

THE UNITED STATES LATIN AMERICAN IMMIGRATION CRISIS:  
A THEOLOGICAL, HISTORICAL, AND EDUCATIONAL APPROACH  
FOR RESTITUTION

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## ABSTRACT

### THE UNITED STATES LATIN AMERICAN IMMIGRATION CRISIS: A THEOLOGICAL, HISTORICAL, AND EDUCATIONAL APPROACH FOR RESTITUTION

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How can the Church transcend hospitality into restitution for Latin American immigrants? The political and military interventionism of the United States in Latin America profoundly disturbed every country's social, political, and economic systems in the Western Hemisphere that produced, beyond the annihilation of lives, communities, natural resources, and political autonomy, the current immigration crisis in the United States. This paper's research focuses on presenting historical data and analysis of the relationship between the United States and other countries of the American Hemisphere and how individual churches and Christian denominations can compromise into tangible acts of restitution for Latin American immigrants. The study embeds a practical theology that focuses on the Christian duty on behalf of the impoverished people relegated by governments, economic interests, and the Church itself.

The literature revision exposed that social, economic, political, and religious systems imported from Europe to the Americas privileged the powerful individuals and organizations rather than the native civilizations already established and their descendants. A church (and a Christian) that embraces a liberative approach to theology

and society committed to the cause of the oppressed, the poor, and the impoverished must acquire a collective understanding of the social injustices of the people it intends to serve for its responsibility to deliver solid and practical solutions.

The dissertation project emerges as an instrument to educate pastors, lay leadership, and congregants about the historical and contemporary issues of abuse and exploitation that have contributed to the current immigration crisis on the United States' southern border. The study modules would assist participants in confronting their historical, cultural, and theological beliefs and prejudices, entering a process that recognizes the need for transformation toward solidarity with Latin American immigrants: *Module 1* exposes the historical perspective of why and how the United States became an imperialistic and colonizing power in Latin America. *Module 2* presents this colonial outcome for women through a *mujerista* theological perspective. In *Module 3*, the Church is urged to create and participate in equalizing actions to promote justice and acts of restitution as a response to the Eurocentric white supremacy mentality permeated in the American minds and systems.

## DEDICATION

My road has been prosperous and blessed. Reaching the precise moment of writing a page like this means that you have already walked a long way interacting with many people that gave something important and transcendental to the journey. Too many experiences to process and so many people to be named along these lines. Some of yourself and the result of our time together are implicit through the following pages.

I dedicate this work to...

...my love and wife, Annie, an inspiration that keeps me moving. People might find you by my side, most of the time ahead of me but never behind. *Te amo... sólo porque sí.*

...my daughters, Rochely and Diana, for loving me and sharing much of your lives with my music, books, and studies. You make me the best I can be.

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...my brothers and sisters of *Primera Iglesia Bautista Hispana de Central Islip*, for trusting me to be your pastor and for your love. Grateful and humbled by your life stories that inspired me to walk the road toward justice for immigrants.

If your name is missing, but we have somehow experienced life together, my apologies. Please, add your name. I dedicate this work to you.

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## PREFACE

Why someone who is not an immigrant *per se* decided to write about immigration?

During a *Theologies of Liberation* class session at Drew, I was about to present an oral report of James Cone's *Black Theology*. I felt uneasy on the subject because it was my first time with Cone's theology in a group where most of my colleagues were African American, and I was the only Hispanic student. I began my presentation with a "disclaimer:" Even though I am Hispanic, I do not consider myself an immigrant or a minority. I am from Puerto Rico, a U.S. territory, and have been an American citizen since birth. I lived there for almost 50 years before moving to New York seven years ago. In Puerto Rico, I am not only part of the majority but also what is recognized as "socially privileged:" a white man, heterosexual, professional, and educated. I have never felt discriminated against in the continental United States, and if I have been, that probably happened when someone got my accent or heard me speak Spanish; honestly, I have not noticed. Since moving to the States nine years ago, at the time of this writing, my ministry as a pastor has occurred in a Hispanic church with a high Spanish-speaking population context.

It was essential for establishing my context for the group because I wanted to eliminate any bias on them from my presentation. Everything we say is filtered by the listeners' notion of the speaker; therefore, I intended to stress that I was a newcomer resident to the dynamics of the Continental United States, no expert whatsoever on Black Theology, and do not have a traditional U.S.-Latin American mentality. Some of my colleagues told me afterward that listening to a Black Theology perspective from

someone non-Black allowed them to visualize their shared vision through other lenses. When we are entangled with the issues of our context, it becomes difficult to detach from reality and have a holistic perspective.

Then, why I decided to write about immigration? I wanted to learn more about the Hispanic/Latino immigration crisis to the United States, its background, and how I can contribute to making a difference for the many *hermanos y hermanas* that suffered the abuses of foreigners who mistreated America for generations. The testimonies of my faith community members, their families, and many other men, women, and children who suffered due to centuries of abuse, impoverishment, and greediness touched me profoundly; I want to share their voices and pains, their claim for justice and freedom. Adding new voices to the struggle for challenging the *status quo* becomes urgent because the story many viciously promote in political, social, and religious circles sustains dangerously the same racial and religious supremacy rhetoric that commenced the crisis.

Every resident of the United States should be part of a radical transformation of the issues that sustain the crisis that keeps deteriorating the lives of millions of Latin Americans on both sides of the border. However, for professed Christians, it should not be optional.

Besides having a biblical foundation, the issue of restitution has been discussed for many years in the United States. However, the discussion generally emphasizes the efforts to recognize and address the claims of justice suffered by generations of African Americans since the first enslaved people forcefully arrived in this hemisphere from Africa. Nevertheless, the dominance of the supremacist historical narrative in the United States has prevented, or in the best scenario, limited, acknowledging the abuses inflicted

by our economic and political interests in Latin American countries and inside our territories. This research and project aspire to bring to the forefront some of the events and biased mindsets that incited and keep producing the flow of migrants to the United States. Through the review of historical facts, I want to provoke an awakening of the conscience from the social/political lethargy rooted in centuries of false claims of supremacy and prejudice toward the brown, black, or non-white enough people of the Americas; to start a call for action in favor of the Hispanic/Latino population at both sides of the border.

I firmly believe that the educational process, at any level, produces a permanent transformation in the individual; therefore, Chapter Two consists of educational modules presenting some perspectives on the Latin American immigration crisis in the United States and the Church's dual responsibility as a perpetrator/accomplice of the crisis and as a radical justice agent. An introduction section to the modules proposes a theological and social/ethical framework for the restitution approach and action. A biblical text and commentary introduce each module to create a more specific theological context of the issue before embarking on the exposition and analysis. After finalizing each module, a list of suggested workshop activities is provided in the Appendix section. Those activities will assist in transcending the educational experience to an immersion stage where the participants apply the acquired comprehension in reflexive exercises that might lead to actual transformative acts of restitution for each particular context. Each participant could work on the activities individually or in small groups and, later, present the results to the collective for further analysis and implementation.

As a faith community, I convoke everyone to gather in a worship experience where our faults and omissions can be confessed, humbly asking for God's love and mercy. As Jesus' followers, let us commit to justice for Latin American immigrants in our midst. Let us present to the world our worship as a living testimony of service derived from an intrinsic transformation from the true Gospel. Let us be modern-day Zacchaeus, and by our repentance and commitment to acts of restitution might hear Jesus' voice proclaiming that *salvation has come to this home today!*

## CHAPTER ONE

### **Research: An Overlooked Crisis**

Ultimately, poverty means death.

—Gustavo Gutiérrez

### **Introduction**

Since the beginning of humanity, people have tried to impose themselves or their clans over others. The strongest usually survived until they met a more potent force. People want to attain a superior standing in the eyes of others. It can be a self-professed establishment of an inflated social, economic, political, or religious level prompted by a self-proclaimed sense of power, dominance, greed, envy, security, fame, or all the former.

From prehistoric male hunters-gatherers who competed for mating to Cain's envy over his brother's offerings; from Attila the Hun's thirst for conquest and dominion over the Roman Empire (and eventually over his brother) to the Nazi's race superiority conviction; from Jim Crow laws to modern-day attempts by political parties to manipulate facts, humans are obsessed with establishing categories of dominion and suppression that declare winners and losers. Determining and attributing value to who wins and loses is a prerogative for the dominant part. The side who gets the upper hand not only has the advantage of writing the history to their please, but has the ability to tear out dignity, hope, future, and life itself from the rest. The rejected Other becomes a by-product that engrosses the dominant part's first-rated and self-adjudicated value. The prevailing party walks away with the outcome of their conquests: stealing, degradation,

and assassination of human beings, natural resources, cultures, and races. Eventually, the victors-imposed groups of “others” produce marginality, thus creating a profound impoverishment that transcends economic factors, disrupting every aspect of humanity; people lose their self-esteem, freedom, faith, and hope. As Gutiérrez said, being poor becomes a death sentence. Christianity has no exemption from sentencing people to death.<sup>1</sup>

### Statement of the Problem

This research project focuses on how individual churches and Christian denominations can transcend the long-time tradition of hospitality into tangible acts of restitution for Latin American immigrants to the United States by provoking a practical theology that focuses on the human duty of the preferential option for the impoverished, oppressed, and therefore, relegated by governments, economic interests, and the Church itself; a theology for the *realengos* (strays) of the world. The term *realengo* (stray) carries a pejorative intention referring either to an animal or a person.<sup>2</sup> A *realengo* dog, for example, has no home and no one to care for it, but when it refers to an individual, this word brings a more derogatory meaning: a vagabond, a lazy person who does not want to work. Social, economic, political, and religious systems imported from Europe to the Americas have favored the powerful individuals and organizations rather than the vast majority of the people who become *realengos* in their own land.

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<sup>1</sup> Although these aspects are still affecting human beings of diverse backgrounds around the globe, this paper will limit its scope to the Latin American context, specially to the Hispanic population, in relation to its history, immigration, and life in the United States and Puerto Rico.

<sup>2</sup> According to the *Real Academia Española*, the term *realengo* refers to a homeless animal, especially in Mexico, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, and Venezuela; it is also used for naming a lazy person in Colombia and Venezuela. <https://dle.rae.es/realengo>.

Living in a country impoverished by bad politics and corruption is detrimental to the well-being of any person. Families suffer from inadequate housing, scarce health resources, food accessibility, poor education, and low-wage jobs or no jobs at all. Grasping to live under these circumstances, many people emigrate to find better conditions for themselves and their families. It is not an easy task, sometimes as hard as staying in their lands, but an idea of safety and progress expedites their decision to leave. Central Americans' options are few because many adjacent countries have similar political, social, and economic situations. To walk up north and reach the United States has become the goal for many. Stories of abundance run everywhere, then millions have taken the road to a land with a different culture and language, but they hope for justice, liberty, and a better way of life. Nowadays, Latin Americans are the majority of the non-white population in the United States.<sup>3</sup> Still, discrimination awaits despite the apparent advantage of having more access to their culture, language, and certain customs. Despite this new reality, Latin American immigrants are stonewalled by social and economic constraints when they arrive in the United States. Some have been here for many years but still confront employment, familial relations (local and distant), discrimination, and socio-cultural adjustment issues.

Immigrants from Latin America typically come to work to send money to their families left behind, repay the *coyotes* (or the ones who financed them), and prepare the way for other relatives to emigrate.<sup>4</sup> Without proper documentation, employers take

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<sup>3</sup> “Quick Facts,” United States Census Bureau, Population Estimates, July 1, 2022, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045219#PST045219>.

<sup>4</sup> “Coyotes, those who smuggle people across the border, have been known to coerce, rape, and force migrants into sexual servitude until their debts are paid.” Miguel A. de la Torre, *The U.S. Immigration Crisis, Toward an Ethics of Place* (Oregon: Cascade Books, 2016), chap. 1, Kindle. The term primarily refers to these human traffickers that cross migrants illegally through the Mexico-U.S. border.

advantage and pay them less than a fair salary, making them work extensive hours, sometimes in unhealthy and hazardous conditions. Workers do not report their employers because the money earned is needed and is more than what they get in their countries of origin. Even religious believers are so busy surviving that they may not have time for attending church or do not find church necessary for their present and opt to work during worship hours. Consequently, immigrants also miss the support and revival benefits of the church's community aspect.

I serve as the pastor of a Spanish-speaking, suburban church in New York State, affiliated with the American Baptist Churches. It is a multicultural parochial church with more than sixty years of history. Although the language is a common one, the cultural spectrum is diverse. People form the congregation from a dozen Latin American countries; some were born in the United States/Puerto Rico, and others came young. Longtime residents mixed with recent immigrants carrying various immigration statuses and backgrounds. Some of those, the more fortunate, immigrated to get better working opportunities and to meet family members already living in the States; they just had to take a plane to arrive. Others engaged in a long and perilous walk across many countries to reach the Southern border, paying thousands of dollars to *coyotes* for being led to cross the rivers and deserts and enter the United States. Most survived violence, poverty, and neglect by their families and governments. Gustavo Gutiérrez's formulations that intend to enunciate the conditions and sufferings of the poor (e.g., "dominated peoples," "marginalized cultures," "discrimination against women") appear in much of the stories from our congregants.<sup>5</sup> Realities like being born poor/impooverished, displaced in their

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<sup>5</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Option for the Poor," in *Systematic Theology, Perspectives from Liberation Theology*, ed. Jon Sobrino and Ignacio Ellacuría (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 23.

own country, marginalized/despised, abused, silenced, and experiences like hunger, frustration, and death are part of the lives of many and their communities. These issues suffered by many Latin American immigrants, as diverse as they may seem, result from the institutionalized violence that governments and capitalist interests impose on the poor, *a de facto social collectivity* that transcends the mere socioeconomic aspect.<sup>6</sup>

The diversity of most Hispanic/Latino churches in the United States presents a challenge *a priori*. Cultural and religious factors will be present but are not the scarier ones: Anguish from the family separation, exhaustion from the long travel, pillage along the hazardous roads, sickness without adequate medical resources, the possibility of being kidnaped by gangs asking for rescue, or even worse, being forced as sexual slaves until they produce an economic quota, are real possibilities during the journey. The ever-present possibility of death, among other risks, dents the immigrants' minds, spirits, and bodies. Many are hurt and distrustful of people and systems, even religious ones.

My church's region is experiencing a lack of cohesiveness in the midst of racial, cultural, and language diversity. Although Hispanics/Latinos are the most significant share of non-White residents in the largest U.S. city, our Baptist region is predominantly African American.<sup>7</sup> Of 194 affiliated churches, only sixteen are Hispanic, or less than 8%.<sup>8</sup> Two Hispanic churches closed in 2021, another filed for disaffiliation, and others

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<sup>6</sup> Gutiérrez, "Option for the Poor," 23.

<sup>7</sup> As the U.S. Census of April 1, 2020, in New York City, with a population of nearly nine million people, Hispanics and Latinos count for 28.9%, while White alone (not Hispanic or Latino) are 31.9%. Black or African American alone, 23.4% and Asian alone, 14.2%. "Quick Facts", United States Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/newyorkcitynewyork/POP010220#POP010220>.

<sup>8</sup> "History," American Baptist Churches of Metropolitan New York, accessed February 8, 2022, <http://www.abcmny.org/history>. The ABCMNY Region includes churches from Bronx, Kings, Nassau, New York, Queens, Richmond, Suffolk, and Westchester counties.

are struggling financially and with attendance; few have been without a pastor for some years. In a state so heterogeneous and complex as New York, primarily New York City and the surrounding counties, we should expect a substantial degree of interrelation and awareness for a ministerial action toward fulfilling God's call and duty toward our diverse community. Not mere tolerance of each group's characteristics but commitment as we embrace the differences.

A church (and a Christian) that embraces a liberative approach to theology and society committed to the cause of the oppressed, the poor, and the impoverished must come alive with a collective understanding of the concrete problems, the social injustices of the people it intends to serve to deliver solid and practical solutions. We must confront ourselves, our church, and our community with fundamental questions that emerge from the embedded issues that each context provides and drive us to deal with the pursuit of concrete answers. For example, we should forcefully consider: How can we teach, preach, and harmonize a group situated in so many stages of life and profoundly affected by their past life? How can a common language reach everyone when the young, especially U.S. natives, are more fluent in English than Spanish? How will my church be instrumental in merging a new and different life for so many individuals and families? Moreover, par with the focus of this research, how can the Church be a positive and influential power in the restitution of what centuries of oppression, exclusion, domination, and exploitation have taken from Hispanic/Latino generations? Which skills must pastoral leaders possess to guide the Church into the appropriate social/spiritual paradigm for effectively transforming human beings?

## Significance to Theology and Church

The intended ministry of the Church has always been to be a place of learning, healing, guidance, and a force to uphold human beings' joys and troubles without distinction because God has no favorites. God is an eternal presence amidst the turbulence of life. God commands the Church and those who profess to be Jesus' followers to care for the poor and foreigner; to achieve a substantial degree of justice for the immigrants of our context. Every act of justice must be embedded into God's example of love. As Jesus stated, "I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love. This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you."<sup>9</sup>

As an example of justice toward the immigrant, the book of Leviticus asserts,

"When you harvest the crops of your land, do not harvest the grain along the edges of your fields, and do not pick up what the harvesters drop. It is the same with your grape crop—do not strip every last bunch of grapes from the vines, and do not pick up the grapes that fall to the ground. Leave them for the poor and the foreigners living among you. I am the Lord your God."<sup>10</sup>

Miguel de la Torre, professor of social ethics and Latinx studies and an evangelical minister, defines God's instructions about hospitality for our context, writing that,

Hospitality is a biblical concept that means more than just opening one's home to the stranger and inviting them for a meal. ... The biblical term 'stranger' or 'sojourner' best captures the predicament of today's undocumented. This term connotes the in-between space of neither being native-born nor a foreigner. As

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<sup>9</sup> Jn 15.9-10,12 (New Living Translation).

<sup>10</sup> Lv 19.9-10 (NLT).

such, the alien lacks the benefit and protection ordinarily provided to those tied to the land due to their birthplace. Vulnerable to those who profit from their labor.<sup>11</sup>

From the experience of being an immigrant himself, De la Torre argues that performing acts of hospitality toward immigrants is not enough. Even as a Christian virtue and biblical mandate, hospitality is proven insufficient.<sup>12</sup> Being hospitable may also bring an imperialistic virtue of false beneficence because we give from our abundance, and this abundance may come from thievery: “The U.S. has a Latin American immigration crisis, yet a failure exists in recognizing that the reason they come is that they are following what has been stolen from them.”<sup>13</sup> The precedent for the political and economic uncertainty of the countries of Latin America is the direct responsibility of the United States’ foreign policies “designed to secure the avarice of multinational corporations.”<sup>14</sup>

In the book *South to America*, Imani Perry, professor of African American Studies at Princeton University, presents a similar argument to De la Torre’s that exemplifies the complicated issues behind Latin American immigration to the United States. The waves of Cuban immigrants cannot be attributed exclusively to a political statement. Economic interests are implicit from all sides. Perry summarizes Cuba’s emigration crisis after the Revolution:

First it was largely elites, those classified as White or nearly so. They set the terms of the Cuban American community. Later, as Cubans felt the brunt of the US embargo and the fall of the Soviet Union, Cuban exiles became increasingly

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<sup>11</sup> De la Torre, *Immigration Crisis*, conclusion.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

more African. Cuban Americans are largely either those who fled revolutionary ideas or those who were starved by the US because of them.<sup>15</sup>

The abundance of the United States comes from the exploitation of their own countries. Therefore, the Southern border immigration, mainly from Latin America, is a self-inflicted crisis.

Furthermore, the Church cannot exclude itself from being an ally to the impoverishment of Latin America's people. The now-not-welcomed immigrants are not risking their lives for greediness but for survival from the oppression and exploitation beyond their countries: "We didn't cross the border, the border crossed us."<sup>16</sup> This reality brings us to the necessity of transcending our actions of mere hospitality and rethinking what we are doing as one of those sent by Jesus to make disciples. To go beyond the current charity and be an authentic Jesus follower. "Rather than speaking about the virtue of hospitality, it would historically be more accurate to speak about the responsibility of restitution."<sup>17</sup>

### **History of Abuse and Exploitation**

Let us deromanticize the history of the Americas. The story of the valiant and intrepid Admiral Christopher Columbus, who embarked on a glorious adventure for the better good of civilization, Spain, and Christendom, needs a revamp. Every land that Columbus disembarked was inhabited; therefore, they were not *discovered* but *possessed*

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<sup>15</sup> Imani Perry, *South to America: A Journey Below the Mason-Dixon to Understand the Soul of a Nation* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2022), Chapter III, Glose.

<sup>16</sup> Otto Maduro, "An(other) Invitation to Epistemological Humility: Notes Toward a Self-Critical Approach to Counter-Knowledges," in *Decolonizing Epistemologies*, ed. Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Eduardo Mendieta (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 89. This quote is a grassroots counter-knowledge phrase that Maduro quotes and refers to the land stolen from Mexico by the United States and the result of the political and economic imposition on many Latin American countries.

<sup>17</sup> De la Torre, *Immigration Crisis*, conclusion.

by him in the name of Spain's monarchy's political/economic power.<sup>18</sup> Power, money, and faith supremacy conjured a complot of abuse and exploitation on behalf of their representatives: government, financial endeavors, and the Church. It is almost impossible to divide their distinct responsibilities in conquering the Americas because they needed and benefited from each other. The silenced voices of the inhabitants of this hemisphere must emerge in the light of justice and historical accuracy.

### **The Government, Capitalism, and the Church**

Since the European invasions from 1492 CE, Christendom has been an active agent of oppression and exploitation, besides being an intrinsic partner of the imperialistic powers. The economic and expansionist interests of Spain, as the first conqueror, were intertwined with the Catholic Church's idea of evangelism: "The salvation of the souls of the 'infidels' and 'Gentiles' was wielded by the Spanish nation—in its dual aspect of state and church—as the primary legal and theological justification for the process of armed domination of the New World."<sup>19</sup>

During his first voyage, Christopher Columbus wrote at the beginning of 1493 a letter to the king and queen of Spain stating two contradicting views about the natives found: first, they were meek and peaceful, lacking religious organization, therefore easy to evangelize; on the other hand, they were infidels that can be enslaved for the economic benefit of the crown.<sup>20</sup> Eventually, the colonist's interests were dismissed as the main intention for their acts of abuse toward the indigenous people of these lands;

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<sup>18</sup> Luis N. Rivera Pagán, *Historia de la conquista de América. Evangelización y Violencia* (España: Editorial CLIE, 2021), 27.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 47. The translation of all the Spanish sources in this document is mine.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

consequently, genocide, slavery, stealing, forced assimilation, and exploitation were subjacent to converting the natives to Christianity. “Evangelization was the theoretical flag that waved the Spanish state for conquest.”<sup>21</sup>

In his analysis of the influence of Christianity on its endorsement and involvement in colonizing enterprises, Aimé Césaire states:

I find that hypocrisy is of recent date; ... that the chief culprit in this domain is Christian pedantry, which laid down the dishonest equations Christianity = civilization, paganism = savagery, from which there could not but ensue abominable colonialist and racist consequences, whose victims were to be the Indians, the Yellow peoples, and the Negroes.<sup>22</sup>

As an example of this connection, Puerto Rico’s census of 1848 recorded a population of 50,000 slaves, many working for the hacienda property of clergy personnel.<sup>23</sup> Because of this relationship between the Church and slavery, Silva Gotay, a Puerto Rican historian and sociologist of religion, supports the people’s enmity toward the Catholic Church and its slavers clergy.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, this mixture of imperialism and religion is not exclusive to the Catholic Church. By 1886, Josiah Strong published a book that analyzed the part of the United States as a Protestant nation that played in establishing the Kingdom of God on Earth.<sup>25</sup>

Without the expansion of the United States into free lands, the American political institutions created by Protestantism will be paralyzed. The end of the 19th century was the key to humanity’s history. ... The United States is called to

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<sup>21</sup> Rivera Pagán, *Historia de la conquista*, 47.

<sup>22</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (1955; repr., New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 33.

