

P E R S P E C T I V A S

HISPANIC THEOLOGICAL INITIATIVE

THIRTEENTH ISSUE – SPRING 2016

Ulrike R. M. Guthrie, associate editor
Francisco J. Pelaez-Diaz, associate editor
Grace Vargas, associate editor

*Perspectivas is a publication of the Hispanic Theological Initiative,
funded by Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey.*

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THIRTEENTH ISSUE, SPRING 2016

ONLINE RE-LAUNCH ISSUE

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P E R S P E C T I V A S

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Perspectivas: Occasional Papers is a publication of the Hispanic Theological Initiative and is made possible by Princeton Theological Seminary.

To celebrate our online debut, we are waiving subscription fees for the first two issues of 2016. Happy reading and thank you for your support!

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P E R S P E C T I V A S

SPRING 2016

From the Editor

Since 1998, *Perspectivas* has offered the Latino/a theological community a space for the innovative contributions of Latino/a scholars in theology and religion. It serves as a critical resource to stimulate further dialogue and research in theological and religious education. A printed peer-review journal through 2009, with this Spring 2016 issue HTI is pleased to move *Perspectivas* to an online (and bilingual!) home. We expect that this online venue is what our readership has been asking and waiting for, and it will continue to offer a channel to showcase scholarship that is much needed in today's American Academy and beyond.

Since our last issue our community has said goodbye to exceptional scholars and dear friends – Alejandro García-Rivera (1951 - 2010), Ada María Isasi-Díaz (1943 - 2012), Rubem Alves (1933 - 2014), and Otto Maduro (1945 - 2013). As we move forward it is our hope that their lives and scholarship will not be forgotten which is why we are pleased that this issue includes several articles that engage some of their work and others that serve as tributes that remind us of their impact not only as scholars, but also as beloved friends. It is our hope that our community continue to remember them in forthcoming issues.

In September of 2014, Princeton Theological Seminary held its annual *Herencia* Lectures in celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month. On that occasion, Leopoldo Cervantes-Ortiz delivered his paper, “*A Theology of Human Joy: The Liberating-Poetic-Ludic Theology of Rubem Alves*,” tracing the history and impact of the late Brazilian poet, author, theologian, and one of the founders of liberation theology in its Protestant Latin American embodiment. Cervantes-Ortiz traces Alves's trajectory from doctoral student in theology under M. Richard Shaull to his transition to theopoetics which catapulted him to become one of the greatest literary writers of Latin America. We are pleased to publish this important work (available in both Spanish and English) as part of this inaugural online issue.

As a response to Cervantes-Ortiz, Raimundo César Barreto Jr. picks up Alves's intellectual trajectory highlighting the theme of exile as a constant presence in much of Alves's work. Barreto's reading of Alves in, “*Rubem Alves and the Kaki Tree: the trajectory of an exile thinker*,” contributes a fresh perspective to the notable scholar's prolific career as having deep roots in his navigation of space and being between the American academy and the Latin American people he deeply loved.

Engaging the work of Ada María Isasi-Díaz in, “*Embodied Love: Explorations on the imago Dei in the Caribbean Latina Theology of Ada María Isasi-Díaz*,” Elaine Padilla

articulates a thoughtful witness to how Isasi-Díaz's concept of 'fully human' raises constructive challenges to classical Christian theological explorations of the *imago Dei*. In memory of her former graduate professor, Padilla points readers to an underexplored aspect of Isasi-Díaz's work (alongside other Caribbean Latina theologians) and maps a way forward for feminist work on bodies and embodied love as our ability to "image God as God images us."¹

In tribute to late philosopher and sociologist of religion, Otto Maduro, Nestor Medina and Matilde Moros both offer powerful testimonies of the prodigious and beloved scholar, who was professor of world Christianity and Latin American Christianity at Drew University's Theological School and also served as the 2012 president of the American Academy of Religion (AAR). In, "*Entre (Otros) Conocimientos and the Struggle for Liberation: Remembering the Legacy of Otto Maduro (1945-2013)*," Medina focuses on Maduro's vocational versatility and his unique ability to cross not only disciplinary boundaries in the academy but also denominational boundaries within the church. Moros highlights the themes of religion as the potential locus of both liberation and oppression to be found in Maduro's work in, "*Otto Maduro: Maestro de cómo ser amigo*." Calling Maduro's work on religion and Marxism from a Latin American perspective, 'timely,' Moros demonstrates that among his many strengths as a philosopher and scholar, Maduro's shining attribute was his ability to stay with the pulse of the people, lands, and movements he studied.

In the same spirit of lifting up voices still seldom heard in the academy, church, and society at-large, Xochitl Alvizo's, "*The Listening Guide: A Practical Tool for Listening Deeply to the Body of Christ*," offers an important practical tool for critical theological reflection on the church. Of interest to both academics and ministerial leaders alike, Alvizo outlines what her doctoral research on Emerging Church discovered and how 'deep listening' can serve as a pathway forward in the corrective journey toward a theology that includes all members of the body of Christ.

As you encounter the work of these scholars, and the scholars that they engage, we hope that you will become more aware of, and employ, the rich resources available in Latino and Latin American scholarship in your own work in the academy or the church. As, locally, our nation continues to change demographically and, globally, the church continues to grow in the Southern Continents it is these voices that are vital, and can no longer remain merely ancillary, to a complete theological witness for the church and the world.

Grace Vargas
Associate Editor

¹ Padilla, Elaine. "Embodied Love: Explorations on the Imago Dei in the Caribbean Latina Theology of Ada María Isasi-Díaz." *Perspectivas* 13 (2016): page 81.
<http://perspectivasonline.com/downloads/embodied-love-explorations-on-the-imago-dei-in-the-caribbean-latina-theology-of-ada-maria-isasi-diaz/>.

A Theology of Human Joy: The Liberating-Poetic-Ludic Theology of Rubem Alves

Leopoldo Cervantes-Ortiz

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Abstract

Rubem Alves was one of the Protestant Latin American founders of Liberation Theology. He exerted an intense teaching thanks to his creativity and ability to transform dense theoretical aspects into impeccable expressive pieces. Later, when he opted for what now is known as Theopoetics, he deployed a theological and literary production that transformed completely his writing and projected him to ambits that he never imagined. This article intends to describe those changes that made Alves one of the best writers that have emerged in the Presbyterian circles in Latin America.

• VEA LA PÁGINA 27 PARA LEER ESTE ARTICULO EN ESPAÑOL •

1. The roots of a new theological language

Father... Mother... of tender eyes,
I know that you are invisible in all things.
May your name be sweet to me, the joy of my world.
Bring us the good things that give you pleasure:
a garden, fountains,
children,
bread and wine,
tender gestures, hands without weapons,
bodies hugging each other...
I know you want to meet my deepest wish,
the one whose name I forgot... but you never forget.
Bring about your wish that I may laugh.

May your wish be enacted in our world,
as it throbs inside you.
Grant us contentment in today's joys:
bread, water, sleep...
May we be free from anxiety.
May our eyes be as tender to others
as yours to us.
Because,
if we are vicious,
we will not receive your kindness.
And help us
that we may not be deceived by evil wishes.
And deliver us
From the ones who carry death inside their eyes.
Amen.²

1. First step: origins and contrasts

In May of 1968 (what a chronological reference!), no one would have imagined that the same pen that wrote a dense and provocative dissertation, *Toward a theology of liberation: an exploration of the encounter between the languages of humanistic messianism and messianic humanism*, would also write, two decades later, these words, a mixture of poetry, prayer, mysticism, and theology.³ Refusing to be a strict or academic theological exercise, Rubem Alves expressed in these words all his pilgrimage in reaching, with texts like this one, the climax of a style dominated by poetry and a completely anti-dogmatic deepening, something that had been announced quite dimly in his first works. Here one can perceive the way in which he had read Nietzsche, Guimarães Rosa, Cecília Meireles, Octavio Paz, Fernando Pessoa, Paul Valéry, Adélia Prado and tens of authors, men and women, who marked him forever. Before coming to Princeton, “next to the rivers of Babylon” (in Union Seminary, New York), in 1964 (the year of the military coup against João Goulart), Alves had drafted a theological interpretation of the revolutionary processes of his country, a work that was only published in the twenty-first century, forty years later. With this work, he introduced and brought into theological reflection the polemical theme of revolution, a topic that his mentor Richard Shaull was engaging at the time, precisely when the movement Church and Society in Latin America was surfacing. Alves was forced to return to the United States because he was being persecuted by both the military and his own church.

To be sure, Alves's background did not suggest, not even in his dreams, that something like this would happen given that he had been born in a rather conservative Presbyterian family. Only his theological studies, next to another Princetonian, Richard

² R. Alves, “Our Father... Our Mother”, in *Transparencies of eternity*. [Transparências da eternidade, 2002] Translation: Jovelino and Joan Ramos. Miami, Convivium Press, 2010, p. 11.

³ Alves's interest in prayer is made evident by his magnificent translation of *Orações por um mundo melhor*, written by the American theologian Walter Rauschenbusch (São Paulo, Paulus, 1997), originally published in 1910 under the title *Prayers of a Social Awakening* (see complete text: <https://archive.org/details/prayersofsocialaoorausiala>). Alves later recorded several prayers in a memorable disc: Paulus-Nossa Cultura, 2007.

Shaull,⁴ could offer a glimpse of what Alves was going to accomplish with such quality and exuberance. Alves is one of the greatest figures of contemporary Brazilian literature, in addition, of course, to the place he reached in the theological and intellectual realm. As a young man, Alves embraced and fought for an ideological militancy that led him to write notable texts, essential in understanding the spiritual climate of those days. The young Alves would become someone who, without thinking that he had lost time, came late to poetry, even though many of his essays, in reclaiming the human body, imagination, eroticism, and magic, were already opening the door to a new form of expression, one that he himself did not suspect. A frustrated pianist, the music of poetry and literature waited for him until they possessed him in body and soul. As a member of a generation of Latin American Protestant intellectuals, among which we must include José Míguez Bonino, Emilio Castro, Hiber Conteris, Jovelino Ramos y Julio de Santa Ana, among others, Alves undertook a revolutionary commitment that placed his theological work in a new arena for the subcontinent, in the forefront. In this respect, Luis Rivera-Pagán explains:

Liberation theology was the unforeseen *enfant terrible* in the academic and ecclesial realms of theological production during the last decades of the twentieth century. It brought to the conversation not only a new theme —liberation— but also a new perspective on doing theology and a novel way of referring to God’s being and action in history. Its project to reconfigure the interplay between religious studies, history, and politics became a meaningful topic of analysis and dialogue in the general theological discourse. Many scholars perceive in its emergence a drastic epistemological rupture, a radical change in paradigm, a significant shift in both the ecclesial and social role of theology.⁵

Rivera-Pagán consistently underscores Alves’s participation in the origins of liberation theology and the foundational role of his doctoral dissertation, including also the role of his mentor, Richard Shaull. Rivera Pagán refers to some aspects of his work that have become classic, for example, the change of title when Alves’s dissertation was published by a Jesuit publishing house:

⁴ See R. Alves., “O Deus do furacão” in R. Alves, ed., *De dentro do furacão. Richard Shaull e os primórdios da teologia da libertação*. Rio de Janeiro, Sagarana-CLAI-CEDI-Programa Ecuménico de Podgradação em Ciências da Religião, 1985, 19-24. When Shaull died, Alves continued to honor him: “I don’t know any other who in so short a time cast abroad so many seeds. It is impossible to narrate all that he accomplished. But let me say that no one who follows the opposite direction can expect impunity. Prophets are cursed beings. Nietzsche, another man who went in the opposite direction, knew the Price that one pays for seeing what others do not see. He said, ‘The Pharisees have to crucify those who invent their own virtue.’ Those who do not see, hate those who do. Richard Shaull was crucified. The churches couldn’t cope with him: he was expelled from Colombia by the Catholics, and expelled from Brazil by the Protestants...”, R. Alves, “...Era un cadáver lleno de mundo...” (“It was a corpse full of world...”, César Vallejo), in *Correio Popular*, Campinas, Brasil, 10 de noviembre de 2002; English version: “Through the eyes of Dick Shaull”, in *Reformed World*, vol. 56, 3, September 2006, 265-268.

⁵ L. Rivera-Pagán, “God the Liberator: Theology, History, and Politics”, in B. Valentin, ed., *In Our Own Voices. Latino/a Renditions of Theology*. Maryknoll, Orbis, 2010, www.gcsynod.org/contact/documents/GodtheLiberator-LRivera-Pagan.pdf, 1.

In fact, the first extensive monograph that focused on historical and social liberation as the central hermeneutical key to conceptualize the Christian faith was the doctoral dissertation of Rubem Alves, a Brazilian Presbyterian. In May of 1968, Alves defended successfully his dissertation at Princeton Theological Seminary. [...] Alves wrote it under the direction of Richard Shaull, who for a good number of years had been working in theological education in Latin America, first in Colombia and later in Brazil, and who was crucial for the development of a liberationist theology in Protestant Latin American circles. [...]

Alves's dissertation is a powerful text, written in a splendid literary style. It was published as a book in 1969, two years before Gutiérrez's, but with a significant change in the title: *A Theology of Human Hope*. Apparently, the publishers believed that the concept of "hope", with its obvious connotations to the writings of Jürgen Moltmann, would be more commercially attractive or relevant than "liberation." Yet, despite the change of title, Alves conceptualizes the temporal dialectics proper to theological language in terms of a historical politics of liberation.⁶

Harvey Cox, in the prologue, welcomed Alves a new, refreshing, and rebellious voice for the context of his days: "Beware, all ideologists, theologians, and theorists of the affluent, so-called 'developed' world! The 'Third World' of enforced poverty, hunger, powerlessness, and growing rage has found a ringing theological voice. Rubem Alves [...] speaks with an authority we cannot avoid noticing, not just in discussions about development and revolution, but wherever we assess the place of Christian faith in our convulsive contemporary world".⁷ In this book he dialogues sharply with the theologies of Barth, Bultmann, and Moltmann, criticizing them because they are not rooted in concrete human circumstances and because they do not adequately express the liberating discourse needed by popular communities.⁸ The fundamental ethical principle, which he takes from Paul Lehmann, is "how human life can remain human in the world." In this way, he engages in a creative dialogue two kinds of discourse which lead to human liberation: messianic humanism and humanistic messianism. Both point to a project of liberation which includes not only the material but also the spiritual and corporal realms. The last part of the book explores the possibilities of a new language for faith and theology, which vindicates joy and play. In this line of reflection he follows very closely Bonhoeffer's concept of *polyphony*. With this work, Alves established himself as one of the founders of liberation theology, for in many ways he anticipated the future works of authors like Gustavo Gutiérrez and Hugo Assmann. He met the former in Switzerland in 1969, at a conference on Theology and Development, and they agreed that was not the correct formulation, since the conditions in the continent depended

⁶ *Ibid*, 7.

⁷ H. Cox, "Foreword", in R. Alves, *A theology of human hope*. Washington D.C., Corpus, 1969, p. vii.

⁸ J. Moltmann reacted hardly to these asseverations: "Rubem A. Alves (*Cristianismo, opio o liberación*, Salamanca, 1973), criticizes the 'theology of hope' affirming that is too trascendental in its determination of the promise and too negative to make a judgement about the historical present. But Alves will end up talking about the divine promise and the language of liberty standing more here of 'theology of hope'", "An open letter to José Míguez Bonino", in Alfred Henelly, ed., *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History*. Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1990, 196.

rather on the dynamic of oppression-liberation, the discussion of which was very much in vogue in those years.

Of course, we cannot omit referring to the “Princetonian flavor” of the first moments of that theology, an aspect that Bruno Mattos Linhares has carefully addressed. Linhares, for example, says: “Alves prefers life be judged not by the way it fits into the social system or as a function of the structures of social organization; rather, he seeks to follow the example of Jesus, who was ‘a master in the art of subverting the rules of sanity and insanity.’ He seeks, in other words, to imagine the birth of a new culture. Since the world is not yet complete because God is still exercising creative powers, the present time of captivity is not a time of birth but a time of the conception of a community of faith”.⁹

Others, of course, have assessed and reassessed his work: in Mexico (Roberto Oliveros Maqueo,¹⁰ maybe the first complete study on his theology), Central America (Juan Jacobo Tancara¹¹), Brazil (Saulo Marcos de Almeida,¹² António Vidal Nunes, the author of an extensive bio-bibliography,¹³ Iuri Andreas Reblin,¹⁴ among others), in the United States,¹⁵ Netherlands (Tjeerd de Boer¹⁶) and Sweden (Ulf Borelius¹⁷). A personal testimony of the Rev. Sonia Gomes Mota, Alves’s disciple, summarizes Alves’s trajectory within and beyond various church traditions:

Rubem Alves was part of a group of pastors, male and female leaders, who reflected and organized different ways of being a Reformed church. This process led to the creation of the United Presbyterian Church of Brazil (IPU), now a member of the WCC. With his erudition, his ecumenical and social commitment, he helped draft the founding documents that are a basis of the IPU. He was not

⁹ B.J. Linhares, “Princeton Theological Seminary and the birth of liberation theology”, *Koinonia: The Princeton Theological Seminary Graduate Forum*, 19, 2007, 85-105; www.ptsem.edu/uploadedFiles/Seminary_Relations/Communications_and_Publications/News_Room/Alum_News/Koinonia-LiberationPTS.pdf, 20-21.

¹⁰ *La humanización como creación y Esperanza: la antropología teológica de Rubem Alves*. Roma, Gregorian University. Doctoral dissertation, 1978.

¹¹ J.J. Tancara, *El jardín bajo el crepúsculo: el cuerpo y la nostalgia en la teología de Rubem Alves*. Masters degree dissertation. San José, Latin American Biblical University, 2007.

¹² *O pensamento teológico de Rubem Alves. Reflexões sobre o papel da linguagem e da corporeidade*. (The theological thought of Rubem Alves. Reflections on the function of language and corporality). São Bernardo dos Campos, Methodist University of São Paulo. Master’s dissertation, June 1998.

¹³ *Rubem Alves e a educação dos sentidos. Um estudo dos seus pressupostos filosóficos e pedagógicos*. (Rubem Alves and the education of senses. A study on its philosophical and pedagogic premises.) Faculty of Education, Unuiversity of São Paulo, Doctoral dissertation, 2001.

¹⁴ *Outros cheiros, outros sabores... o pensamento teológico de Rubem Alves*. (Another smells, another flavors... The theological thought of Rubem Alves.) São Leopoldo, Oikos, 2009.

¹⁵ Glen B. Peterson, *Paradigms of hopes: a comparison of Ernest Bloch and Rubem Alves*. Faculty of Religions Studies, Mc Gill University. Master of Arts dissertation, 1974; Ruy Otávio Costa, *Self-critical theology: parallels and affinities between the Frankfurt School of critical theology and public theology of Rubem Alves*. Harvard Divinity School, 1984; Sergio Gouvea Franco, *The concepts of liberation and religion in the work of Rubem Alves*. Rt College, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, Master’s degree dissertation, 1987; and R.O. Costa, *Towards a Latin America Protestant ethic of liberation: A comparative study of the writings of Rubem Alves and Jose Miguez Bonino from the perspective of the sources and substance of their social etchics*. Doctoral dissertation, Boston University, 1990.

¹⁶ *Hoe zullen wij over God spreken?: de poëtische theologie van het alledaagse van Rubem Alves*. (How will we talk about God? The everyday life in the poetic theology of Rubem Alves.) Free University of Amsterdam, MA Thesis, 2010.

¹⁷ *Källkritik och befrielseologi: Ett bidrag till forskningen om befrielseologins uppkomst*. Uppsala University, 2005.

interested in giving us moral lessons or transmitting the absolute and indisputable truth. As a good theologian, philosopher and educator, he was more interested in making us think, reflect and question the immutable truths of theology and urged us to envision new possibilities and new ways of living our faith. Rubem led us to deserts and invited us to be gardeners and planters of hope.¹⁸

Alves was one of the chief participants in the renewal of Latin American theology. The stages of his thought are distinguished first by a search for the activity of God in history and then by an investigation of the ludic and erotic possibilities of human life in the world. In several occasions Alves made an attempt to explain its biblical and theological roots, as well as the way in which he moved to the other style, particularly in the re-editions of his former books. In 2010, he attributed this shift to his change in audience: “Mine was an academic education. However, there came a time when I ceased to find enjoyment in writing for my peers. I began to write for children and ordinary people, playing with humor and poetry. That’s what the following short texts are all about. They are like snapshots, rather than reasoning”.¹⁹ If he formerly sought to appeal to the conscience of his readers, convince them to join his ideological struggle, now his purpose was different: “I don’t want to prove anything. I just want to portray. There is a thread that assembles them as pearls in a necklace. Yet each text is a complete unit. Through them I try to say what I have come to feel about the sacred. I don’t ask the readers to agree with me. I only ask that they permit themselves to promenade through unknown woods. [...] What really matters is not what I write, but what you will think when provoked by what I write”.²⁰ He suggested something quite similar when in 1990 he was invited to speak to an audience that was expecting to listen to the pioneer of liberation theology without knowing that he had reinvented himself entirely: the orientation of his trajectory had changed and was in search of a deeper change from the perspective of another sense of being: “The Rubem Alves of the theology of liberation, the one who spoke about action, changed. I became different. *I believe God has strange ways of doing things. One of them is turning them upside down.* I decided to accept the risk of playing the role of the jester. [...]”.²¹ For this reason, Alves must be recognized as one of the initiators of theopoetics, even though this concept was born in another environment and was created from another perspective.²²

2. Second step: conversion to imagination

¹⁸ Theodore Gill, “The ecumenical movement remembers Rubem Alves, 1933-2014”, July 24th, 2014, in World Council of Churches, www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/the-ecumenical-movement-remembers-rubem-alves-1933-2014.

¹⁹ R. Alves, “Introduction”, in *Transparencies...*, 9.

²⁰ *Idem*.

²¹ R. Alves, “From liberation theologian to poet: a plea that the Church move from ethics to aesthetics, from doing to beauty”, in *Church and State*, 83, may-june 1993, 20-21. Emphasis added.

²² Cf. “Theopoetics: Longing and Liberation”, en L.M. Getz and R.O. Costa, eds., *Struggles for solidarity. Liberation theologies in tension*. Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1992, pp. 159-171; and L. Callid Keefe-Perry, “Renewal and nets: Amos Wilder and Rubem Alves”, *Way to Water: A Theopoetics Primer*. Eugene, Oregon, Wipf and Stock, 2014, 32-50.

The imaginative emphasis of the theology of Alves began to stand out with clarity in *Tomorrow's Child* (1972; *Hijos del mañana*, 1976, *Gestão do futuro*, 1986), a transitional book which was the fruit of a course on ethics that he gave at Union Seminary. This book was largely misunderstood by his colleagues, since in it he carries out an imaginative analysis of the dominant technological system, beginning with its own cultural premises. One of his metaphors consists in comparing the present world with the large dinosaurs, whose voracity prevented them from surviving, as opposed to lizards which survive until the present time. Back in Brazil, he resigned his membership in the church in 1974 and began his career as university professor. In that year he published "From Paradise to the Desert" (original title: "Confessions: on theology and life"), a profound self-critical confession about his ecclesiastical and theological experience.²³ There, Alves emphasized his vital situation midst the social and ecclesiastical context. His words are hard and sensitive:

Horizons become different according to the vantage point from which we look at them. The new vision of our space, our time, and our lives unveiled to our eyes a Bible that had been hidden hitherto. What a discovery it was for us to see that the Bible is at home in the world! We began to perceive that from its beginning to its end there is an unfaltering celebration of life and its goodness. It is good to be alive, it is good to be flesh and blood, it is good to be in the world. Suddenly the Calvinist obsession with the glory of God seemed to us profoundly inhuman and anti-biblical. Is not God himself concerned with the happiness of man? Is not man His ultimate concern? Is not God a humanist, in the sense that man is the only object of His passion? Bonhoeffer became our companion. We read him with amazement [...]²⁴

And he concludes:

So what? Is there any way out of this situation? One thing I know for sure. In the business of living, one must not live by certainties —but by visions, risks, and passion. Maybe this is what Paul had in mind, when he said that we are saved by hope, *i.e.*, by that which we do not see. The tragedy of our decadent civilization, it seems to me, is due to its fear of losing itself. This is the sin of both nations and individuals. It is tragic to see the sin of nations —their arrogance of power— being reenacted in the sphere of individuals, the absolutization of one's own experience. And when we are entrapped in our heart which is bent upon itself, can we have any hope of rebirth and new life?²⁵

Later he studied psychoanalysis in depth. The enemy of realism, who fought intense battles, unknown to many, was far gone.²⁶ Alves came to embrace the theological

²³ R. Alves, "Confessions: on theology and life", *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, XXIX, 314, 3-4, Spring-Summer, 1974, 181-193.

²⁴ R. Alves, "Confessions...", 183.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 193.

²⁶ R. Alves, "Christian realism: ideology of the establishment", *Christianity and Crisis*, 33, September 7th, 1973, 173-176.

and poetical insight that God fixes human lives, his in particular, like someone who plays with glass beads, a metaphor that he took from the novel *The Glass Bead Game* by the German writer Hermann Hesse. The image that he developed in several occasions is that of those beads (his torn life and personality) submerged in the water that God takes and returns in the form of a new and wondrous necklace: “This is why I need God, to heal my nostalgia. This is how I imagine him: like a fine nylon thread that looks for my lost beads in the bottom of the river and then returns them to me in a necklace”.²⁷

The late but enriching encounter with poetry

It's been a number of years since I lost my academic respectability. No one took it from me, but one day, for reasons unknown to me, something happened to me. I don't know what happened, but suddenly I found myself absolutely incapable of thinking, speaking, and writing analytically. I was possessed and remain possessed by the poetic form whenever I write. I don't like it because it creates a lot of problems in scientific and academic circles; those people do not believe that poetry is something serious; I believe, however, that it is the most serious of things: I believe God is poetry. If I could offer a new translation of John's text: “And the Word became flesh”, I would say, “And a Poem became flesh”.²⁸

Certainly, Rubem Alves's access to poetry occurred late in his life, but it became a definitive, enriching, and rather pleasing encounter. His previous lines attest to how, at a certain point in his life, Alves experienced a “poetic turn” that impacted the totality of his thought, in every way. Even the way his writing was oriented, without looking to write poems as such, implied a new break, but in this case the “coup” of the “poetic form” became decisive because it allowed him to channel in it the richness of his theological and educational legacy. Side by side to his permanent concern, poetry accompanied him constantly and never left him; on the other hand, the knowledge of the authors that had marked him enlightened his new work profoundly.

It is difficult to date the moment of the encounter, but by the late 1980's, he had made clear his new situation and time reaffirmed that inner process of change. He written about it in a brief chronicle from *Quarto de badulaques* (*Room of trinkets*; 2003; Spanish: 2009, my translation, a really musing about many themes where he practices a very personal journey. First, the shock of what happened is manifested: “I discovered poetry lately, after having forty years. What a shame! So much lost time! Poetry is one of my greatest sources of joy and wisdom. As [Gaston] Bachelard said: “Poets give us a great happiness of words...”²⁹ I could say that after an entire life poetry arrived to him too late, but he didn't feel that way.

²⁷ R. Alves, *Lições de feitiçaria*, 56.

²⁸ R. Alves, “Cultura de la vida”, in Simón Espinosa, comp., *Hacia una cultura de la paz*. Caracas, CLAI-Comisión Sudamericana de Paz-Nueva Sociedad, 1989, p. 15. Emphasis added. This text was presented in a gathering sponsored by the two publishing institutions, April 1989. I'm in debt with Arturo Arce Villegas e Israel Flores Olmos for the access to it.

²⁹ R. Alves, “Poesía”, en *Cuarto de cachivaches*. México, Ediciones Dabar, 2009, 89.

Immediately afterwards he directs the hypothetical reader: "Because of this I ask you, Do you read poetry? If you do not, try to do it. Change the television programs for poetry." And he adds a series of creative observations about the extensive prejudices about its comprehension. "If you tell me that you do not understand poetry, I will applaud: Good! Only fools believe that they understand it! Only speakers have the pretensions to understand poetry!" Afterwards, he vehemently exposes what he understands as its purpose through several examples and a concrete proposal: "Poetry is not for that. It is to be seen. Read the poem and try to see what it paints! Do you need to understand a mole? A cloud? A tree? The sea? It is enough to see it. Seeing, without understanding, is happiness! Read poetry so that your eyes open." For Alves, reading a poem is like learning to watch; it is an initiatory experience, almost mystical. And at that point, he offers his specific recommendations, some of the names that resulted in being significant in his path as a poetry reader. The order in which they appear is not random in any way, though in this occasion he only mentioned Portuguese speaking authors: Cecília Meireles (1901-1964) and Adélia Prado (1935) in first place, authors whose work he cited persistently. Alberto Caeiro, a heteronym of the Portuguese Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935), with whom he identified a great deal for his lightness and pantheistic tendencies. Mário Quintana (1906-1994), Lya Luft (1938), Maria Antônia de Oliveira (1964), whom he read during an earlier period. This is a list already filtered through the years and enriched by long periods of reading in which he was accompanied by many friends at a weekly gathering in Campinas. "Read poetry in order to see better. Read poetry to be calm. Read poetry in to beautify yourself. Read poetry to learn how to listen. Have you thought, perhaps, that you speak too much?" In this way he concludes the chronicle, using an inviting tone, kind and firm at the same time.

In a memorable lecture from 1981, Alves bitterly complained of the null protestant presence in the literature of his country, something inexplicable given the antiquity of the historical churches and the acceptable level of culture that had characterized them. His words were sharp/punctilious and hard:

I might have hoped that Protestantism should have made some contribution to Brazilian literature. I look for a great romance, a great novel... in vain [...] It so happens that literature cannot survive this didactic obsession, because literature is aesthetic, contemplative. Its value is in direct relationship to its capacity to produce structural paradigms through which the hidden fractures and daily links are seen.

Protestant literati cannot escape the witchery of their habits of thought. Their novels are disguised sermons or Sunday school lessons. In the end the grace of God always triumphs, believers are rewarded, and impiety is punished. There is no need to read the last chapter.³⁰

³⁰ R. Alves, "The Protestant Principle and its denial", in D. Kirkpatrick, ed., *Faith born in the struggle for life*. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1988, 214.

From there, when he finally transformed his style, approximately in 1983, a little after publishing *La teología como juego (Theology as Play)* y *Creo en la resurrección del cuerpo* (English: *I Believe in the Resurrection of the Body*), he apparently himself assumed the work of overcoming his previous style in order to fully enter the literary field. In his first books, poetry was totally absent and it is not until *¿Qué es la religión?* (What is Religion?) (1981), and above all *Poesía, profecía, magia (Poetry, Prophecy, and Magic)* (1983), that he finally made the jump towards a distinctive poetic expression in a definitive form. In *¿Qué es la religión? (What is Religion?)*, Alves cites texts and poems by Archibald McLeish (United States, 1892-1982), Cecilia Meireles and the visionary English writer William Blake (1757-1827).

From Archibald McLeish, referring to those who build things through words, he remembers the following phrase: "A poem should be palpable and mute like a round fruit; it should not have words like the flight of the birds, it should not mean anything but rather simply...be." From Meireles, he includes this quote: "On one hand, the eternal star, and on the other the uncertain vacancy..." speaking about the search for the meaning of life. And from Blake, there are these verses: "To see a world in a grain of sand / and a heaven in a wild flower / hold infinity in the palm of your hand / and eternity in an hour", which he would take up again many times (up to using it as a title for two of his books), concerning "the ineffable sensation of eternity and infinity, of communion with something that transcends us, that surrounds us and contains us, as if it was a maternal uterus of cosmic dimensions." In that book it is still notable the shyness with which he refers to the poets, perhaps because he still did not feel totally comfortable when he tackled them.

In 1990 he was invited by the University of Birmingham, England, to deliver the Edward Cadbury Lectures. The little book (80 pages) that was published the same year, and whose title was *The poet, the warrior, the prophet (El poeta, el guerrero, el profeta)*, would become the base for those lectures. The lectures became the beginning of a work that evolved over time and became *Lições de feitiçaria. Meditações sobre a poesia (Lessons of Sorcery. Meditations about poetry)* in 2003, after the publication of the Portuguese version in 1992. That book contains the quintessence of what the author developed in his whole life about human realities influenced by a poetic perspective. He was about to discover T.S. Eliot (1888-1965), a great poet from the United States, but raised at United Kingdom, Nobel Prize winner in 1948, who would shake him up even more, and Octavio Paz, who would complete his esthetic panorama through his ideas exposed in the book *El arco y la lira (The Bow and the Lyre)*.

Theology and poetry in strong dialogue: The poet, the warrior, the prophet (1990, 2000)

The poet, the warrior, the prophet is a magnificent mix of attitudes towards life that, in the writing cauldron of Rubem Alves resulted in an stupendous stew, because on top of everything else, it is illustrated with the works by M.C. Escher. The first chapter, an inquiry about the presence of the word, emerges from the contemplation of a whitmanian spider, wandering through the Variaciones Goldberg (Goldberg Variations), of Bach, encountering Mallarmé, and landing in the very human need (and practice) of unlearning; all this irradiated by the influence of the pessimist poet T.S. Eliot and his

vision of the hidden Word by the contemporary uproar in the “Choruses from The Rock” (1934), which is a dramatic poem in which he puts his finger in the wound:

The endless cycle of idea and actions
Endless invention, endless experiment
Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness;
Knowledge of speech, but not of silence
Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Verb.
All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance,
All our ignorance brings us closer to death,
But nearness to death does not bring us nearer to God.
Where is the Life we have lost in living?
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?
The heavenly cycles in twenty centuries
bring us farther from God and nearer to the Dust.³¹

Alves writes, in the same tenor, “[It is easy to distinguish the Word from the words.³²] When that word makes itself palpable, the entire body reverberates and we know that the mystery of our Being spoke to us, outside of its forgetfulness... [...] That is the essence of poetry: returning to the founding Word, which emerges from the abyss of silence”.³³ And it attests to its encounter with the new mentors of his gaze: “I also love the darkness that dwells within the deep and beautiful forests of the poetry of Robert Frost, and the light breaking through the restless waters of the poems of Eliot, and the colorful shadows of the Gothic cathedral, which reminds me the entrails of the whale in the sea: a sunken cathedral”.³⁴

Alves, who was always a teacher, stresses the need and even urgency, to forget whatever is not significant for the body and be willing to learn whatever it is. As in the words of St. Augustine, the body just wants to enjoy, and enjoy infinitely. Words are bridges (in which he agrees with Octavio Paz) and objects to reach the joy that can lead to poetry. Because of the words, insofar as creators of new worlds, sacred rituals are performed in the transfiguration of reality: the Eucharist (cannibalistic phenomenon), Pentecost (“Wisdom emerges from foolishness.”³⁵), and the encounter with Paz and Cummings is almost mandatory, since they, like all other poets, have always known the magical power of words. Unlearning is a necessary step for gaining wisdom: “One must be reborn on the unpredictable power of the Word, to be able to enter the Kingdom. One must be a kid again ...”.³⁶

His way of talking about silence is very illuminating; based on a story by Gabriel García Márquez (“The World’s Greatest Drowned”), he sees in silence the source of words, and some words are “creatures of light” that live “among the reflections on the

³¹ T.S. Eliot, *Collected poems: 1909-1963*. London, Faber & Faber, 1985, 161.

³² Phrase added in *Lições de feitiçaria* (2003), 23.

³³ R. Alves, *The poet, the warrior, the prophet*. London-Philadelphia, SCM Press-Trinity Press International, 1990, 3, 4.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

lake's surface." "Other words are mysterious entities that live hidden in the deep sea or in the shadows of the woods. [...] Most of the time they are heard but not understood, as if they had been enunciated in a foreign language. There are not many. Poets and mystics have suggested that they are a single Word, the one that contains the universe."³⁷ These are the words that free us from platitudes and empty rituals. Psychoanalysis has been able to listen to the silence that lives in the interstitium/gap of words, which is something that poets had already accomplished: "Poetry is a dive into the mysterious lake, it goes through the mirror, into the depths where words are born and where they live..."³⁸ In this regard, Alves' Brazilian fellow Carlos Drummond de Andrade, agrees: "[Poetry] penetrates silently in the realm of words / In that place, there are poems waiting to be written / They are paralyzed, but not in despair, / there is calm and freshness on the intact surface / [poetry] comes closer and contemplate the words / Each one has a thousand secret faces under a neutral face and asks you, without interest in your poor or terrible answer: / Did you bring the key?" ("In Search of Poetry").

