

Article

Theology in Latin American Context: A Look at Soteriology

Daniel Orlando Álvarez * and Wilmer Estrada-Carrasquillo *

Department of Theology, Pentecostal Theological Seminary, Cleveland, TN 37311, USA

* Correspondence: dalvarez@ptseminary.edu (D.O.Á.); wilmerestrada@ptseminary.edu (W.E.-C.)

Abstract: The purpose of this article is to describe a contextual theology in Latin America in dialogue with its cultures, histories, and peoples. This contextual theology must build from a Latin American context. For this reason, dialogue begins with *mestizaje* to begin to describe some of the cultural, ethnic, racial, and religious experiences giving shape to Latin America. The article specifically looks at the intersection and confluence of African, Amerindian, and European origins of Latin American peoples and explores how this could inform theological thought. The essay also considers Liberation Theology as an important theological stream. Throughout this essay, Pentecostalism becomes a case study by which an emerging theology from this tradition can be faithful to both its tradition and the cultures in context. It becomes evident that an emerging Latin American theology is profoundly intersectional, containing issues of race, culture, ethnicity, and popular religions. Theologians must walk through contested spaces. This dialogue requires patience, listening, compassion, and understanding.

Keywords: Latin America; theology; soteriology; liberation; Pentecostalism; *mestizaje*; *mulatez*; spirituality; popular religion



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1. Introduction

In presenting this volume my colleague, (removed for peer review) and I must highlight that this is a study of influential undercurrents for theology from a Latin American perspective. In what follows we approach the theological task to explore how an authentic Latin American Pentecostal soteriology emerges from within its context. In order to construct and fine-tune such a soteriology, we must analyze contextual features of Latin America. Simultaneously, these contextual features go beyond Latin America. It is in a dialogue with Latin American cultures that we may begin to see the profound undercurrents that stand out and that contribute to the formation of a theological ethos and framework. It is also necessary to consider the experiences that characterize Latino peoples to contextualize the soteriology that emerges among contemporary Latino communities (Bevans 2003, p. 3). When analyzing the spiritual condition and Christian tradition of Latin America, our first conclusion is that Latin American theology seems to emphasize the capacity for *supervivencia*, or survival, of human beings (Isasi-Díaz 1993, p. 30). Thus, salvation is to be experienced throughout human life in such a way that salvation is developed and applied in a comprehensive (holistic or integral) way (Campos 2015).

It is necessary to explore these theological questions as one navigates the question of writing a Latin American Theology. This theology must consider its own context and critically analyze both (1) how Christian theological concepts can shape their culture, and (2) how their own contexts and cultures influence their theologies. I shall use the case study of Pentecostalism to dialogue with these currents. Tacitly, Latin American Pentecostals have adapted their theology for their contexts, cultures, and purposes. Consequently, they need to analyze their theological concepts considering the cultures that have shaped them. In what follows, we shall examine the question of a comprehensive (holistic, integral) soteriology through a cultural, historical, and theological dialogue. In some places, the connections are obvious. In other places, the connections may seem disjointed. In a few

places, there is a struggle through contested spaces. The reader must understand that such a soteriology emerges from places of conflict and *encontronazos* (collisions).

2. Crucible of Races

The main undercurrent for this essay is that Latin America is a crucible (melting pot) of races, cultures, and traditions. This is also said of European countries and the United States. However, unlike our neighbors to the North, this melting pot exists in a more marked and ubiquitous way in Latin America. Latino authors in the US have described this as *mestizaje* (Villafañe 1993; Medina 2009; Elizondo 2000; Álvarez 2016). In other words, Latin America experienced a profound miscegenation that currently covers more than five hundred years of history. These Latino theologians describe *mestizaje* as the *locus theologicus* of the Latino people (Elizondo 1995, p. 7). Eduardo Fernández calls the work of theologizing from a Latino perspective an ethnotheology (Fernández 2000, p. 100). *Mestizaje* is an entry point to theological discussion that points towards a Latin American theological framework arising from the *cosmovisiones* (worldviews) of Latin America (Álvarez 2016).

The reader must understand that *mestizaje* is a complex and contested term (Vásquez 2006, pp. 144–45; De La Torre 2006, pp. 164–65). In its worst expression, *mestizaje* is accused of *blanqueamiento*, or trying to make oneself white in order to have access to power and privilege. There are colloquial expressions that say, “we must improve the race” (“*hay que mejorar la raza*”) when considering a mixed marriage preferably to whiter or more European phenotypes. In current events, even the musical movie production of *In the Heights* has been accused of whitewashing Latinos and erasing those with dominant African and Amerindian, (or other!) phenotypes (Al-Heeti 2021). There are also alternative terms to *mestizaje*. Latin American authors talk about *hibridez* (hybridity) and *culturas híbridas* (hybrid cultures) as a way of working through different issues related to *mestizaje*, *mulatez*, and identity in Latin America (Álvarez 2016; García Canclini 1997, p. 110; Donadoni and Houvenaghel 2010, p. 474; De La Cadena 2006, p. 51; Chanandy 1999). For Latin Americans identity is a matter of existing in a web of relationships and not necessarily a matter of apodictic certainty (Gracia 2003, pp. 58, 65).

