members but is principally the unity of Christ acting upon them. Sabrina, reminiscent of Andrés from Renovado, offered an utterly communal vision of unity, with no mention of doctrinal affinity: it is ‘brothers and sisters listening about the problem you have’, and ‘companionship…of taking you out of the pit in which each of us is in’.

In the search for unity and transformation, the ecclesial community stands in the forefront as a potential nexus of transformation. As noted in the past chapter, the church is transforming in being a gathering community. Unity, as Yoder and Moltmann have noted, is first experienced in the context of the gathering community. This gathering of different individuals, with their accompanying identities and histories, demonstrates that unity is thus an expression of freedom and diversity as well as convitional and cultural cohesion.

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64 See Míguez Bonino, ‘Freedom Through Unity’.
65 Interview no. 12.
67 Sabrina was insistent on the importance of being ‘listened’ to and mentioned it twice, once directly asserting that it was ‘listening’ that facilitates the formation of unity in the ecclesial community. She even clarified that when she spoke of someone helping another she was not necessarily giving something but instead in hugging and sincere demonstration that one person is listening to another. Interview no. 9.
In Julieta, the centre continues to exercise power over the silent voices on the benches. The interruptions of Lucho are accusations against what many in the ecclesial community understand as real and acceptable. Even for a committed progressive ecclesial community the words of Lucho disturb. In Renovado, the hierarchy of charisms subverts the assembly and periphery to the apostolic authority. The complaints of Andrés concerning the requirements put on the members of Renovado that are not put on the members of the mother church are a reminder of the structures of power and control. These voices hint at different forms of subjectivity and agency as well as unity, depending of whether they emanate from the centre or the periphery. As noted by Míguez, Reiger, and Sung in their critiques of the spirit of empire, ‘One of the key differences between dominant subjectivity and subaltern subjectivity is the way in which unity is understood’. Unity in a top-down hierarchy demands homogeneity, a refusal to question certain things, but unity that opens the door to community and social transformation is heterogeneous, with ‘different social agents with differing identities and histories’. Gutiérrez spoke of evoking unity without proper attention to the ‘concrete situation’ of the church in the world, ultimately creating a ‘fictitious and formalistic’ unity that support those who profit from social division. The same could be said of unity in the local church, where claims to unity cover a multitude of sins when proper attention is not dedicated to deciphering the concrete social and cultural contexts.

6.3.3. Discernment

In the turbulent times of social-economic and political strife of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, the call to read the signs of the times epitomized the enduring theological interrogation of the burgeoning LAT. The signs of the times called for awareness of the crucible of historical reality and social context, a call to do theology in and for a revolutionary situation. History was a central and unifying category of theological praxis; history was unified (vs. division of sacred and secular) and

69 Míguez, Rieger, and Sung, Beyond the Spirit, p. 165.
70 Gutiérrez, A Theology of Liberation, p. 277.
71 Pope John XXIII and Vatican II popularized this idiom through its use in Gaudium et spes.
72 Here I am paraphrasing the title of Miguéz Bonino’s well-known text, Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation.
moving in a decipherable direction as part of a unified process. Reading the signs of the times, or discernment, typified comprehension and participation of the revolutionary direction of history. The times or the movement of history, in Hegelian fashion, represented the movement of the Spirit and was decipherable with the tools of social analysis (dependency theory and Marxist social theory). The popular movements were an obvious movement of God’s spirit and reading history in light of active participation in them provided theology with a new methodology and the church with new extra-ecclesial ecclesiology. However, the tools of LALT became dulled with changing geopolitics and the crushing defeats of popular movements across Latin America. History was revealed not to be self-evident.

The social sciences as sciences are good for comprehending the present, in light of what is quantitatively measurable in the past; they function well at predicting the predictable. However, the same cannot be said of predicting the unpredictable, whether the resurrection or the breaking of the Spirit in places far away from the centre of power.  

Indeed, the great error of Constantinianism, as recorded in the annals of Eusebius and countless others, has been to measure the movement and place of God’s transforming presence according to the centres of empire and domination and their imperial and/or national historical projects. This not only ignores the realities of division and refines unity, but it ignores other histories. This historiography has not moved according to the power of the poor, but instead according to the powerful economic, political, and ecclesial centres of domination. The underside of history has remained the underside history.

Nonetheless, the exilic present is reminiscent of the original and ambiguous use of the sign of the times, in Jesus’ condemnation of the Pharisees and Sadducees. As religious and political leaders, the Pharisees and Sadducees did not petition Jesus

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73 The social sciences, like theology, are always a step behind. The social sciences could not have predicted the fall of the Berlin Wall or Perestroika and Mikhail Gorbachev. They could not have predicted the Tiananmen Square protests or the recent protests in North Africa and the Middle East against dictatorial leaders. Likewise, the social sciences could not have ‘imagined’ Perón or the cultural power of Peronism or the ensuing National Security Regimes. Finally, Oscar Romero or Carlos Mugica, who both left aristocratic family ties because of an ideology for the poor, are an aberration of the rule of social formation.

as sociologists for ‘signs of the times’ but instead for a demonstration of power and domination. They wanted a ‘sign from heaven’ (Mt. 16:1), an apparent demonstration of God’s incarnating action in history in and through Jesus. Jesus’ response, apart from deriding them for reading well the weather but failing to read the times, is that there will be no sign from heaven apart from ‘the sign of Jonah’ (Mt. 16:4). This, of course, is a direct allusion to Jesus’s own death, burial, and resurrection (Mt. 12:39-40) and an argument for a different sort of historiography. It is not that there has been a paucity of signs of divine action and transformation – Jesus feeding the five thousand (Mt. 14:13-21), walking on water (14:22-36), healing the Canaanite woman’s daughter (15:21-28), feeding the four thousand (15:29-39); the transfiguration (17:1-13), and his healing of the demonized boy (17:14-23) – leading up to and after the petition for a sign; instead, these signs failed to register with those who catalogue change according to the centre of social and cultural structures. So, as Jesus makes the blasphemous claim to be God’s incarnate presence, the true temple of God (Mt. 26:60-61; Mk. 14:57-58; Jn. 2:18-22), he is also recognized as the Son of God (Mt. 14:33; 16:16; 17:5), principally by those close to him and on the fringes of society, and only rarely by those at the centre of systems of imperial (Mk. 15:39) and socio-religious power (Jn. 3:1-21). So it follows, discernment is a creative and ambiguous task, connected both with the sign of Jonah and the present as complex historical, cultural, and social space. The sign of Jonah, Jesus Christ, claims to be the Lord of history and of the powers of principalities; it is an audacious claim, but one that challenges the historiography of the centres of power. This Jesus offers a personal and collective encounter with power of another sort, one rooted in the Holy Spirit and the power of the resurrection. It is rooted in the past, in the Jesus of the Gospels and the tradition of the Church, but discerned and lived in the present, in the transforming hope of resurrection. As mentioned earlier, Leonardo Boff has declared that Christianity is a religion of the life in the present and not one of nostalgia for the past because of the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection is utopia because the resurrection puts an end to the utopic search for that which is not anywhere (utopia in Greek), and the realization of hope and life in the topia of the present and future.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ L. Boff, Jesus Christ Liberator, p. 35, 135-38. See also his discussion of utopia and
The realization of this hope and the work of topia, however, continue in the ambiguity of the present. This ambiguity exists in the contentious social-scape of Argentina as well as the local ecclesial communities. The challenge of Christ continues: how should we read the times in light of the present and the sign of Jonah? Or, stated alternatively, how can the ecclesial community discern being faithfully and effectively transformative?