The general tone of this book is one where the beauty unfolds and produces a transparent aesthetic spell, aimed at rediscovering the magical power of poetry, through which words are good to eat, as in the biblical accounts of Ezekiel and Revelation (Durer's engraving is a must): "We are what we eat ...". Word replaces the food because its flavor does not abandon us, hence its intense symbolic power: "The symbols that are born from the eyes live in the distance and in separation. Those that are born from the mouth express reunion and possession."³⁹ Hence also the proximity to the culinary arts, which is a sorcery and alchemy space.

As for the poetry and magic, the influence of the very Protestant Danish film *Babette's Feast* is crucial: that is the door to theopoetics, which is capable of invading territories that are as refractory as the politics that came to derail a wonderful achievement of the Reformation of the sixteenth century:

Protestant theology was born when the magical-poetic power of the Word was rediscovered and democratized. Each individual should read the Scriptures in the same way a poem is read in solitude, without intermediate voices of interpretation. The interpreters should remain silent so that the voice of the Stranger could be heard: The inner witness of the Holy Spirit. It was believed that the forgotten words written in our flesh and the Word coming from the past would encounter each other and would make love -and so the miracle would happen. If, by sheer grace, the Wind was blowing and the absent melody was heard, the dead would be raised.⁴⁰

In all this, the ancient title (*Poetry, Prophecy, Magic*) became a real vital and existential program to Alves, who never depart from these three realities in everything he did.⁴¹

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁴¹ To appreciate the work of Alves, see: L. Cervantes-Ortiz, Rubem Alves: *A liberating, reconstructing and poetic Word. 20 English texts*, <http://issuu.com/lcervortiz/docs/rubemalves-2014>.

Lessons of sorcery: the open door to poetry and aesthetics

Beauty is infinite;
she is never satisfied with its final form
Every experience of beauty is the beginning of a universo
The same theme is repeated,
each time in a different way
Each repetition is a resurrection,
...an eternal return of a past experience
that must remain alive.
The same poem, the same music, the same story...
and meanwhile, it's never the same thing.
for in each repetition, the beauty is reborn new fresh
like water gushing into the mine.⁴²

Perhaps the work that best represents the evolution experienced by Alves from theology to poetry is that which would be called *Lições de feitiçaria. Meditações sobre a poesia* (*Lessons of Sorcery. Meditations on Poetry*, 2000, 2003). And this is so if we consider that in an earlier work, *Poetry, Prophecy, Magic. Mediations* (1983) it was possible to see the ever closer approximation to a language and literary style that would eventually dominate his writing, highly academic and activist, once marked by liberation theology, which he helped found in the late sixties. The intermediate stage is captured in the book whose title was very similar in both languages, English and Portuguese: *The poet, the warrior, the prophet* (1990, *O poeta, o guerreiro, o profeta*, 1992). The Edward Cadbury lectures, that Alves delivered at the University of Birmingham, England, in 1990, served to channel the metamorphosis through which he realized that poetry was waiting for him for a long time until he found it and never let him go afterwards.

In that earlier and brief book of 1983, published by the Ecumenical Documentation Centre (CEDI), Alves' intention to express himself through resources from other linguistic field was very shy. At that time, he did not feel in full control of those resources. He weighted possibilities, exercised his pen, and he allowed himself to be taught by new teachers. Around those years, Alves had begun contributing for *Tempo e Presença*, led by his friend Jether Pereira Ramalho, who in a humorous way warned his readers about what they were about to find in those pages: "From this number on, Rubem Alves will have a page in our journal to do what he wants: to deface, to play or to make precious reflections like this one, which was conceived while preparing a *bacalhoadada* [cod stew]. Our only concern is that he starts thinking about quieter places, like Luther, and then he would start having revelations, theses ... That's the risk we are taking."⁴³

Alves himself explained (in the 2000 edition) the change of the second title and also the provocative character of the new one as part of a creative cognitive process, which was inevitably linked to theology:

⁴² R. Alves, *Lições de feitiçaria. Meditações sobre a poesia*. São Paulo, Edições Loyola, 2003, 197.

⁴³ *Tempo e Presença*, 181, April 1983, 14.

I was afraid to tell the truth. I chose the first name thinking of the stomach sensitivities of the people. [...] I figured that if I spoke about witchcraft, many readers would be horrified and refuse to try the dish that I prepared. That happened in the village where Babette would enchant her/his guests with food. They attended the banquet, but they swore that they did not feel the taste of the food.

What happens is that what I want is to be a sorcerer, because I find that biblical faith is a blend of sorcery and wisdom. I know that modern theologians would curse me and say that I went crazy. I understand them. A long time ago we stopped understanding each other. I say one thing and they understand a different thing. I embrace the lament of Zarathustra: "I'm not a mouth for those ears."⁴⁴

Poetry possessed Alves and caused a revolution in his thinking and in his theology: never again he went back to be the same person and he regretted a lot what he had written before, and he even wished that others forget about those writings (this never happened, especially among those of us who studied them). Thanks to Ludwig Wittgenstein, from whom Alves learned that science is a linguistic game, he situated himself for a long time on the side from which language and words do things, many things, something that was clear for him since he wrote *Hijos del mañana (Tomorrow's Child)* (1972, 1976). but he failed to develop poetically until 20 years later, even despite the attraction that he felt towards the characters of *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll. And then he quotes and paraphrases Guimarães Rosa, referring to the magical powers of poetry: "Alchemy, sorcery, magic: the sorcerer makes his potions with the blood of the human heart ..."⁴⁵ Alves identified himself with the character of a Jester when he wrote *Theology as a Game* (in Portuguese: *Variations on Life and Death*, 1981), but now the best transfiguration he found for himself as a theologian-poet (and vice versa) was a Warlock, a magician, a sorcerer. In the 2000 preface he tries to distance himself from science and technology, due to their inability to change things, even though they also use words. His long affiliation with the notion of attachment to the body as the center of human existence came to rescue him: "What the body desires does not have to do with knowledge. The body seeks tools that allow it to enjoy more and suffer less."⁴⁶

Sorcery is a word game in which theology and poetry hide: God himself is a sorcerer because he created the universe with the power of his word. "The sorcerer is in search of the power of God." If the contemporary mind, like Alves himself, refuses to believe this as a matter of fact, there is a place where things happen in that way: the body. "The body is the magical center of the universe. The body is magical because it is made of words: '... and the Word became flesh ...' The body is born out of a marriage between the flesh and the words."⁴⁷ The sorcerer is one who seeks the melodies forgotten by the body to make them resonate within it. This is why he says firmly: "I

⁴⁴ R. Alves, "Prefacio. Lições do afogado", en *Lições de feitiçaria*. São Paulo, Edições Loyola, 2000, 7-8. The text of reference is titled "Sobre mágicos e cozinheiros" (About magicians and chefs), that shows his orientation to associate gastronomy with poetry, theology, and magic.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

affirm that this is the only question that interests theology: Which (musical) word has the power to make love to flesh? Which word is capable to raise the dead?" That is why he abandoned theology as "claim to know God," the mystery of God: "God is a nameless void. You cannot catch the Wind with a sieve made of human words. *The knowledge/science of God is heresy.*"⁴⁸ Words themselves are a mystery in this divine-human labyrinth: "There are words which grow out of ten thousand things and words which grow out of other words: endless... But there is a Word which emerges out of silence, the Word which is the beginning of the World. This Word cannot be produced. It is neither a child of our hands or of our thoughts. We have to wait in silence, till it makes itself heard: Advent... Grace."⁴⁹

Here's how Alves arrived, finally, to his encounter with poetry, disbelieving the "scientific" pretensions of theology: "Poets are sorcerers. They know that only beauty has the power to awaken the sleeping beauty within our bodies."⁵⁰ Forgetfulness and silence are the real adversaries. They must be overcome by way of tracking the human depths in which poetry is immersed and where is located. This is Alves' own recommendation to read Alves in a new key: the theopoetics.

This book is about lessons of sorcery. I am looking for words that make flourish Paradise, which forgetfulness transformed into a desert inside us.

Salvation is the return of beauty. For individuals and for the world. [...]

The melodies of the body are dreams.

I wish theology were about that: words that make visible dreams, and then, when they are pronounced, they could transform the valley of dry bones into a crowd of children.

This is the suggestion I make: that the word theology be replaced by the word *teopoesia* (Theo-Poetry), this is, nothing about knowing, all about beauty.⁵¹

3. Third step: From religion to a new theological expression

In the decade of the 1970's he produced a series of critical works on Protestantism and religion, and in *Dogmatism and Tolerance* (1982), he attempted to recuperate nostalgically the values of the Reformed tradition. In *Variations on Life and Death* (1981), *Theology as Play* (1982) and *I Believe in the Resurrection of the Body* (1982) he at last mines his ludic, erotic and poetic style. Since then he has begun to write in a very free style what he calls chronicles, a kind of essay in which he gives free reign to his theological, pedagogical, and every other type of idea; also children's stories, in a vein that is very close to psychoanalytical research. *Our Father* (1987) and *The Poet, the Warrior, the Prophet* (1990) give witness to his literary and poetic maturity. At the same time, he has gathered in other volumes his reflections on education, which are followed with much interest by scholars because of his audacious pedagogical proposals. *Lessons on Sorcery* (1998, 2003) and *Transparencies of Eternity* (2000) bring together some

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 12. Emphasis added.

⁴⁹ R. Alves, *The poet, the warrior, the prophet*, 3.

⁵⁰ R. Alves, "Prefácio. Lições do afogado", 12.

⁵¹ *Idem.*

texts of theological nature which are written from a perspective that is completely anti-dogmatic. These are another examples about it:

Saudade is a word I often use. I believe it is the foundation of my poetic and religious thinking. Translators with expertise in several languages say that there is no precise synonym for it in other languages. It is a feeling close to nostalgia. But it is not nostalgia. Nostalgia is pure sadness without an object. Nostalgia has no face. Whereas *saudade* is always *saudade* “of” a scenario, a face, a scene, a time. The Brazilian poet Chico Buarque wrote a song about *saudade*, in which he says that *saudade* is a piece of me wrenched out of me, *it’s to straighten up the room of the son who just died.*” It is the presence of an absence. [...]

Mystics and poets have known that silence is our original home... There is a Word which can be heard only when all words have become dumb, an eschatological Word which makes itself heard at the end of the world. Pure grace, no encaged bird, a wild bird which flies with the Wind. [...]

Poetry is the language of what it is not possible to say.⁵²

Pleasure: theme and variations

I do not want news. I am not going to buy apartments nor lands. I do not want to travel places I do not know. Eliot: “And at the end of our long explorations we will finally arrive to where we started and then we will know it for the first time...” That’s it. Back to my roots, to the things about Minas that I love so much ... the kitchen, the clover gardens, the mallow, the pomegranates and the *manaca*, the mountains, the streams, the hikings...⁵³

When Rubem Alves turned 80, several of his readers and friends from different countries put together a small tribute that can be read online.⁵⁴ We did something similar on another occasion, to which Rubem reacted with great surprise when he noted that in many Latin American evangelical churches his name is not unknown and that his work is read with admiration and great benefit. This is so because after his “institutional alienation” from Protestantism, he was supposed to stay out of any contact with those communities. But fortunately that’s not the case, as his followers are counted in legions in several places and even there are several groups in social networks that share their texts and books, noting how “the new Alves”, not necessarily the pioneer of the “liberation theology,” who in his role as a “chronicler,” feeds them with his free and highly creative literary style.

In fact, the years in which the thinker and scholar wrote in a flat manner or “flat”, as he said, were left far behind, because the time came when he decided open up himself

⁵² R. Alves, *The poet, the warrior, the prophet*, 15, 25, 96.

⁵³ R. Alves, “Prefácio. Eu não deveria ter tentado escrever este livro”, en *Variações sobre o prazer. Santo Agostinho, Nietzsche, Marx y Babette*. São Paulo, Planeta, 2011, 12.

⁵⁴ Cf. L. Cervantes-Ortiz, ed., *La luz fracturada. Homenaje a Rubem Alves en su 80º aniversario (The fractured light. A homage to Rubem Alves in his 80th anniversary)*, <http://issuu.com/lcervortiz/docs/homenaje-80>.

to literature in general, and poetry in particular; This helped him to re-discover himself as a renewed author, willing to talk about the things of life with a simplicity and beauty that he never imagined.

In the 1960s, Rubem Alves dreamed of “making revolution” and he devoted much of his writings and dreams to that utopia. In 1974, as part of a process of intense introspection that led/took him to the “couch of psychoanalysis,” he wrote a text that released him forever from all the ideological and moral burdens that had imprisoned him for so long. “From paradise to the desert” (“Confessions: on theology and life”) is the title of these autobiographical reflections where he describes the experience he went through and prepared him for what almost 10 years later, in 1983, he was going to discover, namely, the advantages of playing and the goodness of the body and beauty. I must say, though, that from the beginning, in Alves’s first books, there were hints of the direction that his reflections and life would eventually took.

Without denying his Protestant tradition, to which he devoted several memorable texts collected in *Dogmatism and Tolerance* (1982; Mensajero, 2007) in which he explored the bright and the dark side of that heritage, he kept away from churches. He continued doing theology, but a kind of theology that does not recognize limits or boundaries, because it is founded on the freedom that comes from imagination. His words are diaphanous,

I am a Protestant. Today, very different from what I was. No returns. I’m so different that many will refuse to acknowledge my citizenship in the Reformed world. Some others will characterize me as a spy or a traitor. Others will allow my presence but will require that I keep silent. Which makes me doubt about myself and suspicious that maybe, I am in fact an apostate. However, Protestants from other places affirm me, listening to me holding hands, and giving me bread and wine...”⁵⁵

I would argue that he took liberation theology to its ultimate consequences by becoming a “distributor of Happiness.” He did that through the “literary cannibalism” that he practiced and promoted through the textual sacraments that he distributed everywhere and through which he entered into communion with millions of people.

Alves was a full time educator and over the years he refined his observations, resulting in a playful writing and in a one hundred percent dedication to exploring the interstices of life in all of its manifestations, and in the process, he splashed poetry all over everything he experienced and interested him. An example of this is his book with the title *Book Without End* (2002), in a new and beautiful edition with the title *Variations on the pleasure* (*Variações sobre o prazer. Santo Agostinho, Nietzsche, Marx y Babette*). This book is one of the most representative because it reflects the freedom he has achieved as a writer and because it gathers many of the issues that he has obsessively developed over the last thirty years, which is also the period time since his rebirth as a person and a storyteller of imaginary worlds (imaginary but not less truthful), and this is so because, as the writer Paul Valéry has said time after time: “What would we do without the help of things that do not exist?”.

⁵⁵ R. Alves, “Confissões de um protestante obstinado”, in *Dogmatismo & tolerancia*. São Paulo, Edições Loyola, 2004, 19.

In the preface of this book he explains his reasons for creating this book that is so personal, full of quotations deployed in the margins and even a bibliography that recalls his youth, when he displayed an exquisite, thoughtful, provocative and uncompromising art. Alves said that this book, *Variations on the pleasure* is the result of the awareness of the end and of the certainty that his time was up, and therefore that is necessary and required to stand before the language and force it to speak “the things of the soul,” which have always been there, waiting to come out. “I felt then that I would not like to see that what I have written ended up buried. After all, what I write is part of me. But I knew at the same time that my efforts to finish the book would be useless. I played then, with the idea of publishing the book as it was, unfinished. That is like life. Life is never finished. It always finishes without us been able to write the last chapter” (13). In this way, this great master on full use of his capability “abandoned” this lucid and playful exercise in order to leave a testament of his loyalty to writing, which he received from his favorite poets and authors.

So, this is how this book ended up unfinished, even though in its more than 180 pages one can perceive the gushing breath of someone who is squaring accounts with his favorite authors and also with his most beloved influencers, as announced in the subtitle: Saint Augustine (in spite of everything), Nietzsche (a faithful nightstand companion, always at hand, especially the book entitled *The Portable Nietzsche* by Walter Kaufmann), Marx (to whom Alves read and reread in a peculiar way, —to prove is Alves book: *What is religion?*, that does not age with the passage of time) and Babette, the French chef who opened other vital windows to those Lutheran women... All this to say that *Variations on the pleasure* is a book without the slightest waste, and shows an Alves who is honest with all and embraces memory with variations theology (in first place), philosophy, economics and culinary art, which was another of his great passions.

A literary transubstantiation

The ideas of the thinking ego
 self are caged birds – they belong to the realm
 of the ego
 self that does with them what it wants.
 The ideas that live in the body are wild birds
 that come only when they want.
 They have will and ideas on their own.⁵⁶

Since 1981 (more than 30 years ago) Rubem Alves decided to change forever his writing style and inquire into the affairs of life in a differently way than the way of the theology he learned and developed so well (I must say). He managed to refine his style and he continually renewed himself through tireless immersions in his own personal abyss and in everything around him. A person who helped for such transformation in Alves to take place in a more formal way was his friend Jether Pereira Ramalho, who invited him that year to write free texts for the ecumenical journal *Tempo e Presença*.

⁵⁶ R. Alves, *Variações sobre o prazer. Santo Agostinho, Nietzsche, Marx y Babette*. São Paulo, Planeta, 2011, 22.

The first article published there was the starting point of what became *Dogmatism and Tolerance*, after fierce reckoning with the Presbyterian Church of Brazil, which was to topic of his book *Protestantism and Repression* (1979, new title: *Religion and Repression*, 2005.⁵⁷ When Alves moved away from resentment and hard feelings, he transfigured himself into a writer who gradually achieved a powerful and concise prose, all with a personal and endearing touch. That job led him to join the Academy of Letters of Campinas. A similar move was taken by his colleague Gustavo Gutiérrez (the founder of the Latin American Catholic liberation theology) who became a member, in turn, of the Peruvian Academy of Language.

A few years later, he testified to his transformation, but without the clarity and certainty that would him to better understand authors such as William Blake, T.S. Eliot, Fernando Pessoa, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Cecília Meireles, Gaston Bachelard, Octavio Paz or Adélia Prado, to name just a few. The nineties were the stage of the new thoughtful and literary deployment of Alves as a theologian (he never stopped being one, reluctantly though) who now moved like fish in water, free of doctrinal ties that had once gripped his creativity. *The Book without End*, now renamed as *Variations on pleasure* is a gateway to his “intimate literary production shop” because it exhibits without shame nor regrets how the ideas that come out of his body possess him through an inspiration that is not ethereal, that is sensitive, but it remains without a logical explanation.

After an explanation of what happened to him internally and the experience that provoked his desire to write this volume, Alves mixes in his new method of research, all the elements that served to advance his writing. In this way, Tales of Miletus and Nietzsche come together, who along with others bombard the reader from the margins to spur the imagination with multiple paths of interaction and search. The first chapter, a wide digression, outlawed in academic texts, shows this clearly: “The texts of knowledge prevent the authors to confess the struggles they go through before they reach their destination to knowledge. What is required of a text of knowledge is that the author makes a rigorous depuration of their writings. Anything that does not aligns with the straight-line leading to a conclusion of the initial problem, it should go to the trash can.”⁵⁸

With this background, Alves undertakes the literary transubstantiation of all that he has swallowed up in his condition as a “customary cannibal” and he turns into a new sacrament everything that springs from his pen. This is the topic of the brief second chapter, “Hoc est corpus meum”, that is, the sacramental words of Jesus of Nazareth. The author now writes with his blood and his very person, and each text is portrayed on the eyes of the reader: “The things I say, like the fabrics of Arcimboldi and writings of Borges, draw the lines of my face.”⁵⁹ The art “seeks communion” and its flesh and blood are given to us in an aesthetic and liturgical act that actualizes the life of those who produced the texts. Each reading is an act of tasting. And again the “cannibalistic ritual” occurs, as expressed in a language that comes from the “cannibal Manifesto” by Oswald de Andrade, who belongs to the very distant Brazilian poetic vanguard of 1928.

⁵⁷ Cf. Leonildo Silveira Campos, “O discurso acadêmico de Rubem Alves sobre ‘protestantismo’ e ‘repressão’: algumas observações 30 anos depois”, en *Religião e Sociedade*, vol.28, núm.2, Rio de Janeiro, Instituto de Estudos da Religião, 2008, 102-137, www.scielo.br/pdf/rs/v28n2/a06v28n2.pdf.

⁵⁸ R. Alves, *Variações sobre o prazer*, 29.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.

The following chapters, with their modified titles, are rich in reinterpretation and in incorporating the tools of Alves's new pathways. In this way, the chapter "After being old I became a child" was changed to "The metamorphosis of old age", the chapter "I forgot what I knew to remember what I had forgotten" became "The Oblivion: Barthes." In "From Knowledge to Tastes" and "The Knowledge of the body," Alves reinvents world apprehension, now in a gastronomic and extreme sensorial way but without reducing the experience only to the sense of taste. That is why the next chapter is called: "The Body: He/She Knows Without Knowing" (formerly "For a Pedagogy of Unconsciousness"). Again, like he had done before in *Children of tomorrow* and the *Enigma of Religion*, he analyzes the function of language, but now from a perspective different to that of his friend Paulo Freire. Education has always been disrespectful to the body, to its desire to learn only what it likes and finds useful. This is why science has failed to prevail: after all, science books are "recipe" books.

This is the origin of "Variations of pleasure" (formerly, "Reason, servant of pleasure"), a piece in which he reassess Bishop of Hippo, and does not deceive himself: "The experience of pleasure, so good, always places us in a great vacuum [the "door of mysticism," I would add]. San Augustine built his theology upon the vacuum that follows pleasure. (He does not forget Heládio Brito's poem on the *caquis, gostosa* fruit...) After pleasure is exhausted, a kind of nostalgia for something indefinable remains in the soul".⁶⁰

Pleasure is not equal to happiness. For this reasons his "variations" follow the same path: San Augustine in theology; Nietzsche, in philosophy; Marx, in economics; y, to close the circle, Babette, the cook, accompanied by Tita, the character from *Like Water for Chocolate*. That variation is definitive; everything is redefined almost entirely: his approach to the form of knowing of the cook is emphatic. "The banquet begins with a decision to love". The flavors dominated by these women control the world because, unlike a nutritionist, master and lord of quantities and calories: "The head of the cook functions in a reverse way. She does not consider vitamins, carbohydrates, and protein. Her imagination is full of flavors. What she desires is to make love with those who eat through flavors. When hunger is satisfied, the festival of love is comes to an end [...] I hope the evangelical text said: 'Blessed are the hungry because they shall be even hungrier'. The cook wants her guest to die of pleasure!"⁶¹

Alves's passion for food was greatly influenced by the Danish movie *Babette's Feast* (1987), to the extent that, when he decided to open his own restaurant, he used that same name. At some point, he referred to that movie with words that continue to resonate with insight and empathy:

Cook is sorcery, alchemy. And eating is to be spellbound. Babette knew this , an artist who knew the secrets of producing joy through food. She knew that, after eating , people do not remain the same . Magical things happen. The hardened inhabitants of the village were suspicious about this and that's why they were afraid to eat the feast that Babette prepared for them. They believed she was a witch and the banquet was a ritual of witchcraft. And they were right. That was sorcery, just that. Just not the kind they imagined. They believed that their souls

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 138.

would be lost. That they would not go to heaven. In fact, sorcery happened: turtle soup, tripe sarcophagus, wonderful wines, pleasure softening feelings and thoughts, the hardness and wrinkles the body being smoothed through the palate, the masks falling down, the hardened faces becoming pretty through laughter, *in vino veritas...*⁶²

For Alves, this is now the great metaphor of life, of knowledge, and pleasure: food and kitchen, because the eyes of the cook “are just like the eyes of a poet”.⁶³ And then he explains that poetry is culinary, culinary is philosophy. “Poetry is good words to eat. A poet is a wizard alchemist who cooks the world through verses: the universe fits in a simple verse”.⁶⁴ Pleasure, wisdom, poetry, and kitchen: spaces to enjoy existence and time. That was the new Alves, always a theologian and poet.

⁶² Cf. R. Alves, “A festa de Babette”, en www.releituras.com/rubemalves_babette.asp.

⁶³ R. Alves, *Variações sobre o prazer*, p. 150.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

Una teología de la alegría humana: La teología liberadora, lúdica, y poética de Rubem Alves

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Resumen

Rubem Alves fue uno de los fundadores de la teología de la liberación desde el campo protestante latinoamericano. Ejerció un intenso magisterio debido a su creatividad y a su capacidad para transformar aspectos teóricos densos en impecables piezas expresivas. Más tarde, al optar por lo que ahora se conoce como teopoética, desplegó una producción literaria y teológica que transformó por completo su escritura y la proyectó hacia ámbitos que él mismo nunca imaginó. Aquí se intenta dar fe de esos cambios que lo convirtieron en uno de los mejores escritores que han surgido del ámbito presbiteriano en el continente.

• SEE PAGE 6 FOR ENGLISH VERSION •

1. Las raíces de un nuevo lenguaje teológico

Padre... Madre... de ojos mansos,
sé que estás invisible en todas las cosas.
Que tu nombre me sea dulce, la alegría de mi mundo.
Tráenos las cosas buenas en las que encuentras placer:
el jardín, las fuentes,
los niños,
el pan y el vino,
los gestos tiernos, las manos desarmadas,
los cuerpos abrazados...
Sé que quieres darme tu deseo más profundo,

Un deseo cuyo nombre he olvidado, pero tú no olvidas
nunca.
Cumple, pues, tu deseo, para que yo pueda reír.
Que tu deseo se cumpla en nuestro mundo,
de la misma manera que late en ti.
Concédenos satisfacción en las alegrías de hoy:
el pan, el agua, el sueño...
Que estemos libres de la ansiedad.
Que nuestros ojos sean tan mansos para los demás
como los tuyos lo son para nosotros.
Porque,
si somos feroces,
no podremos acoger tu bondad.
Y ayúdanos
para que no nos engañemos con los deseos malos.
Y líbranos
de aquel que carga la muerte en sus propios ojos.
Amén.⁶⁵

1. Primera etapa: orígenes, contrastes

Nadie hubiera imaginado en mayo de 1968 (¡vaya referencia cronológica!) que la misma pluma que escribió una tesis tan densa y provocadora como *Toward a theology of liberation: an exploration of the encounter between the languages of humanistic messianism and messianic humanism* escribiría un par de décadas más tarde estas palabras, mezcla de poesía, oración, mística y teología.⁶⁶ Negándose a ser un ejercicio teológico estricto o académico, Rubem Alves expresaba en ellas todo el peregrinaje que había recorrido hasta alcanzar, con textos así, la cima de un estilo dominado por la poesía y la profundización completamente anti-dogmática que se había anunciado, muy veladamente en sus primeros escritos. Aquí ya se percibía la forma en que había leído a Nietzsche, Guimarães Rosa, Cecília Meireles, Octavio Paz, Fernando Pessoa, Paul Valéry, Adélia Prado y decenas de autores, hombres y mujeres, que lo marcarían para siempre. Antes de su paso por Princeton, “junto a los ríos de Babilonia” (en el Union Seminary de Nueva York), en 1964 (año del golpe militar contra João Goulart) había pergeñado una interpretación teológica de los procesos revolucionarios en su país que no se publicaría en portugués sino hasta el siglo XXI, 40 años después. Con este trabajo, introdujo a la reflexión teológica el polémico tema de la revolución, el cual desarrollaba en esos años su mentor Richard Shaull, precisamente en la época en que surgió el movimiento Iglesia y Sociedad en América Latina (ISAL). Alves se vio obligado a volver

⁶⁵ R. Alves, *Transparencias de eternidad*. Trad. de Paula Abramo Tostado. México, Ediciones Dabar, 2006, p. 7.

⁶⁶ El gusto de Alves por las oraciones puede constatarse en su magnífica traducción de las *Orações por um mundo melhor*, del teólogo estadounidense Walter Rauschenbusch (São Paulo, Paulus, 1997), originalmente publicadas en 1910 bajo el título de *Prayers of a Social Awakening* (texto completo en: <https://archive.org/details/prayersofsocialaoorausiala>). Más tarde grabó varias de ellas en un disco memorable.

a estados Unidos por causa de la persecución de que fue objeto por los militares y por su propia iglesia.⁶⁷

Ciertamente, sus antecedentes no presagiaban algo así, ni en sueños, pues al nacer en Brasil en el seno de una familia presbiteriana conservadora, únicamente los estudios teológicos al lado de otro princetoniano, Shaull,⁶⁸ podían atisbar la veta que desarrollaría con tanta exuberancia y calidad, al grado de que es necesario afirmar que Alves es una de las grandes figuras de la literatura brasileña contemporánea, además del lugar que consiguió dentro del panorama teológico e intelectual desde su juventud, cuando la militancia ideológica que abrazó y por la cual luchó arduamente, lo llevó a escribir textos notables e imprescindibles para comprender el clima espiritual de la época. El joven Alves se tornaría en alguien que, sin considerar que había perdido el tiempo, llegó bastante tarde a la poesía, aunque muchos de sus ensayos, al reivindicar el cuerpo, la imaginación, el erotismo y la magia, abrían ya la puerta a una expresión inédita e insospechada para él mismo. Pianista frustrado, la música de la poesía y la literatura lo estuvieron esperando hasta que por fin lo poseyeron en cuerpo y alma. Como parte de una generación de intelectuales protestantes latinoamericanos entre los que hay que contar a José Míguez Bonino, Emilio Castro, Hiber Conteris, Jovelino Ramos y Julio de Santa Ana, entre otros, asumió un compromiso revolucionario que colocó su labor teológica en un plano inédito hasta entonces en el subcontinente, en la vanguardia ideológica, tal como lo ha resumido Luis Rivera Pagán:

La teología de la liberación fue un *enfant terrible* imprevisto en los campos de la academia y la producción teológica durante las últimas décadas del siglo XX. Introdujo a la conversación no solo un tema Nuevo —la liberación— sino también una nueva perspectiva para hacer teología y una renovadora manera de referirse al ser de Dios y su acción en la historia. Su proyecto para reconfigurar los lazos entre estudios religiosos, historia y política llegó a ser un tópico significativo de análisis y diálogo en el discurso teológico general. Muchos estudiosos perciben en su surgimiento una drástica ruptura epistemológica, un cambio radical de paradigma y un importante giro en el papel social y eclesial de la teología.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Cf. João Dias de Araújo, *Inquisição sem fogueiras. Vinte anos de história da Igreja Presbiteriana do Brasil, 1954-1974*. 2ª ed. Río de Janeiro, Instituto Superior de Estudos da Religião, 1982, pp. 61-68; 114-120; y R. Alves, .

⁶⁸ Cf. R. Alves., “O Deus do furacão” en R. Alves, ed., *De dentro do furacão. Richard Shaull e os primórdios da teologia da libertação*. Rio de Janeiro, Sagarana-CLAI-CEDI-Programa Ecuénico de Podgraduação em Ciências da Religião, 1985, 19-24. Al morir Shaull, Alves no dejó de homenajearlo: “No conozco a nadie que en tan poco tiempo haya sembrado tanto. No es posible contarle todo. Sólo puedo decir que un hombre que anda en la dirección contraria no lo hace impunemente. Los profetas son seres malditos. Nietzsche, otro que caminó así, sabía muy bien el precio que se paga por ver lo que otros no ve. Decía: ‘Los fariseos tienen que crucificar a quien inventa su propia virtud’. Quienes no ven, odian a quienes ven. Richard Shaull fue crucificado. Las iglesias no lo soportaron: expulsado de Colombia por los católicos, de Brasil por los protestantes...” R. Alves, “...Era un cadáver lleno de mundo...” (César Vallejo)”, en *Correio Popular*, Campinas, Brasil, 10 de noviembre de 2002; English version: “Through the eyes of Dick Shaull”, in *Reformed World*, vol. 53, 6, September 2006, pp. 265-268.

⁶⁹ L. Rivera-Pagán, “God the Liberator: Theology, History, and Politics”, en B. Valentin, ed., *In Our Own Voices. Latino/a Renditions of Theology*. Maryknoll, Orbis, 2010, www.gcsynod.org/contact/documents/GodtheLiberator-LRivera-Pagan.pdf, p. 1.

Este mismo autor señala consistentemente la participación de Alves en los inicios de la teología de la liberación y el papel fundacional de su trabajo doctoral, así como de su mentor, Shaull, y recuerda aspectos sobre ella que se han vuelto clásicos, como su cambio de título al publicarse en una editorial jesuita:

De hecho, la primera monografía extensa que enfocó la liberación social y política como la clave hermenéutica central para conceptualizar la fe cristiana fue la tesis doctoral de Rubem Alves, un presbiteriano brasileño. En mayo de 1968, Alves la defendió exitosamente en el Seminario Teológico de Princeton [...] Alves la escribió bajo la dirección de Richard Shaull, quien por bastantes años fue profesor de teología en América Latina, primero en Colombia y luego en Brasil, y quien fue crucial para el desarrollo de la teología liberacionista en los círculos protestantes latinoamericanos.

[...]

La tesis de Alves es un texto poderoso, escrito en un espléndido estilo literario. Fue publicada como libro en 1969, dos años antes de la obra de [Gustavo] Gutiérrez, pero con un cambio importante en el título: *A theology of human hope (Una teología de la esperanza humana)*. Aparentemente, los editores creyeron que el concepto de “esperanza”, con sus obvias relaciones con los escritos de Jürgen Moltmann, sería más atractivo comercialmente o relevante que “liberación”. A pesar de eso, Alves conceptualiza la dialéctica temporal propia del lenguaje teológico en términos de la política histórica de liberación.⁷⁰

Harvey Cox, desde el prólogo, lo saludó como una voz nueva, refrescante y rebelde en el contexto de la época: “¡Ojo con este libro, vosotros los ideólogos, teólogos y teóricos del mundo opulento del mundo denominado ‘desarrollado’! El tercer mundo de forzada pobreza, hambre, impotencia y creciente enojo ha encontrado una resonante voz teológica, Rubem A. Alves [...] habla con una autoridad que no tenemos por menos que notar, no solo en las discusiones sobre el desarrollo y la revolución, sino en dondequiera que declaremos el lugar de la fe Cristiana en nuestro convulso mundo contemporáneo”.⁷¹ En este libro dialoga críticamente con las teologías de Barth, Bultmann y Moltmann, señalándoles que no están arraigadas en las circunstancias humanas concretas y que por ello no expresan adecuadamente el discurso liberador requerido por la comunidades populares.⁷² El principio ético fundamental, que toma de Paul Lehmann, es “cómo puede la vida humana seguir siendo humana en el mundo”. De este modo se compromete en un diálogo creativo con dos clases de discurso que conducen a la liberación humana: el humanismo mesiánico y el mesianismo humanista. Ambos participan de un proyecto de liberación que incluye no solo lo material sino también las esferas corporal y espiritual. La última parte del libro explora las

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 7.

⁷¹ H. Cox, “Presentación”, en R. Alves, *Cristianismo: ¿opio o liberación?* Trad. Á. García Fluixá. Salamanca, Sígueme, 1973 (Verdad e imagen, 33), p. 9.

⁷² Moltmann reaccionó duramente: “Rubem A. Alves (*Cristianismo, opio o liberación*, Salamanca, 1973), critica la ‘teología de la esperanza’ calificándola de demasiado trascendental en la determinación de la promesa y de demasiado negativa en el enjuiciamiento del presente histórico. Pero Alves acabará hablando de la promesa divina y del lenguaje de la libertad, quedándose más acá que la ‘teología de la esperanza’”, “Carta sobre la teología de la liberación”, en *Selecciones de Teología*, vol. 15, núm. 60, 1975, www.seleccionesdeteologia.net/selecciones/lilib/vol15/60/o60_moltmann.pdf, p. 2.

posibilidades de un Nuevo lenguaje para la fe y la teología, el cual reivindica la alegría y el juego. En esta línea de reflexión sigue muy de cerca el concepto bonhoefferiano de *polifonía*. Con esta obra, Alves se estableció como uno de los fundadores de la teología de la liberación, porque de varias maneras anticipó los trabajos futuros de autores como Gutiérrez y Hugo Assmann. Finalmente, él y Gutiérrez se encontraron en Suiza en 1969 en una conferencia sobre teología y desarrollo, donde estuvieron de acuerdo en que ésa no era la formulación correcta dadas las condiciones del continente experimentadas en la dinámica de opresión-liberación, más allá de las modas del momento.