This discussion including hybridity leads to a theology of *encuentros*, *encontronazos*, *desencuentros*, and *reencuentros* (Álvarez 2016). There are conflicting expressions of *mestizaje*. There are power plays and racism associated with this term. For example, it excludes African ancestry and *mulatez*. Yet, it is a hope for the authors that this discussion points to the mixture of races and ultimately to the complexity of this miscegenation. I do not wish to romanticize the term, but to conscientize the discussion to note that there is no room for racism in a Latin American theology. For example, Bantum in his book, *Redeeming Mulatto*, criticizes our concepts of race and the either-or categories that pits black against white while ignoring the intricacies and shades of color in between and outside these poles (Bantum 2010). There are many shades of color and many cultures that intermix in Latin America, and as such a theology emerging from here must look different by recognizing the great diversity therein.

In other words, in sifting through the deep currents of Latin American intermixture, perhaps one may recover a theology that is intercultural, interracial, and can point a way toward racial and cultural mutuality. This can only happen in dialogue raising our concerns and talking through the complex nature of *mestizaje* and the intersecting or digressing web of relationships. In doing so, Latin Americans may somehow point the way forward in solidarity with different races or the irreconcilably other. More and more Latinos in the US find that they do not fit neatly in categories in the US Census (González 2021). Furthermore, if these different races make up our identity, it should further “conscientize” Latinos and Latin Americans to create solidarity and compassion towards oppressed racial, ethnic, and cultural groups. Another important matter to be considered is that in this analysis of culture, the contested spaces are many. In what follows we do not wish to blindly appropriate different aspects of culture. Rather, the purpose is to dialogue with intersecting web of relationship that have given shape to Latin America.

When it comes to theological construction, we must analyze historical events and dimensions of miscegenation in Latin America that influenced their peoples and consequently also shape and affect an emerging theology. *Mestizaje* introduces (initial, but not limited to) lines of thought that affect Latino spirituality and theology. Here, it is necessary to clarify that this topic deserves a deep analysis and in due course, it must be done, but due to the limited space of this presentation, we will only offer a brief summary to guide the reader through these important worldview markers that act as a hermeneutic for creating a Latin American and Pentecostal theology. The goal is to provide direction for a more faithful Latin American theological perspective.

First, there is a profound influence of indigenous spirituality. This spirituality is one of the factors that influence the formation of the Latin American theological framework. Many times, indigenous spirituality is not explicit but tacit. Nevertheless, at the same time, this spirituality penetrates the thought of Latin American Christianity.

Second, Spanish European spirituality also marked Latin America for better and for worse. With its interaction with the indigenous world and later with the African world, there arose theological issues that a Latin American soteriology must carefully investigate. This struggle must work necessarily through issues of inequality, violence, and abuse of power. In a way, this foreshadows the rise of liberation theology.

Third, African spirituality also influences Latino theology. It is worth saying that African spirituality had things in common with Amerindian spirituality and worldview. That was the reason why both could and still exist side by side and intermixed with each other, thus enriching each other in many communities in Latin America, like the Garinagu in Central America.

Fourth, another prominent theological stream is liberation theology. Liberation brought God's option for the poor into the theological task. This theology is the fruit of the awareness of the dynamics between those who hold power and those who live on the fringes of society—in many ways, this was prefigured by that interaction between that Spanish and Amerindian spirituality. However, this is a spirituality that challenges the church to take social problems seriously. Elizondo in the US described how his own reflections on *mestizaje* came about through discussion on liberation theology in the Roman Catholic Church, like Medellin and CELAM, for example. Consequently, it is included here as an important theological stream to consider in building a Latin American soteriology that includes more than just a spiritual element.

The fifth stream of Latin American thought that will be explored in this essay is Pentecostal spirituality and theology. Much has been written about Pentecostalism's explosive growth, but little emphasis seems to be placed on their theology. Some may even say that Pentecostal theology is an oxymoron. However, this is not the case. Pentecostal emphasis on Jesus and the Spirit indicates a movement toward the people. It is a movement that is liberating, but not necessarily liberation. The famous refrain summarizes this stance, "liberation opted for the poor, but the poor opted for Pentecostalism" (Martins and de Padua 2002). The content of his soteriological ideas that enter all these dimensions of daily life and what happens in Latin America. Pentecostalism has the opportunity to enter into a robust dialogue with all these aforementioned streams and interact creatively with these expressions of the different Latin American cultures and create a soteriology in context.