Renovado

In Renovado, discernment is a foundational task. Although it is not feasible to speak of Renovado having ‘a’ practice of discernment or ‘a’ consistent communal understanding, nonetheless the desire ‘to know God’s will’ was a dominant narrative interwoven into almost every communal practice – prayer, spiritual warfare, inner healing, anointing, preaching – and the binding hierarchical structure of the Apostolic Vision. This narrative and accompanying practices exist in dialectic tension between the predominance of individual and subjective experience (God reveals God’s will to me) and the religious and political structure of the Apostolic Vision (God reveals God’s will for the ecclesial community and society through the direction of those called to lead). In short, discernment is not explicitly communal; it is instead a bifurcated dialectic between voluntarism and spiritual hierarchy and authority. On the one hand, at Renovado and in neo-Pentecostalism there exists a vigorous and sincere assertion that all can and should know God’s will for their lives. As such, discernment is not something readily observable, as in natural theology, but is instead revealed principally in subjective and experiential ‘intimacy with God’.

Like LALT, it is a theology of event and praxis, but it is not the event itself (history) that reveals God (e.g., the Exodus and present liberation projects) but the encounter

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76 The Apostle Antonio demonstrated an affinity for the term ‘the will of God’ and the concept is beyond these practices, which compares with the arguments I have laid out concerning Christian practice in chapter 5. Interview no. 7.


78 Antonio and Angelina employed this term (Interview no. 7, and no. 2) but the correlation between close proximity with God and reception of revealed knowledge was a common theme throughout interviews. For example, Angelina spoke of proper understanding and action (i.e., discerning the needs of others and providing for those needs) as flowing from intimacy with God. Antonio said discerning God’s will comes through knowing the Scriptures and having intimacy with God.
(intimacy) with a revelatory God. Thus, sociology and anthropology are not necessary tools; instead, ‘intimacy’ and spiritual discernment become tools to read the ebb and flow of the Spirit. Nevertheless, the present experience is not isolated from the prior experiences of God for, as Antonio stated, the Bible contains ‘ninety percent of God’s Will’. It is the other revelatory ‘ten percent’ that he apportioned to the task of discernment in the ‘here and now’. The subjective neo-Pentecostal experience exists in a collective tension, both assuming and denying a communitarian experience and ecclesial tradition. Comprehension of the Scriptures and intimacy with God is possible only through the experience of conversion and learned ecclesial narratives and practices, however the disposition for ‘intimacy’ is ultimately subjective and voluntarist. While subjectivity can offer an opportunity for freedom and the creation of a new identity or identities, voluntarist subjectivity that ignores the overt social and cultural structures fails to produce identity, habits, and practices of resistance against oppressive social structures. Moreover, although intimacy is foundational for discernment, both are ultimately subject to the discerning and governing core of the church and the hierarchy of charisms.

In tune with the Protestant leitmotif of universal priesthood, discernment – seeking God’s Will – is a universal task. This intimacy can be represented in common ecclesial practices (personal and communal prayer, spiritual warfare, Scripture reading, fasting, etc.) or in specialized practices and strategies (prayer walks and events, spiritual cartography and historiography). Nevertheless, intimacy is concerned with knowing ‘God’s will’, which is directly contrasted with the human will and opinion.\textsuperscript{79} Narrating a story about confronting a brother for sharing his opinion instead of the will of God, Apostle Antonio emphatically declared that ‘I am not interested in my opinion… I am interested in God’s opinion’. While this could be interpreted as an attempt at reflexivity in the process of discernment, no tools of reflexivity are found other than the Scriptures themselves. Instead, Antonio expresses the need to submit discernment to a mediating hierarchical system, in fear, once again, of the open sharing of ideas and opinions. This is problematic because some of the most cogent critiques of the structure of Renovado only surfaced after a space for

\textsuperscript{79} Interviews no. 7 and 18.
free and open sharing had been established. So, while the priesthood of all believers is affirmed individually (all are priests), it is immediately qualified, similar to Luther and Zwingli, by central authority and control. As Luther and Zwingli acquiesced in the need for centrality of learned pastoral authority and the support of magisterial economic and political support, so Renovado acquiesced to the authority of charismatic hierarchy. These questions come even more into focus when moving from the life of the individual to the life of the ecclesial community and/or society. As Deiros argued, the apostle has a vision of unity that others do not. Some have a ‘greater desire’ of God, and it is this grouping that demonstrates a ‘calling…to take the church forward’, as well as charisms for leadership and discernment. Thus, while all believers are relatively free to discern concerning their personal lives, few have the power or position to be able to freely discern for the ecclesial community and/or society. In short, the apostolic leadership holds the keys to the practice of discernment.

When pushed on the question of the assembly and its importance for Free Church identity, Antonio responded that in essence the mother church, and by extension Renovado, have ‘another form’ of assembly. This assembly is not all-inclusive but exclusively consists of the apostolic team and seventy leaders. Within this inner core, the sharing of opinion, ironically, is part of the process of discernment. Based on a confounding biblicism, Antonio asserted that there is a ‘theology that says when…the Bible speaks of the assembly, it is in reality speaking

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80 This can be most vividly seen in that Magdalena only felt free to openly criticize the leadership style of Ricardo after I had assured her for a second time of the confidentiality of her comments.

81 Interview no. 18.

82 I recognize that all, in a voluntarist sense, are free to discern, but the structures of power of the hierarchy of charisms and the socio-cultural experience of submission to leadership puts limits on the possibility of voluntarist discernment of non-leaders becoming binding for the ecclesial community.

83 Of course, the assumption is that people in this inner core have sufficient intimacy with God to be able to keep personal opinion in check and to share what one is convinced is God’s will.

84 When I use the term ‘biblicism’, I mean to speak of the confusing of one’s own interpretation of the Scriptures with the Scriptures themselves. It ignores the social and historical context of the author and reader and the presence of tradition. Indeed, in asserting that there is no tradition except the self-evident Scriptures themselves, it simply turns a blind eye to its own tradition, which is instrumental in its interpretation of the Scriptures.
of a group of seventy committed persons.\textsuperscript{85} In short, while democratic practices may be good for humanity, they are not appropriate for the theocratic church because it ‘annuls the place of God’. This reinforces once again the argument that, while neo-Pentecostalism is an experiential and practice oriented theology, it nevertheless precludes the movement of the Spirit in the gathered, discerning community. The possibility of the ecclesial community as a collective priest in discernment is discarded as impractical and dangerous.

Finally, Renovado is a conundrum because it offers powerful ecclesial practices that take steps towards bridging the gap between spiritual and socio-cultural discernment. The experiences of conversion and the anointing and practices of confrontation (spiritual warfare, inner healing, etc.) are powerful practices that offer the opportunity for the formation of new and radical subjectivities and identity. These attempts to examine the social realm, although usually feeble and hampered by a debilitating dualism and a colonial heritage of racism and oppression, nevertheless mark a small ‘tactical’ step in the direction of ecclesial practices that seek to discern and transform the social. Likewise, discernment as intimate experience is limited, if not clearly connected to a theory of how this experience is formed, not only by individual-divine experience, but also by socio-cultural and material structures. Likewise, there is a need for tools of reflexivity beyond the Scriptures (sociology, history, ethnography), and of course more responsible scriptural hermeneutics that is aware of contexts (author and reader). While it is helpful to speak of spiritual oppression, this oppression, as it is manifested in social organizations, institutions, and structures, needs to be dissected.

\textit{Julieta}

Julieta is intentionally communitarian\textsuperscript{86} in its style of worship, including the central role of the assembly, and organizational structure. The identity of the

\textsuperscript{85} Antonio presumably makes reference to Numbers 10:16-29 where Moses is told to select seventy leaders to share the burden of listening and making decisions for the people.