Y, por supuesto, no puede dejar de hablarse del “sabor princetoniano” de esos primeros momentos de esta teología, algo que ya ha revisado a conciencia Bruno Linhares. Como parte de su argumentación, señala: “Alves prefiere que la vida se juzgue no por la manera en que se ubica en el sistema social o como una función de las estructuras de la organización social, pues él sigue el ejemplo de Jesús, quien fue ‘un maestro en el arte de subvertir las reglas de normalidad o anormalidad’. Busco, en otras palabras, imaginar el nacimiento de una nueva cultura. Debido a que el mundo aún no está completo porque Dios aún está ejerciendo sus poderes creativos, el tiempo presente de cautividad aún no es un tiempo de nacimiento sino de concepción de una comunidad de fe”.⁷³

Otras lecturas y relecturas de su obra se han llevado cabo, en Brasil, por supuesto (Saulo Almeida,⁷⁴ António Vidal Nunes, autor de una amplísima bio-bibliografía,⁷⁵ Iuri Andreas Reblin,⁷⁶ entre otros), en Estados Unidos (Ruy Otávio Costa⁷⁷), Países Bajos (T. de Boer⁷⁸) y Suecia (Ulf Borelius⁷⁹). Un testimonio de la reverenda Sonia Gomes Mota, discípula de Alves, resume también su trayectoria dentro y fuera de las iglesias:

Rubem Alves fue parte de un grupo de pastores, hombres y mujeres líderes, que reflexionaron y organizaron diversas maneras de ser una iglesia reformada. Este proceso llevó a la creación de la Iglesia Presbiteriana Unida de Brasil (IPUB), miembro actual del Consejo Mundial de Iglesias. Con su erudición y su compromiso social y ecuménico, ayudó a delinear los documentos básicos de la IPUB. No estuvo interesado en ofrecernos lecciones de moral o en transmitir la

⁷³ B.J. Linhares, “Princeton Theological Seminary and the birth of liberation theology”, en *Koinonia: The Princeton Theological Seminary Graduate Forum*, 19, 2007, pp. 85-105; www.ptsem.edu/uploadedFiles/Seminary_Relations/Communications_and_Publications/News_Room/Alum_News/Koinonia-LiberationPTS.pdf, pp. 20-21.

⁷⁴ Saulo Marcos de Almeida, *O pensamento teológico de Rubem Alves. Reflexões sobre o papel da linguagem e da corporeidade*. Tesis de maestría. Universidad Metodista de São Paulo, 1998.

⁷⁵ A.V. Nunes, *Rubem Alves e a educação dos sentidos. Um estudo dos seus pressupostos filosóficos e pedagógicos*. Tesis doctoral. Universidad de São Paulo, Facultad de Educación, 2001.

⁷⁶ I.A. Reblin, *Outros cheiros, outros sabores... O pensamento teológico de Rubem Alves*. São Leopoldo, Oikos, 2009.

⁷⁷ Ruy Otávio Costa, *Self-critical theology: parallels and affinities between the Frankfurt School of critical theology and public theology of Rubem Alves*. Tesis de maestría. Universidad de Harvard, 1984; *Idem, Towards a Latin America Protestant ethic of liberation: A comparative study of the writings of Rubem Alves and José Míguez Bonino from the perspective of the sources and substance of their social ethics*. Tesis doctoral. Universidad de Boston, 1990.

⁷⁸ Tjeerd de Boer, *Hoe zullen wij over God spreken? De poëtische theologie van het alledaagse van Rubem Alves*. Tesis doctoral. Universidad Libre de Ámsterdam, 2010.

⁷⁹ Ulf Borelius, *Källkritik och befrielseologi: Ett bidrag till forskningen kring befrielseologins uppkomst*. Universidad de Uppsala, 2004.

verdad indiscutible y eterna. Como buen teólogo, filósofo y educador, le preocupaba más hacernos pensar, reflexionar y cuestionarnos acerca de las verdades inmutables de la teología y urgirnos a avizorar nuevas posibilidades y caminos para vivir nuestra fe. Rubem nos condujo por desiertos y nos invitó a ser jardineros y plantadores de esperanza.⁸⁰

Alves fue uno de los grandes renovadores de la teología latinoamericana. Las etapas de su pensamiento se distinguen por su inicial interés en la actividad de Dios en la historia y, luego, por una investigación profunda y sensible de las posibilidades lúdicas y eróticas de la vida humana en el mundo. En diversas ocasiones Alves trató de explicar sus raíces teológicas y escriturales, así como la manera en que evolucionó hacia el otro estilo, especialmente en reediciones de sus libros anteriores. En 2010 lo dijo así para un nuevo volumen atribuyendo el cambio al público al que se dirigió: “La mía fue una educación académica. No obstante, llegó un momento en que dejé de disfrutar al escribir para mis colegas. Comencé a escribir para niños y para la gente común, jugando con el humor y la poesía. De allí surgió mi nuevo estilo: chispazos, más que razonamiento”.⁸¹ Si antes deseaba apelar a la conciencia de sus lectores, convencerlos para incorporarse a la lucha ideológica”, ahora su propósito era muy diferente: “No quiero probar nada. Sólo deseo retratar. Hay un hilo que los ensambla como perlas en un collar. Cada texto es una unidad completa. A través de ellos intento decir lo que he llegado a sentir acerca de lo sagrado. No espero que los lectores estén de acuerdo conmigo. Sólo deseo que ellos puedan pasear en medio de bosques desconocidos. [...] Lo que verdaderamente importa no es lo que escribo sino lo que pensarán al ser provocados por lo que escribo”.⁸² Algo similar planteó cuando lo invitaron en 1990 a hablar delante de un auditorio que espera escuchar al pionero protestante de la teología de la liberación sin saber que éste se había reinventado por completo: su trayectoria había cambiado de orientación y ahora buscaba un cambio más profundo desde otro asiento del ser: “El Rubem Alves de la teología de la liberación, el que hablaba de la acción, cambió. Ahora soy distinto. *Creo que Dios tiene extrañas formas para hacer las cosas. Una de ellas es voltearlo todo al revés.* Decidí acepar el riesgo de desempeñar el papel del bufón. [...]”.⁸³ Por esto último debe ser reconocido también como uno de los iniciadores de la teopoética, aun cuando ese término surgió en otro ambiente y desde otra perspectiva.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Theodore Gill, “The ecumenical movement remembers Rubem Alves, 1933-2014”, 24 de julio de 2014, en World Council of Churches, www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/the-ecumenical-movement-remembers-rubem-alves-1933-2014.

⁸¹ R. Alves, “Introduction”, en *Transparencies of eternity*. Trad. Jovelino y Joan Ramos. Miami, Convivium Press, 2010, p. 9.

⁸² *Idem*.

⁸³ R. Alves, “From liberation theologian to poet: a plea that the Church move from ethics to aesthetics, from doing to beauty”, in *Church and State*, núm. 83, mayo-junio de 1993, pp. 20-21. Énfasis agregado.

⁸⁴ Cf. “Theopoetics: Longing and Liberation”, en L.M. Getz and R.O. Costa, eds., *Struggles for solidarity. Liberation theologies in tension*. Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1992, pp. 159-171; y L. Callid Keefe-Perry, “Renewal and nets: Amos Wilder and Rubem Alves”, *Way to Water: A Theopoetics Primer*. Eugene, Oregon, Wipf and Stock, 2014, pp. 32-50.

2. Segunda etapa: conversión a la imaginación

El énfasis imaginativo de la teología de Alves comenzó a mostrarse con claridad en *Tomorrow's Child* (1972; *Hijos del mañana*, 1976, *Gestação do futuro*, 1986), un libro de transición resultado de un curso sobre ética expuesto en el Union Seminary, el cual fue muy incomprendido por sus colegas debido a que despliega un análisis imaginativo del sistema tecnológico dominante, comenzando por sus premisas culturales. Una de sus metáforas consiste en comparar el mundo presente con los grandes dinosaurios cuya voracidad les impidió sobrevivir, a diferencia de las lagartijas que lo lograron hasta el presente. De regreso en Brasil, renunció a su membresía eclesiástica en 1974 y comenzó su carrera como profesor universitario. Ese año publicó "Confessions: on theology and life" ("Del paraíso al desierto. Reflexiones autobiográficas", en español, 1977), una profunda autocrítica de su experiencia teológica y eclesial.⁸⁵ Posteriormente estudió el psicoanálisis en profundidad. Lejos quedaría el enemigo del realismo, que peleó verdaderas batallas en trincheras que muchos no conocieron siquiera de lejos.⁸⁶ Alves arribó a la creencia poética y teológica, al mismo tiempo, de que Dios arregla las vidas humanas, la suya en particular, como quien juega con cuentas de vidrio, una metáfora tomada de la novela *El juego de los abalorios*, del escritor alemán Hermann Hesse. La imagen que ha desarrollado varias veces es la de esas cuentas (su vida y personalidad desgarradas) sumergidas en el agua que Dios toma y devuelve como un nuevo y prodigioso collar: "Para eso necesito a Dios, para curarme la nostalgia. Así lo imagino: como un fino hilo de nylon, que busca mis cuentas perdidas en el fondo del río del tiempo y me las devuelve como un collar".⁸⁷

El encuentro tardío, pero enriquecedor, con la poesía

Desde hace unos años tengo perdida mi respetabilidad académica. Nadie me la quitó, pero un buen día, por razones que no me sé explicar, algo sucedió en mí. No sé qué me pasó, mas lo cierto es que de repente me descubrí incapaz, en absoluto, de pensar, hablar y escribir analíticamente. Fui poseído por la forma poética y sigo por ella poseído cuando escribo. Aunque esto me gusta, me crea también muchos problemas con auditorios científicos y académicos, porque esa gente no cree que la poesía sea algo serio; sin embargo, yo creo que es la cosa más seria: creo que Dios es poesía. Si pudiese hacer una nueva traducción del texto de Juan: "y el Verbo se hizo carne", pondría "y un Poema se hizo carne".⁸⁸

⁸⁵ R. Alves, "Confessions: on theology and life", *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, vol. XXIX, 314, 3-4, primavera-verano, 1974, pp. 181-193; "Del paraíso al desierto. Reflexiones autobiográficas", en R. Gibellini, ed., *La nueva frontera de la teología en América Latina*. Salamanca, Sígueme, 1977, pp. .

⁸⁶ R. Alves, "Christian realism: ideology of the establishment", *Christianity and Crisis*, núm. 33, 7 de septiembre de 1973, pp. 173-176.

⁸⁷ R. Alves, *Lições de feitiçaria*, p. 65.

⁸⁸ R. Alves, "Cultura de la vida", en Simón Espinosa, comp., *Hacia una cultura de la paz*. Caracas, CLAI-Comisión Sudamericana de Paz-Nueva Sociedad, 1989, p. 15. Énfasis agregado. Este texto fue presentado en una reunión auspiciada por los dos organismos coeditores, en abril de 1989. Debo el acceso al mismo a Arturo Arce Villegas e Israel Flores Olmos.

Ciertamente el acceso de Rubem Alves a la poesía fue tardío, pero llegó a ser definitivo, enriquecedor y sumamente placentero. Las líneas que presiden este texto dan fe de cómo, en un momento determinado de su vida, experimentó un “giro poético” que impactó la totalidad de su pensamiento, en todos los sentidos. Incluso la manera en que se orientó su escritura, sin buscar escribir poemas como tales, manifestó una ruptura más, de entre las varias que sufrió, aunque en este caso el “golpe” de la “forma poética” resultaría determinante para vaciar en ella todo lo que escribiría luego de haber sido reconocido como teólogo y educador. Lado a lado con sus preocupaciones permanentes, la poesía lo acompañó permanentemente y nunca lo abandonó, pues por el contrario, el conocimiento de los autores que lo marcaron iluminó profundamente su obra.

El momento de dicho encuentro no podría fecharse con total certidumbre, pues si a fines de los años 80 tenía tan claro lo que le había sucedido, el paso del tiempo le aclararía aún más ese proceso de cambio. Así lo describió en una breve crónica de *Quarto de badulaques* (2003; en español: *Cuarto de cachivaches*, 2009), un “cajón de sastre” sobre múltiples temas, en la que hace un recorrido muy personal del asunto. Primeramente manifiesta el asombro por lo sucedido: “Descubrí la poesía tardíamente, después de rebasar los cuarenta años. ¡Qué pena! ¡Cuánto tiempo perdido! La poesía es una de mis mayores fuentes de alegría y sabiduría. Como dice [Gaston] Bachelard: “Los poetas nos dan una gran alegría de palabras...”⁸⁹ Podría decirse que tras toda una vida la poesía le llegó demasiado tarde, pero él sentía que no fue así.

Inmediatamente después se dirige al lector o lectora hipotéticos: “Por eso te pregunto: ¿ lees poesía? Si no lo haces, trata de hacerlo. Cambia los programas de televisión por la poesía”. Y agrega una serie de observaciones creativas sobre los prejuicios tan extendidos sobre su comprensión: “Si me dices que no entiendes la poesía, aplaudiré: ¡qué bueno! ¡Solamente los tontos creen que la entienden! ¡Solamente los oradores tienen la pretensión de entender la poesía!”. Después, expone con vehemencia lo que entiende como su propósito mediante varios ejemplos y una propuesta concreta: “La poesía no es para eso. Es para ser vista. ¡Lee el poema y trata de ver lo que él pinta! ¿Necesitas entender un lunar? ¿Una nube? ¿Un árbol? ¿El mar? Basta con ver. ¡Ver, sin comprender, es una felicidad! Lee poesía para que tus ojos se abran”. Para Alves, leer un poema es aprender a mirar, es una experiencia iniciática, casi mística. Y en ese punto ofrece sus recomendaciones específicas, algunos de los nombres que resultaron significativos en su caminar como lector de poesía. El orden en que aparecen no es de ninguna manera aleatorio, aunque en esta ocasión sólo mencionó autores/as de habla portuguesa: Cecília Meireles (1901-1964) y Adélia Prado (1935) en primer lugar, autoras cuya obra citó persistentemente. Alberto Caeiro, heterónimo del portugués Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935), con quien se identificó muchísimo por su levedad y tendencias panteístas. Mário Quintana (1906-1994), Lya Luft (1938), Maria Antônia de Oliveira (1964), a quienes leyó en una etapa posterior. Se trata de una lista ya filtrada por los años y enriquecida por largos periodos de lectura en la que le acompañaron muchos amigos de una tertulia semanal en Campinas. “Lee poesía para ver mejor. Lee poesía para estar tranquilo. Lee poesía para embellecerte. Lee poesía para aprender a oír. ¿Has pensado que, tal vez, hablas demasiado?”. Así concluye la crónica, en un tono amable, pero firme, de invitación.

⁸⁹ R. Alves, “Poesía”, en *Cuarto de cachivaches*. México, Ediciones Dabar, 2009, p. 89.

En una memorable ponencia de 1981, Alves se quejó amargamente de la nula presencia protestante en la literatura de su país, algo inexplicable dada la antigüedad de las iglesias históricas y el aceptable nivel cultural que las había caracterizado. Sus palabras fueron puntillosas y duras:

Yo esperaría, por otra parte, que el protestantismo hubiese hecho alguna contribución a la literatura brasileña. Hemos buscado una gran novela... pero en vano [...] lo que sucede es que la literatura no puede sobrevivir en medio de esta obsesión didáctica, porque su vocación es estética, contemplativa, y su valor es tanto más grande mientras más grande es su capacidad para producir estructuras paradigmáticas a través de las cuales las figuras y ligámenes ocultos de lo cotidiano son observados. Los literatos protestantes no pueden huir del hechizo de sus hábitos de pensamiento. Sus novelas son sermones travestidos y lecciones de escuela dominical enmascaradas. Al final, la gracia de Dios triunfa siempre, los creyentes son recompensados y la impiedad es castigada. El último capítulo no necesita ser leído.⁹⁰

De ahí que, cuando por fin se transformó su estilo, aproximadamente en 1983, poco después de publicar *La teología como juego y Creo en la resurrección del cuerpo*, pareció asumir él mismo la tarea de superar su estilo anterior para entrar de lleno en el campo literario. En sus primeros libros, la poesía estaba totalmente ausente y es hasta *¿Qué es la religión?* (1981), y sobre todo de *Poesía, profecía, magia* (1983), que finalmente dio el salto hacia la expresión de estirpe poética de forma definitiva. En *¿Qué es la religión?*, Alves cita textos y poemas de Archibald McLeish (Estados Unidos, 1892-1982), Cecilia Meireles y el visionario inglés William Blake (1757-1827).

Del primero, al referirse a quienes construyen cosas mediante palabras, recuerda la siguiente frase: “Un poema debería ser palpable y mudo como un fruto redondo; no debería tener palabras como el vuelo de los pájaros, no debería significar nada sino simplemente... ser”. De Meireles incluye esta cita: “De un lado, la estrella eterna, y del otro la vacante incierta...”, al hablar de la búsqueda del sentido de la vida. Y de Blake son estos versos: “Ver un mundo en un grano de arena / y un cielo en una flor silvestre, / asegurar el infinito en la palma de la mano / y la eternidad en una hora”, que retomaría muchas veces (hasta darle título a dos de sus libros), a propósito de “la sensación inefable de eternidad e infinitud, de comunión con algo que nos trasciende, envuelve y contiene, como si fuese un útero materno de dimensiones cósmicas”. En ese libro aún es notoria la timidez con que se refiere a los poetas, quizá porque aún no se sentía del todo seguro al momento de abordarlos.

En 1990 fue invitado por la Universidad de Birmingham, Inglaterra, a dictar las Conferencias Edward Cadbury y aquel pequeño volumen (80 pp.) sería la base de las mismas, con las que daría comienzo, al publicarse ese mismo año bajo el título de *The poet, the warrior, the prophet* (*El poeta, el guerrero, el profeta*) a una obra que se transformaría con el paso del tiempo hasta convertirse en *Lições de feitiçaria*.

⁹⁰ R. Alves, “Las ideas teológicas y sus caminos por los surcos institucionales del protestantismo brasileño”, en P. Richard, ed., *Materiales para una historia de la teología en América Latina*. San José, Departamento de Investigaciones Educativas, 1981, pp. 345-346. Recogido también en *Dogmatismo y tolerancia* [1982]. Bilbao, Ediciones Mensajero, 2007 (La barca de Pedro, 23).

Meditações sobre a poesia (*Lecciones de hechicería. Meditaciones sobre la poesía*), en 2003, posterior a la publicación de la versión portuguesa en 1992. Ese libro contiene la quintaesencia de lo que su autor desarrolló en toda su vida sobre las realidades humanas influidas por una perspectiva poética. Estaba a punto de descubrir a T.S. Eliot (1888-1965), el gran poeta anglo-estadunidense, Premio Nobel en 1948, quien lo sacudiría aún más, y a Octavio Paz, quien con las ideas expuestas en *El arco y la lira* completarían su panorama estético.

Teología y poesía en diálogo desesperado: El poeta, el guerrero, el profeta (1990, 2000)

The poet, the warrior, the prophet es una magnífica mezcla de actitudes ante la vida que, en el caldero escritural de Rubem Alves dieron como resultado un guiso estupendo pues, además, está ilustrado con obras de M.C. Escher. El primer capítulo, una indagación sobre la presencia de la palabra, surge de la contemplación de una araña whitmaniana, deambula por las *Variaciones Goldberg*, de Bach, se topa con Mallarmé, y aterriza en la necesidad (y práctica) muy humana del arte de desaprender, todo irradiado por la influencia del pesimista poeta T.S. Eliot y su visión de la Palabra oculta por la gritería contemporánea en los “Coros de *La Roca*” (1934), poema dramático en el que se pone el dedo en la llaga: “El infinito ciclo de las ideas y los actos,/ infinita invención, experimento incesante,/ trae conocimiento del cambio, pero no de la quietud;/ conocimiento del habla, pero no del silencio;/ conocimiento de las palabras e ignorancia del Verbo./ Todo nuestro conocimiento nos acerca a nuestra ignorancia,/ toda nuestra ignorancia nos acerca a la muerte,/ pero la cercanía de la muerte no nos acerca a Dios./ ¿Dónde está la vida que hemos perdido en vivir?/ ¿Dónde está la sabiduría que hemos perdido en conocimiento?/ ¿Dónde está el conocimiento que hemos perdido en información?/ Los ciclos celestiales en veinte siglos/ nos alejan de Dios y nos aproximan al polvo”.

Alves escribe, en el mismo tenor: “[Es fácil distinguir la Palabra de las palabras.]”⁹¹ Cuando esta palabra se hace oír el cuerpo entero reverbera y sabemos que el misterio de nuestro Ser nos habló, fuera de su olvido... [...] Esta es la esencia de la poesía: volver a la Palabra fundadora, la cual emerge del abismo del silencio”.⁹² Y da fe de su encuentro con los nuevos mentores de su mirada: “También amo la oscuridad que habita dentro de los bosques hondos y bellos de la poesía de Robert Frost, y la luz que se fractura a través de las aguas inquietas de los poemas de Eliot, y la penumbra colorida de la catedral gótica, que me hace recordar las entrañas del gran pez dentro del mar: una catedral sumergida”.⁹³

El maestro que siempre fue Alves subraya la necesidad, y hasta la urgencia, de olvidar lo que no es significativo para el cuerpo y disponerse aprender aquello que lo es, pues en palabras de San Agustín, el cuerpo sólo quiere gozar, gozar infinitamente. Las palabras son puentes (en lo que concuerda con Octavio Paz) y objetos para alcanzar el

⁹¹ Frase agregada en *Lições de feitiçaria* (2003), p. 23.

⁹² R. Alves, *The poet, the warrior, the prophet*. London-Philadelphia, SCM Press-Trinity Press International, 1990, 3, 4.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

gozo que pueden conducir a la poesía. A causa de ellas, formadoras de nuevos mundos, los rituales sagrados se realizan en la transfiguración de la realidad: la Eucaristía (fenómeno antropofágico), el Pentecostés (“La sabiduría emerge de la estulticia”.⁹⁴), y el encuentro con Paz y Cummings es casi obligado, pues ellos como todos los poetas siempre han conocido el poder mágico de las palabras. Desaprender es un paso obligado para alcanzar la sabiduría: “Uno debe renacer, por el poder de la Palabra impredecible, para poder entrar al Reino. Uno debe ser niño otra vez...”.⁹⁵

Su abordaje del silencio es muy iluminador pues, partiendo de un cuento de Gabriel García Márquez (“El ahogado más hermoso del mundo), pues lo califica como la fuente de las palabras, algunas de ellas “criaturas de luz” que habitan “entre los reflejos que brillan en la superficie del lago”. “Otras son entidades misteriosas que viven escondidas en las profundidades marinas o en las sombras de los bosques. [...] La mayoría de las veces son escuchadas mas no entendidas —como si hubiesen sido pronunciadas en un idioma extraño. No son muchas. Los poetas y los místicos han llegado a sugerir que son una única Palabra, aquélla que contiene el universo”.⁹⁶ Éstas son las palabras que liberan de los lugares comunes, de los rituales vacíos. El psicoanálisis ha sido capaz de escuchar el silencio que vive en el intersticio de las palabras, algo que ya habían hecho los poetas: “La poesía es una inmersión en el lago misterioso, atravesar el espejo, dentro de las profundidades donde las palabras nacen y viven...”.⁹⁷ En este punto lo acompaña el también brasileño Carlos Drummond de Andrade: “Penetra sordamente en el reino de las palabras./ Allí están los poemas que esperan ser escritos./ Están paralizados, pero no hay desesperación,/ hay calma y frescura en la superficie intacta./ Llega más cerca y contempla las palabras./ Cada una/ tiene mil caras secretas bajo el rostro neutro/ y te pregunta, sin interés por la respuesta,/ pobre o terrible, que le des:/ ¿Trajiste la llave?” (“En busca de la poesía”).

Ése es el tono general de este libro donde la belleza se desdobra y produce un hechizo estético, diáfano, encaminado a redescubrir el poder mágico de la poesía, mediante el cual las palabras son buenas para comer, como en los relatos bíblicos de Ezequiel y Apocalipsis (el grabado de Durero es imperdible): “Somos lo que comemos...”. La Palabra sustituye a la comida porque su sabor no nos abandona, de ahí su intensa fuerza simbólica: “Los símbolos nacidos de los ojos habitan en la distancia y la separación. Los que nacen de la boca expresan reunión y posesión”.⁹⁸ De ahí también la cercanía con el arte culinario, espacio de hechicería y alquimia.

En cuanto a la poesía y la magia, la influencia de la muy protestante película danesa *El festín de Babette* es determinante: ésa es la puerta de la teopoética, capaz de invadir territorios tan refractarios como la política que vino a dar al traste con un maravilloso logro de la Reforma religiosa del siglo XVI:

La teología protestante nació cuando el poder mágico-poético de la Palabra fue redescubierto y democratizado. Cada individuo debería leer las Escrituras de la misma forma en que se lee un poema, en la soledad, sin voces intermedias de interpretación. Los hermeneutas debían guardar silencio para que la voz del

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

Extraño pudiese ser oída: el testimonio interior del Espíritu Santo. Se creía que las palabras olvidadas escritas en nuestra carne y la Palabra venida del pasado se encontrarían y harían el amor —y así sucedería el milagro. Si, por pura gracia, el Viento soplase y la melodía ausente fuese escuchada, los muertos resucitarían.⁹⁹

Con todo ello, el título antiguo (*Poesía, profecía, magia*) vino a ser un auténtico programa vital y existencial para Alves, quien jamás se apartaría de estas tres realidades en todo lo que hizo.

Lecciones de hechicería: la puerta abierta a la poesía y la estética

La belleza es infinita;/ ella nunca se satisface con su forma final./ Cada experiencia de belleza es el inicio de un universo./ El mismo tema debe repetirse,/ cada vez de una forma diferente./ Cada repetición es una resurrección,/ un eterno retorno de una experiencia pasada/ que debe permanecer viva./ El mismo poema, la misma música, la misma historia.../ Y, mientras tanto, nunca es la misma cosa./ Pues, en cada repetición, la belleza renace nueva y fresca/ como el agua que brota en la mina.¹⁰⁰

Tal vez la obra que mejor representa la evolución que experimentó Rubem Alves de la teología a la poesía sea la que se titularía, finalmente, *Lições de feitiçaria. Meditações sobre a poesia* (*Lecciones de hechicería. Meditaciones sobre la poesía*, 2000, 2003), pues desde su antecedente más remoto, *Poesia, profecía, magia. Meditações* (1983) se advirtió la cada vez más cercana aproximación a un lenguaje y un estilo literarios que acabarían por dominar su escritura, otrora sumamente académica y militante, marcada por la teología de la liberación, la cual contribuyó a fundar a fines de los años sesenta. La etapa intermedia está constituida por el volumen que llevó el mismo título en inglés y portugués: *The poet, the warrior, the prophet* (1990; *O poeta, o guerreiro, o profeta*, 1992). Fruto de las Conferencias Edward Cadbury que Alves expuso en la Universidad de Birmingham, Inglaterra, en 1990, le sirvieron para dar cauce a la metamorfosis que le significó darse cuenta de que la poesía lo estuvo esperando durante mucho tiempo hasta que dio con él y no lo soltó nunca.

En el lejano y breve volumen de 1983, publicado por el Centro Ecuménico de Documentación (CEDI) era muy tímida la intención de expresarse mediante recursos procedentes de otro registro lingüístico. Aún no se sentía en pleno dominio de ellos: tanteó miradas, ejercitó la pluma, se dejó enseñar por sus nuevos maestros. En esos años, Alves había comenzado a colaborar en *Tempo e Presença*, dirigida por su amigo Jether Pereira Ramalho, quien con bastante humor previno a los lectores acerca de lo que encontrarían en esas páginas: “A partir de este número, Rubem Alves tendrá una

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

¹⁰⁰ R. Alves, *Lições de feitiçaria. Meditações sobre a poesia*. São Paulo, Edições Loyola, 2003, p. 197. Todas las traducciones son de LC-O.

página en nuestra revista para hacer lo que quiera: pintarrapear, jugar o hacer reflexiones preciosas como ésta, pensada mientras preparaba una *bacalhoadada* [guisado de bacalao]. Nuestra única preocupación es que comience a pensar en lugares más reservados, como Lutero, y de ahí pase a tener revelaciones, tesis... Es el riesgo que corremos”.¹⁰¹

Alves mismo explicó (en la edición de 2000), el cambio del segundo título original y los aires de provocación del nuevo como parte de un proceso creativo y cognoscitivo ligado inevitablemente a la teología:

Tuve miedo de decir la verdad. Escogí el primer nombre pensando en las sensibilidades estomacales de las personas. [...] Imaginé que, si hablaba de hechicería, muchos lectores se sentirían horrorizados y se negarían a probar el platillo que preparé. Eso sucedió en la aldea donde Babette hechizaría a sus invitados con la comida. Ellos acudieron al convite, pero juraron que no sentirían el sabor de la comida.

Sucede que lo que deseo es ser hechicero, pues encuentro que la fe bíblica es una mezcla de hechicería y sabiduría. Sé que los teólogos modernos me maldecirán y dirán que ya enloquecí. Los comprendo. Hace mucho tiempo que no nos entendemos. Yo hablo una cosa y ellos entienden otra. Hago mío el lamento de Zaratustra: “No soy boca para esos oídos”.¹⁰²

La poesía poseyó a Alves y había causado una revolución en su pensamiento y en su teología: nunca volvió a ser el mismo y se arrepintió muchísimo de lo que había escrito con anterioridad, y hasta deseó que los demás se olvidaran de ellos (cosa que no hicimos quienes lo estudiamos). Gracias a Wittgenstein, de quien aprendió que la ciencia es un juego lingüístico, se situó desde hacía mucho tiempo en la ladera desde la cual el lenguaje y las palabras hacen cosas, muchas cosas, algo que tuvo claro desde *Hijos del mañana* (1972; 1976), pero que no logró desarrollar poéticamente sino 20 años después, con todo y la atracción que le produjeron los personajes de *Alicia en el país de las maravillas*, de Lewis Carroll. Luego cita y parafrasea a Guimarães Rosa, al aludir a los poderes mágicos de la poesía: “Alquimia, hechicería, magia: el brujo fabrica sus pócimas con la sangre del corazón humano...”.¹⁰³ Del bufón con el que se había identificado en *La teología como juego* (en portugués: *Variaciones sobre la vida y la muerte*, de 1981), ahora la mejor transfiguración que encontró para sí mismo como teólogo-poeta (y viceversa) fue la del brujo, el mago, el hechicero. En ese prólogo de 2000 trata de distanciarse de la ciencia y la técnica, por su incapacidad para cambiar las cosas, con todo y que también se sirven de las palabras. Su prolongada filiación de apego al cuerpo como centro de la existencia humana vino en su auxilio: “Lo que el cuerpo desea no es saber. El cuerpo busca herramientas que le permitan gozar más y sufrir menos”.¹⁰⁴

La hechicería es un juego de palabras en el que la teología y la poesía se esconden: Dios mismo es un hechicero pues creó el universo con el poder de su palabra. “El

¹⁰¹ *Tempo e Presença*, núm. 181, abril de 1983, p. 14.

¹⁰² R. Alves, “Prefacio. Lições do afogado”, en *Lições de feitiçaria*. São Paulo, Edições Loyola, 2000, pp. 7-8. El texto de referencia lleva por título “Sobre mágicos e cozinheiros” (Sobre magos y cocineros), el cual muestra ya su inclinación a asociar la gastronomía con la poesía, la teología y la magia.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 8

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

hechicero está en busca del poder de Dios”. Si la mente contemporánea, como la de Alves mismo, se resiste a creer en esto a pie juntillas, hay un lugar, subraya, donde las cosas suceden en ese camino: el cuerpo. “El cuerpo es el centro mágico del universo. El cuerpo es mágico porque está hecho de palabras: ‘...y la Palabra se hizo carne...’. El cuerpo nace de un casamiento entre la carne y las palabras”.¹⁰⁵ El hechicero es quien busca las melodías olvidadas por el cuerpo para hacerlas resonar en él. Por eso dice con firmeza: “Afirmando que esa es la única pregunta que le interesa a la teología: ¿qué palabra (musical) tiene el poder de hacer el amor con la carne? ¿Qué palabra es capaz de resucitar a los muertos?”. Ésa es la razón por la que abandonó la teología como “pretensión de conocer a Dios”, el misterio de Dios: “Dios es un vacío innombrable. No se puede coger el Viento con cedazos de palabras humanas. *La ciencia de Dios es una herejía*”.¹⁰⁶ Las palabras mismas son un misterio en este laberinto divino-humano: “Hay palabras que crecen a partir de diez mil cosas y otras que crecen a partir de otras palabras. Su número no tiene fin. Pero hay una palabra que brota del silencio, la Palabra que es el comienzo del mundo. Esta palabra no puede ser producida. No nace de nuestras manos ni de nuestros pensamientos. Hemos de esperar en silencio hasta que ella se haga oír. Adviento... Gracia.”¹⁰⁷

Así es como Alves arribó, por fin, al encuentro con la poesía, descreyendo de los pretensiones “científicas” de la teología: “Los poetas son hechiceros. Ellos saben que solamente la belleza tiene el poder de despertar la belleza que duerme dentro de nuestros cuerpos”.¹⁰⁸ El olvido y el silencio son los verdaderos adversarios. Deben ser superados mediante un rastreo de las profundidades humanas en el que la poesía se sumerge y encuentra. De ahí su recomendación para leerlo a él mismo en una nueva clave, la teopoética:

Este libro son lecciones de hechicería. Estoy en busca de palabras que hagan florecer el Paraíso que el olvido transformó en desierto dentro de nosotros.

La salvación es el retorno de la belleza. Para las personas y para el mundo. [...]

Las melodías del cuerpo son sueños.

Me gustaría que la teología fuese eso: las palabras que hacen visibles los sueños y que, cuando sean dichas, transformen el valle de huesos secos en una multitud de niños y niñas.

Ésa es la sugerencia que hago: que la apalabra *teología* sea sustituida por la palabra *teopoética*, es decir, nada de saber, todo de belleza.¹⁰⁹

3. Tercera etapa: de la religión a una nueva expresión teológica

En la década de los años 70, Alves produjo una serie de trabajos críticos sobre el protestantismo y la religión, y en *Dogmatismo y tolerancia* (1982) intentó recuperar nostálgicamente los valores de la tradición reformada. En *Variaciones sobre la vida y la*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12. Énfasis agregado.

¹⁰⁷ R. Alves, *The poet, the warrior, the prophet*. London-Philadelphia, SCM Press-Trinity Press International, 1990, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ R. Alves, “Prefacio. Lições do afogado”, p. 12.

¹⁰⁹ *Idem*.

muerte (1981), *La teología como juego* (1982) y *Creo en la resurrección del cuerpo* (1982) despliega, por fin, su estilo lúdico, erótico y poético. Desde entonces comenzó a escribir en un estilo libre que denominó *crónicas*, un tipo de ensayo en el que da rienda suelta a sus ideas teológicas y pedagógicas; también historias infantiles en una vena muy cercana a la indagación psicoanalítica. *Padre Nuestro* (1987) y *El poeta, el guerrero, el profeta* (1990) dan testimonio de su madurez literaria y poética. Al mismo tiempo, reunió en otros volúmenes sus reflexiones sobre educación, los cuales fueron seguidos con mucho interés por los estudiosos debido a sus audaces propuestas pedagógicas. *Lecciones de hechicería* (1998, 2003) y *Transparencias de eternidad* (2000) reunieron algunos textos de naturaleza teológica escritos desde una perspectiva totalmente antidogmática. He aquí algunos ejemplos de ello:

Saudade es una palabra de uso frecuente. Creo que es el fundamento de mi pensamiento poético y religioso. Los traductores experimentados dicen que no hay un sinónimo exacto en otras lenguas. Es un sentimiento cercano a la nostalgia. Pero no es nostalgia. La nostalgia es mera tristeza sin objeto. No tiene rostro. Mientras que *saudade* es siempre *saudade* “de” un escenario, una cara, una escena, un momento. El poeta brasileño Chico Buarque escribió una canción sobre ella, en la que afirma que la “*saudade* es un pedazo arrancado de mí, es para enderezar la habitación del hijo que acaba de morir. Es la presencia de una ausencia. [...]”