<sup>23</sup> Samuel Silva Gotay, *Catolicismo y política en Puerto Rico bajo España y Estados Unidos: Siglos XIX y XX* (San Juan: Editorial Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2005), 84.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 84-85.

<sup>25</sup> Samuel Silva Gotay, *Protestantismo y política en Puerto Rico, 1898-1930: Hacia una historia del protestantismo evangélico en Puerto Rico* (San Juan: Editorial Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1998), 55.

Christianize and civilize the rest of the world through an evangelization that must follow trade expansion.<sup>26</sup>

Another way of partnering government, economic power, and religion occurs when the cult and religious symbols intertwine with imperialist exploitation. Through the cult of the emperor as a way of holding power, influence, and dominion by the Roman Empire over Greek cities, Richard Horsley argues that the use of religious elements, like images and rituals, was practical to achieve power without the need for an army: “Religion and political-economic structure were therefore inseparable in the relations of power.”<sup>27</sup> Moreover, “religion appears to have been inseparable from, even the product of, particular imperial relations.”<sup>28</sup> Modern-day churches can be part of this imperialistic scheme, naming levels of humans. This relation can be observed in the worship experience when our prayers and hymns are “attached to a hierarchical theological understanding of relating: God (down?) to us, us (down?) to others in need.”<sup>29</sup> The sense of a “higher status and more privileges than poorer people” can be found in predominantly white congregations. In Hispanic churches, this is embedded particularly in the following statement: “These worshipers may cling to the myth that they are economically advantaged—better off than those ‘below’ them, because they are economically independent and self-sufficient members of society.”<sup>30</sup> The mere act of giving money to a worthy cause or donating used clothes can wrongfully become a

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<sup>26</sup> Silva Gotay, *Protestantismo y política*, 56.

<sup>27</sup> Richard A. Horsley, *Religion and Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 104.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>29</sup> Traci C. West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women’s Lives Matter* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 126.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

fulfillment of moral and Christian responsibility to others. We must return to the divine intention of Jesus' love and Biblical practices.

The text about John the Baptist's preaching in Luke 3 presents an example of the intrinsic relation between power, money, faith, and God's intention for the believers:

When the crowds came to John for baptism, he said, "You brood of snakes! Who warned you to flee the coming wrath? Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God. Don't just say to each other, 'We're safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.' ... Even now the ax of God's judgment is poised, ready to sever the roots of the trees. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire." The crowds asked, "What should we do?"<sup>31</sup>

Luke's text presents a group of people from a Jewish background (descendants of Abraham) interested in being baptized. John's preaching had strong words, even insulting, as he called them "brood of snakes" (*vipers*, in other translations). Matthew's Gospel is specific to the receivers of the insult: Pharisees and Sadducees.<sup>32</sup> These sects dominated the religious/political aspects of the Jewish government by having members in the Sanhedrin. The Pharisees proclaimed austerity and rigor in applying the laws and customs of the *Torah* and opposed the High Priest; their scope was developed by teaching in the synagogues, so their theological visions penetrated easily and quickly among the people. The Sadducees, for their part, were wealthy aristocrats who dominated the Sanhedrin and held positions in both the Jewish and Roman governments.<sup>33</sup> They did not believe in the coming of the Messiah or the resurrection, so people like John the Baptist

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<sup>31</sup> Lk 3.7-10 (NLT).

<sup>32</sup> Mt 3.7 (NLT): "But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to watch him baptize, he denounced them. 'You brood of snakes!' he exclaimed. 'Who warned you to flee the coming wrath?'"

<sup>33</sup> "¿Quiénes eran los saduceos y fariseos?," *Compelling Truth*, accessed February 12, 2022, <https://www.compellingtruth.org/Espanol/fariseos-y-saduceos.html>.

and Jesus were a challenge to their political position. John understood that many of them did not come to listen out of conviction but of hatred and envy, to find an error and condemn him. Therefore, John compared them to snakes because they acted stealthily, waiting to attack and kill at the right moment.

After such harsh words from John the Baptist, the people listening to him presented an apparent interest in their relationship with God by asking him, “What should we do?” Even the Pharisees and Sadducees had an opportunity to rescind their history of religious and political oppression against their people by rethinking their responsibilities and actions toward God, justice, and the Otherness: “John replied, ‘If you have two shirts, give one to the poor. If you have food, share it with those who are hungry.’”<sup>34</sup> John’s teaching extends to inner transformation, where all goodness begins. Sharing one’s possessions, even from scarcity, is the exercise to understanding the message’s depth. Rethinking a life without egoism is the point of departure to a deeper relationship with God and breaking human notions of a Christian and the Gospel. Political and economic powers should derogate unjust and oppressive systems pernicious to the equality and freedom of human beings.

Otto Maduro sketched an invitation to rethink our understandings of knowledge and truth through an “epistemological humility,” an effort intended to produce “counter-knowledges” that are a direct consequence of the “oppression, exclusion, domination, and exploitation” of the dominant ones.<sup>35</sup> Understanding our relationship with God and our responsibility with the Other must drive our work for a living theology and praxis

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<sup>34</sup> Lk 3.11 (NLT).

<sup>35</sup> Maduro, “Epistemological Humility,” 87.

intended for restitution and justice. To this end, Maduro writes, “To open oneself to God’s more entails an awareness of divine transcendence in all beings. An awareness of intracosmic transcendence leads humans toward the rest of creation, not away from it, and to a praxis guided by that awareness of divinity in reality.”<sup>36</sup> Relegating human beings and practically sentencing them to a life of marginalization, humiliation, and scarcity raises a theological proposition that emphasizes each church’s actual praxis and duty for the context of the Latin American immigrants and residents of the United States and Puerto Rico. Only by acknowledging how history affects and shapes peoples’ lives can we produce a theology that transcends human needs and a praxis that liberates: “What theology addresses and witnesses to is the experience of God in history.”<sup>37</sup> North America’s history of imperialism against other Latin American countries must recognize the exploitation endorsed by governments and the Church in favor of capitalism in its abusive practices (such as slavery, the Mexican-American and the Spanish-American wars, political/military interventions in Central America and the Caribbean), the experience of God amidst the turmoil, and the failure to witness God’s intervention (slavery endorsement, white privilege, Christian nationalism) in favor of the poor and marginalized. “Poverty for some and prosperity for others is the result of policies and practices implemented by governments and often maintained by use of force.”<sup>38</sup> These human-created maladies against other humans are the intentional product of an unrestrained ambition for power, or as Apostol Paul states, *for the love of money*:

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<sup>36</sup> Mayra Rivera, *The Touch of Transcendence* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 46.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>38</sup> Marvin A. McMickle, *Let the Oppressed Go Free: Exploring Theologies of Liberation* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 2020), 62.

So if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content. But people who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows.<sup>39</sup>

The historical analysis of the spheres of power and their intrinsic relationships must influence pastoral and lay leaders toward an objective and critical approach to their current issues. Understanding the circumstances that shaped millions of lives during more than five hundred years of colonial devastation must prepare church leaders to adhere to social and theological praxis recognizing the immigrant's value in the contemporary milieu. They must point out political and capitalist practices that acknowledge and propagate the lie of white supremacy and nationalist Christianity that generate the impoverishment of the *realengos*. The final goal is to direct the Church into intentional and concrete acts of justice and restitution.

### **The Birth of a Nation with Margins**

It will be an impossible quest to find a nation or a civilization in a broader sense without internal conflicts and divisions. Although it is common to present differences and issues, the consequences are inevitable. The opening sentences of *Discourse on Colonialism* present three statements worth of self-reflection:

A civilization that proves incapable of solving the problems it creates is a decadent civilization.

A civilization that chooses to close its eyes to its most crucial problems is a stricken civilization.

A civilization that uses its principles for trickery and deceit is a dying civilization.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> 1 Tim 6.8-11 (NLT).

<sup>40</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 31.

The mere existence of margins in any civilization, nation, or society is an eventual death sentence. Incapacity to solve their issues and intentional blindness weakens a country, but hypocrisy in treating its people is a stillborn symptom.

The concept of *nation* implies commonality. Usually, a definition of a nation includes its territory, history, culture, and language. The idea of unity does not mean that every resident agrees on political views, religion, or international relationships. A nation can harbor a myriad of opinions and creeds, those infused and adapted from its multiple transformations as a living organism that grows and adapts through every environmental influence. However, its strength must come from the people.

Imani Perry argues that, though there is no unique historical beginning for the United States as a nation, “it did begin in the South.”<sup>41</sup> She argues that each intent of national birth was a path to bounty, therefore, an opportunity to exploit and marginalize people:

There are so many birth dates: 1492, 1520, 1619, 1776, 1804, 1865, 1954, 1964, 1965. The result now, after centuries, is a fractured American people: children of the colonized, colonizers, enslaved, marginal, poor, wealthy, exploitative, White, Black, shades of brown, citizens, and fugitives running from the law. People with jobs but no papers, people with papers but no door or mattress. The American way is what has been bequeathed to us all in unequal measure.<sup>42</sup>

The United States was profoundly fractured before its independence from British rule. Since the arrival of the Spanish conquerors, the dichotomy between *them* and *us* created marginal places for the non-White, or at least not White enough. Highly oppressed and exploited, these Indigenous, enslaved Africans, Asians, Latin Americans, and their children had no option but to learn to live at the nation’s margin. For Perry, the

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<sup>41</sup> Imani Perry, *South to America*, Introduction.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

oppressive systems that gave birth to the United States and helped to create and sustain the margins are a shame to the country:

This country was made with the shame of slavery, poverty, and White supremacy blazoned across it as a badge of dishonor. To sustain a heroic self-concept, it has inevitably been deemed necessary to distance “America” from the embarrassment over this truth. And so the South, the seat of race in the United States, was turned on, out, and into this country’s gully.<sup>43</sup>

From the margins of this nation, it must be difficult for its dwellers to recite the Pledge of Allegiance consciously before the flag of the United States of America.<sup>44</sup> It does not mean that the abused and exploited cannot be loyal to the essence of their homeland or the non-citizens to the nation where they live; the Pledge itself is an interpretation assessed from the White and powerful standing. When people have inherited the burden of slavery and poverty and have been diminished and humiliated by the supremacy of the few, the cracks that divide and marginalize, the systems that imprison, and the unjust laws that only benefit America’s whiteness blind so painfully that even God is not clearly visible.

### *Una teología realenga*<sup>45</sup>

#### God and the Otherness

Understanding God and others cannot start as a separate and distant matter. Theological reasoning needs an intrinsic search from the self embedded in faith. If by faith and through accepting Jesus as Savior, the Holy Spirit seals each believer, the

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<sup>43</sup> Imani Perry, *South to America*, Introduction.

<sup>44</sup> *I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.* Originally written for the 1892 Columbus Day school programs. “The Pledge of Allegiance,” U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, accessed February 11, 2022, <https://www.va.gov/opa/publications/celebrate/pledge.pdf>.

<sup>45</sup> Translation: A Stray Theology. I created this concept for my Master of Divinity graduation essay [*Una teología real-enga*] at *Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico* in 2009.

redemptive grace of the Lord begins to operate within each human life in places hardly known and understood. Therefore, the theological reflection born from within will become impregnated with life itself. The person's psychological, intellectual, spiritual, social, and cultural background, intertwined within theology, gives autobiographical overtones. The result will be a fragmented but honest reflection of the conscious and unconscious integration of the experiential environment, the intentional reflection, and the absolute revelation of God through Christ's testimony. Theology can no longer be an external or isolated activity but integrated with God.

"Who is the Christ who lives in me?"<sup>46</sup> Ivone Gebara, a Brazilian Catholic nun and feminist theologian, asked this, intending to point out that the word *christ* in traditional Christian vocabulary has two functions: its etymological meaning as anointed, designated for a special mission; the other, attributed to Jesus of Nazareth, who brought salvation for all humankind. She adds the pluralistic dimension that everyone can be *christs*, anointed to serve others, united in the search for the collective good. Therefore, Jesus can be imitated by his followers. Believers become capable of acting like Christ in every personal experience, in every moment that they alleviate suffering and nourish the hopes of the needy and marginalized. Inserting the Otherness into the theological equation compels a calculated approach to avoid running into a pluralism that leads to an abstraction of life itself and provokes us to look in an egocentric and ethnocentric way,

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<sup>46</sup> Ivone Gebara, "Cristologías plurales," in *Bajar de la Cruz a los Pobres: Cristología de la Liberación*, ed. Comisión Teológica Internacional de la Asociación Ecueménica de Teólogos/as del Tercer Mundo (México: Ediciones Dabar, 2007), 126.

individually and collectively. It is to react to the very pluralism of life and its complexity.<sup>47</sup>

Genesis' story of the Tower of Babel shows the side of human pride, wanting to make a name for itself, be famous, and stand out so that its feats and memories endure; a clear example of human opposition to God.<sup>48</sup> A second reading of the passage shows us an imperialist action since it is located in the territory of Babylon and alludes to a structure believed to unite heaven with earth, thus showing the polemical vision of the writer in front of the Babylonian beliefs of religious and political superiority.<sup>49</sup> Gebara denounces the contemporary religious imperialisms that preach and demand the Christology of the Tower of Babel, building towers to supervise from above the actions and thoughts of their workers, of its "subordinates."<sup>50</sup> Babel's religious imperialist function deliberately seeks to ignore the differences between human beings of various origins and to forget Jesus' actions in favor of beggars, prostitutes, widows, and foreigners (immigrants), separating Christ from the poor behind a curtain of orthodoxy and ostensible purity, thus blurring the value of the Cross and the affinity with the relegated periphery in need of liberation.

In the book *Another Way*, the authors challenge church leaders to approach biblical reading and social life in engaging and critical ways that enable alternatives to

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<sup>47</sup> Gebara, "Cristologías," 128.

<sup>48</sup> Lawrence Boadt, "Génesis," in *Comentario Bíblico Internacional*, 3rd ed., ed. William R. Farmer, et al. (Navarra, España: Editorial Verbo Divino, 2003), 340.

<sup>49</sup> Boadt, "Génesis," 340.

<sup>50</sup> Gebara, "Cristologías," 129.

the *status quo*.<sup>51</sup> They use the reading from Acts 16, where the Apostle Paul exorcises a slave girl that made money for their owner by fortunetelling.<sup>52</sup> The slave owners accused Paul and Silas to the local authorities of destroying their business. After finding them guilty of disturbing the peace and ordering a severe public beating, the authorities threw them into the deepest part of the jail with their feet clamped so they could not escape. “Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening. Suddenly, there was a massive earthquake, and the prison was shaken to its foundations. All the doors immediately flew open, and the chains of every prisoner fell off!”<sup>53</sup>

When performing a critical theological reflective reading of this story, it is impossible to ignore the explicit and implicit systems of power and privilege. The enslavers, the judicial authorities, the mob rooting for a guilty verdict and beating the now prisoners, “everyone who appears in the story sides with the social order that enslaved the girl.”<sup>54</sup> Traditionally, the theological interpretation would focus on spirituality and the act of piety from Paul, ignoring the systems of oppression enforced over the *realengos* to enrich the few. “This is a theological negligence that leaves the *status quo* intact and unscrutinized,” when the main focus of the critical theological reflection is to dissect “the flesh and blood realities of social life.”<sup>55</sup> When choosing to

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<sup>51</sup> Stephen Lewis, Matthew Wesley Williams, and Dori Grinenko Baker, *Another Way, Living & Leading Change on Purpose* (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2020), 109.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 118-119.

<sup>53</sup> Acts 16.25-26 (NLT).

<sup>54</sup> Lewis, Williams, and Baker, *Another Way*, 119.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

hide behind a veil of spiritual purity, theology often avoids the needed conflicts that disrupt its desired political correctness. The action of the Church must directly serve the *realengos* while disturbing the peace of the oppressors and the systems that permit injustice. As the Church engages intentionally in acts of justice toward the life of others, adverse situations will present to prevent an active and profound challenge to the unjust systems that sustain the *status quo*. When assessing the needs of the context, it must be asked: “What are the unjust systems into which you are likely to stumble?”<sup>56</sup>

Paul and Silas experimented in their flesh with the product of an unjust system built to keep the powerful rich and the poor poorer. They ended up in jail, beaten, but joyful for saving a woman from exploitation, for disturbing an unjust establishment. Because of their action and consequent suffering, God intervened in ways no person or human institution can accomplish while praying and singing in jail. As an earthquake freed Paul and Silas, critical reading and reflection of these verses show that “God’s activity in this story is not neutral.”<sup>57</sup> While every character involved, aside from Paul and Silas, sided “in support of the social order, creation organizes itself to disrupt the system of punishment used to keep the *status quo* in place.”<sup>58</sup> The words that freed this girl from the abuse of slavery and spiritual demonic possession created a wave of disruptions to an unjust system of oppression that involved more than human actions, ending with God’s intervention and God’s creation.

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<sup>56</sup> Lewis, Williams, and Baker, *Another Way*, 120.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

Relegating and sentencing human beings to marginalization, humiliation, and scarcity led me to raise a theology that does not seek to get off the cross but to climb on it as an act of emptying and renunciation for the world's little ones, for the *realengos*; those lifted forcefully to a cross where the peace of death and eternity are not found, but anguish. This reflection moves us away from the imperialist temptations of racial hierarchies and towards true human unity, a unity in justice that requires individual and collective sacrifice in search of equity. "Of course, I don't mean your giving should make life easy for others and hard for yourselves. I only mean that there should be some equality. Right now you have plenty and can help those who are in need. Later, they will have plenty and can share with you when you need it. In this way, things will be equal."<sup>59</sup>

A principle of interdependence presents that how the individual parts integrate into the whole is more important than themselves. Particular needs are subordinate to the survival benefit of the whole. *Una teología realenga* intends to impel every individual into a symbiosis called *love your neighbor*. In the context of Latin American immigrants in the United States, Christians must critically understand their unique standing facing God's will and the needs of those labeled as *aliens* by the ones who create and sustain racial hierarchies. Raising and supporting acts of justice will accomplish what Jesus stressed as the two most important commandments:

Jesus replied, "The most important commandment is this: 'Listen, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.' The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these."<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> 2 Cor 8.13-14 (NLT).

<sup>60</sup> Mk 12.29-31 (NLT).

When a person learns how this self/God/Other relationship is vital to establishing justice, a process of hospitality and restitution may start to flow.

### Hospitality and Restitution

As stated before, hospitality is not enough. Mere acts of charity cannot compensate for the historical and present damage to the millions of Latin American immigrants. Hospitality can be a lifesaver to many in actual need, but at the same time, it becomes a conscience-cleaning deed for the performer. Though being called a Christian involves an act of faith, true Christianity transcends the spiritual sphere to become tangible through specific actions. When Jesus selected seventy-two disciples to reach other towns, he gave them specific instructions: heal and preach.<sup>61</sup> The framework for the fieldwork of His followers was simple but effective, designed to address the needs of people in their context. Nevertheless, we lose the way when we start to look into our worthiness, disregarding the needs of the marginalized. The purpose of the Church (as in the people who comprise it) is to “engage in acts that reflect a heart broken by the plight of the world’s disenfranchised.”<sup>62</sup> In our context, it starts by breaking from the social/cultural and religious constructs that blindfold a country into sustaining a racist and classist horde of white supremacists who benefit from perpetuating the lie that the American dream can be attained by all who are willing to “work hard enough.” De la Torre describes this idea as the reality of the United States, stating that “those born into and/or raised within the United States are a product of a society where white supremacy

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<sup>61</sup> “Whenever you enter someone’s home, first say, ‘May God’s peace be on this house.’ ... If you enter a town and it welcomes you, eat whatever is set before you. Heal the sick, and tell them, ‘The Kingdom of God is near you now.’” Lk 10.5,8,9 (NLT).

<sup>62</sup> Miguel A. De la Torre, *Decolonizing Christianity: Becoming Badass Believers* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2021), 190.

and class privilege have historically been interwoven with how whites, for centuries, see and organize the world around them. How they see has been legitimized as universal.”<sup>63</sup>

Silva Gotay presents this national conscience from a Protestant prophetic view, writing

that will understand the nation as a “Protestant nation,” “chosen by God,” with a “religious and political destiny in the history of the world.” This fusion of political and religious principles, in what sociologists and historians have called the American “civil religion,” will eventually become a kind of culture or political-religious ideology, from which citizens will understand the world and legitimize the acts of the nation.<sup>64</sup>

As a nation that denies an official church-state endorsement, its political mindset preserves the religious colonizing ideas historically avoided on themselves and others.

Transcending hospitality into restitution requires decolonizing the mind by seeing through the eyes of the *realengos* instead of “the lens of oppressors.”<sup>65</sup> It recognizes that the systems of power organized around injustice and oppression function as a buffer that prevents assessing reality. Even people with good intentions can dwell on the fictional side of colonization. Also, standing in solidarity can prove not to be enough, either.

Engaging in acts of restitution is a firm commitment to Jesus’ praxis in the social and spiritual life of the receiver: The blind man in John 9 was deprived of his dignity because it was believed his blindness was a sinful consequence;<sup>66</sup> the woman suffering constant bleeding was not only sick, but lonely, fearful, broke, and defrauded by

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<sup>63</sup> De la Torre, *Decolonizing Christianity*, 188.

<sup>64</sup> Silva Gotay, *Protestantismo y política*, 45.

<sup>65</sup> De la Torre, *Decolonizing Christianity*, 189.

<sup>66</sup> “As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. ‘Rabbi,’ his disciples asked him, ‘why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or his parents’ sins?’” Jn 9.1-2 (NLT).

medicine and religion;<sup>67</sup> the blind son of Timaeus, who was begging at the margin of the street and was shut down by the same people who followed Jesus.<sup>68</sup> Each situation is a model of God’s miracles disrupting the lives of the needy for good. Every act of Jesus presents an incarnation into the life of the Otherness.

Therefore, in the likeness of Jesus’ embodiment with the real-life *realengos*, human restitution efforts are beyond charity or hospitality, thus requiring sharing the self. “Jesus *is* the hungry and thirsty, the naked and the undocumented, the infirm and incarcerated.”<sup>69</sup> As the Church is the incarnated body of Jesus in the world, it should not be a parallel structure to the people but *be* the people in their struggles. As cells of this body, Christians must detach from the destructive constructs forced on themselves and become true worshipers because “the time is coming—indeed it’s here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth.”<sup>70</sup> Worshiping is the decisive action of intervening into the world with the power of God’s Spirit with the eyes wide open to the reality of the context. To worship God is not a self-centered act of greatness, self-condescending virtue, or numbing experience that separates the person from their worldly issues, but a recognition of who is God, who am I, and who is the Other. Also, the worship experience centers the person on their context and purpose. It becomes an incarnation of the self, God, and the Other. It does not matter what the worshiper

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<sup>67</sup> “A woman in the crowd had suffered for twelve years with constant bleeding. She had suffered a great deal from many doctors, and over the years she had spent everything she had to pay them, but she had gotten no better. In fact, she had gotten worse.” Mk 5.25-26 (NLT).

<sup>68</sup> “A blind beggar named Bartimaeus (son of Timaeus) was sitting beside the road. When Bartimaeus heard that Jesus of Nazareth was nearby, he began to shout, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’ ‘Be quiet!’ many of the people yelled at him.” Mk 10.46b,47a (NLT).

<sup>69</sup> De la Torre, *Decolonizing Christianity*, 191.

<sup>70</sup> Jn 4.23a (NLT).

possesses, but his/her true essence is. When standing with the *realengos* in our country or beyond the southern border, the emerging symbiosis solidifies a bond that transforms human needs and glorifies God. The resulting acts of restitution should start by recognizing the impoverishment and abuses perpetrated and perpetuated by the government, the economic interests, the Church, and our ignorance. As worship itself, restitution is not self-centered, self-condescending, or numbing experience but an act from within. Miguel de la Torre offers a list of specific solutions: “Provide food for those who are hungry, give clean water to those who are thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome with open arms those who are undocumented, bring justice to the incarcerated, and provide medicine to the infirm.”<sup>71</sup> These simple acts reflect Jesus’ checklist of worthy actions performed by those who will inherit the Kingdom of God. Restitution is to see Jesus in the Other:

‘For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me’ ... And the King will say, ‘I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!’<sup>72</sup>

Restitution is not an act of giving but of transforming oneself and the Other in Jesus’ Name. Therefore, achieving restitution is fulfilled by what we are, not from what we have.