\textsuperscript{86} Remember I do not mean by this, in a philosophical or theological sense, \textit{communitarianism}. Communitarianism, as a construct of late modernism, is a philosophical or theological response to liberalism, with its assertions on the autonomy of the individual and its rationally based morality. Communitarianism, instead, posits that there is no universal rational ethic, but instead only community-based ethics. All moral arguments are ultimately based in a community
ecclesial community is closely tied to an ethos of community and equality that values the incorporating of each and every person into all facets of the ecclesial community. Julieta has expressed a deeply developed ethos of the priesthood of all believers, which flows from a commitment to emulate the life of Jesus and the values of the kingdom of God. This communitarian ethos extends into its understanding of discernment. While the driving desire ‘to know God’s will’ for one’s personal life through subjective experience (e.g., intimacy) is not a dominant narrative, as in Renovado, conversion and discernment, nonetheless, are central to Julieta’s collective identity. All those interviewed recounted narratives of personal conversions, although there was oscillation from individualist and communalist readings of conversions. Also, as detailed in Chapter 4, worship, governing structure, and even the architecture of the church building is profoundly communitarian in focus. The assembly and the ethos of the assembly are essential constituents in the life of the ecclesial community. While the assembly, apart from exceptional meetings, only meets quarterly, a bi-weekly time of sharing serves as a direct extension of the assembly, making it a formative preparatory community practice. The time of sharing has a sacramental presence in the service because it rotated biweekly with the Holy Meal; both of which are aptly placed at the culmination of the service. Likewise, unlike in explicitly sacramentalist traditions with a central focus on the priest and personal contrition, the Holy Meal incorporates a time of communal sharing and discussion. Again, this open time of sharing, on average, accounts for twenty percent of the weekly service.

This ethos of open discussion and egalitarianism does not flow from a universal, rationally based understanding of equality (e.g., inalienable human rights) but instead from the communitarian focus on the ‘values of the kingdom’ as tradition. Alasdair MacIntyre’s later work After Virtue is good example of this and has proven influential in theology and the development of virtue ethics. The problem with communitarianism in theology is that it often narrowly assumes that one can speak of ‘the’ Christian community and ‘a’ Christian tradition, when in fact there are many traditions. This is problematic because there exists a dangerous temptation to reify one’s own socially and culturally located tradition as ‘the’ tradition, closing the door to other traditions and, typically, leading to a reading of one’s own tradition that lacks reflexivity. For a community focused Christian social ethic that attempts to avoid inherent reification in communitarianism, see González, Reino de Dios e Imperio. For González’s focused critique of communitarianism, see pp. 388-89, and for an example of his attempt to provide ethics that transcend one own tradition, see A. González, ‘Estructuras de La Praxis, Ensayo de Una Filosofía Primera’ (Madrid: Trotta, 1997).
exemplified in Jesus and the kingdom he has inaugurated.\textsuperscript{87} The kingdom of God is not a passing theme at Julieta but instead provides a profound sense of unity and is deeply engrained in the convictional fabric, finding expression in central ecclesial practice and theological interpretation. The majority of interviewees spoke unprompted of the kingdom of God and it is a constituent theme in sermons, discussions, and the community’s statute.\textsuperscript{88} This stands in stark contrast with Renovado where not one interviewee mentioned the term, and it never served as a point of theological reflection.\textsuperscript{89} At Julieta it serves as a theologically and praxis-centring motif. The convictional commitment to the mission of the kingdom of God functions as a lens through which to interpret, to critique, and to adjust ecclesial practice. Remember the reflection from Roberto and Carlos on baptism and how baptism represented an ecclesial community symbol and practice with sociological imperatives: we cannot sleep in our beds while Milagros sleeps on the street. In contrast, at Renovado neither the kingdom nor ethics, as derived from a close engagement of the life of Christ as witnessed in the gospel, were central themes. Indeed, this is warrant to say this occurs in neo-Pentecostalism as a whole.\textsuperscript{90} Instead,

\textsuperscript{87} Interviews no. 12 and 13.

\textsuperscript{88} Interviews no. 8, 11, 12, 13, and 16. This was a theme inherent to the ecclesial community because none of my interview schedules had questions about the kingdom. Moreover, all five interviewees mentioned the theme unprompted, including individuals on both sides of the ideological aisle (e.g., Carlos and Germán) and, interestingly, offering comparable descriptions. Carlos mentioned the term more than twenty times and Juan some fifteen times. On 9 November 2008 my journal notes from a Sunday service record that the sermon reflected on Luke 17:20-37 and the second coming of Christ and the already and not yet presence of the kingdom. Finally, Julieta’s Statute has a section explicitly dedicated to the kingdom (section 2.9), as well as a reference to the kingdom in section 2.13 on stewardship (‘According to the Scriptures, Christians should contribute cheerfully, freely, regularly, and systematically to the advance the kingdom of God’), and in Appendix A entitled ‘The Church that We For’ (A.1: ‘We long for a Church that sees itself as a sign of the Kingdom of God…’)

\textsuperscript{89} Only once in my records of journal entries and documents from Renovado did I find a reference to the kingdom. In a manual for a class on inner healing there was a section dedicated to abortion and the need to confront the sin, but it also included an emphasis on forgiveness and healing. As a reminder of solace and healing, the verse, ‘Let the little children come to me … for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs’ (Mt. 19:14) appears.

\textsuperscript{90} Interview no. 18a. This is not to say the theme cannot be joined to neo-Pentecostal thought because in my interview with Pablo Deiros he made a direct correlation between the kingdom of God and apostolic authority and power. Deiros readily spoke of the ‘kingdom’ and the ‘gospel of the kingdom’ and averred that the apostle has a vision for the kingdom that others do not. This vision, according to Deiros, postulates that the apostle is an apostle because he ‘does not think in the local, but in the kingdom’. An apostle is not so concerned with ‘the local church and the care of the flock’ as with ‘the vision of the kingdom and the care of the church of Jesus Christ, first, in the entire city, and … in all the world’. However, Pablo failed to mention certain values of the kingdom (i.e., preaching to the poor, Lk. 4:18-19) until I challenged his definition of the great commission.
the imprint of progressive evangelicalism has left a profound mark. Germán, who expressed openly concerns about certain interpretations of ‘integral’, nevertheless spoke nostalgically of Integral Mission and provided a definition that was centrally focused on the kingdom of God. The development of communal and Christologically focused ethics in the work of René Padilla, Orlando Costas, and progressive evangelicalism are openly expressed, as in the words of Carlos, in the aspiration to emulate the ‘community of the King’. This demonstrates a tendency towards philosophical and theological communitarianism (i.e., ethics as defined by ‘the’ ideology of Jesus as seen through the lens of ‘a’ certain tradition). However, the central place of the open assembly and the equally prominent ethos of heterogeneity have served both to keep this in check, demonstrating an active acceptance of different forms of interpreting beliefs, and to engage all voices in the ecclesial community. Moreover, the overt presence of varying interpretive voices on central beliefs and practices (e.g., Integral Mission, transformation, baptism, Holy Meal, and the assembly) indicate that it would be impossible philosophically, sociologically, or culturally to substantiate a communitarianism reading of Julieta because there simply is not one theology present. Indeed, I would go a step further and argue that narratives of communitarianism based on local communities fail to engage the true and profound differences of opinions and interpretations present in ecclesial communities. It seems that homogeneous communitarian claims are more caricatures of the communitarians and their ideological opponents than actual depictions of reality. Julieta, even amidst painful division, is a testament to ecclesiological honesty. Although Jorge spoke of the idyllic times of yesteryear when the ecclesial community could function with ‘ten different visions’, the fact is that different visions and interpretations continue to flourish in Julieta, as in all communities.

