

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES LEAD TO SUSTAINABLE SOCIAL JUSTICE:
AN IMMIGRANT EXPRESSION

A dissertation submitted to the
Theological School
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Ministry

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Madison, New Jersey
May 10, 2024

ABSTRACT

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES LEAD TO SUSTAINABLE SOCIAL JUSTICE:

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Throughout history, humanity has faced turmoil when chasing the promised land of a satisfactory life. Although that search seems elusive, humanity has nonetheless dreamed about a better realm in order to enjoy justice and peace (*shalom*), an expectation for something better in this life. In a real sense, we are all pilgrims, immigrants who seek to restore broken dreams, whether physical or spiritual, for a new and better life. As Christians, we must emulate Jesus' pilgrimage model to prioritize the spiritual realm over the secular one. In contrast, we still attempt to respond to our physical needs and those of others.

This project seeks to emulate Jesus' wide-ranging lifestyle to pursue a comprehensive Theology for Immigration and craft a scriptural response to the needs of the immigrants. In the Last Judgment depiction from the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus exhorts all of us to an initiative-taking, faith-based lifestyle that prioritizes care for people's needs—physical and spiritual.¹ Christ's model demands more than mere devotion; it requires commitment, engagement, and praxis. Thus, this project aims to

¹ Matthew 25:31-46

promote spiritual praxis to hopefully change the world. It focuses on immigrants' concerns for social justice and spiritual welfare. The project divides the analysis into two parts: Part A, chapters one to four, correlates the Church's social justice initiatives to Scripture, following the Gospel of Jesus, which calls the Church to embody the exhortation found in the Sermon on the Mount to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Part B, chapters five (educational modules) and six, details Church praxis to educate pastors, leaders, and congregants on how to effect changes and create a caring lifestyle. We will discuss how the Christ-centered model focuses on how love can broaden the Church in partnership with neighborhood contexts. In so doing, the project will strive to avoid prejudice and show kindness to everyone. As such, the Church must affirm individuals, prioritizing Jesus' genuine *Shalom* and Sabbath purpose by connecting social justice with transformative life-giving faith practices to fulfill the needs of immigrants.

Lastly, the Church must honor its legacy by going beyond creating monuments and remembering leaders and abstract ideas. The Church must foster inclusiveness and a sense of belonging and create a justice legacy for future generations. Thus, the project aims to follow Gospel directives and develop programs to eradicate injustices driven by spirituality. Humanity expects Christians to create higher standards by establishing sustainable programs imbued with Christian values to address and help the challenges that immigrants face.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this project paper to my beloved family: my wife of forty-six years, Ana Inés; my son, Efraín; my daughter-in-law, Lucy; and my grandsons, Nicolás and Edgar. They have inspired me to be a conscientious individual for social justice. They are encouragers and supporters, and they are the reason for my dreams and hard work to try to realize those dreams. As a family, we are driven by the idea that a better world is possible.

Ana Inés was born in Puerto Rico and grew up until high school between San Juan, Puerto Rico, and the Bronx, New York. Her experiences nourished her compassionate lifestyle. Our son Efraín was also born in San Juan and moved to San Antonio, Texas, at age fifteen. In San Antonio, he struggled with which group he wanted to belong. Initially, his choices included White Anglo, Texan Americans, Hispanics, and Black people, but none fit his Puerto Rican lineage. However, that experience helped him to develop a profound respect for other cultures and traditions. As a result, he crafted his Hispanic-American identity through struggles, tensions, and hard work.

Similarly, Lucy, the daughter of Mexican immigrants from Laredo, Texas, would do the same. Laredo is a border town that is a crucible for identity challenges between two nations and multicultural societies. That background allowed her to help her students and others passionately in their cultural struggles. Together, we bridge to the new generation, our grandchildren Nicolás and Edgar, proud Texans, who represent the synthesis of the latest trends of North American society. They, like millions, are native-born Hispanic-American citizens who are part of a melting pot yet remain culturally different, like a trail mix or salad bowl, which preserves identities and conforms to our

thirteen-lettered nation's motto, *E Pluribus Unum*. They are the face of Puerto Rican and Mexican descendants with multicultural prospects. Thus, as a Puerto Rican transplanted to Texas, I hope this project paper will help many people relate to our communities and understand complex social realities better.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I acknowledge my wife, Ana Inés Delannoy-Vélez, for her unconditional love and patience and for allowing me to spend long hours of study and reflection in this study! Special gratitude to my academic advisors, Rev. Dr. Francisco Peláez-Díaz and Rev. Dr. Antonio J. “Tony” Miranda, whom I proudly call my pastor. Together, they have supported and encouraged me to advance academically and spiritually. I am also thankful to the Primera Iglesia Bautista de Austin (PIBA) brethren for allowing me to learn from them.

I thank my Drew classmates, Rev. Dr. Julio González-Paniagua, Rev. David Soto, and Rev. Jacqueline Pinkney, for their encouragement and long conversations, which provided much-needed feedback and support.

I also recognize in this work two dear friends: my non-official advisor, Rev. Guillermo Ramírez-Muñoz, Ph.D., as well as Rev. Ediberto López-Rodríguez, Ph.D. They have been my brothers in Christ, mentors, encouragers, and collaborators for over forty-five years throughout my pilgrimage in life, including the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico and Drew University.

Finally, I thank Dr. Janet Stafford and Dr. Daniel Kroger for their valuable editing skills in polishing this dissertation.

PREFACE

Although I have studied applied natural sciences in pharmacy and dentistry for many years, I have been an enthusiastic amateur theologian. Once I discovered Wilhelm Dilthey's approach to the Sciences of the Mind or the Spirit, I became excited about his methodology.¹ Dilthey's hermeneutic portrays an umbrella covering different disciplines to integrate human activity: humanities, literature, natural and social sciences, philosophy, and theology. His methodology realizes life holistically.²

This interdisciplinary approach led me in 1986 to enroll at the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico to study for a Master of Arts degree in religious studies. This experience not only supported my earlier views, but also strengthened my interests. Later, in June 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, I retired after a rewarding career spanning forty-three years. Thus, July 2020 became the right time to continue my journey by enrolling in Drew University's Doctor of Ministry program. This program has helped me to broaden those experiences through Practical Theology—a work that remains very much in progress.

I realized that the natural sciences help us understand the universe's processes by providing physical and mathematical models. However, the “Sciences of the Spirit:”

¹ W. Dilthey coined *Geisteswissenschaften* for *Sciences of the Mind or Spirit* to describe the relationship between the natural and human sciences. For him, human sciences broadly include social sciences and humanities.
https://encyclopaedia.herdereditorial.com/wiki/Recurso:Dilthey:_ciencias_del_esp%C3%ADritu. Also, <https://plato.stanford.edu/Archives/Win2012/Entries/dilthey/>. Accessed May 13, 2023.

² Yaremis Da Trinidad Hidalgo and Yenisey López Cruz. *La hermenéutica en el pensamiento de Wilhelm Dilthey* (ufrb.edu.br).
https://www.academia.edu/32452372/LA_HERMEN%C3%89UTICA_EN_EL_PENSAMIENTO_DE_WILHELM_DILTHEY. Pages 324-340. Accessed, August 15, 2023.

social sciences, philosophy, history, and theology lead us to value human nature and become more aware of the meaningful relationship between God, Creation, and the community. It is a relationship that sustains, strengthens, and provides insight into life. Our lives move in finite spaces, places, and time, which provide myriad experiences and countless memories to nourish our growth sustainably. In my case, those experiences and memories have built bridges and provided lenses to craft a Theology of Place and Migration, which is the primary focus of this project.

Due to the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico, as a commonwealth territory, I may not legally be a Texan immigrant. However, I define myself as a hybrid immigrant. I belong to that *liminal* stage of being an American with a Puerto Rican background.³ My childhood, growing up in poverty in Puerto Rico, and first-hand life experiences have made me have solidarity with the immigrants in our country. My Spanish language, academic accomplishments, and social context in Texas have made me blend in culturally with them for three decades. We may achieve completeness when we fulfill dreams, reach goals, allocate time to practice life-changing values and share them with others. That living hope for completing peace and full realization (*Shalom*) prompts us to search for a better life despite daily challenges.

Although I have personally not suffered many prejudices, I have witnessed unpleasant derogatory incidents close to me or about my people.⁴ Thus, this study allowed me to research ageless lingering queries that required much effort and time. I

³ Because the terms *liminal* and *liminality* recur through this study, see Appendix Four for more information about this fundamental anthropological concept.

⁴ Even educated public figures often ignore some facts, and air disdain against others. For example, Rev. Al Sharpton, did not know that Puerto Rican are U.S. Citizens. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XRoa18xxg_U. Accessed October 27, 2023.

also know that it may evoke more questions. Unfortunately, one of the most important may be my naiveté concerning the efforts of immigrants to adapt to their new context. Those struggles encouraged me to search for those issues that constantly make newspaper headlines—the relationship between social justice and spirituality for immigrants in the United States.

This study consists of two parts, divided into parts A and B, in six chapters. The first chapter introduces the challenges, context, and scope of immigration. Chapter two describes the theme and its significance to America by describing pastoral and theological concerns and the biblical and theological basis for immigrant social justice issues. Chapters three and four define pertinent subjects for this study. Chapter five contains five educational modules that review the essential topics concerning the immigration crisis in our nation and how the Church must familiarize itself with them to contextualize it for the local community and contribute to the betterment of those who may be suffering. Chapter six is the final reflection, summary, and recommendations to implement the suggested initiatives.

Aware of Jesus' challenges, I will emphasize His high standard quest: "For I say unto you, if thy righteousness does not exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven"⁵ (Matthew 5:20).⁵ The kingdom of heaven is within us, demanding our active input to fulfill Jesus' message, detailed mainly in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) and the parable about the Judgement of the Nations (Matthew 25:31-46).

⁵ Unless otherwise specified, I will use New King James Version (NKJV).

PART A
CHAPTER ONE

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES LEAD TO SUSTAINABLE SOCIAL JUSTICE:
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We are not to bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice; we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself.

~ Dietrich Bonhoeffer

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Everyday life reveals conflicts amid the sacred and the profane, moving toward a narrow path—where recurrent injustices thwart humankind’s progress. Injustices constrain joy and social justice. However, people of goodwill search for “the wisdom from above,” aiming to change the world while connecting life-giving faith practices with God’s demands for justice.¹ In Galatians, the Apostle Paul vividly depicts the tension between the flesh and the Spirit’s life-giving approaches. Paul highlights that the fruit of the Spirit includes love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and faith.² According to Paul’s letter to the Galatians, the fruit of the Spirit is a polyhedron diamond illuminating in all directions. Love is the most luminous, which inspires justice to remedy society's turmoil. Since the beginning of history, there has been turmoil.

¹ James 3:18.

² Galatians 5:22-23.

Throughout history, humanity has arrived at postmodernity with all its challenges, particularly religion-related.³ Despite those struggles with postmodernity, sociologist, and ethnographer Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo clarifies:

Religion, after all, was supposed to die as [post]modernity flourished. Instead, it now stares at us almost daily from the newspaper, but it is usually the extremist fundamentalisms of the Christian right or conservative political Islam that grab the headlines.⁴

However, Christians insist that our faith should possess transformative virtues and the fruits of the Spirit, which also help provide the world with hope in order to improve it. The struggles of millions seen by today's Church urge us to change the world positively with the Gospel of Christ. However, the truth is that the irony of intolerant faith-based practices frequently denies life-giving freedom to many, despite the Bible's encouragement and the Church's divine imperative for life-giving values.⁵

We still need to improve our neighborhoods by addressing countless social concerns. Inconsistent policies and interpretations have hurt vulnerable people in the United States and worldwide. Sadly, for many generations, both Churches and colleges used biblical text to perpetuate injustices like slavery. After the Civil War and during

³ Postmodernity, or postmodernism, is the philosophical movement developed after WWII to the present. Its characteristics are skepticism and relativism in every aspect of human endeavor. In many ways, postmodernity constitutes another liminal experience, leading us to uncharted waters not yet explored. These thinking approaches lead to other philosophical thoughts like critical theory, deconstructivism, and post-structuralism, impacting economics, sociology, anthropology, and theology. It also rejects the positivism of knowledge and most of the premises established in the last few centuries by the modern world since the Renaissance, and the scientific revolution perspective of modernity.

⁴ Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo. *Religion and Social Justice for Immigrants*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, Kindle Ed., 2007), Part I, Location 42.

⁵ Michela Moscufo describes the Episcopal Church of NY's participation in American slavery and explains how the Church benefited from slavery. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/churches-played-active-role-slavery-segregation-want-make-amends-rcna21291>. Accessed October 26, 2022.

Reconstruction, Jim Crow laws imposed a system of racial segregation, a legacy that still impacts Black people nationwide. For example, our society dealt with discrimination issues in the school system. For that reason, on May 17, 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled in a civil rights case, *Brown vs. Board and Education of Topeka, Kansas*, to prohibit segregation in public schools because it violated the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Bussing was another related subject where many black children in some school districts were bussed from home to the school and vice versa in order to integrate blacks with white children. This situation caused an increase in discrimination against blacks, even after the *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling.⁶

Furthermore, even one hundred years after the Civil War and after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, there were and still are violations and opposition to that landmark legislation. These facts confirm the bumpy relationship between social justice and civil rights. Racism is a social and human rights issue. For example, on January 27, 2023, a Multnomah County Circuit Court in Oregon compensated a Black woman for discrimination at a gas station. It is disturbing that, after decades of struggles, the news report states:

On March 12, 2020, Rose Wakefield stopped at Jacksons Food Store in Beaverton, Oregon, to pump her gas. She said the attendant disregarded her after she tried to get his attention several times, filling up for other cars that drove into the station after her.” The woman received the following message from the gas station employee: “I don’t serve Black people.”⁷

⁶ Richard Rothstein, *Revived debate over school busing highlights deepening racial segregation*. <https://www.epi.org/blog/revived-debate-over-school-busing-highlights-deepening-racial-segregation/> . Accessed January 7, 2024.

⁷Chanelle Chandler, Reporter, Yahoo! News. <https://news.yahoo.com/black-woman-refused-service-at-oregon-gas-station-is-awarded-1m-in-discrimination-lawsuit-182311630.html?guccounter=1> . Accessed February 18, 2023.

Excluding Black people has been a gloomy part of Oregon's history of racism since its early incorporation as a territory.⁸ Similar disturbing cases also occur nationwide with Hispanics and other minorities.⁹ There are myriad examples of discrimination against Black and Brown communities everywhere.

For instance, In *The U.S. Immigration Crisis: Toward an Ethics of Place*, Miguel de la Torre describes a lengthy catalog of misfortunes that immigrants suffer throughout their journeys.¹⁰ Those misfortunes have occurred for decades under both Republican and Democratic administrations. Nevertheless, this study does not explore political and social perspectives like Woke, Black Lives Matter, or anti-immigrant derogatory discourses well recognized in the mass media. Thus, we must boldly respond to our society's issues while hoping no churches have participated in these uncomfortable situations. Moreover, we need to call them to ask them to stop doing so if they have.

These social issues are also seen in the Gospels. In Mark 3:1-6 Jesus faced a dilemma; He healed a man with a withered hand on Sabbath, and in so doing, he confronted a socio-religious problem. As in Jesus' time, we must confront a constellation of social prejudices as a Church and society. By training our eyes, we should be able to differentiate stars from constellations and apply life-giving faith care to uplift people

⁸ Tiffany Cambi, *A racist history shows why Oregon is still so white*. June 9, 2020. <https://www.opb.org/news/article/oregon-white-history-racist-foundations-black-exclusion-laws/>. Historically, Oregon's territorial legislature passed a Black exclusion law in 1844. Oregon was organized and established as an all-white state. Accessed March 27, 2023.

⁹ Mark Hugo Lopez, Ana Gonzalez, and Jens Manuel Krogstad, *Latinos and discrimination*, Pew Research Center. [Acknowledgments: Latino Concerns About Place in U.S. Under Trump | Pew Research Center](#). Accessed April 6, 2023.

¹⁰ Miguel A. de la Torre, *The U.S. Immigration Crisis: Toward an Ethics of Place* (Oregon: Cascade Books, 2016) 77-107, Kindle.

rather than creating more havoc with legalistic attitudes.¹¹ However, religion, in general, and its faith practices only sometimes help social justice causes.¹² Thus, our caring hermeneutic must satisfactorily help us to “bridge the gap between the Bible and social justice.”¹³

We live in a divided world, split into spiritual, sacred, sociological, political, philosophical, and theological compartments. However, we need *agape* love and a moral compass to seek stronger community ties to address those needs.¹⁴ Thus, those of us living in the postmodern world must apply an eclectic model in order to evoke social justice even as we work to change the world through our faith-based praxis.

People who do the preceding establish and support hospitals, schools, and colleges, visit prisoners in jails, and help immigrants with initiatives to improve individuals and society. The critical issue involves living life-supporting values that respond decisively to xenophobia, control issues, and prejudicial belittling attitudes toward marginalized groups.

¹¹ Ruth King, *Mindful of Race*, (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2018), 49-51. Dr. Ruth King identifies socially isolated incidents as “stars,” contrasting them with consistent, repetitive patterns of discrimination and bigotry as “constellations.” She suggests training our eyes, like astronomers, to identify them and contribute to fixing them.

¹² Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo. *Religion and Social Justice for Immigrants*, Location 40.

¹³ Marek P. Zabriskie, Ed. *The Social Justice Bible Challenge* (Cincinnati, OH: Forward Movement, 2017), 4.

¹⁴ *Agape* is the Greek term to describe an unconditional, selfless in nature, that expresses the highest form of love resonating with the love of God.

1.2. Context and Positionality

All that is gold does not glitter,
Not all those who wander are lost;
The old that is strong does not wither,
Deep roots are not reached by the frost.

From the ashes, a fire shall be woken,
A light from the shadows shall spring;
Renewed shall be blade that was broken,
The crownless again shall be king.

~ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*¹⁵

I am the ninth of a ten-sibling family, raised in poverty in a mountainous rural setting in Adjuntas, Puerto Rico. Poverty implies that we barely covered the basics—poverty results from social injustices such as low wages and unfair working conditions. Therefore, from 1948 to 1952, my father went alone to New York, NY, leaving my mother and my seven older siblings in Puerto Rico in order to work in factories. However, despite low salaries, abuses, and shortages, our parents inspired us to accept that faith and hope could sustain core values, encourage interdependence, link the land and people, and establish relationships. Moreover, we could study at the college level through scholarships, which helped to surmount attendant financial difficulties in this endeavor.

In the Summer of 1995, due to economic struggles, I came to San Antonio, Texas, to pursue a two-year graduate certification in Endodontics. After my education, I wandered across the Rio Grande Valley, Texas. However, because of my role in a different community as a Puerto Rican relocated to Texas to practice dentistry, I

¹⁵ Looking Deeper into Tolkien's Poetry: "All that is Gold Does Not Glitter, Not All Those Who Wander Are Lost". <https://www.teawithtolkien.com/podcast/15>. Accessed April 23, 2024.

witnessed first-hand healthcare issues, housing, and wage injustices, including salary stealing and other inequalities. My motivation in Texas remains intrinsic as a personal preference and extrinsic toward my community's concerns. Although wandering, as Tolkien suggests, I was, and am still "not lost!" My Theology of Place has evolved to include a Theology of Migration to engage people and situations, nurture relationships, and adopt Christ's caring lifestyle to cultivate spirituality.¹⁶

Then, in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, in the Summer of 2020, I moved to Austin, TX. Once there, I became a Primera Iglesia Bautista de Austin (PIBA) member, which provided a unique introduction to the city's diverse culture. Moreover, aware of its context, I am convinced that conscientious Church members must be responsible for their community.¹⁷ As such, and as a Church member, I have been able to raise empathy for suffering immigrants by attempting to decipher their concerns.

The 2022 U.S. Census proved that our country is indeed quite diverse. Austin's population of 974,447 constitutes the eleventh most populated city in the United States and is ranked the fourth largest in Texas. Austin's population is 47.8% White, 7.7% Black or African American, 33.1% Hispanic (about a third), two or more races, 8.7%; and Others 2.7%.¹⁸ The latest census reports that 40.19% of the Texas population is Hispanic, vs. 39.76% non-white Hispanics.¹⁹ KXAN news reports:

¹⁶ Jorge Castillo Guerra, *Teología de la Migración: Movilidad y Transformaciones Teológicas*, <http://www.scielo.org.co/pdf/thxa/v63n176/v63n176a04.pdf>. Accessed April 25, 2023.

¹⁷ Courtney T. Goto, *Taking on Practical Theology: The Idolization of Context and the Hope of Community* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke BRILL N.V., 2018), 91-93.

¹⁸ "US Census Bureau Quick Facts: Austin City, Texas," <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/austincitytexas>. Accessed: August 25, 2023.

Austin ranks among the top metropolitan centers for immigrant productivity and well-being... The Austin Metropolitan ranks as the twentieth most popular destination for foreign-born people to first move to from their counties. But where immigrants settle after their initial destination—what researchers call net inbound domestic migration—Austin ranks number nine.²⁰

Nationwide, “Many immigrants move to large metropolitan centers—such as Miami, the Bay Area, or New York City—when they first arrive in the U.S.” Despite that, the Hispanic influence in Texas keeps growing steadily. Because of this, Austin still struggles with the attendant issues of poverty and ethnicity. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Austin faced challenges that affected the health care of impoverished Blacks and Hispanics.²¹

Primera Iglesia Bautista de Austin²² (PIBA) is a Hispanic church in the South-central area of Austin. Its Sunday morning attendance averages 75 to 100 Hispanic immigrants and first-generation descendants of Spanish-speaking countries from Argentina, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela.²³ The age varies from children to elders, with

¹⁹ Es Oficial: hispanos son el grupo demográfico más grande de Texas, indican nuevas estimaciones del del censo, <https://www.univision.com/local/austin-kakw/hispanos-grupo-demografico-mas-grande-texas>. Accessed June 22, 2023.

²⁰ Sam Stark, “Austin Ranks Among the Top Metropolitan Centers for Immigrant Productivity and Well-Being,” *KXAN Austin* (blog), December 16, 2022 <https://www.kxan.com/news/local/austin/austin-ranks-among-the-top-metropolitan-centers-for-immigrant-productivity-and-well-being/>. Accessed December 21, 2022.

²¹ Miles Bloxson et al., “City Scenes: The Truth Reflects, And Austin Doesn’t Like What It Sees,” *NPR*, February 10, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/02/10/965783407/city-scenes-the-truth-reflects-and-austin-doesnt-like-what-it-sees>. *NPR*, Podcast February 10, 2021, *City Scenes: The Truth Reflects, And Austin Doesn’t Like What It Sees*. Accessed October 19, 2022.

²² From now on, I will refer to Primera Iglesia Bautista de Austin as PIBA.

²³ PIBA is affiliated with the Texas General Baptist Convention, Southern Baptist Convention, Hispanic Baptist Convention of Texas, and other local fellowship associations.

20% Gen X, 30% Gen Z or younger, 20% Millennials, and 30% Baby Boomers or older.²⁴ Despite sharing the standard Spanish language, we exhibit cultural diversity, including language dialects and regional food preferences.

1.3. Scope and Method

This study aims to review, describe, and answer the question: How do faith practices lead to sustaining social justice? Furthermore, how might we use scripture to bridge the gap between the biblical text and social needs? Alternatively, it will explore how churchgoers might correlate faith practices with social justice. Other questions are: How do leaders respond to the immigrants' suffering, and how do they practice their prophetic role dutifully? Is fatigue, despair, or burnout hindering the process? What kinds of praxes might lead to changes in the Church?

This project considers spirituality as a whole and will follow Swinton and Mowat's model of hermeneutic phenomenology to describe, analyze, and interpret lived experiences.^{25, 26} This study will highlight the Church's dynamics in five stages and see if changes will help my ministry as a leader and impact South-Central Austin. The Practical Theology framework constitutes the source of this study's methodology:

1. Identifying and establishing the project's basis
2. Literature review to explore and link spiritual practices to social justice
3. Reflecting and analyzing the findings

²⁴ Dr. Antonio J. Miranda, Pastor PIBA, provided the PIBA Statistical facts as of May 2022. Church Community Profile. Arda.com.

²⁵ John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 2nd Ed. (London ECIY OTG, UK: SCM Press, 2016), 100-106.

²⁶ Doris E. Fuster Guillen. *Qualitative Research: Hermeneutical Phenomenological Method*. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1212514.pdf>, p. 223-228. December 30, 2022.

4. Outline five sessions/lectures of educational modules
5. Conclusions.

CHAPTER TWO

THEME AND SIGNIFICANCE OF IMMIGRATION TO AMERICA

2.1. Pastoral and Theological Concerns

Immigrants are subject to sudden reversals of settings, leading to injustices, dangers, solitude, and separation from their loved ones. These reversals often elicit chaos and sorrow, mostly when they do not speak the mainstream language and encounter feelings of rejection. The debates between the political issues and the Church's take on this concern must prompt us to examine those conflicting ideas. Thus, that should lead to how Church leaders think, feel, and attempt to harmonize social justice with various spiritual needs within these groups.

Both the Church and society are concerned with tensions between stakeholders, ideologies, and responses of various groups to areas of spirituality and social justice with immigrants. In "Religion and Government, A New Model Needed?" David Sapp itemizes a few cases that have reached the United States Supreme Court with legitimate church-state issues.¹ For example, old contentious matters include migration problems, prayers at school events, efforts to influence government decisions, and church tax exemptions. Selected claims of equality in public funds and public spaces overlap immigrant issues and are equally controversial and inconsistent.