Los místicos y los poetas han sabido que el silencio es nuestro hogar original... Hay una Palabra que solo puede ser escuchada cuando todas las palabras han quedado mudas, una Palabra escatológica que se hace escuchar a sí misma al fin del mundo. Pura gracia, un pájaro no enjaulado, un pájaro salvaje que vuela con el Viento. [...]

La poesía es el lenguaje de lo que no es posible decir.¹¹⁰

El placer: tema y variaciones

No quiero novedades. No voy a comprar departamentos o terrenos. No quiero viajar por lugares que desconozco. Eliot: “Y al final de nuestras largas exploraciones llegaremos finalmente al lugar de donde partimos y lo conoceremos entonces por primera vez...”. Eso es. Volver a mis orígenes, a las cosas de Minas que tanto amo..., la cocina, los jardines de tréboles, la malva, las granadas y los manacás, las montañas, los riachuelos, las caminatas...¹¹¹

Cuando Rubem Alves cumplió 80 años, varios de sus lectores/as y amigos de diversos países armamos un pequeño homenaje que puede leerse en internet.¹¹² Algo

¹¹⁰ R. Alves, *The poet, the warrior, the prophet*, pp. 15, 25, 96.

¹¹¹ R. Alves, “Prefácio. Eu não deveria ter tentado escrever este livro”, en *Variações sobre o prazer. Santo Agostinho, Nietzsche, Marx y Babette*. São Paulo, Planeta, 2011, p. 12. Versión de L.C.-O.

¹¹² Cf. L. Cervantes-Ortiz, ed., *La luz fracturada. Homenaje a Rubem Alves en su 80º aniversario (The fractured light. An homage to Rubem Alves in his 80th anniversary)*, <http://issuu.com/lcervortiz/docs/homenaje-80>.

similar hicimos en otra ocasión, ante la cual Rubem reaccionó con enorme sorpresa al advertir que en muchas iglesias evangélicas latinoamericanas su nombre no es extraño y se le lee con admiración y gran provecho. Ello porque después de su “alejamiento institucional” del protestantismo se suponía que quedaría al margen de cualquier contacto con dichas comunidades. Pero afortunadamente no es así, pues sus seguidores suman legiones en varios espacios y hasta existen varios grupos en las redes sociales que comparten sus textos y sus libros, dejando constancia de la manera en que “el nuevo Alves”, no necesariamente el que fue uno de los pioneros de la llamada “teología de la liberación”, hoy en su faceta de “cronista”, los alimenta con su libérrimo y sumamente creativo estilo literario.

Y es que, en efecto, lejos quedaron los años en que este pensador y sabio escribía de una manera plana o “chata”, como él mismo ha dicho, pues llegó un momento en que decidió abrirse a la literatura y a la poesía en particular, para descubrirse como un autor renovado, dispuesto a hablar de las cosas de la vida con una simplicidad y una belleza que jamás imaginó.

Porque en los años sesenta Rubem Alves soñaba con “hacer la revolución” y a esa utopía dedicó gran parte de sus escritos e ilusiones. En 1974, como parte de un proceso de fuerte introspección que lo llevó incluso al diván del psicoanálisis, pergeñó un texto que lo liberó, para siempre, de todas las cargas ideológicas y morales que lo tuvieron sometido durante tanto tiempo. “Del paraíso al desierto” es el título de esas reflexiones autobiográficas en donde describe la experiencia por la que atravesó y que lo preparó para que casi 10 años después, en 1983, descubriera por fin las bondades del juego, del cuerpo y la belleza, aunque hay que decir que ya desde sus libros iniciales se anunciaba el rumbo que tomaría su reflexión y su vida.

Sin renegar nunca de su tradición protestante, a la que dedicó varios textos memorables reunidos en *Dogmatismo y tolerancia* (1982; Mensajero, 2007) en los que exploró las luces y sombras de esa herencia, se ha mantenido a distancia de las iglesias, pero sigue haciendo una teología que ya no admite límites ni fronteras, porque se funda en la libertad de la imaginación. Sus palabras son diáfanos: “Soy protestante. Hoy, muy diferente de lo que fui. No hay retornos. Tan diferente que muchos me contestarán, negándome la ciudadanía en el mundo de la Reforma. Algunos me denunciarán como espía o traidor. Otros permitirán mi presencia, pero exigirán mi silencio. Lo cual me hace dudar de mí mismo y sospechar que, quién sabe si yo sea de hecho un apóstata. Sin embargo, por ahí, protestantes de otros lugares me confirman, oyéndome, dándome las manos, el pan y el vino...”.¹¹³ Podría decirse que llevó la teología de la liberación hasta sus últimas consecuencias ahora que se ha convertido en un “distribuidor de felicidad” gracias a la “antropofagia literaria” que practica y que promueve gracias a los sacramentos textuales que reparte por doquier y por los que entre en comunión con millones de personas.

Educador de tiempo completo, con el paso de los años decantó sus observaciones para derivar en una escritura lúdica, cien por ciento dedicada a explorar los intersticios de la vida en todas sus manifestaciones y a salpicar de poesía todo lo que vive y le interesa. Una muestra de ello es su *Libro sin fin* (2002), en una nueva y preciosa edición con el título *Variações sobre o prazer. Santo Agostinho, Nietzsche, Marx y Babette*.

¹¹³ R. Alves, “Confissões de um protestante obstinado”, en *Dogmatismo & tolerancia*. São Paulo, Edições Loyola, 2004, p. 19.

Este libro es uno de los más representativos porque refleja la libertad que ha alcanzado como escritor y reúne muchos de los temas que obsesivamente ha desarrollado en estos treinta años que también se cumplen de su renacimiento como persona y como fabulador de mundos imaginarios pero ciertos, pues tal como reza la cita de Paul Valéry que no se ha cansado de repetir una y otra vez: “¿Qué sería de nosotros sin la ayuda de las cosas que no existen?”.

En el prefacio explica las razones por las que ha elaborado este libro tan personal, plagado de citas desplegadas en los márgenes y hasta con una bibliografía final que recuerda sus años mozos, cuando ya hacía gala de un arte reflexivo exquisito, provocador y sin concesiones. Alves dice que *Variaciones sobre el placer* es fruto de la conciencia del fin, de la certeza de que su tiempo se acaba, y de que es necesario y hasta obligatorio plantarse frente al lenguaje y obligarlo a decir “las cosas del alma”, las que siempre han estado ahí y esperan salir. “Sentí, entonces, que no me gustaría que lo que había escrito quedase enterrado. A fin de cuentas, lo que escribo es parte de mí. Pero sabía, al mismo tiempo, que mis esfuerzos para terminar el libro serían inútiles. Jugué, entonces, con la idea de publicar el libro tal como estaba, sin terminar. En eso se parece a la vida. Ella nunca está terminada. Termina siempre sin que hayamos escrito el último capítulo” (p. 13). Y así, este gran maestro en plenitud de facultades que desliza sus ideas en el tiempo y el espacio “abandonó” este ejercicio lúcido y lúdico para dejar constancia de su fidelidad a la escritura que le han enseñado sus poetas y autores de cabecera.

Y así fue que este libro sin fin quedó inconcluso, con todo y que en sus más de 180 páginas brota el aliento de alguien que se pone a cuentas con sus autores favoritos y sus influencias más entrañables, tal como lo anuncia el subtítulo: San Agustín (a pesar de los pesares), Nietzsche (el autor permanente de la mesa de noche, siempre a la mano porque vaya que ese *The portable Nietzsche*, de Walter Kaufmann lo ha acompañado siempre), Marx (a quien ha leído y releído de una manera sumamente peculiar; para probarlo está ese otro volumen: *Qué es la religión*, que no envejece con el paso del tiempo) y Babette, la cocinera francesa que le abrió otras ventanas vitales a aquellas mujeres luteranas... Un libro sin el más mínimo desperdicio, un Alves que se sincera con todos y acomete la memoria con variaciones de teología (en primer lugar), filosofía, economía y el arte culinaria, otra de sus grandes aficiones.

Una transustanciación literaria

Las ideas del yo pensante son aves enjauladas - pertenecen a lo que el yo hace con ellas lo que desea. Las ideas que viven en el cuerpo son aves salvajes - sólo vienen cuando ellas desean. Tienen voluntad e ideas propias.¹¹⁴

Desde que allá por 1981 (hace más de 30 años) Rubem Alves decidió cambiar para siempre su estilo de escritura e indagar en los asuntos de la vida de una manera distinta a la teología que aprendió y que desarrolló tan bien (hay que decirlo), ha ido decantando su estilo y se ha renovado continuamente gracias a una inmersión infatigable en sus abismos personales y en todo lo que le rodea.

¹¹⁴ R. Alves, *Variações sobre o prazer. Santo Agostinho, Nietzsche, Marx y Babette*. São Paulo, Planeta, 2011, p. 22. Versión de L.C.-O.

Una persona contribuyó a que esa transformación se realizara de modo más formal: su amigo Jether Pereira Ramalho lo invitó, ese mismo año, a escribir textos libres para la revista ecuménica *Tempo e Presença*. El primer artículo publicado allí sería el punto de partida que se concretaría en *Dogmatismo y tolerancia*, luego del feroz ajuste de cuentas con la Iglesia Presbiteriana de Brasil que fue *Protestantismo y represión* (1979; nuevo título: *Religión y represión*, 2005).¹¹⁵ Ya lejos de cualquier venganza o resentimiento, Alves se transfiguró en un escritor que poco a poco lograría una prosa impactante y concisa, personal y entrañable, al mismo tiempo. Ese oficio lo llevó a incorporarse a la Academia Campinense de Letras, mismo destino de su colega Gustavo Gutiérrez (el fundador católico de la teología latinoamericana de la liberación), miembro, a su vez, de la Academia Peruana de la Lengua.

Pocos años después, él mismo dio fe de su transformación, aunque todavía sin la claridad y la certeza que le permitirían alcanzar sus lecturas de autores como William Blake, T.S. Eliot, Fernando Pessoa, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Cecilia Meireles, Gaston Bachelard, Octavio Paz o Adélia Prado, por citar sólo a algunos. Los años noventa fueron el escenario del nuevo despliegue narrativo y reflexivo del siempre teólogo (a su pesar) que ahora se movía como pez en el agua, ya libre de las amarras doctrinales que atenazaron en otro tiempo su creatividad. *El libro sin fin*, renombrado ahora como *Variaciones sobre el placer* es una puerta de acceso a su “taller íntimo de producción escritural” porque exhibe sin pudor ni arrepentimiento la manera en que las ideas que brotan de su cuerpo lo poseen a través de una inspiración nada etérea, sensible, pero que se queda sin explicación necesariamente lógica.

Luego de explicar, de modo divagado, lo sucedido en su interior y en su experiencia cuando le surgió el deseo de escribir este volumen, Alves mezcla, en su nuevo método de pesquisa, todos los elementos que le sirvieron para avanzar en la escritura. Así, se juntan en una misma página Tales de Mileto y Nietzsche, quienes junto a otros autores bombardean al lector/a desde los márgenes para acicatear su imaginación con múltiples rumbos de interacción y búsqueda. El primer capítulo, una amplia digresión, proscrita en los textos académicos, lo muestra de cuerpo entero: “Los textos de saber prohíben que los autores se entreguen a confesiones sobre los caminos o descaminos de sus pensamientos antes de alcanzar su destino de conocimiento. Lo que se exige de un texto de saber es que el autor haga una asepsia rigurosa en sus materiales. Todo aquello que no hable al respecto del camino en línea recta, que lleve del problema inicial a una conclusión, debe irse a la basura”.¹¹⁶

Con ese trasfondo, Alves acomete la transustanciación literaria de todo lo que ha fagocitado por ser un antropófago consuetudinario que, en una labor casi religiosa, convierte en nuevo sacramento lo que brota de su pluma. A eso se refiere el segundo y breve capítulo, “Hoc est corpus meum”, esto es, las palabras sacramentales de Jesús de Nazaret. El autor ahora escribe con su sangre y su persona misma, y cada texto lo retrata en la mirada del lector: “Las cosas que digo, igual que las telas de Arcimboldi y la escritura de Borges, trazan las líneas de mi rostro”.¹¹⁷ El arte, queda bien claro, “busca la

¹¹⁵ Cf. Leonildo Silveira Campos, “O discurso acadêmico de Rubem Alves sobre ‘protestantismo’ e ‘repressão’: algumas observações 30 anos depois”, en *Religião e Sociedade*, vol.28, núm.2, Río de Janeiro, Instituto de Estudos da Religião, 2008, pp. 102-137, www.scielo.br/pdf/rs/v28n2/a06v28n2.pdf.

¹¹⁶ R. Alves, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

comuni3n". Su carne y su sangre nos son entregados en un acto est3tico-lit3rgico que actualiza la vida de quien proceden los textos. Cada lectura es un acto de degustaci3n. Y nuevamente acontece el "ritual antropof3gico", dicho todo esto en un lenguaje que viene del *Manifiesto antrop3f3go*, de Oswald de Andrade, del ya muy lejano 1928, en los a3os del surgimiento de la vanguardia po3tica brasile3a...

Los cap3tulos que siguen, con el t3tulo cambiado, "Las metamorfosis de la vejez" ("Despu3s de viejo me volví ni3o", era el anterior), "El olvido: Barthes" ("Me olvid3 de lo sabido para recordar lo olvidado", el mismo caso), abundan en la reinterpretaci3n, con las nuevas herramientas, de los caminos recorridos. En "De los saberes a los sabores" y "Los saberes del cuerpo" reinventa la aprehensi3n del mundo, ahora de una manera gastron3mica y extremadamente sensorial, pero sin reducir la experiencia s3lo al sentido del gusto. Por eso el cap3tulo siguiente se llama: "El cuerpo: 3l sabe sin saber" (antes: "Por una pedagog3a de la inconciencia"). Nuevamente, como anta3o (en *Hijos del ma3ana* y *El enigma de la religi3n*) analiza la funci3n del lenguaje, pero desde fuentes muy diferentes a las de su amigo Paulo Freire. La educaci3n le ha faltado siempre el respeto al cuerpo, a sus deseos de aprender 3nicamente lo que le sirve y le gusta. Por eso ha fallado la ciencia en imponerse: despu3s de todo, los libros de ciencia son libros "de recetas".

3se es el origen de "Variaciones sobre el placer" ("La raz3n, sierva del placer"), donde relee al obispo de Hipona, y no se engaña: "La experiencia del placer, tan buena, siempre nos coloca delante de un vac3o [la "puerta de la m3stica", agregar3a yo]. La teolog3a de San Agust3n se construy3 sobre ese vac3o que sigue al placer. (No olvida el poema de Hel3dio Brito sobre los *caquis*, fruta *gostosa*...) Despu3s de agotado el placer, existe, en el alma, la nostalgia por algo indefinible".¹¹⁸

El placer no es lo mismo que la alegr3a. De ah3 que sus "variaciones" sigan el mismo rumbo: San Agust3n en teolog3a; Nietzsche, la filosof3a; Marx, la econom3a; y, para cerrar, Babette, la cocinera, acompa3ada de Tita, la de *Como agua para chocolate*. Esa variaci3n es la definitiva, en donde todo se redefine de manera casi total: su acercamiento al saber de la cocinera es enf3tico. "El banquete se inicia con una decisi3n de amor". Los sabores que ellas dominan controlan al mundo porque, a diferencia de un nutriólogo, amo y se3or de las cantidades y las calor3as: "La cabeza de la cocinera funciona al rev3s. No considera vitaminas, carbohidratos y prote3nas. Su imaginaci3n est3 llena de sabores. Sue3a con los efectos que los sabores producirán en el cuerpo de quien coma. No quiere matar el hambre. Lo que ella desea es hacer el amor con quien come a trav3s de los sabores. Cuando el hambre se satisface, el festival de amo llega a su fin. [...] Me gustar3a que el texto evang3lico fuese otro: 'Bienaventurados los hambrientos porque ellos tendrán m3s hambre'. ¡La cocinera desea que su invitado muera de placer!".¹¹⁹

La pasi3n de Alves por la cocina fue estimulada de manera monumental por la pel3cula danesa *El fest3n de Babette* (1987), al grado de que, cuando emprendió la aventura de abrir su propio restaurant, no otro fue el nombre del mismo. En otro momento, se explay3 sobre el film con palabras que siguen resonando por su perspicacia y empat3a:

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

Cocinar es hechicería, alquimia. Y comer es ser hechizado. Eso lo sabía Babette, artista que conocía los secretos de producir alegría mediante la comida. Ella sabía que, después de comer, las personas no siguen siendo las mismas. Cosas mágicas acontecen. De eso desconfiaban los endurecidos moradores de aquella aldea, que tenían miedo de comer del banquete que Babette les preparó. Creían que era una bruja y que el banquete era un ritual de hechicería. Y tenían razón. Que era hechicería, eso mismo. Sólo que no del tipo que imaginaban. Creían que Babette haría que sus almas se perdieran. No irían al cielo. De hecho, la hechicería aconteció: sopa de tortuga, callos al sarcófago, vinos maravillosos, el placer ablandando los sentimientos y pensamientos, las durezas y las arrugas del cuerpo siendo alisadas por el paladar, las máscaras cayendo, los rostros endurecidos haciéndose bonitos por la risa, *in vino veritas*...¹²⁰

Para él, esa es ahora la gran metáfora de la vida, el saber y el placer: la cocina, porque los ojos de la cocinera “son iguales a los ojos de un poeta”.¹²¹ La poesía es culinaria, la culinaria es filosofía, dice a continuación. “La poesía son palabras buenas para comer. El poeta es un hechicero alquimista que cocina el mundo en sus versos: en un simple verso cabe un universo”.¹²² Placer, sabiduría, poesía y cocina: espacios para degustar la existencia y el tiempo. Ése era ya el nuevo Alves, siempre teólogo y poeta.

¹²⁰ Cf. R. Alves, “A festa de Babette”, en www.releituras.com/rubemalves_babette.asp.

¹²¹ R. Alves, *Variações sobre o prazer*, p. 150.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 151.

Rubem Alves and the Kaki Tree: the trajectory of an exile thinker

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Abstract

This article presents a perspective on the changes that marked the development of Rubem Alves's thought throughout his life. In the process of identifying the factors that contributed to those changes in Alves's intellectual work, it argues that the situation of exile was a key motif in his work and one of the reasons he was never fully understood and appreciated in the U.S. Contrary to perspectives that stress radical ruptures in his thought, it sustains that Rubem Alves underwent an ongoing distancing from the restrictions imposed by the academy, an irreversible return home in his intellectual life.

I write as a poet... Being a poet, I don't know how to talk scientifically about Christianity. I can only talk about it as it is reflected in the mirror of my body, through time...Today, the central ideas of Christian theology, in which I used to believe, mean nothing to me... They don't make any sense...Even more curious is the fact that I continue to be linked to this tradition. There is something in Christianity that is part of my body. (Rubem Alves, *Transparencies of Eternity*, 2010)

The purpose of this text is to offer a perspective on the changes that marked the development of Rubem Alves's thought throughout his life. In the process of identifying the factors that contributed to those changes in Alves's intellectual work, I identify the situation of exile as a key motif in his work.¹²³ Alves's experience of trying to make sense

¹²³ I began to write this text as a response to Leopoldo Cervantes-Ortiz's 2014 *Herencia Lecture* at Princeton Theological Seminary. The text that you have in hands has been significantly expanded if

of his life and identity in the process of developing his intellectual work exemplifies the conflicts faced by a number of Latin American theologians who have sought to break free from a hegemonic colonial logic.

Contrary to perspectives that stress radical ruptures in his thought, I sustain that, informed by his biographical experiences, Rubem Alves underwent an ongoing radicalization, a return home, in his intellectual life. From the very beginning of his career as a thinker and a writer, Alves already showed signs of being uneasy and dislocated in the dominant context of the academia. Later on, he began to break free from what he increasingly perceived as an intellectual cage. He allowed himself to move from having and controlling ideas to being possessed by ideas. This experience gave birth to new expressions and perceptions in his writings, which took the form of poetry and short chronicles. Alves's ideas at this stage, though, were not totally new. They represented the expansion, deepening, and transformation of insights that had already appeared in embryonic forms in his earlier thinking.

In 1987, eighteen years after its publication in English, Alves's classic *A Theology of Human Hope*¹²⁴ was finally published in Portuguese, his mother language.¹²⁵ Alves wrote a new preface for the book, introducing it to his Brazilian readers. He called that essay "Sobre Deuses e Caquis," (On Gods and Kakis). Alves's reference to kaki, the Japanese name to persimmon, has profound connection with a story he heard about the Kaki tree in Japan.

After the bombing that killed 200,000 people in Hiroshima and burned all living things to the ground, there was a tree that survived. It was a persimmon or kaki tree. This persimmon became then a symbol of triumph of life over death. The Japanese took care of it, reaped its fruits, planted their seeds and spread their seedlings to many cities in the world.¹²⁶

Alves's words in the preface of *Da Esperanca* were carefully chosen. His love for kaki—which he often said, should have been the fruit of temptation in the Eden Garden—symbolized the endurance of his soul living in exile. The resistance of the kaki tree mirrored his own. "Sobre Deuses e Caquis" thus is one of the most revealing autobiographical texts Alves wrote, particularly with respect to his relationship with the U. S. academy. In this preface for the Brazilian edition of the book that made him known

compared to my oral response to Cervantes-Ortiz's lectures. Although, this essay might still be somewhat in conversation with Cervantes-Ortiz, at this point its argument stands on its own. I am very grateful, though, to Rev. Cervantes-Ortiz's thoughtful lecture, and to the insights that our conversation has provided for me. He is without any doubt one of the best interpreters of Rubem Alves's life and theopoetics I know.

¹²⁴ Rubem Alves, *A Theology of Human Hope* (Washington, DC.: Corpus Books, 1969).

¹²⁵ Rubem Alves, *Da Esperanca* (Campinas, SP, Brazil : Papirus, 1987).

¹²⁶ Rubem Alves, "O Caqui," *Revista Educacao*, August, 2011, online access, <http://revistaeducacao.uol.com.br/textos/169/artigo234950-1.asp>, accessed on May 10, 2015.

[Translation is mine]

in the U.S., Alves apologized for having written such a “boring” academic text. He says, “I did not want to write like that, because I am not like that. If I have written in this way it is just because I have been obligated to do so in the name of academic rigor.”¹²⁷ He goes on with his critique of the academia by saying that the most beautiful things ever written in philosophy would never be accepted in the academic circles today.

The Background

Rubem Alves’s doctoral dissertation at Princeton Theological Seminary (1968) was the first full treatment of liberation theology. Published in English a year later, and three years prior to Gustavo Gutierrez’ *A Theology of Liberation*, it had its title changed by the publisher to *A Theology of Human Hope*.¹²⁸

In the period of one year Alves had gone from barely having his dissertation approved to being considered a brilliant and creative emerging theological voice from the Southern hemisphere. In the foreword of Alves’s first book, Harvey Cox, an already known young North American theologian at the time, highly praises the sophistication and refinement of Alves’s work, describing him as a ringing theological voice from Latin America that challenges theologians in the North Atlantic to stop talking “about the Third World theologically,” and begin to listen to them.¹²⁹

In 1985, Richard Shaull, who had taught Alves first in Campinas, Brazil, and later became his mentor and friend, referred to him as “one of the most outstanding and best-known Third World theologians;” someone with “a brilliant mind” and “an extraordinary capacity to articulate his thought.”¹³⁰

In fact, in order to better understand Alves, one must consider Richard Shaull’s impact upon him and other members of an “extraordinary new generation of ministers and lay men and women,”¹³¹ which were challenged by Shaull to think theologically from the perspective of their social and cultural location, as Latin American Protestants. Alves’s *A Theology of Human Hope* became the most articulated expression of that emerging theology at the time. This is how John H. Sinclair describes the Protestant situation in Latin America prior to that time:

¹²⁷ Rubem Alves, “Sobre Deuses e Caquis,” In *Sobre Deuses e Caquis: teologia, política e poesia em Rubem Alves. Comunicacoes do ISER* 32 (1988): 9-31 (9).

¹²⁸ The title of Rubem Alves’s Ph.D. dissertation was *Towards a Theology of Liberation: an exploration of the encounter between the languages of humanistic messianism and messianic humanism* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1968). In light of the attention being dispensed to the theology of hope in academic circles at the time, and of the fact that Alves’ work engaged and challenged Jurgen Moltmann’s understanding of hope in his well acclaimed *Theology of Hope* (New York, NY.: Harper & Row, 1965), Alves’s publisher decided to go with the more marketable title *A Theology of Human Hope* (Washington, DC.: Corpus Publications, 1969).

¹²⁹ Harvey Cox, “Forward,” *A Theology of Human Hope*., p. vii.

¹³⁰ Richard Shaull, “Foreword,” in Rubem Alves, *Protestantism and Repression: a Brazilian case study* (Maryknoll, NY.: Orbis, 1985), p. xii.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. xi. Shaull further describes that young generation of Protestant thinkers in Brazil as ‘intellectually gifted, socially concerned, and dedicated to the service of church and country.’ *Ibid.*

Protestant Christianity in Latin America often was thought to lie outside the purview of Christian history; it was seen merely as an extension of Protestantism from North America, Britain, and Europe.¹³²

The absence of theological voices in Latin America prior to the late 1960s can be understood in light of the condition of coloniality of power, which inhibited autonomous thinking. Rubem Alves was one of the first Latin American theologians to rebel against that situation of suppression of the “different”. Enrique Dussel has rightly affirmed that the existence of the Latin American ‘other’ has been historically eclipsed since the conquest, which he prefers to call “the invention of the Americas.”¹³³ This eclipse has impacted Latin America on several levels, including our intellect. As Dussel points out, for centuries Latin Americans were led to imitate and repeat Western philosophy and theology, since we were told that the only way to think right and to exist before the developed world was thinking like Europeans, following the same patterns of their logic.¹³⁴ Our universities and seminaries until fairly recently did not stimulate their students to think as Latin Americans. Instead, we had to comply with the European philosophical and theological categories and structures in order to be accepted by the academic world. Such an oppressive context has made brilliant non-conforming minds, such as Alves’s, not to feel at home in academia because they do not operate in accord with the dominant rules of that particular game. Many of us, Latin American theologians, think with our minds and hearts together, bringing emotions and reason together, and developing our thoughts in concrete and contextual ways.¹³⁵

The development of Alves’s life and thought, which is the focus of this essay, illustrates the conflicts faced by Latin American thinkers who try to break free from that colonial logic.

The Periodization of Rubem Alves’s Thought

¹³² John H. Sinclair, “Research on Protestantism in Latin America: a bibliographic essay,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 26/3.(2002): 110.

¹³³ Enrique Dussel. *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of “the Other” and the Myth of Modernity* (New York: Continuum, 1995). In this book Dussel describes the origin of “the myth of modernity,” which justifies European violence. He holds that although the gestation of modernity took place within Europe itself, it just came to birth in the confrontation of Europe with those who were otherized by Europeans: “by controlling, conquering, and violating the Other, Europe defined itself as the discoverer, conquistador and colonizer of an alterity likewise constitutive of modernity. Europe never discovered this Other as Other but covered over the Other as part of the Same.” (p. 12)

¹³⁴ Enrique Dussel defines this kind of thinking as a colonial mercantile philosophy; a “philosophy” that was exported from Europe to Latin America, Africa, and Asia starting in the sixteenth century and had a “spirit of pure imitation or repetition in the periphery of the philosophy prevailing in the imperialist center.” Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1985), p. 10.

¹³⁵ This has also been characteristic of U.S. Latina/o thought. A good analysis of this *Latino/a* way to understand things can be found in Ismael Garcia, *Dignidad: Ethics Through Hispanic Eyes*, (Nashville: Abingdom Press, 1997).

In seeking to understand the evolution of the trajectory of Rubem Alves, scholars like Leopoldo Cervantes-Ortiz and Antonio Vidal Nunes have developed periodization models to identify changes in emphases and method in his thinking and writing in the course of his life.¹³⁶ It is not in the scope of this essay to do an in-depth analysis of these models. However, it is important to engage them to the extent that they can help to prevent generalizations about what Alves thought or wrote in a particular period of his life. For example, in the forward of his book *Teologia da Libertação em suas Origens*—which is the translation of his 1963 masters' thesis at Union Theological Seminary—to a Brazilian audience, Alves warns his first-time readers against possible generalizations about his thinking made from the content of this book. For him, the significance of that book lies not in its content, which is outdated, but in its biographical role. He sees the text of his youth as a frozen picture in a photo album. "This text is a picture of things that I thought many years ago, which I no longer think."¹³⁷ The value of looking at frozen images from the past is to imagine the path taken by one's thinking over the years.

Leopoldo Cervantes-Ortiz highlights the transformation Rubem Alves's work underwent, as Alves moved from being mainly a liberation theologian to becoming a poet. He identifies the book *Tomorrow's Child* (1972)¹³⁸ as the moment when Alves's imaginative mind begins to become more prominent in relation to his more analytical vein. According to him, such a conversion from reason to imagination would reach its fullest with the discovery of poetry by Alves in the early eighties.¹³⁹

In the preface to the Brazilian edition of his book on the theology of Rubem Alves, Cervantes-Ortiz cites a conversation with Alves in which he said that the only writer who he envied was Gaston Bachelard.¹⁴⁰ Bearing that conversation in mind, Cervantes-Ortiz compared Bachelard's lifestyle with Rubem Alves's career as a writer. The correlation made by Cervantes-Ortiz is this: while Bachelard used the daylight hours of his regular days to produce his philosophical work and the night to write poetry—being thus a daytime thinker and a night "feeler"—Alves produced a more intellectual work (his daytime work) earlier in his career, later abandoning the logic imposed by the academy to become a poet and a chronicler, seeking to paint with words his fantasies, "images modeled by the desire" (his night time work).¹⁴¹

The periodization put forward by Cervantes-Ortiz emphasizes a break with the theological and academic discourse clearly perceived by the reader of Alves's work,

¹³⁶ Leopoldo Cervantes-Ortiz, *A Teologia de Rubem Alves: poesia, brincadeira e erotismo* (Campinas, SP.: Papirus, 2005); Antônio Vidal Nunes, *Corpo, Linguagem e Educação dos Sentidos no Pensamento de Rubem Alves* (S. Paulo, Paulus, 2008).

¹³⁷ Rubem Alves, *Teologia da Libertação em suas Origens: uma interpretação do significado da revolução no Brasil – 1963* (Vitoria, ES.: Faculdade Salesiana de Vitoria, 2004), p. 17.

¹³⁸ Rubem Alves, *Tomorrow's Child: imagination, creativity, and the rebirth of culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

¹³⁹ Leopoldo Cervantes-Ortiz, "A Theology of Human Joy: The Liberating-Poetic-Ludic Theology of Rubem Alves," lecture read during the Herencia Symposium, Hispanic Heritage Month, Mackay Campus Center, Princeton Theological Seminary Princeton, New Jersey, October 16th, 2014. P. 6.

¹⁴⁰ Cervantes-Ortiz, op. cit., p. 11.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 11-12.

which began in the early 1970s and radicalized in the 1980s. It was in that spirit that when he published his masters' thesis in Portuguese Alves urged his new readers to go beyond just seeing the picture of the young Rubem Alves, to also read his most mature work.

The Rubem Alves who was initially known as a liberation theologian through his first two books originally published in English, and who later, back in Brazil, wrote widely-read texts in the areas of philosophy of religion and philosophy of education, also turned into a storyteller (having started to write for children after the birth to his daughter Raquel). Later he became also a poet and chronicler of everyday life. By embracing this new persona, Alves not only broke with formal discursive theology, but also broke away from academic discourse as a whole. This movement of distancing himself from both formal theological discourse and academic/scientific language should be perceived as a natural move by the attentive reader of the autobiographical narratives found scattered throughout the work of Rubem Alves. Just as Alves had had difficulty to keep his relationship with the church—which led him to break with the Presbyterian Church in 1970—he also admitted his uncomfortableness at the academy.

He explained his turning away from discursive theological language by saying, "I know nothing about God—I am not a theologian!"¹⁴² Likewise, to explain why he no longer saw himself as an educator or a scholar he would say, "I am no longer a professor. I have no lessons to give, no knowledge to communicate ... I know nothing about the world—I am not a scientist. I know only this little space, which is my body, and even my body I only see as a dim reflection in a dark mirror."¹⁴³ At the end, he declares, "Not theology. Poetry!"¹⁴⁴

But how did Alves define the poet whom he so strongly identified with? "The poet is the person who speaks words which are not to be understood; they are to be eaten." The poet is a cook and "his [sic] stove is his[sic] own body, lit with the fire of imagination." "The poet knows that there is not a universal scientific knowledge to be communicated... Nobody can be universal outside one's own backyard garden."¹⁴⁵

In his rebellion against universal, standardized knowledge, by the mid-1980s Alves was already flirting with insights that would later be more sophisticatedly developed by decolonial and border thinkers.¹⁴⁶ Although one cannot claim any direct linkage, it is possible to say that Alves was already pointing in the direction of intercultural criticism.

Alves, likewise, rebelled against the impersonality and lack of corporeality in academic communication of knowledge, which he saw as ineffective and non-liberating. He saw it as a cage that blocks creative initiatives. That is why in 1987 he apologized to its Brazilian readers for writing such a boring book.¹⁴⁷ It is worthy to note that he said

¹⁴² Rubem Alves, "Theopoethics: longing and liberation," in *Struggles for Solidarity: liberation theologies in tension*, edited by Lorine M. Getz e Ruy O. Costa (Minneapolis, MN.: Fortress Press, 1992), pp. 159-171 (160).

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: coloniality, subaltern knowledges and border thinking* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 2000).

¹⁴⁷ Alves, *Da Esperanca*, op. cit.

that even at the time he originally wrote that book (1968), that was not how he wanted to have written it. He felt he was forced to write that way in the name of academic rigor:

As Nietzsche observed, the condition to pass a doctoral examination is to have developed a taste for the boring stuff. Thus, I wrote ugly, without laughter or poetry, because I had no choice: a Brazilian student, from an undeveloped country, in a foreign institution, has to abide by the rules if [s]he want to pass ...¹⁴⁸

A confession that certainly deserves attention.

Antonio Vidal Nunes offers an alternative periodization of the thought of Rubem Alves.¹⁴⁹ His proposal is a little more nuanced, emphasizing transitions and alternating predominant emphases, rather than breaks or radical turns. He highlights metamorphoses and predominant features in his reflective journey, without claiming, however, that these phases are rigid or absolute.¹⁵⁰ Nunes suggests three phases for an interpretation of the ways Alves thought and represented the world: the theological phase, the philosophical-poetic phase and the poetic-philosophical phase.

At the time he arrived for his studies at the Presbyterian Seminary of Campinas, in 1953, Alves, in his own words, was a fundamentalist. He defined this term as "an attitude which attributes a definitive character to one's own beliefs."¹⁵¹ "Fundamentalists," he said, "are characterized by a dogmatic and authoritarian attitude with respect to their own system of thought and by an attitude of intolerance... toward every 'heretic' or 'revisionist'."¹⁵² The most significant contribution to the profound transformation that occurred in his worldview as a seminarian came from his encounter with Richard Shaull, a North American Presbyterian missionary who had also just arrived at the Seminary of Campinas, after working for almost a decade in Colombia. The influence of Shaull on Alves was invaluable. In different texts, Alves used very vivid expressions to describe such an impact:

We arrived at the seminary in Campinas in the same year, 1953. I was a freshman and was full of certainties. Shaull was a professor and was full of

¹⁴⁸ Rubem Alves, "Sobre Deuses e Caquis," In *Sobre Deuses e Caquis: teologia, política e poesia em Rubem Alves. Comunicacoes do ISER* 32 (1988): 9-31 (9).

¹⁴⁹ Antônio Vidal Nunes, *Corpo, Linguagem e Educação dos Sentidos no Pensamento de Rubem Alves* (Sao Paulo, SP.: Paulus, 2008).