3. An Indigenous Spirituality

Indigenous spirituality deserves a lot of attention in what has to do with the formation of Latin American soteriological thought. Amerindians provided an important worldview that contributed to the formation of Latino peoples. Different Amerindian groups had their own distinct worldview. They were the first pathmakers or trailblazers in the American continent. They established many cities and communities and spread from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego, Chile. These civilizations established large empires, of which the best known are the Aztecs, Incas, and Mayas.

As Daniel Álvarez grew up in his native Honduras, a false narrative was maintained in the education system that indigenous peoples were exterminated during conquest and colonization. Yet, Thomas Hart (2008) in his book, *The Ancient Spirituality of the Modern Maya*, describes how those years, just before commemorating 500 years since Columbus arrived in the “new world,” that many indigenous people decided to commemorate “Five Hundred Years of Resistance” (p. 6). During this event, indigenous people made it known that many had resisted massacres, persecution, and disease all while resisting the dominant culture of erasure.

Around their spirituality, Latin American cultures have preserved strong religious beliefs learned from indigenous peoples. For example, their religions were characterized by a spirituality that allowed them to make a path or way where there was none. They had a deity or deities that intervened in that frontier world, which enabled them to survive in the face of the challenge of a new and unknown world. Amerindians understood their god or gods as active agents who were interveners in a fierce world (Hart 2008, p. 10). In other words, they were convinced that powers, spiritual beings, or divine beings spoke to them through shamans, priests, dreams, and visions (Hart 2008, p. 10). Other dimensions nurtured by Amerindian spiritual worldviews were passed on from generation to generation and still mark many Latin American peoples. People in the West and North may criticize this for its lack of scientific certainty. However, this Latin American theology takes the world of spiritual powers impinging and influencing current affairs seriously. The world is immersed in a spiritual cosmology.

Gailyn Van Rheenen (1991) observes that this belief is still present today and describes how Christians also interact with these beliefs. This spiritual world has spiritual beings and spiritual impersonal forces with some kind of power over human affairs (p. 20). Consequently, human beings must discover what those forces are and the powers that influence them (p. 20). Ultimately, by determining these forces, humans determine what action they will take and how they will manipulate or defend against those powers (p. 20).

For the purpose of this essay, it can be said that there is a connection between salvation, which is considered as the confrontation with a fierce world, still exists in Latin American worldviews. Throughout Latin America, for example, a Pentecostal soteriology is open to evil spiritual forces and confronts them in the name of Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 6:12–13). Again, this goes against the notion of the scientific method that has influenced the European and Western world. Nonetheless, Latin Americans may reject a worldview closed to the world of spiritual and supernatural influences. In the past North American missionaries viewed these customs as primitive and superstitious. However, in expressions such as Pentecostalism there is a theological space that affirms that there is a spiritual world that must be spiritually confronted. For example, as noted by Bledsoe above, in a Pentecostal service the pastor, prophet, or apostle is equivalent to a shaman (Bledsoe 2014; Clarke 2011, p. 125). The pastor is the anointed one that God uses to be an oracle, provide exorcism or even to heal disease. Some Pentecostals distribute charms with Christian connections during their worship services (Bledsoe 2014).

This is not done in every Pentecostal service. Yet, the important point here is that Pentecostals know the spirit world is real. Salvation starts from a confrontation between light and darkness. God has the power to save people from the clutches of Satan, unclean spirits, and demons (1 Peter 5:8). In an authentically Latin American soteriology, the material world is saturated with a spiritual world that cannot be ignored (Daniel 10:13). To summarize, Pentecostalism with its emphasis on power encounters offers salvation in the name of Jesus Christ from all oppressive forces. Pentecostals thus minister deliverance in the power of the Holy Spirit from these forces. This soteriology points to things on the earth and under the earth and that, “every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Philippians 2:10,11). Nonetheless, the question of how these Pentecostals relate to non-Christian religions in a pluralistic society remains a questions Pentecostals must address.

4. Spanish Spirituality

Mackay's (1952) classic book, *El Otro Cristo Español*, recounts some unique characteristics of European Spanish spirituality that interacted with the Amerindian world and marked Latin America through the centuries. For example, Mackay describes the Spanish as the European African following the Augustinian tradition. Mackay points out that what makes the Spanish unique in Europe is their exuberance and passion. These traits spread into the Spanish Empire's own version of Catholicism throughout the colonies. The Spanish also believed in divine intervention, but such intervention was Roman Catholic in character.