The above patterns for migrants have been recurrent subjects in history, including those registered in biblical texts. For example, The biblical story of Ruth shows similar ancient concerns. Rodney Aist declares in "Pilgrim Spirituality": "Living as a second-place

¹ David Sapp, "Religion and Government: A New Model Needed?" *Christian Ethics Today* 12, no.4, Aggregate Issue 61(Fall 2006): 13-17.

person is a primary theme of the book of Ruth.”² These experiences are part of the struggles that Abram experienced when he left Ur, prompting Aist to argue that “the Bible is a pilgrimage text.”³ As such, Deuteronomy 26:5-10 portrays the Israelites as proud children of Jacob, a wandering Aramean, who, with his family, wandered to Egypt. However, in the end, God brought them out of bondage from Egypt with all their suffering and its implications. Likewise, Israelites and Christians eventually became engaged in similar journeys.⁴

Many leave their homeland reluctantly, knowing the risks, without any alternatives. Most immigrants stay fragile and are tied to their homeland in challenging times.⁵ The Bible depicts how people’s minds, souls, and dreams remain bound to their homeland despite geographic and socio-political challenges. It shows how conflicts affect immigrants’ spiritual practice in unfamiliar places. Ruth’s story shows how she became part of her husband’s (Chilion) land and culture by committing to the Other and how God calls us to Others while promising sustenance. Ruth’s loyalty to Naomi remains odd because it is an uncommon relationship between mother in laws and daughter in laws.⁶

² Rodney Aist, *Pilgrim Spirituality: Defining Pilgrimage Again for the First Time* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2022), 97.

³ Rodney Aist, *Pilgrim Spirituality*, 95.

⁴ Several biblical text suggest that pilgrimage: Genesis 23:4; 1 Chronicles 19:15; Psalm 39:12; Matthew 19:27; Philippians 3:20; Hebrew 11:9, 10, 13, 16, 38; 1 Peter 2:11.

⁵ Psalm 137:1-9.

⁶ Ruth 1:16.

History provides many diverse ways to practice faith in other cultures. Societies constantly change, and faith practices evolve. After the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the progress of natural and social sciences prompted a blend of spiritualities.⁷ Some of these new life-lifting approaches inspired Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s groundbreaking theology to open spaces for his disciples. While studying in the United States at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, Bonhoeffer “was impressed by the social gospel being explored by the students... [and] was appalled to discover the discrimination against Blacks in American society.”⁸

Despite diligent attempts by religious leaders and their groups to integrate social justice and spirituality, it remains a job in progress. In order to fulfill the Church's Gospel purpose, the Church must develop diverse life-giving templates to move our values away from theoretical papers towards real, flesh and blood people.⁹ Life-giving faith practices aim to shape communities by performing the “Practical Theology cycle—actions and reflections.”¹⁰ These eye-opening efforts prompt new avenues to adopt an interfaith approach to social justice and genuine concern for people’s needs. We must realize that we

⁷ Boaz Huss, “Spirituality: The Emergence of a New Cultural Category and its Challenge to the Religious and the Secular,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 29, no. 1 (2014), 47-60, <https://doi:10.1080/13537903.2014.864803>. November 22, 2022.

⁸ Isabel Best, Editor’s Introduction, *The Collected Sermons of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), XV.

⁹ Isaiah 61:1-3; Luke 4:18-19.

¹⁰ Mark Lau Branson, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=daisyllVomM>. Accessed November 22, 2022.

are God's means to alleviate suffering.¹¹ That means more involvement in the community's needs and political processes and accepting the challenging liberation process.

2.2. Biblical and Theological Basis for Social Justice

Centuries-old accounts of conquest, colonialism, and tyranny worldwide, particularly in Latin America, have made the biblical exodus story real and meaningful to marginalized communities. The biblical hope resonates with people experiencing poverty who await liberation. Freedom is the only exit for the oppressed seeking salvation. Moses' ploy to end the bondage that was the experience of the ancient Israelites and today's Church in dealing with similar difficulties requires an approach grounded in hope. Those powerless depend on their faith practices, and their expectancy rests on believers incarnating God's message. This situation constitutes the theological context for the "preferential option for the poor."

Similarly, the Theology of Liberation claims for hope, freedom, and justice.¹² The Theology of Liberation arose in Latin America as a response to the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the CELAM Medellin Episcopal Conference (1968), and the CELAM III Puebla Conference (1978) to address the Latin American Church's concern about socioeconomic inequality. Those conferences produced two guiding papers: the documents of Medellin and Puebla that itemized the issues and strategies to deal with Latin American

¹¹ Psalm 107:33-41.

¹² Gustavo Gutierrez, *Systematic Theology, Perspectives from Liberation Theology*, ed. Jon Sobrino and Ignacio Ellacuría, (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 22-37.

poverty. These two papers inspired the Catholic and Protestant churches in Latin America to address the Central American political, economic, and social conflicts.

Conversely, the U.S. counter-politics to address those problems, based on the policies of Presidents Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan in their Santa Fe Documents of 1980 and 1986, respectively, were crucial. They encouraged ideological clashes and triggered unrest in Central America for decades.¹³ Many political pundits at the time had dubbed Central America the Vietnam of the '80s, a situation that still causes turmoil, which continues to this day.

Appallingly, there are many other instances of inconsistencies regarding the orthopraxis of the Christian Church throughout history. During the fourth century (306-337), the reign of Constantine did not always follow Christian values in the ancient Roman Empire. In Renaissance Florence (1494), Girolamo Savonarola advocated for Christian renewal but arrogantly destroyed secular art and culture. During the French Revolution (1789), the Catholic Church sided with the Monarchy against the people. During WWII, the institutional Lutheran Church sided with Hitler's Nazi Germany regime (1933-1945). Furthermore, in the 2016-2024 U.S. Presidential and Congressional election cycles, many Protestant churches have supported the more radical positions advocated by former president Donald J. Trump. Last but not least, the Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Cyril of Moscow sided with Putin's autocratic government (1922-2023) against the Ukrainian people. However, those struggles have also inspired alternative leaders throughout history

¹³ Francisco J. Concepción, *La Eclesiología de Monseñor Romero y el Problema de la Tortura*. Segunda Edición, (Orlando, FL: Publicación Independiente, Amazon, 2022), 200-225.

who boldly incarnate Gospel values, confront those harsh times, and often pay a high price for their boldness.

The apparent lack of social justice is one of the primary factors for societal unrest worldwide. Injustices contradict the real meaning of Christianity. Historically, this issue has been the most acclaimed prophetic call for Christians. Oscar Romero (the Roman Catholic Archbishop of San Salvador, was assassinated on March 24, 1980, during Mass for his stand against social injustice) affirms that :

We have never preached violence, except the violence of love, which left Christ nailed to a cross, the violence that we must each do to ourselves to overcome our selfishness and such cruel inequalities among us. The violence we preach is not the violence of the sword, the violence of hatred. It is the violence of love, of brotherhood, the violence that wills to beat weapons into sickles for work.¹⁴

The violence of love irradiates from a vertical component of the cross, linking God to us, but with equal intensity, a horizontal connection between our fellow humans in need and us. If the reign of God is within us, everyone should benefit from the hope of salvation here and now. Therefore, in harmony with Romero's claim, Mark Bozzuti-Jones asserts, "Liberation theologians contend that the crisis facing the Christian faith is that Christians and people of faith are dying before their time...God is a God of life and justice."¹⁵

¹⁴ Oscar Romero, "A Pilgrim Church," in *The Violence of Love*, Bruderhof.com. The Violence of Love (servicioskoinonia.org), 14. <http://www.romerotrue.org.uk/sites/default/files/violenceoflove.pdf>, page 25. Accessed December 28, 2022.

¹⁵ Mark Bozzuti-Jones, *Face to the Rising Sun: Reflections on Spirituals and Justice*, (Cincinnati, Ohio: Forward Movement, 2021), 51-52.

Jesus calls all followers to face difficulties in the cause of social change.¹⁶ Jesus challenges our life goals by encouraging us to proclaim hope for the oppressed.¹⁷ However, both Catholic and Protestant churches have suffered persecution in Central America. Nevertheless, Christ instructs us to overcome these challenges and share His grace and message.¹⁸ Despite this, the Church often has not delivered a prophetic voice. For example, the Salvadorian Catholic Church sometimes sided with the oppressors, as have churches in other locations worldwide. In “Harvest of Empire,” Juan González agrees with this statement, affirming that:

The church historically had been a bulwark of Latin America’s oligarchies, but by the late 1960s, it was assuming a new role. Scores 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. They organized new civic groups, turning their churches and missions into centers for democratic dissent.¹⁹

Those struggles have inspired leaders who boldly incarnate Jesus’ Gospel by confronting harsh times. Thus, Oscar Arnulfo Romero, Ignacio Ellacuría, and others raised their voices in solidarity with people experiencing poverty and injustice. As mentioned above, in El Salvador, they and other priests paid the ultimate price for their efforts. Their martyrdom mirrors that of Jesus and heightens Jesus’ demands for justice while hopefully inspiring others to continue that mission. Sadly, these clashes displaced millions of Latin

¹⁶ Mt. 10:16-25.

¹⁷ Isaiah 61:1-3; Luke 4:18-19.

¹⁸ Acts 1:7-8.

¹⁹ Juan González, *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America*, 2nd Edition, (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2022), 149.

Americans from their homeland to the United States in their search for freedom and better opportunities. This quest for liberty sparked today's Latin American immigration crisis. In many cases, people were fleeing for their lives. It was not only that they wanted freedom and better opportunities. They were escaping war, violence, and repression, much of which was sponsored and facilitated by the United States policies. Since justice longs for better living conditions, leaders must promote spiritual unity and fairness for the appropriate changes, thereby sharing hope and a message of transformation.

Although poverty often stimulates hope and expectation for a better future, as Christians, we need more than just an awareness of this situation. The fear of uncertain political and social conditions should not be the only motivator to escape those circumstances. We must proactively build the future with understanding and compassionate, life-giving faith practices by committing ourselves to novelist William Faulkner's ideals, as rendered in his 1950 speech at the Nobel Awards ceremony banquet:

I believe that man will not merely endure; he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance. The poet's, the writer's, duty is to write about these things. It is his privilege to help a man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past. The poet's voice needs not merely be the record of man. It can be one of the props, the pillars to help him endure and prevail.²⁰

The Church should embrace its prophetic role in society, not as just as seen in Faulkner's optimistic view as a writer, but with Practical Theology. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus directed His disciples (and us) to avoid temptation. He said: "Stay awake

²⁰ William Faulkner, *Nobel Banquet Speech*, Stockholm, Sweden, December 10, 1950, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1949/faulkner/speech/>. Accessed November 5, 2022.

and pray...The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”²¹ Jesus’ words anticipated disruptions but fostered a hope to surmount obstacles and remain alert. Jesus’ directives are inspiring, prompting us to provide life-giving faith practices in the middle of a crisis so that we may support immigrants in their challenges. Countless immigrants suffer hardship, low wages and even stolen salaries, loss of dignity as well as the trauma of leaving everything as they search for freedom and a better future.

In their book *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, Ethnographers Swinton and Mowat assert: “Theology is assumed to be emergent, and dialectic, rather than simply revealed and applied.”²² Spirituality commits to dialogue and the practice of high values so that we may engage with the world to respond to God’s demands in everyday life. Sadly, discrepancies concerning faith practices thwart social justice efficacy by creating wasteful clashes. No wonder, in his lecture “Espiritualidad Comunitaria” (Community Spirituality), Juan Bek asserts, “Christians’ spirituality is the encounter with God in the church and the community.”²³ Believers must awaken and live high-standard values in the Church and society in solidarity with those suffering. Theologian Juan Bek recaps the core values of the Gospel, relating to the Second Vatican Council as its byword because the Church is “the only body giving sense to the world.” He concludes: “When we have poor stewardship, we damage the habitat of our fellow humankind.”²⁴

²¹ Matthew 26:41.

²² Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 78.

²³ Juan Bek, “Espiritualidad Comunitaria” (unpublished article, provided by Milka Vigo, Librarian, Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico Library November 13, 1993), 2-3.

²⁴ Juan Bek, “Espiritualidad Comunitaria,” 3-4.

We have already noted that Latin America has consistently suffered difficulties throughout the Twentieth Century, something that caused migration. In *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America*, Juan González details the struggles of the people of Central America.²⁵ These situations inspired Christian leaders in El Salvador and other countries to practice the Gospel by confronting evil and the political establishment and paying the price for their boldness.

However, they were not the only ones. Before, other Christians also approached spirituality from a broader standpoint. Scholars like Howard Thurman in *Jesus and the Disinherited*,²⁶ Contemplative theologian Rev. Thomas Keating in *The Human Condition: Contemplation and Transformation*,²⁷ and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in *My Pilgrimage to Nonviolence*²⁸ have inspired their disciples to live their spirituality by following Jesus's model and to adopt inclusiveness concerning others by applying Jesus' message. Jesus incorporated a profound notion of a personal pilgrimage of walking, talking, and touching people around twenty-one centuries ago.²⁹ To use Thurman's image, Jesus cares about those who "... are against the wall." His wandering gives us a holistic perspective on confronting challenges. His pilgrimage signifies liminality and hope, helping us deal with diseases,

²⁵ Juan González, *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America*, 2nd Ed. (New York, NY: Penguin Random House LLC), 144-164.

²⁶ Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon Press. Kindle Version, 1996).

²⁷ Thomas Keating. *The Human Condition: Contemplation and Transformation* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1999).

²⁸ Martin Luther King, Jr. "My Pilgrimage to Nonviolence," <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/my-pilgrimage-nonviolence>. Accessed April 1, 2023.

²⁹ Charles Foster, *The Sacred Journey*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 60-82.

harsh times, and everyday needs.³⁰ Living with such a model helps to make experience change after a difficult journey. Pilgrimage writer, barrister, and tutor in medical law and ethics, Charles Foster's dictum summarizes this thesis: "Salvation is by grace, not a pilgrimage. But pilgrimage can help create conditions where grace can work best."³¹ Our pilgrimage fluctuates between the world's difficulties and God's merciful grace. Jesus' experience of pilgrimage or wandering in his ministry inspired both the early and medieval Churches to follow a seemingly widespread practice to express spirituality: going on pilgrimage.³² Pilgrimage evokes actual movements by sharing the God that wanders with us and us with Him through history. This relationship fosters an intimate relationship between belief and spirituality, which is why faith and pilgrimage inspire migrants. That notion of walking shares practices and patterns that vary widely, from the secular perspective to valuing God's grace and trust.³³ However, for theologians, religion is the best set of beliefs, rituals, and practices to cultivate these quests and the best structure and vehicle to develop a sensible spiritual life. Our actions also have psychological and sociological implications for better understanding those victims of injustices, the ones we have already described as "against the wall." Then, we need a mature, respectful dialogue to surmount the differences and obstacles to implicit societal biases.

³⁰ See Appendix Four.

³¹ Charles Foster, *The Sacred Journey*, XVIII.

³² Ian Bradley, *Pilgrimage: A Spiritual and Cultural Journey*, (Oxford, England: Lion Hudson, 2009), 30-37.

³³ Rodney Aist, *Pilgrim Spirituality*, 51-80.

2.2.1. Hebrew Bible

This study builds upon several Hebrew Bible terms for practicing justice. Even though we often forget to practice social justice, it is distinctly related to loving our neighbor.³⁴ The Hebrew concept of *Mishpat*³⁵ refers to setting things right for individuals or groups who have experienced injustice. The prophet Micah’s understanding of *Mishpat* describes God’s call to “practice justice and love mercy.”³⁶ When Micah says, “to walk humbly with the Lord,” in context, he expects honesty and fair-mindedness in dealing with others—neighbors. A second Hebrew term, *Tzedek*, describes solidarity and, thus, social justice with the vulnerable, valuing their dignity as human beings.³⁷ These words call us to action and start the appropriate life-giving faith practices for making a better world. My pastor, Antonio J. Miranda, in a graduation speech from 2020, quoted “*Kingdom Ethics*” by David Gushee and Glen Stassen, who assert: “Kingdom is something we do, not just wait for.”³⁸ Kingdom praxes such as justice, healing, forgiving, reconciling, community building, and deliverance respond to the diverse forms of injustices we see in our world.³⁹ Micah

³⁴ Leviticus 19:18.

³⁵ W. E. Vine, *Diccionario Expositivo de Palabras del Antigo y Nuevo Testamento*, “s. v. mishpat,” (Nashville, TN: Editorial Caribe, Inc., 1999), 170.

³⁶ Micah 6:8.

³⁷ “Tzdek: The Jewish Value of Justice,” <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/tzedek-the-jewish-value-of-justice/>. Accessed October 13, 2022.

³⁸ David P. Gushee and Glen H. Stassen, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*. 2nd Ed. (Grand Rapid, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 13.

³⁹ The information presented in this section—including the quotation of David P. Gushee and Glen H. Stassen, *Kingdom Ethics*, is a summary from my pastor, Dr. Antonio J. Miranda, 2020 Graduation Message of Howard Payne University, Brownwood, TX. (He provided the document).

underscores the formula for making justice and love. Furthermore, the prophet Amos declares:

The Lord says: I will not relent from punishing Israel for three crimes, even four, because they sell a righteous person for silver and a needy person for a pair of sandals. They trample the heads of the poor on the dust of the ground and block the path of the needy. A man and his father have sexual relations with the same girl, profaning My holy name.⁴⁰

That declaration must change our attitude to defend the poor and the afflicted, who suffer permanent injustices and misery. We can strive to achieve justice when we refuse to conform to the world systems by changing our attitudes toward neighbors so that we “act justly and love mercy,” according to Micah’s message.

2.2.2. New Testament

Likewise, in the New Testament, the Greek term *dikaionuné*⁴¹ expresses a virtue that belongs to God—justice as the priority and the standard behavior for those who welcome the reign of God.⁴² The Bible confirms actions that support social justice, faith, and deeds. These actions are evident in Jesus, Paul, and James. For example, according to Paul, the Gospel requires consistent faith practices to develop a way of life.⁴³ Although the message does not change, we must contextualize and adjust it to changes. Besides being a worship

⁴⁰ Amos 2:6-7.

⁴¹ W.E. Vine, *Diccionario Expositivo de Palabras del Antiguo y Nuevo Testamento*, s.v. mishpat, (Nashville, TN: Editorial Caribe, 1999), 476-477.

⁴² Matthew 6:33; Romans 3:25-26.

⁴³ Philippians 1:27; Colossians 1:10.

⁴³ Sergio Ojeda-Cárcamo, *Hacia una Teología de la Acción Pastoral: Una Aproximación a la Pastoral Reformada*, (Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias: [CLAI], 2006), 77-103.

place, the church is a center for rites, preaching, education, *Koinonia*, and *Diakonia*, and it is a forum to hopefully transform the community and the world. These terms challenge us to understand God's will and Christ's example of loving our neighbor. We must know God's revealed purpose in the Scriptures in order to fulfill such a mission.

The theological understanding of justice applies to all human endeavors—religious, social, cultural, economic, and political—breaking down barriers within and outside our context. In short, the trilogy *mishpat*, *Tzedek*, and *dikaioσύνη* confirm that social justice is not another choice but a duty to help mend the world! There is an urgency for fair justice and the search for a lasting relationship with God to better the future, an ongoing process that should never stop. It suggests sustainable action.

2.2.2.1. Jesus' Perspective

Matthew's Gospel affirms the association of spirituality and social justice in Jesus's Sermon on the Mount. Jesus demands that his followers care for those hurt by injustices everywhere. In the pericope, which describes the Judgment to the Nations sermon, Jesus highlights the Gospel's transformative power by challenging us to a spiritual path that requires a sustainable long-term commitment to social justice. Jesus' sermons constitute the social justice reference for the Church. Jesus asserts that how we serve Him relates to how we treat others, especially those who are vulnerable. Jesus knew the intricacies of poverty.

Theologian Justo L. González insists on the fact that:

Jesus was born in poverty, rejected, and did not have a place to lay down his head, which defines the trial we will endure when we serve others and follow Him. ...

So, we should not serve the powerful but the starveling, undressed, foreigners, sick and prisoners.⁴⁴

Jesus' message challenges us to deliver what we preach, to speak against injustices, and to try to remedy them. The service to others determines the outcome of our practice. As theologian Justo Gonzalez asserts, "service to the neighbor in need is not an option in the Christian life."⁴⁵ Jesus' journey is the model that expresses liminality and helps us deal with diseases, harsh times, and everyday struggles.⁴⁶ Journeying through difficulties urges people to transform their lives rather than criticize others without seeking alternatives. No wonder these theological views disturb the establishment while, at the same time, they enkindle hope for those who feel powerless in the face of injustices.

2.2.2.2. Paul's Perspective

And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus de Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

Paul details the struggles between the flesh and Spirit, the world, and God's realm. He challenges us to live according to the Spirit: "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; old things have passed away, and look, new things have come."⁴⁷ A new creation

⁴⁴ Justo L. González, *Three Months with Matthew* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press 2002), 134-135.

⁴⁵ Justo L. González, *Three Months*, 136.

⁴⁶ The best example of this idea is the Princeton theologian, Gerhardus Vos expression "already but not yet" to describe the Christian journey. See Appendix Four for other liminal possibilities.

⁴⁷ 2 Corinthians 5:17.

sees the world differently and cares for those who suffer from worldly decisions. In Romans, Paul contrasts the struggles between the spirit and the flesh by prioritizing the demands of the Spirit.⁴⁸ Also, Ephesians 2:10 maintains that: “For we are His creation, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared ahead of time so that we should walk in them.” These texts lead us to live “not conformed to the world of this age but to be transformed by renewing our minds, so that we may discern God’s good, pleasing, and perfect will.”⁴⁹

Paul distinguishes between spirit and the materiality of the body.⁵⁰ In Galatians 5:17, he affirms that: “The flesh lusts against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh; these are contrary to one another so that you do not do the things that you wish.” His search helps us discover life’s essential secrets and mysteries. For example, in the Areopagus discourse in Athens, Paul’s apologetics appeals to the listener's understanding.⁵¹ He contrasts the worldly affairs of the Epicureans and the pantheistic views of the Stoics with Christian theology. However, in 1 Corinthians 2, Paul adjusts the strategy by moving from the intellect to a more spiritual plane.⁵² In 1 Corinthians 2:12-16, he affirms that God engages in world affairs with a spiritual understanding, not the Epicureans’ materialistic way or the Stoics’ pantheistic views. Paul’s words stress the content instead of merely the form and style of the

⁴⁸ Romans 8:1-17.

⁴⁹ Romans 12:2.

⁵⁰ I Thessalonians 5:23; Gal. 5:19-26.

⁵¹ Acts 17:16-34.

⁵² These are my inferences from the references in notes 36 and 37.

message.⁵³ Paul discerns two contending living styles: worldly and spiritual, prioritizing the latter in speech and conduct and presenting himself as unselfish and unworldly. For him, the cross is the determinant that defines humanity. The mystery of the cross marks Paul's ministry and establishes the basis for what he would discuss in his letters to the Corinthians. Paul proclaims his witnessing without lofty speech or wisdom (v. 1), repeatedly returning to the compelling message of the cross. His address reveals a profound mystery (v. 2), pointing to the Crucified. He attempts to decipher the secrets and mysteries of God's grace, stressing God's power (v. 4) and the spirituality that emerges from the cross. Paul uncovers his soul, weaknesses, anxieties, and humanity, emphasizing that "God's hidden wisdom-power" flows from the cross, trusting that Christianity's mystery is accessible through faith.⁵⁴

2.2.2.3 James' Perspective

If anyone among you thinks himself to be religious and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this [person's] religion is worthless. Pure and undefiled religion is in the sight of our God, and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.⁵⁵

Theologian Giacomo Cassese notes that the letter of James challenges the church to live an "ethical and practical theology."⁵⁶ James abridges the Sermon of the Judgment of

⁵³ *The New Interpreters' Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, Volume X, Leander E. Keck, New Testament, Editor, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 816-818.

⁵⁴ See footnote in *The Apologetics Study Bible*, Ted Cabal, General Editor, (Nashville, TN: Holman CSB, 2007), 1710-1711.

⁵⁵ James 1:27 (NASB).

⁵⁶ Giacomo Cassese, *Epístolas Universales*, (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2007), 10-29.

the Nations in Matthew 25:31-46 and Paul's faith-centric theology in Romans in five chapters. James merges practical faith and deeds, inspiring the Church to live amid persecution while defending faith in Christ.⁵⁷ James affirms the New Testament theology that supports the impossibility of pleasing God without faith. Salvation and liberation go together. We must integrate faith practices with concrete acts to respond to injustices like low wages, wage theft, and poor workplace safety conditions.⁵⁸ James writes that a person's faith produces works that vindicate the faith in Christ as genuine.⁵⁹

2.3. Extrabiblical Perspective

Christians live in evolving and advancing societies. We share spaces, places, and times and struggle with diverse worldviews and perspectives. For instance, considering the democratic ideals developed twenty-five centuries ago in the Greek city-states, they evolved slowly during the first twenty-three centuries. However, the process has taken over two more centuries to show slight changes in the United States. For example, for centuries, only men were qualified citizens with all the rights in the Greek city-states and the United States. In the United States, despite the ideals depicted in the foundational documents, enslaved people and women were not allowed to participate in the democratic process. It took more than seven decades and a bloody war for Black people to gain their rights as free people

⁵⁷ James 2:14-26.

⁵⁸ Hebrews 11:6 and James 5:1-6.

⁵⁹ *The Apologetics Study Bible*, 1843.

(confirmed by the Civil rights Act of 1965) and over fourteen decades for women to obtain their right to vote.

This assertion may seem strange today since we must comply with evolving societal laws forbidding discrimination, but despite some gains in the last few centuries, it needs to show more progress.

Consequently, Lawyer and New Testament Scholar Ediberto López-Rodríguez, in a recent dialogue with Vilma G. Pizarro, argued about the difficulties of evolving legal terms in the United States legal system. For example, he explained the challenges many people in the United States face in understanding “that the state cannot show prejudices against anyone.”⁶⁰ In his analysis, he describes and clarifies the word “men” in the U.S. Declaration of Independence and the Constitution by discussing the evolution of that legal term. For example, in the Declaration of Independence (1776) and the United States Constitution (1778), the word “men” is used in a different sense than we use it in today’s legal context. In the Eighteenth Century, “men” referred to white, wealthy, educated males. By 1812, “men” evolved, including males able to read and write. Then, in 1868, the country adopted the Fourteenth Amendment, which added Black “men” who could read and write. Moreover, in 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution added “women” and granted women the right to vote. Similarly, other societal matters constantly evolve—immigration, interracial marriages, LGBTQ+ rights, and others. Today’s human rights advances have added groups rejected earlier by giving them a broader definition and

⁶⁰ Dr. Vilma G. Pizarro interviewed Dr. Ediberto López-Rodríguez on her Webpage program, *Ministerio Verdaderos Adoradores*, on Facebook. September 23, 2022. <https://fb.watch/hrjLuTWTmA/?mibextid=v7YzmG>. Accessed November 3, 2022.

standing. For example, myriad court cases denounced violations and claimed rights for various minority groups. These new laws and their interpretations have opened nuances, encouraging a more just and inclusive society, awaiting the day of an egalitarian society!