Turning to the specific discussion of the question of discernment, consensus at Julieta, not surprisingly, proved elusive. As with transformation, conceptions of discernment tended to oscillate between two poles: individualist and communal interpretations. Indeed, the interviewees’ concepts of discernment neatly dovetailed

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91 There is a good chance that Carlos’ use of this term comes from Howard Snyder’s *Comunidad del Rey*, 2nd ed. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Kairós, 2005) – original English version published by IVP in 2003 – which he had read and was for sale at Julieta.
with their conceptions of transformation. While Sara, Germán, and Jorge tended to speak of discernment in more individualist terms, Carlos, Juan, and Roberto preferred to speak in communal terms. For example, Sara suggested that the difficulty of discernment over whether or not the local church should participate or instigate popular movements was ultimately an individual decision. Recognizing no fast rule, she averred that this depends, as exemplified in the Old Testament prophets, on the distinct calling of each person. Thus, while openly supporting Christian involvement ‘in government, in history, in social changes, in everything’, she did not interpret the process of discernment Christologically or communally, but instead through an individualist reading of the movement of the Spirit in the Old Testament. She added to this by paraphrasing Jeremiah 17:5,7: ‘Blessed is the man who trusts in God. Cursed is the man who trusts in man’. Jorge gave a more tempered understanding, speaking of the process of becoming a leader at Julieta as both receiving a personal call and as a process of community discernment. For Jorge, discernment was not depicted as an open and closed book (blessing vs. cursing) but as a thorny process, recognizing that not all would openly support the attempt of someone such as Carlos to be pastor because of his background and ideological stance. Juan spoke of the transition in his understanding of the will of God through his participation at Julieta and his academic studies of the Scriptures. When he arrived at Julieta he believed that God had a specific and individual calling for each person, but over time he has come to question this and no longer believes it. Instead, he believes that there is a general calling for all Christians and openly recognized the difficult process of communal discernment. Carlos complicated matters by confronting the assembly and claiming that social class is determinative for becoming a deciding member in the congregation. For Carlos, if a doctor or lawyer comes to the ecclesial community, they will quickly be given a space to make decisions while someone from a lower class background will be bequeathed a space of ‘being helped’. As mentioned above, this relegation is a complex reality of learned cultural and social habitus – acceptance of a certain place within the context of heterogeneous cultural and social setting such as Julieta – and active opposition, as represented by Lucho’s complaints. He is an apt example of the self-expressive agency and subjectivity of those on the margins, because unlike other more defiant
voices from the ranks of the middle class (Carlos, Roberto, and others), he does not claim to speak for the poor, but instead seeks to express his voice and experience. It seems that Jorge again offers a bridge: he acknowledges that divisions in the church in recent years are a reflection of society as a whole and thus disagreement should be interpreted as necessarily an enemy of discernment. This division and expression of different voices is not an obstruction to the movement of the Spirit but is instead an expression of this movement. While there is the possibility that open expression can turn into a *carnicería*, this is a risk that Julieta is willing to take. Instead, this division is part of an organic, as well as spiritual, process. The ecclesial communities need to resist the conflict of society dictating the ecclesial community and this necessitates discernment.

6.4. Conclusion

This chapter has built on the argument from the preceding chapter that the local church is a nexus of transformation and a historical project. The local church is a micro-social project that provides small steps of transformation, even amidst the present wilderness of ecclesial heterogeneity, hybridity, and division. More specifically, I have argued that the local church as a gathering community is transforming and in this chapter we have explored this by examining the ecclesial communities’ potential to confront division non-violently, seek reconciling unity, and engage in discernment. The intention has not been to prescriptively offer a catalogue of *notae missionis*, *notae ecclesiae*, or ecclesial practices, because this would invariably impose the imperial and civilized centre over against the periphery. Instead, I have demonstrated that both Renovado and Julieta have struggled to confront division without erecting new structures of oppression, to form a unity that is faithful to the gospel of Jesus and yet open to the periphery, and to discern in ways that create spaces for inclusion and empowerment amidst a context of exclusion and division. The ecclesial communities are witnesses to faithfulness and failure, but still represent the possibility of historical project that seeks to change the present in light of the Kingdom. They represent steps towards transformation that can challenges and confront the present exclusionary wilderness.
Conclusion

7.1. Introduction

This thesis commenced with the exhortation of Gustavo Gutiérrez that ‘the times demand of us a creative spark…to create new ecclesiology structures’. In response to this entreaty, I suggested a double movement. First, the thesis developed an analysis of the Latin American context through the lens of Argentina. The verdict was a categorical declaration that the present context is an exclusionary, exilic wilderness, and that the successive macro-social projects of liberation (liberal, Peronist, neo-liberal, and the New Left), each with particular focus on the national, political, and social system, have failed. Second, I offered the measured hope of micro-social alternatives amidst lo cotidiano of the exilic present: community assemblies, piquetero movement, barter system, and Catholic and evangelical churches and organizations. While these projects do not offer a quick fix, or archetypal models for direct application to society as a whole, or can even guarantee freedom from co-option and clientelism, they do offer alternatives and attempts to build micro historical projects. They are small steps towards transformation in the exilic present.

The central question that ultimately emerged from this examination was not novel, but nonetheless fitting for the present time of wilderness: is the church transformative? The answer with which I began and with which I conclude is, yes. However, this affirmation is not a jubilant declaration of ecclesiogenesis or a new reformation; instead, it is a measured assertion that the church, as a community gathering in the name of Christ and in the power of the Spirit, takes hopeful yet small, and often contradictory, steps toward transformation.

7.2. The Transforming Possibility of the Church

The political, religious, cultural, and economic realities of Latin America have profoundly changed in recent decades, but change, as detailed in Chapter 1 and

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2 See L. Boff, Ecclesiogenesis.
3 See Shaull, Heralds of a New Reformation.
2, does not constitute transformation. Likewise, transformation, rather than change or liberation, proved to be the theological idiom of choice in the ecclesial communities of Julieta and Renovado. Change is ambivalent; it is the evolution or alteration of something, or the moving from one condition to another, whether for good or bad. Transformation, in contrast, is the making anew, freeing, and completing of something. It incorporates the integrity of the individual, the foundations and structures of community and society, and the entire creation, that is the built and natural environments. Moreover, I have established that both Julieta and Renovado are gathering ecclesial communities with sacramental social practices that demonstrate that transformation is both a gracious gift and task of human effort. Again, we saw in Julieta, with the baptism of Milagros, and in Renovado, with the Saturday Holy Meal, sacramental practices that created the space and place for binding and loosing through confrontation, reconciliation, and discernment. While both Julieta and Renovado exemplify internal contradictory trends – failure and effective faithfulness – they are still enduring testimonies of small narratives and practices of transformation that attest to the Reign of God. At times the practices resulted in failure, such as open division in Julieta and charismatic hierarchy and fear of the assembly in Renovado, but they also provided a sacramental space and place where the periphery could confront the centre of each community and form a reconciling and reflexively discerning community. In like manner, the two small ecclesial communities have significantly impacted their surrounding communities through their presence as ecclesial gatherings and through the development of practices and ministries to care for those who live on the periphery, once again opening up a space and place for confrontation, reconciliation, and discernment. They attest to a transformation that denotes both a conforming to Jesus and a renewing change in the ecclesial community that forms an open space and place for freedom and abundance, which in turn can transform the surroundings communities and social realm.

However, it is here, amidst the breadth and width of transformation, that the theological and tactical severance between individualist and socially focused theologies of transformation occurs. In defence of sola fide, individualist soteriology shrinks at the possibility of sacramentally mediated salvation. Universalist and
Constantinian soteriology subsumes the personal into the historically mediated salvation of society and the world. These dualist tendencies between individual and social change plague conservative evangelical and neo-Pentecostal theology as well as progressive and liberationist perspectives. Instead, there must exist a tactical midpoint, a theological locus, from where the personal and social, the theory and praxis of transformation can emanate.