### **Methodology and Future Directions**

The dissertation project (Chapter Two) emerges from the previous statements and research to provide pastors, lay leadership, and congregants of the American Baptist

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<sup>71</sup> De la Torre, *Decolonizing Christianity*, 12.

<sup>72</sup> Mt 25.35,36,40 (NLT).

Churches (ABCUSA) and possibly other churches/denominations with education about the historical and modern issues of abuse and exploitation that have contributed to the current immigration crisis on the United States' southern border. The participating leaders should model allyship by driving each congregation to assess and provide for their Latin American community's needs.

As a framework for diagnosing the project's viability for a particular congregation/denomination, it is imperative to enter a process that recognizes the need for transformation toward solidarity with Latin American immigrants. A one-size-fits-all approach would be impossible because of the ample diversity in resources and contexts. Participants must confront their historical, cultural, and theological beliefs and prejudices. The resulting analysis of the immigrant crisis background should generate acknowledgment and clarification of the biases, repentance, and commitment to justice. By ascertaining this crisis, churches should acknowledge their active involvement and recognize their present responsibility in initiating practical ways for restitution. The ABCUSA-affiliated churches, as well as any church and denomination, therefore, might respond to this modern immigration crisis and live into our Christian heritage by becoming a revolutionary force, addressing prescient social issues related to immigration, such as the pull toward cultural assimilation, race and gender discrimination, poverty, employment, food insecurity, and disparities in access to healthcare.

The following chapter will promote education and consequent actions through three teaching modules, workshop ideas/exercises, and a worship service aimed at clergy/lay leaders and their congregations. These educational modules engage with a scholarship from education, history, sociology, psychology, Christian ethics, and various

practical theological areas, such as postcolonialism, feminism, and liberation theology. Ultimately, this project will provide clergy and lay leaders with the skills and tools necessary (e.g., critical thinking, research, exegesis, hermeneutics, transculturation, data/historical/cultural/political analysis) to empower themselves and their congregations in the advocacy and service to the needs of Latin American communities, especially those disproportionately affected by the immigration crisis and related social issues listed before.

The dissertation project's objective is to promote engagement in actual restitution practices. The participants should interconnect the history of Latin American oppression and immigration issues in the United States and Puerto Rico to the influence of Christianity, politics, and economic matters, comparing and analyzing specific characteristics from the biblical horizon and their present context and applying learned aspects. The liturgical program includes prayers, Scripture readings, published and original hymns/praise songs selections, and a sermon. The modules include a commentary on a biblical text, reference notes, and an appendix with workshop activities—a bibliography for further research and interaction with the themes exposed rounds the dissertation document.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Project: A Learning Process for Justice and Restitution**

You must not mistreat or oppress foreigners in any way.

—Exodus 22.21

### **Introduction to the Study Modules**

The immigration topic in the United States is a complex issue. The European settlers that came to this continent in 1492 found these lands inhabited by indigenous people and arbitrarily referred to them as *Indians*. The fundamental notion that vast lands with millions of human beings with millenary civilizations and distinct cultures were already “discovered” escaped the common sense of the white-Eurocentric-minded travelers. Mark Charles, a Native American descendant, describes how he stood before a statue of Christopher Columbus in Washington, D.C., where a ceremony celebrating Columbus Day was about to start. Facing the public, he said “in a calm but loud voice:” “You cannot discover lands already inhabited. That process is known as stealing, conquering, or colonizing. The fact that America calls what Columbus is ‘discovery’ reveals the implicit racial bias of the country—that the Native Americans are not fully human.”<sup>1</sup> Immediately, a white man dressed in a suit approached him, grabbed him by the arm, and walked Charles away, saying, “You are not welcome here.” More than five

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Charles and Soong-Chan Rah, *Unsettling Truths: The Ongoing, Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 13-14.

centuries later, the *discovery*, “legitimized by reasons of theological and religious nature,” still empowers the European immigrants.<sup>2</sup>

The white colonizers constantly and brutally abused brown bodies. Those immigrants, crossing the ocean in their ships carrying guns, sables, disease, Bibles, and hate, with complete disregard for the inherent humanity of the natives, imposed themselves over the lives, culture, civilization, religion, and most important for stimulating their greediness, immeasurable lands full of riches that extend beyond their imaginations. The indigenous people interfered between those riches and the Europeans; the natives must be conquered.

The main human right is the right to exist. ... This principle gives priority to the miserable. The existence of the needy is threatened by hunger, violence, neglected diseases, abuse, and overwork. The oppressed poor is helpless in the face of the violence of the powerful. Their vulnerability and precariousness threaten their lives, not just their freedom and happiness.<sup>3</sup>

Forwarding a few centuries, the immigrants from Europe became the new owners of the land by violently imposing on the indigenous people across the whole hemisphere, pillaging every possible resource. Once immigrants, now landlords.

Generally, U.S. citizens are not fully aware of the history that forged the present, creating the prevailing social/economic/political systems and shaping the ideas by which people relate to each other; others are conscient of the disparaging but opt to ignore it. The United States of America emerged from the same process of European immigrants that arrived in a foreign land, imposed on the native inhabitants, decimated them, and took their land. It did not occur in a void.

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<sup>2</sup> Luis N. Rivera Pagán, *Historia de la conquista de América. Evangelización y Violencia* (España: Editorial CLIE, 2021), 33.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 234-235.

The people of this white nation believe themselves to be self-made, ... ignorant of how the wealth of the nation exists because of all that has been taken from communities of color. To maintain this oppressive system legitimized by laws, upheld by courts, normalized by schools, and ordained by Christian churches, people of color had to be defined as inferior, created by God to domestically serve those on the higher stages of the evolutionary scale. But it was never enough to simply relegate nonwhites to the role of servants. Structures needed to be created and violence committed to maintain the superiority of whiteness.<sup>4</sup>

The emerging nation called herself *the land of the free and the home of the brave* became the opposite for those arriving from outside the border.<sup>5</sup> Many oppressed and impoverished survivors began the new migration path, not crossing the ocean but walking north. For many residents within the U.S. perspective, this new breed of immigrants from Latin America, impoverished and brown-skinned, have been vastly characterized as a threat to the nation's safety and a burden to the economy.

As *Module 1* will show, the United States became an imperialistic and colonizing power in Latin America, repeating the learned lesson: arriving, imposing, decimating, and pillaging. Although colonization disturbed every aspect of society and touched every threshold of humanity, *Module 2* presents this outcome through a *mujerista* perspective. In *Module 3*, as an institution and a collective of believers, the Church will be urged to create and participate in equalizing actions to promote justice and acts of restitution. The Eurocentric white supremacy mentality permeated the minds and systems so profoundly that a thoughtful and holistic analysis is required to start a multiform healing process.

The Bible passage of Jesus and Zacchaeus demonstrates that restitution should be a natural response to the self-realizing experience of wrongdoing toward other human

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<sup>4</sup> Miguel de la Torre, *Decolonizing Christianity: Becoming Badass Believers* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2021), 19.

<sup>5</sup> *The Land of the free...* are the last two lines of the U.S. national anthem "The Star-Spangled Banner."

beings. Zacchaeus' willingness to retribute the money stolen through a corrupt tax collection scheme does not originate from "a spontaneous gesture of abundant goodwill" but as "a conscious act of obedience to the Hebrew Scriptures."<sup>6</sup>

From an OT perspective, Kwon and Thompson elaborate on *five essential principles of restitution*:<sup>7</sup>

1. *Realization*. Preceding any material restitution, a verbal confession of the sin committed leads to the spiritual act of repentance that must occur in the person.<sup>8</sup>
2. *Return*. Any material goods acquired sinfully must be restituted to the victim.<sup>9</sup>
3. *Relatives*. If the person affected is deceased or missing, "the goods should be returned to his next of kin." If no heir can be found, the "restitution should be offered to the priest as representative of God."<sup>10</sup>
4. *Ram*. Stealing from another human created in God's image ultimately steals against God. Restitution of the material goods is not enough; therefore, an offering of atonement must be presented, rendering "payment for the sinner's guilt as restitution made unto the Lord."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Duke L. Kwon and Gregory Thompson, *Reparations: A Christian Call for Repentance and Repair* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2021), 139.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 139-141.

<sup>8</sup> Lv 6.4a (NLT): "If you have sinned in any of these ways, you are guilty." Nm 5.7: "They must confess their sin and make full restitution for what they have done."

<sup>9</sup> Lv 6.4b (NLT): "You must give back whatever you stole, or the money you took by extortion, or the security deposit, or the lost property you found." Restitution "is a routine response to even the most ordinary instances." Kwon and Thompson, *Reparations*, 140. Expanding on this concept, Ex 21.33-22.15 presents a list of examples about restitution responsibilities and common practices that extend beyond theft.

<sup>10</sup> Nm 5.8a (NLT): "But if the person who was wronged is dead, and there are no near relatives to whom restitution can be made, the payment belongs to the Lord and must be given to the priest."

<sup>11</sup> Nm 5.8b (NLT): "Those who are guilty must also bring a ram as a sacrifice, and they will be purified and made right with the Lord."

5. *Remission*. God's mercy offers the forgiveness of sins to those who repent and fulfill the act of restitution.<sup>12</sup>

These principles outlined the Old Testament theology of restitution that guided Zacchaeus' response and nowadays serve as a guide for a New Testament response to this responsibility. Christians today must qualify the moral foundation of restitution through Christ's reparation offering in his death. Christians are not bound to an atonement offering because "Jesus himself would be the ram."<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, the believer in Christ responsible for theft must fulfill the process by repenting and restituting to achieve God's forgiveness.

The practice of restitution should rectify any kind of theft; to go beyond the quantifiable things. Kwon and Thompson describe the *essential comprehensiveness of restitution* in three ways: It covers any kind of stealing, requires the return of the original property or equivalent payment, and applies to individuals and "groups or corporate bodies."<sup>14</sup> It is relevant to consider that theft can apply to "*nonmaterial possessions*," such as honor, "Spiritual Injuries," adultery, and personal reputation: "Even when dealing with nonmaterial things, the essential practice of returning and restoring what was wrongly taken still applies."<sup>15</sup>

The next step is to determine the legitimate receivers of the restitution. The first recipient must be the *original owner* of the material or nonmaterial possession, but if

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<sup>12</sup> Lv 6.7 (NLT): "Through this process, the priest will purify you before the Lord, making you right with him, and you will be forgiven for any of these sins you have committed."

<sup>13</sup> Kwon and Thompson, *Reparations*, 142.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

he/she is deceased or cannot be located, his/her *heirs* must receive the restitution.<sup>16</sup> If no owner or relative is found, a third class of recipients is recognized: the *poor*. The authors argue that in the case that no wronged person or heir is available to receive the restitution, Numbers 5.8 assess that *the payment belongs to the Lord*, the ultimate owner of everything, and *must be given to the priest* as an administrator of God's treasures, which must be used "*especially in service of the poor.*"<sup>17</sup> As a possible motivation behind Zacchaeus' distribution, Kwon and Thompson added that "granting one's sinfully acquired goods to the poor is also the proper course of action when repentant repeat offenders cannot count or recall every past instance of theft or wronged strangers whose identities and whereabouts they do not know."<sup>18</sup> With the recipients identified, who is bound to make the restitution must be determined.

When restitution is due, the natural providers are the *perpetrators* of the stealing, and if they were not acting by themselves, the *accomplices*.<sup>19</sup> When those are deceased, there is a third type of provider: the *heirs* of the thieves. These are the ones who inherited the goods and possessed them even if they "*did not personally participate in the original theft, and even if they were not yet alive when it was committed.*"<sup>20</sup> There is a characteristic human inclination to disregard any issue that negatively affects our

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<sup>16</sup> Kwon and Thompson, *Reparations*, 145. The authors include as heirs of the victims "*their children, successors, nearest relations, next of kin, or executors of estate.*"

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. Accomplices may cooperate with the perpetrators, directly or indirectly, by command, counsel, consent, flattery, receiving, participation, silence, not preventing, and by not denouncing. Ibid., 146-147.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 148-149.

inherited reality, to have a blind spot for accepting responsibility for things done by prior generations. It is imperative to realize and accept that the restitution responsibility of the perpetrators' heirs is based on physical possession of the stolen good, not on a moral transfer or personal guilt.<sup>21</sup> Restitution must be understood "as a matter of great moral urgency" by every perpetrator involved.<sup>22</sup> This statement should not pass as the mere addressing of recognition of the debt would suffice. On the contrary, a dual morality is involved, an urge to act in love toward justice for the restitution's rightful recipients and the providers' moral well-being.<sup>23</sup> "Theology that arises from Scripture and from the teachings of Jesus does not allow for the identification and exclusion of the other."<sup>24</sup>

The Church's historic mission is to lead with a prophetic voice in favor of the impoverished and dispossessed, naming injustice of any kind. However, when this leading has been indispensable for establishing justice for the oppressed, more than a few times, it sided with the oppressor by ignoring the cry for righteousness and dignity.

In the most challenging times of the Civil Rights Movement fight, incarcerated for participating in a non-violent demonstration, Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote a letter to the religious leaders who criticized him instead of siding with the oppressed. Reflecting on Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Letter From Birmingham Jail*, Juan Ángel Gutiérrez expresses that the religious leaders that criticized the non-violent protests are partial to the systems that perpetuate racism and oppression because they do not show concern for

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<sup>21</sup> Kwon and Thompson, *Reparations*, 149.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 150-151.

<sup>24</sup> Charles and Rah, *Unsettling Truth*, 22.

what is beyond the causes of the demonstrations.<sup>25</sup> They were partial to the oppressive forces that enforced the inherited privileges derived from the theft of freedom and justice forcibly taken from the U.S. slave system.

As with the African Americans in the United States, the migrants from Latin America struggle with the reality of the lands, freedom, and dignity stolen by the privileged groups that inherited the benefits of the theft and refused to relinquish voluntarily to the riches of the systems of oppression offered them. As the oppressors feel threatened by the cries for restitution, they will perceive the demands of the oppressed as “violent, as threats to law and order, as untimed, as an attack on democracy: because they threaten their privileges.”<sup>26</sup> This same reaction provoked political and military interventionism in Latin America, profoundly disturbing every country’s social, political, and economic systems in the Western Hemisphere that produced, beyond the annihilation of lives, communities, natural resources, and political autonomy, the current immigration crisis in the United States. As in Martin Luther King Jr.’s setting, the Church and many religious leaders in the United States and Latin America sided with the oppressor and its *status quo*. Gutiérrez reminds us that “the Church is called to defend not only the life but the quality of life of our people.”<sup>27</sup>

For Christians, the biblical foundations for restitution have been part of the preaching of the Church and its theology. The call for acknowledging fault and repentance is part of the believer’s life and the Church’s liturgy. Then must be asked,

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<sup>25</sup> Juan Ángel Gutiérrez Rodríguez, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Resistencia y lucha: Reflexiones sobre el pensamiento del Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. ante la realidad puertorriqueña* (Puerto Rico: Poema, 2021), 69.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

why have Christians, as followers of Jesus' Gospel and the Church as the embodiment of Christ, been perpetrators and accomplices of so many instances of impoverishment, racism, theft, and oppression, are not committed to acts of restitution? Some may have participated intentionally, recognizing their involvement by giving preference to the evils of prejudice and greediness while portraying faithfulness as well-intentioned Christian and respectful citizens; therefore, they have nothing to repent. For these, restitution is counterproductive to their economic interests. Others may be genuinely acting on their understanding of faith, influenced by a distorted and toxic interpretation of the Gospel; they believe in restitution, but the problem is "that they didn't believe they had stolen anything—or anyone."<sup>28</sup> Ignorance is not a lesser evil. As a living organism, the Church permitted, promoted, and participated in the ravaging of the Other by justifying systems of imperialism, colonialism, and slavery as God's intention for humanity. When abiding by this reasoning, acts of restitution to the descendants of the enslaved Africans and the Latin American immigrants (living and still arriving) in the United States are unnecessary.

Every Christian must introspect in their participation or inheritance of structures of systematic oppression that are still destroying cultures, societies, and families in many countries of Latin America and the United States. Individuals cannot excuse themselves for the shortcomings of the institutionalized Church; after all, individuals are responsible for the toxic theology and teaching that contradicts Jesus' Gospel. The apostle Paul expresses individual accountability for transforming the mind and understanding God's will:

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<sup>28</sup> Kwon and Thompson, *Reparations*, 152.

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.<sup>29</sup>

More detrimental than geographical borders and physical walls that rise as a way to “defend” a privileged way of life are the psychological walls that keep people from accepting their responsibility for restituting what belongs to others.

Restitution has many faces. When faced with the complexity of the colonization and interventionism that Latin America suffers, a specific framework is unfeasible, especially for the heirs of centuries of stealing practices that lead to the impoverishment of millions of lives, cultures, and countries. How civilizations like the Toltec, Aztec, and Mayan, or indigenous groups like the *Tainos*, can receive restitution of the land, resources, freedom, dignity, and lives stolen from them during more than 500 years of colonialism? Fighting through a long-rooted system of immoral appropriation, relentless looting, and poisonous supremacy appear as an impossible task to accomplish. Restitution is not an intended practice for reacquiring past possessions but an imperative “need for justice to exist and flourish now and in the future.”<sup>30</sup> Without a sense of justice, restitution becomes a handout, a continuous act of control and limitation “by the rich and powerful.”<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, if the idea of injustice started with one person and extrapolated

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<sup>29</sup> Rom 12.1-2 (NLT).

<sup>30</sup> Ada M. Isasi-Díaz, “Un poquito de justicia—a Little Bit of Justice: A Mujerista Account of Justice,” in *Hispanic/Latino Theology: Challenge and Promise*, ed. by Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Fernando F. Segovia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 336.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 336-337.

to empires, bringing restitution could start from a solo act of justice. Engaging in actual acts of restitution will require determination and imagination.

In Zacchaeus' account of restitution, he returned stolen money to people who were victims of the corrupted tax collection system, and to cover those impossible to identify, he gave money to the poor. This way of restitution would be an easy task if the stolen goods were available. What to do when money is unavailable, the stolen good is destroyed or nonexistent, or the theft was nonmaterial? How does a person, a group, or an institution recognize that inherited the responsibility does not have the economic resources to retribute? Here is where creativity will help to achieve restitution. Indeed, not every act of restitution can return or compensate for the original theft. Suffering, humiliation, enslavement, and death cannot be restituted. Governments and private companies can generate economic resources to bring some restitution to the victims, but individuals and small organizations, like many churches, do not have the capital necessary.

The following is an example of a joint effort from the government and the private sector to provide restitution:

U.S. vice president Kamala Harris ... announced almost \$1 billion in new pledges by private companies to support communities in Central America, part of the Biden administration's effort to keep migrants from fleeing toward the U.S. border.

Ten companies, including Nestle, Target, and Columbia Sportswear, said they would collectively spend \$950 million on projects in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador to support farmers, create textile jobs and invest in telecommunications and other industries.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Michael D. Shear, "Harris Announces Funding to Address Root Causes of Migration Crisis," New York Times, February 6, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/06/us/politics/harris-migration-central-america.html?searchResultPosition=1>.

This effort is part of a \$3 billion initiative to “strengthen the region’s economic security.” A business executive in the project asserted that results might take five to ten years.<sup>33</sup> Even though the investment is considerable, and the impact will take a few years to show some results, many people’s quality of life will improve in the short run. This initiative should motivate others to participate, and the program’s scope could expand. Efforts like these, meritorious and necessary, are rare and challenging to develop and oversee.

Let us bring attention to the most vulnerable group of immigrants from Latin America: the children. Child immigration is a relatively recent phenomenon: “Between 1965 and 1985, millions of undocumented workers crossed the border for work and returned home after the harvest.”<sup>34</sup> These were seasonal workers who “would make his (seldom her) way as far north as possible, and then follow the harvest seasons southwards,” returning “to their own lands and families in Mexico.”<sup>35</sup> With the increased immigration enforcement in the southern border, the Latin American immigrants needing to work in the United States decided to stay and bring their families rather than risk being unable to return. Because most of the agricultural workers were men, women and children were forced to migrate on their own, leaving behind their possessions and exchanging their land for the possibility of an income.

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<sup>33</sup> Shear, “Harris Announces.” The article cited “the root causes of migration: poverty, corruption, climate change, and political instability that drives people to leave their homes in search of a better life.” However, there is no acknowledgment that many of these causes are consequences of the U.S. political and economic interests in Latin America.

<sup>34</sup> De la Torre, *Immigration Crisis*, chap.1. De la Torre noted that from 1942 to 1964, the Bracero Program promoted documented Mexican immigration to the United States for agricultural workers. When the program ended for reasons that included abuses to farm workers, the American farmers continued to hire Latin American workers, now undocumented.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

Unaccompanied children are rising from the number of Latin American immigrants in recent years. As a news release from the U.S. Department of Labor, since 2018, “a 69 percent increase in children being employed illegally by companies” has been registered.<sup>36</sup> The department acknowledges that migrant children, many without a parent in the United States, are escaping their countries’ violence and poverty. “The number of unaccompanied minors entering the United States climbed to a high of 130,000 last year—three times what it was five years earlier.”<sup>37</sup> These children come desperately to the United States trying to get something back of what was stolen from their lands, only to find that they possess more things worthy of being stolen. This country should be restituting them from the bounties unjustly taken, but in the end, many of them come to lose more.

Many of the United States’ freedoms and rights are partly financed by the riches historically stolen from other countries. Both examples directly result from the impoverishment of many on behalf of a privileged few. They are also great opportunities to engage in acts of restitution. It is possible that many of those reading this paper, if not all, including myself, have inherited the responsibility to become providers for restituting the theft made by generations before us. Being poor does not exclude anyone from benefiting from the profits of colonialism. The available infrastructure, access to housing, food abundance, accessible and advanced health care, an enviable level of employment,

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<sup>36</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, “Department of Labor, Health and Human Services Announce New Efforts to Combat Exploitative Child Labor,” February 27, 2023, <https://www.dol.gov/newsroom/releases/osec/osec20230227>. “In the last fiscal year [2021-2022], the department found 835 companies it investigated had employed more than 3,800 children in violation of labor laws.”

<sup>37</sup> Hannah Dreier, “Alone and Exploited, Migrant Children Work Brutal Jobs Across the U.S.,” *New York Times*, updated February 28, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/25/us/unaccompanied-migrant-child-workers-exploitation.html>. See this journalist report for more details about Hispanic children exploited by families, foster parents, and commercial institutions.

and access to travel nationally and internationally are some of the privileges that most U.S. citizens take for granted.

It is imperative to admit the immigration crisis in the United States as a national issue requiring the urgent involvement of the government, the economic and commercial institutions, the Church, and everyone. Acknowledging responsibility, studying the crisis' background, and inserting it into the context affected by the colonizing systems are unavoidable for leading the change. Quoting U.S. Secretary of Labor Marty Walsh: "This is a problem that will take all of us to stop."<sup>38</sup>

The fight must include the victims of colonialism. Even those who carry the direct effect of this oppressive system can find a place of action but must understand that as colonization is a violent system of oppression, decolonization "is equally violent" and "is always active and intentional."<sup>39</sup> Ekemini Uwan presents decolonization as two simultaneous processes:

The first is decolonization of the mind, which starts by calling the colonial situation into question. The second process is when the natives actively turn the colonial structure on its head, so that the once-colonized natives gain their independence.

Deep, introspective soul work is required for someone to come to terms with the reality of how they have been colonized—disciplined into believing that white theology, white doctrine, white ways are higher than those of their own people.

It takes work to admit this.

It takes work to undo this.

It takes work to uproot this.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, "Combat Exploitative Child Labor."