2.4. Social Justice for Immigrants

Author and Social theorist Lawrence Harrison notes that:

In the United States, as the aphorism goes, we are all immigrants. American Indians, who had, by the most widely accepted theory, immigrated from Asia across the Bering Strait some thousands of years before the arrival of the first European explores. ... The Spanish were the first Europeans to settle permanently on what would become the United States mainland—in St. Augustine, Florida, in 1565. ...[Furthermore], Black slaves from Africa formed the first major non-European immigration movement—involuntary, to be sure—into the United States.
61

Nevertheless, historically, what took centuries to occur due to the constriction of time and space, today, in days or even hours, we cross international borders.

Sociologist and ethnographer Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, in *Religion and Social Justice for Immigrants*, states: “The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries are proving to be an age of global migration.”⁶² The United States has the most significant number of immigrants globally, with 49,780 million of the population in 2017.⁶³ Conflicts in their countries of origin are the leading reasons more than sixty-eight million people annually emigrate

⁶¹ Lawrence E. Harrison, *Who Prospers: How Cultural Values Shape Economic and Political Success* (New York, NY: Basic Books, A Division of Harper Collings Publishers, Inc., 1992), 150.

⁶² Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Religion and Social Justice for Immigrants*, Location 45. Kindle.

⁶³ Pew Research Center, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/interactives/global-migrant-stocks-map/>. Accessed March 20, 2023.

worldwide.⁶⁴ As we know, myriad adventures over the centuries have ended in colonialism, slavery, and the abuse of others to benefit a few in power, establishing boundaries between “them and us.” However, migration stimulates people to look for open doors, generates alternatives to reorient life, and reconfigures dreams. Unsurprisingly, during the last twenty years, efforts have been made to legalize the undocumented children who come to our shores. These children were identified as Dreamers, which came from the DREAM Act, a legislative action that seeks to grant protection to immigrants brought to the United States as minors. The DREAM Act is still pending legislation.⁶⁵

In Summary, pastoral and theological concerns about the theme and significance of immigration to America are paramount to comprehending the immigrants’ social justice and spirituality implications. Chapters three and four will build up a few more terms to clarify this project’s scope.

⁶⁴ Illinois Center for Global Studies. [The Number of Displaced Peoples Around the World is Growing | Global Currents \(illinois.edu\)](#). Accessed December 15, 2022.

⁶⁵ The Dream Act: An Overview, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/dream-act-overview> . Accessed December 28, 2022.

CHAPTER THREE
DEFINITION OF TERMS

Nothing happens unless first a dream.

~Carl Sandburg

3.1. Migration

Since the dawn of history, social, economic, religious, and political dysfunction has always provoked clashes between host societies and migrants. Migrants are pilgrims searching for dreams and a better future. They travel through spatial and temporal labyrinths, searching for peace, freedom, and hope. However, those dreams collide with a challenging reality. For example, rooted thousands of years ago in Judeo-Christian tradition, as found in the book of Genesis, we see the migration story of Abraham and his descendants. The story symbolizes the challenges, changes, and hope in their search for the Promised Land—an endless worldwide effort. Even today, those descendants, Jacob, Joseph, and others, represent the children of a “wandering Aramean that went down to Egypt.”¹

On the other side of the spectrum, throughout history, influential people have taken advantage of those dreams, exploiting migrants to benefit themselves and creating conflicts between “them and us.” Those circumstances prompt instability, joblessness, health issues, lack of adequate education, inadequate housing, safety concerns, poor food supply, and perhaps untimely death. Migration remains a disrupting trend that can affect the spirit of those involved, and there are acute challenges regarding justice for at least

¹ Deuteronomy 26:5.

two societies: the origin, where the migrants exit, and the destination, where they land. The first disrupts families and depletes skilled, educated people, while the second gains resources for their workforces.

Nevertheless, the society where immigrants land seldom realizes its benefits, giving myriad excuses, including citing biblical texts out of context to justify fears to resist the phenomenon. For example, I have witnessed fearful believers quoting:

The foreign resident among you will rise higher and higher above you while you sink lower and lower. He will lend it to you, but you will not lend it to him. He will be the head, and you will be the tail.²

However, Deuteronomy 28:1-68 upholds another proposition. This chapter follows Deuteronomy 26 and 27, which asserts that the Israelites were pilgrims, the children of a “wandering Aramean.”³ The text calls for faithfulness:

Now, if you faithfully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all His commands, I am giving you today, the Lord your God will put you far above all the nations of the earth. All these blessings will overtake you, for you obey the Lord your God.”⁴

To make its point, Deuteronomy contrasts obedience vs. curses for disobedience to God’s law. God’s curses outnumber the blessings relating to the disastrous fate of disobedience because then, the Israelites and now us do not follow God’s will. So, the Church should instill within believers the confidence to follow God’s commands.

Later in history, the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel interpreted the Israelites’ vicissitudes as the dire result of disobedience and non-compliance to the prophetic

² Deuteronomy 28:43-44 (Holman Christian Standard Bible).

³ Deuteronomy 26:5-6.

⁴ Deuteronomy 28:1-2.

message. Their message claimed that true repentance would help them avoid the suffering they ultimately experienced during the exodus from Egypt and later deportation to Babylon.⁵

Typically, two societies share the responsibility for the migration crisis (the origin, from where the emigrants leave, and the destination, where the immigrants arrive). The original society disobeys God by not adequately recognizing and supporting the needs of its people. Concurrently, the destination society disobeys God by not dignifying, welcoming, and absorbing immigrants into their communities. The latter treated them differently by not providing developmental opportunities following God's directives like the ancient Egyptian society did with Israel's children in Egypt. In that case, the Egyptian behavior backfired, afflicting themselves repeatedly as a byproduct of their exploitation and mistreatment of the Israelites. So, no society should inflict suffering, bigotry, jealousy, or hatred on others. On the contrary, we must develop a compassionate theology for migrants while applying practical, common-sense solutions while dealing with them.

Similar to biblical narratives, the causes of Latin American immigration northward to the United States are multifaceted. Furthermore, those causes cannot be framed only in terms of the Latin American country's inability to support their people or the lack of compassion on the part of the United States. It is essential to acknowledge that the United States shares accountability in the immigration crisis. The media describes it as a failure.⁶ The United States has overtly displayed, among other factors, a political

⁵ Jeremiah 3:12-13 and Ezekiel 2:3.

⁶ "Daily, headlines by The Press show America's Immigration policies are Failing," *The Economist*, (January 2024) <https://www.economist.com/united-states/2024/01/25/how-americas-failed-immigration-policies-might-cost-joe-biden-the-election>. Accessed Feb 2, 2024.

double standard for decades. First, the United States supported dictators and policies which have contradicted the United States' democratic form of government. For instance, during the twentieth century, the United States championed domestic democratic processes and, conversely, did not support the same democratic processes for Latin American countries. Well-known examples are Cuba, Nicaragua, Bolivia, and Paraguay, among others worldwide. Those countries suffered horribly during those tragic dictatorships.

Secondly, changing policies is unfavorable in many respects. Sadly, the policies, motivated mainly by domestic politics, have been confusing and inconsistent for decades. Thus, Miguel de la Torre contends:

Migration was based on an eight to nine-month cycle of working north of the border followed by months at home to attend to their own October harvest and the year-end religious holidays. ... What was once a circular migration became permanent with the erection of the fence. The border wall has had two immediate results. First, fewer field hands created chaos in the agricultural industry.

Second, those coming to work on farms were forced to pay higher costs, in monetary and human terms, to the coyotes—whose power is strengthened and solidified—due to the need of being led through mountainous terrain and treacherous deserts.⁷

Another example is that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) establishes quotas and guidelines for each country, like Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Haiti.⁸ This subject turned out to be a big issue in society—including churches—that does not holistically address the immigrants' physical and spiritual needs.

⁷ Miguel A. de la Torre, *The U.S. Immigration Crisis: Toward an Ethics of Place* (Oregon: Cascade Books, 2016) (Kindle), 12.

⁸ DHS Implements New Processes for Cubans, Haitians, and Nicaraguans and Eliminates Cap for Venezuelans <https://www.uscis.gov/newsroom/alerts/dhs-implements-new-processes-for-cubans-haitians-and-nicaraguans-and-eliminates-cap-for-venezuelans#:~:text=On%20Jan.,also%20apply%20for%20work%20authorization>. Accessed February 2, 2024.

In *The U.S. Immigration Crisis: Toward an Ethics of Place*, Miguel de la Torre portrays a lengthy catalog of misfortunes and sufferings in their journeys.⁹ De la Torre boldly addresses the United States' responsibilities in migration ordeals concerning the lack of coherent policies for real people and situations. He asserts:

Forgotten in our current immigration discourse is that not long ago (1942–64), documented Mexican immigration flourished. Under the Bracero Program, more than four million Mexicans worked on U.S. farms. By the late 1950s, during the height of the program, an average of 438,000 workers crossed the borders with proper documentation. These brown hands built a formidable U.S. agricultural center. For a multitude of reasons, including abuses of farm workers, documented immigration came to an end; nonetheless, farm workers continued to enter the country during the harvest to continue picking American crops, only now without proper documentation. Between 1965 and 1985, millions of undocumented workers crossed the border for work and returned home after the harvest. When migration was more fluid, the import of seasonal workers was beneficial for both countries and encouraged.¹⁰

These changes in the United States policies moved immigrants northward. Thus, these huge inconsistencies have discouraged the revolving migration process. That means people who previously spent part of their time in their homeland for months now remain in the United States while attempting to avoid further hassles, bringing their families with them and making their relocation permanent.

Everybody must know that borders are porous, permeable to ideas, and always open to customs and commercial exchanges of two or more societies, a kind of cross-pollination. Congress and the executive branch of the United States government are not reaching common ground to solve such a crisis. Therefore, at least partially (to no small degree), we share responsibility for the immigration crisis experienced in our society in

⁹ Miguel A. de la Torre, *The U.S. Immigration Crisis*, 77-107.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

the last several decades. Those exchanges, referenced above, stress the necessity for a better understanding of the border challenges with the hope for more humane policies for those who attempt to cross the border, as de la Torre states:

A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. ...This artificial line that we call a border stretches from San Diego, California, to Brownsville, Texas, and represents the most frequently crossed international border in the world. The U.S. and Mexico are not in a state of war; nevertheless, this border is among the most militarized in the world, contributing to a war-zone mentality.¹¹

Furthermore, in *Jesus and the Undocumented Immigrant: A Spiritual Geography of a Crucified People*, Daniel G. Groody emphasizes immigrants' narratives as they confront geographical landmarks. Those stories resemble Jesus' sufferings in His journey toward the cross. Moreover, those stories include recurrent themes like "the immigrants' reasons for leaving their homeland, the challenges of their border-crossing, their search for dignified lives, the importance of their relationships, the spirituality that sustains them, and their views of Jesus Christ."¹² All these themes are the main conversation topics for millions worldwide, particularly on the southern border between Mexico and the United States. We all have stories. Accordingly, these sad stories of millions of farm workers struggling to find their space in society will hopefully call us to action.

¹¹ Miguel de la Torre, *The U.S. Immigration Crisis*, 9-10.

¹² Daniel G. Groody, C.S.C., "Jesus and the Undocumented Immigrant: A Spiritual Geography of a Crucified People." *Theological Studies* 70 no. 2 (2009): 299.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0040563909070002042024>
<https://www3.nd.edu/~dgroody/Published%20Works/Journal%20Articles/files/Groody%20Article%20Jesus%20Undocumented.pdf>. Accessed January 28, 2024.

Furthermore, sociologist and ethnographer Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo confirms those struggles and painful outcomes in *Religion and Social Justice for Immigrants*.¹³ Similarly, in *Jesus and the Undocumented Immigrant: A Spiritual Geography of a Crucified People*, Dr. Daniel G. Groody reports similar tragedies. These scholars detail the crudeness and inhumane conditions that many immigrants have surmounted to cross the border of our nation.

Unfortunately, immigration is another political game ball that nobody wants to carry forward responsibly. The constant stalemate between Congress and the White House confirms this crude reality. Thus, this project highlights the need to establish biblical life-giving awareness to change the current trend. Furthermore, we hope to explore remedies to satisfy the physical and spiritual demands inherent in those stories. Hence, the immigration crisis must be approached more humanely, with the Gospel's loving passion for everyone. For example, in *Jesus and the Undocumented Immigrant: A Spiritual Geography of a Crucified People*, Daniel G. Groody asserts that we must be motivated by organizations like Samaritans and Hu-Gospel to provide aid to immigrants to "take death out of the immigration equation."¹⁴ Ultimately, we are our brother's keepers, regardless of the immigration status.¹⁵ Douglas S. Massey supports Groody in *Backfire at the Border: Why Enforcement without Legalization Cannot Stop Illegal Immigration*:

¹³ Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Religion and Social Justice for Immigrants*, Location 47. See also, <http://www.hondagneu-sotelo.org/>. Accessed February 2, 2024.

¹⁴ Groody, "Jesus and the Undocumented Immigrant," 314. Accessed January 28, 2024.

¹⁵ Genesis 4:9.

In addition to offering direct aid to immigrants in need, the same Christological spirituality that animates these organizations also leads them to challenge a disordered reality that creates social structures and political policies that precipitate migration in the first place. An unjust trading system, the continuing debt crisis, insufficient development aid, and significantly flawed border policies are not ways of mixing faith with politics. However, instead, they serve as challenges that draw out the political implications of Christian commitment. The U.S. government has not reduced irregular migration despite spending billions of dollars to control its border with Mexico.

No wonder the Deuteronomist, to make his point, contrasts obedience vs. curses for disobedience to God's law. God's curses outnumber the blessings if we do not obey His commandments. Deuteronomy 28 describes the disastrous fate of disobedience when we do not follow God's will. In contrast, this chapter seeks to encourage support to follow God's commands instead of remaining in the bondage they suffered in Egypt.¹⁶ Furthermore, it is advisable to include in the forementioned exegesis, Exodus 12:49, to include foreigners in its detailed Passover instructions. Obedience applies to natives and foreigners: "The same law applies to both the native and the foreigner who resides among you." Exodus 12:49 foretells Romans 2:11, confirming that "There is no partiality with God" between natives and foreigners.

The migrants' vicissitudes result from societal nonfunctional and non-compliance factors, not because God has favoritism. The original society, native aristocrats, disobeys God by not adequately supporting the needs of its people. At once, the destination society defies God by not recognizing the migrants suffering and not welcoming them into their

¹⁶ Exodus 1:8-13.

community. Eventually, the opposite occurred. Several prophets interpreted the Israelites' suffering during the Babylonian exile as disobedience.¹⁷ However, historically, the afflicting societies also suffered when they exploited and mistreated the Israelites.

In MODULE 2,¹⁸ I will explore the needs of a subgroup of migrants—refugees and asylum seekers—who usually suffer the most. Since 1960, Europe, the United States, and Canada have become among the twenty-five most common destinations for immigrants worldwide.¹⁹ Those moves follow climate disasters, wars, and worldwide socioeconomic and political unrest. These factors impact societies' social, educational, economic, and theological perspectives, triggering frustrations, lack of understanding, pain, and death everywhere. These tragedies generate people's search for better places to fulfill their dreams and improve their life prospects, filled with hope about economic and political freedom.²⁰

As we build a life, we recall memories in time and places in order to better respond to challenges. These memories teach us great lessons. Migrants identify as pilgrims due to the intimate relationship between both activities. Lack of security and social imbalances trigger migration and geopolitical turmoil. Migration often disrupts unpleasant memories. The International Organization for Migrants/UN defines a migrant as:

¹⁷ Jeremiah 3:12-13 and Ezequiel 2:3.

¹⁸ Module 2, Section 5.7. The Refugee Crisis, page 89.

¹⁹ "Top 25 Destinations of International Migrants," *Migration Policy Institute*. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/top-25-destinations-international-migrants> . Accessed May 16, 2023.

²⁰ For an excellent discussion of the theology of migration, see Jorge Castillo Guerra, *Teología de la Migración: Movilidad y Transformaciones Teológicas*, <http://www.scielo.org.co/pdf/thxa/v63n176/v63n176a04.pdf>. Accessed April 25, 2023.

An umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflects the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from their usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for various reasons. The term includes [several] well-defined legal categories of people, such as migrant workers; persons whose particular types of movements are legally defined, such as smuggled migrants; and those whose status or means of movement are not specifically defined under international law, such as international students.²¹

So, this study does not include students, tourists, or business adventurers, only those forced to migrate for economic, social, religious, and political reasons.

3.2. Spirituality

Spirituality is a fascinating term that concerns the human spirit instead of material or physical things. Dr. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, a psychiatrist, divides human life into four quadrants: physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual. She grants considerable importance to spirituality, portraying it as a universal capacity to awaken the meaning of life.²² Harold Segura asserts that spirituality is “faith in action.”²³ Spirituality encompasses more than faith; it embraces a way of living.

In *Pilgrim Spirituality*, Rodney Aist affirms that: “Spirituality encompasses prayer, worship, the quest for meaning and the pursuit of God, and social relations.”²⁴ Furthermore, in *Sustainability and Spirituality*, John E. Carroll asserts that regardless of whether or not we admit it, “all people have spiritual experiences, and therefore a

²¹ International Organization for Migration, <https://www.iom.int/who-migrant-0> and https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml_34_glossary.pdf. 132. Accessed January 16, 2023.

²² Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fZtU2ckLVVc>. Accessed September 17, 2023.

²³ Harold Segura, “*Ser Iglesia para los demás: para una espiritualidad comprometida*”, 2da. Edición Actualizada, (Buenos Aires, Argentina, Ediciones Kairós, 2010), 133.

²⁴ Rodney Aist, “Pilgrim Spirituality,” 10.

spiritual side to their being.”²⁵ Carroll also links life to spirituality: “Spiritually based sustainable living is an endless dance of reason and faith.”²⁶ Moreover, in 1 Timothy 4:7-8, Paul encourages Timothy to “train [himself] in godliness ... because ... it is beneficial in every way”. That means that we can grow and improve in spirituality!

Likewise, Professor Agustina Luvis, in “*No Dejes de Ser Pentecostal!*” asserts that “spirituality is an elastic concept.” She supports her statement by quoting Theologian Pedro Casaldáliga from “*Experiencia de Dios y pasión por el pueblo*” (*The Spirituality of Liberation*) to define the scope of spirituality.²⁷ In it, Casaldáliga describes spirituality as: “Be what you are. Speak what you believe. Believe what is preached. Live what is proclaimed, to the last consequences in the daily trifles.”²⁸ Casaldáliga also asserts that there are many spiritualities and that every human person is animated and marked by one spirituality or another because the human person is fundamentally spiritual. However, he boldly affirms his Christian faith:

In the light of the Christian faith (there is a Quechua religious faith, an Islamic religious faith, and a Hindu religious faith), we discover the presence of God in the cosmos, in human life, and in history as gratuitous love and salvation precisely because Jesus, Son of God and Son of Mary of Nazareth, with his word, Activity, death, and resurrection, makes us enter vitally into that discovery. From this encounter of faith, our spirituality can only be “religious” (as a turn towards

²⁵ John E. Carroll, *Sustainability and Spirituality*, (Albany, NY: SUNY at Albany, 2004), 9.

²⁶ John E. Carroll, *Sustainability*, 6.

²⁷ Agustina Luvis, “¡No Dejes de Ser Pentecostal!” in *Una Vida Bella: En Honor al Legado Teológico y Pastoral Del Profesor Dr. Johannes Bek de Goede*, ed. Guillermo Ramírez Muñoz (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico, 2020), 33. Luvis quotes Pedro Casaldáliga, from *Experiencia de Dios y pasión por el pueblo*, (Santander: Sal Terrae), 1993.

²⁸ Pedro Casaldáliga, *Experiencia de Dios y pasión por el pueblo*, (Santander, España: Sal Terra, 1993), 46.

the living God, revealed by Jesus) and even “Christian” (as a follow-up to Jesus himself).²⁹

Our spirituality challenges us to practice what we believe. When we deal with spirituality, most of the time, the best tool to deal with it is our faith. A blend of faith and reason yields the best results to advance in life and spirituality.

Furthermore, in *Pilgrimage: A Spiritual and Cultural Journey*, Ian Bradley describes the relationship between creeds, pilgrimage, and spirituality that buoyed people from ancient times until today.³⁰ These concepts depict spirituality’s value over belief and the natural and social sciences during the last two centuries.

Moreover, although from another faith tradition, educator, social critic, and writer Bell Hooks quotes a Buddhist Monk’s assertion that spirituality is “concerned with those qualities of the human spirit—such as love, kindness, tolerance, a sense of responsibility, and harmony, bringing joy to self and Others.”³¹ Spirituality deals with themes greater than us—“love, compassion, altruism, life and death, wisdom, and truth,” identifying with a lifestyle according to those values.³² Indeed, spirituality incorporates in its definition, values, and principles by which we live, establishing our relationship with God and others. However, I have a caveat: despite the many alternatives to cultivating spirituality in this project, we are dealing specifically with the Christian faith!

²⁹ Las Causas de Pedro Casaldáliga, Mi espiritualidad, 24 de abril de 2022. <https://fperecasaldaliga.org/es/mi-espiritualidad/>, Accessed February 23, 2024

³⁰ Ian Bradley, “Pilgrimage A Spiritual and Cultural Journey” 23-36.

³¹ Bell Hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), 148.

³² May Spencer. *What is spirituality? A personal exploration*, <https://www.studocu.com/in/document/kolhan-university/keeping-spirituality/what-is-spirituality-maya-spencer-x/15500054> . Accessed February 27, 2023.

There are three main models for ministerial workers to utilize in order to foster spirituality and social justice. The first is a secular model, which puts less stress on spiritual values and leans toward the secular worldview, which can create a dualistic perspective. Many identify as “spiritual, not religious.”³³ These individuals tend to view life broadly and keep lightly connected to religion.³⁴ Conversely, the Church confronted this challenge as Christians by practicing two biblically aligned models to promote spirituality and convey faith practices. However, as Miles-Yépez says:

The problem with being “spiritual but not religious” is that it is a dead-end for the spiritual seeker. Without the positive ‘tools of religion,’ it can only describe a person’s point-of-view: on the one hand, a sense of wonder and personal conviction about transcendent possibilities and the numinous; on the other, a disinterest in, or dissatisfaction with known religious history, structures, and dogmas. ... at the same time, spirituality without religion is a soul without a body.³⁵

For centuries, the spiritualist model led the faith practices expressed by asceticism, mysticism, and martyrdom during the Early Christian era and Middle Ages.³⁶ For example, in John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, the best-known Puritan model for the spirituality of the seventeenth century, an isolated pilgrim (Christian) escapes, deals with himself, and struggles to enter heaven as he abandons the realm of this earth.³⁷

³³ Netanel Miles-Yépez, *Spiritual and Religious*, Spectrum: Spirituality, Culture, and the Arts, March 05, 2014. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/spiritual-and-religious_b_4875273. Accessed February 25, 2024.

³⁴ For more information about this topic, see Amy Hollywood, Harvard Divinity Bulletin, Winter/Spring 2010. <https://bulletin.hds.harvard.edu/spiritual-but-not-religious/>. Accessed December 22, 2022.

³⁵ Netanel Miles-Yépez, *Spiritual and Religious*.

³⁶ Sergio Ojeda-Cárcamo, *Hacia una Teología*, 87-88.

³⁷ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, (Abbotsford, WI: Aneko Press, 2014).

In general, that model of spiritualism depicts monks and other individuals who lived isolated from the world, read the Bible, and cultivated their inner spirit, all of which could be genuine, sincere, and honest practices. However, some may eschew their interaction with fellow humans by focusing on purifying themselves. In another area, personal piety, if taken to the extreme, can lack a practical component about connection with the concerns of the world.

Nevertheless, Dr. Daniel Kroger clarifies that despite the trend of monasticism, there are exceptions that combine work and prayer:

Many monks and friars involved in this ascetic lifestyle would take issue with their distancing from the world. However, they feel part of the world, connected by prayer, in which they are engaged at all hours of the day. For example, The Benedictines are engaged in work (St. Benedict's rule: *Ora et Labora* - work and prayer). It is the work of making beer, bread, jam, and honey and selling it to us that pays the bills of the monastery and directly benefits all of us who buy their wares.³⁸

Instead, Jesus promotes a third, broader model. Jesus calls for an integrated physical-spiritual lifestyle with more substantial exchanges within the social fabric. In order to not be isolated in the last century, Jesus' followers, such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Howard Thurmond, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Archbishop Arnulfo Romero, Ignacio Ellacuría, and others, embodied Jesus' model. They bridged the hope of salvation with the needs of humanity. They acknowledged the sufferings in the world, and like Jesus, they did not run away from it but confronted evil.³⁹ In order to transform the world, they claimed their spaces and places in real-time, were aware of the cost of following Christ, and paid the price. They integrated worship, prayers, teaching, and preaching while

³⁸ In personal communication, Dr. Daniel Kroger, the editor of this project, shares this reflection to clarify that not all monks and priors behave according to the above-depicted perception.

³⁹ John 16:33.

practicing life-supporting justice, thus incarnating the Gospel.⁴⁰ Jesus' Gospel aims to conquer evil, heal the world, and incorporate life-giving practices for social justice.⁴¹ That means we must be spiritual by prioritizing the spirit within us and defining ourselves as spiritual because "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."⁴² By perceiving the Christian life as a balance between the physical and the spiritual, we honor the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus while affirming human life. Luis Fidel Mercado declares: "We sense life integrated and balanced, honoring and affirming Jesus' incarnation and resurrection as real life."⁴³ Thus, we need more than to accept this truth enthusiastically. We also need to address the spiritual and physical needs of others comprehensively. Such an idea incorporates the *Koinonia* preached and practiced in the early Church, a concept that communicates love within the world. Considered holistically, in addition to our spiritual salvation, we must reach out to others to share physical salvation, represented by the liberation that our faith proclaims and has achieved in Christ. Not surprisingly, Bonhoeffer's quotation emphasizes that "[we] are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice;

⁴⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *El Precio de la Gracia: El seguimiento*, (Salamanca: Sígueme, Verdad e Imagen, 1995), 13-64.