I have argued that the local church – a gathering and transforming community – is such a nexus. Personal transformation, the penchant of conservative evangelicalism and neo-Pentecostalism, cannot be divorced from its sociocultural context. As demonstrated by both Julieta and Renovado, the immediate context of personal transformation is the ecclesial community, which is also a product of its context, but can nonetheless prospectively serve to be a space for the formation of personal and communal subjectivity that can in turn challenge and transform cultural practice and social structures. A transforming community does not subsume subjectivity but instead potentializes it. The local church, I have argued, can aptly be LAT’s historical project, a midpoint between the personal and the renewal of society, as well as between the current social situation and a society free of oppression and corruption. It serves as a midpoint between the exilic present and the often-effusive visions of el pueblo and the realization of the kingdom of God. It grounds the theological conversation in actual ecclesial praxis. The local church is the εκκλησια, the assembling (gathering) community that has sacramental social practices such as binding and loosing through which it confronts, reconciles, and discerns. It is not an assembled utopia, a realized kingdom, but instead a complicated and often divisive topia between this unjust present age and the eschaton. Community, like change, is not inherently good simply because it is ‘community’, or ‘mass’, or ‘popular’. Instead, popularism and comunitarianism often collapse into the sins of the abuses they desire to avert, such as oppressive elitism and localised Constantinianism. In short, the local church is not transformative by simply being a community or an assembly. As Miroslav Volf has noted, ‘The church is an assembly, but an assembly is not yet a church’.\footnote{Volf, ‘Community Formation as an Image of the Triune God’ p. 217.} Mutatis mutandis, the church is a community, but a community
is not yet a church. The church is a transforming community in great part because ecclesial gathering and communing is irrevocably linked to being an assemblage in *the name of Christ*. As a community, the church gathers in the name of Jesus and in reinstituting (task) and receiving (gift) the kingdom.

The ecclesial community is also an apt historical project for LAT because it can function as a bridge from which to engage the hermeneutical and social sciences, between what Manuel Mejido has called the historical-hermeneutical sciences and emancipatory-cognitive sciences. A transforming community is a reminder that while social structures and institutions are pivotal in the formation of human life, localized culture is instrumental in creating the imaginative possibility to change these structures and institutions. Community serves to remind us that ‘man does not live by bread alone’, and that human existence is more than material existence. Humanity desires bread but also a sacrament. However, community also serves to demonstrate that bread is not made and shared without the creating of just structures and practices of freedom. Both Julieta and Renovado, even with their contradictory tendencies, serve as apt examples of ecclesial communities that provide the space and place for the creation of imaginative and transformative possibilities through gathering and powerful sacramental social practices and social ministries. While the historical interpretations of praxis and transcendence are significant, theology and the Christian life are also concerned with forming liberating praxis and transcendence. The ecclesial community is a *topia* where the culturally infused symbols of utopia can interact with the realities of the present social structures, forming new, transformative structures and practices. Ecclesial community is a socio-cultural project – a historical project.

Finally, the ecclesial community as the historical project of LAT provides a place for the interaction between *el popular* and the formation of a minority ethic and culture. This implies, as noted in Chapters 5 and 6, that the *popular* is not necessarily the majority or the mass, but instead those symbols and practices formed

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5 Ibid.

6 Mejido, ‘Beyond the Postmodern Condition, or the Turn Toward Psychoanalysis’; Mejido, ‘A Reconstruction of the Theologies of Liberation’; Mejido, ‘A Return to the Foundations of the Critically Oriented Theologies of Liberation’; and Mejido, ‘The Postmodern: Liberation or Language’. 
by people who live on the periphery – with limited access to social and economic power and capital – in response to the circumstance in which they live. The ‘popular’ is the subversive response of the periphery to the centre; it is a minority ethic from the underside that opposes the power of the centre. The ecclesial community functions to confront the reality of an exclusionary society by incorporating the popular culture, images, and practices through the constant discerning renewing of the ecclesial community. In both Julieta and Renovado this was clearly demonstrated with the formation and enacting of practices such as the Holy Meal and Baptism that challenged the centre of each community through the imposition of the periphery, as noted on chapter 5. The ‘popular’ challenges ecclesial structure and practice, and demands transformation that leads to a minority-popular ethic that is faithful and effective. As such, there is great potential for the formation of powerful practices that can tactically challenge oppressive social structures and institutions.

The intent of this thesis is to offer an ecclesial vision with cultural symbols and practices rooted in the Christian tradition and the popular culture periphery: powerful practices of resistance that bring a confrontation with injustice, division, and violence to the centre of ecclesial practice. While this continues to be the thrust of this thesis, the cultural and ecclesial hybridity and diverse assortment of ecclesial practices in the ecclesial communities at the centre of the contextual studies made it difficult to produce a catalogue of ecclesial marks. Moreover, the desire to avert the oppressive politics of the centre has caused us to move away from neat catalogues and definitions. Instead, I suggest that the ecclesial community is transformative by gathering in the name of Jesus in non-violent confrontation, reconciling unity, and discernment.

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7.3. Confrontation, Reconciling Unity, and Discernment: Julieta and Renovado as Gathering Communities

The church is transforming (transformed and transformative)\(^8\) as a gathering community in that it confesses Jesus as Lord and constructs an ecclesial community by confronting division in its midst, forming bonds of unity in light of its common confession and shared spiritual and social experience, and seeking to discern what it is to be a kingdom community. This is not a task completed once and for all, but performed again and again. The repetitiveness of the project is due to the regenerative and creative ontology of transformation and the constantly changing social and cultural context. This repetitiveness is neither static nor monotonous but ludic, that is participating in the Spirit’s work of reconstitution and sanctification. Thus, the ecclesial community changes in tune with the continuously changing social and cultural context, but it is transforming in response to change by confronting oppressive practices and structures through the re-creation of the ecclesial community and practice.

As noted in Chapter 5, Matthew 16:13-20 and 18:15-20 are the only instances in the Christian canon where Jesus utters the word ‘church’. The pericopes are suggestive of a fundamental, although often ignored, Christian practice: two, three, or more gathering in the name of Jesus in a process of nonviolent confrontation, reconciling unity, and discernment (Mt. 18:15-20). This confrontation is evangelical and prophetic in that it presupposes, *a posteriori*, conversion to and proclamation of the lordship of Christ and the prophetic denunciation of structures and powers that deny and oppose the reign of Christ. This confrontation also constitutes a project, the re-establishing of a foundation – *petra* (Mt. 16:18) – on the confession of Christ and the building of the assembling community and the kingdom through binding and loosing.

At Julieta, gathering occurs not only during the Sunday morning service, but also among the many ministries and activities that occur in homes, streets, and

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\(^8\) I am assuming the term ‘transforming’ denotes that transformation and gathering are dynamic processes and that a gathering community’s ontology is not static (i.e., transformed or gathered). While the gathering community is transformed, it is only transformed by being in a constant state of transforming. Thus, the gathering community is transforming in that it is transformed and being constantly transformed, and providing opportunities for transformation.
localities throughout northern GBA. However, the ethos and practice of the assembly best represent the spirit and practice of gathering. This ethos extends far and wide throughout the life and practice of the ecclesial community, representing a sincere attempt to create a transforming space where all can speak, act, and be heard. However, we are reminded that even here, in the heart of an intentionally gathering community, there is division. Community is not the antithesis of anomie and society. In the midst of intentional community the bifurcation between the centre and the periphery perdures. The back row (the subaltern) questions and challenges the confession and the efforts of gathering and transforming because faithful and true confrontation of division, formation of unity, and discernment can only occur when there are practices that bind and loose and form structures that create space for the subaltern to speak for themselves. Ironically, the open assembly creates the possibility of disruption but also of domination. The assembly is transforming in opening up a place and space that creates the possibility for the periphery and the ‘popular’ to act and speak. However, the possibility looms large that those with social status, capital, and formed habitus (those accustomed to readily speaking for themselves and others) will dominate this place and space. Space, if not reconstructed with transforming practice and structures, is not enough, it becomes yet another captive space of the centre. The middle class and their social insecurities and ideological bickering have sadly dominated Julieta’s gathering and transforming space. Indeed, the voice of Milagros and other silent voices will only be heard, unmediated through that of Carlos and others, when the structures and practice that create and substantiate the peripheral back row are transformed. The utopic hope of the historical project is not an ungrounded idealism. It is the rejection of the failed present and the openness to receive and strategically to construct the transforming topia created in gathering.