¹⁵⁰ Antônio Vidal Nunes, "Etapas do Itinerário Reflexivo de Rubem Alves: a dança da vida e dos símbolos," In *O Que Eles Pensam de Rubem Alves e de seu Humanismo na Religião, na Educação e na Poesia*, organizado por Antônio Vidal Nunes, 2ed (Sao Paulo, SP.: Paulus, 2008), pp. 11-52 (14).

¹⁵¹ Rubem Alves, "From Paradise to Desert: Autobiographical Musings," in *Third World Theologians: a reader*, edited by Deane William Fernald (Maryknoll, NY.: Orbis Books, 1986), pp. 93-108 (94).

¹⁵² Ibid., pp. 94-95.

questions. Of course I did not suspect that soon my certainties would fall to the ground, otherwise I would have run away.¹⁵³

I was young and walked on a plane and safe way. I had been taught every detail about the way. It was all signaled with signs to prevent anyone from getting lost. In some signs one could read 'certainties'. In others, 'prohibitions' ... I had no moral conflict because the prohibitions had already made the decisions for me ...

Then the unexpected happened. A man came by walking in the opposite direction ... [As] we approached, we were facing each other. I looked right into his eyes, and saw, reflected as in a mirror, a world I had never seen...

One [where] there were neither certainties nor prohibitions. What was there were horizons, directions, possibilities, freedom...

And I can say today that my life is divided into two periods: before I met him, and after I met him. His name was Richard Shaull ... If you ask me, 'What did you learn from him?' - The answer is simple: 'Dick Shaull taught me how to think'.¹⁵⁴

Nunes's theological-pastoral phase starts right after Alves graduates from seminary, in 1957. According to Nunes, this phase was marked by a theological reflection that "aimed to establish a symbolic network which could motivate Christians to participate effectively in the life of society."¹⁵⁵ In terms of Alves's writing, this first phase is represented by his Th.M. thesis at Union Theological Seminary, in 1964.

The second phase, identified by Nunes as philosophical-poetic, starts when Alves has to leave Brazil again in exile, in 1964. It is characterized by the deepening of his understanding of the behavior of religious institutions and the development of his theological humanism in dialogue with various philosophers and poets.¹⁵⁶ According to Nunes, in this phase "there is a philosopher on stage, which will, now and then, be interrupted by the presence of an intruding poet, always trying to embellish the symbolic constellations woven by the former... Religion remains at the heart of his reflection."¹⁵⁷

Finally, the poetic-philosophical phase, in Nunes's words "represents an inversion of the previous one."¹⁵⁸ In other words,

At first, there was a philosopher who spoke, and a poet always meddling in a speech marked by rigor, inserting, albeit quickly, elements of a lighter and different language from the hegemonic discourse. Now the tables are turned. The poet steals the show, takes over the stage, and replaces the

¹⁵³ Rubem Alves, "O Deus do Furacão". In *De Dentro do Furacão: Richard Shaull e os primórdios da teologia da libertação*. Vários Autores (São Paulo-SP: Sagarana Editora, 1985), pp. 19-24 (20).

¹⁵⁴ Rubem Alves, "su cadaver estava lleno de mundo," *Religiao e Sociedade* vol. 22, numero especial (2003): 91-95.

¹⁵⁵ Nunes, op.cit., p. 22.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 32.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 41.

philosopher. The philosopher, though, will not go away; he only retracts, following silently the poet who speaks.¹⁵⁹

Such distinctions in the reflective path of Rubem Alves are understood as metamorphoses that occurred in the context of his inevitable historical existence, and are linked to concrete events and experiences. Among the facts that contributed significantly to the third metamorphosis in Alves's trajectory was the birth of his daughter, Raquel, in 1975. In Nunes's words, "this was an event that deeply marked Rubem Alves, releasing thus definitively the poet and mystic who up to that point had been in the background."¹⁶⁰

The birth of Raquel leads Alves to rearrange his priorities. Among other things, he decided that from that point on he would only do things that were really important for him. Thus, he opted for the beauty of poetry as his preferred language to "convey the image of a special world to Raquel."¹⁶¹ Apart from the impact that Raquel's birth itself had on Alves, little Raquel also had to undergo surgeries very early. The desire to tell stories that could ease her pain contributed to turn this father into a fabulous storyteller.

In all his narratives Rubem Alves highlights events, encounters and experiences that deeply impacted his way of seeing the world and of using language. In a way, these narratives suggest a kind of continuity in his thought, a creative restlessness that marks Alves's intellectual path from beginning to end, regardless of the emphasis that predominates in a given moment of his life.

If this impression is correct, one can speak, then, first, of a methodological continuity, which sees the theological thought of Alves always as emerging from its historical and existential circumstances. This can be said of any of the phases or turns identified above, including the apparent abandonment of theology, which can instead be perceived as the abandonment of a way of doing theology, which reflects Alves's engagement of particular lived realities. At a conference in Albuquerque, in the early 1990s, speaking to an audience which still expected to hear the Rubem Alves known for his liberation theology, Alves explained the changes in his thinking, tracking the existential dimension of his change from an emphasis on doing to one on beauty: "In my own experience, I have been able to face tragedy only by the power of beauty."¹⁶² Elsewhere in his work, he recalls Marx by saying that the human being is not an abstract being; "biography and history belong together."¹⁶³ Likewise, he will say, "It is this personal story that compels me to do theology...Theology and biography, thus, belong together."¹⁶⁴

Such continuity can also be seen in a thematic approach. The historicity of language; the emphases on desire, the senses, and the body; his continuous interest in religion, which in one way or another remains to the end in his writings; and even the frequent

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 42.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Alves, "From Liberation Theologian to Poet: a plea that the church move from ethics to aesthetics, from doing to beauty," *Church and Society*, May/June 1993: 20-24 (24).

¹⁶³ Rubem Alves, "Confessions: on theology and life," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, vol. XXIV, no. 3&4, Spring & Summer 1974, pp. 181-193 (185).

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 186.

theme of hope, despite its variations; all can be perceived as lines of continuity in the Alvesian thought.

Multiple Exiles

The experience of exile deeply affects one's perception of the world. Home sickness, rejection, struggle to redefine one's identity, longing for belonging, living in between, nostalgia, all these things are experienced in one way or another by people who are uprooted and forcibly moved into a different place. I would like to argue that more attention should be paid to the experience of the exile as a motif in Rubem Alves's work. This motif, which has often been overlooked, can shed new light into the understanding of metamorphoses in Alves's thought.

Rubem Alves experienced exile on at least three dimensions. As a young pastor in the Presbyterian Church of Brazil, a denomination at that point led by people who used God as an "ideological weapon...to preserve the power structure,"¹⁶⁵ Alves was deemed a dissident, a subversive, a communist, and a heretic. In the context of this institutional exile, Alves asked, "how is one to survive in solitude, far from any community?"¹⁶⁶

Ostracized in the context of his church, Alves was also forced to leave his home country to avoid the destiny of some of his friends: prison, torture, or even death. When referring to the experience of leaving Brazil, Alves spoke also in exilic terms: "It was the beginning of a great loneliness!"¹⁶⁷

Finally, it is also possible to talk about his life in the academia as a sort of exile. Alves described his work on his doctoral dissertation in exilic terms as well.

This book is a rude meditation about my own body: its space, its time, its values, its hopes, its struggles. If we go through seemingly so distant paths from the flesh that laughs and cries it is because the academic rigor forbade the body to speak... I needed to find words that would help my body to regenerate, now in this sad condition of exile ¹⁶⁸

Referring to his time at Princeton Theological Seminary Alves recalls repeating Psalm 137 (which refers to the Babylonian exile), as never before. As Alves associated his academic work with his condition of exile, such a condition informed his writings. At the same time, his writings became a tool through which he tried to make sense of the experience of exile.

Let's quickly review these three dimensions of exile.

As for his relationship with the church, Rubem Alves was raised as a member of the Presbyterian Church of Brazil. I have already mentioned his immersion in a fundamentalist piety in his youth and his decision to go to the Seminary of Campinas, where he experienced a profound change in his theology. Among other things, assisted by Shaull and other theologians whom he met in those years, he discovered that the sacred "slipped from the religious greenhouses we had built, and invaded the world."

¹⁶⁵ "From Paradise to Desert," op. cit., p. 97.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Alves, "Sobre Deuses e Caquis," p. 22.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 24.

Now that the whole world was made sacred, “the whole world is a cloister—making unnecessary the construction of other cloisters.”¹⁶⁹ This understanding of a faith fully immersed in human history put Alves on a collision course with the Presbyterian Church in Brazil. His questions and concerns were perceived as threats that had to be suppressed. He was denounced to the Supreme Council of IPB (Presbyterian Church in Brazil) as a subversive communist, and also to the authorities of military regime. He felt betrayed by the church he loved, and was forced to rush and leave his beloved country.

When Alves returned to Brazil after his doctorate, he was still a member of the Presbyterian Church of Brazil. However, in 1970, he decided to break with the church that had marginalized him. For Nunes, such a decision contained an element of protest to a church that Alves described as “the very inversion and denial of the Gospel...[where] authoritarianism triumphs over community; structures over people; the past over the future; law over love; and ultimately, death over life.”¹⁷⁰

Another element that stands out in this period is that in spite of the relationships and friendships he made during his exile, Alves never felt totally at home in the U.S. He described his first stay in the U.S. for a one-year master's degree program as “a year of suffering.”¹⁷¹ He had traveled alone, and terribly missed his wife and children who were waiting for him in Brazil. In the course of that year he packed his stuff to return to Brazil several times, and put a countdown calendar on his bedroom wall to count the days to return home.¹⁷²

His return to Brazil, however, as indicated above, coincided with the fateful Military Coup d'état. Fleeing to avoid prison, he returned to the U.S. for his Ph.D. studies. The feeling he had during his abrupt departure from Brazil was ambiguous. Afraid of being arrested, he felt the euphoria of freedom when the plane took off. However, that euphoria was tempered with the sadness of exile. In reference to the return to the U.S. he says, “That was not my world.”¹⁷³

Considering all these facts, I argue that Alves's move from logical reasoning and academic rigor towards poetry was a movement back home to his own soul. The academy had also become for him a symbol of exile. This argument does not devalue the invaluable contributions that Rubem Alves offered through his academic work. But it points to the fact that the academy, with its strict rules, and search for accurate truth, was never Rubem Alves's world. In many ways, it was also a place of exile.

From the beginning, Alves struggled to adjust to the rules of academic rigor, and to the goals of the Academy. He refers to that difficulty when recalling his doctoral work:

What the doctoral work required of each of us was the mastering of a field of knowledge... It turns out, though, that I dreamed of a world I had lost. And was shocked with the questions that other students had chosen as those to which they would devote four or five years of their lives. For me they were fantastic abstractions, which I could not connect to anything.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁹ Alves, “O Deus do Furacão,” p. 22.

¹⁷⁰ Nunes, *Corpo, Linguagem e Educação dos Sentidos*, p. 38.

¹⁷¹ Alves, “Sobre Deuses e Caquis,” p. 18.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

In this odd context of exile, Alves could only contemplate one alternative: resignation. "Exiled people have no option but obey the laws of the country that hosts them. I would have to learn to play the game that everyone else played."¹⁷⁵ But for Alves, this also meant the determination to find alternative ways for his body to be able to speak. Despite the rigorous academic formation he received at Princeton Theological Seminary to take control of ideas and possess them, Alves knew that things work a little differently.

Ideas: how strange they are... At first, they are tame, domesticated things, dwelling in our minds, obeying our commands, our property, and we say: "I *have* a good idea..."

But suddenly a magical transformation occurs: the tame things begin to flap their wings — is it not strange that they have wings? We had never suspected that they could fly by themselves, without our command... and it is only then that we realize that we had never had them.

Now they are like wild birds, flying to unknown lands, and we go with them, because they are stronger than we are...

Yes, my ideas took me in a direction different from the one I had envisaged at the beginning.¹⁷⁶

Rubem Alves identified himself with those wild birds. He never felt comfortable in the academia despite his immense skill to use the written and spoken word, and the sophistication of his intellectual articulation. Despite his attempt to play the game that everyone played, his game was another one. He "wanted to reinvent words."¹⁷⁷

Exiled from the church he once loved, and from the homeland which he missed, the expectations that Alves had about his academic work were nowhere to coincide with the expectations that the academy had for him. From Alves's point of view at the time, he had to deal with the concrete, existential and political dilemmas of his time.¹⁷⁸

A careful reading of *A Theology of Human Hope* shows the presence, even if in embryonic form, of some of the things that marked Alves's reflective journey. A full blooming of a new language would come as his thought matured in conversation with life events which contributed to open his eyes, like the birth of Raquel. The discovery of poetic language contributed to Alves's fuller expression of ideas that were already moving within him like wild birds. Among other things, he realized that theological discourse should make an anthropological turn. This is how Alves explains how he got the title of his thesis, *Towards a Theology of Liberation*, when, in 1968, there was no theology with this name:

I had completely abandoned the illusion that theology could be a kind of

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 24.

¹⁷⁶ Alves, "An Invitation to Dream." In: *The Ecumenical Review*. World Council of Churches. Vol.39 - No 1-January. p. 59-62. 1987.

¹⁷⁷ Alves, "Sobre Deuses e Caquis," p. 25.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

knowledge of God. God is a great and unspeakable mystery and I can only refer to what happens within me, when confronted with what Rudolf Otto called 'The Wholly Other', the 'Mysterium Tremendum'. Theology is anthropology; to speak of God is to speak about us (Feuerbach). No I am not turning man[sic] into God. I am simply saying that God is a name that is only pronounced in the depths of the human body.¹⁷⁹

The Ambiguous Reception of Rubem Alves's Work in North America

The work of Rubem Alves received mixed reviews in the U.S. His sweeping criticism of both fundamentalists and scientific critical theories put him in an uneasy place at the time. Both of them believed in the possibility of reaching the true meaning of the text, and thus finding truth. Alves already thought in terms of other categories, which valued the poetic language of Scriptures and understood revelation as the unveiling of human desire. Scriptures should be read as a mirror to ourselves.¹⁸⁰ Alves began to imagine theology as an exercise of witchcraft, in which the word becomes flesh.¹⁸¹ This was difficult to understand, particularly in the context of his doctoral dissertation.

A doctoral dissertation, first of all, is written for a specific audience, a small group of scholars who assess its scholarly qualities. The first readers of Alves's work in the United States were the professors who examined his dissertation. And the response he got from those readers was not positive. In Alves's view, they could not understand the meaning of his work. He was not interested in scientific truth. He wanted to think his own destiny. Alves describes his oral defense as "a battle." He takes responsibility for that, though, by saying that he decided to write "what he wanted".¹⁸²

They said I could not write a dissertation like the one I intended to write. A PhD dissertation, they claimed, must be an analytical exercise, pure demonstration of technical mastery. But I proposed to think my own thoughts. My dissertation was constructive. And that was forbidden. It turns out I was living in exile, waiting for the time to go back home, and had to think about life. My pain did not allow me to do something else. It is always like that: our thought is located in the place of suffering.¹⁸³

In response, there were those who did not want to approve Alves's dissertation. His old friend and mentor since the days of Campinas, Richard Shaull, once again played a key role in negotiating an alternative. Alves, tired of his exile, had made it clear that he would not stand another year at Princeton to rewrite the dissertation. Eventually they approved it with a minimum grade. In a correspondence with this author in 2006, Alves referred to this contradiction. "I was approved...with the lowest possible grade—and in the following year my dissertation was published and became a bestseller."¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 28.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p. 24.

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁸⁴ Rubem Alves, electronic mail of May 5, 2006.

This is very representative of the ambiguity in the way Alves's work has been received in the U.S. over the years. And, as Alves's narrative makes very clear, one of the difficulties for some of his professors to understand him was the fact that they had very different understandings of what he was doing, and conflicting expectations of what he was supposed to do. His experience of exile could not go away. It was an integral part of the process of developing his thinking, which had to be historicized, connected on different levels to his living experience. Again, the academy was his place of exile, of anguish, where he longed for returning home.

The turning point for him happened when a Catholic editor showed interest in publishing his dissertation. Finding the title of the dissertation a little odd, he suggested a change. The foreword was enthusiastically written by Harvey Cox.

Cox's foreword, accompanied by a photograph of "Dr. Alves," appeared in the journal *The Christian Century*, under the title "Rubem Alves: Hopeful Radical." The text begins with an unprecedented call to the affluent world thinkers to take note and hear the ringing voice of a brilliant theologian of the "third world." The eloquent appeal made by Cox had deep theological meaning, and is still very current, in light of the World Christianity turn in recent decades, which highlights non-Western voices, narratives and identities.¹⁸⁵

Soon after the publication of his book, Alves was launched in the midst of important theological debates, bringing to them a unique and challenging perspective. His critique of Jurgen Moltmann's theology of hope, for example, initiated an important conversation between the German theology of hope and Latin American liberation theology. For Alves, the problem with Moltmann's theology of hope was that he had based such hope on a transcendent future rather than taking as its starting point the resistance to present injustice.¹⁸⁶ Alves's constructive proposal thought to offer a new language as an alternative to Moltmann's humanistic messianism. He proposed a conception of hope that could not be dissociated from history. Alves's proposal rejected both hope without history (European theologies of hope) and history without hope (Christian realism). The historic hope set by Alves rebelled against present dehumanization, seeking to build a new future starting from a concrete historical situation.¹⁸⁷

The strong ethical orientation that is seen in Alves's first book was abandoned in later writings. However, in this first and most classic book by Rubem Alves, one can already see the seeds that informed his later reflection, especially some indication of the growing place of imagination in his work. He claims, for instance, that the creation of an open future is both an act of human will and a gift that is offered in favor of human beings.¹⁸⁸ Joseph Williamson's comments in his review of the book *The Theology of Human Hope* are revealing:

Alves lures me because his primary epistemological method proceeds by

¹⁸⁵ Harvey Cox, "Rubem Alves: Hopeful Radical," *The Christian Century*, November 5, 1969: 1417-1419.

¹⁸⁶ Alves, *Theology of Human Hope*, p. 67.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

¹⁸⁸ Joseph C. Williamson, "A Theology of Human Hope" *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, Volume XXV No. 3 Spring, 1970, pp. 381-382.

appealing to the imagination rather than to the canons of critical rationality. He is a myth-maker. On occasion, he does slip into the thesis writing footnote syndrome, but time and again he goes beyond that to cross the threshold of the imagination which allows him to move into the world of imagery and poetic power. Rubem Alves affirms that the present anticipations of liberation are a kind of "aperitif" which hold for us the foretaste of our future freedom. My taste is whetted. I await the coming meal.¹⁸⁹

The theme of hope remains prominent in Alves's second book, *Tomorrow's Child* (1972).¹⁹⁰ This book resulted from his lectures as a visiting professor at Union Theological Seminary (1970-71). The theme is still hope, but there are new contributions and nuances as for how Alves understands it. This time, there is a more explicit emphasis on imagination, on the logic of the heart in contrast with the logic of the mind. Also, he begins to take a more critical stand in relation to some understandings of liberation theology and Marxism. The ambition of his liberating project now is much humbler. The task is no longer to create a new future, but to sow the seeds for it.

In an article published in 1974, Alves explained these changes by stating that he belonged to a frustrated generation that speaks out of an experience of unfulfilled promises. He criticized the merely deconstructive focus of the revolutionary process, denouncing its limits.

Negation may expel an evil spirit, but it cannot create a positive reality ...
For lack of a positive vision, the tactics of negation condemns itself to repeat in another form what was negated.¹⁹¹

It is clear by now that Alves's work is not about negation, but about creation of new possibilities. In spite of the aforementioned frustration, he is not ready to give up. Hope then is not only reaffirmed but redefined:

It is the *presentiment* that *imagination is more real and reality less real than it looks*. It is the *hunch* that the overwhelming brutality of facts that oppress and repress is not the last word. It is the *suspicion* that reality is much more complex than realism wants us to believe, that the frontiers of the possible are not determined by the limits of the actual, and that in a miraculous and unexpected way life is preparing the creative event which will open the way to freedom and resurrection.¹⁹²

Alves categorically affirms that human beings cannot generate the creative event. For him, after the frustration with the illusion of revolutionary movements, there

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 382.

¹⁹⁰ Alves, op. cit.

¹⁹¹ Rubem Alves, "The Seed of the Future: the community of hope," *International Review of Mission*, vol. LXIII, no. 252, Oct., 1974, pp. 551-569 (554).

¹⁹² Ibid., p. 560.

remains the realization that we are in a time of bondage, a time when seeds of hope are sown, and signs of hope are experienced in contextual and bodily ways.¹⁹³

Once again, Alves seeks to overcome frustration by tweaking his understanding of hope. In this movement of resisting, expanding and rethinking, more room is made for the inclusion of new strategies and languages, including art, poetry, and songs to express alternatives to hegemonic and uncreative thinking. In his continuous homecoming Alves contributes to new creative ways of thinking theologically.

The book *The Poet, the Warrior, the Prophet*,¹⁹⁴ was the first more extensive expression of Alves's theo-poetics available in the English-speaking world. A more recent work available in English is *Transparencies of Eternity*.¹⁹⁵ Both books have attracted the attention of English-speaking thinkers interested in Christianity and literature.¹⁹⁶ Alves's theopoetics has been perceived as a language with potential to renew inter- and cross-disciplinary conversations on religion and theology.¹⁹⁷ Craig Nesson, reviewing *Transparencies of Eternity*, affirms that by introducing literature, songs and poetry in his writings, Alves provokes the imagination and invites an eruption of the transcendent in the space-time coordinates of this world, without attempting to categorize or capture it.¹⁹⁸

Katelynn Carver draws on Alves to propose an interdisciplinary theopoetics. Theopoetics, as she highlights, is an invitation for conversation rather than an assertion. It is an invitation to intercontextual dialogue.¹⁹⁹ Drawing on Alves's use of the Portuguese word *saudades*, which refers to the presence of an absence, combining longing and nostalgia, Carver suggests a spirituality of absence, which gives positive meaning to the void inside ourselves. This void is not perceived as emptiness, but as a space of resonance, where we can hear the echo of the sacred once again.

We are a void on the inside, but we are not empty. As we live and engage ever deeper in relation—toward beauty—we encounter the resonance, the magical words that hold sacrality in them, the sweetest and most achingly satisfying fruits of our gardens: we are voids, *saudades*, and the more we speak these words, the more we hear the echoes in the void, the more we remember, the more we recall our keys, the closer we come to restoring that glorious, transparent rainbow of absences, of darkness, of the places

¹⁹³ Braz, Ludek, "Alves' s Programme of Radical Utopianism," *Communia Viatarum*, XV, No. 4 (1972), 201-209.

¹⁹⁴ Rubem Alves, *The Poet, The Warrior, The Prophet* (London: SCM Press, 2002).

¹⁹⁵ Rubem Alves, *Transparencies of Eternity* (Miami, FL: Convivium Press, 2010).

¹⁹⁶ L. B. C. Keefe-Perry, "Theopoetics: Process and Perspective," *Christianity and Literature* Vol. 58, No. 4 (Summer 2009).

¹⁹⁷ Katelynn Carver, "DANCE ACROSS THE PALATE: Rubem Alves' Theopoetics and the "Good Fruits" of Interdisciplinarity," *Cross Currents* (Dec 2014: 566-579).

¹⁹⁸ Craig L. Nesson, Book Review of *Transparencies of Eternity*, *Currents in Theology and Mission* (February, 2013: 59-60).

¹⁹⁹ Carver, op. cit., p. 577.

where we overlap, find newness, make harmony.²⁰⁰

Some of the Alves's contributions as a theopoet reside in his contestation of ontological discourses about God. In his move from theology to theopoetics he has affirmed that in order to know God one must forget God. In other words, we must "let God be God."²⁰¹ Alves, the poet, is not an antithesis of Alves, the theologian. On the contrary, the former radicalizes some of the insights of the young bright theologian of whom Cox so enthusiastically spoke in 1969. The later Alves fully embraces beauty, defining his knowledge of the world in terms of his body. Believing is no longer significant. He sees no need to question the presence of transcendence in the world. However, the proper language to relate to it is through the arts, not through reason.

It is necessary to understand, once and for all, that to believe in God is not worth a broken penny...Please, don't be angry at me. Be angry with the apostle James, who wrote in his sacred epistle: 'You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder (James 2:19).' In other words, the apostle is saying that the demons are in a better situation than we are, since they do not only believe but also shudder.²⁰²

The highest form of believing is in fact sensing:

Of course I believe in God, the same way I believe in the colors of the sunset, the same way I believe in the perfume of the myrtle, the same way I believe in the beauty of the sonata, the same way as I believe in the joy of a child at play, the same way I believe in the beauty of the gaze that falls silently upon me. All these things are so fragile, so non-existing, but they make me cry. And if something makes me cry, it is sacred. It is a piece of God.²⁰³

The problem with theology is that it has traditionally taken the opposite direction, moving from beauty to reason.

For centuries, theologians, cerebral beings, had devoted themselves to transforming beauty into rational speech. Beauty was not enough for them. They wanted certainty, they wanted truth. However, artists, beings of the heart, know that the highest form of truth is beauty. Now, without any shame, I say: 'I am a Christian, because I love the beauty that lives in this tradition. What about the ideas? They are the screech of static, in the background.' Therefore, I proclaim the only dogma of my erotic-heretic Christian theology: 'Outside of Beauty there is no salvation.'²⁰⁴

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 576.

²⁰¹ Iuri Andréas Reblin "Waves of Liberation Theology: God non-science since Rubem Alves," *Protestantismo em Revista*, São Leopoldo, RS, v. 27, jan.-abr. 2012, pp. 2-8 (5).

²⁰² Alves, *Transparencies of Eternity*, p. 22.

²⁰³ Ibid., p. 25.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 119.

Conclusion

For most of his life, Alves struggled with the experiences of his past. Autobiographical narratives are scattered throughout his work. The triple experience of exile undoubtedly left deep marks on him. His work represents a journey back home. After his return from exile in the U.S., Alves overcame the earlier experiences of displacement, loneliness and even rejection to become one of the most read and most beloved writers in Brazil. He certainly found ways to return home on the different levels of displacement. His choice to stop writing for his peers and start writing for children and ordinary people certainly played a role in that process.

When Rubem Alves died in July 2014, Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff hailed him on her Facebook page as one of the most respected intellectuals of Brazil. Admirers from all over the world honored him. Many of them never thought of him as a theologian. It was as an educator, a writer, and a poet that Rubem Alves became best known by a larger public. Quotes from his poems and chronicles can be easily found in the lips and social media pages of a huge number of Brazilians. As an educator Alves has been almost as acclaimed as Paulo Freire among Brazilian teachers.

In spite of his frustration with the church, and with theology, the themes of God, eternity, and religion kept returning to his writings to the end. For some time, Alves talked about himself as an ex-theologian, and did not know what to make of his relationship with Christianity. Towards the end of his life, however, he came to embrace his connection with Christianity, now in totally different terms.

Today, the central ideas of Christian theology, in which I used to believe, mean nothing to me...They don't make any sense...Even more curious is the fact that I continue to be linked to this tradition. There is something in Christianity that is part of my body.²⁰⁵

Although Alves moved away from formal academic language, his insights continue to have meaning to theological conversations. However, despite some interest among some younger writers for Alves's writings on theopoetics, in the field of religion and theology as a whole the interest in his work, at least in the United States, does not reflect the enthusiasm with which Harvey Cox Rubem Alves announced him to the American Academy in 1969.

Given the number of disciplines his work has touched upon, and in light of the creative insights that marked his intellectual life, I urge scholars of religion to rediscover Rubem Alves's work, this time in a more comprehensive manner—considering all its phases, and the contexts that informed his trajectory as an intellectual and an artist. Such a move can potentially generate new waves of renewal and creativity in theological research and in the study of religion, particularly in the context of emerging theologies from different parts of the world, which might find a good conversational partner in Alves's rebellious and creative freedom.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 118.

Embodied Love: Explorations on the *imago Dei* in the Caribbean Latina Theology of Ada María Isasi-Díaz

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Abstract

This article primarily engages the concept of being fully human found in the work of Ada María Isasi-Díaz in order to offer a response to classical constructs of the *imago Dei*. Even as the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures robustly affirm manifestations of divine corporeality, much of classical Christian theology rejects or neglects enfleshed views of the *imago Dei*. By accentuating the interplays between the invisible reality and the modes of relationality that resemble the Jesus event underscored in the anthropological theology of Isasi-Díaz, this article constructs a view of humans as icons of a God whose excessive love is embodied.

As story after story was shared, it became very obvious that these women...had lived many times the “no greater love” message of Jesus recorded in the Gospel of John read during the *servicio de la amistad*. The women’s theological understanding of this central text of Christianity is revealed not in elaborated discourse but rather in thoughtful implementation. For them “no greater love” is not a matter of dying for someone else but a matter of not allowing someone else to die.

Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology*²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶ Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 106. This essay is a modified version of an independent study done with Ada María Isasi-Díaz during my last year of coursework. I left many of the theological insights intact, even though many of these have since evolved, in order to show earlier developments first attempted in my studies with her. My intent is to share this essay in memory

The concept of the *imago Dei* (image of God) has long served as a cornerstone of Christian anthropology. It refers to the idea that by means of perichoresis, the entire cosmos participates in the divine reality. Humans, particularly, derive from it and are a peculiar *eikon*, similitude, or icon of God's way of being God essentially and economically (Gen. 1:26-27), meaning that God's very self is partly manifested as the God with, in, and for us. This essay argues that in being fully human, humans tangibly can make manifest this relational reality in bodily form. It follows approaches to Christian theology that view the event of Jesus the Christ as the utmost act of being a "similitude"²⁰⁷ that is, the event par excellence that makes God comprehensible bodily (Col. 1:15; II Cor. 4:4).

Given that the context of Genesis 1:26-27 is being set amidst creation accounts, and that the Second Testament testifies so strenuously to Jesus being one who was in the flesh (Col. 1:22), one might also assume that the corporeal God-image of human beings is widely affirmed in Christian theology.²⁰⁸ Yet this latter position has been neglected or rejected. For instance, Origen argued for a human *likeness* to the Son of God as savior, who assumed the human image, and in taking the form of a servant humbled himself to the point of death so that humans could be transfigured according to his saving form by means of repentance.²⁰⁹ This likeness into which we are transfigured is not humanly corporeal, but rather an inward or spiritual process of becoming a semblance that while it seeks to attain "the body of his glory" does not consist of mirroring any earthly form.

From the patristic era onward, the *imago Dei* has been almost exclusively disembodied, with a heavy emphasis placed on dimensions of the mind, soul, or spirit of the human being. With body and soul dichotomized, the body has been relegated to a secondary position, if not altogether excluded from notions of the divine image. This deep schism separating the flesh has also split humans along gender lines, with the divine image being identified more unambiguously, if not exclusively, with the male (not to mention a disregard for the nonhuman). Furthermore, any good attributed to the human flesh has been deemed extrinsic. As such, the body as qualitatively lacking in its capacity to image God is viewed as being in need of a metaphysical gift that, despite all references to divine gratuitousness, implicitly is obtained by means of an illumined mind, a form of noetic transcendence.

A number of Caribbean-Latina theologians have sought to challenge these dichotomized views by putting flesh back onto concepts of the image of God, a move

of her as a professor at Drew University's School of Theology, and to highlight in particular her contributions to the lives of many Latino/a students whom she welcomed and guided through their masters and doctoral studies at Drew.

²⁰⁷ Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 2:388. According to the wider biblical tradition, the entire cosmos participates in the divine reality and makes it manifest. The focus of this paper is on the image of God in human beings, however, and its emphasis is on the manner in which human beings participate in the divine reality. It stays within the theological framework of Ada María Isasi-Díaz for whom anthropology was focused on the human dimension. This participation will be discussed below primarily with regard to the relationship between God and humanity, and only briefly to the cosmos.

²⁰⁸ The centrality of Jesus in the Christian understandings of humanity in the image of God, however, does not make notions of the image of God exclusive to the Christian human. Humanity embodies the image of God in various religious contexts and traditions. Christian and non-Christian peoples are fully and equally human in the image of God. An implication of this is that the *imago Dei* is diverse in its religious orientation. The participation in the divine reality of love crosses religious boundaries. Its beauty shines forth from the faces of all humans as a variegated manifestation of its essence, which is love, most prominently whenever and wherever its basic principles of love are at work.

²⁰⁹ Origen, *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, ed. Ronald E. Heine (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, Inc., 1982), Homily I, 13.

which tacitly feminizes God. Among them is the late *mujerista* theologian Ada María Isasi-Díaz, whose work is here engaged in conversation with other Caribbean Latina theologians, and as a response to early Christian thought. And while many studies have rightly focused on her notion of Latina women's experience as *locus theologicus*,²¹⁰ this essay finds in her anthropology an understudied yet significant contribution with which to offer a much needed response to classical constructs of the *imago Dei*, her concept of being *fully* human. For her, any understanding of self as human stems from knowing that one is created according to the divine image, this notion of likeness also being informed by one's full humanity.²¹¹ Similarly, this essay offers insight on the divine image as manifested through the body,²¹² the manner in which the invisible reality of the divine comes into form through modes of relationality that resemble the Jesus event.²¹³ This is made manifest in the human passion for justice, in the human capacity to exist in the interstices of time and space, and in the human expressions of God's excessive love.

These body images can lead to fuller understandings of God as love. In shifting the dialectics of the doctrine in the direction of embodiment, the emphasis comes to be on the dimensions of both the image and of a God who loves passionately (1 John 4:16). The main premise is that to *be* like God is *to love* in the flesh. An embodied love, often forgotten in relation to the doctrine of the *imago Dei*, turns the attention to the entire human—mind, soul, spirit and flesh—as theological locus for the manifestation of divine love.

IMAGO DEI IN THEOLOGICAL TRADITION

In the opening pages of the Hebrew Bible one reads, "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image (*tselem*), according to our likeness (*demuth*)...' (Gen. 1:26a, NRSV). This notion of the *imago Dei*, though traditionally viewed in Jewish tradition as being intrinsically embodied,²¹⁴ during the intertestamental period underwent a process of Hellenization, and by the time of the development of Christian theology came to resemble the idea of a "metaphysical gift." This gift became the divine wisdom or heavenly knowledge fashioned after the eternal logos breathed in by God. Since the divine breath is imparted into the soul or the imperishable part of the human, the soul began to be viewed as the container, bearer, or seat of logos—the one aspect of the

²¹⁰ See, for instance, the well-developed analysis of her anthropology in Miguel H. Diaz, *On Being Human: U.S. Hispanic and Rahnerian Perspectives* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001).

²¹¹ See, for instance, how Isasi-Díaz correlates the concept of the *imago Dei* with the day-to-day living of Latinas in *En la Lucha/In the Struggle: Elaborating a Mujerista Theology, A Hispanic Women's Liberation Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 52.

²¹² In this paper, rather than referring to an "embodied self," I use the terms "body" and "self" interchangeably and even refer to the human self or selves as the locus of the body, soul, spirit, and mind. To use the term "embodied self" would reinstate Western emphases on the embodiment of the mind, soul, or spirit (body as an outer shell of the true human essence).

²¹³ The term that Isasi-Díaz uses is "kinship." I prefer the term relationality as it more explicitly puts the emphasis on the relational component of the *imago Dei* (more so than on the familial). Even though she explicitly describes this term as not being circumscribed by family bloodlines or by definitions of the traditional nuclear family, I find relationality to be a more comprehensive term, as it can also be inclusive of the non-familial, or the explicitly other, alien or stranger to the self/selves. Yet kinship, like kindom, can playfully help challenge imaginaries of male sovereigns that bolster patriarchal, hierarchical, and elitist structures. See Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues: Mujerista Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004), 241-251.

²¹⁴ Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 2:393. For instance, Hillel called for the bathing of the body and its care in his arguments on the *imago Dei*.

human that is according to the divine image. Under this impact of Greek thinking, the early Christian conception of humanity became bi-partite: spirit and body. In some cases the one who bore the image described in Genesis 1:26 was viewed as a heavenly human, while the one created in Genesis 2:7 being the earthly human made from dust.²¹⁵ In the same manner that the body became devoid of the divine image, so the human came to be in need of something external to the body to aid it in returning to its “original” state, a grace extrinsic to it, a grace entirely other than flesh.