<sup>39</sup> Ekemini Uwan, "Decolonized Discipleship," in *Truth's Table: Black Women's Musings of Life, Love, and Liberation* (New York: Convergent Books, 2022), 63-64.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

Developing the correct combat strategies is impossible without the necessary and pertinent information “about the reality of exploitation, exclusion, violence, and impoverishment.”<sup>41</sup>

Restitution, as complex as the immigration crisis itself, must impact the daily lives of those who reside in the United States and those living in countries impoverished by its political, economic, and military interests. What has been stolen from them? As individuals or as part of an institution, like a church, we are financially limited to retribute stolen properties. However, we can retribute dignity, confidence, acceptance, opportunities, and love to sustain the impoverished in our midst to a productive and fulfilling life. From our scarcity, justice might shine onto others. “This is what the Lord says: Be fair-minded and just. Do what is right! Help those who have been robbed; rescue them from their oppressors. Quit your evil deeds! Do not mistreat foreigners, orphans, and widows. Stop murdering the innocent!”<sup>42</sup>

Let us take the words from Jeremiah as a wake-up call to fulfill justice for the immigrants. Let us embark on a learning process for justice through restitution.

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<sup>41</sup> Gutiérrez Rodríguez, *Resistencia y lucha*, 70.

<sup>42</sup> Jer 22.3 (NLT).

## **Module 1**

### The Need to Migrate

Poverty is not written in the stars;  
underdevelopment is not one of God's  
mysterious designs.

—Eduardo Galeano

### **Introduction**

The United States' southern border is experiencing the most significant flow of migrants from many parts of the world, especially Latin American countries. This immigration wave is the result of political, economic, and social factors that directly affected those countries and, therefore, impacted the well-being of their inhabitants. Many of those factors were a direct result of U.S. laws and foreign policies, military intervention, and the monetary interests of multinational corporations. North America's history of imperialism and interventionism against other Latin American countries must recognize the exploitation endorsed by governments and the Church in favor of capitalism in its abusive practices (e.g., the Mexican-American and the Spanish-American wars, political/military interventions).

The Latin American immigration phenomenon needs to be comprehended holistically; it cannot be partial to individual interests or insubstantial and biased historical facts. The historical bias of politicians, resulting from the greed and selfish interests of individuals and corporations, has produced political and economic systems that have become an oppressive and destructive force against the poor. For many, migrating is not an option but their only mean of survival.

## Biblical Text Commentary

### *The Escape to Egypt*

Matthew 2:13-15 (New Living Translation)

<sup>13</sup> *After the wise men were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up! Flee to Egypt with the child and his mother,” the angel said. “Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”*

Israel’s history is a history of migrations. Abraham was called from his land to migrate to the land God promised to him and his descendants. Joseph, the son of Jacob/Israel, was sold by his brothers and forced to live in Egypt, where eventually, his family became immigrants during a famine in Canaan. After four centuries, the Israelites were freed from Egypt’s slavery and started, under the leadership of Moses, a journey of 40 years to go back to Canaan. From Matthew’s passage, a new migratory event is necessary as part of God’s plan.

Matthew’s Nativity story in Bethlehem transitions to the need of Jesus’ family to migrate out of Israel’s territory. The wise men’s visit triggers king Herod’s jealousy and anger because of the possibility of the prophetic arrival of the Messiah, God’s king of the Jews, a situation he perceives as an eventual loss of power and his position as king. Matthew is determined to establish several parallelisms between Jesus’ infancy narratives and the events from Old Testament stories of Moses and Israel as people.<sup>115</sup> This verse shows two parallels: Joseph, Jesus’ legal father, counterparts the patriarch Joseph’s image: “Both interpret dreams and save the family by going to Egypt.”<sup>116</sup> It also portrays

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<sup>115</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, “Matthew,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 8.

<sup>116</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 176.

Moses and Jesus as Israel's saviors after an order from the ruler (Pharaoh and Herod) to slay all the male children fails to kill them.<sup>117</sup>

*<sup>14</sup> That night Joseph left for Egypt with the child and Mary, his mother, <sup>15</sup> and they stayed there until Herod's death. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: "I called my Son out of Egypt."*

Joseph's dream presents an imminent threat to his family, especially to Jesus, provoking an immediate response to leave the country. There was no time for planning a trip or telling others about the sudden need to leave their homes and countries. *That night* embeds the urgency imposed by a ruthless government that impulses whole families to migrate out of hope for a safer future for themselves: "The political situation brought by colonization during the time of Jesus, pushed his family, out of fear for their lives, toward Egypt."<sup>118</sup> To those forced to live undocumented in a foreign land, Jesus' experience resonates profoundly: God's hope connecting with the "hopelessness of being uprooted."<sup>119</sup>

In another parallel to the Old Testament, Matthew quotes the last part of Hosea's 11.1 to recall Moses' led exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land and link it to the future reestablishment of God's Kingdom as a new exodus, now to be led by Jesus.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Brown, *An Introduction*, 176.

<sup>118</sup> Miguel de la Torre, *The U.S. Immigration Crisis: Toward an Ethics of Place* (Oregon: Cascade Books, 2016), conclusion, Kindle.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Adrian Leske, "Mateo," in *Comentario Biblico Internacional*, 3rd. ed., ed. William R. Farmer, et al. (Navarra, España: Editorial Verbo Divino, 2003), 1148.

## Exposition

Human beings develop a tremendous emotional attachment to their place of birth, or at least where the first memories dwell. We may move to another place, but that house, town, city, or country will be permanently attached to the heart. Leaving that particular place usually involves *force majeure*. Events such as natural disasters, plagues, wars, and their expected consequences, like sickness, poverty, and oppression, are catalytic for migration. Like Joseph, Mary, and baby Jesus experienced, the hovering possibility of death prompts the need to migrate, as Juan González explains, “Nobody likes to leave their home; no one relishes the idea of abandoning their family or their children, their loved ones for years at a time. They only do it out of desperation; they only do it because they can no longer live and the conditions that they’re facing in their own country.”<sup>121</sup>

After leaving their countries and confronting multiple perils throughout their journey to northern lands, the U.S. border with Mexico is where the desperation that triggers the need to migrate confronts another set of realities. The overwhelming number of bureaucratic requirements and constant changes led by partisan policies and court rulings make more migrants swayed to take the illegal option. Migrants face the alternative of submitting U.S. government documentation for eventual legal entry to the country or running the chance of crossing illegally. The number of people apprehended by the U.S. Border Patrol during the 2022 fiscal year (Oct to Sept) trying to cross the Mexico-United States border illegally amounts to nearly 2.4 million, a sharp increase

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<sup>121</sup> *Harvest of Empire: The Untold Story of Latinos in America*, directed by Peter Getzels and Eduardo López (Onyx Films, 2012), Juan González, 1:23:53 to 1:24:14, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5gW84cAN2Pw>.

from the 2021 report of more than 1.7 million.<sup>122</sup> Illegal border crossing deaths also increased dramatically, from 546 in 2021 to 853 during the fiscal year 2022, making the latest the deadliest recorded by the U.S. Border Patrol.<sup>123</sup> “This artificial line, and its consequences in terms of the carnage of brown bodies, is a product of empire building. For the United States to exist, the indigenous population had to either be evicted or exterminated.”<sup>124</sup> If we ask why they keep risking their lives to enter the United States, “we should understand that our government had a role in creating the crisis that brought these people here,” therefore, “our attitude as to how we should respond to these refugees from that violence” must change.<sup>125</sup> History may enlighten the way.<sup>126</sup>

The United States’ prosperity since its independence from the British Empire, and the rapid spread of *white supremacy* racial views, incited an overwhelmed territorial ambition.<sup>127</sup> Toward the mid-nineteenth century, the U.S. expansion to the West created interest in territories occupied by Mexico. The annexation “of Texas to the union

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<sup>122</sup> US Customs and Border Patrol, *Southwest Land Border Encounters*, (Last modified: January 17, 2023), <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-land-border-encounters>.

<sup>123</sup> Camilo Montoya-Galvez, “At least 853 migrants died crossing the U.S.-Mexico border in past 12 months – a record high,” CBS News, October 28, 2022, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/migrant-deaths-crossing-us-mexico-border-2022-record-high/>. Must be noticed that “the number also does not encompass all deaths of migrants who died trying to reach or cross the U.S. border, since Border Patrol only counts migrants it identified or processed on U.S. territory. Still, the record deaths reported by Border Patrol offer a grim glimpse into the dangerous, and sometimes deadly, trek millions of migrants have undertaken over the past years in hopes of reaching the U.S.”

<sup>124</sup> De La Torre, *Immigration Crisis*, chap. 1.

<sup>125</sup> *Harvest of Empire* (film), Juan González, 1:06:00 to 1:06:13.

<sup>126</sup> Because of the abundant military/economic interventions, wars, treaties, and laws that are part of the shared history between the United States and many Latin American countries, this module will limit its scope to some that influenced direct migration toward the U.S. mainland.

<sup>127</sup> Cooper-White defines *white supremacy* as a term that “encompasses both conscious and unconscious assumptions ingrained in American society that white people are superior to all other people.” Pamela Cooper-White, *The Psychology of Christian Nationalism: Why People are Drawn In and How to Talk Across the Divide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2022), 28.

precipitated war with Mexico.”<sup>128</sup> Slavery-prone states, as well as military and federal government officials, envisioned the territorial expansion of the nation as a way of developing the institution of slavery; therefore, provoking a war with Mexico presented an opportunity to achieve it: “The Mexican war was a political war, and the administration conducting it desired to make party capital out of it.”<sup>129</sup> Economic, political, and personal ambition dragged the sense of justice intended by the United States, as Ulysses S. Grant, a lieutenant in the military during the Mexican-American war and later President of the United States, reflected in his memoirs, “to this day [I] regard the war, which resulted, as one of the most unjust ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation. It was an instance of a republic following the bad example of European monarchies, in not considering justice in their desire to acquire additional territory.”<sup>130</sup> By 1848, the *Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo* forced Mexico to cede its northern territory encompassing the present-day U.S. states of New Mexico, California, Nevada, Arizona, Utah, and parts of Texas, putting an end to the Mexican-American War.<sup>131</sup> To the Mexican citizens that stayed in this area, the border crossed over them.

After the end of the war, Mexico’s lack of political unity and large amounts of foreign debt with European nations paved the way for France to proclaim a Mexican Emperor, the Austrian Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian, antagonizing with the president

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<sup>128</sup> Juan González, *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), 43.

<sup>129</sup> Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant* (New York: Charles L. Webster & Company, 1885), chap. IX, e-book. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/4367/4367-h/4367-h.htm#ch16>.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. III.

<sup>131</sup> González, *Harvest*, 44.

*de facto*, Benito Juárez.<sup>132</sup> Because of this European intervention, the U.S. government invoked the *Monroe Doctrine* to exert its diplomatic and military resources to overthrow the French-imposed Emperor and return the political power to Juárez.<sup>133</sup> The clash between political sides, social classes, military interests, and the clergy, although improving labor laws, education, and the Mexican middle class, “diminished Indian communal holdings as land grabbers took renewed advantage of the law to acquire Native American properties.”<sup>134</sup> The now-displaced Mexican natives engrossed the hundreds of thousands of migrant laborers that went north to find work in the conceded territories.<sup>135</sup>

United States’ territorial expansionism was not limited to continental land. Political and economic ambitions included the control of businesses in the Caribbean islands. Since the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the Spanish territory of Cuba had many U.S.-owned plantations. By the end of the century, the trade between Cuba and the United States “accounted for nearly one-fourth of our nation’s world commerce.”<sup>136</sup> By 1898, to protect the political and economic interests in the Caribbean, the United States

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<sup>132</sup> William Cumiford, “Benito Juarez Bust,” Chapman University Collection of Historical Figures, Chapman University, accessed February 15, 2023, <https://www.chapman.edu/about/our-home/busts-collection/juarez.aspx>.

<sup>133</sup> “Monroe Doctrine (1823),” Milestone Documents, National Archives, last reviewed on May 10, 2022, <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/monroe-doctrine>. “The Monroe Doctrine was articulated in President James Monroe’s seventh annual message to Congress on December 2, 1823. The European powers ... were obligated to respect the Western Hemisphere as the United States’ sphere of interest. ... [The Doctrine] warns European nations that the United States would not tolerate further colonization or puppet monarchs. The doctrine was conceived to meet major concerns of the moment, but it soon became a watchword of U.S. policy in the Western Hemisphere.”

<sup>134</sup> Cumiford, “Benito.”

<sup>135</sup> González, *Harvest*, 47.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 52-53.

declared the Spanish-American War, resulting in a victory over Spain: “The Treaty of Paris that formally ended the war gave the United States direct control not only of Cuba but also over Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines.”<sup>137</sup>

When the U.S. military invaded Puerto Rico in 1898, the island was on the way to gaining autonomy from Spain. In 1900, the U.S. Congress declared Puerto Rico a U.S. territory through the Foraker Act; in 1917, U.S. citizenship was imposed on all Puerto Ricans via the Jones Act.<sup>138</sup>

The U.S. military apparatus assumed the political, legal, and military functions of the State. It transformed the political structure by expelling the autonomists from power, modifying legal structures and judicial authorities, establishing a new regime of politics and militias under U.S. commanders, and ruling by decree. Its decisions invaded the economic field, quickly undermining the economic power of the island’s owners. ... By 1920, three large American sugar corporations owned 50% of the land dedicated to sugar cultivation. ... Other U.S. corporations controlled 85% of tobacco production and 35% of minor fruit production, in addition to controlling banks, railroads, electricity, telephone and telegraph, and a commercial sector of imports.<sup>139</sup>

Beyond this political and fiscal grip imposed during half a century of colonialism on Puerto Rico, the military dictatorship also assessed the indoctrination and reprogramming of the Puerto Ricans’ loyalty to the United States by establishing a governmental public school system and by promoting Protestant missionary work.<sup>140</sup> After decades of resistance and unrest from a growing nationalist movement opposed to this unilateral control of the Island’s affairs, the U.S. Congress allowed for the first time

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<sup>137</sup> González, *Harvest*, 56-57.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-62.

<sup>139</sup> Samuel Silva Gotay, *Catolicismo y política en Puerto Rico bajo España y Estados Unidos: Siglos XIX y XX* (San Juan: Editorial Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2005), 214.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

the election of the governor, and by 1952, a “limited self-rule” form of government: *Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico* (the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico).<sup>141</sup>

Puerto Rico’s new economic and social prosperity, the product of the local quasi-autonomy granted by Congress and powered by investments from U.S. companies, induced a flow of people from the countryside to look for jobs in major cities, but there were not enough available.<sup>142</sup> To avert another civilian turmoil, local and federal government officials “started to encourage emigration north ... sparking the largest flight of Latin Americans to the United States that the hemisphere had ever seen.”<sup>143</sup>

A few years after the Spanish-American War, U.S. president Theodore Roosevelt was determined to complete the plan for a maritime way to connect the Pacific with the Atlantic Ocean. After a failed attempt to construct a canal through Nicaragua, Panama, part of Colombia at the time, became the intended location. The United States was asking for a sovereign ten-kilometer zone at both sides of the canal, and as occurred before with Nicaragua, Colombia rejected the proposal, provoking a U.S.-backed revolt resulting in Panama’s independence by November of 1903.<sup>144</sup> The Panama Canal started its construction by the following year, and the United States took sovereignty of the land zone sought.

Beyond these imperialist achievements that secured and increased economic, political, and military advancement, the United States instilled a continuous need for

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<sup>141</sup> González, *Harvest*, 62. Still the official name of the Government of Puerto Rico.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 63. *Operation Bootstrap* was the industrialization program that Gov. Muñoz-Marín implemented to lure U.S. companies “by offering them low wages, tax-free environment to set up their factories, and duty-free export to the mainland.”

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

interventionist policies in the Latin American region. American businesses' interests enticed U.S. expansionism in many foreign markets, but the proximity to Latin America was particularly relevant.

Through its economic might, the United States dictates terms of trade with other nations, guaranteeing that benefits flow to the U.S. center and the elites from the countries that agreed to the trade agreements. This strategy became a neoliberal based foreign policy during the twentieth century that moved the focus from acquiring the lands of others toward a hegemonic control of the economies of others.<sup>145</sup>

Before World War I, the fear that Germany or other European countries positioned themselves near the continental United States, as well as the Communist bloc after World War II, prompted a close and aggressive monitoring of Latin American affairs. Moreover, bank investments in loans and government bonds were made throughout the region, stimulating the opening of U.S. bank branches in many Latin American countries.<sup>146</sup> The diverse commercial interests of U.S.-based companies propelled the role of the U.S. government as a *regional policeman*.<sup>147</sup> In 1904, President Theodore Roosevelt reinforced to Congress the necessity to commit to the Monroe Doctrine's purpose to intervene in Latin American affairs, asserting that the United States is judge over the events or shortcomings of the other nations and executor of the deemed remedial action. This approach is known as *Roosevelt's Corollary to the Monroe*

*Doctrine*:

Chronic wrongdoing, or an impotence which results in a general loosening of the ties of civilized society, may in America, as elsewhere, ultimately require intervention by some civilized nation, and in the Western Hemisphere the adherence of the United States to the Monroe Doctrine may force the United

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<sup>145</sup> De la Torre, *Immigration Crisis*, conclusion.

<sup>146</sup> González, *Harvest*, 76-77.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

States, however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of such wrongdoing or impotence, to the exercise of an international police power.<sup>148</sup>

As a result of this concept of international affairs interventionism that the United States implemented over Latin America, the *Trans-Mississippi Commercial Congress*, a “business association that deals with the development of agriculture, commerce, and mining ... between the Mississippi River and the Pacific Ocean,” offers an example of commercial and political interests converging for financial gain.<sup>149</sup> This commercial conglomerate intended to influence the U.S. Congress and the President to sign a treaty with other Latin American countries, asserting that an obstacle “to a satisfactory development of trade with the Spanish-American republics is the suspicion ... that the United States may take an unfair advantage of their size and strength to acquire sovereignty where they now have no such right.”<sup>150</sup> Additionally, the report from the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives from February 1911, stated that taking the initiative of promoting this agreement would serve the country “to have the appearance of a genuinely friendly movement and to be free from the suspicion of self-interest ... government of commanding strength and resources,” and “an American international agreement of honesty and fair play.”<sup>151</sup> Next April, a House resolution requested the President of the United States to enter into negotiations to

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<sup>148</sup> “Theodore Roosevelt’s Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine (1905),” Milestone Documents, National Archives, last reviewed on February 8, 2022, <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/roosevelt-corollary>.

<sup>149</sup> House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Report on Joint Agreement Between Various Governments, 61st Cong., 3d sess., February 3, 1911, 1. 710.11. 25 May 1911. World Scholar: Latin America & the Caribbean, <https://tinyurl.gale.com/tinyurl/EPKYnX>.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

eventually sign a treaty with the individual governments of the other countries of the Americas.<sup>152</sup> The resolution incorporated the opinion of the *Trans-Mississippi Commercial Congress*, asserting that “the peace and the commercial development of the American Continent would be more certainly and speedily secured if the various South, Central, and North American Governments were reasonably assured against the forced permanent loss of territory as a consequence of war or otherwise.”<sup>153</sup>

U.S. State Department’s Division of Latin-American Affairs advised the Secretary of State in a memorandum from May against the pursuit of this treaty: As “it may happen in the future, as it has in the past,” the United States keeps the possibility of acquiring any desirable “territory in these countries, either through lease or purchase, or even as the result of war.”<sup>154</sup> It would be unwise to guarantee other countries their territorial integrity when such a treaty will limit interpreting the *Monroe Doctrine* as the United States see fit, concluded the memorandum.<sup>155</sup>

The election of Franklin D. Roosevelt as U.S. president in the early 1930s brought a change in the interventionist policies in Latin America. Under the FDR administration, the political bullying and military occupations that were the current ways to maintain control and order over the countries abroad with American interests, U.S. diplomats

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<sup>152</sup> House of Representatives, Resolution, 62d Cong., 1st sess., H. Res. 23, April 4, 1911, 1. 710.11. 25 May 1911. World Scholar: Latin America & the Caribbean, <https://tinyurl.gale.com/tinyurl/EPKYnX>.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>154</sup> Department of State, Division of Latin-American Affairs, Memorandum, May 25, 1911, 3. 710.11. 25 May 1911. World Scholar: Latin America & the Caribbean, <https://tinyurl.gale.com/tinyurl/EPKYnX>.

<sup>155</sup> Department of State, Division of Latin-American Affairs, Memorandum, June 14, 1911, 1. 710.11. 25 May 1911. World Scholar: Latin America & the Caribbean, <https://tinyurl.gale.com/tinyurl/EPKYnX>.

sought collaboration “through pliant pro-U.S. dictators.”<sup>156</sup> For a few decades afterward, names like Rafael Leónidas Trujillo in the Dominican Republic, Fulgencio Batista in Cuba, the Somoza family in Nicaragua, Jorge Ubico Castañeda in Guatemala, Maximiliano Hernández Martínez in El Salvador, and Tiburcio Carías Andino in Honduras, represent decades “filled with horror and darkness” to their countries because their political skill to groom favor with the United States government.<sup>157</sup> These “dependable strongmen” were fundamental in stabilizing threatened economic markets in favor of U.S. companies with the support of the CIA.<sup>158</sup> Nonetheless, “as U.S. capital increasingly penetrated Latin America during the [20<sup>th</sup>] century ... Latin American labor headed north.”<sup>159</sup>

The migration pattern toward the United States from all over the continent, as it is still occurring well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is primarily the result of nearly 200 years of foreign policies and trade deals that “push immigrants out [of their countries] while the US hunger for cheap labor pulls them into the United States.”<sup>160</sup> Migration was not necessarily a preferred option for many people; however, facing overwhelming political and economic pressure, leaving their countries became the only opportunity to survive. Latin American migrants used the same paths built by U.S. corporations to extract the

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<sup>156</sup> González, *Harvest*, 76.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 76-77. U.S.-sponsored right-wing opponents attacked leftist regimes in Guatemala, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Chile, Peru, and Nicaragua during the second half of the century; Grenada and Panama received military invasions in the 1980s.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>160</sup> De la Torre, *Decolonizing Christianity*, 76.

products and natural resources from their countries of origin, as Miguel de la Torre testifies:

The reason I am an immigrant in this country ... is because I am following all that has been stolen from the land of my birth—my sugar, my tobacco, my rum ... The US created the immigration crisis yet refuses to recognize its culpability. We come escaping the poverty, violence, and terror the US historically unleashed upon us through gunboat diplomacy and regime changes in its effort to protect pax americana, the needed status quo for American businesses to flourish.<sup>161</sup>

Arriving in New York City from Cuba as a toddler, his parent’s decision was “not originally based on some desire for liberty or pursuit of economic opportunities;” their migration was a direct result of decades of impoverishment forced by foreign policies that deprived his country “of political and economic sovereignty.” As for themselves, many families opted to risk their born-right citizenship for a pejorative “illegal alien” identity on foreign soil.<sup>162</sup> “The reality is that most, like myself, would rather remain in their homeland, but instead are forced to leave for the insecurity of border crossing because the U.S. created political and economic uncertainty in their country due to a foreign policy designed to secure the avarice of multinational corporations.”<sup>163</sup>

Since the arrival of the European colonizers, the entire American Hemisphere became a new venture for exploiting riches and the “expansion of commercial capital.”<sup>164</sup> Every resource, from the soil and its products, to “the people and their capacity to work and to consume,” historically translated into foreign capital, as Eduardo Galeano’s

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<sup>161</sup> De la Torre, *Decolonizing Christianity*, 76.

<sup>162</sup> De la Torre, *Immigration Crisis*, conclusion.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Eduardo Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), 29.

metaphor exemplifies: “Latin America is the region of open veins.”<sup>165</sup> For more than 500 years, Latin America lacked the opportunity of producing justly for itself and its people but for the wealth of others, Europeans first, North Americans lately.