⁴¹ Matthew 25:31-46

⁴² John 4:24.

⁴³ Lydia E. Mercado-Sherman y Jesús Rodríguez-Sánchez, Editores, *Teología Pastoral y Espiritualidad: Escritos Selectos de Luis Fidel Mercado Marrero* (San Juan, PR: Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico, 2021), 130.

we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself.”⁴⁴ With this statement, he stresses the necessity to uproot and fix the underlying causes of prejudices.

Moreover, in another evocative quote, Bonhoeffer denounces the idea that “The road to hell is paved with good intentions.”⁴⁵ Thus, as a church and innovative society, we must guide changes and vow to transform our ritual thoughts and plans into life-giving ones beyond mere good intentions. No wonder Luis F. Mercado-Marrero favors Bonhoeffer’s (Jesus’) model over Bunyan’s world denial.⁴⁶ Jesus’ model offers a more compassionate view of getting involved: addressing and transforming social justice issues. If we want consistency with the Gospel, we must follow Jesus, aware of the costs. We can approach spirituality as a devotion, an art, or an academic subject. Gilberto Cavazos-González coined the term *Spiritualogian* to describe those studying spirituality academically.⁴⁷ However, he prefers to approach it as an art in his personal life.⁴⁸ I will take the same approach in this study. I will highlight spirituality as an art and a vehicle for our faith practices, describing its value and essence.

⁴⁴ Quotation cited in the epigraph introduction, first page of Chapter One. “*Good Read Quotes*,” Bonhoeffer, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/22884-we-are-not-to-simply-bandage-the-wounds-of-victims> . Accessed on November 28, 2022.

⁴⁵ Isabel Best, *The Collected Sermons of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 124, 193-199.

⁴⁶ Lydía E. Mercado-Sherman y Jesús Rodríguez-Sánchez, *Editores*, 149.

⁴⁷ Gilberto Cavazos-González, *Mas Allá de la Devoción*, (Roma, Italia: Verbo Divino, 2014), 23-25.

⁴⁸ Gilberto Cavazos-González, *Mas Allá de la Devoción*, 26.

3.3. Social Justice

Without justice, courage is weak.

~Benjamin Franklin

Social justice is a modern term that describes an abiding concern of people living in societies. Mark Bozzuti-Jones, in *Face to the Rising Sun: Reflections on Spirituals and Justice*, sadly summarizes the dilemma, saying, “Poverty, incarceration, violence, police brutality, poor health care, and shoddy educational systems throughout... communities in the U.S. today give the sense that little has changed.”⁴⁹ However, poor employment, low salaries, stealing, and living conditions also happen beyond Black, Hispanic, and immigrant communities. These social injustices call for the church’s wholehearted concern and require diverse responses from politics, sociology, and theology. In “Three Months with Matthew,” Justo González affirms:

One often hears debates about whether religious life or social service is most important in the church. This passage [Matthew 25:31-46] tells us that the discussion itself is wrong. They are not two different matters; they are a single reality. The Jesus we worship in church is the same Jesus we serve in the neighborhood. To make these into two different options is to deny Jesus and his words.⁵⁰

Sadly, social justice is often a casualty in the clashes of opinions. However, pastoral care and practical theology must include compassionate advocacy for immigrants’ rights. However, some believers are against social justice, arguing that it is a politically motivated subject. Nevertheless, others, including myself, believe social

⁴⁹ Mark Bozzuti-Jones, *Face to the Rising Sun: Reflections on Spirituals and Justice*, 37–38.

⁵⁰ Justo L. González, *Three Months with Matthew*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press 2002), 136.

justice should be included in a fruitful dialogue, with a genuine love for the common good to ease tensions among polarizing political views.

Those who are against social justice forget that many Israelites prophets affirm a complete, integrated, consistent, and honest lifestyle capable of influencing family and community.⁵¹ In ancient Israel, the caring message went beyond the Jewish community to include other people and cultures. For example, despite Jonah's feelings against the Ninevites and his preference for Israel, he followed God's command and preached to them.⁵²

Likewise, in several passages, Jesus incarnated and emphasized His compassionate message to Romans, Samaritans, Syrophenicians, and Gadarenes.⁵³ He encouraged us to be good neighbors, caring for Others, regardless of personal risks and circumstances, and unlike the priest and Levite who passed by the neighbors with apathy, to do something on behalf of those in need.

In *What Americans Hear about Social Justice at Church—and What They Do About It*, R. Khari Brown and Roland Brown describe the U.S.'s relationship between sociological, political science, race, and faith.⁵⁴ They say African and Hispanic Americans support religious leaders who speak against bigotry and attempt to change

⁵¹ Particularly ancient Israelite prophets Amos, Micah (Amos 2:6-7 and Micah 6:8).

⁵² Jonah 3:1-10.

⁵³ Luke 7:2-10; Luke 10:25-37; John 4:1-26; Mark 7:24/30; Mark 5:3-5.

⁵⁴ R. Khari Brown, Roland Brown, What Americans Hear about Social Justice at Church—and What They Do About It, *Christian Ethics Today*, A Journal of Christian Ethics, Volume 32, Number 1, Aggregate Issue 123, Winter 2022, 66-67.

poverty and immigration policies by expressing political views on specific issues, from poverty and homelessness to peace. For example:

According to a July 2020 Pew Research Center poll, 67 percent of African American worshippers reported hearing sermons supporting Black Lives Matter, compared to 47 percent of Hispanics and 36 percent of whites ... Race affects the relationship between hearing such sermons and supporting related policies.⁵⁵

They conclude that many Americans are pessimistic concerning inequality, political divisions, and ethnic conflict, showing distrust in justice and the political system. These “surveys show social justice-minded congregations inspire members to work for policies that support their vision of the public good.” Partisan boundaries and public conflict explain why social justice-minded churchgoers inspire members to work for policies supporting their view of the public good. Much more work must be done in these areas to educate our communities.

Consistent with that assessment, sociologist Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo states that “religion may also motivate nonimmigrants to organize immigrant groups around social justice issues collectively.”⁵⁶ However, conservative religious and non-religious groups resist progressive social justice needs in minority groups.⁵⁷ Often, our political views are more normative than our Gospel convictions.

⁵⁵ R. Khari Brown, Roland Brown, “What Americans Hear about Social Justice at Church—and What They Do About It,” 66.

⁵⁶ Hondagneu-Sotelo, Pierrette, “Religion and Social Justice for Immigrants,” Loc 185.

⁵⁷ Hondagneu-Sotelo, Pierrette, “Religion and Social Justice for Immigrants,” Loc 211-228.

3.4. Inclusiveness

Inclusiveness embraces emotional intelligence attitudes in verbal and nonverbal communication, including qualities like kindness, empathy, solidarity, sincerity, and the will to find consensus in discrepancies. Inclusiveness appeals to our sense of belonging. Rightly, the apostle Paul examines those essential things when he recaps the essence of diversity and inclusion: “There is no Jew or Greek, [enslaved person] or free, male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, heirs according to the promise.”⁵⁸ Furthermore, in today’s context, inclusiveness is “the practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, such as those having physical or intellectual disabilities or belonging to other minority groups.”⁵⁹ Belonging is a fundamental and essential need for all of us. Good leaders know that and encourage those feelings in their followers.

In “Why Live the Christian Life?” T.B. Maston affirms, “There is no aim or center, for the Christian, that is more inclusive or adequate than his devotion to the kingdom, the rule, the reign of God.”⁶⁰ We know that the church is the laboratory to apply and practice the inclusiveness that God’s Kingdom demands.⁶¹ Although being a

⁵⁸ Galatians 3:28-29.

⁵⁹ “Inclusiveness Meaning - Google Search,” https://www.google.com/search?q=inclusiveness+meaning&rlz=1C1CHBF_enUS955US955&oq=Inclusiveness&aqs=chrome.1.0i433i512l2j0i512l8.2157j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8 . Accessed June 7, 2023.

⁶⁰ T.B. Maston, *Why Live the Christian Life?* (New Orleans, LA: Insight Press, 1996), 93.

⁶¹ T.B. Maston, *Why Live the Christian Life?* 104-105.

church member does not equate to affiliation with the Kingdom of God, we expect church members to develop higher ethical standards. The Kingdom of God is a messianic hope and a God-centered refuge for everyone.

Moreover, Rodney Aist states that the book of Acts depicts the growth of the early church, an expansion of the Reign of God, as a:

pilgrimage-like movement of the Gospel itself toward the outside. The rippling effects of the resurrection—the fury of Pentecost, the conversion of Jews and Gentiles, and Paul’s missionary journeys—fuel the centrifugal momentum of a pilgrim church, nascent but on the move.⁶²

Then, the church must follow these parameters while reaching into the community.

Jesus prays to unite all believers. Moreover, He “tore down the dividing wall of hostility.”⁶³ Thus, Jesus aims to offer everyone abundance and a sense of belonging, guiding the Christian church to implement social justice while practicing genuine spirituality.

Nevertheless, some groups still insist on wall-building.⁶⁴ Physical and metaphorical walls divide people based on faith, color, gender, appearance, origin, language, accents, ideologies, physical constraints, and rituals. Such attitudes depict inconsistencies within the Gospel’s teachings. The book of Acts steadily leads us to attain the church’s inclusive advance and expansion by following Jesus’s command. “You will

⁶² Rodney Aist, 108.

⁶³ Ephesians 2:14.

⁶⁴ See Appendix 3.

be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”⁶⁵

However, that growth caused contention in the Acts church, as it faced conflicts, mainly when it came to uniting with and including outsiders. It was a daunting task then for the church’s leadership, as it still is today.

Good leaders’ primary goal is to make their followers feel like they belong to the group, mainly when growing and developing an ethic that shares God’s values. Diversity motivates, shapes, and makes it normative for the church to adopt St. Augustine’s principle: “In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, love.” We should live as “we are all one in Christ Jesus,” following God’s all-embracing directive.⁶⁶ If we believe in monogenism, we are brethren—children of God. Prioritizing God’s Kingdom implies prioritizing our fellow humankind’s needs.⁶⁷ There is no place for prejudice in God’s family.

Acts 10:1-48 to 11:1-18 explain Peter’s vision and reason for Cornelius’s baptism and his family in Jerusalem’s church, showing inclusiveness.⁶⁸ It is a complex, challenging referent for the growing defense of Gentile inclusion in the church *Koinonia*. The church followed the promise, moving from those who stood in the street on Pentecost to Philip’s preaching and baptism of the Samaritans, culminating in the baptism

⁶⁵ Acts 1:18.

⁶⁶ Galatians 3:28.

⁶⁷ Monogenism is the theory that the human race has descended from a single pair of individuals or a single ancestral type.

⁶⁸ William H. Willimon, *The International Lesson Annual*, September-August 1992-93 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1992), 159-166.

of Cornelius, a Gentile.⁶⁹ These rippling effects point to openness and willingness to change everything everywhere in the early Christian Church. Cornelius has historically been an archetype of rejected people everywhere in the Jewish and Christian churches.

Despite vast support for breadth, churches often deny the purpose of reaching all kinds of people. Countless churches have considered themselves friendly for years while behaving as exclusive clubs. They exercise homogeneous partisan politics and cultural activities, prompting the refusal of visitors and outsiders, mainly when they are in need. T. B. Maston says that while the Kingdom of God is spiritual, there is also a deep and “abiding concern for the material well-being of people.”⁷⁰ The burdens of homogeneity impede church empathy and growth. If the church intends to appear friendly and familiar spiritually, it must welcome everyone, regardless of their social and physical needs. In *Models of Contextual Theology*, Stephen B. Bevans contends that the “catholicity of the church reflects the essence of what the church of Christ should try to be.” He adds, “*Catholic* comes from two Greek words, *kata* and *holos* (according to the whole), and points to the all-embracing, all-inclusive, all-accepting nature of the Christian community.”⁷¹

Sadly, Miguel A. de la Torre accurately asserts, “All too often, houses of worship slumber in the light, operating as some sort of country club with a thin veneer of

⁶⁹ Acts 2:1-42.; Acts 8:1-25; Acts 10:47-48.

⁷⁰ T.B. Maston, *Why Live the Christian Life?* 98.

⁷¹ Stephen B. Bevans., *Models of Contextual Theology: Faith and Cultures*, Revised and Expanded Edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 14.

spirituality.”⁷² Thus, if we are Christ’s Church, we must be aware, act in solidarity, and solve people’s suffering.

3.5. Sustainability

We need spiritual sustainability to answer most of the present world’s problems. John E. Carroll quotes Steven C. Rockefeller, who says: “An activity is sustainable if it can be continued indefinitely.”⁷³ As the world strives to improve its living conditions, it needs to sustain and maintain its course to develop economic, educational, and ecological science models to accomplish those objectives. Similarly, the spiritual life is a work in progress that must grow sustainably. To live “in the Spirit,” we must develop goals for a comprehensive, sustainable lifestyle. In this context, sustainability means indefinitely increasing, with a growing faith and fruition for social justice. The church and the world need sustainable peace, love, and hope models.⁷⁴ We should uphold infinite, eternal principles by prioritizing “justice,” not “just us,” as J. Brent Walker says.⁷⁵ The focus is to apply life-lifting faith practices and mercy, report wrongdoings, and bring remedies that will value people. God’s love and grace are long-lasting for generations.

The psalmist in Psalm 51:10, searching for spirituality and justice, requests a force to renew and sustain a steadfast spirit within him after a thorough and well-felt confession. He asserts: “Create a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within

⁷² Miguel A. de la Torre, *The U.S. Immigration Crisis: Toward an Ethics of Place*, 109.

⁷³ John E. Carroll, *Sustainability and Spirituality*, 1.

⁷⁴ J. Brent Walker, “‘Justice’ Or ‘Just-Us’ Sunday,” *Christian Ethics Today*, Volume 11, Number 3, Aggregate Issue 55 (Summer 2005), 12.

me.” His is a long-term shout that yields and expects forgiveness—a lasting benefit. Likewise, Proverbs 18:14 declares: “The spirit of a man will sustain him in sickness, but who can bear a broken spirit?” These texts call us to care for and cultivate spiritual sustainability for us and others.

This chapter defines five essential terms: migration, spirituality, social justice, inclusiveness, and sustainability. They constitute the core base for understanding the scope of this project. In addition, it shows the interrelation of all these elements to develop a theology for migration that will follow in this practical theology project.

CHAPTER FOUR

LIFE-GIVING FAITH PRACTICES SUSTAIN SOCIAL JUSTICE

Where there is no vision, the people perish.

~Proverbs 29:18

Spirituality should be the hallmark of our lifestyles and is associated with myriad faith practices. Due to the wide range of faith practices, this study focuses on essential practices like love, mercy, restitution, pastoral care, and the urgency of shaping people's lives.¹ Despite religious and non-religious groups actively working on diverse projects for immigrant social justice, there is still room for more and possibly better actions everywhere. In some religious groups, devotion is the most common expression of our faith. However, as previously stated (section 3.2. Spirituality), Gilberto Cavazos-González advocates for a broader approach to spirituality. Within it, there is an interest in promoting spirituality as an academic discipline that differs from a process that builds and supports our devotional life.² As a Spiritualogian, an expert in spiritual studies (*espiritualogo*), Cavazos-González is concerned about the relationship between Christian spirituality, Church social teaching, and pastoral ministry—or Practical Theology.

¹ Restitution is a contentious subject in our society and ecclesiastical circles. For an excellent discussion of this topic, see Julio A. González Paniagua, Doctoral Thesis, *The United States Latin American Immigration Crisis: A Theological, Historical, and Educational Approach for Restitution*, (Unpublished, Madison, New Jersey: Drew University. May 12, 2023). Accessed June 29, 2023.

² Cf. Friar Gilberto Cavazos-González, OFM. <https://relforcon.org/people/friar-gilberto-cavazos-gonzalez-ofm-1>. Accessed March 3, 2023.

Besides this academic viewpoint, Cavazos-González, confesses his preference to explore spirituality as an art. Art conveys an enjoyable activity requiring constant practice, study, and repetition until we master it like any other artistic technique and ability.³ He agrees with Mahatma Gandhi: “An ounce of practice is worth more than tons of preaching,” as we aim for consistency in our actions to achieve proficiency and sustainability.

Furthermore, more straightforwardly, in *Practicing Our Faith*, Craig Dykstra and Dorothy C. Bass state, “Christian practices are things Christian people do together over time in response to and in the light of God’s active presence for the life of the world.” Thus, “...these are ordinary [things], the stuff of everyday life...” woven faithfully as a way of life.⁴ For example, life-giving faith practices include honoring the body, providing hospitality to others, applying household economics, Bible reading, learning to say yes and no, prayer, fasting, meditation, keeping the Sabbath, giving testimony concerning discernment, shaping communities, forgiving, healing, counseling, visiting the sick and prisoners, and others.⁵

Life-giving spiritual practices build social justice and follow the well-known healthcare providers’ Hippocratic Oath of “do no harm” to help people through a clear understanding of how to confront injustices. For example, regarding restitution, Julio González-Paniagua asserts: “As individuals or as part of an institution, like a church, we

³ Gilberto Cavazos-González, *Más allá de la Devoción: La vida Espiritual, La Justicia y la Liberación Cristiana*, Breve historia del término, (Navarra, España: Editorial Verbo Divino, 2014), 19-22.

⁴ Dorothy C. Bass, *Practicing Our Faith* (San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1997), 5.

⁵ Dorothy C. Bass, *Practicing Our Faith*, 5.

are financially limited to retribute stolen properties. However, we can retribute dignity, confidence, acceptance, opportunities, and love to sustain the impoverished [...] to a productive and fulfilling life.”⁶ This example suggests the necessity to develop intentionality and dedication to achieve excellence in faith practices. To make strides in our journey, believers must develop a sustainable interest in faith practices, as seen in the teachings of Jesus. The Letter of James helps the Church understand Jesus’ criteria for distinguishing between sheep and goats, religious belief (faith), and deeds.⁷ Although Albert Einstein asserted that “it is easier to break an atom than a prejudice,” we must prove him wrong. We must supply energy and strength to benefit humankind—breaking prejudices. However, the Church’s most significant challenge is deciphering how to apply these faith practices consistent with the Gospel’s authenticity. Lastly, I may exchange faith and spiritual practices, knowing they are not always equal.

4.1. Love

Love is our faith practiced to its most magnificent and elevated quintessence. As Cornell West affirms, “Justice is what love looks like in public.”⁸ Furthermore, T. B. Maston states that love is the “crowning virtue.”⁹ Love is a choice and an act of will, constituting the golden standard for faith practices within God’s kingdom. Love must

⁶ Ibid., 44.

⁷ Mathew 25:31-46 and James 2:21-26.

⁸ Cornel West quotes, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/279991-never-forget-that-justice-is-what-love-looks-like-in> . Accessed April 22, 2023.

⁹ T.B. Maston, *Why Live the Christian Life?* 120.

imbue our spiritual and physical actions and underline all our efforts, including truth and justice, to effectively transform the world. According to the Greek definition of agape, love is the leading factor in adequately changing lives and society. Jesus emphatically challenged: “For I say unto you, if thy justice does not exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”¹⁰ Jesus’s priority on justice should direct our lives to: “...seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (justice), and all these things will be added to you.”¹¹ Thus, 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 and 1 John 4:11 establish the most consequential Scripture templates for practicing love and social justice. Justice without love is an oxymoron. Furthermore, without justice and love, there is no Christian life because “God is love.”¹² No wonder Martin Luther King expressed: Now we can see what Jesus meant when he said,

"Love your enemies." We should be happy that he did not say, "Like your enemies." It is almost impossible to like some people. "Like" is a sentimental and affectionate word. How can we be affectionate toward a person whose avowed aim is to crush our very being and place innumerable stumbling blocks in our path? How can we like a person who is threatening our children and bombing our homes? This is impossible. But Jesus recognized that love is greater than like. When Jesus bids us to love our enemies, he is speaking neither of eros nor philia; he is speaking of agape, understanding, and creative, redemptive goodwill for all men. Only by following this way and responding with this type of love are we able to be children of our Father who is in heaven. ... Every time I look at the cross, I am reminded of the greatness of God and the redemptive power of Jesus Christ. I am reminded of the beauty of sacrificial love and the majesty of unswerving devotion to truth. ... Love is the most durable power in the world. This creative force, so beautifully exemplified in the life of our Christ, is the most potent instrument available in mankind’s quest for peace and security.¹³

¹⁰ Matthew 5:20.

¹¹ Matthew 6:33.

¹² 1 John 4:6.

¹³ Martin Luther King Jr., *Strength to Love*, (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1963), 44. See also, [Strength to Love Quotes by Martin Luther King Jr. \(goodreads.com\)](https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/author/Martin-Luther-King-Jr), Accessed April 20, 2024.

The Church’s agape love must be pervasive and respond convincingly to Jesus’ radical message for change. Love’s imperative compels us to care, offer service, and be concerned for individuals and society.¹⁴ Mark Bozzuti-Jones affirms that prejudices—racism, xenophobia, homophobia, misogyny—“prevent us from co-existing in love.”¹⁵ When we do not love nor practice justice, we betray others. First John 3:10-11 confirms it: “In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest; Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God nor is he who does not love his brother. You first heard this message: We should love one another.”

4.2. Be Aware of the Language

Words matter, but manners even more. One of the latest examples is the 2022 Oscars ceremony fiasco between Chris Rock and Will Smith.¹⁶ Awkwardly, there are widespread ways to express thoughts and feelings by hinting at derogatory jokes about sex, xenophobia, accents, body defects, and socio-economically motivated prejudices. However, amusing comparisons or remarks belittle others and have adverse outcomes. Criticizing and denigrating others is not a fair game. Ruth King depicts these appalling results, saying: “Regardless of race, we must all concern ourselves with both intent and impact and do

¹⁴ Emmanuel Buch, *Ética Bíblica: Fundamentos de la Moral Cristiana*, 2ª Ed., (Tarragona, España: Grupo Nelson, 2014). 201, 15-26.

¹⁵ Mark Bozzuti-Jones, *Face to the Rising Sun: Reflections on Spirituals and Justice*, 33.

¹⁶ Angie Orellana Hernández and Amy Haneline, Will Smith Slapped Chris Rock at the 2022 Oscars. Here’s what has happened since. USA Today, March 21, 2023. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/entertainment/movies/2023/03/03/will-smith-chris-rock-slap-2022-oscars/11338815002/>. Accessed March 13, 2024.

what we can to wake up and minimize the harm of others and ourselves.”¹⁷ She reveals that poor judgment in using appropriate language leads to adverse outcomes such as breaking old relationships.

Furthermore, King’s chapter *Kindness Practice* (Metta) details this idea about the complex race issue.¹⁸ Hasty language and its implicit attitudes hinder harmony, showing a lack of empathy in every context.¹⁹ Miguel A. de la Torre expresses a similar call when many parents “verbally or, more likely, non-verbally communicate to their child. [Alternatively], children may learn to remain silent or offer up nervous laughter as the usual response to racist jokes, slurs, or abuses.”²⁰

Nobody likes being the talking point of a sickening story. Let us stop creating bad feelings among people. The apostle James delivers an appropriate message about the correct use of the tongue:

But no [human being] can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it, we bless our God and Father, and with it, we curse [human beings], who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.²¹

The tongue utters what the heart and mind believe. Instead, we should remain silent to avoid conflicts and disputes and listen quietly to God’s voice. We should meditate more and talk less!

¹⁷ Ruth King, *Mindful of Race*, 57.

¹⁸ Ruth King, *Mindful of Race*, 93-103.

¹⁹ Ruth King, *Mindful of Race*, 45-70.

²⁰ Miguel A. de la Torre, *The U.S. Immigration Crisis*, 84.

²¹ James 3:8-10.

As another unfortunate example, The Guardian reports The anti-immigrant slur US border patrol tried to ban: ‘It reflects sanctioned violence.’²² Thus, careless vocabulary dehumanizes and leads to violence and other wanted social responses.

4.3. *Shalom*

The concept of *shalom* in Hebrew conveys the maximum of completeness and excellent expectations.²³ It combines peace, love, and justice to achieve spiritual and physical security and wholeness. *Shalom* points to calmness, the enjoyment of the benefit of the place where we live, the usefulness of the work, the peace in our relationships, and the most profound sense of God’s presence and blessings. Moreover, *Shalom* points to a joyful life of well-being, allowing us to harmonize spirituality while caring for the needs of others. The holy person must recognize and share God’s *shalom* to attain wholeness, safety, and harmony. As an example of these efforts, we can review and learn from the efforts of some Jewish communities to implement their *Shalom* perspectives.”²⁴

4.4. **Become Practical: Understand**

Sadly, many nations worldwide still face the dreadful results of economic and political systems and leaders who do not understand human anguish. Many countries

²² Matthew Cantor in Los Angeles, March 4, 2024. The Guardian, [The anti-immigrant slur US border patrol tried to ban: ‘It reflects sanctioned violence’ \(yahoo.com\)](#), Accessed April 20, 2024.

²³ W. E. Vine, *Diccionario Expositivo*, s.v. “*Shalom*,” 238.

²⁴ Sanctuary Or *Shalom* <https://www.orshalomsf.org/sanctuary>, <https://www.templemicah.org/act/sukkatshalom/>, <https://rodephshalom.org/immigration/>. Accessed April 20, 2024.

worldwide are manipulated by merciless, apathetic, and selfish leaders like Abimelech in Shechem, in Judges' time.²⁵ Thus, it is appropriate for us to review Jotham's parable depicting Abimelech's terrible leadership. Jotham's parable addresses the graphic image of reckless menaces and bribery, which misused social order and justice in Abimelech's favor but against Shechem's people. Gracelessly, a fruitless bramble, like in this allegorical passage, takes over good, caring, honored, and hardworking leaders to cause chaos and injustices.

The results often are apparent. Capable leaders yield their spaces to those bad ones to avoid personally uneasy burdens and criticism. The world remains chaotic due to leaders like Abimelech, who cannot recognize their questionable leadership, often due to the apathy of good leaders and the silent majorities that do not want to become involved. Again, I hope no Church is practicing such questionable leadership attitudes.