Renovado is also a gathering community, although not expressly in a congregational style of governing as expressed through the practice of the assembly.

\[9\] Of course, more layers of the periphery could be examined such as the voice of children, the disabled, and the LGBT community.

The dissolution of the practice and the governing polity of the assembly among many Argentine Baptists is a formidable challenge to the transforming potential of gathering and confronting. The neo-Pentecostal roots of Renovado’s polity and praxis offers contradictory movements. Spiritual warfare, liberation, inner healing, and anointing are culturally appropriated and reconstructed practices that provide a place and space for the formation of subversive subjective and community identities that can challenge the structures of society. Spiritual warfare is a practice of confrontation of oppressive spirits that have authority over individuals, peoples, and places. Liberation is an exorcising practice of freeing individuals and places from psychological, sociocultural, and spiritual traumas and ataduras. Inner healing is a pseudo-psychological counselling practice that confronts past ataduras through seeking to free and bring integral transformation and healing. Anointing is a power base of the neo-Pentecostal practices that offer an empowering experience and transformative ideological lens (God has empowered me for ministry!). It underlines the constructive cultural possibility of these practices, an experience and ideological narrative that God is empowering individuals to free them to confront and serve. These practices are part of a larger evangelical, popular mobilizing movement that has not only changed the physiognomy of Argentine Baptists and evangelicalism, but has also gained significant social capital. Moreover, these practices demonstrate an evangelical parlance that includes the terminology of binding (atar) and loosing (liberar, soltar, desatar) in its lexicon. However, the stubborn dualistic neo-Pentecostal metanarrative does not readily lend itself to socio-cultural reflexivity. In fact, even the most socially- and politically-oriented practices fail to confront their proclivity to, and entrenchment in, colonial and neo-liberal narratives and structures of power. Moreover, the this dualist metanarrative assumes that freedom flows directly from the individual experience of these practices to society at large, bypassing the transforming potential of the local, gathering community. While a marriage between the spiritual, psychological, and socio-cultural spheres is a possibility, they fail to integrally interact because of a crippling apostolic hierarchy

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11 Again, liberation in this instance refers to a practice akin to the exorcism of demons.  
12 Spanish for ‘bindings’ and in this instance refers to spiritual curses and/or oppression.  
13 Interview no. 6. Miguel spoke of wanting to avoid being ‘bound’ to the spiritual inheritance of alcoholism coming from his father.
and a rugged individualist and spiritualist phenomenology. Neo-Pentecostal binding and loosing is shaped by dualist, individualist, and spiritualist interpretations of New Testament narratives of exorcism, rather than by the ecclesial embedded practice outlined in Matthew 18:15-20. The fear of a gathering space for open confrontation, reconciliation, and discernment dominates. Fittingly, the ecclesial community that began rejecting its ‘butcher shop’ beginnings now falls prey, because of the Apostolic Vision, to the fear of the carnage of the assembly: i.e., la carnicería. Nevertheless, it is the context of Renovado that has served as the space and place where believers gather to learn and do powerful and transformative practices. Renovado is an ecclesial community of many contradictions, but also one of great transformative potential.

7.4. Conclusion: The Local Church and Transformative Practice

Besides these significant qualifications to the gathering of Julieta and Renovado, they are (i.e., the ‘church’ is) transforming. In Chapter 5 I recounted the possibility that several socio-religious practices at Julieta and Renovado signalled a unification of sacramentality and social transformation, of culturally formed habits and values with social practice and organization for confrontation of the structures of society. I noted two examples: baptism and the Holy Meal. Although these are traditional Christian sacraments, I could also have chosen non-traditional practices (e.g., anointing, assembly, etc.). However, I decided to choose them instead of non-traditional practices in order to demonstrate the untraditionally accepted dialectic movement of transformation.

In the first instance, the testimony of the baptism of Milagros at Julieta forced an opportunity on the ecclesial community for confrontation, formation of unity, and discernment. When Milagros was baptized, the miracle of transubstantiation occurred; the local church became the confessed body of Christ through receiving (gifts) and responding (task) to the marriage of the sacramental and the socio-cultural: a ‘baptized’ Milagros can no longer sleep in the street while others sleep in their beds. Carlos realized that baptism is not simply a symbol but a powerful social practice that confronts, unifies, and demands discernment and action. While clearly the narrative of gathering in the name of Jesus and the confessed and repeated ethics
of the kingdom were influential in Carlos’ realization of the ecclesial community’s obligation to a newly baptized brother, it is important to note that it was the periphery that imposed the presence of Milagros on the ecclesial community. Lucho, the lone and often criticized voice from the silent back row, first befriended Milagros and invited him to Julieta, to become part of the back row. Like his almost weekly petitions to remember the poor, Lucho’s invitation to Milagros was another silent imposition of the margin on the centre. The periphery and popular quite literally imposed themselves on the ecclesial community, demanding a response.

At Renovado, an ecclesial community not noted for its cognitive theological descriptions, the situation was even more ambiguous. Here, numerous traditional ecclesial practices (i.e., the sacraments of baptism and the Holy Meal) were almost non-existent. Instead, the catalogue of neo-Pentecostal practices loomed large. Nevertheless, under the steady vision of Ricardo, the ecclesial community responded to the crisis of 2001 by opening a soup kitchen. An impromptu ecclesial practice – eating a common meal after serving the hungry – has arisen from a response to physical and social needs. This practice is not communally recognized as a sacrament or even theologicially interpreted as embryonic worship, but more mundanely viewed as a good way to finish off a long morning of service. However, the lunch table is a profoundly transforming space. Company is diverse, with Argentines, Paraguayans, Peruvians, Chileans, and women and men all gathered, and conversation is jovial and reflective. The practice is formative for communal identity and ethos and provides a space for fomenting subversive subjectivity that can counter the harmful effects of hierarchy and the unjust structures of society. Those present received and laboured for a Holy Meal of true giving (task) and receiving (gift). The mood was one of thanksgiving (Eucharist) and the meal eaten was more than a symbol, it was real food for real people, including the least of these. The intention is social in orientation, but clearly it is sacramental in form and practice.