If Latin America had not been pillaged by U.S. capital since its independence, millions of desperate workers would not now be coming here in such numbers to reclaim a share of that wealth; and if the United States is the world’s richest nation, it is in part because of the sweat and blood of the copper workers of Chile, the tin miners of Bolivia, the fruit pickers of Guatemala and Honduras, the cane cutters of Cuba, the oil workers of Venezuela and Mexico, the pharmaceutical workers of Puerto Rico, the ranch hands of Costa Rica and Argentina, the West Indians who died building the Panama Canal, and the Panamanians who maintained it.<sup>166</sup>

The trend of exploitation of Latin American resources is still on the rise.<sup>167</sup> From 1900 to 2016, “Latin America was a net supplier of materials to the rest of the world,” greatly exceeding its exports than its imports.<sup>168</sup> As long as political and economic disparities and aggressions are encouraged as a *modus operandi* of capitalistic success in the region, and the flow of wealth continues to drift from south to north, the need to migrate will inevitably remain a constant for Latin American generations to come.

### **Conclusion**

In a land rich in human and natural resources, people are not poor but impoverished. Every human being is born with a God-given dignity. The geographic place nor the social condition of the entourage should determine each child’s capacities

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<sup>165</sup> Galeano, *Open Veins*, 2.

<sup>166</sup> González, *Harvest*, XXIII.

<sup>167</sup> For example, “in 1900, net exports were 4 million metric tons (Mt), and in 2016 they amounted to 610 Mt. ... Exports in 2015 and 2016 may even have surpassed those that took place over three centuries of colonialism.” Juan Infante-Amate, Alexander Urrego-Mesa, Pablo Piñero, and Enric Tello, “The open veins of Latin America: Long-term physical trade flows (1900–2016),” *Global Environmental Change* 76, (September 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2022.102579>.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

and future. When driven by selfishness and greediness, political, economic, and religious powers know no limits; people's welfare must be the starting point and the limit. Stealing the subsistence of the many cannot endorse the enrichment of the few. However, as history reveals, progress is measured on the prominence of political and economic victories, validated by annihilating the Other's land and life.

Bethlehem was Jesus' family home place, but circumstances beyond their control pushed them out of the country to where their ancestors remained enslaved for centuries. Although Jesus was a child, upon him were forced the consequences of colonization, "a victim of political circumstances beyond his comprehension or control."<sup>169</sup> Systems of power and oppression leave victims with few options: death or a slim possibility of survival by becoming migrants. "To ask why Jesus was in Egypt is to ask why Latinxs are in the United States."<sup>170</sup>

History may expose the atrocities against humanity, but it also reveals God's reality: "Having a perspective on history allows us to ask about the space in which God manifests himself and faith becomes a liberating reality."<sup>171</sup> Parallel to the needs of millions of Latin Americans escaping death due to centuries of imperialistic racism and colonization, God's liberating truth exists. Those in privileged positions must put faith into action, recognize their direct or indirect participation in oppressive systems, and articulate answers to the questions victims represent.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> De la Torre, *Immigration Crisis*, conclusion.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Francisco J. Concepción, *La Eclesiología de Monseñor Romero y el problema de la tortura*, 2nd ed. (Self-published, 2022), 138.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 139.

Historically, immigrants are considered inferior by those in positions of power and privilege. Anyone with brown, black, or not-white-enough skin, with broken English or no English, might be pejoratively identified as an *alien* or *illegal* regardless of being born in U.S. territory or naturalized. “Gaslighting the immigrants into believing they are the illegals ... is a better strategy than dealing with the historical illegalities of creating banana republics.”<sup>173</sup> Those who unjustly disenfranchise the Other make unfairness the key to success.

The U.S. immigration crisis of the 21st century is a collective responsibility for every citizen. A country and its people must confront their responsibility for the decisions and actions of previous generations and rise for a more just present and future. Christian leaders must educate and model God’s love and mission toward the poor and oppressed, attending to the cries of the marginalized and abused. However, as Jesus’ followers, it is ineludible because He was an immigrant too: “Responsibility toward aliens is so paramount that God incarnated God’s self as an alien.”<sup>174</sup> Providing systems of oppression operate anywhere, the need to migrate will be a reality for the poorest of the world.

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<sup>173</sup> De la Torre, *Decolonizing Christianity*, 76.

<sup>174</sup> De la Torre, *Immigration Crisis*, conclusion.

## Module 2

### Women: Strong and Vulnerable

*Porque amo,  
porque vivo y soy mujer, y no me animo  
a amordazar sin compasión a mi conciencia,  
porque río y cumplo y plancho entre nosotras  
los mínimos dobleces de mi caos,  
me declaro hoy a favor del gozo y de la gloria.<sup>175</sup>*

—Rosario Ferré, *Envío*

### Introduction

Historically, women are the most discriminated against gender, making them vulnerable to oppression, disrespect, and abuse. However, women have demonstrated strength and resilience, becoming the foundation of society. Our American context (Latin American and Anglo) severely embeds the patriarchal culture, colonialism, and religion inherited from Europe. This module aims to disarm the patriarchist views sustained by culture and religion that keep affecting the life of Latin American women, particularly those forming a life outside their countries of origin. The starting point for this practical and theological articulation must arise from the cries for justice voiced from the very lives of the *Latinas*, as *mujerista* theology and other feminist theology approaches propose.

### Biblical Text Commentary

*The Faith of a Canaanite Woman*  
Matthew 15.21-28 (New International Version)

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<sup>175</sup> Translation: “Because I love, because I live and I am a woman, and I do not dare to muzzle my conscience without compassion, because I laugh and fulfill and iron between us the minimum folds of my chaos, I declare myself today in favor of joy and glory.”

<sup>21</sup> *Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon.*

This verse starts an account of events out of Judean territory parallel to Mark's narrative (cf. Mk 7.24-ff.). Matthew established in 1.1 that Jesus is the seed of Abraham; therefore, Jesus and his disciples leaving the region of Galilee for non-Jewish territory is a fulfillment of the blessings that Gentiles would receive from the ministry of the Messiah.<sup>176</sup>

<sup>22</sup> *A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly."*

Mark's Gospel refers to this woman as Syrophenician. Still, Matthew's not-common first-century use of the gentilic *Canaanite* is deliberate for "conjuring up distasteful memories of the pagan Tyrians and Sidonians from OT times."<sup>177</sup> The verse denotes essential aspects of this woman: She is a Gentile that lives outside of the Judean territory but uses Jewish terminology related to the Messiah; is a mother; her daughter is sick because of demonic possession; she has faith in spiritual healing; both are suffering, the child as the direct affliction of the illness, the mother because of her inability to heal her daughter.

<sup>23</sup> *Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us."*

The disciples demonstrated the social differences between men and women, interpreting Jesus' silence as a dismissal of the woman's inquiry.

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<sup>176</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, "Matthew," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 54. "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." Gn 12.3 (NIV).

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."*

This verse, absent from Mark's story, makes us wonder if Matthew's intention is a reminder of Jesus' instruction to the disciples in 10.5-6.<sup>178</sup>

<sup>25</sup> *The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said.*

Once again, the woman's suffering and desperation for not being able to provide for her sick daughter broke social paradigms of how a woman behaves in public, not only following Jesus, shouting at him, and begging for help, but also throwing herself to the ground in front of a man. It is not an act of worship nor a controlled action of submission but a desperate means to get Jesus' attention.<sup>179</sup> "The woman simply tries to get a favor, regardless of the fact that as a woman she has no right to do so."<sup>180</sup>

<sup>26</sup> *He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."*

Jesus' response may seem harsh and repressible for lack of sensitivity toward the desperate mother's cry. "The Talmud associated non-Jews with dogs. These little animals were considered bad, impure, and undesirable (Psalm 22.16-20). ... Jesus cushions the insult by calling her *cachorrita*."<sup>181</sup> Jesus operates within his cultural paradigms because "after all, he was fully human."<sup>182</sup> His family, society, and religious teachings raised him

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<sup>178</sup> Brown, *An Introduction*, 188. "These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: 'Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.'" (NIV).

<sup>179</sup> Osvaldo D. Vena, *Evangelio de Marcos* (Miami: Sociedades Bíblicas Unidas, 2008), 157.

<sup>180</sup> Eliseo Pérez Álvarez, *Marcos* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2007), 70.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid. The Greek word here for *dogs* (κυνάριον) is generally translated as *little dog*.

<sup>182</sup> Vena, *Marcos*, 159.

in a culture emphasizing “the superiority of his people and the inferiority of others.”<sup>183</sup> His humanity and profound unity with God will make him retract a wrong answer to turn a situation of oppression into one of liberation.<sup>184</sup> Being scandalized by Jesus’ non-egalitarian response “may reflect a failure to accept Jesus as a 1st-century Jew.”<sup>185</sup>

*<sup>27</sup>“Yes it is, Lord,” she said. “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.”*

The woman’s answer is a direct rebuttal of Jesus’ ethnocentric statement. She challenged him to acknowledge that including the experiences of outsiders enrich any individual and their community.<sup>186</sup> She was imploring a miracle for her daughter but was not frightened to confront Jesus’ Jewish-patriarchist vision with her own. Although emotionally devastated, she showed herself as a brilliant, self-confident woman who understands her reality and does not evade life.<sup>187</sup>

*<sup>28</sup> Then Jesus said to her, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed at that moment.*

“Jesus could not do more and declared his defeat.”<sup>188</sup> The brief episode between the Canaanite woman and Jesus exposed social/politically constructed differences that concealed inequality. The woman’s insistence revealed a genuine faith that claimed a miracle for justice and opened a way for solidarity. Despite Jesus’ biased initial response,

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<sup>183</sup> De la Torre, *Decolonizing Christianity*, 77.

<sup>184</sup> Vena, *Marcos*, 160.

<sup>185</sup> Brown, *An Introduction*, 137.

<sup>186</sup> Agustina Luvis Núñez, *Creada a su imagen: una pastoral integral para la mujer* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), 15.

<sup>187</sup> Pérez Álvarez, *Marcos*, 71.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

his determination toward solidarity with the oppressed won: “Walking in solidarity helps our heart enter into another person’s world. ... The deeper our relationship with another gets, the easier it becomes to come to an awareness of the other’s needs.”<sup>189</sup>

### **Exposition**

The *crying out* of the Canaanite woman is a cry for justice. She was in pain because, in her body, she was carrying the unbearable sickness attributed to the spiritual realm of her daughter: a demonic possession. *Why is my daughter suffering from others’ sins? Why God permits this injustice?* These could be some questions wondering in this mother’s mind. Also, we must refrain from our theologically formed Christian understandings and ask ourselves: why this woman had to beg a foreign man (Jesus), representing the Jewish establishment of patriarchalism and disdain for anyone not Jew, to bring justice to her daughter?

Approaching a passage that involves women must bring the suspicion of bias from the historical narrative point of view as from its theological purpose. A critical feminist theology of liberation formulates that “gender is socially, politically, economically, and theologically constructed and that such a social construction serves to perpetuate the patriarchal exploitation and oppression of all women.”<sup>190</sup> Therefore, from the implicit context of the biblical narrative, mother and child were failed by their community, religion, and faith; they are struggling for liberation, for getting deserved justice and peace. Struggling for liberation, as Isasi-Díaz defines, “is the struggle to be

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<sup>189</sup> Douglas Avilesbernal, *Welcoming Community: Diversity That Works* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2016), 84.

<sup>190</sup> Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 6-7.

self-determining within the context of community and in view of the common good, and to have the material conditions needed to develop into the fullness of our capacity.”<sup>191</sup>

The Canaanite woman must have felt frustration and desperation from her daughter’s sickness and the system that limited their quality of life and freedom. This mother was fighting for their right to live with dignity and other women’s liberation: “Without liberation there is no justice and peace ... no one can be liberated at the expense of others or isolated from others.”<sup>192</sup>

*Mujerista* theology source for reflection is the lived experience of Latinas amid an oppressive and unjust system. Examining the nature of their oppression is vital in the struggle for justice: “Justice for us refers not only to what we receive but also to our active and effective participation in making justice a reality.”<sup>193</sup> The *materia prima* (raw material) for the *mujerista* theology comes from “the voices of grassroots Latinas” that find a platform for expressing their daily struggles interwoven with the “ongoing revelation of God” in their lives.<sup>194</sup> This theology roots its work amid Latinas’ cry for justice, but in its goal “to create spaces for justice to flourish” and its faithfulness to the Gospel’s preferential option for the poor and the oppressed, *mujeristas*’ theologians must stand in solidarity with every victim cry.<sup>195</sup> We cannot achieve justice by selecting certain

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<sup>191</sup> Ada M. Isasi-Díaz, *En la Lucha-In the Struggle: A Hispanic Women Liberation Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), xi.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>193</sup> Isasi-Díaz, “Un poquito de justicia,” 327.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 326-327.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*

cries; we must listen beyond our immediacy. Women's struggles for liberation are unequivocally tied to "the liberation of all Hispanics and all oppressed people."<sup>196</sup>

People, especially the poor and the oppressed, are forced to live amidst structures of injustices, proactively limiting and destroying their right to live to the top of their capacities and attempting to go against their well-being. Isasi-Díaz, although she recognizes that "there is no moral primacy among the causes or factors or elements of oppression,"<sup>197</sup> offers five modes of oppression derived from Latinas' experiences that provide an understanding of its dynamics and would assist us in developing strategies that favor justice in real-time:

1. *Exploitation*- The process that goes from work itself to how human labor transfers to benefit others: "what work is, who does what for whom, how work is compensated, and how and by whom the result of that work is appropriated."<sup>198</sup> Latinas, as well as women in other cultures, also suffer from gender exploitation when they are exclusively made responsible for the housekeeping and for providing economically for the family's basic needs, although having a husband or male partner present.<sup>199</sup> Even churches contribute to the exploitation when male leaders take credit for women's work and economic contributions to the church, not allowing them to fully participate in its administrative decisions.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Isasi-Díaz, "Un poquito de justicia," 326.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 328-332.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 328.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 328-329.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 329.

2. *Marginalization*- Becomes a radical and dangerous form of oppression because it involves the deprivation of people's inherent humanity and cultural conditions. Marginalized people's lack of worth and recognition to society may produce a limited interaction with the extended community, negatively affecting their identity. "Surplus people who not only are considered to be useless by others but come to understand themselves that way as well. ... All this leads to lack of self-respect, to a crisis of identity, to lack of self-worth, to *un hastío*—a disgusting boredom—that is totally destructive."<sup>201</sup>
3. *Powerlessness*- Manifests in oppressed people as a lack of authority or autonomy to implement what they believe to be good in their lives and communities; a lack of status and respect with "little or no opportunity to be self-defining, because power is exercised over the individual."<sup>202</sup> Trust and respect must constantly be earned.<sup>203</sup>
4. *Cultural imperialism*- The basis for ethnic prejudice and racism; the oppressed become stereotyped as the *other*.<sup>204</sup> Makes the ways and meanings of the dominant group the social and cultural norm, constructing aspects of the *others'* experience as "deviant and inferior," provoking assimilation in the latter that "become as invisible" to themselves "as they are to the dominant culture."<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Isasi-Díaz, "Un poquito de justicia," 329.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 330.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 330-331.

5. *Systemic violence*- It is embedded in living “with the fear of random, unprovoked attacks on their persons or property that have no motive but to damage, humiliate, or destroy them.”<sup>206</sup> More dangerous than particular acts of violence is “the fact that there is a societal context that makes such actions possible and acceptable.”<sup>207</sup>

Women’s struggle throughout the biblical testimony must be acknowledged and remembered while addressing the oppression systems in every context possible: “A feminist paradigm of critical interpretation is not based on a faithful adherence to biblical texts or obedient submission to biblical authority but on solidarity with women of the past and present whose life and struggles are touched by the role of the Bible in Western culture.”<sup>208</sup> In this statement, Schüssler Fiorenza breaks from traditional paradigms, not only as a Catholic faithful but from a conservationist and authoritative biblical perspective. Her feminist theological view becomes entirely liberationist as it departs from the traditional Bible-Word-of-God/dogmatic-tradition/faithful-obedient-human line of action, reversing it to a Bible-text/subdued-history/struggling-human dynamic “insofar as it maintains that revelation is ongoing and takes place ‘for the sake of our salvation.’”<sup>209</sup>

Structures of power, religion included, systematically sustain the *status quo* as a survival means: “Historically, religion has been used to encourage the poor and the oppressed to postpone hopes and expectations to ‘the next world.’”<sup>210</sup> Nevertheless, *next*

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<sup>206</sup> Isasi-Díaz, “Un poquito de justicia,” 331.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, 14-15.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>210</sup> Isasi-Díaz, *En la Lucha*, 34.

*world* salvation and liberation are an imminent necessity in the present for those whose reality is crushing their right to live to the top of their capacities and well-being.

*Mujerista* theology addresses the aspects of salvation and liberation as one simultaneous and active process.<sup>211</sup> *Salvation* becomes an intrinsic relationship of love with God and the neighbor; human responses to our understanding of divine actions that “affect our present and future reality.”<sup>212</sup> This commitment to concrete actions “to strive toward human fulfillment” is *liberation*:<sup>213</sup> “For the poor and oppressed women of the world, basic liberation from oppression would mean a chance to manage fulfillment of their own basic needs.”<sup>214</sup>

There are no limits or space for negotiation when acts of oppression and injustice are present in our reality or others’; solidarity must reign. When compassion and solidarity are a priority in life, newcomers find a space with enough provision.<sup>215</sup> Answering our initial question about why the Canaanite woman had to beg a foreign man to bring justice to her daughter, we must attest that: first, she recognized the oppressive structures that were limiting her daughter’s capacities and well-being; second, she decided to own the struggle for justice for her and her daughter; third, got actively involved in assessing a plan; fourth, realized that *next world* salvation starts in the

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<sup>211</sup> Isasi-Díaz, *En la Lucha*, 35. *Mujerista* theology uses the term *proyecto histórico* as a plan that proposes Latinas’ need to identify oppressive structures and denounce them, understanding their daily struggles to survive and their communal identity.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Ann-Cathrin Jarl, *In Justice: Women and Global Economics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 126.

<sup>215</sup> Luis Núñez, *Creada a su imagen*, 15.

present; and fifth, her love for her daughter translates to others. This woman was brave and determined; she confronted a foreign man with the conviction and faith that her cry for justice would be heard and acted upon for the liberation of her child. Facing Jesus with his argument made him overcome his bias and restituted a place where “no one should be excluded.”<sup>216</sup> Justice was served for her daughter and others: “She has achieved the setting of a new table to which all are invited, under which no one must grovel and beg for crumbs.”<sup>217</sup>

The Canaanite woman and her daughter, women of color, raised in a different culture and religion, excluded from human standards designed by and for men, relegated to society’s crumbs, taught Jesus a lesson of inclusion and faith in what is just for every person, regarding gender, social status, or ethnicity.

It was unimportant whether she belonged or had proper documentation. She was willing to cross the borders erected to separate her from Jesus because of her gender and ethnicity. Why? Because her daughter was sick and was entitled to be healed. She was more than the dog Jesus called her—and so too are Latinxs today!<sup>218</sup>

The United States’ southern border witnesses the struggle of an infinite number of Latin American women that reach this country begging for justice. Women with different backgrounds but a common goal: to find at least some kind of salvation and liberation for themselves and their families.

Women constitute a majority of the poor and are often the poorest of the poor. The societal disadvantage and inequality they face because they are women shapes their experience of poverty differently from that of men, increases their

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<sup>216</sup> Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist Ekklesiology of Liberation* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing, 1993), 296.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> De la Torre, *Decolonizing Christianity*, 78.

vulnerability, and makes it more challenging for them to climb out of poverty. In other words, poverty is a gendered experience.<sup>219</sup>

Despite “disproportionately high rates of sexual violence ... by actors such as smugglers (*coyotes*), gangs, cartels, and police,” a “growing numbers of Central American women” engage in a northbound journey.<sup>220</sup> After reaching U.S. territory, women still face structural disadvantages that could not prevent being abused physically and emotionally by their “partners or employers who use the threat of deportation to exert control over them.”<sup>221</sup> The adverse experiences of undocumented immigrant women in the United States surpass poverty and immigration-related issues (e.g., arrest, incarceration, deportation):

Immigrant women in the United States also experience trauma and depression, often the result of being separated from their children. One study found that Mexican mothers separated from all their children were nearly six times more likely to have depression than those with at least one child living with them. Loneliness, social isolation, and dependence on a partner can be exacerbated in communities that do not offer women the opportunity to develop social networks—a factor that is understood to be more important for the positive adjustment of immigrant women than for men. Limited job opportunities with low pay and long hours place further pressure on women, especially mothers, as they simultaneously care for those around them or send money to family in their country of origin. Still, reports indicate that Latina women are willing to remit a greater proportion of their salary and send money more consistently than men.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Department of State, Bureau of International Information Programs. *Global Women's Issues: Women in the World Today, extended version*. “Women and Poverty,” by Geeta Rao Gupta. (2012), 2-3. <https://opentextbc.ca/womenintheworld/>.

<sup>220</sup> Jeffrey Hallock, Ariel G. Ruiz Soto, and Michael Fix, *In Search of Safety, Growing Numbers of Women Flee Central America* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, May 30, 2018), <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/search-safety-growing-numbers-women-flee-central-america>.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

Violence and marginalization can be subtle, even when sickness and disability issues are ignored or minimized.<sup>223</sup> In many churches, women are marginalized just for being divorced/separated, unmarried, or single-mother, intensifying the rejection if they come from a life of prostitution or being victims of rape.<sup>224</sup> For those escaping violence and injustice, the Church must be the place to find hope, a place that, by living and understanding the message of the Gospel, constantly revises its patriarchal systems and those that influence culture, society, and the Church.<sup>225</sup>

In a patriarchal world, household and labor/professional roles are predetermined without considering individual skills, capacity, and academic preparation/experience, alienating women. Men are responsible for the family's income, expecting the woman to attend to the children and the household chores, even if she has an outside-the-house job.

Gender inequalities persist, and recent shocks, including planetary imbalances, the Covid-19 pandemic, and economic crises, are aggravating the current scenario for women all over the world. ... While women have seen some progress in basic capabilities, there are still challenges in areas that involve greater agency and power. In 59 countries adult women are more educated than adult men. In those same countries the income gender gap is 39 percent.<sup>226</sup>

When she was eight years old, Rigoberta Menchú and his family traveled for hours to work at a coffee plantation in Guatemala. For a month at a time, they were

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<sup>223</sup> “There are 300 million women with disabilities worldwide, and 80% live in poor countries. They are marginalized, made invisible, and their rights constantly violated, and this includes the Church.” Luis Núñez, *Creada a su imagen*, 32.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid. “Single mothers are much more likely to be poor than married couples. The poverty rate for single-mother families in 2020 was 23.4%, nearly five times more than the rate (4.7%) for married-couple families.” “Single Mother Statistics,” in *Single Mother Guide* (Updated, February 2, 2023), <https://singlemotherguide.com/single-mother-statistics/>. For more information, <https://singlemotherguide.com>.

<sup>225</sup> Luis Núñez, *Creada a su imagen*, 31-32.

<sup>226</sup> United Nations, *Human Development Report 2021/2022*, dir. Pedro Conceição (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2022), 205. [https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/global-report-document/hdr2021-22pdf\\_1.pdf](https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/global-report-document/hdr2021-22pdf_1.pdf).

abused and cheated by the landowners. Women and children confronted the worst consequences.

I saw my mother who, many times, at three in the morning, already had food for the workers who leave early to work and at eleven in the morning, also had the food [lunch]. At seven o'clock at night, she ran again to feed [the workers]. She also had to work all his free time, cutting coffee to earn an extra profit from what she earned. So, faced with this, I felt very useless and cowardly that I could not do anything for my mother, only take care of my little brother. And that's when my conscience was born, then.<sup>227</sup>

Even though women endure daily abuse and violence at home, work, society, and religion as the result of systems of domination, many have found the strength and sensibility as women of faith “to bet for an ethic of care, respect, responsibility, justice, reciprocity, and interconnection with all of the Creation.”<sup>228</sup> Years later, Rigoberta found this vision as a labor and social revolutionary for the indigenous woman in Guatemala. Women have to fight for justice, not alienated from men, but together as partners. The women organizing a group against the economic and sociopolitical systems of exploitation, backed by the government and, in many instances, condoned by the Church, found that many women prioritized others' issues before their own.<sup>229</sup> Despite this overwhelming reality, they decided not to advance an organization exclusively for women but to educate men and women equally to achieve justice.