Noetic Transcendence

Church fathers such as Origen and St. Augustine adopted Hellenized understandings of the logos, and they correlated the *imago Dei* with the mind.²¹⁶ Origen viewed corporeality as being according to form, hence that component of the human in the likes of the “slime of the earth,” and not that which was made in the divine image, the latter referring to the incorruptible or the inner human.²¹⁷ According to him, to argue erroneously for a corporeal image is “to represent God himself [sic] made of flesh and in human form.” For Augustine of Hippo, “to be is to know.”²¹⁸ “God’s image,” Augustine avers, “is reason itself, or mind or intelligence or whatever other word it may more suitably be named by.”²¹⁹ He proceeds with an analysis of Ephesians 4:23-24 and Colossians 3:10, and explains that Paul made it “plain enough just in what part man was created in God’s image—that it was not in the features of the body but in a certain form of the illuminated mind.” Since one transcends only by thought, the mind holds a place of superiority against less rational human parts, i.e., the body.

For the mind to receive a sense of imagery or to be shaped according to the image directly from God via illumination and so for the senses of the body not to aid in the process of illumination²²⁰ entails dominating or subjugating the body.²²¹ In this scenario, corporality is corruptible, an obstacle to seeking truth, a “load upon the soul,” the earthly habitation that “presses down the mind.”²²² It impedes the realization of the image in the soul. Like the description of the Platonic soul, only that which is lacking corporeality can be perfect, hence the need for it to rise above all flesh as if carried by wings when in the presence of the divine beauty and goodness.²²³ The body, while sensing the immutability and the power of the soul, and while searching for the invisible that is made visible through corporeality, is limited in its search because of its own corruptible habitation. Eventually corporeality pulls down the seeker from its initial climb, leaving only the trace of a memory.

²¹⁵ Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 2:396.

²¹⁶ See Everett Ferguson, ed., “Image of God,” in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997), 2:560-561.

²¹⁷ Origen, *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, Homily I, 13.

²¹⁸ See Augustine, “The Literal Meaning of Genesis,” in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, O.S.A., trans. and noted Edmund Hill, O.P. (Hyde Park, NY: New York City Press, 2002), 234.

²¹⁹ Augustine, “The Literal Meaning of Genesis,” 234.

²²⁰ The reception is in terms of recollection or memory of the image.

²²¹ Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. F. J. Sheed (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1943), 141-142.

²²² Augustine, *The Confessions*, 149.

²²³ Plato, *Phaedrus*, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. by John M. Cooper, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1997), 246c, 250d-252d.

From this perspective, not only is the body of a lower order when compared to reason, but the capacity to reason and its degrees of illumination place women further removed from being made according to the image of God. Rational life is then divided between “the contemplation of eternal truth and the management of temporal affairs,” which correspond to the rationality of men and of women. Men are able to direct their minds toward contemplation whereas women conform their minds to temporal affairs, he insists.²²⁴ Another aspect of humanity then becomes significant, namely the ethnic and racial difference that the dominant power constructs unfavorably towards the marginalized, whose skin tone and other physical features like hair texture are made to serve as a litmus test of their lack of intellectual capacity, hence also their limited beauty appeal to image the divine tangibly.²²⁵ By implication, in order for women, and especially women of color, to exercise higher reason they have to overcome their womanhood, i.e. their concern for the temporal order, and with effort reflect the image of God in spite of their bodies.²²⁶ Ultimately, then, noetic transcendence eradicates the female self.

The Metaphysical Gift

The concept of the mind as a metaphysical component superior to the body devalues the body and nature in favor of something considered external to them both. This something that is *ad extra* or *extra nos* is similar to Philo’s notion of the “metaphysical gift.”²²⁷ This gift was the divine wisdom or heavenly knowledge, derived from the breath of God and fashioned after the eternal logos of God that according to Philo was received by the soul or the seat of logos or reason—the only imperishable part of the human. Christian tradition has viewed grace as that gift that restores the image of God in humanity.

Much of the Western theological tradition has viewed the work of grace as necessarily coming from beyond humanity, in part because it has seen little if anything good as remaining in humanity after the fall. While the notion of “total depravity” was most pronounced in John Calvin and his followers in the Reformed tradition, comparable ideas of a lack of any intrinsic value being found in human life and existence are scattered throughout Christian history.²²⁸ The impact of this conception of an external work of grace similar to a metaphysical gift further devalues the body as a means and a location for salvation, since the effects of grace have been viewed primarily to be upon the soul or mind where the image of God resides. The body has been assigned to a lesser role in either receiving or mediating grace due to its close associations with that which is “lower” in nature.

There have been a number of attempts in recent theology to modify, if not overturn, the notion of a divine gift that is entirely above or wholly beyond the flesh, or grace that is less concerned with the body, or that it is concerned primarily with restoring an image

²²⁴ Augustine, *The Trinity*, ed. John E. Rotelle, O.S.A., trans. and notes by Edmund Hill, O.P. (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1991), 328.

²²⁵ See Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues*, esp. 69-70.

²²⁶ Michelle A. González, *Created in God’s Image: An Introduction to Feminist Theological Anthropology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 40.

²²⁷ See, for example, Philo, *Quod Deus sit Immutabilis*, 86-110.

²²⁸ The term “total depravity” refers to the complete depraved state of the human, his or her inability to act righteously, thus the need for something external called the irresistible grace of God.

that is not itself embodied. The twentieth-century Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner, for instance, challenged this view by demonstrating the “intrinsicism” of grace (grace being intrinsic to nature) to the whole of the human experience. The full human reality is the medium proper to God’s communication or incarnation of Godself, he insists. This divine incarnation in the reality of the human is “the mystery and the fullness of grace.”²²⁹ It is only via embodiment in full human nature, in the incarnation, that God has communicated Godself personally to the world in the fullest of terms possible within the finitude of the created order.

Since nature and the gift of grace are both distinct from and intrinsic to one other, the same remains true regarding body and soul, which he understood to be fully integrated and incapable of separation. Borrowing from views that affirmed an embodied soul,²³⁰ which meant a step in the right direction but not enough to embrace the fullness of the body, Rahner went further, suggesting that the body makes the soul appear and be present. And since the divine life is in the world (and not merely above and beyond it), both body and soul partake in the divine reality of transcendence from within the created order and make it manifest in part.²³¹ For Rahner, salvation, which entails being as much as becoming according to the *imago Dei*, is not a process that is concerned only with the soul or with the mind. Hence to be an *icon* of the divine is an event or ongoing process by which body and soul as a unified reality integrally symbolize the divine in the human. For Rahner, this process closely connects the historical actualization and self-presentation of the divine. God and human join in this process in the same manner that soul and body together form the symbolic.²³² The image of God is found only as this unified reality.

At this juncture, the significance of reflections such as Rahner’s might seem apparent. Yet it remains relevant, as Michelle González remarks, that because women have been associated with “the body, sensuality, and emotion,” they are considered to be deficient in their reflection of the image of God.²³³ And so, “their bodies in particular, come to be linked to that which impedes the fullness of the image within them.” Placing the body of women at the heart of the doctrine of the image of God, González concludes, rejects the notion that embodiment and being woman is a hindrance.²³⁴ Therefore a turn to the body of love as bearer of the divine image continues to be necessary.

COMMUNION “WITH/IN” SELVES

Grace is the impulse of love in all flesh (as with the whole of the created order) for the purposes of making manifest incarnations of God’s love here on earth. Several *modes of relationality* in some Caribbean Latina theologies can aid in dissecting this statement, and so in sketching a challenge to Greek notions of noetic transcendence and of the metaphysical gift prevalent in classical constructs of the *imago Dei*. These modes make manifest the human-iconicity of God as a possibility, affirming grace as being

²²⁹ Karl Rahner, “Nature and Grace,” in *Theological Investigations*, trans. Kevin Smyth (Baltimore: Helicon Press and London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966), 4:177.

²³⁰ The actual self is the soul with an outer shell called the body.

²³¹ See Karl Rahner, *Spirit in the World* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 1994).

²³² See also Rahner, “The Theology of the Symbol,” in vol. 4 of *Theological Investigations*.

²³³ González, *Created in God’s Image*, 86.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 132.

intrinsic to the whole of their very selves, in that bodies hold a capacity to love as communicated in the Jesus event.

The Dance

A useful theological point of departure has been the perichoretic dance or interconnected way of being “with/in” others: God, humans, and the cosmos dancing with and within one and another. Relationality is distance overcome between the human (in all its rare forms) and God, amongst humans and with any human-other. In moving beyond the self towards another and returning to the self-transformed, being human becomes being fully in-participation or being according to relationship.²³⁵ This movement of dancing about with/in God and other living beings is generated by and generates love.

We are intrinsically linked to God, and participate intimately in God in the flesh. Recounting a spiritual experience, Isasi-Díaz shares, “This sense of the divine in me and I in the divine was a bodily one: I could feel, sense God, and I could wrap my arms around the divine... this sense of participation in the divine filled me in such a way that it remains with me today.”²³⁶ While there is a distinction between the divine and the human, the union is an intimate bodily union that breaks free from false dichotomies between the material and the spiritual, the human and the divine. As she further argues, “our God is thoroughly involved with us as we are, humans who inhabit this world, suffused in materiality, struggling to go beyond the limitedness of our humanity to embrace the divinity in which we are called to participate.”²³⁷ Our deep intimacy with God conveys a sense of continuum in our love-experience that denotes a daily mysticism that embraces the whole of the self. One can fall in love with God and begin a spiritual journey that is long lasting because of love.²³⁸ We transcend ourselves through falling in love *daily* in a manner that touches the divine in our lives, again and again, and everywhere.

Being-in-participation is being “with” an inner propensity to move toward another, and “in” the other, for the enhancement of the good and beautiful of the other without the sacrifice of the self. We take part in or partake of an-other through love, through falling in love in a manner that touches the divine in us and connects us with other humans (and nonhumans) without renouncing who we are. Isasi-Díaz agrees: “Keeping love alive means folding oneself into the life of the beloved without losing oneself or absorbing the beloved.”²³⁹ Falling in love involves a deep intimacy that enacts the mutual gifting of selves, being transformed by means of this perichoretic dance (in the exchange of selves), including God.

Imaging God means incarnating or enfleshing the divine dance, hence the divine relations and dynamisms of love in relationship with the rest of the created order. It denotes that love, being the most significant divine and human aspect internally shared

²³⁵ See my elaboration of this argument on the passionate God in my book, *Divine Enjoyment: A Theology of Passion and Exuberance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015).

²³⁶ Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology*, 24.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

²³⁸ Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues*, 30.

²³⁹ Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues*, 31.

between living beings, partly in-corporates the other in the self and images the other through the self because of love. In this, there is an embrace of the whole of selves. And so physically, because the body is intrinsic to the embrace, their shared love constitutes their being humanly transformed by the other visibly or tangibly. Furthermore, the inclusion of the many selves in their corporeality with their varied expressions of being fully human points to a dissonant harmony, meaning a dance amongst heterogeneous and variegated shapes of being according to love simultaneously partaking of divinity.

A Divine Kindom of Relationships

What I am challenging here is a disembodied understanding of the Jesus event that devalues grace in nature (the natural work) that has been occurring since creation, of the redemptive capacity inherent to the temporal order that Jesus incarnated through his life, works, death, and resurrection, and so of the tangible divine-cosmos expression of loving relationality. Jesus enacts the divine relationality of love in this world order; Jesus demonstrates how the divine reality does not “‘pass’ through us without being affected by us and affecting us as well.”²⁴⁰ By being human according to an alternative to the empire of Caesar, Jesus became a unique mediator and icon of the divine mission of love. Similarly, those who imitate Jesus the Christ can reincarnate the divine relational-reality as human beings. By becoming more fully human, human beings can essentially and economically put on display God’s way of being love.

The fullness of humanity active within/in the continuum of the created order can help mediate such semblance of the divine relationship in this temporal order by helping transfigure it. For Isasi-Díaz, mediation then can come through other human beings (*alter Christus*): their choices and commitments in dealing with reality and in modifying it. I agree with Isasi-Díaz that a useful term for capturing the divine relationality is “the kindom of God.”²⁴¹ On the one hand, there is an idyllic vision of the future being challenged in the use of this metaphor. The divine reality, while infinitely unique from this world, cannot be entirely apart from it, or be like a *kingdom* descending from an unchanging dimension (the heavens) putting an end to all history by means of a world-replacing process permanently achieved solely by God. On the other hand, neither can it be the same makeup to the point of being confused with and subdued by the church and political powers, for it would easily become prey of earthly forms of dominion.

The divine kindom speaks of fullness of life, the *shalom* for entire communities and the created order; still, according to Isasi-Díaz, more specifically it refers to what lies at the core of being human, as in being in relationship. Relationality itself grounds the whole of the human communal experience and contains the love ingredients with which tangibly to unfold a fullness of life. And so the divine kindom that permeates the whole of earthly reality would be not defined by bloodlines, in particular traditional definitions of family such as the patriarchal family, and heterosexual and biological parents. Furthermore, since it is not conflated with structures of domination, this relationality would mirror much less the accumulation of capital and progress, and be inclusive of “bonds of friendship, of love and care, of community” at the borders of systems of

²⁴⁰ Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues*, 247.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.* 247-251.

production and exchange value.²⁴² It would instead mirror interdependence shaped as a prism of relationships and multitudes and be inclusive of all societies. It would provide the needed support and would communicate the responsibilities to replace “exploitation and abuse”²⁴³ with the wellbeing of all. This relationality translates the *we/nosotras* into “‘we others,’ a community of *otros* [and *otras*], or others.”²⁴⁴

Transfigurations...

As illustrated in the incarnation of the logos in the human figure of Jesus, in our dance with God, and in embodying love according to the divine relationality, God can become manifest as a grandmother, suggest Isasi-Díaz.²⁴⁵ The Christian God is “a God that exists in relationship.”²⁴⁶ And so ourselves, embodying God and one another as Cheo,²⁴⁷ another example, can be viewed as one participating in the lives of others, in the family or in the streets, those who are sick and in need, the impoverished and homeless, the *viejitos* or elderly, the stranger and undocumented, a neighbor. One can come to realize that one’s acts of love amongst them “is not separate from knowing God for through them God is known.”²⁴⁸ God and others “with/in” comes to be encountered “in more and more places, in new and different ways.”²⁴⁹ In a story told by Ivone Gebara to Isasi-Díaz we read the following,

“God visited me today.” Ivone was surprised and started talking to the woman trying to find out what had happened. A neighbor had turned over to the woman the money she had earned that day so she could buy medicine for her sick son. For Ivone’s friend this neighbor had become God, had become Christ. This generous neighbor did not merely “represent” Christ, but was indeed Christ made present in a poor neighborhood of Brazil in our days.²⁵⁰

This multitude of divine embodiments of love amongst humans (and nonhumans) dancing about one another bear the semblance of a “dissonant harmony.” Our participation in God and others is a multifarious perichoresis that, while harmonized because the diverse dancing partners involved maintain their differences, shows forth as dissonant. A way to illustrate this apparent dissonance can be Caribbean Latina ethnicities that inform a relational complex of love according to an *imago Dei* of varied elements harmonized without the loss of selves—distinct shapes and colors.

Such relational dissonance challenges notions of sameness. The Afro-Caribbean and Indigenous alongside the European in us re-image the divine in shades of color that bear the marks of our peculiarities. Shades of white, of white and black, of brown, of black, show proof of a mixture of peoples out of love. These ethnic elements added to our harmony in unexpected ways account for differences and struggles of past and present

²⁴² Ibid., 249.

²⁴³ Ibid., 251.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 250.

²⁴⁵ Isasi-Díaz and Tarango, *Hispanic Women: Prophetic Voice in the Church* (Cambridge: Harper & Row, Publishers, San Francisco, 1988), 16.

²⁴⁶ González, *Afro-Cuban Theology*, 137.

²⁴⁷ Isasi-Díaz and Tarango, *Hispanic Women*, 26.

²⁴⁸ Isasi-Díaz, *En La Lucha*, 157.

²⁴⁹ Isasi-Díaz *La Lucha Continues*, 30.

²⁵⁰ Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues*, 264.

inequalities that are prevalent in our communities. The mixed loving unions of our ancestors embedded in our skins darken the divine image through our willingness to live out our ancestry and across ethnic barriers, become hospitable to the dark stranger.²⁵¹ For González, “a fundamental reality that colors our human existence and our relationship with the divine,”²⁵² would also mean keeping in step with a concept of dissonance resulting from what she regards as “an anthropology that takes seriously how race and racism have functioned within theology.”²⁵³ Fullness of humanity “will not be realized until we cease denying who we are and how we have marginalized those in our community who do not fit racist constructions of identity.”²⁵⁴

Awareness of the differences in imaging God can also awaken selves to dissonance that exposes the “ugly” components of harmony or the common good presumed to be existent universally. Inequalities inevitably will result from improper forms of relating to the other, of moving towards another for the purposes of dominion, or by selfishly returning to the self un-transfigured (indifference), as in the negation of mutual giftedness and sharing of selves across social borders or nations. For instance, the tangible iconicity of the dispossessed can loudly challenge the inhumane conditions many undocumented persons are enduring, as those most distant from the centers of society. For Daisy Machado, any concept of the *imago Dei* would need to account for the foreigners and outsiders, the unprotected and vulnerable women crossing our borders. At times, many of them endure “rape, violence, and even torture” at the hands of the local police and national military personnel in their countries and across borders.²⁵⁵ The unjust afflictions that they suffer are “an affront to their humanity and dignity but also a challenge to our own gender-based discourse about justice and self-worth of women across the globe.”²⁵⁶ To think of the *imago Dei* as embodied love is to go beyond the self and be transformed by means of *seeing* and *touching*, *giving* of the self and *receiving* from the dispossessed-other. This means tangibly loving the dismembered, raped, maimed, disfigured, marginalized, and the exiled.²⁵⁷

* * *

Hence being an icon of God assumes a position of intimacy that challenges Greek dichotomizations of spirit and flesh. Its transcendental *noesis* no longer remains the primary component of the self-imaging God, once the human flesh is viewed as intrinsically harboring the divine grace or quality of love that draws the self beyond itself, towards another, and that pulls the self back to itself transformed. Its rare forms that seek to embody the divine love according to this relationality grant significance to the one falsely deemed less than human. The dissonance of multiple realities of embodied love in the jarring sense of melodious rhythms can enhance appreciation for difference as much as sensitivity for the one in need of enjoying fuller forms of

²⁵¹ Rivera, “Ethical Desires,” 269.

²⁵² González, *Afro-Cuban Theology: Religion, Race, Culture, and Identity* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), 122.

²⁵³ González, *Afro-Cuban Theology*, 138.

²⁵⁴ González, *Afro-Cuban Theology*, 140.

²⁵⁵ Daisy L. Machado, “The Unnamed Woman: Justice, Feminists, and the Undocumented Woman,” in *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology*, ed. María Pilar Aquino (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2002), 162.

²⁵⁶ Machado, “The Unnamed Woman,” 162.

²⁵⁷ See, for instance, issues stirring migration, such as the femicides in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, as argued in Nancy Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011).

humanization. Therefore, relationality manifested in this way de-romanticizes the notion of community or things being according to sameness and as universally held in common, and can kindle a passion for fuller manifestations of God as flesh here on earth—the transfiguration of the whole created order.

THE BODY OF LOVING FLESH

Bodies love intellectually, spiritually, physically, and soulfully. And because love is a passion, loving involves as much logic and reason as desire and sensuality. This last point is particularly important because many of the desires of the human body have been closely associated with sin and hence as diminishing the human capacity to image God. To develop an embodied theology or a theology of embodiment requires that we reflect theologically upon the desires of the flesh. As María Clara Bingemer states, “reason, science, and systematic rigor have their role and their place but they can never suffocate desire, never tame the divine pathos that, from all eternity, has broken silence and become a loving word, kindling an irresistible desire in the hearts of women and men.”²⁵⁸ In theology, desire becomes significant since love is arguably the ultimate expression of being human in the image of God, for “God is love,” says 1 John 4:16.

Love Kisses Justice²⁵⁹

Love, inclusive of human bodily desires and passions, embodies the divine relational reality essentially and actually. Hence one can posit that God as love also desires passionately.²⁶⁰ God becomes not only our object of desire; rather, inasmuch as God desires, so do we. We see a primary example of how being with/in others makes manifest the essence of God in the divine desire to become human, to live amongst humans, and to suffer and die as a human. By means of the Incarnation, God participated in humanity in accordance with a self-love that equally loves another. Desire pushes theologically beyond the traditional view of God, beyond the confines of a transcendental logos and a metaphysical gift that permeate theology, by emphasizing a bodily love, a love of flesh that grounds humanity in this earthly existence.

Without partial fulfillments of love in history, there can be no manifestation of the *imago Dei*. A requisite is for love of self to serve as “the measuring rod for the love of neighbor required by Christian Scripture.”²⁶¹ If relationality aims at participation in the reality of another in the act of being with/in one another in reciprocal manner, then the “active involvement of those who are in relationship”²⁶² will be manifested historically when there is mutual giftedness of selves—none being far superior, beyond, and wholly other. As indicated above, to image God is to be passionate. So being human is an ongoing divine incarnation or embodiment being made manifest through desire or love, which entails participating in God and the realities of other humans, what continuously

²⁵⁸ María Clara Bingemer, “Women in the Future of the Theology of Liberation,” in *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader*, ed. Ursula King (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1994), 311.

²⁵⁹ Subheading adapted from Isasi-Díaz’ chapter title “Justice and Love Shall Kiss” in *La Lucha Continues*, p. 186.

²⁶⁰ See Padilla, *Divine Enjoyment*; also the divine eros being the source of the human erotic is the basic premise in Jean Luc Marion’s *The Erotic Phenomenon*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2007).

²⁶¹ Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues*, 173.

²⁶² Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology*, 89-90.

“constitutes the fullness of humanity.”²⁶³ Arguably, then, the “fullness of being” or “being fully human” makes manifest the *imago Dei* in terms of tangibly demonstrating one’s desire for the good of another as much as for the self (love for the self and neighbor). For Isasi-Díaz, the continuous move from alienation to an intimate relationship with God and others is love shown in justice.²⁶⁴

Invariably, loving tangibly will remain in tension with inordinate desires, those arising from the self as well as those of others (rationally and bodily). A body that loves according to mutuality will be longing for the good of the other as for the self despite its impulses toward an inordinate drive to amass power over others, or devalue the self and other selves in the community, resulting in acts of racism, sexism, ageism, and enablism, among others. Longing to create a better future for oneself and others²⁶⁵ also can expose inordinate desire made visible in societal structures and in people’s acts of injustice. It can offer another possibility for life beyond oppression caused by systemic violence, exploitation, marginalization, cultural imperialism, and powerlessness.²⁶⁶

Hopeful expectations of “the next world” in this world, hopes for the kingdom of God to be realized in our time and space, might help give birth to liberative structures amidst struggle with the present conditions.²⁶⁷ Desire is a revolutionary expression of love, the starting point or source of passion that takes us from the reality where we are to the reality we imagine, and so is an impulse in the struggle to turn a utopian vision into reality.²⁶⁸ It sets in motion and continues to fuel the human striving to build God’s kingdom concretely. While acknowledging that it cannot be fully realized in history is essential to the process of partial fulfillments, enactments of these “eschatological glimpses” can progressively contribute to the unfolding of the kingdom in our world.²⁶⁹ The “now but not yet” expressed in hopeful activity begins to make real “what one passionately desires,” states Isasi-Díaz.²⁷⁰

Because of desire, eyes see and courage is found to denounce situations in which the fullness of life is not being realized.²⁷¹ Love, as Isasi-Díaz defines it, challenges oppressive systems and human actions, and announces a space for the expression of full humanity in the self and others. Love is “*not* a matter of dying for someone else but a matter of not allowing someone else to die.”²⁷² The emphasis is on an option for the fullness of life for others as much as it is for the self.

²⁶³ Ibid., 89.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 101.

²⁶⁵ As Isasi-Díaz explains, desire can be experienced even in wishing to have a roof over one’s head. See Isasi-Díaz and Yolanda Tarango, *Hispanic Women: Prophetic Voice in the Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1988), 61.

²⁶⁶ For forms of oppression, see Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology* and her description of five modes of oppression, 108-115.

²⁶⁷ Isasi-Díaz, *En La Lucha*, 34.

²⁶⁸ Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues*, 167.

²⁶⁹ Isasi-Díaz, *En La Lucha*, 35.

²⁷⁰ Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues*, 168.

²⁷¹ Intrinsic to Caribbean Latina theology is a protest against denied full humanity, the ignored assent of the Latina imaging of God. Hence there is a declaration to activate love as the strategy for participation in the liberation of all humans so that each human can be as she or he fully is: human. As Raquel Rodríguez asserts, women in many of our cultures and traditions have encountered minimal opportunities “to live full lives as human beings” (Raquel Rodríguez, “Open Our Eyes,” in *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader*, ed. Ursula King (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1994), 226). For her, “Our possibilities for living a full life have been limited by a patriarchal concept of society in which women are discriminated against because of their gender. We are women, therefore we are inferior” (Ibid). Hence, her emphasis, similar to Isasi-Díaz, is not merely to survive life, but to participate in the fullness of life in a manner that promotes ethical relations.

²⁷² Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology*, 106.

The Third Space of Love

The body that desires, that loves the self and others, makes manifest the “in between” components of divine and human reality and exposes the falsehood of a colonized notion of the *imago Dei*. In-betweenness is not about being in one space versus another, but about being in a “third space” of participation that exposes the heteronormal dimensions of the God who is love in history. Because of its incarnational nature, as indicated above, love can fall prey to inordinate desires, and so historically take on forms of unequal relationships and selfish ways of being with/in others. Yet divine love continuously aims for heteronormativity (continuous transfiguration) with which to decolonize relationalisms of absolute power or dominion, noetic superiority, dehumanization, and exclusion.

For Caribbean Latina theologians, God’s interstitial love transforms love of neighbor in the shape of loving the stranger or an-other unlike the self. To love is to free the self from habits of self-preservation at the expense of others unlike the self, strangers, that more often than not are born of fear. Preservation of the status quo at all cost reifies norms grounded in and grounding superiority and exclusion. Transformation comes by means of multitonal bodies making manifest human participation in the yet and not yet of history, meaning the in-between of historical events of imperial colonization of bodies. Bodies of love after colonization darken the divine image with their fluid identities, cultures, religions, and ways of loving. For those who live hyphenated lives, being a divine icon in history means living at the interstices not just within a community but in-between histories, economies, political agendas, social groupings, sexualities, and ethnicities not bound to dominant definitions of selves.²⁷³

For instance, the *imago Dei* as embodied involves love expressed through sexual desires yet beyond colonized definitions of being sexually human and of constructs of the erotic God of love. With reciprocity of love in mind, part of the process of imaging God will entail regaining “our pleasure-loving selves” whereby a fully incarnated and embodied love embraces sexuality in a manner that also pays attention to desires for a “fullness of life-liberation.”²⁷⁴ If having in mind Latino/a sexual orientations or sexualities not according to the norm, the *imago Dei* can be recognized in queer modes of being in-between. And so when the full humanity of segments of our communities are not recognized due to their sexual orientation, the desire to love must overcome deep-seated homophobias, and likewise embody the interstitial love of God by incarnating a passion for the justice of inclusion. As with racism, for Nicholasa Mohr the need is for cleansing oneself from hatred of others, “to wash away those aspects of ourselves which no longer do us justice, that no longer affords us, as women, as Puerto Ricans, as Latinos/as, as humans, a proper appreciation of what God has created and to enjoy that creation fully.”²⁷⁵

²⁷³ The body is, as stated by Roberto Goizueta, “a collective communal subject,” *una mestiza y mulata*, a new subject of subjects within, “one irreducible to the various communities” to which one belongs. Not only is the being not a singular being, a one, but it is also an uprooted being in terms of historical times. See González, “Who Is Americana/o?” in *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire*, ed. Catherine Keller, Michael Nausner, and Mayra Rivera (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2004), 73; Roberto S. Goizueta, “Nosotros: Toward a U.S. Hispanic Anthropology,” *Listening* 27, no. 1 (1992): 57.

²⁷⁴ Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues*, 174.

²⁷⁵ Delgado, “Prophesy Freedom,” 47.

In the struggle for the colonized body of Caribbean Latina women to make manifest the image of God, as Isasi-Díaz explains, the choice can be about how to stand in that in-between space and raise questions, and in so doing to lay claim to forms of “denunciation of all destructive sense of self-abnegation.”²⁷⁶ Standing with/in holds the potential for participation with “the oppressed as protagonists” in creating realities unlike present colonizing ones.²⁷⁷ It does not mean standing beyond, apart from, of above history as a sovereign subject, isolated from others in one’s historical subjectivity, but being with/in others in a collective project. As Isasi-Díaz writes,

I want to capitalize on the interstices ... I want to stand on the ‘in-betweens’ fully conscious that it is not only a matter of acknowledging that this is where I am, but also knowing that I have to decide ‘how’ I stand there and ‘which way’ to turn. I stand in these spaces as a protagonist – a non-sovereign *sujeto histórico* – needing to contribute to the ‘meanings’ operative in society and wanting to resist any attempt to leave me out of this enterprise.²⁷⁸

A body being and becoming a divine icon in the “in-between” of histories is a displaced body of love, not fully belonging to a particular place, especially a colonized prescription of being human, including ethnos as defined by the colonizer. Rather living as having “*un pie a cada lado*” it participates in the process of transformation and novelty in history.²⁷⁹ Never *fully* at home, the movement is one from here to there that allows for creativity in a multi-sited spatial configuration. In the back and forth movement, space becomes “a place that harbors spaces,” states Isasi-Díaz.²⁸⁰ As the daughters of the Europeans, the Africans, the Asians, and the pre-Colombian Americans, of conquered and conqueror, of masters and slaves, of North and South, East and West, the body is in relation to each as part, to some extent defined by *mestizaje y mulatez*, in the present as living memory of the past in and as expectation of the new in history.

Imaging the Excessiveness of the Divine Love

Such manifestations of embodied love therefore indicate that desire is more than wishful thinking. The desire to seek the good for the self and others partakes of a transcendental divine reality that is excessively relational in the here and now, what is not yet but can be according to divine love that transforms the present. The being and becoming in the *imago Dei* or icons of the divine love in history, is fluidly manifested materially and yet is beyond calculation. It is always in the making.

The divine image even as embodied maintains its quality of excess in the economy of mutual givenness. As a mode of love, relationality has the resilience not to give up. Tangible changes are desired in spite of the possibility that one might never see them become a reality or receive a response.²⁸¹ It may be that one does no more than embody

²⁷⁶ Isasi-Díaz, *En La Lucha*, 62.

²⁷⁷ Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology*, 1.

²⁷⁸ Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues*, 159.

²⁷⁹ Isasi-Díaz, *En La Lucha*, 15.

²⁸⁰ Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues*, 124.

²⁸¹ Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues*, 168.

an unquenchable passion for the good of self and others. Embodied relationality, furthermore, though intentional, remains beyond agendas, a “working relationship” based on a “common” cause—thus a materiality of love based on a sterile contract or value-exchange agreement, for example. Though there can be expectations involved, embodied relationality surpasses any goal. Ultimately, love is shared by partaking in the lives of others without the enforcement of a specific plan or without it being contingent upon the obedience of rules. It can go beyond the law for love is beyond obedience, since relationality does not subordinate itself to any calculus of *caritas*.²⁸²

Because the excess of the divine love takes on an interstitial embodiment or locates itself at the in-betweens of the not yet, and as it takes as its cue the principle of dissonance in harmony discussed above to relate to matters of mutual participation or being with/in, one can argue that in the dance with God, selves bring along others unlike themselves. What is more, in the embrace of “radical immanence of the divine in us,”²⁸³ I argue, there is an act of justice that is dissonant love. Without ignoring the well-being of each part of the community, this love is the power to create without the exercise of control and domination of one over another, as in seeking to make others become an exact mirror image of the self. The excess is such that love expands the relational network in which the *imago Dei* has been perceived rather than shrinks it. The radical immanence of God in-between temporalities and contexts expands the traditional limits by interrogating and challenging that which had been considered normative, and leads to understandings of divine love that are more heterogeneous and fluid. Sameness being challenged with diversity makes for a dissonant-harmonious way of being humanly divine.

Such embodied love would be before and beyond the womb, Mayra Rivera reminds us. The flesh remembers the histories of wonder and pain of our ancestors. Their histories of alienation make possible the desire for a justice today that continues to be redefined in new modes because of, not despite, their wounded bodies. Rivera avers that the memories of our ancestors open us toward “unforeseeable becomings.”²⁸⁴ While in welcoming the other one retains the past in moving forward,²⁸⁵ the past active in the present is likewise a future yet to come. In this we engage in a “politics of memory,”²⁸⁶ in “the disruption of the stability between the ‘there’ and ‘not there,’ between the past and the present” that opens up the possibility for a different future.²⁸⁷ We see things that are unseen, relate to “other persons, other places, others who are no longer living and not yet living, with the cosmos.”²⁸⁸

The manifestation of embodied love, because it is relational, creates a dynamic set of interrelations that are open and becoming. Since the embodied image of God is love in continuous movement within and beyond the self towards another, the embodied human participation in the divine and others that results in acts of justice reflects a

²⁸² Delgado, “Prophesy Freedom,” 32.

²⁸³ Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues*, 26.

²⁸⁴ Mayra Rivera, *The Touch of Transcendence: A Latina Postcolonial Contribution to Philosophical Theology*, PhD. Dissertation, Drew University, 2005, 157. Her dissertation was revised and published as *The Touch of Transcendence: A Postcolonial Theology of God* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007).

²⁸⁵ Rivera, *Touch of Transcendence*, 166.

²⁸⁶ Rivera, *Touch of Transcendence*, 200. See Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, translated by Peggy Kamuf; with an introduction by Bernd Magnus and Stephen Cullenberg (New York: Routledge, 1994), xix.

²⁸⁷ Rivera, *Touch of Transcendence*, 201.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 209.

sense of the “undone” or becomingness within and with others in relation. Hence the *imago Dei* is selves being love and of selves in the state of becoming love.

Lastly, as already implied, love embodied is not coercive. With love being primary, the emphasis shifts from the will to obey to having and cultivating a passion for justice. When the concept of the “will” translates into “desire” and “obedience” as “justice,” love can also be bodily and be incorporated into the whole of the self (desire). Also rather than imagining obedience to be something external imposed upon the self, the argument is for a passion for justice that is nurtured from within.²⁸⁹ Justice hence becomes intrinsic to anthropology—not something lost or in need of being regained (in its original or perfect state)—and so an innate expression of embodied love.

As Teresa Delgado suggests, the will defined as desire can point to “genuine and mutual relationships based on love and respect rather than on fear and power.”²⁹⁰ Being “the most human as intended by God” would become manifested because of an innate “will/willingness to love.”²⁹¹ And since being according to the *imago Dei* is to “love justice passionately,”²⁹² as Isasi-Díaz argues, a justice that comes from love is sustained by love. Love embodied in the interstices decolonizes our conceptions of being human. It is love beyond demand for it makes it possible to welcome the rejected, strengthen the weak, include the excluded in our midst, and embrace the unlovely, even the oppressor. Participation in the life of God and others is intended also for those with whom relationship is not yet right but can become so through incarnational love amongst equals.²⁹³ The *imago Dei* as love will entail mutual and non-coercive participation in the liberation process of the whole of humanity, and this embodies a passion for justice.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The embodiment of the image of a God who loves passionately, the body that loves as God loves, or the embodiment of God as passionate love, does not allow for a simple categorization of parts of the self that allocate an even distribution of and allocation to spirit and body. Bodies of flesh that in loving make manifest God’s relationality in semblance of the Jesus event can challenge constructs of a lost image as a result of the fall that voids the intrinsic good found in bodies also composed of dust. Bodies participate in God’s relational essence and thus can innately desire the good for the self and others.

That is why the underpinnings of the works of Caribbean Latina theologians such as that of Isasi-Díaz continue to be essential in feminist efforts towards recognizing the varied earthly tones of the divine gift of love, hence the bodily fullness of the image of God in us. For theologians like her, incarnation, *en la carne*, or what I call embodiment, entails the lived experience of the whole of “the mystery of existence.”²⁹⁴ Reflection upon the mystery entails “the senses, desires, flavors, pleasure, pain, imagination.”²⁹⁵

²⁸⁹ God guides us from within. See Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues*, 25.