This cocktail of circumstances contributes more to the problem than the solutions. Knowing and understanding the problem precedes the solution and constitutes the basis for changes. John Maxwell states, "Leaders [must] read the need, then lead."²⁶ The lack of knowledge and empathy are the reasons for the Church's past cocktail of errors that prolonged social injustices. A healthy Church intentionally reaches out to know its community and becomes involved in its social, political, and economic problems while fostering people's spirituality. In that sense, how many immigrants do we personally know and have some sort of relationship (other than a contractual relationship)? Moreover, how

²⁵ Judges 9:1-16.

²⁶ John Maxwell, *Leadership Promises for Every Day* (Nashville, TN: Maxwell Motivation, Inc., 2003), 322.

do those relationships change our perceptions about immigrants? Those objectives are achievable with caring and loving interpretation, contextualizing Scripture, and searching for God's will.

The Gospel's strategy includes using our senses: "if we have ears to hear, we should listen."²⁷ Nevertheless, it also includes the correct diagnosis and management of human nature. We must foster obedience to God's commands in order to understand social crises and remedy injustices. Hence, proper hermeneutics of Jesus' Good Samaritan story and James' comprehensive Practical Theology become necessary for social involvement.²⁸ Believers should remain eager disciples, formulating questions to grow spiritually. Transcendent leaders search the Scriptures and daily newspapers to contextualize what happens in their place, space, and time. We should learn from the past and know what is happening around us to help broken people suffering discrimination and who are active in attempting to claim their rights.

4.5. Forgiveness

Martin Luther King, Jr. said: "Forgiveness is not an occasional act; it is a permanent attitude."²⁹ In other words, forgiveness must be a sustainable virtue. The Church must practice forgiveness at every step while working toward reconciliation. If forgiveness is complex, the aftermath of restoration and reconciliation is even more challenging. When

²⁷ Luke 8:8.

²⁸ Luke 10:25-37. See also, Lydia E. Mercado-Sherman, *Editores*, Teología Pastoral y Espiritualidad, 67.

²⁹ *The Words of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, selected and introduced by Coretta Scott King (New York, NY: Newmarket Press, 1987), 23.

the Church's attitude toward social justice focuses on the correct issues and confronts them caringly, as a body, a transformation is possible.

Some obstacles arise from societal dominating groups that work against the Church's priorities. However, the Church's biggest obstacle is when it does not respond mercifully to the needs of others, which can cultivate grudges and bad feelings against other groups. Thus, faith practices must show mercy and compassion toward others as we claim them, Christ. Forgiveness is necessary for a healthy future, to promote reconciliation, and hopefully to attain salvation. Aware of this complex relationship between forgiveness and justice, the Church must undertake a proactive role in this binomial faith-practice-forgiveness, to demolish the current situation (*status quo*) that hinders true justice. In other words, if injustice persists, forgiveness only solidifies the status quo and hence the injustice, particularly in the community. Thus, in this respect, the Church has a paramount transformative task to achieve. In *Practicing Our Faith*, L. Gregory Jones describes forgiveness as a whole way of life.³⁰ This way of life allows individuals and communities to boldly work toward reconciliation and transformation to surmount misunderstandings, difficulties and obstacles of all kinds.

4.6. Shaping Communities

Shaping communities is not only social but spiritual engineering. The purpose is gathering, breaking the bread, telling stories, and relating to Others.³¹ When practicing

³⁰ Dorothy C. Bass, *Practicing Our Faith*, 134.

³¹ Dorothy C. Bass, *Practicing Our Faith*, 119.

koinonia (mutual help, fellowship, communion, or joint participation), we build and shape communities by improving feelings of solidarity. Families often suffer harsh times. As the Dalai Lama suggests, we travel a long distance to visit and learn about faraway places from home; however, we do not cross the street to meet neighbors or family members to respond to their needs.

As a Church, we must share stories of both *Koinonia* and *Kerygma* in order to develop, shape, and connect people with empathy and love.³² Otherwise, moral and social decay can hinder spiritual sustainability. Conversely, *Kerygma* conveys the substance of the message. In the case of justice, we should live it as the good news.³³ To sustain spirituality, we must focus on our inner being, not opinions or possessions. However, paradoxically, growing in faith requires knowing the suffering and struggles of the Church members and neighbors. Thus, to be effective in the community, the Church must understand the people we love around it in order to learn their emotional, psychological, and spiritual languages. That attitude shows empathy, teaches people to utilize expressive language, and allows the Church to empathize with and care for its neighbors' needs.

Nevertheless, the biggest problem is that we often do not know what is happening in the community due to the lack of communication and understanding of our ministerial context. An honest dialogue explores community problems. That awareness supports groups, builds trust, establishes long-term relationships, and promotes healing between Church members and the community.

³² W. E. Vine. *Diccionario Expositivo*, Nashville, s.v. "*Koinonia*", 108.

³³ W. E. Vine, *Diccionario Expositivo*, s.v. "*Kerigma*," 685-685.

4.7. Overcoming Evil

One of the most tragic and evil situations in the modern world is the constant human rights violations. The Church often does not realize its purpose and responsibility in confronting evil and conforms to the world's views. As such, the Church frequently resists changes, making its mission and demands harder to realize. The ever-changing world affects the Church in many ways.

Reciprocally, the potential of a transformed and renewed Church must attempt to influence the world by fulfilling Paul's message: "Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good."³⁴ However, in these struggles and sufferings, the Church must respond in various ways. The Church must face this indifference to the misery and pain of millions with sensible and genuine interest in advancement. We must overcome evil by lifting people suffering dispossession, humiliation, and violation of the most elementary rights of the human being granted by our Creator.

For example, in Latin and North America, not to mention other regions, we constantly witness police abuses, prison overcrowding and insanitation, despotism, marginalization, and attacks on human dignity in all its forms.³⁵ These situations undoubtedly contribute to the migration crisis northward. Thus, in searching for solutions to these painful experiences, the Church must decisively influence the development of a Theology of Human Rights and Migration. There are ubiquitous human rights violations everywhere which are evil manifestations in today's society. Thus, we must prioritize

³⁴ Romans 12:21.

³⁵ Harold Segura, *Ser Iglesia para los demás*, 113.

preparedness to advocate human rights and to make the Gospel's vision the standard in favor of those who suffer. It is heartbreaking to read reports of the Human Rights Watch organization in different parts of the world.³⁶

Therefore, the best way to overcome evil, as discussed throughout this section, is to establish a workable pathway according to the true agape love in all dimensions. This agape love is a clear call for the Church to be ready to confront and transform those situations by living out the Gospel. Our responsibility as Christ's Church is to promote human rights in the modern world. These situations are teachable lessons that concern the Gospel. In addition, we can also learn a few lessons from the experiences and legacies from history, like the challenges of the French Revolution of 1789 and other meaningful struggles throughout the past.³⁷ Shamefully, we still negate basic human needs that constitute evil, like lack of decent salaries, healthcare, education, access to housing, and justice for many people, mainly minorities. These basic unfilled needs trigger migration, unease in civilization, and conflict in how we violently express our views.

No wonder that attitude forces the Church on the narrow path of being the true salt of the earth and the world's light.³⁸ To be both, the Church must proclaim the correct message and realize that Jesus entrusted us with a comprehensive mission and responsibility, not a

³⁶ For concrete example of crisis, see news and reports of the Human Rights Watch. www.hrw.org. Accessed April 23, 2024.

³⁷ Harold Segura, *Ser Iglesia Para Los Demás: Hacia una Espiritualidad Comprometida*, 2da. Edición Actualizada. (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Ediciones Kairós, 2010), 109-130.

³⁸ Matthew 5:13-16.

partisan one deprived of love. If we do not exercise our function adequately, “the stones would cry out.”³⁹

To improve various underserved communities, it is imperative to pay attention, revisit and implant at least two programs instituted by the early Church: *Koinonia* and *Diakonia*. Both concepts portray the communion and the service of the Church community from the outset of the book of Acts and in the letters of Paul, Hebrews, and James. These programs are still pertinent and necessary for today’s Church work. However, they must be functional and practical by adapting and contextualizing them to today’s needs. Therefore, in the following paragraphs, I suggest funneling some of these objectives through the two essential programs developed in the early Church: *Koinonia* and *Diakonia*.

4.8. Koinonia

Koinonia comes from the Greek root *koinós*.⁴⁰ Etymologically, it comes from the word “*com-yos*,” the ones who go together, and refers to things with shared, public, or communal ownership. *Koinonia* is both, at once, an expression of and measurement of our spirituality. *Koinonia* works simultaneously as a thermometer and a thermostat to set new parameters or paradigms. It involves communication, a shared good in general or in collaborative groups, an intimate relationship with God, and transformative actions for humankind: “Do not neglect to do good and share, for God is pleased with such sacrifices (Hebrews 13:16).” *Koinonia* is a joint participation and sharing implying a solid

³⁹ Luke 19:40.

⁴⁰ Sergio Ojeda-Cárcamo, *Hacia una Teología*, 78-79.

relationship between believers and God. It describes how we live in the Spirit and the kind of fellowship achievable when we are united as a body. More than ever, *Koinonia* is still a practical way to display empathy and solidarity with those communities going through difficulties.

4.9. *Diakonia*

Diakonia is *Koinonia*'s outward expression of love that embodies the church's arm to touch the world.⁴¹ We need to practice *Diakonia* in private and public squares. It is the praxis' hallmark for the community's growth. *Diakonia* emphasizes service to care for the basic needs of believers and non-believers by distributing food, shelter, and spiritual and emotional support to the harmed, elders, poor, widows, and children. When we practice *Diakonia*, we live to support and care for others in response to what God does for us. This lifestyle should develop the Church's diaconal function in order to practice the faith community's proclamation of the Gospel with compassion and reconciliation.

4.10. Pastoral Care (Counseling)

The journeys experienced by most immigrants often leave them feeling confused, depressed, and lost due to economic and psychological strains, especially if circumstances force them to become refugees. Our own lives must deal with clusters of problems. In *The Way of Wisdom in Pastoral Counseling*, Daniel S. Schipani considers pastoral counseling a

⁴¹ Sergio Ojeda-Cárcamo, *Hacia una Teología*, 155-174.

vital part of practical theology, which can better enable clients to deal with life crises.⁴²

Therefore, pastoral care, counseling ministry, or chaplainship must be part of a comprehensive community program for immigrants.

A person's life experiences realized in various places and at different times often modify how we develop and practice a proper theology. Practical theology, its genitives, and the theology of place and migration affect life choices wherever and whenever we are. These theologies empathically connect actions and reflections within a place and time to give life to our psychological and spiritual lives. Churches should seek to understand groups like migrants as fellow human beings to help society recognize their full humanity. The Church must be motivated by the Gospel, which is normative, and not by partisan politics and ideologies.

The Church should assume its prophetic role and utilize its readiness to support people spiritually. Moreover, the Church should constitute an oasis for those in dire need by developing and supporting existing programs to help immigrants and those who might be weak. These programs must provide caring services, from hotlines to convergence behavior ministries and other strategies to improve the lives of immigrants and other needy people.⁴³ These strategies help to depict the Church as a humane, guiding, and healing body representing Christ's loving care for people. In all this, Love is not optional.

Once we develop empathy, we will more readily understand the dire situations expressed in the pain and suffering of others. Empathy involves having a kind attitude and

⁴² Daniel S. Schipani, *The Way of Wisdom in Pastoral Counseling* (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonites Studies, 2003), 5-36.

⁴³ Howard W. Stone. *Crisis Counseling*. (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1989), 68-73.

understanding for others while genuinely looking for solutions to problems. We must open our minds and hearts to solidarity with the suffering. Often, counselors model that kind of human virtue for us. In his essay, Schipani quotes Christie Cozad Neuger's proposal: "The goal of pastoral counseling is not just personal transformation but also the transformation of the culture—including the church—as part of a larger transformational project through pastoral care."⁴⁴ The goals of pastoral counseling practices must liberate, empower, and heal the path of those seeking care. Unlike other institutions, the Church has unique roles, programs, and opportunities that are not always available to governmental and non-governmental institutions.

4.11. Discipline to Grow Spiritually

In *Disciplinas Espirituales*, Peter Amsterdam suggests that as Spiritualogians, we must study and explore spiritual disciplines deeper.

This kind of study makes one aware of how faith operates. Understand more deeply the reasons for everything. When we have a better understanding of the Scriptures, their context, and their overall meaning—including the history of God's relationship with humanity in general and ancient Israel in particular, and the concept of God's plan of salvation through Jesus—we have a clearer understanding of who He is and why He does what He does. You get to know him better and understand what he wants from us and why. Simply put, one can get to know him personally even more deeply. The insights we gain from studying God at the foundation level, starting from a deeper understanding of what He has told us about Himself, allow us to understand better why He wants us to be and live a certain way and how we can better adjust our behavior to His nature.

The benefits of studying and delving into spiritual topics are manifold, but the process takes work; it requires effort, application, time, and discipline. However, from my personal experience, it is worth it. As I better understand how my beliefs are articulated, the meaning of Scripture has been revealed to me, and my faith has deepened. While some of the texts I have read and studied have been quite dry and

⁴⁴ Schipani, *The Way of Wisdom in Pastoral Counseling*, 34-35.

academic, I have come to a greater understanding of God and His truth by persevering in my program of study. In the Essentials series, I *tried to condense the rudiments of theology that I acquired through my studies, intending to be a good foundation for studying the Scriptures at an elementary level.*⁴⁵

Christian spirituality allows the Church to cultivate a practice that will hopefully allow us to learn and grow daily by surrendering to God. However, for sustainable spiritual growth, it is necessary to develop a vision, have discipline, and set aside time to study and meditate—in other words, have an attitude of reading, digesting, and practicing what we learn from the Scriptures and spiritual leaders. As Henry Ford said, “You cannot build a reputation on what you are going to do.”⁴⁶ First, we must do something to build that reputation. Without these elements, there is no fruit.

⁴⁵ Peter Amsterdam, *Disciplinas Espirituales; El Estudio Rincón de los Directores*, <https://directors.tfionline.com/es/post/disciplinas-espirituales-el-estudio/> August 5, 2014. Cf., Gilberto Cavazos-González, *Más allá de la Devoción*, 23-27. Accessed March 10, 2023.

⁴⁶ Henry Ford, <https://quotefancy.com/quote/826150/Henry-Ford-You-can-t-build-a-reputation-on-what-you-re-going-to-do-It-s-simple-fantasize>. Accessed January 31, 2024.

PART B
CHAPTER 5

LINKING SOCIAL JUSTICE AS SPIRITUAL PRACTICE FOR
IMMIGRANTS

This curriculum provides information for at least five Sixty-minute Bible studies/lectures on social justice and spirituality issues concerning migration. These modules unpack the essential themes and the study's scope of social justice and spiritual aspects, as addressed in the first four chapters of this dissertation, with multiple opportunities for group discussion. Since we must be a relevant community Church, we aim to impact, improve, and relate practical strategies for Church programming. We must establish support groups to study and develop activities for these lectures. The groups must prioritize immigrants in their adaptation stage to their new lives, such as counseling, spiritual support, and basic needs.

We aim to stimulate an honest debate that will integrate social justice as a spiritual practice in an immigrant church—Primera Iglesia Bautista de Austin (PIBA) and other similar churches. PIBA is an average-sized Hispanic parish in Austin, TX, as described in Chapter 1, Section 1.2. Context and Positionality (pages 9-12). Thus, we encouraged an active debate by reading the Scripture texts, reviewing the subject matter, and then sharing and reflecting on living social justice as a spiritual practice in its manifold dimensions. The definitions and the migrants' essential social and spiritual needs will hopefully help to clarify immigrants' new context in the United States. Together, we will explore the Church's challenges by relating the church's practical social justice philosophy with life-giving faith practices. Lastly, we hope to develop a

practical theological framework to connect social justice and spirituality by proposing a few new initiatives for the Church to respond to the Scripture passages we will study.

This project contains five modules. Each module provides the essential information to lead the discussion about social justice as a practice of spirituality. The scenario and context for this project are the church congregants of PIBA who are interested in having an informed perspective about necessary themes. The goal is to gather and encourage the church's members to be involved in studying and developing a more profound knowledge about the immigration crisis in our community. That will prompt a practical project to deal with the suffering of hundreds or thousands of people who need help. This project will provide a structure to cover a series of prayers, Bible studies, and workshop sessions to train and qualify the church to act in these areas. The agenda will include at least six weekly meetings where we will make general sessions and divisions of small groups as needed to accomplish the following objectives:

- Explore diverse immigrant stories that may shed light on the immigration crisis.
- Explore the most significant necessities of those immigrants.
- Organize a series of Bible studies, prayers, and workshops to support immigrants in need.
- Develop at least one practical activity as a group to support immigrants
- Evaluation.

Each session will have two parts. The first one will have a short devotional that may contain biblical passages, poems, prayers, or hymns to create the necessary spiritual atmosphere to release the stress of our quotidian schedule and an introductory lecture about the main topic of each module. The second part will be a group discussion.

Phase One: Gather Members of the Ministerial Context

- Opening Prayer
- Use portions of Module One to set the tone
- Tell your own Immigrant-Pilgrimage Story
- Break into small groups
- Each can share their own story with someone recording highlights
- Return to the large group, and recorders reveal what others have shared
- Closing Prayer

MODULE 1

God allows himself to be humiliated and crucified in the Son to free the oppressors and the oppressed from oppression and open to them to free sympathetic humanity.

~Jürgen Moltmann

5.1. Why Should we Engage in this Work?

Fulfilling the requirement of social justice and spirituality needs resolution and coordination. The refugee crisis constitutes an endless lingering social concern and is a hot political subject. It interconnects multiple countries, societies, and issues worldwide, which makes it a naturally challenging research subject. All these challenges result in a nexus of possible suffering and pain, which often synergize to worsen the immigration crisis. Due to its overwhelming intricacy, most people, including the authorities of the United States, including Congress, and Churches, often prefer to stay the course by frequently deferring solutions.

However, others, including myself, empathize with the immigrant's issues and seek sensible solutions. People's suffering is an opportunity for a life-changing ministry and a Church to exercise its leadership in the community.

Hence, the Hispanic Church must introspectively join in these efforts and be risk-takers by developing visionary programs to change people's lives. Furthermore, the

Church must prophetically raise its voice to create and promote compassionate policies to fulfill the Gospel's principles. Immigrants need education, safety, healthcare, training in economics, decent housing, fair salaries, spiritual care, and civil rights advocacy. They also need to be able to participate in human and drug trafficking awareness programs proactively. Most of these areas of concern have a link to a lack of social justice and weak or non-existent spiritual practices, which are often the root causes of social unrest worldwide. These facts are also valid for other groups across society. Thus, I am contemptuous of the government's inaction, and the policy summarized in the phrase stays the course to which many Churches everywhere adhere.

Because this issue is multifaced, the immigration crisis remains a broad subject. Thus, this project study examines biblical templates to explore how the Church can apply such biblical models of life-giving spiritual practices to advance social justice. Furthermore, it also aims to develop a prophetic voice for sustainable, caring, loving, and life-changing attitudes about immigrants. Sadly, many immigrants often forget about the suffering endured by other immigrants after surmounting their struggles. So, we should constantly renew our goals to help others with a revolving attitude to support future generations.

5.2. Historical Background

Jesus' life-giving faith practices have impacted millions for centuries. His message inspires theologians such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Jürgen Moltmann,

and others to adopt Jesus' model as the standard for the "church for others."¹ With those ideas, a broad blending of spiritualities associated with the natural and social sciences set a milestone in the eighteen and nineteenth centuries. However, despite multiple attempts by those individuals to blend spirituality with social justice, the task remains a work in progress in this postmodern world.

5.3. Social Justice is an Expression of Love

We must take the initiative to contextualize theological lifestyle templates to improve lives collectively. Those efforts require objective programming as well as a dedication to the journey the Church must undertake to address the suffering of immigrants.

Justice is essential to accompany the virtue of love for one's neighbor.² As a result, an interfaith approach must open new avenues that demand compassionate social justice as a spiritual practice. This study defines the terms and scope of the project postmodern social justice debates, notwithstanding and also establishing a theological referent. It introduces and discusses the pertinent advice on the Theme and Significance of Immigration to America in Chapter 2, Section 2.1.; Pastoral and Theological Concerns, Section 2.2.; and the Biblical and Theological Basis for Social Justice (pages 14-24).

To initiate the discussion, let us search for the connection of a handful of biblical justice principles linked to love. First, the Hebrew *Mishpat* offers a legal foundation to

¹ Harold Segura, *Ser Iglesia Para Los Demás*, 9-40.

² Leviticus 19:18.

provide fairness to those who suffer injustices.³ Micah’s understanding of the Hebrew concept of *Mishpat* describes God’s call to “practice justice and love mercy.”⁴ When Micah says, “to walk humbly with the Lord,” in context, he expects honest and fair dealing with others—neighbors. A second Hebrew term, *Tzedek*, describes having solidarity and providing social justice to those suffering, valuing their dignity as human beings.⁵ Thirdly, in the New Testament, the Greek term *dikaioné* voices a virtue belonging only to God—the standard behavior the citizens of the Reign of God should pursue, as found in Matthew 6:33.⁶

These terms assess the implications of justice spread throughout the Scriptures regarding fulfilling God’s will and following Christ’s example of loving our neighbor. The biblical assessment of justice pervades the collective sense, in keeping with religious, cultural, economic, and political aspects, in order to break down barriers within and outside our context.⁷ In *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*, David Gushee and Glen Stassen assert, “Kingdom is something we do, not just wait for.”⁸ Kingdom practices such as justice, healing, reconciliation, community building, and deliverance can be the solutions to diverse social injustices in the world, and all of these

³ W. E. Vine, *Diccionario Expositivo*, s.v. “Mishpat,” 170.

⁴ Micah 6:8.

⁵ The Jewish Value of Justice. <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/tzedek-the-jewish-value-of-justice/>. See Deuteronomy. 16:20; Amos 5:24. Accessed March 4, 2022.

⁶ W.E. Vine, *Diccionario Expositivo*, 476-477.

⁷ Much of the information presented in this introduction—including the quotation of *Kingdom Ethics*, David Gushee and Glen Stassen, is from my Pastor, Dr. Antonio Miranda, 2020 Graduation Message of Howard Payne University, Brownwood, TX.

⁸ David P. Gushee & Glen H. Stassen, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*, 2nd Edition, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 13.

expressions of love for others. Social justice is attainable when we transform our minds to “act justly and to love mercy” toward our neighbors in their different acceptances: *mishpat*, *Tzedek*, and *dikaio suné*.⁹ For believers, social justice is not a choice but necessary to reinstitute justice in the world.

These themes have been essential to God’s people. They triggered many theological debates, mainly after the Second Vatican Council (the 1960s and 1970s). The purpose was to integrate the Gospel and social work as a byproduct of Latin America and spiritual development in the United States.¹⁰ For instance, in *What Americans Hear about Social Justice at Church –and What They Do About it*, R. Khari Brown and Roland Brown thoroughly evaluated the relationship between sociological and political science with race and religion in the United States of America. They claim, citing the Pew Research Center statistics, that: “African Americans and Hispanics tend to be more supportive of religious leaders speaking out against racism and attempting to influence poverty and immigration than whites.”¹¹ In support, they quote the Pew Research Center, which reports that sixty-seven percent of African American worshippers reported hearing sermons supporting Black Lives Matter, compared to forty-seven percent of Hispanics and thirty-six percent of whites. This fact gives a better idea of why white parishioners who chose to attend worship services emphasizing social justice-themed sermons tend to be more politically progressive or open to hearing challenging messages than other white

⁹ Micah 6:8.

¹⁰ For example, Rubem Alves, José Miguez Bonino and C. René Padilla. Rubem A Alves. *Towards a Theology of Liberation: An Exploration Theological Encounter Between the Languages of Humanistic Messianism and Messianic Humanism*. (Princeton Theological Seminary, 1968).

¹¹ R. Khari Brown, Roland Brown, *What Americans Hear About Social Justice*, 66-17.

parishioners. They conclude that many Americans are pessimistic concerning inequality, political divisions, cultural conflict, and why social justice-minded churchgoers inspire members to work for policies that support their vision for the public good.

The general world model favors the materialistic realm. Our human biological nature often prioritizes the world over the spirit and disregards the Spirit within us. However, many Churches prioritize the spiritual over the inclusion of real-world needs. Due to our dual nature of spirit and flesh, we are whole: obverse and reverse-like coins with holistic needs. As such, we must develop a compelling lifestyle that sensibly interacts with flora, fauna, and other people's needs while still caring about spirituality. As Christ's followers, we can confront these concerns with two aligned Scriptural models of spirituality and justice. The first one, the mystical model, conveyed devotion as an expression of our faith. The second model is Jesus' comprehensive model, which will be privileged in this project study.

The first model depicts monks living isolated from the world, reading the Bible, and cultivating their spirits. As we have already seen, it was the preferred model during the early Church and Medieval times when Christians emphasized asceticism, mysticism, and martyrdom as their faith practices.¹² Those were and still are good-faith practices replete with good intentions. However, they needed a broader perspective because they kept practitioners isolated from the world. For example, *Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress*, the best-known Puritan model of the seventeenth century, shows a lonely pilgrim (Christian) escaping, dealing with himself, and struggling to heaven, abandoning this odd realm.

¹² Sergio Ojeda-Cárcamo, *Hacia una Teología*, 87-88.

That earnest outset isolates and depresses him as he searches outside the world for a refuge for *Shalom*. Although these activities may be genuine devout practices, the mystical model often shows no empathy. That leads to forgetting fellow humankind by focusing primarily on purifying the individual's soul.

5.4. Migration is an Ageless Phenomenon

Rooted thousands of years ago, in Genesis Judeo-Christian tradition, the story of Abraham and his descendants symbolizes the challenges, changes, and hope in searching for the Promised Land. Migration remains a disrupting trend that can affect humanity's spirit, justice, and essence of life for at least two societies. The society of origin, where the migrants exit, disrupts families and loses skilled, educated people, and the society into which immigrants arrive with challenges we have already mentioned. For a more detailed explanation of migration, see Chapter 3, Section 3.1, pages 32-36.