Women also work and are exploited. ... They also cut coffee, cotton, ... many are with guns in hand [and] many elderly women are also fighting day and night. ... [Creating] an organization just for women would involve separating women's work from men's work. ... What good is it for us to educate women if the man is not present and does not contribute to learning and does not also learn? To create

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<sup>227</sup> Elizabeth Burgos, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*, 16<sup>th</sup> ed. (1985; repr., México: Siglo veintiuno editores, 2000), 55.

<sup>228</sup> Luis Núñez, *Creada a su imagen*, 44-45.

<sup>229</sup> Burgos, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú*, 246.

an organization for women is to give another weapon to the system oppressing us.<sup>230</sup>

For Isasi-Díaz, these women “conscious of their oppression and who struggle for their liberation, taking into consideration their communities,” are descriptive of the *oppressed* and *impoverished*.<sup>231</sup> These can understand their situation as oppressed people, take responsibility and face their experience with the understanding that their reality is the result of oppressive structures, “not due solely or mainly to personal shortcomings.”<sup>232</sup> Siding with the oppressed requires permitting them to become a conscious part of the fight. Therefore, “a commitment to the impoverished and oppressed is precisely a commitment to create spaces that will allow them the opportunity to become more conscious of the reasons for the injustices they suffer.”<sup>233</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Rigoberta’s revolution in Guatemala and the Canaanite woman’s cry for her daughter are still the fights for justice for many immigrant women in the United States. Both women understood the injustice, impoverishment, and marginalization coerced on them and those like them, constantly and impudently, by the established systems of oppression. Being born in the United States or immigrating later in life, Hispanic/Latino women must navigate through a patriarchal and biased system where, in many instances, men and Anglo women do not consider them equals. Here, brave women are forced to

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<sup>230</sup> Burgos, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú*, 246-247.

<sup>231</sup> Ada María Isasi-Díaz, “Mujerista Discourse: A Platform for Latinas’ Subjugated Knowledge,” in *Decolonizing Epistemologies: Latina/o Theology and Philosophy*, ed. by Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Eduardo Mendieta (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 47.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*

face health systems designed for the wealthy, a Department of Education that prioritizes resources in areas where white students are a predominant, opportunistic employer that offers starvation wages, a government predominantly in favor of powerful elites, and a silent Church that fails to offer those needed spaces for incubating acts of justice and restitution.

The understanding, acceptance, and conscientization of their unjust situations, women's rights movements are being developed in many countries with fundamental advances in many much-needed aspects like

better legal rights to participate in economic life, greater representation in politics, better support for paid and unpaid domestic care work, better protection from sexual harassment, better access to land tenure, financial inclusion, overcoming stigma and raising awareness around violence against women and girls.

Feminist mobilizations defy stereotypes, redefine boundaries and expand agency for women and girls. They can open pathways to enhanced wellbeing and agency for women occupying spaces in all spheres of life, using their voices to bring new perspectives, participate equally in society and hold governments and others in positions of power accountable.<sup>234</sup>

By providing voice and opportunities for creating spaces of self-definition and action, women can overcome oppressive paradigms and create a collective movement that brings back long-stolen justice and dignity to themselves and their community.

The rich story of every woman is worthy of a safe space to be shared and listened to, providing acceptance, solidarity, and grace to all. Contemporary contexts, inside and outside the churches, must listen to stories like those of Rigoberta and the Canaanite mother. When Jesus was confronted by the woman's claim for divine justice, though initially ignored, the long-occurring disdain and frustration produced a more potent and incisive cry. Her story transformed her daughter's future and those around her, including

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<sup>234</sup> United Nations, "Human Development Report," 204.

Jesus. “The pagan and foreign woman represents a claim of acceptance in that new community that Jesus came to create; An inclusive and supportive community where mercy is more important than religiosity.”<sup>235</sup>

Because injustice abounds, a liberation feminist ethic’s claim for justice must emerge from the mere experience of injustice.<sup>236</sup> Ann-Cathrin Jarl assesses, based on the experience with her grandmother, that “all women and children who live a life framed by injustices have a story to tell.”<sup>237</sup> How many lessons have we missed by ignoring others’ stories?

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<sup>235</sup> Luis Núñez, *Creada a su imagen*, 15.

<sup>236</sup> Jarl, *In Justice*, 126.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*

## Module 3

### Church's Deed: World Equalizer

And where cowardice resides, love cannot abide.

—Ekemini Uwan

#### Introduction

Human restitution efforts are beyond charity or hospitality; acts of restitution start by recognizing the impoverishment and abuses perpetrated and perpetuated against humanity by the established political, economic, and religious systems, creating embodied actions of transformation. As the active arm of God's justice amidst the contemporary issues that affect humanity, the Church must be involved in life-changing actions. Christians must participate in God's experience amidst the social turmoil and recognize our failure to witness God's intervention in favor of the poor and marginalized (e.g., slavery endorsement, white privilege, Christian nationalism). Participants should develop the urgency that the Church's actions must directly serve others while disturbing the peace of the oppressors and the systems that permit injustice.

#### Biblical Text Commentary

*Jesus and Zacchaeus*  
Luke 19.1-10 (NLT)

*<sup>1</sup> Jesus entered Jericho and made his way through the town. <sup>2</sup> There was a man there named Zacchaeus. He was the chief tax collector in the region, and he had become very rich.*

The city of Jericho was a well-traveled route where people in transit would be victims of an overcharged toll by local corrupted tax collectors who would not only “pocket the surplus” but also, if they suspected fraud, would confiscate the goods of the

passerby “with force and harassment.”<sup>238</sup> Tax collectors had a bad reputation because they were Jewish citizens and were allied with the Roman Empire to enforce an excessive burden of taxes on the colonized Israel. Usually, they collect more than required for personal gain.<sup>239</sup> The Roman Army silenced any protest against the tax system, which helped the tax collectors to enforce the pillage. Being a tax collectors’ chief, the people of Jericho despised Zacchaeus because of his ill-gotten wealth, and he was considered a sinner because of his richness.<sup>240</sup>

*<sup>3</sup> He tried to get a look at Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowd. <sup>4</sup> So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree beside the road, for Jesus was going to pass that way.*

Zacchaeus was determined to see Jesus, but his height limited him. Though he was rich and had a powerful position, he was just another person trying to have at least a sight of Jesus in the crowd. Climbing the tree demonstrated tenacity in his intention to have a glance at Jesus.<sup>241</sup>

*<sup>5</sup> When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. “Zacchaeus!” he said. “Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today.”*

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<sup>238</sup> Kwon and Thompson, *Reparations*, 137.

<sup>239</sup> “Tax collectors would offer to prepay the government the duties and tolls to be collected in a district for the coming year, and contracts were awarded to the highest bidders. While they were obligated to deliver no less than the agreed upon amount, the collectors were also afforded the liberty to collect a ‘surcharge’ from the people—whomever they could prey and pillage—in order to return a much larger profit.” Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Samuel Oyin Abogunrin, “Lucas,” in *Comentario Bíblico Internacional*, 3rd ed., ed. William R. Farmer, et al. (Navarra, España: Editorial Verbo Divino, 2003), 1291.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

Jesus surprised us with an act of “radical kindness.”<sup>242</sup> Jesus and his followers should have passed by the crowd to find a place where people could sit and listen to him or get healed, but instead, he stopped and looked at the man up at a tree, called him by name, and in a countercultural moment, invited himself to his house.

*<sup>6</sup> Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy. <sup>7</sup> But the people were displeased. “He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner,” they grumbled.*

“In the ancient world, the giving and receiving of hospitality was a sign of intimacy and solidarity, a whole-hearted exchange of friendship,” therefore, Jesus’ interaction with a despised figure, as Zacchaeus represented for the Jewish society, turned scandalous for the crowd.<sup>243</sup> Visiting Zacchaeus was not the only occasion that Jesus interacted with a tax collector; even one of his disciples was one, but the observers criticized Jesus in each instance. Jesus never began “his relationships with them in judgment.”<sup>244</sup>

*<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, “I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!”*

Zacchaeus’ declaration to pay back to the people defrauded by his tax collection alludes to various Old Testament restitution practices.<sup>245</sup> His resolve expresses a dual intention: “his willingness to restore the damage that he has caused but also of his inward

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<sup>242</sup> Kwon and Thompson, *Reparations*, 138.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> Avilesbernal, *Welcoming Community*, 126.

<sup>245</sup> David W. Pao and Eckhard J. Schnabel, “Luke,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 353. For example, Ex 22.1 (NLT): “The thief must pay back ... four sheep for each sheep stolen.”

transformation resulting from his encounter with Jesus.”<sup>246</sup> Jesus’ kindness in openly calling Zacchaeus by name and entering his home produced a “radical transformation” in the tax collector: “Surely it is the kindness and grace of Jesus that leads Zacchaeus to renounce his former way of life and pledge to redress his wrongs.”<sup>247</sup>

*<sup>9</sup> Jesus responded, “Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. <sup>10</sup> For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost.”*

“Is the spirit of sacrifice rather than the percentage the important issue?”<sup>248</sup> Verse 9 contrasted with 18.22-23 when Jesus asked a rich man to give away everything when inquired about what to do to attain salvation. Contrary to Zacchaeus, the man in chapter 18 was interested in salvation but avoided sacrificing his possessions. Jesus’ mission enforces God’s will to seek out the lost, to heal and restore “the people who have been mistreated by Israel’s leaders.”<sup>249</sup> Certainly, Zacchaeus mistreated many people, Jewish and Gentiles. However, he was included in Jesus’ mission for healing and restoring, and by acknowledging his wrongs, offered to repair at least some of the damage inflicted, especially to the poor: “Once a despised thief, now a beloved son, Zacchaeus promises to make restitution.”<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Pao and Schnabel, “Luke,” 354.

<sup>247</sup> Kwon and Thompson, *Reparations*, 139.

<sup>248</sup> Brown, *An Introduction*, 252.

<sup>249</sup> Pao and Schnabel, “Luke,” 354.

<sup>250</sup> Kwon and Thompson, *Reparations*, 139.

## Exposition

*Colonization* is an act of transformation. It is intentional and requires a process, one that is profoundly violent: “Colonization does not live in theory; its impact is tangible and generational.”<sup>251</sup> This process usually starts with a territorial invasion where the indigenous inhabitants are dispossessed and plundered “through rape, genocide, and other egregious acts of violence. Those who survive are oppressed, conscripted to second-class citizenship, and forced to labor on their own land.”<sup>252</sup> Beyond these violent acts, their “culture, language, customs, and personhood” become degraded.<sup>253</sup> Aimé Césaire defines *colonization* in terms of *what it is not*: “Neither evangelization, nor a philanthropic enterprise, nor a desire to push back the frontiers of ignorance, disease, and tyranny, nor a project undertaken for the greater glory of God, nor an attempt to extend the rule of law.”<sup>254</sup>

From Césaire’s definition, we can assess that in many instances, the Church itself has been and still is complicit, first from Europe and later from the United States, for the colonization enterprises in this hemisphere. The white supremacist ideology inherited from the European vision of colonialism becomes embedded in “Christian pedantry.”<sup>255</sup> The *Doctrine of Discovery* can exemplify this *pedantry*.

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<sup>251</sup> Uwan, “Decolonized Discipleship,” 57.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>254</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (1955; repr., New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 32.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 33. “Which laid down the dishonest equations *Christianity = civilization, paganism = savagery.*”

The Doctrine of Discovery emerged from three decrees (papal bulls) emitted by two popes during the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century: *Dum Diversas* (1452), *Romanus Pontifex* (1454), and *Inter Caetera* (1493).<sup>256</sup> The first two were issued in favor of the kingdom of Portugal, granting permission

to invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens and pagans whatsoever, and other enemies of Christ wheresoever placed, and the kingdoms, dukedoms, principalities, dominions, possessions, and all movable and immovable goods whatsoever held and possessed by them and to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery.<sup>257</sup>

And to secure the possession of territories, properties, and people “discovered” from the action covered by the first bull, Pope Nicholas V granted “the said King Alfonso [king of Portugal], or, by his authority, the aforesaid infante [prince Henry, his uncle], justly and lawfully has acquired and possessed, and doth possess, these islands, lands, harbors, and seas, and they do of right belong and pertain to the said King Alfonso and his successors.”<sup>258</sup>

The actions of invasion, dispossession, and degradation toward the established and sovereign people performed by Portugal in Africa, and later extended to other Christian European colonial powers in their colonization of the Western Hemisphere, were seen by the Pope and others as beneficial to the Church and the faith:<sup>259</sup> “A large number of these have been converted to the Catholic faith, and it is hoped, by the help of

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<sup>256</sup> “The Doctrine of Discovery is a set of legal principles that governed the European colonizing powers, particularly regarding the administration of indigenous land.” Charles and Rah, *Unsettling Truths*, 15. See also, <https://doctrineofdiscovery.org>.

<sup>257</sup> Indigenous Values Initiative, “Dum Diversas,” *Doctrine of Discovery Project* (23 July 2018), <https://doctrineofdiscovery.org/dum-diversas/>.

<sup>258</sup> Indigenous Values Initiative, “The Bull Romanus Pontifex,” *Doctrine of Discovery Project* (23 July 2018), <https://doctrineofdiscovery.org/the-bull-romanus-pontifex-nicholas-v/>.

<sup>259</sup> Charles and Rah, *Unsettling Truths*, 15.

divine mercy, that if such progress be continued with them, either those peoples will be converted to the faith or at least the souls of many of them will be gained for Christ.”<sup>260</sup>

To avoid conflicts with the kingdom of Portugal, Pope Alexander VI issued the papal bull *Inter Caetera*, addressing it to king Ferdinand and queen Isabella of Spain “as an ecclesial affirmation of the state-sanctioned expedition and work of conquest by Christopher Columbus.”<sup>261</sup>

We give, grant and assign in perpetuity to you and your heirs and successors, the kings of Castile and Leon, all the islands and mainlands found and to be found, discovered and to be discovered, in the west and south, with all of their dominions, cities, castles, towns and villages, and all rights, jurisdictions and domains, and make, appoint and regard you and said heirs and successors as their lords with full, free and all-encompassing power, authority and jurisdiction.<sup>262</sup>

These papal bulls set the legal and theological bases that justified the European nations’ imperialistic and colonizing endeavors for the following centuries. The Doctrine of Discovery affirmed “the privilege of the ‘pure’ European Christians to determine what is right and just.”<sup>263</sup> Besides the immediate effects on the populations of the invaded lands (i.e., death, destruction and pillaging of property, social, religious, and political annihilation), the survivors confronted the crime of losing their freedom: “The slave trade would become the fulfillment and material expression of the dysfunctional theology offered by the church.”<sup>264</sup> The inhabitants of Africa and the soon-to-be-called America

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<sup>260</sup> Indigenous Values Initiative, “The Bull Romanus Pontifex,” *Doctrine of Discovery Project* (23 July 2018), <https://doctrineofdiscovery.org/the-bull-romanus-pontifex-nicholas-v/>.

<sup>261</sup> Charles and Rah, *Unsettling Truths*, 19.

<sup>262</sup> Indigenous Values Initiative, “Inter Caetera,” trans. by Sebastian Modrow and Melissa Smith, *Doctrine of Discovery Project* (13 June 2022), <https://doctrineofdiscovery.org/inter-caetera/>.

<sup>263</sup> Charles and Rah, *Unsettling Truths*, 16.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

were theologically categorized as *pagan*; therefore, the Church hierarchy, standing from a spiritual authority as God's enforcers on Earth, deemed justifying the atrocities as an act of evangelization. The kings of the European Christian nations and their "explorers," like Columbus, in the eyes of the Church, operated as "agents of God, while the conquered and enslaved people would have no agency before God."<sup>265</sup>

When a group of people, be it a country, representatives of an ideology, or the Church, assume a position of supremacy, especially with an army at their disposal, they appropriate the privilege to impose their criteria and perpetuate their narrative. The dominant powers need a narrative to sustain their authority, so they resort to "a diseased social and theological imagination" that defines "the other as inferior."<sup>266</sup> Kwon and Thompson describe the complicity with a narrative on moral justification as "the church served as an accomplice ... by publicly authorizing the theft of truth, power, and wealth. ... appealing to a 'plain' and 'literal' reading of Scripture, ministers, laypersons, and seminary faculty members alike defended the institutions of slavery and the slave trade with numerous biblical texts."<sup>267</sup> Diminishing the value of Others' lives becomes a stealthy but potent weapon of the colonial enterprise, eagerly supported by Christian institutions, because "once minds are colonized, bodies can be controlled with little effort."<sup>268</sup>

The assumptions of white supremacy and Christian absolutism derived from the Doctrine of Discovery distilled hate, racism, and intolerance toward a stereotyped group

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<sup>265</sup> Charles and Rah, *Unsettling Truths*, 16.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>267</sup> Kwon and Thompson, *Reparations*, 123-124.

<sup>268</sup> De la Torre, *Decolonizing Christianity*, 202.

of infidels. This European construction of race and religion supremacy narrative “took root in the imagination of the Western mind,” becoming “embedded realities in the American Christian worldview.”<sup>269</sup>

For anyone trying to understand racism ... What could allow for the deaths of 66.5 million [American indigenous] people? Or for the deaths of an estimated 50 million Africans in the beginning centuries of the slave trade? The Spanish and the Portuguese, like the British after them, seemed driven by a psychosis of domination. It affected kings as well as soldiers, workers as well as priests.<sup>270</sup>

Theological, political, and economic interests can always find a way to inter collaborate effectively. There are infinite situations where those 15<sup>th</sup> Century supremacist concepts were present in every colonialist rationale and action in the centuries following Europe’s imperialism trait and are still present in our contemporary world. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Ulysses S. Grant exposed that the Southern states’ principal argument for seceding from the Union was protecting “the ‘divinity’ of human slavery.”<sup>271</sup> Concurrently, in the Spanish colonies, the clergy used the pulpit to indoctrinate and encourage submission and fidelity to the king and the colonial system; democratic rights and the concept of political and ideological freedom were presented as an “aberrant monstrosity.”<sup>272</sup> The 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries are no exception in sustaining supremacist rhetoric in religious discourse.

In the United States, mainly white-conservative-evangelical churches have been promoting through sermons and speeches a fundamental theological belief that America

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<sup>269</sup> Charles and Rah, *Unsettling Truths*, 23.

<sup>270</sup> Mab Segrest, *Memoir of a Race Traitor: Fighting Racism in the American South* (New York: New Press, 2019), 201.

<sup>271</sup> Grant, *Memoirs*, chap. XVI.

<sup>272</sup> Silva Gotay, *Catolicismo y política*, 150-151.

has fallen into sinful beliefs and ways of living not congruent with God’s original intention for the country. Political issues of atheism, socialism (i.e., establishing a “welfare state” and overrunning the individual freedom/self-governance), full and equal authority for women, and equal rights for LGBTQ persons, are perceived as threats to the God-intended *family values*.<sup>273</sup> This protective vision of the country’s national identity (a constructed historically dominant ethnic, cultural, and religious history) has been named *Christian nationalism*.<sup>274</sup>

In a large-scale comprehensive research study, the sociologists of religion Whitehead and Perry elaborated on a definition: “Christian nationalism is a cultural framework—a collection of myths, traditions, symbols, narratives, and value systems—that idealizes and advocates a fusion of Christianity with American civic life.”<sup>275</sup> It is vital to make a distinction about their call to “take America back to God” because, primarily, they are seeking “about mobilizing the faithful toward” retaining or gaining “power in the public sphere—whether political, social, or religious. ... Christian nationalism is, therefore, ultimately about privilege.”<sup>276</sup> Its *Christian* notion embeds America’s intrinsic and perpetual “self-identity, interpretations of its own history, sacred symbols, cherished values, and public policies.” At the same time, their *nationalism* concept includes “assumptions of nativism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and

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<sup>273</sup> Cooper-White, *The Psychology of Christian Nationalism*, 16.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>275</sup> Andrew L. Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry, *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States*, up. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), chap. 1, Kindle.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, conclusion.

heteronormativity, along with divine sanction for authoritarian control and militarism.”<sup>277</sup>

The previous research concluded that the Christian nationalism meaning of *Christianity*

seems to be one that paradoxically holds America as sacred in God’s sight while viewing its future as tenuous and bleak. It valorizes conquests in America’s name and bloodshed in its defense. It idealizes relations marked by clear (metaphorical or physical) boundaries and hierarchies both in the private and public realms. It baptizes authoritarian rule. It justifies the preservation of order with righteous violence, whether that be carried out by police against deserving (minority) criminals, by border agents against presumptively dangerous (minority) immigrants, or by citizen “good guys” with guns against rampaging “bad guys” with guns. And it glorifies the patriarchal, heterosexual family as not only God’s biblical standard, but the cornerstone of all thriving civilizations.<sup>278</sup>

Christian nationalism/white evangelical ideology appears to be the contemporary version of the Doctrine of Destiny. Embracing Christianity has been a cover for unscrupulous people “to mask all manner of death-dealing policies” (e.g., separating families at the border, locking children in cages, new Jim Crow-like practices and attitudes, pushing families to choose between medicine or financial stability), reclaiming to defend *family values* as hollow rhetoric “for unchristian commitments that glorify the whiteness ... but in fact it contributes nothing toward creating a more just social order.”<sup>279</sup> This version of Christianity “has failed to detect evil even though the faithful are staring directly into its eyes.”<sup>280</sup> *Love your neighbor* is implied by many as *love your neighbor if he/she looks and thinks like you*. The apostle Paul admonished regarding this destructive bias:

For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don’t use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love. For the whole law can be summed up in this one command:

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<sup>277</sup> Whitehead and Perry, *Taking America Back for God*, chap. 1.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid., conclusion.

<sup>279</sup> De la Torre, *Decolonizing Christianity*, 20.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., 21.

“Love your neighbor as yourself.” But if you are always biting and devouring one another, watch out! Beware of destroying one another.<sup>281</sup>

Who are the ones who must deal with the unjust systems that keep destroying the lives of so many human beings based on their place of origin, skin color, language, or religion? Who are the ones who should start a healing process of justice for others and themselves? One answer is decisive: not the victims. Although it may not be recognized by most, participating in systemic abuses toward those who are *not-like-me*, intentionally or inadvertently, bring suffering to all sides involved. Still, De la Torre states that pretending that the abused heals the abuser is offensive: “In the cohabitation of different races and ethnicities that comprise our nation-house, those who are privileged and cloaked in the supremacism of whiteness expect those who have been physically exploited for centuries to administer the necessary balm to soothe their abusers’ troubled souls.”<sup>282</sup> He adds, “salvation, liberation, and redemption for the oppressed and the oppressor are not mysterious hidden secrets eluding humanity, only to be found by the chosen few.”<sup>283</sup> These theological concepts are not reserved for the chosen few but are accessible to humankind; there be abused and abusers. Salvation, liberation, and redemption are embedded into the Church’s work in a seamless but distinct effort for individual and communal benefit.

God leads human history in noncomprehensive ways. God’s people expect that the Church understands and guides them toward the promised eternal salvation. Gustavo

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<sup>281</sup> Gal 5.13-15 (NLT).

<sup>282</sup> De la Torre, *Decolonizing Christianity*, 3.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

Gutiérrez asserts that the mission of the Church in the world has radically changed:<sup>284</sup> “It seems clear today that the purpose of the Church is not to save in the sense of ‘guaranteeing heaven.’ The work of salvation is a reality which occurs in history. This work gives to the historical becoming of humankind its profound unity and its deepest meaning.”<sup>285</sup>

*Salvation* involves every aspect of the human dimensions (i.e., social, political, economic, and cultural spheres) in an intrinsic relationship with God.<sup>286</sup> As Christ shares distinctive but not separated divine and human conditions, God’s salvation occurs beyond history, and simultaneously, human beings “must build fellowship” with one and the other.<sup>287</sup> Gutiérrez theologizes the possibility of integrating every person as an agent of salvation for others, not only Christians but anyone who embraces the collective transformation. “Persons are saved if they open themselves to God and to others, even if they are not clearly aware that they are doing so. . . . Salvation—the communion of human beings with God and among themselves—is something which embraces all human reality, transforms it, and leads it to its fullness in Christ.”<sup>288</sup> For the professed Christian, failing to recognize the cries of the nation’s poorest shows an inward rejection of the

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<sup>284</sup> “The [Catholic] Church historically had been a bulwark of Latin America’s oligarchies, but by the late 1960s it was assuming a new role. Sores of parish priests, nuns, and missionaries, responding to the social call of the Second Vatican Council, threw themselves into social action among the region’s poor.” González, *Harvest*, 134. After this council, the Latin American *Theology of Liberation* was born.