These two practices offer no distinguishable ordo salutis but instead a dialectical process of transformation. In the case of Julieta, an ordinance transcends symbology, becoming an opportunity for confronting division, forming unity with the least of these, and discerning what it is to be church in the present. The demands of baptism and the narrative of the kingdom community are directly connected to the
reorganization of the ecclesial community in order to meet one another’s daily, physical needs. The sacrament is a social process; baptism is a socio-cultural practice that begins to break down divisions through the formation of new bonds of unity. In the case of Renovado, an explicit response to a social need provides the space for the formation of a new sacramental practice. The weight of the present overcame the lack of reflexivity and demanded a discerning response. The communal cafeteria has become part of the weekly rhythm and flow of Renovado and an opportune place for the periphery to disrupt the centre. While neither ecclesial community lays claim to sacramentalist understandings of ecclesial practice, both in essence have sacraments – practices that open a space for the task and gift of transformation. However, transformation does not flow out in the form of concentric circles from an ecclesial or sacramental centre, but instead is a reverberating and tense dialectical movement from the church outward and from the world and society inward. Baptism became a communal social practice at Julieta because of the pressure placed on the ecclesial community from the periphery, through Milagros. The Holy Meal only exists as a weekly practice because of the communal response to the physiological needs of others. Transformation is a two-way street. Transforming faith, as José Míguez Bonino has said, is both faithful and effective.¹⁴

This transforming possibility also exists in the determinate practices of the assembly, although the structure and practice must actively open space so that the Spirit may speak, critique, and condemn through the marginal, back row. Likewise, the neo-Pentecostal practices represent creative attempts to develop liberating spiritual practices and a materiality of salvation. However, a marriage between sacrament and social practice (i.e., spiritual and socio-cultural liberation) will only occur within the constructs of ecclesial community structures and practices that abandon the theological inheritance of a dualist cosmology and form a structure of charisms that open space for the periphery. Nonetheless, the possibility of transformation exists even amidst the testimonies of faithfulness and failure. The

¹⁴ Míguez Bonino, La Fe en Busca de Eficiencia; Davies, ‘Faith Seeking Effectiveness’. For a similar argument from Gustavo Gutiérrez in relation to love, see Gutiérrez, We Drink From Our Own Wells, pp. 107-13.
local church is transforming and is a laudable historical project for LAT in the present context where the body and spirit hunger and thirst for justicia (Mt. 5:6).\textsuperscript{15}

\footnote{I use the Spanish justicia for the Greek την δικαιοσύνην, so as to avoid having to choose between righteousness and justice, as in the case of English.}
APPENDIX I

Interview Schedules

Level I: Interviews of ‘Lay’ Leaders Involved in Social Ministries

History of personal involvement in ministry and history of ministry

- Why did you get involved in this church?
- How has it changed you? (Identity formation)
- Tell me briefly how _____ ministry began.
- Why did you get involved in _____ ministry?
- How has it changed you?
- How is participation in _____ related to your Christian faith and participation at _____ church? (Identity formation)
- What does _____ ministry do that no one else is?
- What unifies this local church? What unifies it to other churches or organizations?
- What is the church? (Attempt to understand the social definition of church)

Defining ‘positive social transformation’ and funding its location

- What are the biggest problems faced by people in this barrio/villa?
- What is good social change? What is bad social change? (Attempt to define positive social change)
- How is this church involved in these types of change? Impetus, Neutral Presence, Deterrent
- With whom should the church work for social change? (Attempt to identity other social worlds – organizations, civil politics – that the church works with for change)
- How is _____ ministry in bringing about good social change?
- With whom does _____ ministry work for social change?
  - other churches (Try to identify unity in this context)
  - other para-ecclesial organizations (Try to identity location of transformation)
  - other social movements – piquetero movement, agro-sector, police, city and state government (Identify relationship between church and these organizations)
- How important is _____ ministry to the life of _____ church?
- Is _____ ministry supported by all? (Find out who does not support it)
- Where does good social change occur – in the church, outside the church, both?
- How do Christians learn how to act? (Attempt to find out ‘Christian’ practices and ethical formation - Bible, teaching, social situation, etc.)
You said the church changed you in this _____ ways? What exactly were those things that you did in church that changed you?

You said _____ ministry changed you in these _____ ways? What exactly were those things that you did in church that changed you?

Is there such a thing as a Christian identity? If so, how is it formed?

What are some things (practices) that you have learned to do as a member of this church? (or another church?)

What are some things (practices) that you have learned to do as participant/leader in _____ ministry? (Attempt to see if these challenge ills of society)

How does this church confront violence in this barrio/villa?

- Did this church support or oppose the dictatorship in the 1970s and 1980s?
- Did this church oppose or support Carlos Menem and the Peronism of the 1990s?
- How did the church respond to the difficulties after December 2001?

I saw this ______. Why do you do this? How does it change people?

What is communion for you?

What is baptism for you?

What is more important for Christians to do

- _____ ministry or Sunday service
- Communion or preaching
- Baptism or bible reading
- Pray or feed the hungry
- _____ or _____

How does this church/ministry confront poverty and economic oppression?

Role of Women/Lay People/Racism:

- What sex are the leaders of the church? _____ ministry?
- What race / nationality are the leaders of the church? _____ ministry?
- Who should be able to teach? (Women? Bolivians? Paraguayans? etc.)
- Who should be able to serve communion? (Women? Bolivians? Paraguayans? etc.)
- Who should be able to baptize? (Women? Bolivians? Paraguayans? etc.)
- Who should be the leader in the family?

Terms: Answer what is it and how is the church involved in it?

- What is salvation?
- What is liberation?
- What is evangelism?
- What is reconciliation
Level II: Interviews of ‘Official’ Local Ecclesial Community Leaders

History of personal involvement in ministry and history of ministry

- Why did you become a pastor/priest/bishop, etc.? *(Attempt to identify how they see their role in the church and larger society)*
- Briefly tell me how this local church began.
- What are the biggest problems faced by urban Argentinos (i.e., Bonarenses)? Residents of this barrio/villa? *(Attempt to identify challenges to ecclesial identity and positive social change)*
- Tell briefly about the following:
  - Tell me about the challenge of poverty and socio-economic oppression faced by those in this barrio/villa. *(Attempt to determine how does/can this local church improve the socio-economic reality of those who live in this barrio/villa? - mention December 2001)*
  - Describe for me the role of women in this Church in comparison to society at large today.
  - Describe to me the role of laity in this church. (in relationship to hierarchy, sacraments, etc.)
    - *(For Catholics)* According to every CELAM conference, one of the major problems in Latin America is the shortage of priests.
    - *(For Evangelicals)* Is the evangelical focus on personal salvation and the priesthood of all believers evidenced in church hierarchy?
  - Describe for me the reality of class division in this church and barrio/villa. *(Touch on popular movements of 1960s and 1970s, piquetero movement since - el santiagazo of 1993, la pueblada of 1996, la plaza del aguante en Corrientes 1999, Radical K vs. agro-sector.)*
  - Describe what racism looks like in Buenos Aires today and how this church confronts it. *(Role that indigenous, Paraguayan, and Bolivian population plays in leadership, etc.)*
  - Describe for me the reality of violence in this barrio/villa and how this church confronts this.
- What unites this local church? What unites this church to other churches

Defining ‘positive social transformation’ and its ‘location’

- What is good social change? What is bad social change?
- Give me a brief history of this church’s involvement in good social change.
- Where does good social change occur? In the church, outside the church, both?
- With whom does this church work for social change? *(Attempt to identity other social worlds – organizations, civil politics – the church works with for change)*
- You mentioned _____ ministry (ies). Describe the relationship between this local church and that ministry (ies). *(Attempt to identify how ‘ecclesial’ these ministries are, how central they are to ecclesial identity, as well as key persons involved in them.)*
• How important is this ministry to the community?
• Is there anybody that does not support this ministry?
  ➢ How does _____ ministry help to bring about good social change?
  ➢ With whom does _____ ministry work for social change?
    • Other churches (Try to identify unity in this context)
    • Other para-ecclesial organizations (Try to identify location of transformation)
    • Other social movements – piquetero movement, agro-sector, police, city and state government (Identify relationship between church and these organizations)
  ➢ How do Christians in this church learn how they are to live?
  ➢ Does this church have an identity and culture of its own?
  ➢ How does this identity help bring forth good change and resist bad change? (Try to identify practices the church does to do change)
  ➢ How does the church know what ‘practices’ to do and how to do them? (Bible, teaching, social situation, etc.)?
    • Traditionally, the majority of the Western church has had two practices in common: communion and baptism. Are these socially and culturally transformative?
      ▪ Baptism
      ▪ Communion
  ➢ Does this church have any practices particular to it?
    • I saw this _____. Why do you do this? How does it change people?
  ➢ How does this church identity/practice challenge:
    • Poverty and Economic Oppression – (2001 recession)
    • Machismo
    • Hierarchy/Lay Division
    • Class Division
    • Racism
    • Violence (Dictatorship of 1970-80s)
  ➢ What is more important for good social change?
    • _____ ministry or Sunday service
    • Communion or preaching
    • Baptism or bible reading
    • _____ or _____
  ➢ Is the church political? (Attempt to define politics and how this meaning may affect understanding of social change)
Terms: Answer what it is and how the church is involved in it.