²⁹⁰ Teresa Delgado, “Prophesy Freedom: Puerto Rican Women’s Literature as a Source for Latina Feminist Theology,” in *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology*, eds. María Pilar Aquino, Daisy L. Machado, and Jeanette Rodríguez (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2002), 30. See Nicholasa Mohr, *In Nueva York* (Houston, TX: Arte Público Press, 1993), 32. Note the play of words, of “will” within “willingness,” “will” as a part of something larger, desire.

²⁹¹ Delgado, “Prophesy Freedom,” 30; Mohr, *In Nueva York*.

²⁹² Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues*, 192.

²⁹³ See Isasi-Díaz’ chapter on “Reconciliation” in *La Lucha Continues*, 219-239.

²⁹⁴ Isasi-Díaz, *En La Lucha*, 176.

²⁹⁵ Isasi-Díaz, *En La Lucha*, 186.

These embodied forms of understanding the *imago Dei* are fluid and dynamic, multifarious and multitonal, and they offer a wider glimpse into the relational complex of selves that embody the divine love. This embodied love would be beyond measure and so will incarnate a decolonized image of God in its in-between expressions of love and justice.

How can we continue to construct a God that images our mixed and hybrid selves, in-between selves that might continue to be too queer and other? How would the statement “God is love” come to be defined according to the not yet of the divine kindom? How could our particular theological insights on the *imago Dei* enable us to theologize concerning the image of God in a manner that is faithful to the human-cosmic complexity and diversity? I believe that this notion of the image can open the path to insights on a theology of iconic symbols. Human beings share in the reality to which they point—God. Iconic symbols, furthermore, would also point to an excess of that reality. An adequate theology of symbols might lead us to a better understanding of human beings as icons of God’s presence, traces of the mystery of God here on earth, with a wealth of theological content yet to explore.

The starting point is for understandings of the *imago Dei* as the embodiment of love expressed through relationality from within a Caribbean Latina theological perspective to be able to challenge notions that devalue nature and the body, that devalue the bodies of women and of diverse human beings, and from there also of nonhumans. The body is the site of multiple desires and locations in terms of space and time, and these enable the self to love and seek the well-being of self in relation to the many others. Love desires the inclusion of the disenfranchised, seeks the transformation of the ugly without “whitening” it or “perfecting” it, cherishes the intimacy between bodies whether human, nonhuman, or divine, and promotes loving relationships in multitudinous historical contexts. Since God is love, we are capable of love, and we are thus also able to image God as God images us—as the embodied capacity to be in relationship passionately.

Entre (Otros) Conocimientos and the Struggle for Liberation: Remembering the Legacy of Otto Maduro (1945-2013)²⁹⁶

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Abstract

This article celebrates the life and numerous contributions of Otto Maduro to the study of religion. It highlights some of the important moments in his personal and academic life, as well as his life commitments. Alluding to some of his written works, it becomes evident that Otto was a versatile academic, activist at heart and dedicated teacher and mentor committed to the liberation of oppressed peoples. This article also celebrates his approach at crossing disciplinary boundaries as well as his ecumenical engagement of different faith traditions and Christian denominations.

Se nos fue Otto con su cargamento de preguntas –idesconfiaba de las respuestas, sobre todo si nos las tomamos demasiado en serio...!–. La gustaba interpelar: “dime qué te preguntas y te diré quién eres”. Y soñaba: “Imaginemos a alguien que se interroga constantemente, por ejemplo, “¿qué podré hacer para hacer más hermosa la vida de la gente a mi alrededor?”²⁹⁷

296. The content of this paper has three main sources. See Néstor Medina, “The Newark Pentecost: Toward a Latina/o Catholic-Pentecostal Conversation,” paper presented at the panel: Honoring the Legacy and Life of Otto Maduro (1945–2013), American Academy of Religion (Baltimore, 2013); Mendieta, “Reflections on Otto Maduro,” paper presented at the panel: Honoring the Legacy and Life of Otto Maduro (1945–2013), American Academy of Religion (Baltimore, 2013); Laurel Kearns, James Spickard, and Elias Ortega-Aponte, “In Memoriam: Otto Maduro (1945–2013),” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 82, no. 1 (March 2014): 22–29. I also allude to other remarks made by colleagues at the American Academy of Religion in a special session in Otto’s honor.

297. Joseba Lazcano, “Otto Maduro (1945–2013) / Su obra en SIC,” *Revista SIC*, 13 May 2013, <https://sicsemanal.wordpress.com/2013/05/13/otto-maduro-1945-2013-su-obra-en-sic/> (accessed January 1, 2016).

To write about Otto Maduro's life and academic legacy is easy: he was well-liked by his peers, colleagues, and friends, and was known as an exceptional scholar. At the same time, it is very difficult: he had his hands and mind on so many debates and was involved in so many struggles for liberation, so a short article cannot do justice to the multiple sides of who he was. Otto was and will continue to be one of my academic role models. I came to know Otto because of my dissertation advisor, Lee Cormie, who was one of his many good friends. I was all too happy to approach Otto and tell him that I had a connection to his circle. To my surprise, he quickly extended his friendship to me, and from then on every time we saw each other we spent a couple of minutes getting updated about each other's lives and work.

Personal and Academic Background

Otto was born in Venezuela in 1945, the son of two lawyers of working-class origins, and the eldest of five children. And in 1984, he married Nancy Noguera. Their dear son Mateo was born in 1995. Otto often described being raised in an intense intellectual atmosphere, but one with at best an ambivalent attitude toward religion. He considered becoming a priest and did eventually go to seminary, but soon left to get a philosophy degree. In his *Mapas para la fiesta*, he wrote that he briefly contemplated atheism.²⁹⁸ He was disenchanted with Catholicism but soon realized that conservative Venezuelan Catholicism was just one strand of an extremely complex tradition. As part of his own personal and intellectual journey, he went to study philosophy and sociology at the Catholic University of Louvain, where he received a Master's degree in the sociology of religion, as well as a Master's degree and Ph.D. in the philosophy of religion. Among his intellectual influences one finds Friedrich Engels, Pierre Bourdieu, Paulo Freire, and Enrique Dussel, as well as Karl Marx, on whom he wrote his dissertation. No ivory tower intellectual, Otto was conscious that intellectuals hold "a special kind of power" and moral responsibility. He called on intellectuals to exercise epistemological humility and to recognize the intimate connection between individual's ideas and the ideas of other peoples.²⁹⁹ For him, knowledge and power were ethical issues. "How do we use that power, with whom, for whom, [and] what for" were central intellectual questions for him.³⁰⁰

Otto resisted academic strictures that hindered fluid conversation across disciplinary boundaries, and his work crossed multiple fields of study (Marxism, sociology, epistemologies, sexualities), religious traditions (Catholicism, Pentecostalism), and disciplines (sociology, philosophy, theology). He often preferred casual conversations to more restrictive academic engagement; "para él era más importante sentirse como una persona que sabía disfrutar de la vida."³⁰¹ With his

298. Otto Maduro, *Mapas para la fiesta: Reflexiones sobre la crisis y el conocimiento* (Atlanta, GA: Asociación Para La Educación Teológica Hispana, 1998), 13.

299. Otto Maduro, "An(Other) Invitation to Epistemological Humility: Notes Toward a Self-Critical Approach to Counter-Knowledges," in *Decolonizing Epistemologies*, Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Eduardo Mendieta (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2011), 87–104.

300. Laurel Kearns, James Spickard, and Elias Ortega-Aponte, "In Memoriam: Otto Maduro (1945–2013)," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 82, no. 1 (March 2014): 23.

301. Lazcano, "Otto Maduro."

eclectic taste for music and the arts, he enjoyed “listening and dancing to folk music traditions from around the world—jazz, salsa, bluegrass, klezmer, blues, tango, zydeco, Celtic and country music among these—preferably while chatting, drinking and eating among good friends!”³⁰²

After brief teaching stints at the University of Southern California’s School of Religion, Union Theological Seminary, the University of Pittsburgh, Candler School of Theology, and at his alma mater of Louvain in Belgium, in 1992 he accepted a full time position at the Drew Theological School, Drew University with his wife Nancy (who is now an Associate Professor of Spanish at Drew). There he served as The Professor of World Christianity and Latin American Christianity.

Intellectual, Teacher, Mentor

While at Drew, Otto collaborated with Ada María Isasi-Díaz in establishing a major Latino/a presence in a theological school. Together, they started the Hispanic D.Min. program and the Hispanic Institute of Theology. He also began to focus on the social and religious situations of U.S. Latino/as, actively mentoring in the Hispanic Theological Initiative (now Hispanic Theological Initiative Consortium or HTIC) housed at Princeton Theological Seminary. He also directed the Hispanic Summer Program (HSP)—an independent program for enhancing the education of Latina/o graduate students studying religion and theology in the United States—from 2006 to 2012. According to current HTIC director, Joanne Rodríguez, Otto played a crucial role as director of HSP: “During his tenure, the consortium went from 30 member schools to over 50 today....during his tenure, Otto re-instituted Through Hispanic Eyes for non-Latina/o faculty and deans from member institutions to better understand the Hispanic culture.”³⁰³

Otto sought social transformation for the poor, for women, for people of color, for LGBTQI, and for all of those whom both the powerful and the ordinary mainstream society silenced, ignored, and left aside. He yearned for “liberation among the economically, racially, culturally, and/or sexually oppressed peoples (Latin American and U.S. Latinas/os in the first place).”³⁰⁴ He was an activist, “within the academia, the churches, and community organizations, advocating, funding, and directing many initiatives on behalf of Latina/o priests, pastors, religious workers, community activists, and of course students.”³⁰⁵ He fit the profile of an organic intellectual, or, as Fernando Segovia put it, “he was a classic intellectual of the “Third World,” “with a wide knowledge of world affairs, a command of several fields of studies, a wide repertoire of cultural knowledge and a commitment for the have-nots.”³⁰⁶

Eduardo Mendieta reminds us that “Otto was preeminently preoccupied with how suffering, subaltern, marginalized and disempowered subjects produce knowledge.”³⁰⁷

302. See his personal webpage at <http://www.users.drew.edu/omaduro/> (accessed December 26, 2015).

303. Cited in Kearns, Spickard, and Ortega-Aponte, “In Memoriam,” 26.

304. See <http://www.users.drew.edu/omaduro/> (accessed December 26, 2015).

305. Eduardo Mendieta, “Introduction to the English-Language Edition: Toward an Epistemology of Liberation,” in *Maps for a Fiesta: A Latina/o Perspective on Knowledge and the Global Crisis*, edited and with an introduction by Eduardo Mendieta (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2015), vii.

306. Cited in Kearns, Spickard, and Ortega-Aponte, “In Memoriam,” 23.

307. Mendieta, “Reflections on Otto Maduro,” paper presented at the panel: Honoring the Legacy and Life of Otto Maduro (1945–2013), American Academy of Religion (Baltimore, 2013).

Otto's vision was in stark contrast with those positions that viewed knowledge as a commodity purchased by the wealthy, the privileged, and the educated. That type of commodified knowledge "is what we have when we stand back from the world, and dispassionately objectify it and ourselves in the process of observing it."³⁰⁸ Instead, Otto was preoccupied with the commodification of knowledge as a type of self-alienation and separation from the world by reducing it to its lowest common denominator of capital. The connection between those suffering and knowledge was clear for Otto, claims Mendieta, as he (Otto) "believed intensely that knowledge is a form of power, a power of hope and resilience."³⁰⁹ He argued that it is the suffering ones, the poor, *los desechados* who produce a knowledge that "traces a map out of an unjust society, a society of dispossession, towards one in which we come to a "fiesta"—to the carnival of peace and justice...out of their destitution they produce knowledge."³¹⁰

A polyglot teacher, for many of his students Otto was a rigorous teacher-mentor. Deeply committed to popular forms of education à la Paulo Freire,³¹¹ Otto saw himself as "a sort of agent provocateur in the classroom; not so much transmitting knowledge as eliciting doubts, questions, and quests."³¹² Consistent with his own personal commitments, he challenged his students to be deeply engaged and cognizant of the social implications of his ideas. At the celebration of his life at Drew, and in online comments, his students spoke of how much he encouraged them, welcomed them, and challenged them. At Drew, he was also "awarded twice for his outstanding teaching and lectures, often given from 3 x 5 cards covered with minute handwritten notes."³¹³ I recall participating with him on a panel in 2006 at which he spoke from a series of handwritten Post-its.

Otto always pushed students to see the messy complexity of social settings when studying all issues, particularly religion. The outstanding line-up of Latinas and Latinos who studied under his direction and obtained their Ph.D. degrees, such as Mayra Rivera Rivera at Harvard Divinity School, Benjamin Valentín at Andover Newton Theological School, Elaine Padilla at New York Theological School, and Samuel Cruz at Union Theological Seminary, attests to his broad commitment for empowering and working with Latinas/os.

Incisive Author and Prolific Writer

Otto was a world-traveling lecturer and prolific author; he wrote five books in five languages and over a hundred articles published in a dozen languages on five continents.³¹⁴ His first major book, *Marxismo y Religión*,³¹⁵ was published after his 1977 return to Venezuela and grew out of his interest in a more complex understanding of the

308. Ibid.

309. Ibid.

310. Ibid.

311. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York, NY: Seabury Press, Continuum, 1970).

312. Kearns, Spickard, and Ortega-Aponte, "In Memoriam," 25.

313. Ibid.

314. Ibid., 23.

315. Otto Maduro, *Marxismo y Religión*, in *Decolonizing Epistemologies: Latina/o Theology and Philosophy*, ed. Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Eduardo Mendieta (Caracas, Venezuela: Monte Avila Editores, 1977), 87–104.

Marxian perspective on religion. It was quickly followed by *Religion and Social Conflicts*,³¹⁶ which was published in Spanish, Portuguese, and English. “Together they received much attention for his analysis of the role religion plays, both positively and negatively, in social and economic development.”³¹⁷

Much of Otto’s writings were geared toward engaging “other” voices that are not often found in mainstream academic debates. He sought to empower lay people and ordinary citizens in the struggle for justice in the various social, political, and academic structures. He was an active scholar who served on the councils of several disciplinary societies (where he was known for being an early member of any women’s caucus). He also contributed as an editor to journals and as a member of editorial boards. Due to his reputation, he was nominated to run for the presidency of several social science disciplinary societies, such as the Association for the Sociology of Religion. In 2012 he was elected president of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) at a critical time of important labor disputes.³¹⁸ He was the first Latino to hold that office in the history of the AAR. His commitment for the oppressed was shown during his presidential address in which he called on us researchers, teachers, academics, and scholars of religion to hear the cry of the oppressed and to respond to that cry; to confront the reality of misery, poverty, and precariousness that migrants face and not pretend that it is not part of the study of religion.³¹⁹ He called on us to respond “with our power, our ethical responsibility, and our role in the production and dissemination of knowledge, in any and all forms within our reach.”³²⁰ He was very clear that in the study of religion and theology, we must dismantle the fallacy of being able to be or being called to be “objective” and “uninvolved.”³²¹

Religiously Versatile

In terms of religious affiliation, Otto also crossed traditional boundaries. He described himself as Christian but not only Christian, Catholic (a convert in his teens, he was raised atheist) but not only Catholic. He challenged others to embrace, or at the very least be open to, the possibilities of having multiple religious identities.

Over the years, I came to know Otto more closely. One time he told me he was studying Latina/o Pentecostalism in the Newark, New Jersey area. I had been looking for ways of connecting my liberationist perspectives and intuitions with my Latina/o Pentecostal side, so he seemed like a great interlocutor to have. During another of those “update” conversations we had, he told me that he would gladly share with me his findings on Latina/o Pentecostalism.

At first, I was a bit suspicious of what a religious scholar with Catholic affiliations would say about Latina/o Pentecostals. It almost seemed counterintuitive for a liberationist such as Otto to study the development of Pentecostalism among Latinas/os

316. Otto Maduro, *Religion and Social Conflicts* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1982).

317. Kearns, Spickard, and Ortega-Aponte, “In Memoriam,” 24.

318. *Ibid.*, 27.

319. Otto Maduro, “Migrant’s Religions Under Imperial Duress: Reflections on Epistemology, Ethics & Politics in the Study of the Religious ‘Stranger,’” keynote presidential address, American Academy of Religion Conference (Chicago, 2012).

320. Cited in Kearns, Spickard, and Ortega-Aponte, “In Memoriam,” 22.

321. Maduro, “Migrants’ Religions Under Imperial Duress.”

in the New Jersey area. When I came to read his material, I was prepared to find a long list of familiar criticism of Pentecostalism, criticism to which I have become accustomed coming from other non-Latina/o and Latina/o Catholic scholars I have read, with the exception of Orlando Espín.³²² His writings were not only refreshing but insightful. In them I found an uncompromising spirit of justice, and his intentional effort to tease out the liberative aspects of Pentecostalism.

Otto's uncanny ability to connect the dots and discern the direction of social and religious movements uncovered for me multiple points of intersection between liberation theology and Pentecostalism. He helped me reorient my understanding of Pentecostalism, for his research directly contradicted stereotypical notions of Pentecostals as disembodied hyper-spiritualized and socially uninvolved people.

He connected the ongoing "Pentecostalization" of the Latina/o population to several important insights with which I have been wrestling. Besides the compatibility between the Latina/o cultural ethos and Pentecostalism³²³—something Pentecostalism and Latina/o popular Catholicism share³²⁴—he highlighted the fact that the Pentecostal leaders reflect the population of the subaltern communities which they serve.³²⁵ Among Pentecostals, he stated, it matters little to the Holy Spirit if the chosen person shares none of the traits that make somebody "respectable" in the eyes of the world.³²⁶ Most important, he notes how in Latina/o Pentecostal migrant churches people are transformed and welcomed.

De ser un 'extranjero', un 'ilegal', un 'cualquiera', un 'sospechoso' o, peor, un 'don nadie', la persona inmigrante, al cruzar el umbral de una iglesia pentecostal hispana, pasa a ser más que simplemente 'alguien', para convertirse en una persona absolutamente importante, escogida, llamada, empujada, bendecida y protegida por Dios; una persona con una misión más importante que la de cualquier estrella de cine, millonario, doctora, presidente, ejecutiva o profesor: la de mostrar a quien no lo conozca el verdadero camino de la salvación eterna.³²⁷

Otto insisted that a look at the on-the-ground practical dimension of Pentecostalism

322. Orlando O. Espín, "Pentecostalism and Popular Catholicism: The Poor and *Traditio*," *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 3, no. 2 (November 1995): 14–43.

323. Otto Maduro, "Notas sobre pentecostalismo y poder entre inmigrantes latinoamericanos en la ciudad de Newark (New Jersey, E.U.A.)," Paper Presented at the XII Jornadas Sobre Alternativas Religiosas Na América Latina (Porto Alegre, Brasil, 2005).

324. Orlando O. Espín, "Pentecostalism and Popular Catholicism" See also Juan Sepúlveda, "Pentecostalism as Popular Religiosity," *International Review of Mission* 78, no. 309 (January 1989): 80–88.

325. More specifically, "Pentecostal congregations, besides providing a warm, friendly, caring, and supportive environment, also allow for much freedom, flexibility and support for initiatives and services resonating with the customs, hopes, and values of the Latina/o population" (Otto Maduro, "Becoming Pastora: Latina Pentecostal Women's Stories from Newark [NJ]," paper presented at the Panel: Recent Research on Immigrant Christianity in North America, American Academy of Religion, World Christianity Group [Montreal, 2009], 11).

326. Otto Maduro, "Religion and Exclusion / Marginalization: Globalized Pentecostalism Among Hispanics in Newark, N.J.," in *Religion, Globalization, and Culture*, ed. Peter Beaman and Lori Beyer, International Studies in Religion and Society Series (Leiden, NL: Brill Academic Publishers, 2007), 374.

327. Maduro, "Notas sobre pentecostalismo y poder," 17.

reveals the emergence of a new face of Pentecostals, ones who are conscious of their social role. Indeed, Tetsunao Yamamori and Donald Miller call it “progressive Pentecostalism,” yet they insist that Pentecostalism is filling the void left by the death of liberation theology.³²⁸ Flippantly, many have said that liberation theology made an option for the poor but that the poor opted for Pentecostalism. But my sense--and Otto’s findings confirmed this--is that among Latina/o Pentecostals liberation theology is being reconfigured and rearticulated.³²⁹ In fact, and in light of his work, I can confidently say that what is being forged is the material content for the articulation of a type of “Pentecostal liberation theology” that finally closes the circle by emphasizing the involvement of the Spirit in the process of liberation. While some see opposition between these two currents, what we are finding is that both are “powerful manifestations of the Spirit.”³³⁰ Indeed, José Comblin had already hinted at this from his Catholic perspective in Latin America³³¹ and Juan Sepúlveda echoes this from his Latin American Pentecostals perspective,³³² but Otto with his on-the-ground engagement with Latina/o Pentecostals makes the point all the more obvious and unavoidable.

In my view, his work on Pentecostalism also opens the door for a fruitful conversation between Latina/o Catholics and Latina/o Pentecostals that is long overdue, and which the dominant culture and media are bent on preventing from happening. Ecumenical conversations among Latinas/os have already begun in some important measure,³³³ so a conversation between Latina/o Catholics and Pentecostals is the next step.³³⁴ Lately we have been bombarded by broadcasts and publications that pit Latina/o Catholics against Latina/o Pentecostals and Evangélicos, but as Latinas/os we cannot allow that to happen.³³⁵ We must turn the traditional urge to “divide and

328. Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2007).

329. Juan Sepúlveda, “Pentecostalism and Liberation Theology: Two Manifestations of the Work of the Holy Spirit for the Renewal of the Church,” trans. J. M. Beaty, in *All Together in One Place: Theological Papers from the Brighton Conference on World Evangelization*, ed. Harold D. Hunter and Peter D. Hocken (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 51–64; Campos Bernardo L., “En la fuerza del Espíritu: Pentecostalismo, teología y ética social,” in *En la fuerza del Espíritu: Los Pentecostales en América Latina: Un desafío a las iglesias históricas*, ed. Benjamín F. Gutiérrez (Guatemala: Centro Evangélico Latinoamericano de Estudios Pastorales; Asociación de Iglesias Presbiterianas y Reformadas en América Latina, 1995), 57–72; Darío López, *Pentecostalismo y transformación social: Más allá de los estereotipos, las críticas se enfrentan con los hechos* (Buenos Aires: Kairos, 2000) are great examples of how Pentecostals are taking seriously the insights of liberation theology and responding to the critical question of the social impact of Pentecostalism on the Latin American context.

330. Virgilio Elizondo, “The Response of Liberation Theology,” in *Pentecostal Movements as an Ecumenical Challenge*, vol. 3, ed. Jürgen Moltmann and Karl-Josef Kuschel, Concilium (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 3:52.

331. José Comblin, “Espíritu Santo,” in *Mysterium liberationis: Conceptos fundamentales de la teología de la liberación*, ed. Ignacio Ellacuría (Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 1990), 619–42.

332. Sepúlveda, “Pentecostalism and Liberation Theology.”

333. See Orlando Espín, *Building Bridges, Doing Justice: Constructing a Latino/a Ecumenical Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009).

334. Néstor Medina, “Unlikely Siblings? Pentecostal Insights from the Catholic Teachings on Mary,” Keynote presentation at the Receptive Ecumenism in a Latin American Context: Catholic and Pentecostalist Learning in Relation to Mariology Dialogue, The Third International Receptive Ecumenism Conference (Fairfield University, Connecticut, 2014).

335. Elizabeth Dias, “Evangélicos,” *Time* 181, no. 14 (15 April 2013): 20–28.

conquer” on its head and work toward finding ways to work together and learn from each other. In Otto’s words, “ ‘anybody’ can do, be, build and lead church.”³³⁶ Otto’s work invites us to see the possibilities for this conversation to take place, and if it were to happen, such conversation will have to be included as part of his larger legacy.

Otto’s religious versatility went beyond his work on Pentecostalism, of course. He taught and practiced liberation theology, and encouraged the Catholic prophetic voice. He was conversant with various other religious traditions. Marc Ellis—with whom Otto edited a volume in honor of Gustavo Gutiérrez³³⁷— writes how Otto supported his own development of a Jewish theology of liberation. Dealing with these questions Ellis asked himself “Could Jews and Christians go prophesy together?”³³⁸ And in Otto’s characteristic way we find a resounding “Yes, we can!” As part of his own continuing conversation with Judaism, he later edited *Judaism, Christianity, and Liberation*.³³⁹ He had a personal motivation to do so since his father was of Jewish descent, his family driven from Spain by the Inquisition.³⁴⁰

Otto was planning to retire from Drew in May 2013. But he intended to continue his work, this time as faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary as the new Maxwell M. Upson Professor of Christianity and Society. His struggle with cancer abruptly shortened his life, “y se nos fue” on May 8, 2013,” just six days before a special celebration of his life was held at Drew.³⁴¹ We will remember him as a rigorous scholar, incisive author and writer, public intellectual, dear friend, and a loving husband and father. May we learn from his rich life and like him work for justice and on the side of the poor and the oppressed peoples in our communities.

336. Maduro, “Religion and Exclusion / Marginalization.”

337. Marc H. Ellis and Otto Maduro, eds., *The Future of Liberation Theology: Essays in Honor of Gustavo Gutiérrez*, ed. Marc H. Ellis and Otto Maduro (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989).

338. See <http://mondoweiss.net/2013/05/prophetic-encountering-maduro.html> (accessed October 10, 2013)

339. Otto Maduro, ed., *Judaism, Christianity, and Liberation: An Agenda for Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991).

340. Kearns, Spickard, and Ortega-Aponte, “In Memoriam,” 25.

341. *Ibid.*, 29–30.

Otto Maduro: Maestro de cómo ser amigo

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Abstract

In addition to his unforgettable friendship, which became support for his research, Otto Maduro left much for us to think with regard to religion. Starting with his first book and until his last writings, he was attentive to the historical context. To speak of Marxism and religion in that historical moment meant that Otto was in tune with the times. Religion continued being the theme and the place from which Otto studied, for a long time, the relation between social theories especially with regard to social conflict. His intellectual question centered on how religion could be both the cause of oppression as well as the cause of liberation in social conflicts.

• SPANISH LANGUAGE ARTICLE •

“La única manera de hacer un amigo es serlo.”
Emerson (1803-1882) *Poeta y pensador estadounidense.*

En 1977 se publicó el ahora famoso texto, *Marxismo y religión*, en Venezuela, por la editorial Monte Ávila. Pero antes de publicarse ese texto tan recorrido, ya Otto Maduro, su autor, tenía fama. Tenía fama de ser brillante, de ser un intelectual excepcional, de estar como un sociólogo hecho radar, justo en el momento histórico, precisando cómo estaba el pensamiento y conocimiento religioso, la filosofía de la religión, afectando la realidad de la época, la coyuntura actual. La vasta sabiduría filosófica, el entendimiento del marxismo y el estudio de cómo esto afectaba o era afectado por el discurso y la práctica de lo religioso lo hacían un muy buscado pensador. Crearía sensación entre

intelectuales de varios círculos y lugares, y en Venezuela, creó fama y reverencia entre colegas y amistades, sobre todo en los círculos universitarios.

Por ser una época de represión, explosión de nuevos movimientos sociales, procesos de cambio, y en general, mucha actividad y creatividad en cuanto a ideas liberacionistas, tanto el marxismo como la religión en América Latina tenían mucho que aportar, y demasiada importancia y relevancia. Así fue que por medio de su tesis doctoral de la Universidad Católica de Lovaina, Otto Maduro pasó a ser un reconocido intelectual y académico de la filosofía de la religión, y sociología de la religión en América Latina. Con este primer texto, Otto Maduro marcó un paso importante. Con un libro, cuyo título, en una sola letra (en español) y palabra, dejaba entender a un mundo que negaba una u otra dimensión o de lo político o de lo religioso. Esa “Y”, del título de ese primer texto publicado, significaba que la relación entre la teoría política y la práctica religiosa era de hacerse. Esto, no nuevo para filósofos y religiosos en la historia del cristianismo, por ejemplo, pareció muy nuevo en un momento histórico en que se negaba, se separaba, se rechazaba a quien no escogía un lado u otro. En momentos de lo que desde el norte se ha llamado la Guerra Fría, durante la cual se hacía persecución, como bien está probado en la historia, de quien pareciera identificarse con el enemigo ideológico de una conservadora y tradicional cúpula política y religiosa, no era cualquier filosofía política la que Otto Maduro relacionaba con la religión, se trataba precisamente del marxismo.

Otto Maduro entró en el diálogo con un muy expansivo estudio de la perspectiva marxiana de la religión. En esa época se vivía, para cuando se publica el texto, en América Latina, no solo la religión en general, se trataba de un cristianismo en especial que entraba en un momento de nueva reforma o más bien un momento de revolución teológica. Hablar de marxismo y religión en ese momento histórico significó que la investigación académica de Otto estaba al día con la época. La religión siguió siendo tema y lugar de estudio para Otto por mucho tiempo, en relación a teorías sociales y sobre todo en relación al conflicto social, su inquietud intelectual se centró en cómo podría ser la religión tanto causa de opresión como causa de liberación en los conflictos sociales. Como ese conflicto se iba definiendo en su trabajo intelectual, dependió de cómo el mundo, el contexto vivido, de Otto Maduro fue cambiando.

Pero, se nos fue Otto Maduro, en mayo del 2013 dejó esta dimensión de vida y nos dejó llenos de amor hacia el mejor amigo que muchos tuvimos el placer de tener. Dirán que es muy informal decirle así, después de todo fue un gran intelectual latinoamericano, orgullo de Venezuela, de los primeros en publicar sobre el marxismo y el cristianismo en un estudio sociológico de la religión. Fue espectacular escritor, editor, profesor, autor, mentor, pensador, como también fue un maravilloso conversador, y una magnífica persona. Se esmeraba en ser amigo, pero no sólo en lo personal, también implementó el arte de ser amigo como algo central a su método de investigación. En sus estudios vimos el conflicto como algo central, pero en su llama intelectual, la razón por la cual el conflicto social era tan importante, era porque a pesar de diferencias, Otto Maduro entendía la posibilidad de un acercamiento hacia toda aquella persona hecha “otra”.

Por medio de la amistad, de apertura, de estudio y entendimiento, de diálogo entre polos opuestos, se podría llegar al “y” esa unión por medio del cuestionamiento de sistemas y coyunturas que crean “el otro”, aquel rechazado por el conflicto social en sí. Esto último fue algo que conocí de su trabajo en la Universidad de Drew, y que como su alumna aprendí. Otto respetaba a “los otros” y siempre se esmeró en ser amigo, como

filosofía relacional, como teología encarnada, como pedagogía práctica, como método de investigación sociológica. Por eso este escrito se titularía en un más completo título: *Otto Maduro: sociólogo, filósofo, religioso, especialista y maestro de cómo ser amigo*.

A Otto Maduro, primero lo conocí cuando yo tenía siete años y él estudiaba su doctorado en Europa. Eso fue en la sala de mi casa, con un grupo de la universidad que se había reunido en la casa de quien Otto contaba había sido su primer amigo protestante, mi padre, teólogo y pastor presbiteriano, profesor de filosofía. Ellos se habían conocido antes en una reunión, en el Congreso Cultural de Cabimas, Venezuela, en donde una congregación ecuménica se dio. Por esas cosas que uno llama del destino unos años después mi padre entró a dar clases en la plaza de filosofía en el núcleo Táchira de la Universidad de Los Andes (ULA), la universidad que Otto dejó por irse a doctorar en Europa. De esa primera vez que lo conocí, mi memoria de niña es que mucha gente lo admiraba, lo sentían gran pensador y que para esos admiradores, Otto era una persona no sólo intelectualmente brillante, sino “sentipensante”, como dice Eduardo Galeano.

Ya de adulta, cuando volví a ver a Otto fue en la universidad de Vanderbilt, en Nashville, Tennessee, en E.E.U.U., donde mi padre se había acabado de doctorar y donde la facultad de divinidades reunía una serie de teólogos y filósofos de la liberación latinoamericanos para un foro, entre ellos Enrique Dussel, Jean Pierre-Bastian, Joel Gajardo, y Otto Maduro. Para mi dicha, fui yo entre las personas asignadas por los organizadores del evento para dar la bienvenida y sacar a divertir a ese grupo esotérico de grandes pensadores. Y Otto salió a bailar salsa con un grupo de estudiantes venezolanos. Desde aquella reunión, nuestra amistad creció y recibí postales de Otto, y saludos en cada uno de mis cumpleaños hasta su fallecimiento en el 2013. Me siento privilegiada al decir que estuve entre un grande grupo de amigos que él supo cultivar, y que recibimos cariño, cartas, postales, llamadas y saludos por tanto tiempo. Fue Otto quien me convenció a estudiar el doctorado en Drew, la universidad metodista, protestante, donde él daba clases desde 1992, y fue Otto quien me echó la bendición, para mi enfoque en ética cristiana dentro de la escuela de religión y sociedad de Drew. Otto fue mi apoyo moral como amigo, pero también mi gran inspiración, además de susto, como profesor, tan exigente. Así que afirmo, que no solo fui alumna de Otto, fui discípula suya, fui su amiga.

Ya para el 1992 cuando comenzó como profesor en la Universidad de Drew, el amigo Otto había publicado su también famoso texto, *Religión y Conflicto Social*, en 1980 por el Centro de Estudios Ecuménicos/Centro de Reflexión Teológica en México, D.F. Las siguientes ediciones de este texto fueron publicadas en Venezuela por el Ateneo de Caracas y en Brazil por Vozes, los cuales salieron en 1981 y en inglés se publicó por Orbis en NY, en 1982. Así, al cumplirse la década desde que se leía y se discutía este texto entre publicados y estudiados teólogos y teoristas de la liberación, se conocía bien el nombre y trabajo de Otto Maduro en escuelas de sociología, filosofía y teología, en círculos de grupos de acción social, a múltiples niveles se estudió el trabajo de Otto Maduro. Sus colegas de ciencias sociales, sociólogos, y de las humanidades, filósofos o religiosos en la academia en EEUU comenzaron a tomarle mucho afecto, y cuando se enfermó por primera vez, fueron ellos quienes expresaron su apoyo a nivel nacional, por este Otto Maduro, ahora ubicado en universidades en el norte de las Américas. Otto, aun radicado fuera de Venezuela, viajó y participó en conferencias, clases, paneles, cursos

intensivos, e intercambios de muchos tipos en toda América Latina, en muchos lugares del mundo y además de haber anteriormente dado clases en universidades venezolanas, fue profesor de mucha gente, alumnas y alumnos de varios niveles y lugares, y empleado en la Universidad de Notre Dame, la escuela de teología de Maryknoll y la Universidad de Drew, y hubiese seguido, hacia el Seminario Teológico de Princeton, si no le hubiese llegado la muerte antes.

Otto había hecho estudios y publicado en ramas de la filosofía y la sociología, pero en 1989 hizo marca en el ámbito profético editando dos ejemplares de textos teológicos en inglés, junto con su colega Mark Ellis, reconocido teólogo judío de la liberación, tanto *The Future of Liberation Theology: Essays in Honor of Gustavo Gutierrez*, en 1989 como *Judaism, Christianity, and Liberation* en 1991, fueron publicados por la casa editorial Orbis, y leídos en seminarios y departamentos religiosos en muchos lugares.

Al enfermarse por última vez, Otto comenzó a recibir llamadas diarias, de todos los rincones del mundo, mensajes, abrazos cibernéticos, y tantas formas que los amigos íntimos demuestran su amor. Aquella canción de los años setenta que decía “yo quiero tener un millón de amigos y así más fuerte poder cantar”, pareciera haber sido el lema de Otto. Sus amigos no venían de una sola categoría, había desde la más sencilla y humilde trabajadora hasta los más reconocidos, entre ellos grandes intelectuales y artistas, tanto venezolanos como a nivel continental latinoamericano, también expandían territorios globales, lo interesante de Otto es que sus amistades eran grandes en todo, desde quienes se dedicaban a sus labores más sencillas hasta las más reconocidas, todas importantes para Otto. Como mi primer mentor a nivel doctoral me preparó para ser profesora, donde me enseñó la importancia de cada estudiante, y de la claridad que debe existir entre profesor y alumno. Otto me dio recomendaciones, me abrió el paso, y me dejó grandes huellas profesionales, que dudo pueda llenar. Otto y su familia me recibieron en múltiples ocasiones y pasaron por mi casa para celebrar largas cenas, tantas copas de vino o simplemente un cafecito con su esposa Nancy, su hijo Mateo, y el perrito Leo, que murió a los meses de Otto. Y fue recientemente, en ocasión de la celebración de la vida de Otto en la Academia Americana de Religión (AAR) del noviembre de 2013, cuando acompañé a Nancy, su esposa. Amigo, no solo para mí, sino de para tantos de nosotros. Amigos, hermanos, “panas” de Otto, todo un grupo que se sintió instruido, acompañado, querido, y apreciado, pero sobre todo visto y comprendido por Otto. Desde sus colegas, hasta sus alumnos, desde quienes le vendieron helados, hasta quienes le sirvieron en algún bar de jazz, desde las personas que él estudió hasta las que seguimos estudiándolo, todos nos sentimos parte de su círculo, y no sabíamos cuán grande círculo éramos.