Tragically, Spanish Catholicism depended on God for conquest. Their passion and commitment to their religion unified them against the Moors (i.e., Santiago de Compostela) and then propelled them into the conquest of the American continent. The Spanish believed that by their fidelity and by their works that they could achieve their salvation. A telling example is that of Hernán Cortés. When he landed in Mexico, he ordered to burn all his ships, indicating to his soldiers that there was no retreat in the conquest of México. The Spaniards expelled the Moors in 1492, the same year that Columbus arrived at the Americas. This unwavering Catholic faith shaped the spirituality of the Latin American world. Latin America has had a Christianity of effort, hard work, and one that clings to its traditions.

Latin American Christians tend to emphasize works in a similar way to this Catholicism. Some outsiders and independent observers think that Pentecostals, for example, have not really left the emphasis on works that this Catholicism requires. John MacArthur, one of the most anti-Pentecostal contemporary writers, said that Latin Americans, including Pentecostals, do not know true salvation. He claims that Latin Americans know about the Bible, God, and salvation—they may even use biblical terminology because of the influence of the Catholic Church. However, his conclusion is that they do not know Christ, nor the gospel of the grace of God. Therefore, they do not know the revelation of the Scriptures (Corey 2016).

There is a marked cultural contrast between Latin American spirituality when compared with a North American Protestant tradition and its emphasis on the grace of God. The latter, like MacArthur, misreads Latin American Pentecostals as severe, legalistic, and even as Judaizers. On the other side of the coin, Latin American Pentecostals are scandalized by the lack of holiness, transformation, and sacrificial commitment to the Gospel seen in North American churches. However, the reality is that Latin American Pentecostal spirituality is deeply influenced by a passion for Jesus who saved them and an understanding of salvation as a synergistic engagement that includes post-conversion experiences, including sanctification.

This passion leads them to dedicate their entire lives to holiness and evangelism. Outside observers describe a "time hoarding" where parishioners may go to church every day of the week (Brenneman 2012, pp. 168, 170, 217). Christ demands everything of them, and as such Pentecostals, like other Latin American Christians, leave their entanglements to this world to passionately serve Jesus Christ. The concept of salvation is a radical break with everything that has to do with the mundane. Furthermore, a commitment to holiness is the logical next step in reaching conversion. Salvation is a break from sin and a full and passionate commitment to new life in holiness, or sanctification (Hebrews 12:14; 1 Peter 1:16).

Another dimension that emerges in a Latin American spirituality is the intersection of Amerindian spirituality with the Spanish worldview. This intersection or encounter with the Spanish world brought many drastic cultural changes, that is, seismic shifts in their worldviews (*cosmovisiones*). The authors who study Latin America describe this clash as a complete miscegenation of race, culture, and worldview (*cosmovisión*). Since 1492, Latin America has been marked by an internal struggle between the worlds of the oppressor and the oppressed.

Such miscegenation produced an enduring longing for justice. For example, the forced irruption of the Spanish crown created the subjugation of the Amerindian and, soon later, also of Africans. In Latin American thought, this struggle for salvation must necessarily carry a larger dimension than mere moralizing tendencies. It considers the unequal development between the conqueror and the pawns (*campesinos*), and the oppressed and the oppressor. The reality of the oppressor vis à vis the marginalized forces Latin Americans to think of salvation in terms of liberation from oppression and of working for justice for the marginalized and oppressed. It is in this social sphere that some Pentecostal theologians need more critical reflection. Yet, authors like Lopez (2017) are challenging these stereotypes through work focused on the common good and holistic mission (*misión integral*, see Álvarez 2018).

In light of the above discussion of liberation, there are many historical figures such as Bartolomé De Las Casas and Juana Inés de la Cruz who advocated for the cause of the oppressed in their *mestizo* contexts. First, Bartolomé de las Casas became known as the Defender of the Indians. He was a Spanish landowner in the Americas, but later became a priest and violence and injustices imposed on Amerindians. De Las Casas (1877) was convinced that he only needed to preach to the Amerindians with love and peace (p. 34), rather than by force and with the backing of the army (45). He became the most important ecclesiastical figure in Chiapas, Mexico, and prefigured liberation theology in its historical context.

Another important person is Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. She was a writer and thinker who demonstrated the beauty and complexity in the interracial mix that existed in Latin America and that this new reality was not to be feared. Many of her works compare the Spanish world with the Amerindian world. However, as her work shows, it is not about one power imposing itself over another, but rather about a new miscegenation from which both cultures mutually benefit (Zanelli 2016). In her “Loa al Divino Narciso” she calls readers to just, mutual, and holy relationships even though they may appear to be very different and completely exclusive from one another. She brings the Amerindian and Spanish worldviews into dialogue and mutual learning.