- What is salvation?
- What is liberation?
- What is evangelism?
- What is reconciliation
Level III: Interviews of Ecumenical and Hierarchical Ecclesial Leaders

Personal and Ecclesial History

- Why did you become a pastor/priest/bishop etc.?
- What is the church? What is its role in the world/society?
- What do you see is your role as a religious leader in the church? And, in the larger society?
- What are the biggest problems faced by Argentinos and Bonarenses? (Attempt to identify challenges to ecclesial identity and positive social change)
- Answer briefly each question (Impetus, Neutral, Deterrent)
  - Describe for me the reality of poverty and socio-economic oppression in Argentina. (Touch on the 2001 economic crisis)
  - Describe for me the role of women in the church in Argentina in comparison to society today.
  - Describe for me the role of laity in the church today.
    - (For Catholics) According to every CELAM conference, one of the major problems in Latin America is the shortage of priests.
    - (For Evangelicals) Is the evangelical focus on personal salvation and the priesthood of all believers evidenced in church hierarchy?
  - Describe for me the reality of class division in the Church and Society today. (Touch on popular movements of 1960s and 1970s and today’s piquetero movement)
  - Describe what racism looks like in Buenos Aires and how the church confronts it. (Role that indigenous, Paraguayan, and Bolivian population plays in leadership, etc.)
  - Describe for me the reality of violence in Buenos Aires and how the church confronts this.
- Tell me about the state of Christian unity. (Attempt to define Christian unity)

Defining ‘positive social transformation’?

- What is good social/cultural change? What is bad social/cultural change?
- How is good social change brought about and who brings it about? (Attempt to identify if they advocate macro-level or micro-level change or both, if entire structural change or simply modification [i.e. development] of present structures, if urban is intertwined with other contexts – industry, banking, ecological, argo-sector, etc.)
- How has the church historically been involved in such change? (1. Church and dictatorship of the 1970s to 1980s; 2. During the economic crisis leading up to and after December 2001; 3. During most recent radical K vs. agricultura crisis and piquetero movement)
- With whom does the church work to bring about such change? (Attempt to identify relationship between ecclesial context and other ‘social worlds’ and civic politics, i.e. society at large)
Does ‘good’ social change principally occur in or outside of the church?

How do Christians learn how to act? (Attempt to find out ‘Christian’ practices and ethical formation and how they know what to do - Bible, teaching, social situation, etc.)

Is there such a thing as a church/Christian identity or culture? If so, how is it formed? (What are the practices that the church/individuals does/do to form identity)

Does the Latin American/Argentine Church have any practices particular to it?

Traditionally, the majority of the Western church has had two practices in common: communion and baptism. Are these socially and culturally transformative?

- Baptism
- Communion

How does church identity and culture carry out or impede social change?

- Poverty and Economic Oppression: How can local churches help those who live in poverty?
- Machismo
- Hierarchy/Lay Division
- Class Division
- Racism
- Violence

Is Christian unity important for bringing about social change?

What is your opinion about the liberation theology movement?

Terms: Answer what it is and how the church is involved in it.

- What is salvation?
- What is liberation?
- What is evangelism?
- What is reconciliation
# APPENDIX II

## Interview Charts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Interview Schedule Level</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description of Individual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Andrés</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>19 Nov. 2008</td>
<td>He was a key lay leader in the ecclesial community who lived in the newly built apartment complex next to the church. He was in his late thirties and married to Magdalena.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Angelina</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>18 Nov. 2008</td>
<td>She worked in the kitchen for the after-school program and numerous other programs. She was Catholic before becoming evangelical and was fifty years old. She was modest and dedicated lots of time to the ecclesial community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Pastor Ricardo</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>29 Nov. 2008</td>
<td>He was the pastor of Renovado Community Centre as well as a computer science high school teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Magdelena</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>29 Nov. 2008</td>
<td>The ecclesial community first began in her mother’s house and she has been a key leader from the beginning. She was forty-five years old and had been at the church for eleven years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Luz</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>2 Dec. 2008</td>
<td>She was sixty-eight years old, had been in the church since 1996. She has been a Christian for twenty years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Miguel</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>6 Dec. 2008</td>
<td>He was thirty-six years old and a new convert. He came from a past with substance abuse and without having completed a high school education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Apostle Antonio</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>12 Dec. 2008</td>
<td>He was the pastor of the mother church of Renovado and the apostle that served as the direct authority over the ecclesial community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Interview Schedule Level</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Description of Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>18 Nov. 2008</td>
<td>A recovered drug addict who directed a drug rehabilitation centre connected to the church. He was very vocal about the need to reach out to the poor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Sabrina</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>19 Nov. 2008</td>
<td>She and her family have long lived in a slum. She used to attend Julieta and has recently returned through connecting with Carlos and an initiative to make and sell bread.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Cristian</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>20 Nov. 2008</td>
<td>He was a Paraguayan who moved to Argentina to attend culinary school. He was in his early twenties and came from a conservative church background.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>23 Nov. 2008</td>
<td>She was a single mother who studied at ISEDET and was a missionary in Bolivia before her divorce. She was seventy-five years old and was an active leader in the church.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Juan</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>24 Nov. 2008</td>
<td>Twenty-two year old theology student who came to the church during the height of the time of conflict. He came from a difficult family background.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Pastor Roberto</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>24 Nov. 2008</td>
<td>One of the voluntary pastors who was the son of North American missionaries. He was married to a deacon of the church and was very vocal about the need to serve the poor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Pastor Jorge</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>27 Nov. 2008</td>
<td>One of the voluntary pastors. He ran a construction company and grew up in the Wesleyan tradition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Marcos</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>9 Dec. 2008</td>
<td>He was a former drug addict that lived at the centre that Carlos runs and was active at Julieta</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
church. He was thirty-three years old.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description of Individual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Gérman</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>16 Dec. 2008</td>
<td>He was church deacon and an engineer with a prominent international construction company. He was of German descent and was forty-nine years old.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Roman Catholic Community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Interview Schedule Level</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description of Individual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>8 Nov. 2008</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>14 Dec. 2008</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>1 Dec. 2008</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>13 Dec. 2008</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>17 Dec. 2008</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>14 Dec. 2008</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>21 Dec. 2008</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Ecumenical Leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Interview Schedule Level</th>
<th>Date (s)</th>
<th>Description of Individual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>C. René Padilla</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>20 Dec. 2008</td>
<td>A noted Progressive Evangelical and Baptist leader, who was one of the founding members of the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18a</td>
<td>Pablo Deiros</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>27 Nov. 2008</td>
<td>A noted neo-Pentecostal and Baptist pastor and historian. He was the rector of the <em>Seminario Internacional Teológico Bautista</em> at time of interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18b</td>
<td>Pablo Deiros</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>23 Dec. 2008</td>
<td>Same as above.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Raúl Bermudez</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>20 Nov. 2008</td>
<td>A Roman Catholic lay person who was involved in the Argentine Liberation Theology movement as well as lay participant in the <em>Villero</em> priest movement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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