5.5. Jesus Calls for Action

Amazingly, Jesus offers a different, more comprehensive spiritual model. It is an integrated, physical-spiritual lifestyle incorporating wide-ranging relationships rooted in the social fabric. He calls us to live within the world, without merging into it, with a different attitude and broader prospects.¹³ Like a ship, we must navigate the world's seas, avoiding water flow into the vessel. Jesus' followers, like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King, Jr., Archbishop Óscar Arnulfo Romero, and Ignacio Ellacuría, embody His

¹³ John 17:15-16.

model, acknowledging the world's difficulties and cruelties of suffering.¹⁴ Like Jesus, none of these exemplars ran away from their challenges. Each confronted evil, claimed their spaces, tried transforming the world, and was well aware of the cost. They ultimately paid the price, or as Bonhoeffer would have said, the Cost of Discipleship. That involves concrete physical and spiritual actions—such as integrating worship, prayers, teaching, and preaching while exercising justice and bringing the Gospel to life.¹⁵ Jesus' Gospel purpose must conquer evil, heal the world, care for physical needs, and fight for social justice as an essential spiritual ritual, including covering basic physical needs—shelter, food, and sharing for a hopeful worldview.¹⁶ Jesus' model offers a broader prospect of being involved in the historical reality of the world in order to hopefully bring about change.

Suffering and inequalities create an excellent broth for politicians and social activists. Sadly, the Church often abandons social justice, leaving a noticeable vacuum in which politicians and activists eagerly offer solutions. Then, with some sagacity, they compete with the Church and can divide us. However, if the Church wants to be the Church for others, it must know the subject, recapture its mission, and promote constructive dialogues for life-giving faith practices. Otherwise, politicians' solutions that do not conform to God's plan could take over. As a result of injustices in our

¹⁴ John 16:33.

¹⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *El Precio de la Gracia*, 13-64.

¹⁶ Matthew 25:31-46.

communities and worldwide, social justice must be a priority for the Church praxes to care for and improve people's lives.¹⁷

Essentially, we are spiritual beings embodied in communities aligned with the Spirit. We must unroot the prejudices of underlying social problems and cultivate transcending life-giving faith practices while denouncing injustices and caring for the wellbeing of others. In that respect, the prophetic Church must establish a game plan and a scoreboard to assess its progress like any other life endeavor. The first step is to design what to do, and the second is to adjust the progress.

Despite the ubiquitous Gospel preaching in pulpits, injustices remain pandemic. The aim is prevention and early intervention to amend our practical and spiritual expressions. Given that Jesus referred those duties to the Church, it is imperative, without hesitation, to approach them eclectically, prioritizing practical theology and including political, economic, and sociological perspectives. The Church plan must include a calendar, practical solutions, and resources that attempt to embrace God's social justice alternatives for His children. Jesus' cost of discipleship to be "salt of the earth and the light of the world" motivates us to act against prejudices that hinder happiness and the abundant life in Him. These objectives are only achievable when we genuinely, synergistically love, share, and help people facing difficulties and marginalization.

Although education, economic resources, and other material things are essential, the most critical step is implementing a loving commitment to transformation and living the Gospel. The purpose is to move people from marginalized, disadvantageous positions

¹⁷ Leviticus 19:36 establishes the norms to practice justice, and Amos 5:15 and 24, its goal and results.

to life-giving paths. Social justice stands not for the heritage or legacy of any group, religion, or party but for the sake of humanity and in the name of God.

Sadly, the Church has conformed to the world, often siding with partisan ideologies far from the compassionate lifestyle requested by the Gospel. The biggest obstacles stem from partisan debates, relativism, and the need for more commitment to the issue of justice. Worldly philosophies often appeared more normative in our society than the Gospel. The Gospel calls us to exercise the kind-heartedness found in the ancient Israelite prophets and the followers of Jesus. However, unwisely, in Amos' and Jesus' time and ours, their words remain unvalued in the current circles of a postmodern Church. In His ministry, Jesus echoed the ancient prophets in support of justice. Jesus raised the bar, stating that our justice must be greater than the devout leaders of His time: the Scribes and Pharisees.¹⁸ Therefore, His message remains the homework for genuine kindness and love when diagnosing and seeking the proper responses to injustices.

The Jewish religion had Moses's law as their golden standard. Moreover, Christians believe that Jesus' Sermon on the Mount excels at providing proper examples of correct behavior, perhaps aiming to fulfill the Law of Moses. However, Jews and Christians alike must practice those commands to make them a more excellent pathway than any religious leaders of His or our time. We need Jesus' pitch, enhancing social justice, love, and mercy to make a better world.

¹⁸ Matthew 5:20-26.

5.6. Spirituality is a Lifestyle

The essence of the Church's pilgrimage requires a compassionate social ministry lifestyle engaging in the change we desire. Our pilgrimage must include social justice to improve the social health and quality of the Church's community. Due to the wide range of social problems, we must select at least one or two critical situations related to the Church's context to work with directly—for example, children and widow immigrants. They need education, food, and shelter, among other basic needs. The Church can strategically apply the Pareto Principle (80/20 Rule) to tackle these issues. In it, we must prioritize critical challenges and allocate all the necessary efforts to bring about a solution with an excellent outcome by relating the plan mentioned above and creating a scoreboard to evaluate parameters. We do not have to reinvent the wheel but apply and share some programs already developed, such as the *Ten Essential Strategies for Becoming a Multiracial Congregation* by Lewis and Janka, to excel in one or two leading issues at a time.¹⁹ That book is a practical theology approach to choosing doable activities to join efforts with other institutions to develop a living and productive pilgrimage focused on a specific scope, like the children mentioned above and widow immigrant situations.

Scriptural life in the spirit reminds us of the constant struggles between the never-ending, wide-ranging spiritual-flesh conflict. Like Paul, we constantly wrestle between what we must and hate to do.²⁰ Paul recognized the complexity and encouraged us to prioritize Christ's lifestyle instead of the flesh.

¹⁹ Jacqueline J. Lewis and John Janka. *Ten Essential Strategies for Becoming a Multiracial Congregation*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018).

Therefore, the church praxes require preparedness to close the gap between physical and spiritual needs comprehensively and sustainably. Living in the Spirit implies being open to God's *Ruah*.²¹ In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus itemized many actions to comply with God's kingdom objectives for human caring advances. The same message recurs in Ephesians 6:17-18, which prioritizes spiritual discipline and readiness for life. In Ephesians, our struggles are related to military duty, which sustains and permeates all our beings. Spiritual practices motivate an initiative-taking determination to seek God to respond to diverse needs. A shallow spiritual life is not acceptable. (See page 26, Chapter 3.2. Spirituality, for a deeper consideration of this subject).

MODULE 2

5.7. The Refugee Crisis

Phase Two – Gathering Information

- Opening Prayer
- Use portions from Module two to set the tone
- Distribute the questionnaire/survey²²
- Ask participants to brainstorm on things to do for immigrants
- Break into small groups
- Identify the top three suggestions for action
- Return to the larger group
- Identify the top suggestion for implementation
- Closing Prayer

²⁰ Romans 7:14-25.

²¹ Hebrew words for “breath, air, or wind” refer to the Spirit of God or Holy Spirit.

²² For this survey, I suggest using the model that appears in Appendix One on page 130.

Your enemy is not the refugee. Your enemy is the one who made him a refugee.

~Willie Nelson, Musician

Biblical Text: Matthew 2: 13-23

This second module defines refugees according to international laws and rights, like the 1951 Refugee Convention and other relevant legal standards.²³ Refugees and asylum seekers create a subgroup of migrants who suffer the most. Since 1960, Europe and North America (US and Canada) have become among the twenty-five most common destinations for immigrants worldwide.²⁴ Those movements follow climate disasters, wars, and socioeconomic and political unrest worldwide. These factors impact societies' educational, economic, and theological perspectives.²⁵ Frequent frustrations, lack of understanding, and tragedies provoke havoc, pain, and death everywhere. Like ancient pilgrims, blisters, calluses, and scars leave external and internal marks on millions who must go through those experiences. However, international forums like G-20, BRICS, and others often prioritize wars and political issues, relegating further important geo-social issues to second and third places and leaving countless unattended problems. These

²³ D. Glenn Butner, Jr., *Jesus the Refugee: Ancient Injustice and Modern Solidarity*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2023), 12-15.

²⁴ Top 25 Destinations of International Migrants *Migration Policy Institute*. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/top-25-destinations-international-migrants> . Accessed May 16, 2023.

²⁵ Jorge Castillo Guerra, *Teología de la Migración: Movilidad y Transformaciones Teológicas*, <http://www.scielo.org.co/pdf/thxa/v63n176/v63n176a04.pdf> . Accessed April 25, 2023.

forums seem interested in competing for economics and political hegemony instead of genuinely searching for social problem solutions.²⁶

As we build a life, we recall stories in time and places that accumulate as memories. These experiences and labels belittle human dignity, as happened with Herod's intention in the case of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph's saga.²⁷ These tragedies trigger people's search for better places and spaces for life prospects in economic, political, emotional, and spiritual freedom. Sadly, such exchanges are seldom smooth and welcomed by the involved societies. These hitches include a broad range of unwanted labels: "legal," "illegal," "undocumented," "cheap labor," "illegal worker," "black," "white," "brown," "political refugee," "asylee," "economic refugee," "non-Western," "non-integrated" or "dangerous."²⁸

Annually, thousands of refugees lose their lives attempting to leave places with inhumane living conditions and oppression.²⁹ Refugees are vulnerable, constituting a large sub-group of migrants that are "forced to flee their homes and cross an international border to find safety in another country."³⁰ Not all migrants are refugees; however, all

²⁶ Will The BRICS Confront the West at The G20? <https://www.silkroadbriefing.com/news/2023/08/29/will-the-brics-confront-the-west-at-the-g20/> . Accessed September 8, 2023.

²⁷ Matthew 2:7-18.

²⁸ Jorge Castillo Guerra, *Teología de la Migración*, 374.

²⁹ For example, the world mourns the five victims of the Titan Submersible but often forgets thousands dying while fleeing their countries. *Titan Submersible and Greek Migrant Crisis: Tragedies Reveal Inequities in World Attention*-The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/23/world/europe/titan-sub-greek-migrant-boat.html> . Former President Barack Obama adopted a similar reaction. *Barack Obama slams Titan coverage, as hundreds of migrants die in Greece - Rolling Out*. <https://rollingout.com/2023/06/23/barack-obama-titan-greece/> . Accessed June 23, 2023.

³⁰ *What is a refugee?* <https://www.unhcr.org/what-refugee>. Accessed June 20, 2023.

refugees are migrants.³¹ That indication has specific characteristics needing special attention and compassion. In other words, “A refugee is anyone fleeing danger, but in law, to be a refugee is to possess a status that guarantees certain rights, protections, and opportunities.”³² This essential distinction became evident after WWII with the 1951 Refugee Convention Definitions and the United States Refugee Act of 1980. Since then, the highest number of refugees has recently reached new records.

Nevertheless, migration is as ageless as humankind. In that respect, I agree with Miguel A. de la Torre, who says, “An immigration story runs like a thread through the entire biblical text consistently calling us to yoke our faith to the persecution of the alien among us.”³³ He concludes that even Adam and Eve started their journey when they were kicked out of the garden.

We have already established a strong relationship between migration and pilgrimage. Both activities build up memories that advance and respond to challenges. Migration disrupts fickle memories that teach us great lessons. For example, immersed in fear, sometimes, we develop and cultivate faith-lifting practices that support hopes for ourselves and new generations. In *Jesus the Refugee: Ancient Injustice and Modern Solidarity*, D. Glenn Butner, Jr. gauges today’s situation by exploring the ancient refugee

³¹ Immigrants versus Refugees – The Real Truckmaster.
<https://realtruckmaster.blog/2021/04/09/immigrants-versus-refugees/>. Accessed July 2, 2023.

³² D. Glenn Butner, Jr., *Jesus the Refugee*, 5.

³³ Miguel A. de la Torre, *The U.S. Immigration Crisis: Toward an Ethics of Place*, 114.

crisis shown in Jesus, Mary, and Joseph's journey to Egypt during Herod's persecution.³⁴

Butner asks: "Would Jesus receive refugee status today?"

He analyzes different angles of Matthew's passage, reflecting on refugees' ancient and modern crises. Butner's thesis connects and reflects on the 1951 Refugee Convention Definitions and the United States Refugee Act of 1980 to challenge today's predicament. He asserts that 145 countries have adopted the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol for Refugees today.³⁵ There are myriad worldwide conflicts. However, the most evident ones are the 2022 Ukraine War and decades-long political unrest in Africa, Latin America, and Israel-Gaza, with displacements reaching new records.³⁶

In that regard, humanity has become more aware of disparities and persecution, and many laws have become the backbone of a new attitude to deal with the refugee crisis. For example, the exodus to the North from Africa, South, and Central America is an excellent example of countless migrants asking for asylum and suffering all kinds of distress.³⁷ For decades, in our hemisphere, bloody wars consumed Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, impacting the Central American societies and churches.³⁸ The U.S. often supported dictators that did not promote pro-justice and democratic processes.

³⁴ Matthew 2: 13-23.

³⁵ D. Glenn, Butner, Jr., *Jesus the Refugee*, 15.

³⁶ Los desplazados forzosos en el mundo marcan récord con 110 millones. <https://www.other-news.info/noticias/los-desplazados-forzosos-en-el-mundo-marcen-nuevo-record-con-110-millones/>. Accessed June 20, 2023.

³⁷ Juan González, *Harvest of Empire*, 154-159.

³⁸ Miguel A. de la Torre, "The U.S. Immigration Crisis: Toward an Ethics of Place" 70.

Instead, those dictators proclaimed unfair policies for their people, creating post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) while forcing countless into asylum.³⁹ Some regimes (from right and left) do not adequately manage their people's claims for justice, exploiting unattended social and political issues for their benefit. Thus, we need more efforts and economic resources to cope with the magnitude of the problem. In the last twenty years, these unfortunate outcomes in Central America have triggered a substantial exodus toward the U.S. However, these situations can provide churches and social activists opportunities to help those refugees while practicing their faith. These opportunities must lead churches to embrace a new pro-justice movement to develop programs that build on social justice, love, and compassion to incarnate God's kingdom. Given those experiences, the church has a handful of migrants' critical issues to collaborate directly with them in their context. For example, we must embrace a changing pilgrimage to adopt a comprehensive social ministry with children and widows. This task requires prioritizing and setting adequate programs, allocating the necessary means, and outcome assessment. This study provides bibliographic references to several books and articles that deal with diverse social situations and the corresponding approach to tackle the church neighborhood's most common injustices and critical social needs.

MODULE 3

5.8. Affirming People with Jesus's Priorities

Phase Three – Prayer Service for Action

³⁹ D. Glenn Butner, Jr., *Jesus the Refugee*, 34-35.

- Opening Song –Lord, You have Come/Tú has venido a la orilla (Spanish version)
- Opening Prayer
- Reading
- Homily or Reflection⁴⁰
- Prayers of Petition and Action
- Closing Prayer
- Closing Song – Lord, You have Come/Tú has venido a la orilla (English version)

Biblical Text: Mark 2:23-3:6

Open the session by reading Mathew 11:27-30 and leading a reflective meditation. The passage will hopefully help participants search their souls in gratitude. It could be their own Sabbath experience in their innermost spaces by following Jesus' message. The objective of this module is multifold: to examine Jesus' response to injustices, even on Sabbath, and to understand how Jesus actively worked against injustices despite cultural/religious prohibitions regarding the Sabbath observation. Hopefully, the participant will be able to contextualize Jesus' understanding of priorities concerning his approach to the Sabbath.

Like Jesus, Christians live surrounded by many obstacles. Jesus confronted them in His journey, just as we must find ways to surmount hurdles daily, regardless of which day of the week. We discover angry, unhappy, and dissatisfied people everywhere who might be ranting, for example, against the successes of others. These attitudes constitute obstacles to progress and block fairness for others, while others can surmount obstacles and live celebrative lives. For example, Mark 2:23-3:6 shows an example of angry

⁴⁰ See Module Three, on page 140.

leaders who should know better. Certain Pharisees misinterpreted the objectives of Jesus' disciples by criticizing their endeavor on the Sabbath—not necessarily for good. They gave more weight to traditional issues in a legalistic manner rather than considering the physical needs of people with disabilities and Jesus' disciples' need for food. Mark 2:23-3:6 shows the Pharisees' misleading analysis of the Sabbath, which they used to push their hateful agenda against Jesus. However, twenty-one centuries later, many still use the same reasoning and tactics when the Church attempts to apply Jesus' commands for social justice. Our human nature does not help in that process. Let us examine this debate on the Sabbath to contextualize it within today's world.

5.9. The Sabbath: Jewish perspective

Abraham Joshua Heschel portrays the Sabbath as holiness in time, underscoring a fundamental characteristic of Judaism. He says that “time is “the heart of existence.”⁴¹ He considers holiness in time more normative than space and place and emphasizes that *what* happens is more important than *where* it happens. Heschel asserts that holiness in time is more concerned with events than space for the Jewish people, while other faiths emphasize space rather than time. He contends that time building requires a different feeling than building a cathedral in space. For Heschel, the Sabbath is God's finale of His grand masterpiece: “It is not an interlude, but the climax of living.”⁴²

Heschel declares the Sabbath is rest (*menuha*), but a holy rest to meditate, concentrate the mind, love, and achieve God's intimacy. It is a particular time to reflect

⁴¹ Abraham Joshua Heschel. *The Sabbath*. (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2005), 3.

⁴² Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 14.

on life's spiritual endeavors and to enjoy "tranquility, serenity, peace, stillness, harmony, and repose, pointing to eternal life."⁴³ He enhances the Sabbath's profound impact on God's intimate relationship with humans because "Thou art One."⁴⁴ The Sabbath invites our body to unite our souls in resting, worshiping God, and celebrating the majesty of holiness in time.⁴⁵ The Sabbath emphasizes the quality of time, surrendering to sovereignty, and welcoming (*kabbalah Sabbath*) the presence of the day and God's fellowship.⁴⁶ He emphasizes holiness in time due to the Ten Commandments' lack of a sacred locus for prayer.⁴⁷ However, there is a time set for prayers.⁴⁸ We may pray anywhere. However, the Sabbath longs for an extra spiritual time to satisfy holiness, which is hopefully achievable within one's context and in companionship with others across the other days, and, as such, suggests a continuing pilgrimage.

Heschel portrays Judaism as a pilgrimage to the seventh day in order to attain holiness, following God's demands and yearning for things of time.⁴⁹ Instead of coveting material things in space, the Sabbath craves things in time, "teaching a man to covet the

⁴³ This refers to the magnificent description in Psalm 23, while the psalmist longs for green pastures and still waters. Heschel, 22.

⁴⁴ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 55.

⁴⁵ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 9-10.

⁴⁶ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 61-62.

⁴⁷ Jesus' exchanges with the Samaritan Woman may include time as an essential worship variable between Gerizim and Jerusalem. John 4:20-24.

⁴⁸ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 80.

⁴⁹ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 90-91.

seventh day all days of the week.”⁵⁰ He says: “It is as if the command: Do not covet things of space, where correlated with the unspoken word: Do covet things of time.”⁵¹

Hershel’s idea corresponded with Jesus’ argument when He approached the Samaritan woman’s confusion about the worship place. Jesus emphasizes not necessarily the site but the attitude of the worshiper “in Spirit and truth.”⁵² However, we must pledge quality time for prayers beyond a specific place.

Walter Brueggemann, a Christian scripture scholar, emphasizes that the Sabbath, as found in the fourth commandment, is more than a transitional clause concerning the demands of recognizing and worshiping YHWH. The Sabbath acknowledges the effects of human bonding in society.⁵³ For YHWH, the Sabbath ensures rest while giving Spirit to Him and others as the center of life. Brueggemann contrasts the Sabbath’s scope with “the power for commodity,” which is materialistic. The Sabbath deals more with attitudes and quality of actions than merely something that appears on a calendar or schedule.

5.10. Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath

How we organize time is a fundamental practice found in any society. God knows it and shares it freely with humanity. In the New Testament, the Sabbath expresses flexible love, prioritizing and portraying the vertex of Jesus’ cross as it points vertically

⁵⁰ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 91.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁵² John 4:21-24.

⁵³ Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, New Edition with Study Guide, (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, Kindle, 2017), 59.

toward heaven. Furthermore, it simultaneously suggests a humanitarian horizontal direction that includes fulfilling the requirements for social justice by caring for all⁵⁴—without exceptions.⁵⁵ Jesus is the incarnation of the Father, and He is also the incarnation of the Sabbath—offering himself as the embodiment of rest—“come to me and rest.”⁵⁶ The Sabbath calls us to allot time to cultivate our inner spirit away from the business of our daily life (or the commodity system, as Brueggemann calls it).

Jesus reinterprets and broadens the thinking of other teachers. “He ignored some laws that other teachers thought should restrict healing or eating to specific situations of need.”⁵⁷ Jesus' unique approach to the Sabbath within Mark 2:27 and 3:4 confirms that “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath; so the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath” and that “it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”⁵⁸ In that sense, Jesus observed the Jewish Sabbath as fulfilling even and broadening the Law.

I think that Jesus could agree with Hershel's account that the Sabbath represents a matter of attitude and quality of time and falls within the spirit of the law rather than a legalistically empty understanding of the written ideal. However, Jesus's inference and assertion that He is the “Lord of the Sabbath” may also satisfy the above assertion.⁵⁹ As Christians, we must “treasure the Sabbath's implications for our lives, along with the

⁵⁴ John 3:16.

⁵⁵ Romans 2:11.

⁵⁶ Matthew 11:28-30.

⁵⁷ Dorothy C. Bass, *Practicing Our Faith*, 82.

⁵⁸ Matthew 12:12.

⁵⁹ Matthew 12:8; Mark 2:28, and Luke 6:5.

other nine commandments from Sinai.”⁶⁰ Christians accept a holistic understanding of the directives from Sinai, incorporating God’s new beginning within the context of Christ’s passion, death, and resurrection. Jesus prioritizes caring for people’s needs daily, even on the Sabbath. Thus, according to the perspectives of both Heschel and Brueggemann, when Jesus satisfies hunger, heals the sick, and restores dignity, he fulfills the ideal of sacred time and entirely reestablishes the correct understanding of the Sabbath.

5.11. Sabbath Perspectives on Social Justice

Like controversies regarding the Sabbath in Jesus’s time, social justice remains contentious for the faith life of some people today. Just as Pharisees in Jesus’ time did not agree with Jesus’ application of his understanding of the Sabbath, many remain reluctant to link that understanding with today’s social justice perspectives and, in so doing, tend to label “social justice as the religion of secularity.”⁶¹

Regarding this issue, Pope Francis took a concerted approach to that kind of cliché years ago when he argued: “Communists had stolen the Christian flag. The flag of the poor is Christian. Poverty is at the center of the Gospel,” by citing biblical passages when he emphasized “the need to help the poor, the sick, and the need. Then, he concluded: “Communists say that all this is communism. Sure, twenty centuries later. So,

⁶⁰ Dorothy C. Bass, *Practicing Our Faith*, 82.

⁶¹ Matt Slick. *Social Justice, secularism, and Christianity*. <https://carm.org/social-justice/social-justice-secularism-christianity/>. Accessed June 27, 2023.

when they speak, one can say to them: ‘But then you are Christian.’”⁶² Thus, Pope Francis challenged the Church to reclaim the Christian banner for social justice.

Interestingly, some leaders prefer “Biblical Justice” instead of “Social Justice,” attempting to make a distinction.⁶³ They do that to avoid interpretative biases associated with political movements. However, life-giving faith practices should grind misconceptions underfoot. Either term relates to the objective of solidarity with our societies’ most vulnerable people, as reflected in the Gospel. The idea is to set new goals, like thermostats, rather than only registering temperature measurements like thermometers.

The goal is to evangelize the community, develop new ethical standards, and respond with love to the needs of people. No wonder Jesus preaches: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His justice and all these things shall be added unto you.”⁶⁴ Thus, we must revisit the Scriptures to consistently confirm that social justice is a biblically solid practice. Our thesis supports that social justice is biblical, and that is enough for the Church to respond to it decisively. For example, Isaiah 61, Luke 4:18-19, and Luke 7:22 all summarize the proper range of the Messiah’s work. Although we are not the Messiah,

⁶² ‘Stolen Our Flag’: Pope Says Communists Are Closet Christians (nbcnews.com). <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/stolen-our-flag-pope-says-communists-are-closet-christians-n143811>. Accessed May 16, 2023.

⁶³ William Wolfe, *Social Justice vs. Biblical Justice: An Incompatible Difference*. Social Justice vs. Biblical Justice: An Incompatible Difference – Standing for Freedom Center. <https://www.standingforfreedom.com/2021/07/social-justice-vs-biblical-justice-an-incompatible-difference/>. Accessed June 27, 2023.

⁶⁴ Matthew 6:33, (Douay-Rheims Bible).

we must follow His teachings, incarnate, and collaborate to build the right attitudes with Him within His real.⁶⁵

Justice suggests retribution, distribution, and restoration, as well as prioritizing fairness, love, justice, and mercy to execute social justice suitable for a better world. Justice and *Shalom* are achievable if the Church deeply replicates the Messianic goal with understanding and generosity. Love's primary concern searches for the well-being of others, not of the self!⁶⁶

Societal forces managing laws cannot falsely bring about a kind of justice by obliterating love and justice. Justice is only possible due to its implicit love, not by the power that implies the laws. The church should obey and guard the highest standards of Jesus's message. In a quest for justice, the Church must balance theologian Paul Tillich's trilogy of love, power, and justice, thereby recapturing God's message to live in righteousness.⁶⁷ Furthermore, Luis Fidel Mercado-Marrero recognizes that people have fulfilled part of God's command to "Be fruitful and multiply."⁶⁸ However, according to him, we have not practiced stewardship of nature and have not practiced justice.⁶⁹ We still discriminate against others for multiple reasons when we do not practice love and do not follow the real spirit of the Sabbath and social justice, as Jesus commands.

⁶⁵ I Corinthians 3:9-10.

⁶⁶ I Corinthians 13:1-13.