<sup>285</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 15<sup>th</sup> ed. (1971; rev. ed., New York: Orbis Books, 1988), 143.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, xl.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxix.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, 84-85.

Gospel: “The difference between the saved and the damned is what they did or failed to do for the least of these.”<sup>289</sup>

Gutiérrez presents *liberation* as a three leveled interdependent process that may occur parallel or successively; however, it departs and ends in the salvific work of Christ: First, “expresses the aspirations of oppressed peoples and social classes, emphasizing the conflictual aspect of the economic, social, and political process which puts them at odds with wealthy nations and oppressive classes;” second, the “humankind is seen as assuming conscious responsibility for its own destiny;” and finally, making humankind truly free, ... Christ “enables us to live in communion with him.”<sup>290</sup> Liberation integrates the individual, the collective, and the divine into a trinitarian process that deals with the human context before Jesus’ Gospel.

While with salvation and liberation, God and humans participate intensely, *redemption* is an exclusive act of God: “For redemption is purely a matter of God’s grace in Christ Jesus received by faith alone.”<sup>291</sup> God’s righteousness and fairness are available to every person “through [the] faith of/in Jesus Christ, justifying without distinction.”<sup>292</sup> Redemption restores the “alienation from God, from others, and from ourselves” broken by sin; it is “God’s free, unconditional, and unmerited” gift to humankind.<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> De la Torre, *Decolonizing Christianity*, 11. De la Torre refers here specifically to the white Christians’ political pronouncements, but his statement is universally sound.

<sup>290</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 24-25.

<sup>291</sup> John Bright, *The Kingdom of God: The Biblical Concept and Its Meaning for the Church*, 24<sup>th</sup> ed. (1953; repr., Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), 220.

<sup>292</sup> Brown, *An Introduction*, 566. (cf. Rom. 3.22-26).

<sup>293</sup> Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (1991; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), 236.

During the 1980s revolution in Guatemala, Rigoberta Menchú describes a split in the Guatemalan Catholic Church: the one of the rich and the poor Church that “joins us.”<sup>294</sup> She testifies that the Church’s hierarchy and many priests that prefer to stay out of trouble have no intent to get involved in the people’s fight for freedom and justice, “not even the massacres make them understand. ... They say we should forgive, but they don’t see that the regime doesn’t ask us to forgive for killing our brothers. ... The Church has always spoken of love and freedom and there is no freedom in Guatemala. ... At least for us.”<sup>295</sup>

In the eyes of the oppressed, Rigoberta assures that the Church will disappear. John Bright sustains the same idea from New Testament theology: “The New Testament was convinced that the Church must exhibit its faith in distinctively Christian conduct, or it will fail to be the Church.”<sup>296</sup> Paraphrasing from the Epistle of James’ theology, words of faith, good intentions, and pious prayers alone do no good: “Faith by itself isn’t enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.”<sup>297</sup> The Church’s deed is to be the world’s equalizer among the poor and dispossessed, the human movement that embraces the necessities and wanting of the Other, not for acquiring salvation, but because of it, “for works are the index of faith.”<sup>298</sup> “So you see, we are shown to be right with God by what we do, not by faith alone.”<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> Burgos, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú*, 259.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> Bright, *Kingdom of God*, 262.

<sup>297</sup> Jas 2.17 (NLT).

<sup>298</sup> Bright, *Kingdom of God*, 221.

<sup>299</sup> Jas 2.24 (NLT).

The Church, as the living paradigm of God’s Kingdom in the world, is tainted by its involvement with systems of hate. What is seen more openly in the United States are Christian religious actions that spread partisan demagoguery, racism, violence, and misinformation. Call it worship service, civic march, political rally, or U.S. Capitol’s January 6 attack;<sup>300</sup> everywhere God is invoked, the Cross is raised, and prayers are said in the Name of Jesus, Christians and non-Christians expect to experience God’s Kingdom values.<sup>301</sup> People’s actions in the Name of the Lord are how the Church will represent Jesus’ Gospel to the world. Therefore, non-Christians might perceive Christian-like acts and narratives as efforts of *bonafide* evangelism. Where a genuine evangelistic work envisions a holistic educational process that prioritizes and respects the local culture and values, and the dignity of every human being is protected, the Church is achieving its ministry. Colonialism and the Christian faith are incompatible. Evoking Aimé Césaire’s experience, the leading players of the colonial theater are “the adventures and the pirate, the wholesale grocer and the ship owner, the gold digger and the merchant, appetite and force.”<sup>302</sup> In contrast, the players for a counter-colonial force are those who reach out and embrace, repent and forgive, accompany and comfort, produce justice and live by love.

Committing to working toward justice for the poor and oppressed will require a deep and concrete understanding of the context and the part each person must embrace.

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<sup>300</sup> There were displayed Christian sacred symbols, religious language, and worship-like demonstrations before and during Jan. 6, 2021, by participants of the attack on the U.S. Capitol. For details and analysis, read Elizabeth Dias and Ruth Graham, “How White Evangelical Christians Fused With Trump Extremism,” New York Times, updated January 19, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/11/us/how-white-evangelical-christians-fused-with-trump-extremism.html>. Thomas B. Edsall, “The Capitol Insurrection Was as Christian Nationalist as It Gets,” New York Times, January 28, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/28/opinion/christian-nationalists-capitol-attack.html?searchResultPosition=3>.

<sup>301</sup> Kingdom’s values such as love, mercy, forgiveness, hope, justice, and peace.

<sup>302</sup> Césaire, *Discourse*, 33.

Christians could be inclined to fulfilling their duty as Jesus' followers and follow the biblical commandment of *hospitality*, particularly to the foreigner, drawn from OT and NT passages.<sup>303</sup> Miguel de la Torre argues that hospitality is not the best way for the United States "to approach our current immigration crisis" and fulfill the inherited responsibility toward Latin American immigrants.

To practice the virtue of hospitality assumes the "house" belongs to the one practicing this virtue who, out of the generosity of their heart, is sharing her or his resources with the Other who has no claim to the possession. But it was due to Latin American natural resources and cheap labor that the U.S. house was built in the first place. The virtue of hospitality masks the complexity caused by the consequences of empire building. Due to U.S. sponsored "banana republics" throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century, Latin Americans holds a lien on this U.S. house's title. Rather than speaking about the virtue of hospitality, it would historically be more accurate to speak about the responsibility of restitution.<sup>304</sup>

De la Torre's argument presents a different perspective on the prosperity of this nation as foreign income from an unjust system founded on opportunism, extortion, abuses, and disenfranchisement enriched banks, big corporations, and government arcs. The previous study modules exposed how much of the U.S. wealth derived from imperialistic and interventionist efforts, as well as economically driven political maneuvers, that drained much of the human and natural resources of the American Continent, particularly from the Caribbean and Central American countries. The rise of the United States as a World-leading power was financed, in a significant proportion, by the stolen resources of Latin America. The lands and the lives of the people of those countries paid for much of the United States' flaunting prosperity. Therefore, Latin American immigrants are not coming to steal; they own a substantial part of the nation's

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<sup>303</sup> Cf. Dt 10.17-19; Lv 19.33-34; Is 58.7; Rom 12.13; Heb 13.2; 1 Pt 4.9

<sup>304</sup> De la Torre, *Immigration Crisis*, conclusion.

abundance. When individuals, corporations, and U.S. governmental institutions contribute to the welfare of Latin American immigrants, they are not giving charity, nor are Christians fulfilling the virtue of hospitality to the Latin American immigrants. Actions that improve the lives of millions of immigrants living on *this* side of the border and those struggling to reach it become acts of restitution; it is giving back what was taken from them. “Maybe the ethical question we should be asking is not ‘why’ are they coming, but how do we begin to make reparations for all we have stolen to create the present economic empire we call the United States?”<sup>305</sup> Being a force equalizer committed to an active role in favor of the impoverished and rejected amid the immigration crisis experienced at the southern border, the Church has to identify its obligation to decolonize the mind of the oppressed and the oppressors.

### **Conclusion**

The Kingdom of God operates in an apparent contradiction because it is simultaneously reality and reasoning.<sup>306</sup> It is not mutually exclusive. As in the visit of Jesus to Zacchaeus’ house, this contradiction produced restitution toward the victims of an unjust and crooked taxation system and brought spiritual salvation to Zacchaeus and his family. In the case of the impoverished people and countries of Latin America, if the powerful uses its position and resources to control the poor, the Kingdom must favor the powerless.<sup>307</sup> Therefore, the Church must be a doer of justice by participating in the direct and inclusive response of the earthly Kingdom of God.

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<sup>305</sup> De la Torre, *Immigration Crisis*, conclusion.

<sup>306</sup> Concepción, *Monseñor Romero*, 116.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*

Suppose the Kingdom of God must contest colonizing power structures, and the Church is responsible for effectively confronting injustice that affects human lives. In that case, Christians must understand their role and assume their participation in the struggle for liberation and justice. Addressing Others' struggles sensitize the heart in solidarity, promotes and deepens relationships, and enables an awareness of their necessities.<sup>308</sup> Decolonizing the minds of the oppressed and the oppressor becomes an act of love that depends on collective involvement and compromise.

Procuring liberation from a colonized mind requires understanding the holistic reality of every subject involved, assessing each one's responsibility, and procuring repentance. The oppressed must recognize that its defining reality occurs through the lens of the oppressor.<sup>309</sup> The colonized mind is unaware of other possibilities beyond their known paradigms. Addressing the much-needed justice for the oppressed cannot block the necessity for permitting the oppressor to attain liberation from the prejudiced conditioning of their minds.

If philosophical and theological thought is particular cultural constructs, then those born into and/or raised within the United States are a product of a society where white supremacy and class privilege have historically been interwoven with how whites, for centuries, see and organize the world around them. How they see has been legitimized as universal.<sup>310</sup>

The Gospel impels the Church to embed acts of justice as its work towards salvation, liberation, and redemption of humanity and the planet. A society where justice is forefront can be achieved, and believers in Jesus can be the dynamo to succeed. With a

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<sup>308</sup> Avilesbernal, *Welcoming Community*, 84

<sup>309</sup> De la Torre, *Decolonizing Christianity*, 189.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

single act of restitution, Zacchaeus produced a chain of events that attained justice worldwide. Those events commenced in him, and his family extended immediately to those at the table. Zacchaeus' spiritual transformation went beyond the immediacy ones defrauded by him with concrete restitutive actions. Intentional acts of restitution will level out detrimental differences between the oppressed and oppressors. Will "this generation of Christians in America ... finally see and own and respond to the call of reparations as a singular call to the Church?"<sup>311</sup> Let rise to the occasion.

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<sup>311</sup> Kwon and Thompson, *Reparations*, 132.

## Appendix A

### Module 1 Workshop Activities

1. Watch the film *Harvest of Empire: The Untold Story of Latinos in America*. Consider the following statements:
  - a. Discuss the meaning and use of the words *alien* and *illegal* toward people.
  - b. Do you agree with the following statement? Support your answer:

*Military interventions of the U.S. in Latin America for defending and promoting economic and political interests outranked the fight for justice and freedom.*
  - c. *We didn't cross the border. The border crossed us.* How must Mexican descendants living in the U.S. feel when someone tells them to *go back to their country*?
  - d. What does the history of political and economic interventionism in Latin America say about American values?
  - e. Do American society's *family values* apply equally to Latin American families abroad and within U.S. borders? Explain the differences, if any.
2. Compare historical events described in the module with previously known accounts (e.g., school/college class, book/journal reading, Internet searching, personal/family account).
3. Reflect individually and share your insights about these guiding questions: Is your perspective about the historical events changed, or is it the same? Do you feel responsible for the U.S. immigration crisis? How do you perceive the Church's affirmation of the Gospel in the history of Latin America? How do the political and economic backgrounds presented in the module contribute to your understanding of the Latin American U.S. immigration crisis?
4. Reflect and elaborate on a list of issues related to immigrants/immigration in your context. Organize them in columns by categories, for example: Imperil the life/health of individuals; Disturb families' well-being; Affect learning/work; Human rights violations; Limit religious freedom. List each column in order of priority, starting with the most deemed urgent. Modify and add columns as needed.

5. From the previous list:
  - a. Discuss ways to implement restitution practices for each item. Classify each item by one of the following statements:
    - i. No money is needed to achieve it.
    - ii. Require some spending but can be subsidized by the organization's budget allocations, assets, or both (e.g., human resources, equipment, properties).
    - iii. Require spending outside the organization's budget, but a fundraiser would suffice.
    - iv. Require spending outside the organization's financial possibilities (e.g., governmental grants, private funding, joint ventures, loans).
  - b. Gather each answer into a collective form. Bring to consensus those that are within the scope/resources of your organization. Develop an action plan set for time-wise goals: short-term, medium-term, and long-term.
6. Does the information in this module make you feel uncomfortable in any way? Elaborate on your answer.
7. Pray for becoming an agent of justice through establishing acts of restitution toward Latin American immigrants in your community.

## Appendix B

### Module 2 Workshop Activities

1. Using the *five modes of oppression*, identify and discuss contemporary examples of oppressive behavior against women within the family, community, work, and church.
2. Read Ada María Isasi-Díaz fragment in Appendix D. Discuss her made-up background analysis of the Latina woman and her child. Then, craft a similar story from experience, or create a similar imaginary setting, and discuss a figurative background analysis.
3. Would you think Rigoberta Menchú's ideology to include men in the fight for women's justice works in your community context? Explain your answer.
4. Women, especially Latinas, are overwhelmingly affected negatively compared to Latino men. Would justice and balance be achieved by developing more assistance programs or creating more restitution initiatives toward women than men? Sustain your assessment.
5. Is the following statement a reality in your church's community?: "There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal 3.28 NLT). Are there explicit or implicit circumstances of racism, entitlement, and misogyny in your religious and social context? List them by categories.
6. Survey your organization's leadership positions (paid and volunteered) and list them by area and gender. How do they compare quantity, hierarchy, responsibilities, and salary (if it is a paid position)?
7. Reflect and elaborate on a list of issues related to women and children in your context. Organize them in columns by categories, for example: Imperil the life/health of individuals; Disturb families' well-being; Affect learning/work; Human rights violations; Limit religious freedom. List each column in order of priority, starting with the most deemed urgent. Modify and add columns as needed.
8. From the previous list:
  - a. Discuss ways to implement restitution practices for each item. Classify each item by one of the following statements:
    - i. No money is needed to achieve it.

- ii. Require some spending but can be subsidized by the organization's budget allocations, assets, or both (e.g., human resources, equipment, properties).
  - iii. Require spending outside the organization's budget, but a fundraiser would suffice.
  - iv. Require spending outside the organization's financial possibilities (e.g., governmental grants, private funding, joint ventures, loans).
- b. Gather each answer into a collective form. Bring to consensus those that are within the scope/resources of your organization. Develop an action plan set for time-wise goals: short-term, medium-term, and long-term.
9. Does the information in this module make you feel uncomfortable in any way? Elaborate on your answer.
10. Pray for becoming an agent of justice through establishing acts of restitution toward women and children in your community.

## Appendix C

### Module 3 Workshop Activities

1. White supremacists have used the passage of the Sons of Noah to justify Black dehumanization and enslaving human beings for centuries. Read Genesis 9.18-27. Write two short essays (300-500 words each) arguing for a biblical view against and favoring institutionalized slavery.
2. Survey the Hispanic community in your context and identify instances of tangible acts, or the lack of them, representing God's Kingdom values of love, mercy, forgiveness, hope, justice, and peace.
3. How the statement "Jesus *is* the hungry and thirsty, the naked and the undocumented, the infirm and incarcerated"<sup>1</sup> provokes a different theological approach for the *realengos* of your context. Refer to Chapter 1, *Una teología realenga* section, for supporting your answer.
4. Why do you believe attending to the necessities of the oppressed immigrants and their oppressor are necessary?
5. How do you visualize your church/organization as a force of justice through intentional acts of restitution toward Hispanic immigrants during the next year? How do you envision it in five years?
6. Does the information in this module make you feel uncomfortable in any way? Elaborate on your answer.
7. Pray for becoming an agent of salvation and liberation through establishing acts of restitution toward the Hispanic community in your context.

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<sup>1</sup> Miguel A. De la Torre, *Decolonizing Christianity: Becoming Badass Believers* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2021), 191.

## Appendix D

### *Fragment from Mujerista Discourse: A Platform for Latina's Subjugated Knowledge<sup>1</sup>*

I was at a bus stop last Sunday on my way to church, when I noticed a woman crossing the street. She seemed to be in her mid-fifties and had a little boy with her who was about six years old. The little boy was dressed in a pair of shorts and a T-shirt, a white one clean and pressed. He happily skipped across the street and came to sit on the bench next to me. He looked healthy and rested, for he did not have a sleepy face even though it was early. The woman, in contrast, was wearing a faded dress that was not ironed. She was very thin and looked distraught. She was munching on a donut and was drinking coffee from a paper cup that indicated she had bought her breakfast at a convenience store. The little boy sat next to me, and the woman sat next to him. After a few minutes the little boy, who in order not to bother me was crowded against the woman, said to her, "Mom, you stink." He repeated it a couple of times in a soft voice. Previously the woman had talked rather sharply to him telling him he needed to behave. Now she mumbled softly to him, "Yes, I know."

Their bus came before mine, and I was left to ponder on what I had just seen and heard. First of all I was surprised that the woman was the mother of the boy—he called her Mom—for she looked too old to have such a young child. I realized that most probably she was not in her mid-fifties but in her forties. She indeed looked older, her body wasted beyond her natural age. Then I thought about how smartly dressed the little boy was in contrast to how disheveled she looked. Most probably she had poured all her attention on the little boy and had little time, energy, or money left to get herself clean, to wash and iron her dress. She could have saved money by making coffee in her house instead of buying it at a convenience store. Well, that is, if she had a house and had paid for the gas or the electricity to run the stove, and owned a coffeemaker, and had the money to buy a can of coffee plus the filters needed to brew it, which all together would cost over \$5. She might not have had \$5; she might only have had \$2.00 to buy one cup of coffee and a donut.

I thought long and hard about all the decisions she had made by 9 am that Sunday morning. She had to think about breakfast. She had fed the little boy, for if not, I thought, he would have been asking her for some of her donut, and she had fed him at home or his face might have smudges of powdered sugar or the glaze that covers the donuts. Her breakfast came second, given the fact that she was quickly eating before boarding the bus. She, perhaps, had to start thinking about breakfast the night before. Perhaps she had to decide not to buy a can of coffee. She needed the money for the bus fare.

In contrast, I had made no decisions about breakfast: I have all I need to make coffee at home and I have oatmeal to cook, or bread to toast. I did not have to choose between having money for the bus fare and eating a good breakfast. I have a fare-card

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<sup>1</sup> Ada María Isasi-Díaz, "Mujerista Discourse: A Platform for Latina's Subjugated Knowledge," in *Decolonizing Epistemologies: Latina/o Theology and Philosophy*, ed. by Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Eduardo Mendieta (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 52-54.

that automatically gets recharged by debiting my bank card. I knew that if the bus did not come in time for me to make it to church before the service started, I could and would take a taxi. I had been preoccupied with other things than the routine of surviving since I had gotten out of bed. The decisions I had taken on that Sunday morning were so trivial that I do not remember a single one of them. It was different for this woman. This woman probably had made half a dozen decisions that impacted her values, her commitments, her responsibilities, and her obligations. How important the child was for her was obvious by the contrast between his appearance and hers. And the fact that he felt he could tell her that she was smelly meant that, though she had spoken roughly to him at first, he was not afraid of her. Her soft reply to the child, I thought, was one of embarrassment, embarrassment that I too might have noticed her condition. However, even if she paid no attention to me, how embarrassing for your own child to tell you that you stink!

From the perspective of liberation, socio-political-economic liberation, I also had many questions. I wondered if she is alone or has a family or community that helps her in her daily struggle to make ends meet I doubt she is paid a just wage that would make it possible for her to care for herself and her child. Maybe she does not even have a job, a reality today in the United States for almost 10 percent of the population. The terrible economic situation of the world today is a consequence of a neoliberal economics that does not take seriously the lives of the majority of people around the globe, people like this woman and this little boy. Neoliberal economics considers this woman and this child surplus people, and they are not taken into consideration by present-day systems. She is, if anything, blamed for her situation, for the myth that in the United States anyone who is willing to work hard can “make it” continues to influence the way in which many in this country look upon this woman. Her *cotidiano* is not factored into the “reality” of this society, of this nation; it is never taken into consideration by the economic mechanisms at work on Wall Street.<sup>2</sup> How she understands her life and how she deals with it every day are given no attention or importance by those of us whose work is to explain, in order to influence, the world in which we live, be it from a political, economic, social, philosophical, or religious perspective. Much less is the academic discourse willing to engage this woman and the millions like her in order to understand *lo cotidiano* of the majority of the human race. Why?

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<sup>2</sup> For Isasi-Díaz, *lo cotidiano* “refers to the immediate space—time and place—of daily life, the first horizon of our experiences, in which our experiences take place. ... the way in which we relate to that reality (culture) and how we understand and evaluate our relationships with reality (our memories of what we have lived, which we refer to as ‘history’). ... Is an ethical space ... for in it we can move with a certain autonomy, take decisions and put them into paly—decisions that might seem unimportant but which woven together constitute our ethical and moral horizon.” Isasi-Díaz, “Mujerista Discourse,” 48, 51.

## Appendix E

### Worship Service Order

#### Prelude

(Congregational singing in English and Spanish)

#### We Are One in Christ Jesus<sup>315</sup>

We are one in Christ Jesus, all one body,  
All one spirit, all together.  
We are one in Christ Jesus, all one body,  
All one spirit, all together.

We share one God, one mighty Lord,  
One abiding faith, one biding love,  
One single baptism, one Holy Comforter,  
The Holy Spirit, uniting all.

#### Somos uno en Cristo

Somos uno en Cristo, somos uno,  
Somos uno, uno sólo.  
Somos uno en Cristo, somos uno,  
Somos uno, uno sólo.

Un solo Dios, un solo Señor,  
Una sola fe, un solo amor,  
Un solo bautismo, un solo Espíritu  
Y ese es el Consolador.

#### Call to Worship

(Antiphonal)

#### Psalm 100 (New Living Translation/Nueva Traducción Viviente)

Shout with joy to the Lord, all the earth!  
Worship the Lord with gladness.  
¡Aclamen con alegría al Señor, habitantes de toda la tierra!  
Adoren al Señor con gozo.

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<sup>315</sup> “We Are One in Christ Jesus/Somos uno en Cristo,” trans. to English by Alicia Parker, in *Mil voces para celebrar: Himnario metodista* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1996), #273.

**Come before him, singing with joy.  
Acknowledge that the Lord is God!  
Vengan ante él cantando con alegría.  
¡Reconozcan que el Señor es Dios!**

He made us, and we are his.  
We are his people, the sheep of his pasture.  
Él nos hizo, y le pertenecemos;  
somos su pueblo, ovejas de su prado.

**Enter his gates with thanksgiving;  
go into his courts with praise.  
Entren por sus puertas con acción de gracias;  
vayan a sus atrios con alabanza.**

Give thanks to him and praise his name.  
For the Lord is good.  
Denle gracias y alaben su nombre.  
Pues el Señor es bueno.

*His unfailing love continues forever,  
and his faithfulness continues to each generation.  
Su amor inagotable permanece para siempre,  
y su fidelidad continúa de generación en generación.*

### **Prayer of Affirmation**

#### A Prayer for Migrants<sup>316</sup>

Good and gracious God,  
we pray for all people who are migrating  
particularly those who are forced from their homes  
or separated from their families  
because of threats of violence and persecution.  
We ask that you protect and keep them safe.