When contemplating Spanish spirituality, a Pentecostal Latin American soteriology must consider the intersection with Spanish spirituality in order to forge a more just world. In the Latin American context there is much violence and injustice. Today there is a lot of crime expressed through extortion, kidnappings, hitmen, gangs and drug trafficking. In some places, a life of crime pays better than an honest life. Therefore, in salvation there is a drive to reorient their affections so that it includes a struggle for a more just society. In other words, there is an emphasis on the Kingdom of God brought about by a concern for orthodoxy, orthopraxis, and orthopathos (Land 2010, p. 219). For Pentecostals, in particular, instead of collapsing into an escapism, it may emphasize the creation of a just society precisely by coming to Jesus Christ, the Liberator and Righteous King.

5. African Spirituality

Along with indigenous and Spanish spirituality, we also find African and/or *mulato* spirituality.¹ This, although forcibly brought by the Spanish colonists, plays another important role in the construction of Latin American soteriology. According to historical accounts, as the indigenous population declined due to disease and severe exploitation. Consequently, the settlers undertook the task of forcibly removing our brothers and sisters from Africa from their lands (See Pico 2005; Roe et al. 2005). These men and women arrived in chains to work in the colonies. However, these did not only come with their hands and feet.² Rather, they brought their customs, traditions, and spiritual practices to such an extent that African spirituality is also woven into a Latin American worldview.

To begin to understand the contribution of African spirituality to Latin American soteriology, it is important to understand the African worldview. There is no doubt that when speaking of an African worldview some criticism could be raised due to the variety of tribes, cultures and nations existing within the African continent. However, with this

complexity in mind, it is possible to recognize some unifying elements.³ Below we will examine some of these elements, which, more than exhaustive, are representative of a more comprehensive list.

According to some scholars of African theology, the foundation of the African worldview begins with its communal epistemology. Reflecting on this, Michael Battle affirms that the community plays a central role in defining who the person is. Similarly, Dyrness (1990) expresses that “the person plays a role in African thought, but always in the community context” (p. 49). Consequently, the level of impact of the African community is of such importance that African Christian theologians have fully developed what has been called Ubuntu, a theology of community that seeks to understand how the “community shapes the individual” (Battle and Tutu 2009; Battle 2010, p. 405).

Another of the central elements of African spirituality is the harmony or integration of the cosmos. In other words, everything that happens in the here and now—in the material sphere—has its reason for being in the spiritual world. Consequently, there is no division between the two spheres, but there is a harmony between them and it is of the utmost importance that such harmony is respected. It is for this reason that every decision in your daily life, such as marriages, collaborative agreements, and sowing, among many others, is not made without first consulting the relevant deity or deities (Dyrness 1990, p. 42).⁴

One last element to consider is that of the *fiesta* or koinonia. This third element is intrinsically connected to the two already mentioned. Following the harmony or integral element of the African worldview, the *fiesta* serves as a reconciling element between the spiritual and material spheres. For example, “the goal of rituals and cultic activity sustains both the social order and the cosmic order” (Dyrness 1990, p. 51). When reflecting on this reality of the *fiesta* and koinonia from a Caribbean and African perspective, Pentecostal theologian Agustina Luvis Núñez mentions that the African heritage in Puerto Rico has left its mark on popular festivals. During these festivals, specifically the Santiago Apóstol Festivities in Loíza, Puerto Rico, there is a marked tendency to appropriate public spaces to celebrate among the community and with those who have already departed from each other.

This communal epistemology calls us to just relationships echoing the concept, *Ubuntu*. In the case of a Pentecostal soteriology, the emphasis is communal. It steers and guides the individual to coexistence and solidarity participation (Mark 12:30–31). Not only is it a static community of salvation, but it is a new participatory and dynamic community where the new Christian can organize, participate and be an essential part of the community of faith. The Spirit of God is promised to all believers and empowers them to use their giftings and talents in service in the community. This community is that of *la fiesta del Espíritu* (Febus Paris 2012; Villafañe 2012, p. 103; López 2020). This is a highly participative concept that fosters the priesthood of believers (1 Peter 2:8,9). For Pentecostals, the laity participate in the community life of the church (Joel 2:28–29). This participatory life is not something distant but very obtainable. The laity conducts themselves with care and strength—struggles and strives to live faithful to the gospel.