⁶⁷ Paul Tillich presents this thesis in *Love, Power and Justice*. I used the Spanish translation: *Amor, Poder y Justicia*, Translated to Spanish by Helena Calsamiglia. (Barcelona, España: Oxford University Press, 1954), 55-94.

⁶⁸ Lydia E. Mercado-Sherman y Jesús Rodríguez-Sánchez, Eds. *Teología Pastoral y Espiritualidad*, 143.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

MODULE 4

5.12. An Inclusive Church: Acts 11:1-18

Phase Four: Implementation

- Implement the suggestion proposal made earlier with volunteer
- participation from the group
- Use resources from Module Four for additional input

Although in conflict and appearing imperfect, the model of the Church found in the Acts of the Apostles proposes an all-inclusive social justice that emphasizes spiritual-guiding practices. The Book of Acts is assertive when people do not appear to comply with specific ethical parameters.⁷⁰ It advocates creating awareness and inclusiveness to overcome divisions and promoting sensible community involvement and changes to address physical needs. Its tone discusses Church options integrating the appropriate models needed to achieve unity. That model and style are consistent with Christ's purpose of tearing down the dividing wall of conflicts, as found in the Letter to the Ephesians.⁷¹ Despite this, humankind insists on wall-building, separating people based on faith, color, gender, culture, origin, traits, languages, accents, political ideologies, physical defects, and dietary rituals. Such behavior seems to be inconsistent with Gospel teaching. To glorify God, an inclusive church must be heterogeneous and not isolated in separated temples spread throughout the same neighborhood, preaching similar messages but with contradictory practices. We must follow the dictum, "In essentials, unity; in non-

⁷⁰ Acts 5:1-11.

⁷¹ Ephesians 2:14.

essentials, liberty; in all things, love.”⁷² Divisions perpetuate because love does not motivate, integrate, or become the norm for our lifestyle. Thus, it is imperative to surmount ideological boundaries to move toward a more diverse, integrated, and livable community.

Sadly, ever since the first century, the Church community, as revealed in the Book of Acts, has resisted the inclusion of outsiders. Inclusion was and still is vital in transforming the early and modern Church. Acts 11:1-18 describes a complex and challenging awareness process that serves as a referent to make the required corrections within the Church.

5.13. Outsiders: Gentiles

Acts 10 and 11:1-18 present Peter’s vision and defense of Cornelius’s baptism and his family in Jerusalem’s church, showing inclusiveness in the Church body.⁷³ Luke steadily leads us through Acts as the author depicts the growth of the Church: “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”⁷⁴ In that way, the Church obeyed the order to move on from those who stood in the street on

⁷² This phrase has been attributed to St. Augustine; despite, it seems to be from a different source, it is still applicable. <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/essentials-unity-non-essentials-liberty-all-things>. Accessed February 8, 2024.

⁷³ William H. Willimon, *The International Lesson Annual*, September-August 1992-93, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1992), 159-166.

⁷⁴ Acts 1:18.

Pentecost day⁷⁵ to Philip's baptism of the Samaritans⁷⁶ to the culminating event of the baptism of Cornelius—a gentile.⁷⁷ These ripple effects direct us to change the Church's configuration. Cornelius is a Roman officer, not necessarily beloved of the Jewish community.

Nevertheless, this is another example of the Church's ideals, reaching out to people beyond prejudice. We must remember that Jesus healed the daughter of a Syrophenician woman,⁷⁸ cleansed Samaritan people with leprosy,⁷⁹ and saved the dying servant of a Roman soldier⁸⁰—all Gentiles, including Samaritans.⁸¹ Recall that Samaritans epitomized others and outsiders.

5.14. The Situation of the Gentiles of Today: Making Disciples of All People

Do we need more proof of inclusiveness? Still, the Church's growth yearning to reach all kinds of people worldwide requires a deliberate plan. Meanwhile, Church members have considered themselves open to others (outsiders) for years despite having restricted clubs and often preferring to be homogeneous both ethnically and culturally. Thus, many may feel excluded, with subjacent difficulties that act to impede Church

⁷⁵ Act 2:1-42.

⁷⁶ Acts 8:1-25.

⁷⁷ Acts 10:47-48.

⁷⁸ Mark 7:24-30.

⁷⁹ Luke 17:11-19.

⁸⁰ Luke 7:1-10.

⁸¹ Robert P. Sellers, "Jesus and Gandhi: A Study in Commonalities," *Christian Ethics Today*, Vol. 32, Number 1, Aggregate Issue 123 (Winter 2022): 13.

empathy and growth. Many churchgoers attempt to distinguish between “wheat and tares.” However, Jesus advised against such practice.⁸²

The Church must appear welcoming and familiar to the community, integrating and getting involved in the neighborhood’s social struggles while eschewing prejudices. Jesus echoes Isaiah’s message, advocating for solutions for those deprived of justice—the poor, widows, children, and orphans by bringing that message to the Gospel’s center stage.⁸³ Jesus’ message includes all the wretched who accept God’s forgiveness, regardless of sexual orientation, social constraints, or ethnic background. With that in mind, the Church should conform to Paul’s assertion that “there is no favoritism with God”⁸⁴ and “there is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”⁸⁵ While condemning wrong actions, the church must not judge or condemn individuals. We must not judge. God will! However, we must show mercy and be sensitive without partiality. These principles focus on Jesus’ commands—which integrate worship, prayers, and discipleship while embodying Jesus’s message.⁸⁶

These practices point to social justice as essential for spiritual engagement, doing good, and sharing with others in order to strive to conquer evil. In *Love, Power, and Justice*, theologian Paul Tillich calls for social justice, emphasizing the Church’s duty to

⁸² Matthews 13:24-30.

⁸³ Isaiah 10:1-4.

⁸⁴ Romans 2:11.

⁸⁵ Galatians 3:28.

⁸⁶ Matthew 25:31-46.

exercise its power and practice love and justice simultaneously.⁸⁷ The Church must show solidarity with the oppressed and express sympathy toward them but also do practical things, as Jesus commands us in His Sermon on the Mount and Sermon of the Judgement of the Nations, to help those who hunger for justice, live in poverty, or are immigrants, prisoners, hospitalized, homeless, and unemployed. Consequently, pursuing Jesus' model, Bonhoeffer and Tillich offer a radical view: become involved in the world, transform it passionately, and practice His love.

The Gentile Cornelius's conversion story presents an example of inclusiveness, which we must adopt for those often regarded as having different origins, worldviews, races, colors, genders, and cultures.⁸⁸ Besides welcoming them, the Church must develop follow-up programs to make everyone accepted. In order to attempt to achieve justice, we must encompass acts of love for challenged individuals in their neighborhoods.

Once again, this study provides suggestions in the bibliography with concrete ideas from ancient times to modern days. For example, "*Be the Bridge*" by Latasha Morrison⁸⁹ and "*Another Way: Living and Leading Change on Purpose*" by Williams, Lewis, and Baker offer detailed, practical, compassionate approaches to present

⁸⁷ Paul Tillich. *Amor, Poder y Justicia*. Barcelona, España: Libros del Nopal, Ediciones Ariel, S.A, 1954, 27. Translation to Spanish by Helena Calsamiglia, Original Title: *Love, Power, and Justice*. Ontological analyses and ethical applications, (Oxford University Press), 1954.

⁸⁸ Acts 10:1-48.

⁸⁹ Latasha Morrison, "Part III: The Bridge to Restorative Reconciliation," in *Be the Bridge, First Ed.*, (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook, 2019), 127-208.

multiracial and multicultural interfaith leadership.⁹⁰ These books provide excellent frameworks for developing training programs in our Churches.

⁹⁰ Stephen Lewis, Matthew Wesley Williams, and Dori Ginenko Baker, *Another Way: Living and Leading Change on Purpose*, Chalice Press, St. Louis, Missouri, 2020, 1-22. C.A.R.E. stands for: Create hospitable space, ask self-awakening questions, reflect theologically together, and enact the next most faithful step). The church must organize seminars to follow up, discuss and overtly explain the content of these references.

MODULE 5

5.15. Social Justice is the Church's Hallmark of Spiritual Practice

It will be righteousness (justice) for us if we carefully observe all this commandment before the Lord our God, just as He commanded us.

~Deuteronomy 6:25

Phase Five: Evaluation

- Opening Prayer
- Use resources from Module Five
- Have the group reassemble and share stories about how it went
- Plan for future long-term ministry
- Ask about the other earlier suggestions made
- Closing Prayer
- Closing reception and modest *fiesta* to celebrate the project.

Illustration: My Algebra teacher used to have a big banner in his room:

“Mathematics is not a sport for spectators.”⁹¹ This lecture aims to link and discuss a handful of faith practices portrayed in Chapter Four of this paper, page fifty-one.

Hopefully, this material will help the Church become more aware of social justice issues and work toward bringing about social justice for all.

The “Mathematics is not a sport for spectators” banner still encourages me to realize that some activities require active participation, not merely watching from the sidelines. Social justice requires an initiative-takers’ response and active doers to condemn and remedy injustices. That is the hallmark of a coherent plan to help people, foster their spiritual faith practices, mend community life, promote dialogue, and utilize

⁹¹ This unforgettable experience occurred in 1970-71 Washington Irving High School Algebra course with Professor Rafael Ruiz.

correct language to strive to achieve a better world. Such goals require a compassionate theological view and praxes.

The Hebrew Bible describes social justice as exhibiting well-rooted practices applicable to all, including today's Christians.⁹² However, modern social justice ideally encompasses inclusive access to wealth, with prospects for fair salaries. *Shalom* may incorporate a common-sense social justice with a life-giving Gospel message. Jesus encourages His disciples to satisfy people's physical needs.⁹³ The process by which we attempt to satisfy these needs refers directly to Jesus' preaching of the Sermon of the Judging of the Nations. In that, He stresses the concrete realization of love for others.⁹⁴ Christians have a historical reference for intermingling social justice programs with spiritual endeavors.

This lecture visualizes a positive outcome toward social justice as an ongoing effort to unite real-world needs and spiritual praxes with love for others. Our actions leading us toward social justice oscillate between two extremes. On one extreme, most secular groups often fail to practice social justice without considering spirituality. Conversely, churches sometimes emphasize spirituality without concern for everyday physical human needs.

⁹² Cf. Pachamama Alliance. What Is Social Justice? | Define And Practice | Pachamama Alliance, <https://pachamama.org/social-justice#:~:text=Social%20justice%20is%20the%20equal,treatment%20and%20equality%20of%20people>. Accessed April 11, 2023.

⁹³ Luke 9:13.

⁹⁴ Matthews 25: 31-46.

However, the Scriptures highlight that we are spiritual beings, embodied with physical needs and demands. We cannot separate spirituality from the realms of physical and social justice. We need food, education, shelter, transportation, recreation, and, as the United States' own Declaration of Independence asserts, the right to the "pursuit of happiness." Those acts are worthless, vague, empty dreams without love, which Scripture renders as "resounding gong or clanging cymbals."⁹⁵ The Christian life must synergize, combining passion, love, and good works to attain social justice. Jesus' message broadly commands us to care for physical and spiritual needs. Paul and James follow Jesus by fostering the idea that faith and works must synergize.⁹⁶ James' view authenticates beliefs and works by encouraging results that can inspire strong faith. (For this session, review Chapter Four, Life-giving Faith Practices Sustain Social Justice, on page fifty-one).

These ideals flood Jesus' ministry, particularly in the story of the Good Samaritan and in Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman.⁹⁷ Historically, the Jews considered Samaritans to be foreigners and even enemies. However, Jesus stressed the urgency of trusting in faith and worked to restore people's relationships by first providing aid to those who suffered. God's message impacts those who are suffering injustices and abuses.

Martin Luther King, Jr., in his sermon "I've Been to the Mountaintop," interprets this story by seeking answers to two insightful questions. King suggests that the priest's and the Levite's first consideration was, "If I stop to help this man, what will happen to

⁹⁵ 1 Corinthians 13:1.

⁹⁶ Ephesians 2:10 and James 2:14-26.

⁹⁷ Luke 10:25-7 and John 4:7:26.

me? But then, the good Samaritan came by and offered that person care by reversing the question: If I do not stop to help this man [the injured man], what will happen to him?”⁹⁸

All our acts have consequences—to us or someone else! Impressively, the Good Samaritan did the unexpected. In the story, the priest and the Levite were not the heroes. Antonio Miranda asserts: “The good Samaritan did what two religious men did not do.”⁹⁹ Jesus’ message shows us that we must remove selfishness in answering those questions by considering the benefits for others. With those two questions, the center shifts from “self” to “the other.” Similarly, Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman shows that Jesus cared holistically for her physical and spiritual needs by offering her both physical and spiritual water.¹⁰⁰ Martin Luther King, Jr. emphasizes that Jesus calls us to sensible action, not to be “compassionate by proxy.”¹⁰¹

How, then, do we respond to injustices? Can we eradicate discrimination and violence by being kind, gentle, and obedient? Do we need to display creative activism to confront injustices? These texts suggest that the Gospel upsets the status quo. Despite the hefty price, Christians and non-Christians like Martin Luther King, Jr., Óscar Arnulfo Romero, Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, and others found commonalities with Jesus’

⁹⁸ Martin Luther King, Jr., “*I’ve Been to the Mountaintop*” (speech, Memphis, TN, April 03, 1968). <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkivebeentothemountaintop.htm>. Accessed December 8, 2022.

⁹⁹ Antonio Josué Miranda, *Las Parábolas de Jesús en su Contexto*. (El Paso, TX: Editorial Mundo Hispano, 2022), 239.

¹⁰⁰ John 4:1-26.

¹⁰¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., “Mountaintop.”

model, proving the benefit of considering healthier ideas instead of warfare.¹⁰² The primary human mysteries and quests belong to the Spirit. However, we must also care for physical, natural, and temporal events that might affect the lives of people in our care.

5.16. Living the Message

As you press for justice, move with dignity and discipline, using only the instruments of love.

~Martin Luther King, Jr.

This lecture aims to create awareness of our wrongdoings and search for solutions.

Introduce the lecture with a liturgy of confession and forgiveness.¹⁰³

This lecture will review the prophetic aphorisms found in Amos 2:5-8, 3:1-2, and Micah 6:6-7, familiarizing us with the historical and cultural context. Secondly, we intend to use a brainstorming diagnostic exercise to examine the Church's neighborhood context to identify community issues.¹⁰⁴ Thirdly, the group will review and then consider compassionate awareness practices in order to hopefully start the healing process.

In her essay, "*No dejes de ser Pentecostal*," Agustina Luvis suggests that spirituality depicts an open, polyvalent model encompassing everything we do.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² I love the "commonality" term that Robert P. Sellers adopted. Robert P. Sellers, "Jesus and Gandhi," 13.

¹⁰³ For an excellent model, see Latasha Morrison, *Be the Bridge*, Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook, 2019, 119-123.

¹⁰⁴ Appendix 1 provides examples of questions we may use to discuss these issues.

¹⁰⁵ Agustina Luvis Núñez, ¡No dejes de ser pentecostal! In *Una Vida Bella*, (San Juan, PR: Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico, 2020, 28-36. In her essay, Dr. Luvis broadens the scope of spirituality.

Injustice is everywhere. Spirituality defines social justice as an aspiration to transform the world and us. Justice, love, and freedom are the most valuable trilogy we can utilize in order to alleviate unfulfilled necessities worldwide. Many complain that small groups worldwide enjoy great resources while enormous groups remain impoverished. For example, women often receive low-paying salaries for the work they do. Taxes are only fair for a few economic sectors of our society. While many suffer, many also report unfair and disproportionate responses from leaders in faith, politics, civil society, and even sports. However, we must unite these forces to bring positive results for the seemingly endless issues of poverty and other injustices. As Dennis A. Jacobsen asserts, “Social action is messy, disruptive, and noisy.”¹⁰⁶

Sadly, social injustices persisted for a long time in the history of ancient Israel. A longstanding dilemma motivated prophets to denounce abuses to achieve God’s *Shalom*.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, migrants are still suffering vicissitudes in the United States and worldwide. The culprits of those injustices in the past were awful shepherds of Israel, and modern ones still exist in our world. Most were, and others still are, selfish leaders of idolatry with dishonest practices, extortion, and stealing. In ancient Israel, as in today’s world, the wave of injustices affected the Judges who did not respect the impoverished, strangers, widows, and children. For example, in the eighth century B.C.E., Amos denounced abuses, bias, lack of empathy, and inhumane attitudes, like those identified as wrong by Moses. Even today, after almost thirty centuries, we can find seventy-four

¹⁰⁶ Dennis A. Jacobsen, *A Spirituality for Doing Justice* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 2021) Kindle), 8.

¹⁰⁷ For example, Jeremiah 23; Ezequiel 22:29; Ezequiel 34; Micah 2:2; 3:11; and Amos 5:11-12.

phrases in the Thesaurus that define the scope of social justice.¹⁰⁸ That vast list covers many disciplines, creating a significant mesh of activities for our thesis. Thus, we have challenging homework to transform ourselves and the world.

Meanwhile, what about us, Christ's Church? How do we live this message? We must return to God's commands to do right by connecting with the community—learning from the past, contextualizing, and creating sensible plans in order to deal with those issues collectively. If the Church remains isolated from the community, it can lose its biblical identity as “salt and light.” Sadly, today's postmodern attitudes are no different from those of previous centuries. For example, the Gospel of Prosperity emphasizes financial blessings and physical well-being, arguing: “We deserve it; we are children of the King.”¹⁰⁹ In today's world, relativism, individualism, and hyper-individualism are typical and treasured values, particularly in Western culture.

However, in Amos' time, the communal view was as familiar to the eighth century B.C.E. as it is to today's individualism.¹¹⁰ Despite such perception, his society had many injustices that concerned Amos and his fellow prophets, so his message encouraged advances in the cause of justice.

The Hebrew prophets Amos, Micah, Obadiah, and others were quite blunt with the leaders of Israel.¹¹¹ Amos and Micah charged them, stating that worshipping God

¹⁰⁸ Amazingly, there are plenty of synonyms for Social Justice to describe the actual situation. Social Justice synonyms - 74 Words and Phrases for Social Justice (powerthesaurus.org). Accessed May 15, 2023.

¹⁰⁹ I do not recall the name, however a few years ago I heard a preacher talking about this issue.

¹¹⁰ William H. Willimon and Patricia P. Willimon, *The International Lesson Annual, September-August 1994-95* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 347.

¹¹¹ Amos 2:6-7; Micah 2:1-2; 2:8-9; 3:1-4; 3:11; 6:8:10-12.

without proper justice made them inadequate to be well with God. They underscored how honoring and worshiping God includes mercy, remorse, and acts showing compassion. That includes singing and dancing, practicing righteousness and hope, renovation, and hope for salvation.¹¹²

James echoes this message in the New Testament, claiming a complete, transparent message incarnating love without favoritism (James 2:2-6). Being spiritual is sharing love and authentic relationships with God and humanity. The Church is a microcosm of society with an explicit Gospel aim in mind. We must revisit social justice with renewed faith, assuming its biblical scope, and try to live it out. Thus, the above effects apply to the Church's theology enacted in its programs. Social justice can exist within a complex milieu dealing with economics, politics, belief, and spirituality. However, it also calls for conscious stewardship to achieve a thriving, balanced, and healthy life.¹¹³

Today's catalog of injustices includes xenophobia, bigotry, mass arrests, civil rights abuses, inadequate health care, lack of prospects for schooling, stigmatization, civil rights violations, and general uncertainty about one's future. The National Association of Social Workers believes everyone deserves equal economic, political, and social rights

¹¹² Guillermo Ramírez-Muñoz, *Introducción al Antiguo Testamento* (Nashville, TN: Abigndon Press, 2003), 72-77.

¹¹³ In "*Dios, El Planeta Tierra y Nosotros*," Luis F. Mercado foresaw what we are experiencing today with the messy ecosystem of our planet *Gaia* (the Greek term for the planet earth). *Teología Pastoral y Espiritualidad: Escritos Selectos de Luis Fidel Mercado Marrero*. Transcrito y editado por Lydia E. Mercado Sherman y Jesús Rodríguez Sánchez. (San Juan, PR: Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico, 2021), 224-229.

and the ability to make better choices.¹¹⁴ Social workers try to encompass fair economic justice, distributing wealth and privileges within a society. However, these unending issues are the bedrock for political and sociological back-and-forth discussion instead of a compelling subject for an encounter. Thus, the Church must be part of these transformative efforts.

¹¹⁴ Social Work: Professional Values and Ethics. Walters States Community College. <https://library.ws.edu/c.php?g=689126&p=7760216.%20Accessed%20April%2026,%202023>. Accessed April 26, 2023.

CHAPTER SIX

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Utopia is on the horizon. I move two steps closer; it moves two steps further away. I walk another ten degrees, and the horizon runs ten steps further away. As much as I may walk, I will never reach it. So, what is the point of utopia? The fact is this: to keep walking.

~Eduardo Galeano

If nothing ever changed, there would be no such things as butterflies.

~Wendy Mass

6.1. Theology For Migrants and Walkers

The abovementioned concerns lead us to a Theology for Migrants and Walkers. Jesus calls us, “Follow me.” To follow someone implies moving to abide by his teachings and act to make strides in a productive pilgrimage. Charles Foster suggests, “Physical pilgrimage involves bodies, blisters, hunger, and diarrhea. And it’s a kingdom activity.”¹ Both physical and spiritual warfare require sacrifice and determination to overcome adversities and demand change, as the apostle Paul stresses in Romans.² It is essential not to leave it in a utopian context but to practice it.

No wonder Winston Churchill, even as he encouraged a great victory, offered his people crudeness, toughness, and sacrifice during WWII. He challenged them not to surrender but to pursue success at all costs, offering “blood, toil, tears, and sweat.”³ Similarly, spiritual warfare involves risks, setbacks, soul burdens, turmoil, and

¹ Charles Foster, *The Sacred Journey*, XVI.

² Romans 12:2.

³ Winston Churchill, *Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat*.
Winston Churchill – YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=80_HXIH724 . Accessed June 27, 2023.

despair. However, as Bonhoeffer observed, many in our Churches offered lightweight, diluted, more accessible pathways or cheap grace.

Cheap grace is the term coined by Dietrich Bonhoeffer to describe “the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.”⁴

On the contrary, the Christian life requires sacrifices and commitments standardized by the Gospel of Jesus.

As Jesus’ disciples, we must lead humbly, following the leadership displayed on His last earthly night. On that remarkable night, He washed His disciples’ feet, teaching us an excellent lesson.⁵ However, we need adequate spiritual preparation to accept such implications for changes. John Maxwell asserts, “Anyone can steer the ship, but it takes a leader to chart the course.”⁶ Furthermore, Dietrich Bonhoeffer assumes that taking risks constitutes the cost of discipleship.⁷ Walking and imitating Jesus in His pathways takes time and effort. Following Jesus requires daily readiness for the challenging path, alertness, and doing something more than just walking and feeling the natural environmental breeze. Being a pilgrim implies awareness of objectives for each step, being aware of surrounding circumstances, time, landscape, and willingness to pay the price.

⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *El Precio de la Gracia, La llamada al seguimiento*, (Salamanca, España, Sígueme, 1995), 16.

⁵ John 13: 1-20.

⁶ John Maxwell, *Leadership Promises*, 229.

⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *El Precio de la Gracia*, 26-43.

As pilgrims, we must have a clear objective for the pilgrimage, wandering after God and with Him. Furthermore, like the Good Samaritan, we must be alerted to identify and assess situations on the road, assuming responsibility for helping those injured.⁸ Because we need to walk somewhere, we better understand the implicit theological challenges—the theology of place, the theology for walkers, and the theology of migration. Walkers must purposely assess and synchronize their destinations and timing with God’s will. The key is to exhibit a precise theology of the walker. Charles Foster suggests, “and I agree, that we should make a “well-mixed cocktail of mind, body, and spirit, infused with the Holy Spirit Himself.”⁹ He contrasts two extreme approaches, the “spiritual person” versus the “gnostic” (knowledgeable), asserting that we must prepare to mix them.¹⁰

It is well known that Christians often spiritualize things that should include practical solutions for everyday problems. Unlike mystical dreams, Foster endorses Jesus’ useful pilgrimage model. Foster’s approach portrays real-life embedded within the world with daily struggles and difficulties. It should be accurate, not too spiritual or physical in practical terms, but with a mix of both. That is consistent with Jesus’ demands that knowledgeable walkers must be able to feel, work, and act in solidarity with His kingdom. However, walkers should be vigilant in their pathways to avoid invasions of properties that belong to others, thereby not allowing a return of imperialism and colonization of aliens in any of its modalities.

⁸ Luke 10 :25-37.

⁹ Charles Foster, *The Sacred Journey*, 21.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Unfortunately, many societies have been victimized by conquerors who exploited others in the name of faith. Sadly, North, Central, South America, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East are vivid examples of these tragedies. We cannot stand passively watching the carnage of children and vulnerable people without confronting attacks on democracy. Without a reliable democracy and fairness, we cannot have trustworthy justice. Hence, we must remember the past to avoid past mistakes. In that sense, memory plays an excellent role in contextualizing different issues with history. Sociologists and activists often identify past problems to engender societal change. However, ambitions and power struggles dwarf changes intended to mend social injustices, thereby creating power clashes.

Throughout history, the United States has enacted American Immigration Restriction initiatives that have triggered more problems than solutions. For instance, anti-immigrant sentiment has surfaced in the United States since the 1840s, when the potato famine drove millions of Irish people to emigrate to America. Americans, at the time, had often rejected Irish immigrants because they were poor, Catholic, and considered, simply put, different. Another sad chapter was the Chinese immigration scenario after the California Gold Rush in 1849. The Chinese Exclusion Act was passed in 1882 and remained in effect until 1943.¹¹ Likewise, when Japan rose to power after the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, the Japanese were discriminated against by the

¹¹ The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

https://www.google.com/search?q=chinese+exclusion+act+of+1882&rlz=1C1CHBF_enUS955US955&oq=Chinese+Exclusion+Act&aqs=chrome.1.0i433i512j0i512l6j0i131i433i650j0i512l2.2507j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8. Accessed June 26, 2023.