Although we come from different countries,  
and have our origins in different cultures,  
we were created by you, and are made in your image  
and therefore we all share an inalienable dignity  
that is deserving of respect.

Lord we ask that you give us the strength  
to defend those who are marginalized,

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<sup>316</sup> U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, “A Prayer for Migrants,” *Social Justice Resource Center*, accessed May 3, 2023, <https://socialjusticeresourcecenter.org/prayers/immigration/>.

to give aid to those in need,  
to come to the defense of those  
who are poor or vulnerable,  
and to welcome those who are on the move  
into our homes and into our hearts.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God,  
forever and ever. Amen.

### Oración por los migrantes

Dios bueno y clemente,  
oramos por todas las personas que emigran,  
especialmente, por aquellas que son  
forzadas a dejar sus hogares o  
amenazadas de violencia y persecución.  
Te pedimos que las protejas  
y las pongas a salvo.

Aunque vengamos de distintos países,  
y nuestro origen se encuentre en  
diferentes culturas,  
todos hemos sido creados por ti y hemos  
sido hechos a tu imagen y semejanza,  
por lo tanto, todos compartimos una  
dignidad inalienable que merece respeto.

Señor, te rogamos que nos des las fuerzas  
para defender a los marginados  
para ayudar a los necesitados,  
para salir en defensa de  
los más pobres y vulnerables,  
y para acoger a aquellos que llegaran a  
nuestros hogares y a nuestro corazón.

Por nuestro Señor Jesucristo, tu Hijo,  
que vive y reina contigo,  
en la unidad del Espíritu Santo, un Dios,  
por los siglos de los siglos. Amén.

**Praise song**

(Congregational singing in English and Spanish)

This Is the Day<sup>317</sup>

This is the day,  
 this is the day that the Lord has made,  
 that the Lord has made. I will rejoice,  
 I will rejoice and be glad in it, and be glad in it.

This is the day that the Lord has made.  
 I will rejoice and be glad in it.  
 This is the day,  
 this is the day that the Lord has made.

Este es el día

Este es el día,  
 Este es el día que hizo el Señor,  
 Que hizo el Señor. Día de alegría,  
 Día de alegría y de gozo, y de gozo.

Este es el día que hizo el Señor.  
 Día de alegría y de gozo.  
 Este es el día,  
 Este es el día que hizo el Señor.

**Pastoral Greetings****Call to Confession and Intercession**Psalm 19.12-14 (NLT)

How can I know all the sins lurking in my heart?  
 Cleanse me from these hidden faults.  
 Keep your servant from deliberate sins!  
 Don't let them control me.  
 Then I will be free of guilt  
 and innocent of great sin.  
 May the words of my mouth  
 and the meditation of my heart  
 be pleasing to you,  
 O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

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<sup>317</sup> Les Garret, "This Is the Day", in *African American Heritage Hymnal* (Chicago: Gia Publications, 2001), #108.

Salmo 19.12-14 (NTV)

¿Cómo puedo conocer todos los pecados escondidos en mi corazón?

Límpiame de estas faltas ocultas.

¡Libra a tu siervo de pecar intencionalmente!

No permitas que estos pecados me controlen.

Entonces estaré libre de culpa

y seré inocente de grandes pecados.

Que las palabras de mi boca

y la meditación de mi corazón

sean de tu agrado, oh Señor,

mi roca y mi redentor.

**Song of Confession**

(For soloist or group singing in Spanish)

Mi misión<sup>318</sup>

Mira el sol brillar,

En su luz el mundo gime.

Reverdece el flamboyán,

En su sombra se refugia el dolor.

No vemos al pobre que sufre,

Tampoco al niño que llora.

Reniega la madre en su angustia.

Olvidamos al Señor que perdona.

Cerramos nuestra alma a la humanidad.

Dios, ¿qué quieres que haga para libertar

Al pueblo oprimido, al ser limitado,

Al mundo que vive sin paz?

Dios, ¿qué quieres que haga para consolar

Al desposeído, al pueblo afligido,

Al pobre y al falta de pan?

Dios, ¿qué quieres que haga para transformar

A este mundo que se muere sin pensar?

My Mission

See the sunshine,

In its light the world groans.

The *flamboyán* blossoms,

Pain takes refuge in its shade.

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<sup>318</sup> Julio González-Paniagua, *Mi misión*, 2009. Non-singable English translation by the author.

We do not see the poor who suffer,  
 Nor the crying child.  
 The mother grumbles in her anguish.  
 We forget the Lord who forgives.  
 We close our soul to the humanity.

God, what do you want me to do to liberate  
 The oppressed people, the limited human being,  
 The world that lives without peace?  
 God, what do you want me to do to comfort  
 The dispossessed, the afflicted people,  
 The poor, and hungry?  
 God, what do you want me to do to transform  
 This world that is dying without thinking?

### **Prayer of Confession and Intercession**

Te damos gracias, Señor, porque siempre estás presente en el mundo. Aunque no reconozcamos todas tus bendiciones, contamos con la seguridad de que son constantes y se renuevan cada día. Porque frecuentemente ignoramos tu voluntad y la sustituimos por la nuestra, te pedimos perdón. Porque en numerosas ocasiones hemos ignorado tu llamado, te pedimos perdón. Porque nos ensimismamos en nuestros intereses y proyectos, rechazando el clamor de los marginados y empobrecidos del mundo, imploramos tu perdón. Límpianos de nuestros pecados de pensamiento, palabra, obra y omisión, los que conocemos y los ocultos, y ayúdanos para ser mejores seres humanos.

Reconocemos que otras personas necesitan de tu provisión, sanidad y consuelo tanto o más que yo. Por esto, entregamos nuestras cargas ante tu presencia para que seas propicio a tu pueblo. Confiamos en tu siempre oportuna intervención. En el Nombre de Jesús. Amén.

Lord, we are grateful because you are always present in the world. Although we do not recognize all your blessings, we are sure they are constant and renewed daily. Because we frequently ignore your will and substitute it for ours, we ask your forgiveness. Because we have often dismissed your call, we ask your forgiveness. Because we lose ourselves in our interests and projects, rejecting the cries of the marginalized and impoverished of the world, we implore your forgiveness. Cleanse us of our sins of thought, word, deed, and omission, the ones we know and the hidden ones, and help us to be better human beings.

We recognize that others need your provision, healing, and consolation just as much or more than I do. For this reason, we deliver our burdens before your presence so that you are conducive to your people. We trust in your always timely intervention. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

## Scripture Reading

### Deuteronomy 10.12-20 (NLT)

And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you? He requires only that you fear the LORD your God, and live in a way that pleases him, and love him and serve him with all your heart and soul. And you must always obey the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good.

Look, the highest heavens and the earth and everything in it all belong to the LORD your God. Yet the LORD chose your ancestors as the objects of his love. And he chose you, their descendants, above all other nations, as is evident today. Therefore, change your hearts and stop being stubborn.

For the LORD your God is the God of gods and Lord of lords. He is the great God, the mighty and awesome God, who shows no partiality and cannot be bribed. He ensures that orphans and widows receive justice. He shows love to the foreigners living among you and gives them food and clothing. So you, too, must show love to foreigners, for you yourselves were once foreigners in the land of Egypt. You must fear the Lord your God and worship him and cling to him. Your oaths must be in his name alone.

### Deuteronomio 10.12-20 (NTV)

Y ahora, Israel, ¿qué requiere el SEÑOR tu Dios de ti? Solo requiere que temas al SEÑOR tu Dios, que vivas de la manera que le agrada y que lo ames y lo sirvas con todo tu corazón y con toda tu alma. Debes obedecer siempre los mandatos y los decretos del SEÑOR que te entrego hoy para tu propio bien.

Mira, los cielos más altos, y la tierra y todo lo que hay en ella pertenecen al SEÑOR tu Dios. Sin embargo, el SEÑOR eligió a tus antepasados para darles su amor. Y a ti, que eres su descendencia, te eligió de entre todas las naciones, como se ve hoy. Así que cambia la actitud de tu corazón y deja de ser terco.

Pues el SEÑOR tu Dios es Dios de dioses y Señor de señores. Él es el gran Dios, poderoso e imponente, que no muestra parcialidad y no acepta sobornos. Se asegura que los huérfanos y las viudas reciban justicia. Les demuestra amor a los extranjeros que viven en medio de ti y les da ropa y alimentos. Así que tú también tienes que demostrar amor a los extranjeros porque tú mismo una vez fuiste extranjero en la tierra de Egipto. Tienes que temer al SEÑOR tu Dios, adorarlo y aferrarte a él. Cuando hagas juramentos, que sean solo en su nombre.

## Prayer for Illumination

Lord, open our hearts and minds  
by the power of your Holy Spirit,  
that as the Scriptures are read  
and your Word is proclaimed,

we may hear with joy  
what you say to us today. Amen.<sup>319</sup>

## Sermon

### Foreigners

Are we not somehow foreigners? Foreigners, historically and contemporaneously, inhabit our hemisphere. Perhaps we were born in the United States or any American country, but one of our ancestors was likely called a foreigner at some point. In the American Continent, only those of pure indigenous heritage have not been foreigners. Still, only some have not mixed at some point in the past 500 years. And this is the irony that should make us uncomfortable.

Around the world, overcoming extraordinary challenges for their own lives, “foreigners” continue to arrive in other lands. Human beings have always needed to emigrate. The people of Israel began with a call from God to a man and his family to emigrate. Then Jacob’s family migrated to Egypt because of the famine, where they remained for centuries and were turned into slaves, when in search of their freedom, they emigrated again. Examples abound in the Bible, so God always reminded them of the importance of caring for the stranger with justice as one’s own: “He ensures that orphans and widows receive justice. He shows love to the foreigners living among you and gives them food and clothing. So you, too, must show love to foreigners, for you yourselves were once foreigners in the land of Egypt.” (10.18-19 NLT). We are still in a moment in history where believers can be the difference in the lives of others “foreigners.”

The United States knows what it is to be a foreigner because, although it was more times than less by force, with blood and outrage, this nation was defined by such. The most significant entry point to this country for more than 60 years (1892-1954) was through Ellis Island, a small island off the Hudson River, a short distance from the island of Manhattan. During those years, more than 12 million immigrants passed through those gates after fleeing their countries because of hunger, wars, diseases, lack of equity, and religious and political persecution, among many everlasting factors. People were carrying trunks full of what little remained of their history and abundant hope. They arrived and stayed: Italians, Poles, Russians, Greeks, Chinese, and Indians followed the immigrations of Germans, Dutch, and British, to mention the most outstanding, to nail their future to the rock that inspired a new opportunity for freedom. The Statue of Liberty, standing a short distance from Ellis Island, welcomed the hope, the freedom longed for by every human being. It seems that many people in this nation have forgotten this claim. It does not seem like the same country that sings in its national anthem *The land of the free and the home of the brave*, which recites *One nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all* in its

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<sup>319</sup> “Prayer for Illumination,” *Presbyterian Mission, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*, accessed May 3, 2023, <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/worship/service-lords-day/service-lords-day-illumination/>.

oath of allegiance, once fired tear gas at human beings across the border into Mexican territory, regardless of whether they were children or women present. This attack happened a few years ago by agents of the U.S. Border Patrol.<sup>320</sup> It went beyond breaking international laws but against God's law of love to foreigners, too. It was not an act of the brave in the land of the free. Moreover, it reflected a nation above God, divided, with privilege and justice for some.

Who are the free and courageous to whom this land is dedicated? Under which God are we standing? Where did the union, freedom, and justice go? People in this country mercilessly attack a football player who kneels during the anthem like they attack people across the border. What are we afraid of? Just because they are foreigners? Foreigners like those have created this country and keep sustaining it. It seems that the god of some in the United States is not the same God who was fair to orphans and widows, the God who showed abundant love by providing clothing and food to the refugees of Moses' day. It cannot be the same God or the same grateful people. This is the irony that should keep irritating us.

People fleeing their countries today are suffering the millennial scourge of evil. They no longer arrive on boats at Ellis Island; now they walk away, carrying the sin of others to the Mexican border. They are no longer battered Europeans but impoverished Latin Americans. If Jesus' family were alive today, they would be foreigners on that side of the border. Jesus would have been gassed too.

### **Hymn of Response and Invitation to Offering**

(Congregational singing in English, Spanish, or bilingual)

Here I Am, Lord<sup>321</sup>

I, the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard my people cry.  
 All who dwell in dark and sin my hand will save.  
 I who made the stars of night, I will make their darkness bright.  
 Who will bear my light to them? Whom shall I send?

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<sup>320</sup> For details, refer to these articles: Megan Specia and Rick Gladstone, "Border Agents Shot Tear Gas Into Mexico. Was It Legal?," *New York Times*, Nov. 28, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/28/world/americas/tear-gas-border.html>; "U.S. fires tear gas across Mexican border to thwart migrants, including children," *CBS News*, last modified January 2, 2019, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/migrant-caravan-us-fires-tear-gas-across-mexican-border-to-thwart-migrants-children/>; "US fires tear gas at migrants at Mexico border crossing," *BBC*, January 2, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-46739126>; Associated Press, "US fires tear gas across Mexico border to stop migrants," January 2, 2019, <https://apnews.com/article/immigration-caribbean-ap-top-news-az-state-wire-ca-state-wire-3f2a5aba2a8844dcb05816a24402739e>.

<sup>321</sup> Daniel Schutte, "Here I Am, Lord", in *African American Heritage Hymnal* (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2001), #567.

*Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?  
I have heard You calling in the night.  
I will go, Lord, if You lead me.  
I will hold Your people in my heart.*

I, the Lord of snow and rain, I have borne my people's pain.  
I have wept for love of them. They turn away.  
I will break their hearts of stone, give them hearts for love alone.  
I will speak my word to them. Whom shall I send?

*Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?  
I have heard You calling in the night.  
I will go, Lord, if You lead me.  
I will hold Your people in my heart.*

I, the Lord of wind and flame, I will tend the poor and lame.  
I will set a feast for them. My hand will save.  
Finest bread I will provide till their hearts be satisfied.  
I will give my life to them. Whom shall I send?

*Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?  
I have heard You calling in the night.  
I will go, Lord, if You lead me.  
I will hold Your people in my heart.*

Heme aquí<sup>322</sup>

Yo, el Dios del cielo y mar, oigo a mi pueblo clamar.  
Del pecado y del mal, les salvaré.  
Yo, Creador de luna y sol, Dios de vida y resplandor.  
¿Quién mi antorcha llevará? Oh, ¿quién irá?

*Heme aquí, Dios. ¿Tú me llamas?  
En la noche escuché tu voz.  
Con tu guía y tu apoyo,  
Sostendré a tu pueblo con amor.*

Yo, Creador de lluvia y flor, por mi pueblo en su aflicción  
He llorado su amargor. Lejos están.  
La dureza de su ser, en amor convertiré.  
Mi Palabra lo hará. Oh, ¿quién irá?

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<sup>322</sup> Daniel Schutte, "Heme aquí", English trans. Yolanda Pupo-Ortiz, in *Mil voces para celebrar: Himnario metodista* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1996), #289.

*Heme aquí, Dios. ¿Tú me llamas?  
En la noche escuché tu voz.  
Con tu guía y tu apoyo,  
Sostendré a tu pueblo con amor.*

Dios del aire y del calor, tiernamente acogeré  
Al lisiado y al pobre. Les sanaré.  
Pan y agua les daré y su hambre saciaré.  
Vida en mí encontrarán. Oh, ¿quién irá?

*Heme aquí, Dios. ¿Tú me llamas?  
En la noche escuché tu voz.  
Con tu guía y tu apoyo,  
Sostendré a tu pueblo con amor.*

## **Benediction**

### **Postlude**

(For soloist or group singing in Spanish)

¡Libertad!<sup>323</sup>

Dios, potente Creador, la máxima expresión  
De amor, justicia y perdón.  
Yo, imagen del Señor, instrumento de bendición;  
Escucho tu voz y me pides que proclame:

*¡Libertad a toda la humanidad!  
A todo el que sufre: paz,  
Esperanza, perdón  
Y amor al que está herido.  
¡Libertad a toda la humanidad!  
A todo el que sufre: paz,  
Esperanza, perdón  
Y amor al que está herido. ¡Libertad!*

Dios, nos diste a Jesús, llenaste con tu luz  
De amor cada corazón.  
Yo, guiado por la cruz, colmado de virtud  
Anuncio el perdón y a todo el que está preso:

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<sup>323</sup> Julio González-Paniagua, *Libertad*, 2019. Non-singable English translation by the author.

Freedom!

God, powerful Creator, the ultimate expression  
Of love, joy, and forgiveness.  
I, the image of the Lord, an instrument of blessing;  
I hear your voice, and you ask me to proclaim:

*Freedom to all humanity!  
To everyone who suffers: peace,  
Hope, forgiveness,  
And love to the one who is hurt.  
Freedom to all humanity!  
To everyone who suffers peace,  
Hope, forgiveness,  
And love to the one who is hurt. Freedom!*

God, you gave us Jesus; you filled each heart  
with your light of love.  
I, guided by the cross, full of virtue,  
I announce forgiveness and to everyone who is imprisoned:

# Somos uno en Cristo/ We Are One in Christ Jesus

English translation  
by Alice Parker

$\text{♩} = 78$

So - mos u - no en Cris - to, so - mos u - no, — so - mos u - no, — u - no  
We are one in Christ Je - sus, all one bo - dy, — all one spi - rit, — all to -

só - lo. — So - mos u - no en Cris - to, so - mos u - no, — so - mos u - no, — u - no  
geth - er. — We are one in Christ Je - sus, all one bo - dy, — all one spi - rit, — all to -

só - lo. — Un so - lo Dios, — un so - lo Se - ñor, — u - na so - la  
ghet - er. — We share one God, — one might - y Lord, — one a - bi - ing

fe, — un so - lo a mor, — un so - lo bau - tis - mo, — un so - lo Es -  
faith, — one bind - ing love, — one sin - gle bap - ti - sm, — one Ho - ly

pí - ri - tu — y e - se es el — Con - so - la - dor.  
Com - for - ter, — the Ho - ly Spi - rit, — u - nit - ting all.

# This Is the Day/ Este es el día

Les Garrett

Text: Psalm 118.24

♩ = 100

This is \_\_\_ the day, This is \_\_\_ the day that the Lord has made, that the

Lord has made. I will \_\_\_ re-joice, I will \_\_\_ re-joice and be glad in it, \_\_\_ and be

glad in it. \_\_\_ This is \_\_\_ the day that the Lord has \_\_\_ made. I will re-joice and be

glad in \_\_\_ it. \_\_\_ This is \_\_\_ the day, this is \_\_\_ the day that the Lord has

made. Es-te es el dí-a, es-te es el dí-a que hi-zo el Se-ñor, que hi-

zo el Se-ñor. Dí-a de a-le-grí-a, dí-a de a-le-grí-a y de go-zo, \_\_\_ y de

go-zo. \_\_\_ Es-te es el dí-a que hi-zo el Se-ñor. Dí-a de a-le-grí-a y de

go-zo. \_\_\_ Es-te es el dí-a, es-te es el dí-a que hi-zo el Se-ñor.

# Mi misión

Ballad ♩ = 60

Julio González-Paniagua

C9 G sus4 G D m7 G7

Mi-ra el sol bri-llar, en su luz el mun - do gi - me. Re-ver-

C9 G sus4 G D m7 G7 E7/G# A m7 A m7/G

de-ce el flam - bo-yán, en su som-bra se re-fu - gia el do - lor. No

F9 G/F E m7 A m7

ve-mos al po - bre que su - fre, tam - po-co al ni - ño que llo - ra. Re-

F9 G/F E m7 A m7

nie-ga la ma - dre en an-gus - tia. Ol-vi - da-mos al Se-ñor que per-do - na. Ce-

F9 D m7 G sus4 G7 C9 A m7

rra-mos nues-tra al-ma a la huma - ni-dad. Dios, ¿qué quie-res que ha - ga  
Dios, ¿qué quie-res que ha - ga

D m7 E m7 G7 F C/E D m7 A m7

pa - ra li - ber-tar al pue-blo o-pri-mi - do, al ser li - mi - ta - do, al  
pa - ra con - so-lar al des-po - se - í - do, al pue - blo a-fli - gi - do, al

F D m7 G7 C9 A m7 E7/G# E7(b9) F Maj7

mun-do que vi-ve sin paz? Dios, ¿qué quie-res que ha - ga para trans - for-mar a este  
po - bre y al fal-to de pan?

D m7 G7 sus4 G7 C9

mun - do que se mue - re sin pen - sar?

# Here I Am, Lord/ Heme aquí

Daniel Schutte

Spanish Trans.: Yolanda Pupo-Ortiz

Pop Ballad ♩ = 86

G Em Am D Em  $\frac{G}{D}$   $\frac{G}{C}$  Bm Em D

I, the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard my peo-ple cry.  
Yo, el Dios del cie-lo y mar, oi-go a mi pue-blo cla-mar.

G Em Am7 C  $\frac{G}{B}$  Am  $\frac{Am}{G}$   $\frac{D}{F\#}$   $\frac{D}{E}$  D7

All who dwell in dark and sin, my hand will save.  
Del pe-ca-do y del mal, les sal-va-ré.

G Em Am D Em  $\frac{G}{D}$   $\frac{G}{C}$  Bm Em D

I who made the stars of night, I will make their dark-ness bright.  
Yo, Crea-dor de lu-na y sol, Dios de vi-da y res-plan-dor.

G Em Am7 C  $\frac{G}{B}$  Am  $\frac{G}{B}$   $\frac{Am7}{C}$  D<sup>sus</sup> D D7

Refrain Who will bear my light to them? Whom shall I send? Here I  
¿Quién mi an-tor-cha lle-va-rá? Oh, ¿quién i-rá? He-me a-

G Em D G  $\frac{G}{F\#}$  Em

am, Lord. Is it I, Lord? I have heard You  
quí, Dios. ¿Tú me lla-mas? En la no-che

Am  $\frac{G}{B}$   $\frac{Am7}{C}$  D D7 G  $\frac{G}{B}$   $\frac{D7}{A}$  G

call-ing in the night. I will go, Lord, if You lead me.  
es-cu-ché tu voz. Con tu gui-a y tu a-po-yo,

D G G7 Am7  $\frac{C}{D}$  D7 G

I will hold Your peo-ple in my heart.  
sos-ten-dré a tu pue-blo con a-mor.

# ¡Libertad!

Julio González-Paniagua

**Funk Rock** ♩ = 136

2x only  
tad! \_\_\_\_\_

G F/G G F/G G F/G

Dios, po - ten - te Cre - a - dor,  
Dios, nos dis - te a Je - sús,

G Dm7 G7 C G/B Am7

la má - xi - ma ex - pre - sión de a - mor, jus - ti - cia y per - dón.  
lle - nas - te con tu luz de a - mor ca - da co - ra - zón.

Dsus D7 G F/G G

Yo, i - ma - gen del Se - ñor, ins - tru -  
Yo, guía - do por la cruz, col -

Dm7 G7 C G/B Am7 Bm7 C

men - to de ben - di - ción, es - cu - cho tu voz y me pi - des que pro - cla -  
ma - do de vir - tud a nun - cio el per - dón y a to - do el que es - tá pre -

Dsus D7 G D/F# Em7

- me: ¡Li - ber - tad a to - da la hu - ma - ni - dad! A  
- so: \_\_\_\_\_

Dm7 C#7 C G/B Am7 Bm7 C

to - do el que su - fre: paz, es - pe - ran - za, per - dón y a - mor al que es - tá he - ri -

Dsus D7 **Da Capo** Am7 Bm7 C Dsus D7

- do. ¡Li - ber - tad! Y a - mor al que es - tá he - ri - do. ¡Li - ber - tad! Y a -

Am7 Bm7 C Dsus D7 F A<sup>b</sup> G

mor al que es - tá he - ri - do. ¡Li - ber - tad!

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