6. Liberation Theology

The theology of liberation, from the Documents of the Second Vatican Council (1965), and from the fertile ground that was developing in Latin America, took the wheel of both the content and the methodology of the theology of the region.⁵ This theological approach was born as a response to the concrete realities of the continent. Its results, although it has some similarities with the sister theologies of liberation that come from Africa, Asia or African Americans among others, also have indigenous elements.⁶

There are many who have spoken and elaborated on this topic, however, in order to understand broadly the environment of this theology, it is important and necessary to listen to how it is described by the most recognized voice of liberation theology, Gutierrez (1988). The definition, methodology, and the locus will be briefly described below.⁷

In the preliminary notes of his work *A Theology of Liberation*, Gutierrez (1988) makes a clear distinction between liberation theology and what he calls modern theology. For many, liberation theology is the “radical, political, left wing of progressive European theology” (p. xxix). For both him and other proponents of this theology, such a description is not to take that theology seriously, and to make a caricature of it. Once, Gutierrez rejects such a definition, and he presents his own. Liberation theology is “a critical reflection on Christian practice (praxis) in the light of the word of God” (Gutierrez 1988, p. xxix). More than a definition, it presents it as a proposal or a path to follow. Additionally, to make clear what he means by both reflection and practice, Gutierrez says: “the practice on which liberation theology reflects is on the practice of solidarity in liberation and grounded in the gospel” (Gutierrez 1988, p. xxx). In short, this theology is a close relationship between praxis and reflection.

Following the definition presented by Gutierrez (1988), we can then look at the locus of liberation theology. According to scholars of liberation theology, the lives of the poor, marginalized and oppressed in Latin America and their contextual realities serve as the tapestry on which to reflect (Gutierrez 1988, p. xxx; Boff and Boff 1987, p. 47). According to Gutierrez (1988), “liberation theology approaches the word of God and seeks to respond to the challenges that the historical process brings to the Christian faith” (p. xxxiii). This quote responds to a constant criticism that has been given to liberation theology. It has been criticized because it “begins” from the context or the need of the human being, and not from “above” or the Bible. However, Gutierrez states that the Bible is essential in the process of praxis and reflection, and that without it, liberation theology is null (Gutierrez 1988).

Finally, we will briefly consider a methodology of liberation theology. This methodology is not without a systematic process. As mentioned in the previous point, liberation departs from a particular point, but it does not stop following a systematic process which is continuous and proactive. The first step is to “understand lived experiences (Gutierrez 1988, p. xxxiv). Faith, although it is a divine act, is intertwined with our life experiences. Additionally, as much as we want to deny it, what we know about God is colored by our life experiences. The second step is to “weigh our lived experiences through the Word of God (Gutierrez 1988, p. xxxiv). In the methodology of liberation, the Word of God maintains a central place, and this is not subject to the position or place it occupies in the methodological process. It is the Word of God which sheds light on how to respond daily to lived experiences. The third element is the response or “praxis” (Gutierrez 1988, p. xxxv). It is this step which should lead us to demonstrate concrete actions. In other words, once we have reflected on what the Word of God tells us about life experiences, there should emerge in each person a desire to respond to those situations in a tangible way. As Gutierrez would say, “may a faith arise in us that is inseparable from concrete actions” (p. xxxv). In summary, the methodology of this theology moves us to see contextual reality, think about what is seen through the Word, and to act in a concrete way (Boff and Boff 1987, p. 47).

It is here that Pentecostals can sustain a dialogue with liberation theology. Pentecostal theology of the Five-Fold Gospel is a powerful emphasis emphasizes both Jesus and the Spirit of God being present in their midst. First, Jesus identifies with them as “he was born in a manger and lived the life of a poor Galilean prophet” (Alfaro 2010, p. 135). Nevertheless, the Spirit of God also accompanied Christ from his incarnation to his resurrection (Alfaro 2010, p. 135). The other Paraclete also offers his identification with humanity’s plight (John 14:16).

Solivan, in particular, addresses the interrelationship between orthodoxy (right doctrine or right praise), orthopraxis (right praxis), and orthopathos (right affections). This is a recurring theme throughout Pentecostal thought (Land 2010, p. 34). However, Solivan creates a unique Pentecostal Latino approach by highlighting how orthopathos works among Latinos in the US. While many have emphasized orthodoxy and orthopraxis, Pentecostals also focus on orthopathos. This does not mean they focus on this in the sense of emotionalism, but in their dispositions that are objective (towards God), relational (to-

wards neighbor), and dispositional (Land 2010, p. 132). In the latter sense it refers to “the disposition toward God and neighbor in ways appropriate to their source and goal in God” (Land 2010, p. 132).

For Solivan, in the US Latino perspective, orthopathos leads Pentecostals to recognize and critique things that lead to experiences of suffering, dehumanization, pain and marginalization. Solivan describes how orthopathy can be a source for liberation and social transformation through the presence of the Spirit (111). Solivan critiques arguments of divine impassability. Instead of impassibility, God feels in ways appropriate to God. God has an orthopathic nature or divine pathos. The experience of the Spirit of God is not merely an individual ecstatic experience, but one that is also social and preoccupied for neighbor. Solivan states that this serves social and community wholeness.