El trabajo de Otto recorrió el mundo, fue traducido en múltiples idiomas, fue y sigue siendo estudiado en seminarios teológicos, escuelas de sociología y de filosofía. Otto Maduro, simplemente fue grande. Pudo hacer trayectoria intelectual entre ramas de estudio que en general se separan en la academia. Publicó tanto como humanista así como científico social, publicó desde la base del conflicto social y desde la revelación teológica de lo profético. Hizo estudios con y de los más rechazados, como pensadores y hacedores de realidades. En su último libro, *Mapas Para La Fiesta*, un trabajo que aunque es epistemológico, yo lo llamo escatológico, Otto, en esos mapas, nos relató su entendimiento sobre la razón, el intelecto, la sabiduría, la opresión, la liberación, y la expresión, todo en base a lo que es el conocimiento. En su mejor intento de escribir un librito útil lo que hizo fue empaparnos de la capacidad de llenarnos más de preguntas, y

cubrirnos más de la forma filosófica-sociológica de Otto ver el mundo. En la descripción de este librito, Otto se presenta no sólo como sociólogo y filósofo venezolano, sino como autor de múltiples libros y artículos, eso muchos lo sabemos. Lo que muchos por fuera del ambiente estadounidense no sabrán es la cantidad de cosas que hizo Otto mientras dio clases en Drew, una universidad metodista, donde las clases no sólo eran para estudiantes doctorales en el departamento de religión y sociedad. Otto también le dio clases a futuros líderes eclesiásticos, pastores de variados grupos protestantes en formación en la escuela teológica de Drew.

Desde aquella época cuando primero conoció Otto a un protestante, mi padre, hasta sus últimos días, Otto creció en aprecio por la diversidad ecuménica dentro del cristianismo. Otto en su labor académica como profesor de cristianismo global en Drew, y en E.E.U.U. fue líder del “Hispanic Summer Program”, una organización nacional que ofrece cursos de maestría en teología o divinidades en español durante los veranos. En esta organización participan profesores y estudiantes Latinos de seminarios del país y es prácticamente la única manera para estudiantes Latinos poder tomar cursos teológicos dictados por profesores Latinos, o en español o exclusivamente sobre temas Latinos o Latinoamericanos. Otto fue mentor del “Hispanic Theological Initiative”, una organización que otorga becas y apoyo a estudiantes Latinos en programas de Ph.D. en cualquiera de las ramas teológicas. Y fue presidente de la más grande organización de estudiantes y profesores de teología y religión en el país, la Academia Americana de Religión (AAR). Además, fue organizador, junto con Ada María Isasi-Díaz, en la formación del “Hispanic Institute of Theology”, la comunión local de alumnos y potenciales alumnos hispanos de la escuela de teología de la Universidad de Drew.

Sobresalió en proyectos colaborativos con América Latina, con mucho apoyo a Brasil, los Maryknoll, y otros espacios donde Otto participó. Fue editor de varias revistas académicas y de apoyo no sólo a alumnos suyos, sino también a estudiantes en múltiples países, quienes dicen que desde que conocieron a Otto, él se convirtió en importante amigo, consejero, mentor. Ahí también esa metodología del amigo, la relación profesor estudiante, era absolutamente relacional, de amistad. Para con los alumnos de maestría, recuerdo que como su asistente, trabajamos el sílabo y prontuario para su clase, de manera absolutamente meticulosa, previendo muchas incongruencias o posibles confusiones, trabajamos meses organizando de manera exacta. Pero el primer día de clases, se abrió emocionalmente ante una clase de desconocidos y les contó por qué era profesor, qué lo hizo trabajar la religión; les contó de su más profundo dolor al perder a sus hijitas durante su programa doctoral; les contó de manera muy sensible y apasionada sobre su vida y su dedicación profesoral. Se hizo amigo, antes de cualquier otra cosa, exigió apertura.

La apertura de ser amigo, también se veía en su apertura intelectual. Pensaba desde una perspectiva “otra”. Su primer libro *Marxismo y religión*, fue realmente sobre Engels, quien había sido protestante. Su labor dentro de la academia en EE.UU. ayudó mucho al estudiante hispano en EE.UU. Pero me interesa mucho su investigación en la ciudad de Newark, donde Drew había llevado desde 1993 a estudiantes graduados a hacer investigación sobre la resistencia religiosa en centros urbanos, un proyecto que tuvo su base en estudios etnográficos financiados con fondos privados adquiridos por la escuela de teología de Drew, para hacer trabajo antropológico, sociológico de la religión. Ahí fue donde Otto empezó a comprender la enorme discrepancia entre inmigrantes pobres y trabajadores de América Latina y el espacio, literalmente espacio físico como

también el importante espacio pastoral protestante que llenaban los hispano/latino/as en Newark. El proyecto se le llamo “The Newark Project”, informalmente, pero fue inicialmente una forma de hacer trabajo de campo, haciendo observaciones y estudios en la ciudad más cercana a la universidad, y construyendo un cuadro urbano de múltiples dimensiones religiosas de la ciudad. De ahí, para sus alumnos, quienes lo siguieron en ese proyecto, salieron varias tesis doctorales, libros, y salió también el ultimo interés académico de Otto, el central puesto social que juegan las iglesias pentecostales en la comunidad hispana/latina en EE.UU. Su método descriptivo sociológico además de su curiosidad y manera tan abierta de ver a las comunidades religiosas en Newark llevó a Otto a conclusiones sobre cómo están creciendo y cambiando las comunidades cristianas de hispanos en EE.UU.

Me interrogaba en 1999, al principio de esta pesquisa ¿Por qué tanta gente latina abandona la iglesia de sus ancestros (sobre todo la católica) y se convierte al pentecostalismo? Tal pregunta se convirtió desde el 2000 en ¿Por qué no se convierten más latin@s católic@s al pentecostalismo? Después de todo, como quizá lo sugieran las reflexiones siguientes, la panoplia de recursos que las congregaciones pentecostales latinas producen para salvar la vida de inmigrantes en dificultades – recursos raramente accesibles en otros lugares de los E.U.A. a inmigrantes de habla hispana – quizá ayude a entender cuánto sentido tiene hacerse y permanecer como pentecostal. (*Horizontes Antropológicos*, Porto Alegre, año 13, n. 27, p. 13-35, jan./jun. 2007)

El estudio de Otto en las comunidades pentecostales de Newark recibió prestigioso apoyo de fundaciones y organizaciones que financian estudios especiales, para organizar un perfil de los pentecostales hispanos en Newark. Pasó largo tiempo junto a varios estudiantes doctorales asistiendo como observador participante a variadas comunidades pentecostales, y organizó ensayos y presentaciones sobre su trabajo de campo. Todo esto en un ambiente donde otros profesores investigaban el vudú, las religiones afro-caribeñas, el sincretismo religioso en las comunidades católicas, la resistencia religiosa desde espacios “otros” a los espacios anteriormente ocupados por instituciones prestigiosas y comunidades privilegiadas. Como tantas otras comunidades urbanas en EE.UU., Newark ha vivido transiciones de poblaciones que han dejado grandes espacios de pobreza, racismo, hambre y violencia de todo tipo. En ese contexto Otto comenzó a ver a las poblaciones de los más recientes inmigrantes, no solo como un patrón migratorio, sino como un espacio de salvación para la comunidad, por aquel fenómeno que se está dando a nivel mundial, el crecimiento de las comunidades pentecostales entre los más pobres.

Lo que Otto vio, y midió incluye los cambios sociales religiosos entre comunidades latinas, pero también el cambio en el papel que juega la mujer como en el caso de las mujeres pastoras pentecostales. El espacio que provee la iglesia para con esas comunidades de desplazados, y rechazados es no sólo de hacer que la gente se sienta en casa, sino absolutamente recibidos e importantes. Al igual que en otros tiempos donde poblaciones de ex esclavos se sentían gente únicamente en su espacio religioso, muchos de los despreciados inmigrantes latinoamericanos también viven esa experiencia.

Entre las descripciones que Otto utilizó para informar sobre el panorama que vive la comunidad pobre de inmigrantes trabajadores de América Latina, vio el valor de una

iglesia donde quien manda es el espíritu de Dios. Qué mejor amistad que la directa con Dios, y no por medio de la institucionalidad, el liderato apropiadamente autorizado, la sociedad predominante, o cualquier otro impedimento para ser visto como persona, aun frente a Dios. En especial la relación entre las comunidades más marginalizadas de inmigrantes latinoamericanos y el espacio santo que ofrece la iglesia fue marcada en los estudios de Otto, por la manera en que las mujeres son tratadas en estas comunidades pentecostales en EE.UU.

Las *mujeres* inmigrantes de países latinoamericanos (más aún aquéllas en dificultades económicas, familiares, laborales, educacionales o legales), hallan en las iglesias pentecostales latinas uno de los escasísimos sitios donde es posible encontrar respeto, atención y apoyo continuos. Ello hace posible para muchas el compensar y superar muchas de las dificultades inherentes a la condición de mujer, de inmigrante, de indocumentada, de desempleada, de madre soltera, de persona de piel oscura, de alguien que no habla el idioma, y/o que tiene poca o ninguna escolaridad previa – junto con desarrollar su capacidad de comunicación y liderazgo, su autoestima y sus habilidades para sobrevivir creativamente en el nuevo territorio. (*Horizontes Antropológicos*, Porto Alegre, año 13, n. 27, p. 13-35, jan./jun. 2007)

Es interesante que en sus estudios, y hasta en las notas al pie de página, vemos que las amistades de Otto, así como sus alumnos que trabajaban sus doctorados en aquel entonces, le dieron aún más entendimiento, ya que en encuestas informales se dio cuenta que aquellos estudiantes, ahora protestantes de otras ramas habían en muchos casos pasado por iglesias pentecostales en su niñez y que sus familias se habían convertido en sus momentos iniciales como familias nuevo inmigrantes. ¿Y qué de sus lazos con el catolicismo? Según los estudios de Otto, los hispanos en EE.UU., sobre todo quienes llegan en situaciones precarias, tienen a dónde llegar en las comunidades pentecostales.

Mucho más que otras tradiciones cristianas, la pentecostal estimula la aceptación del que una persona creyente cualquiera pueda ser llamada por el Espíritu de Dios, en cualquier momento de su vida, a cualquier ministerio (predicación, educación, misión, fundación de iglesia, etc.) – independientemente de los rasgos morales, educacionales, económicos, étnicos o culturales de la persona, de su edad, estado civil, género, o antecedentes criminales. Ello hace posible el insólito hecho de que, con inusitada frecuencia, el *liderazgo* de tales iglesias esté formado por gente latina proveniente de grupos social, económica y/o profesionalmente subalternos, semejante, pues, en mucho, a la mayoría de la población latina circundante y al resto de quienes conforman la congregación. La manera de vestir y hablar, las reglas de trato interpersonal, los gustos, el nivel de escolarización e ingresos, los empleos fuera de la iglesia, la vivienda, el vehículo (si hay uno), las preocupaciones y los problemas de la dirigencia, todo ello con frecuencia sitúa al liderazgo – objetiva y subjetivamente – como gente cercana, semejante al inmigrante común y corriente, muy diferente de l@s pastor@s escolarizad@s y ordenad@s de las denominaciones oficiales o de los típicos líderes de otras agencias de la sociedad – suscitando una identificación que alimenta la

conciencia de que “si alguien como yo pudo, yo también puedo.” (*Horizontes Antropológicos*, Porto Alegre, año 13, n. 27, p. 13-35, jan./jun. 2007)

En su última presentación, cuando salía de la presidencia ante la asamblea anual de la Academia Americana de Religión (AAR), 2011, Otto Maduro exigió mayor respeto hacia las comunidades pobres, los inmigrantes, los marginados latinoamericanos, ahora latinos en EE.UU. Tuvo con esa apasionada revelación de su estrecha amistad con quienes él estudiaba, una recepción de sus colegas que le aplaudieron en ovación, respeto y amistad, inadie lo olvidará! He llorado escribiendo sobre Otto...cómo nos hace falta. Sus besos, sus llamados en voz de bajo y a todo volumen “mi amor” por los pasillos de Drew, fueron ampliamente compartidos, con facultad, estudiantes y trabajadores de la universidad. Una semana antes de morir, la escuela teológica le brindó un homenaje, para el cual Otto les pidió adelantarse esa semana, ya que él pensaba, sentía, que no duraría otra semana después. Quienes estuvimos ahí, su familia que viajó de varias partes del mundo, sus alumnos, amigos, colegas, todos quienes pudieron llegar, encontramos a un Otto lúcido, presente, y lleno de amor y amistad. La recurrente celebración fue la amistad, los besos libremente regalados a todas y todos, y la presencia tan poderosa de su espíritu en ese lugar. Otto Maduro, quien entre amigos, que seguimos siendo muchos, se auto-confesaba ser neurótico, más bien fue un hermoso ser, para quien tod@s éramos importantes. Sus estudios sobre el poder de una comunidad que se entiende dirigida por el Espíritu Santo, quedan como evidencia de su sensibilidad y espíritu de amor.

El maestro de cómo ser amigo, se nos fue, pero sigue dando lecciones de apertura donde lo recordemos. Para mí, como mujer protestante, de la rama reformada, me es más que especial, que Otto, quien salió de una familia no religiosa y de trasfondo judío, fue católico, y ecuménico, fue amigo de los protestantes, y entendió la libertad del Espíritu de Dios para con sus preferidos, los más sufridos de este mundo. La amistad de Otto me enseñó mucho, y espero sólo poder corresponder con el mismo método de amor al prójimo. Otto Maduro, oficialmente Profesor de Cristianismo Global, fue profesor de lo que debe ser el Cristianismo, la religión, la filosofía y la sociología, todos deben ser abiertos, amigos de los más rechazados y entendedores de multiplicidad. Por algo Otto podía conversar, leer, escribir, dictar clases y en general comunicarse en varios lenguajes, en varias ramas académicas y en varias teologías, por algo podemos decir que la amistad significa ser amiga, ser amigo, no sólo adquirir amistad, sino adquirir las destrezas para entender las diferencias entre personas, para ver posibilidades y esperar más allá de la preparación para la fiesta.

Algunas Obras de Otto Maduro:

1977 *Marxismo y religión*. Caracas, Venezuela: Monte Ávila Editores.

1977 “New Marxist Approaches to the Relative Autonomy of Religion.” *Sociological Analysis* 38/4:359-367.

1980 *Religión y Conflicto Social*. Mexico, D.E.: Centro de Estudios Ecuménicos/Centro de Reflexión Teológica (Venezuelan edition by Ateneo de Caracas; Brazilian translation by Vozes: Petrópolis, 1981; English translation by Orbis: Maryknoll, NY, 1982).

1981 *La cuestión religiosa en el Engles premarxista*. Caracas, Venezuela: Monte Avila Editores.

1982 *Religion and Social Conflicts*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

1989 *The Future of Liberation Theology: Essays in Honor of Gustavo Gutierrez*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

1991 *Judaism, Christianity and Liberation: An Agenda for Dialogue*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

1992 *Mapas para la fiesta: reflexiones latinoamericanas sobre la crisis y el conocimiento*. Cap. federal, Rep. Argentina: Centro Nueva Tierra para la Promoción Social y Pastoral.

1996 "Notes toward a Sociology of Latina/o Religious Empowerment."
In *Hispanic/Latino Theology: Challenge and Promise*, ed. Ada Maria Isasi Diaz and Fernando F. Segovia, 151-166. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers.

2002 "Implications politico-theoriques d'une définition de 'la religion' solidus: On the Theoretical Politics of Defining 'Religion'." *Social Compass* 49/4:601-605.

2004 "'Religion' under Imperial Duress: Postcolonial Reflections and Proposals." *Review of Religious Research* 45/3:221-234.

2007 "Notas sobre pentecostalismo y poder entre inmigrantes latinoamericanos en la ciudad de Newark (New Jersey, E.U.A.)." *Horizontes Antropológicos* 13/27:13-35.

2009 "Religion y exclusión/marginación: Pentecostalismo globalizado entre los hispanos en Newark, Nueva Jersey." *Cultura y Religión: Sociedades en transición*.

3/1:35-51.

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The Listening Guide: A Practical Tool for Listening Deeply to the Body of Christ

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Abstract

The Listening Guide is a voice-centered method of narrative analysis developed collaboratively by Carol Gilligan et al. designed to keep the researcher open to discovery. This essay argues for the use of the Listening Guide as a “deep listening” method for critical theological reflection on the church. It is a practical tool that affirms the continuing incarnation of Christ in all participants of the church and is a corrective to the pervasive pattern within theology of allowing a handful of voices (too often, white male voices) to speak for the many.

I helped to found a pub church. Over the course of several years, a group of friends and I frequented a favorite local pub every Friday to eat fish and chips. In a moment of convergence, it occurred to us that the pub was a perfect place to gather as church – a more ideal place. There were enough in our group whose experiences of church had been negative, hurtful, and for some even abusive, that a typical church building was a place they were no longer willing to enter. To use the terminology of John Inge’s Christian theology of place, the traditional church building had become negatively storied.³⁴² Like all places, the church building was a place filled with meaning, but in

³⁴² See John Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2003), 37. Inge argues that ‘place’ is a locale filled with meaning because of what has happened there, the memories, as well as the hopes that have been constructed and encountered by people there. In this way, places are *storied*; a particular place has a particular narrative attached to it. Some who envisioned church in a pub did so because a traditional church building was now storied in such a way that it was no longer a place to which they would choose to go, unlike the pub, a place where they gathered with friends every week.

this case it was negative meaning, developed as a result of shattered hopes and hurtful memories. In contrast, the pub was a place of community and friendship, a place where we could relate to one another anew, and where we could imagine engaging with God again. Our idea of a church in a pub was born.

At the time, we thought this was novel, born of our own imagination and experiences, but I quickly discovered that such creative ideas about church were becoming quite common in United States and in the United Kingdom (not to mention throughout church history!). Yet what is reflected in these new forms of church is a deep listening and responding to people's experiences of church and to their desire for a church that could be experienced as Good News.

"Deep listening," as a tool for critical theological reflection, is the focus of this essay. I will offer a quick glimpse of my larger research project on the ecclesiology of the Emerging Church that led me to this method of narrative analysis. I will then present the *Listening Guide*, a feminist voice-centered method of narrative analysis developed collaboratively by Carol Gilligan et al. that is designed to keep the researcher open to discovery.³⁴³ This a valuable tool for doing theology, a tool that facilitates our understanding of what is being experienced in a particular historical moment and values the voice and participation of all who make up the Body of Christ—not simply that of a select few. It is also a practical tool for critical theological reflection that affirms the continuing incarnation of Christ in all the participants of the church as a corrective to the pervasive pattern within theology of allowing a handful of voices (too often, white male voices) to speak for the many.

The theological task

My favorite definition of good practical theology comes from Gustavo Gutiérrez who defines theology as: "Critical reflection on praxis in light of the Word of God."³⁴⁴ This means that theology is always engaged in the tension between reflection and action – praxis – and is concerned with reflecting upon praxis *critically* in light of what God is up to in the world. This theology takes seriously concrete reality and makes critical judgments that may lead to more faithful action according to the Good News as embodied by Jesus in community. This theology has social, political, and economic implications. It is meant to transform the world.

My interest is the transformation of the church. There are two aspects of the church that concern me and motivate my work on Emerging Church ecclesiology. First are the experiences of judgment and exclusion that people encounter within church as well as the judgment and exclusion of lesbian, gay, bi, and trans people experienced in their interactions with Christian-identified family and friends. Second, it is evident that pervasive patriarchal patterns in the church persist in the public presentation of the Emerging Church. There are a handful of 'usual suspects' repeatedly cited in Emerging Church blog posts, articles, interviews, and conference posters that dominate the public presentation of the Emerging Church and create its popular imagination. As it stands,

³⁴³ Carol Gilligan, Renée Spencer, M. Katherine Weinberg, and Tatiana Bertsch, "On the Listening Guide: A Voice-Centered Relational Method," in *Emergent Methods in Social Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2006).

³⁴⁴ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (15th Anniversary Edition with New Introduction by Author), (New York: Orbis Books, 1988) 5-11.

that predominant image highlights a popular few and effectively erases the vast majority of the people, especially the women, who make up the movement. No church, especially a church that seeks to emerge in ways that are organic, relational, and inclusive, can be adequately represented by a subset of voices.

Broadly speaking, the “Emerging Church” refers to a relationally connected network of congregations within Western Christianity that seek to rethink and reform the church in light of what it understands to be important elements of a changing culture and in response to experiences of Christianity and church as “unchristian.”³⁴⁵ The literature of the Emerging Church purports that Emerging Church congregations embody a vision of church that is organic, relational, and inclusive in form. While I do not have space here to offer a detailed description of these three characteristics, early on in my investigation of Emerging Churches I noted that first wave feminist theologians,³⁴⁶ who raised robust challenges to the church regarding the largely overlooked sexism and patriarchal practices embedded within it, also developed and contributed much toward an ecclesiology that would make for a more organic, relational, and fully inclusive church. However, Emerging Church literature does not reference or acknowledge this fact – erasing the work and contributions of feminist liberation theologians before them – belying the Emerging Church’s desire to be a relational and inclusive church. I also encountered critiques of the Emerging Church which addressed its predominately white male leadership.³⁴⁷ Further, the concerns first raised by feminist theologians decades ago were also being raised by women involved in the Emerging Church.³⁴⁸

So was the emerging church forming in ways that were organic, relational, and inclusive? Specifically was it sufficiently self-critical of sexism and patriarchy within the church? To answer this question, it was important that I listen to the voices of Emerging Church participants beyond those in the published literature. I had my questions and concerns regarding the Emerging Church and I had feminism as the particular critical lens I brought with me as I theological reflected upon it. But I additionally needed my critical reflection to be informed by the praxis of a broader circle of Emerging Church participants, to be informed by the larger Body of Christ, so that I would remain open to discovery and keep myself from seeing only that which might reinforce my own

³⁴⁵ I draw the term from David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons’ book *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity...and Why it Matters* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2007), which outlines the millennial generation’s predominant experience of Christians and of the church. Through an extensive three-year research project that included more than two thousand surveys and extensive interviews with “outsiders,” people who are outside of Christianity and church – both de-churched and un-churched people ages 16 – 29, Kinnaman and Lyons discovered that outsiders’ overall perception of Christians are that they are “unchristian.” Nine out of the top twelve perceptions outsiders have of Christians are negative. The top three being that Christians are 1) antihomosexual, 2) hypocritical, and 3) judgmental.

³⁴⁶ The early feminist theology I draw from is often referred to as first wave feminist theology. First wave feminist *theology*, produced from the 60’s – 80’s, rose out of second wave *feminism* and the women’s liberation movement of the same time period. Second wave feminist theology would be what arose in the 1990’s; there is a difference between numbers in the feminist movement and feminist theology.

³⁴⁷ See Soong-Chan Rah and Jason Mach, with responses by Debbie Blue, Julie Clawson, and Brian D. McLaren, “Is the Emerging Church for Whites Only?” *Sojourners* (May 2010): 16-21. This article created a major stir among emerging church leaders and participants, responses to which exploded on the blogosphere for months to follow.

³⁴⁸ This came up both in my interviews with emerging church participants as well as within the innumerable blogs and online forums related to the topic of the Emerging Church.

suspicions or biases. Such a theological task was well served by the *Listening Guide*.

Getting technical with the Listening Guide

In order to capture the fuller picture of the texture and context of the Emerging Church's ecclesiology, beyond that which is popularly portrayed or thus far captured in the literature, I conducted a qualitative research study with twelve Emerging Church congregations from across the United States.³⁴⁹ The intent of my study was to draw in the insights and experiences of the wider range of people who make up the Emerging Church than just of those who have published books. The findings of my study were based on research that includes participant observation, review of the congregations' printed materials, and 47 interview/focus group sessions with participants from among the twelve sites. I applied the *Listening Guide* method of narrative analysis to the transcripts of my interviews with participants in order to uncover the ways in which they did or did not experience the Emerging Church, through their participation in their particular congregation, as organic, relational, and inclusive.

The *Listening Guide* is a voice-centered relational approach to narrative analysis. The method involves a series of four sequential 'listenings' that are designed to "bring the researcher into relationship with a person's distinct and multilayered voice by tuning in or listening to distinct aspects of a person's expression of her or his experience within a particular relational context."³⁵⁰ In the case of this study the voice being tuned into is that of persons and groups of Emerging Church participants and their expressed experiences of their Emerging Church congregation. The approach of multiple listenings assumes that "many voices are embedded in a person's expressed experience"³⁵¹ and that "the psyche, like voice, is contrapuntal (not monotonic) so that simultaneous voices are co-occurring."³⁵² Gilligan et al. contend that the significance of listening to the "many voices" is that it is in the tensions between the voices that new insights can be gained – that discovery is possible. Thus, the researcher listens for distinct and multiple aspects of the person/persons' expressed experience in order to uncover new findings.

The "listenings," rather than "readings" of the text, are named thus to highlight the active participation required on the part of the researcher, i.e. the listener. This acknowledges the active presence required of both teller and listener; this relational method recognizes the researcher's role and "intentionally brings the researcher into relationship with the participant through making our responses, experiences, and interpretive lenses explicit in the process, and by listening to each person's first-person voice before moving in to listen for answers to our own research questions."³⁵³ This makes explicit the researcher's active role with the aim of maximizing the researcher's

³⁴⁹ While I make reference to "the ecclesiology" of the Emerging Church, I do acknowledge that it would not be fair to impose or reduce the clearly varied and diverse Emerging Church to a singular ecclesiology. The qualitative research study I conducted with twelve Emerging Church congregations helped me to identify the ecclesiology that is most prominent within the movement and useful for reflecting on the Emerging Church's faithfulness to its own claims about who it is as church.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 159.

³⁵¹ Ibid., 157.

³⁵² Ibid., 159.

³⁵³ Gilligan, et al., 169.

ability to listen and not have her responses interfere with the listening process.³⁵⁴ Ultimately, the method “listens to, rather than categorizes or quantifies,” the text – the transcribed interviews.³⁵⁵

The *Listening Guide* is framed by three overarching questions about voice: “Who is speaking and to whom, telling what stories about relationship, in what societal and cultural frameworks (Brown & Gilligan, 1992, p.21)?”³⁵⁶ With this framework in mind, the researcher conducts a series of four sequential readings: 1) listening for the plot, 2) listening for the first-person voice,³⁵⁷ 3) listening for contrapuntal voices, and 4) composing an analysis.

Listening for the plot has two steps. In the first step one attends to the landscape, to what is happening, to the stories being told, to what is happening in them, when, where, to whom, and why. One also attends to repeated images, metaphors, or dominant themes; to contradictions or absences, and finally, to the larger social and cultural contexts within which the stories are embedded and expressed, as well as to the context within which the researcher and research participant come together. In step two of the first listening, the researcher attends to her response to the narrative by “identifying, exploring, and making explicit [her] own thoughts and feelings about, and associations with, the narrative being analyzed.”³⁵⁸

The second reading focuses on listening to the first-person voice of the speaker by noting each use of the first-person pronoun “I”. The researcher underlines, or marks in some visible way, each “I” spoken in the text and the verbs that follow it. These are then pulled out and written down on a separate paper, each “I” phrase written on a separate line, like a poem, and in the same sequence as they appear. The purpose is two-fold: it moves the participant’s subjectivity to the foreground in order to listen to how the person speaks about her or himself in relation to the topic in question, and it enables the listener to get to know the “distinctive cadences and rhythms” of the teller.³⁵⁹ This listening attunes the researcher to what the participant knows of her or himself before talking *about* her or him; it resists dealing with the research participants in an objectifying way.³⁶⁰ In terms of the research questions, isolating the first-person voice facilitates listening for distinctive moments of variation, dissonances, and shifts in the person’s expression of their experience, referred to as “hot spots,” that may be key places for further exploration and inquiry.

The third listening connects directly back to the research question and is more explicitly designed for ‘discovery’ within the research area. This begins by identifying a particular ‘voice’ for which the researcher will listen – an aspect of the research question – and determines the markers by which this voice is identified. For example, one of the specific voices I listened for in my analysis was that of relationality – the church as relational in its structure and design. Markers I looked for to identify this voice were

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 161.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 159, quoting D.L. Tolman, *From Subjects to Subjectivities: A Handbook of Interpretive and Participatory Methods* (New York: New York University Press, 2001) 132.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 159, drawing from L.M. Brown and C. Gilligan, *Meeting at the Crossroads: Women’s Psychology and Girls’ Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

³⁵⁷ Ibid., Gilligan et al. refers to these as I poems – I will refer to this listening as simply the first-person voice.

³⁵⁸ Gilligan, et al., 160.

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 162.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 162.

mentions of participation, of decision-making, and of roles and responsibilities. I marked these by underlining with a particular color. This is done at least one more time, if not more, to listen for another voice related to the research question. I did this three times, listening for relationality, organicity, and inclusivity. The voices are marked in different colors or highlighting in order to make it easy to see how the voices relate to one another and to see what is revealed in the relationship between the voices. Is there dissonance, harmony, or contradiction? Listening for at least two contrapuntal voices recognizes the reality that there is a multiplicity of voices and aspects of experience always at play in any given situation or relational context, and it helps reveal what may not be immediately obvious.

One then looks at how these contrapuntal voices relate to the first-person voice and its expressed experience. These points of intersection may become points of interest for the researcher and key for the discovery of new understandings regarding the research topic.

I conducted both individual as well group interviews with participants of the twelve congregations I visited. My research project is ecclesiological, its interest being the church as a *body* made up by the collective of all its participants. When I researched the *Listening Guide*, I did not find any study in which the guide was used with the transcriptions of group interviews or focus groups. I therefore adapted the second listening to account for participants' individual voice as well as their sense of the collective voice. In the second listening, usually focused on just the first-person voice, I added an additional step of listening for the collective "we" voice. Initially, as I conducted the second listening, I followed the *Listening Guide's* structure, isolating the first-person voice and drawing out each use of "I" and the verbs that followed it. However, as I did this, I also began to take notice of the use of "we" within the text. What stood out was that there would be long stretches of text when the first-person voice dominated only to be abruptly interrupted with a short spurt of "we" voice. What was clear in those moments was a sudden shift in the person's experience, one that moved from their individual internal experience to an outward one in which others played a clear role. Note, for example, the illustration that follows in which one participant is giving expression to her conflicted feelings about the significance of Jesus. As she began her story, she exclusively used the first-person voice:

I'm in a personal struggle
I don't know
I love
I've had
I don't associate
I don't
I don't
I can't
I can't
I find it hard
I still love
I don't know
I think

Then, she made a sudden switch to the “we” voice:

We’re all here
We all do
We all see
We see
We’re tired
We be authentic
We have right now

The whole of her last line states, “This is all we have right now; to be authentic.” After her long litany of “I believe,” “I wonder,” “I think,” “I don’t” and “I find” statements, she ends her story by moving from the “I” to the “we” voice. For me, these clear ruptures revealed something about how the participants were experiencing their Emerging Church congregation, and so I adapted the method accordingly. I listened not only for the contrapuntal voices regarding the church as organic, relational, and inclusive, but also for the moments of tension and convergence between the first-person voice and the collective voice – between the “I” and the “we.” I then also noted the relationship between the “I” and “we” voices to the distinct markings of my listenings related to the research question regarding the organicity, relationality, and inclusivity of the emerging church and participants’ experiences within it.

Thus far, these four listenings – plot, the isolated first-person voice, and at least two contrapuntal voices – have created a ‘trail of evidence.’ There is a visual trail of different colored underlining and markings left with each listening, as well as a trail of notes, researcher responses, and interpretive summaries.³⁶¹ This trail of evidence then serves as the basis of the researcher’s interpretations in relation to the research questions in the fourth and final step of the *Listening Guide*. Composing an analysis is the final step in which the researcher ‘assembles the evidence’ and pulls together what has been learned about the research question through this process and how he or she has come to know it.³⁶²

For the study of Emerging Church congregations, an essentially social and relational subject, this method of analysis allowed me to listen to the “many voices embedded in a person’s embedded experience,” to take seriously the experiences of the persons as persons and not as objects of study, and to have my questions and concerns about the Emerging Church be informed by more than just the few voices that are represented in the literature. It facilitated a process that allowed the data to ‘speak for itself’ and assisted in keeping my biases and pre-commitments as the researcher from getting in the way of discovery.³⁶³ The method also implicitly recognizes the constructed nature of knowledge. I intentionally sought to have the knowledge I produced about the Emerging Church, specifically its praxis, to be informed by a wider circle of people – persons who

³⁶¹ Gilligan, et al., 159, 168.

³⁶² Ibid., 168.

³⁶³ The biases of the researcher are never eliminated and the perspectives and interpretations offered by any study always belong to the researcher. Nonetheless, as research seeks to draw out insights and disclose generalizable patterns, structures, practices, etc. about a given subject, in this dissertation I make efforts to minimize biases through triangulation and through the use of this “deep listening” method of narrative analysis.

not only have a stake in the subject matter, but for whom the faithfulness of the church has direct personal and collective implications.

The significance of listening deeply to the Body of Christ

As early as 1970, in an infrequently cited book titled *The Emerging Church*, Bruce Larson and Ralph Osborne, Presbyterian ministers, wrote about the church they saw emerging as one that was *organic*, as in responding to “God’s new thing” as it comes to be known and “discovered locally, at the grassroots”³⁶⁴; *inclusive*, as in open to and inclusive of not only “the dramatic changes and developments in contemporary society,” but also to the questioning and critique of those inside and outside the church³⁶⁵; and *relational*, as in moving away from the non-Christ-like ways that have become embedded in church – hierarchy, clericalism, and other ‘outmoded strategies,’ “habits and restrictions of a bygone day.”³⁶⁶ More than twenty years before the Emerging Church we know today came to be, Larson and Osborne were already anticipating the development of this new kind of church, a church appropriate for its time and the changing culture.

They proposed that central to the workings of a church that is transformed by the “amazing workings of God’s kind love”³⁶⁷ is the *gift* of the divinity of Christ’s continuing incarnation in the humanity of the church. The significance of this is that humanity itself is the means of God’s love through which the church is transformed.³⁶⁸ The extent to which the whole body, i.e. the humanity of the church, serves as a resource to express the divinity of Christ continues to be an important question in our undertaking of the theological task. Larson and Osborne contend that, “In too many instances, the Church has neglected its primary resources: the *divinity* of Christ continuing [Christ’s] incarnation in [Christ’s] people, and the very *humanity* of those in whom [Christ] continues to live.”³⁶⁹ If Christ’s divinity is recognized as continuing among all who make up the body of Christ which is the church, then this must apply in all matters of church, including the research methods and tools used for our critical theological reflection, especially if the good news of Jesus Christ is to “always be new and relevant, always re-inventing itself.”³⁷⁰

I offer the *Listening Guide* as a valuable method of analysis for the church’s practice of critical theological reflection. Our intentional practice of listening deeply to the multiplicity of voices “on the ground” guards us from the easy habit of listening to only the dominant voices. This method takes seriously the continuing incarnation of Christ in all persons of the church.

³⁶⁴ Bruce Larson and Ralph Osborne in *The Emerging Church* (Waco, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1970), 91.

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 104-106.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 86-87.

³⁶⁷ Larson and Osborne, 19-20.

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 73.

³⁶⁹ Ibid. Capitalization in the original.

³⁷⁰ Christopher Rodkey, “Satanism in the Suburbs: Ordination as Insubordination,” 53, in *Hyphenateds*, ed. Phil Snider, 47-60.