Perhaps it can be summarized that the work of the Spirit as liberating, but not necessarily liberationist. This is an important nuance because the Spirit guides Pentecostals in a liberating move but does not become an exclusive liberation mode. In other words, while it is liberating, it is not the same as liberation. The mission of God according to Pentecostals is similar but different to that of liberation theology. The concern is not just justice for justice’s sake. Justice is a heteroglossic term, that addresses both social dimensions and personal righteousness dimensions (Álvarez 2016, p. 154). For this reason, Pentecostal ethics are both individual and social. Pentecostals talk about the reconstruction of life at the most basic human level (Barreto 2004, p. 171), talking of a repentance before God and working this out in their personal lives and in relationships with others (Matthew 6:33; Mark 8:36; Matthew 16:26). As an example, some Pentecostal Latin Americans are writing about *misión integral* (holistic mission) in more pronounced ways (Lopez 2017; García 2020; Cubillas 2020; Ortiz 2020; Arcos 2020; Álvarez 2018). US Latino Pentecostal theologians have also engaged this in creative ways (Alfaro 2010; Solivan 1998; Villafañe 1993).

7. A Pentecostal Soteriology

Up to this point we have seen these powerful undercurrents of Latin American *cosmovision* and the way context affects theological reflection, and in each section I have made connections to the case study of Pentecostalism as a way to observe possible points of convergence and correlation to these Latin American worldviews. This section further builds upon the case study and proposes possible contributions for Pentecostalism in a Latin American context. These worldviews come to Christ in what Pentecostals describe as salvation. Salvation is both an event and a process in which Pentecostals begin and continue, to organize and reorganize their way of being. Through conversion, Jesus Christ influences these cultures, and in turn, these cultures influence the construction of Christian thought and life in context.

In many countries, Pentecostals presented their teachings as “the Full Gospel.” Many churches are known as “Evangelio Completo” (Full Gospel) in order to clearly identify them as Pentecostal. One way to explain this phenomenon would be to emphasize that his message contained the Gestalt of the Five-Fold Gospel or Full Gospel suggested by Steve Land and developed by Wolfgang Vondey. The Five-Fold Gospel centers on Jesus and is known by five key phrases: (1) Jesus saves; (2) Jesus heals; (3) Jesus sanctifies; (4) Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit; (5) Jesus is coming again soon (Land 2010; Vondey 2017). This gestalt offered a message that early converts in Latin America could easily appropriate to their context.

The first theme of the Full Gospel gestalt, Jesus Christ Saves, has always been the *modus operandi* of Latin American Pentecostals. This salvation occurs in a Trinitarian emphasis. First, the Holy Spirit is active in the world drawing all persons to Jesus through prevenient grace. In this inclusion of the Spirit of God, Pentecostals could connect with Amerindian spirituality and the foundation of a spiritual world. Many times, salvation includes struggle and, in some cases, exorcism prior to conversion. This salvation is an invitation into a living relationship with God through the mediation of the Holy Spirit and the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross.

This salvation is also synergistic in nature because it implies an engagement with God and sanctification post-conversion. This connection to sanctification hearkens to Catholic theological concepts of cooperating grace and sanctifying grace (Coulter 2009). Holiness matters. Good works matter. However, more importantly than the demonstration of outward piety, Pentecostals teach they must bear the fruit of the Spirit and that a clean heart is a preparation for the empowerment of the Spirit (Church of God 1948).

Another possible point of connection could be an emphasis on the priesthood of believers as empowered by the Spirit of God. Anyone could be used by God in accomplishing his mission (Galatians 3:28). Perhaps this may connect to both an African spirituality and liberation theology because no one is excluded in an invitation to the *fiesta* of God. Furthermore, all individuals are gifted by God and can use their giftings and talents in service to God. The people of God take on an orthopraxis that is liberative in character. Pentecostal soteriology believes that salvation is for everyone (John 3:16; 1 Peter 3:18). God's prevenient grace is at work in all. As such, they preach to everyone. It can be described as a democratization of the gospel through the Spirit. The Pentecostal church may be found everywhere—in the marketplace, in town, on the mountain, and in the city. It appears to be similar to the goal of the Base Ecclesiastical Communities found in liberation theology. In this new community, the Pentecostal invites friends and family to experience same salvation. In *Ubuntu* mode, salvation becomes for the whole group, for the whole family (*oikonomia*, Acts 16:31). Consequently, the church becomes a place ready for the *fiesta* of God.

Perhaps a unique point of Pentecostal theology that encompasses discussion on worldview is a Pentecostal soteriology that emphasizes an orthopathic transformation (Land 2010). This is often expressed as a change of heart, and it has a strong cathartic power. Pentecostal soteriology appeals not only to the brain or the intellect (orthodoxy) or right praxis (orthopraxis), but also to the heart (orthopathos). This includes exuberant expressions of worship and participation in worship that characterizes African and Amerindian cultures. Pentecostalism seeks to bring about an integration through the Holy Spirit of thought, actions, and passions; or the head, heart, and hands; or knowing, doing and being. Latin American Pentecostals will share testimonies of how they feel different, live differently, and walk differently. He or she expresses this great experience with all his or her heart as the corito says, "*yo tengo gozo en mi alma*" (I feel joy in my soul). To the western mind this may seem as enthusiastic, naïve, and emotional; yet, perhaps it is a reason that many on the margins may have found solace in Pentecostalism.

Land (2010) emphasizes that Pentecostal spirituality encompasses the depths of human motives and dispositions. This spirituality encompasses themes that are enduring, decisive, and guiding in human life (pp. 22–23). In a sense, soteriology is oriented towards the world to come, but it should be expressed in everyday living in just relationship with others. This is an area in which Pentecostalism has been criticized for apparently having no social conscience. However, these are stereotypes that do not indicate what is happening in these countries (Miller 2007). Various pastors are involved and are changing patterns of how these churches are perceived (Álvarez 2012). Many of them have active social projects to improve their countries. They establish schools, medical clinics, and soup kitchens for the poor. While this is something common to other denominations, it should explain that Pentecostals are not so heavenly minded that they are no earthly good. Pentecostal theology in context invites the individual to a union between what they know and what they practice in a profoundly affective transformation.

8. Conclusions

In this essay we have explored powerful cultural, historical, and theological streams that arise from the Latin American context. We examined some of the African, Amerindian, Spanish, and Liberation streams of thought. We recognize that these have affected Latin American worldviews and cosmologies in profound ways. However, building on the principle of *mestizaje* and *hibridez*, these undercurrents must not be appropriated blindly

and without respect for the traditions where they come from. Latin America exists in a profound web of relationships and continued sustained dialogue *en conjunto* will help to trace more connections between these undercurrents.

There are limits to such an analysis. There are also contested spaces. There are also gaps in knowledge that must be filled in. However, it is our hope that this may help move dialogue further. In understanding Latin American history, we can understand the diversity in Latin American ethos. In understanding this, it is the hope that we can build and create theologies that are faithful to both culture and Christian tradition. The intention is not to simply have a syncretistic conflation of a religious tradition, such as Pentecostalism, with these different streams of thought, but to think critically about the way this particular tradition interacts and build a theology with Latin American cultures.

In light of this analysis, perhaps other faith traditions can continue to explore these questions in ways that honor and respect cultures in context. Considering such a process, perhaps Pentecostalism can come to more maturity so that is attentive of the Latin American traditions and at the same time highlights the importance of the Pentecostal tradition in Latin American thought, even that which differs from itself. Perhaps an emerging Pentecostal soteriology could include serious reflection on its history and themes that pertain to the many diverse Latina American communities.

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Notes

- ¹ Mulatto is a racial classification term which was used to categorize/identify sons and daughters born between whites and blacks. It is a terminology which questioned the ‘racial purity’ of the mulatto or mulatto. With the passage of time it has somewhat lost its denigrating weight, and is heard among popular culture as a way to identify its heritage and culture. In fact, there are some theological approaches that seek to build a Christian theology from the reality of mulatez (See [Bantum 2010](#)).
- ² Missiologist Andrew Walls and the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai affirm that when people move, they take much more than what we can see on the surface. For Walls, one of the reasons why Christianity has been maintained through the ages is because the Christian faith is a cross-cultural reality that is transmitted from one culture to another. On the other hand, Appadurai explains that “ideas” (and he places faith within this term) move with people where they want them to go ([Walls 2002](#); [Inda and Rosaldo 2007](#)).
- ³ In his introductory study on the theology of the southern hemisphere, Asia, Africa and Latin America, [Dyrness \(1990\)](#) mentions that although there is a tendency to emphasize the vast variety of elements within the African continent, there are also common patterns, throughout the continent, which “Provides material for an African theological reflection” (p. 42).
- ⁴ It should be noted that this type of consultation leads us to the practice of ‘mediation’. In many cases these consultations are made via deities that serve as ‘means’ to a greater deity. This has impacted, for better and for worse, the type of ecclesial leadership that has developed in Latin America (See [Dyrness 1990](#), p. 42).
- ⁵ Regardless of the side on which you understand yourself to be, for or against this theological approach, it is a fact that we cannot hide. Now, we must also recognize that this is not the only theological approach that occurs in Latin America.
- ⁶ It should be noted that the liberation theology of Latin America is one of several ([Ford and Muers 2005](#)).
- ⁷ *Lugar or contexto*.

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