California Board of Education, requiring Japanese children to attend separate schools.¹² Another example is the U.S. Immigration Act of 1924, which established a quota system favoring Europeans over Asians, which caused Japan to declare a National Humiliation Day on July 1, 1924, to repudiate the enactment of such a law against them.¹³ This law had to wait until 1952 for Congress to change it.¹⁴

Aware of this tragic past, the Church's pursuit should never promote or be an accomplice to injustices by siding with the victimizers. The Church must always condemn injustices that lead to bigotry, reckless caring for children out of wedlock, low and stolen salaries, unsafe working conditions, harmful drug habits, and inadequate schooling. These social and moral issues should concern compassionate people who seek to defend the victims of injustices. The Church is God's creation through Jesus Christ, whose praxes must support those "people against the wall."¹⁵ The Church's mission is to open spaces for dialogue and act to connect, share, and heal the community while remaining vigilant in the postmodern world. Believers should follow James' assertion of being doers more than hearers.¹⁶ James' message demands awakened, practical leaders, acquainted with their context, purpose, and the Church's endless mission.

¹² *Densho Encyclopedia*, Cherstin Lyon. "San Francisco school segregation," <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/San%20Francisco%20school%20segregation>. Accessed June 26, 2023.

¹³ The Immigration Act of 1924 (The Johnson-Reed Act). <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/immigration-act#:~:text=The%20Immigration%20Act%20of%201924%20limited%20the%20number%20of%20immigrants,of%20the%201890%20national%20census>. Accessed June 26, 2023.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Howard Thurman's expression quoted previously.

¹⁶ James 1:23.

The Church's endeavor is multifold—consider the Sabbath, deliver the proper care regardless of the circumstances, and practice social justice—incorporating Christ's comprehensive insights into today's needs. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus demands us to build our “house on the rock,” pondering His fundamental practical message.¹⁷ Jesus concludes His sermon by inviting: “Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a sensible [human being] who builds his house on the rock.”¹⁸ Therefore, we fail not because of a lack of knowledge or information. Instead, it could be due to a lack of commitment and determination to apply Jesus' message.

We must reflect on the relationship between the Pharisee's understanding of the Sabbath in Jesus' time and the view of certain political groups in our world vis á vis social justice. Furthermore, let us adopt mindfulness from other religious and non-religious organizations, joining our efforts with those to better our community.

For example, in Austin, TX, several governmental and non-governmental institutions and Churches are already working together on food pantries and educational and legal issues on behalf of immigrants.¹⁹ Let us join in raising awareness and efforts with some of them. If that is unrealistic, let us open our programs to tackle specific needs, such as widows and children's challenges. We must identify functional plans where we can join efforts, discuss relationships and differences, and consider undertaking a project for the next months or years, collaborating with immigrants and the homeless of our

¹⁷ Matthew 7:24-29.

¹⁸ Matthew 7:24.

¹⁹ For example: *Todos Juntos Learning Center* (<http://todos-juntos.org>), at St. John Church (Lutheran), 409 W. Ben White Blvd., Austin, TX. 78704.

community to start the faith practices purposed in these Bible studies series. For example, we could provide a comprehensive spiritual chaplainship and supporting group curriculum to tackle immigrants' ordeals.

6.2. Leaving a Long-term Practical and Spiritual Legacy

We are not all in the same boat but in the same storm. Some of us have yachts, some have canoes, and some are drowning. Just be kind and help whoever you can.

~ Lewis Brogdon²⁰

Since Moses' time, ancient prophets encouraged God's people to manage injustices by assuming compassionate choices throughout complex crises, exile, and persecutions. They did not talk in the name of any ideology or partisan viewpoint but, for God's sake, paid a high price for their boldness.

For example, Joshua 4:1-24 reminds us of the impact of iconic events and places to leave a legacy for the children and future generations after an incredible journey. God's message to Joshua highlights the importance of remembering transforming events. Life blessings flow despite difficulties and conflicts, encouraging us to embrace life-supporting faith practices to change spiritual ventures. In the abovementioned text, Joshua builds upon Moses' God-inspired, ethical, and social reform in ancient times. Moses' humanitarian and philanthropic Law taught the basic principles on which Israelite prophets would later build their spiritual and social sensitivity between the eighth and

²⁰ Lewis Brogdon, "Christian Can Be Bad Neighbors? Reflections on Luke 10:25-37 and My Visit to the United Nations," *Christian Ethics Today: A Journal of Christian Ethics* 33, no.3, Aggregate Issue 129, (Summer 2023): 13.

fourth centuries BCE.²¹ Thus, the best way to teach something is to practice and stimulate the involvement of others until we master the subject. Likewise, the Church must be involved in that change to do justice to immigrants and positively impact their situation.

Likewise, the Church must remember past leaders and their relentless work pioneering the social justice movement in which we are engaged today. However, instead of establishing headstones, we must honor them by following their legacy and building consistent programs to improve people's lives. We must genuinely seek opportunities to transform people's lives by searching for justice and leaving a legacy for future generations. Two names come to my mind: Martin Luther King, Jr., a Protestant, Black preacher, and Civil Rights advocate, and Cesar Chavez, a Roman Catholic Hispanic worker's leader in favor of more just labor conditions. This way will provide more than a perishable inheritance but a gift embodying our message with the correct praxes.

Finally, like ancient Israel prophets who loved Israel, I love America! However, I cannot remain silent and inactive, observing tragedies without suggesting practical biblical alternatives to surmount our immigration crisis. Paradoxically, church buildings remain empty during the week, while they are usually called sanctuaries. That means we do not use them in the traditional open-door attitude to help people in need because we do not intend to utilize the traditional definition of "sanctuary."

We must remember that Jesus' called us to put new wine in new wineskins; otherwise, we risk losing both the wineskins and the wine.²² We must see the world with

²¹ Harold Segura, *Ser Iglesia para los demás*, 87-88.

²² Luke 5:37-39.

a new spiritual perspective, not necessarily a new religion. Religious structures like the old Jewish Temple, specific ceremonies, and practices may change. However, Jesus' new wine perspective challenges us to transform ourselves and society, grow spiritually, and strive to live a compassionate life, delivering understanding, light, and love.²³

²³ 1 Peter 2:5,9.

APPENDIX ONE

Social Justice and Spirituality in Primera Iglesia Bautista de Austin (PIBA)

Primera Iglesia Bautista de Austin should assess its social justice and spiritual perception as an immigrants' congregation, as described in Chapter 1.2., pages 8-11. This survey aims to gauge PIBA's commitment level, stimulate the research process, and provide the basis for further studies and considerations. Hopefully, the PIBA community will identify and relate critical social justice issues to its spiritual practices. Second, PIBA should know the necessities and values for adopting a thorough Theology of Migration to respond to sociological, political, and theological challenges, including human rights.

When dealing with human endeavors, it is suitable to identify the objectives, the place, and the time for our goals. I recommend surveying the Church using the following questionnaire in order to stimulate brainstorming. The survey should help establish an inventory of its practices (or lack thereof) and explore the Church's understanding of social justice and spirituality parameters, which might lead to future meetings and program developments. The survey will hopefully drive the dialogue in a variety of corresponding directions. We should be able to use the data for discussion flexibly. However, we should also meet the applicable Institutional Review Board requirements if needed. The following survey contains the essential topics and questions.

Questions and Discussion Assessment

Spiritual Practices Lead to Sustainable Social Justice: An Immigrant Expression

Instructions: This survey aims to identify an inventory of spiritual practices and social justice issues affecting the PIBA community. Please answer each question by encircling all the appropriate items or writing the corresponding response. Be specific!

1. Which faith practices are you more familiar with?
 - a. Prayer
 - b. Fasting
 - c. Bible reading
 - d. Meditation
 - e. Silence
 - f. Forgiveness
 - g. Discernment
 - h. Hospitality
 - i. Counseling
 - j. Shaping communities
 - k. Visits to the sick at home or hospitals
 - l. Visits to prisoners in prisons
 - m. Others _____

2. Identify at least three social issues affecting you or your community.
 - a. Unemployment
 - b. Discrimination in the workplace
 - c. Lack of good living conditions
 - d. Healthcare issues
 - e. Inter-race marriage
 - f. Same-sex marriage
 - g. Racial profiling
 - h. Financial credit issues
 - i. Access to health services
 - j. Stealing of salaries
 - k. Transportation issues
 - l. Work accidents and compensation issues
 - m. Marriage certifications issues
 - n. Police brutality
 - o. Other _____

3. Which specific issues of social justice impact or call your attention the most?

4. What is the relationship between social justice and spirituality? Please describe it.

5. Do you think PIBA faith practices adequately prioritize the care of social justice issues?
6. Do you feel our leaders know the consequences of immigrants' suffering?
7. Do you feel our leaders are focusing properly on social justice issues?
8. If not, do you feel tired, despairing, or that burnout hinders the process?
9. From the above list, which social issue does the church need to address more urgently in our community?
10. Which church program(s)/activities do you recommend?
 - a. Share the facilities with community institutions
 - b. Develop awareness programs for human rights
 - c. Develop programs to help immigrants and people without housing
 - d. Organize a supportive educational program
 - e. Organize sports and recreational programs
 - f. Others _____
11. Why do migrants have to leave their countries?
12. What factors affected them to leave?
13. What variants impacted them in the country where they left?

APPENDIX TWO

A Liturgy for Transformation: Social Justice as a Spiritual Practice

Invocation:

O God, may you move in history with the wayfarers, the suffering, and the needy. Once more, we ask you to move with us in this project of life. We ask for your guidance as we propose to begin this series of lectures and workshops in our church. Make us sensitive to your Spirit, voice, and request for action, so in Your name, transform the world. We praise you, Lord, our Wayfarer par excellence. Amen.

Hymn: Lord, You have Come /Tú has venido a la orilla¹

(Start with the English version and leave the Spanish version to close the liturgy).

1. Lord, you have come to the seashore,
Neither searching for the rich nor the wise,
Desiring only that I should follow.

O, Lord, with your eyes set up on me,
Gently smiling, you have spoken my name.
All I longed for I have found by the water
at your side; I will seek other shores.
2. Lord, see my goods, my possessions;
In my boat, you find no power, no wealth.
Will you accept, then, my nets and labor?
3. Lord, take my hands and direct them.
Help me spend myself in seeking the lost,
Returning love for the love you gave me.
4. Lord, as I drift on the waters,
Be the resting place / of my restless heart,

¹ Lord, You have Come/Tú has venido a la orilla, <https://clmusa.org/song/lord-come-tu-venido-la-orilla/>. Accessed February 20, 2024.

My life's companion, my friend, and refuge.

Psalm 40:1-5a

1. I waited patiently for the Lord, and He turned to me and heard my cry for help.
2. He brought me up from a desolate pit, out of the muddy clay, and set my feet on a rock, securing my steps.
3. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord.
4. Blessed is [the human] who trusts the Lord and has not turned to the proud or those who run after lies!
5. Lord my God, You have done many things—Your wonderful works and plans for us: none can compare with You!

Confession:

Leader: Like Nehemiah, Ezra, and Daniel, O Lord, we confess we had mistaken your commands. We acknowledge that we have not waited patiently.

Congregation: We do.

Leader: Lord, we acknowledge that we can do more to better this world.

Congregation: We do!

Leader: We ask for your help to change our attitude and aptitude in this transformative process.

Congregation: We do!

Meditation:

Psalm 40 describes an insightful story of transformation, a two-stage setup situation:

- In the first verse, the psalmist trusts His Lord's capacity to hear his cry for help. He realizes that God turns His ears to him, recognizing his uneasy state, and acknowledges that God is aware of his misery.

- Nevertheless, the second verse contrasts, describing the transformative process, where he was, and what happened. The psalmist portrays his life as anguish, misery, and depressing, comparing it with a swampy pit. Those conditions represent many people's ordinary days, with a hard life, diseases, stresses, hopelessness, and death.
- Such explicit and graphic language utterly describes many lives. The psalmist assesses and compares his situation with a desolate, muddy pit, aware of its unwanted qualities. A slimy and slippery pit is risky, often smelly, and makes people unresponsive to normalcy. A slimy pit drags our self-esteem, obliterates our will, drains energy, and leaves us without alternatives to keep hope living. Indeed, he paints a depressing situation, like many people worldwide, victims of injustices and misunderstandings. Furthermore, this is an evident pattern everywhere, during climate disasters, war times, and political and social turmoil. For example, many immigrants, homeless, and impoverished people worldwide can identify with the psalmist.
- However, that is not the end of the story. The second scenario is the best one, expressing optimism, success, gratitude, and joy. God does not leave us stranded in those pits. "His God set his feet on the rock, making his steps secure" and "put a new song in [his] mouth, a hymn of praise to our God." Such is the expression and testimony of a changed life, expecting that they "will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord."

- The psalmist's gratitude to God is a logical result of the transformative outcome. God puts a hymn of praise in his mouth. That is recognition, worship, and affirmation of God's blessings!
 - As sensible people, it is unavoidable to feel depressed and uneasy when going through demanding situations. We feel like the psalmist in a desolate, muddy pit without a satisfactory outcome. Psalms 42 and 43 depict similar themes. However, Psalm 40 summarizes and reminds us to get closer to God, regardless of the circumstances, to:²
 - Praise God for all He has done (verses 1-5)—Despite being in the muddy pit!
 - Give God all He asks (verses 6-10)—He will move you from the muddy pit to the firm rock and finally to His Sanctuary!
 - Trust God for all that remains (verses 11-17); the best is yet to come!
- Then, recognize and worship Him for what He is!

Let us meditate, thinking about the inconvenient situations in our lives. How could we benefit from applying this Psalm's message in such circumstances?

For example, my testimony is that I am frequently an unapologetic optimist because despite many challenging situations in life, and regardless of where we can be or suffer, God will always help us overcome them.

I was born and raised in poverty in the small town of Adjuntas, Puerto Rico. However, I have learned to cultivate my spirituality since childhood to overcome many

² Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Worshipful Glorifying God for Who He Is*, Psalms 1-89, (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2004), 147-150.

inconveniences. That has helped me to approach and overcome injustices. I believe that besides intelligence quotient (IQ) and emotional quotient (EQ), we must integrate and cultivate a robust spiritual quotient (SQ) to succeed. Spirituality is a broad attitude and praxis. As stated in this thesis, it helps to identify and search for solutions to physical and spiritual situations. However, that is only viable when we prioritize the spiritual realm over the worldly one. Thus, Psalm 40, for decades, has remained a profound inspiration in my life. Verse 17 summarizes it: “Since I am afflicted and needy, let the Lord be mindful of me. You are my help and deliverer; do not delay, O my God.”

Prayer: Let us think in our muddy pits while praying (by Rev. Jacqueline Pinkney):

In Our Muddy Pits, Based on Psalm 40 1-5a reflection.

Dear Lord, In our muddy pits, we will continue to walk heavily through the slush of hatred, racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, and all that causes harm to the Other.

In our muddy pits, we will continue to keep our eyes and minds open with creative spirits that will build a better place where all are well and free. In our muddy pits, we will continue to share stories of our woes and victories so that someone who has lost their way, their being, and their purpose will be healed by the stories they hear. In our muddy pits, slimy and slippery as it may be, we will keep our hands connected to each other so that any falls we experience might be gentle. In our muddy pits, we will call out every injustice in the land, speaking in different tongues but with unified voices from every nation, as those described as unity in the Books of Acts.

We will drudge on in our muddy pits, dirty, tired, weary, but firm, with a God who is with us in these muddy pits. Furthermore, when we rise from these muddy pits, we shall remember the dirt that stuck to our hands, the clumps of clay that hardened our thighs, and the debris that fell into our mouths and flowed through our bodies; we shall then know that we are bonded together and only together we will rise from these muddy pits.

In the Name of Our Creator, In the Name of Jesus, In the Name of All Tribes Gathered in this Space. Amen.³

³ Rev. Jacqueline Pinkney, “Prayer” during *Social Justice as a Spiritual Practice Chapel*. Prof. Dr. Samuel Arroyo’s class Prayer Service, Drew University Seminary Chapel, Madison, NJ, April 5, 2022.

Hymn: Lord, You have Come /Tú has venido a la orilla

1. Tú has venido a la orilla,
No has buscado ni a sabios ni a ricos;
Tan solo quieres que yo te siga.

Señor, me has mirado a los ojos,
Sonriendo has dicho mi nombre,
En la arena he dejado mi barca,
Junto a ti buscaré otro mar.

2. Tú sabes bien lo que tengo;
En mi barca no hay oro ni espadas,
Tan solo redes y mi trabajo.
3. Tú necesitas mis manos,
Mi cansancio que a otros descansen,
Amor que quiera seguir amando.
4. Tú, Pescador de otros lagos,
Ansia eterna de almas que esperan,
Amigo bueno, que a mí me llamas.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for your love and the gift of life, allowing us to be intimate with you and accept your mercy and blessings daily. Lord of heaven and earth, help us be part of the learning discussion of these necessary topics in our lives. Today, we ask for your help to seek opportunities to be part of your kingdom in our communities and help those suffering from injustices. Let them know they are not alone in pain, lament, and utter despair—trapped in muddy pits. Since Jesus referred them to us, let us do our part to change the world. In His name, we pray. Amen.

APPENDIX THREE

REFLECTION: TEARING DOWN WALLS Ephesians 2:11-22

Observing a typical Sunday morning in our nation, we still notice how divided we are—the separation wall is intact. For reasons of personal preferences and even traditions accumulated for years, each denomination, ethnic, or racial group most often worships in its parish without community interaction with others. In 1 Corinthians, Paul rightly questions something similar when he asks: Is Christ divided?¹ Was Paul crucified for you? Is God different? Is the Gospel different? Furthermore, we ask ourselves: Is there any logical reason for this pattern of behavior?

Physical and metaphorical walls in biblical texts describe separation, alienation, isolation, and mistrust. Today's walls still have the same purposes: to justify separation, privacy, and privileges. There are invisible walls of incomprehension, intolerance, lack of compassion, vested interests, xenophobia, sexism, and racism, among others. However, Ephesians' text brings hope! The text interprets the division and hostility between the Jews and the Gentiles, describing a new aspiration for the integration of humanity, urging us to repudiate the walls of misunderstanding and hostility because Christ has already achieved the integration of peoples. The demolition of the walls that separated Jews and Christians, and Christians among themselves, is the new paradigm for a better relationship between Christ's Church, the world, and itself.

¹ I Corinthians 1:10-17.

Today, Twenty-one Centuries later, the model described in Ephesians remains the only one capable of explaining why we must tear down the walls that keep each group isolated in bubbles in our communities. We wonder why there are still divisions in the world, particularly in the Church, when Christ requests unity because He is “our peace”? Moreover, why do we insist on separation if He “abolished enmity in His flesh” by His sacrifice on the cross? “The Dividing Wall of Hostility” refers to the division of ideas, liturgies, theological perspectives, leadership styles, and places of worship, as was the case in the temple of Jerusalem, where the Gentiles and the Jews could not worship together because they could not mingle. That implies that we have not yet been able to understand and engage in the meaning of Christ’s sacrifice for us!

The conclusion that “He broke down the wall of hostility” makes sense in light of Jesus’s sacrifice on Calvary. We are finished with the walls! Now, Jews and Gentiles are “one body,” “one people” in Christ, and hostility is over.

You would tell me: “I still see the wall! What is going on?” How can we be united and integrated into heaven if we remain divided? The reality is that Christ destroyed the walls of separation. There are no more walls! The walls only exist inside pockets of the defeated, of those who do not yet know that they have lost the battle! The centrality of this passage of Ephesians is in the unification of the power of people, achieved by Christ and described in verses thirteen and fourteen before our separation. However, unity is achievable through Christ’s sacrifice. As Christ has already won, it is an integration we theologically understand as “already, but not yet.” Not yet, because pockets of resistance persist; in this sense, we must continue to work and live to complete all integration. So, there is finally only one group of people.

However, we must build “on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. Moreover, the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself” (v.20). The foundation of the apostles and prophets is the love described and placed into practice by Christ to destroy the enmity between people. Many people discriminate secretly against foreigners, but once they meet them, they learn that their customs and practices are “similar to ours.” Once they know them closely, many change their opinion, excluding those from the larger group of immigrants or foreigners who express that they are friendly people. Then proximity improves knowledge, awareness, and empathy most of the time to transform people. Let us stimulate such transformation by proclaiming this message to all people.

Our mission is to proclaim unity even amid diversity. It is acceptable to have differences, but we must also nurture love, interdependence, and intercultural experiences with other faith traditions to enrich ours and contribute to theirs. There is urgency. The world is small. Moreover, time is short.

We become enriched when we share with other people and cultures, worship God with believers of other traditions, races, and ethnicities, and share the inspired music of other peoples and cultures. That would make us more interdependent and more human. If we cannot do that, how are we going to sing a hymn that reads:

*We are one in the bond of love,
we are one in the bond of love,
we've united our spirit
with the Spirit of God,
we are one in the bond of love.*

It is challenging to think that Jesus is the genuine link that keeps us united in an excellent new communion, but practicing it is even more beautiful. In this context, the Gentiles to whom the biblical text refers are pilgrims. Yes, pilgrims, foreigners, and

strangers to the covenant and the promises of the Jews, but equally, attained by the grace of God. This new paradigm implies a new citizenship sheltered by the agape love of God. We are all saints and fellow citizens of His Kingdom, by the blood of the crucified Christ on Calvary and risen. Jesus is the source of that boundless love and is the only one who can re-establish the union between the divided and separate world. This passage coincides with the purpose of the Letter to the Ephesians (1.10), which states, “And this is the plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth.” There is still hope for unity behind the wall or without it.

As religious leaders, we must denounce harmful attitudes and biased applications of some political groups or parties’ theology to change how we think and behave. Our prayer and dream are to heal and reconcile the world—humanity. Let us destroy their enemies by loving and making them friends. Let us raise our consciences for the integration of all peoples by following St. Francis of Assis prayer:²

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,
 Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
 where there is injury, pardon;
 where there is doubt, faith;
 where there is despair, hope;
 where there is sadness, joy;
 where there is darkness, light;
 where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to
 be consoled as to console;
 to be understood as to understand;
 to be loved as to love.

² St. Francis Prayer:
https://medicine.yale.edu/psychiatry/care/cmhc/spiritual%20care_prayers_421484_284_4172_v1.pdf.
 Accessed February 20, 2024.

For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

APPENDIX FOUR

LIMINALITY

INTRODUCTION TO LIMINALITY

In 1909, in *The Rites of Passage*, anthropologist and ethnographer Arnold van Gennep coined the term *liminality*. *Liminality* defines the relational threshold or border between two things, states, or conditions, sometimes subtle or barely perceptible and, at other times, more abruptly. The term applies to individuals as well as groups. Gennep conceptually describes the middle stage of the three steps of the rites of passage: separation, transition, and incorporation. He expresses it this way:

I think it legitimate to single out rites of passage as a special category, which... May be subdivided into rites of separation, transition rites, and rites of incorporation.¹

In *The Rites of Passage*, he depicts the middle stage of transition as a threshold with its characteristic ambiguity or disorientation. To express it, he derives the term *liminality* from the Latin *limen*, meaning “threshold.” Later, in 1963, in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, anthropologist Victor Turner rediscovered, expanded, and built upon van Gennep’s idea to show human reactions to those experiences. In that way, Turner gave “an unconventional definition of ‘ritual’ that overturns the long-held understanding that ritual serves to maintain the status quo.”² Keeping the same semantics, Hester and Walker-Jones added that Turner explores:

¹ Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 10-11.

² Richard L. Hester & Kelli Walker-Jones, *Know Your Story and Lead with It* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 23.

“Ritual [as] an activity in which people move from their ordinary daily life across a threshold into a state of *liminality*.”³

Turner credits van Gennep’s term as a building block for further exploration of that life transitional process, adapting it to various aspects of life, when he states:

van Gennep has shown that all rites of passage or ‘transition’ are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or *limen* signifying ‘threshold’ in Latin), and aggregation.⁴

Turner further proved that ambiguity and disorientation by saying:

Liminal entities are neither here nor there. They are betwixt and between...As such, their...attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols...that ritualize social and cultural transitions.⁵

Life is a continuous sequence of *liminal stages*, similar to the Greek philosopher Heraclitus’ concept of “everything flows.” As soon as we finish one, another one follows, like what happens as we head to the horizon, which we can never reach. Thus, movements through diverse stages constitute an endless transforming life experience regarding thinking, feeling, and acting. From phases beginning at the embryo to ending our lives, we constantly go through those liminal processes.

These ideas hint at why transformative experiences like adolescence, pilgrimage, and immigration, among others, stand *liminal* in space and time and are so significant. Movements, departures, and arrivals mark diverse experiences as valuable parts of the journeys. In those transitional stages, we leave something to gain something else. Those

³ Ibid.

⁴ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, first paperback ed. (Hawthorne NY: Aldane de Gruyter, 1995), 94.

⁵ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, 95.

experiences constitute the cyclical moments of life where we learn to begin, process, and end somewhere else, hopefully, all the better for the journey.

The beauty of this anthropological model is that we can explain life's constant moves, changes, and adaptations to new settings. That allows us to revise, modify, or continue an exciting life as needed. *Liminal* spaces and times are temporal, but we can become something else at those crossroads.

Christian leaders should be interested in the well-being of people during those transitional moments. However, those transitional ritual stages are exactly where ambiguity and disorientation occur. Turner calls the participant community affected by those changes *communitas* (and the Church may call it *Koinonia*).

Thus, as leaders, we must be alert, pay attention to others, and be aware of those moments to interject our contribution to lift everyone in life's crises. For instance, Hester and Walker-Jones quote Timothy Carson, who applied Turner's theory to pastoral care, calling ministers *liminal beings*, suggesting that our goal is to create *liminal* spaces to help others. As such, Hester and Walker-Jones say:

They deal with life transitions as do no other professionals—attending births, marriages, baptisms, confirmations, bar and *bat mitzvahs*, illness, and death, to name a few. When the physician walks out of the room saying, “There is nothing more I can do,” the minister follows to create a liminal space for the dying and the family.⁶

With such a mindset, we can significantly benefit the community by creating adequate *liminal* spaces for others. In addition, we must help those in that community to complete their stage satisfactorily and move toward their new phase.

⁶ Hester & Walker-Jones, *Know Your Story and Lead with It*, 120.

My liminality:

My life's three most significant liminalities are being a physical and spiritual pilgrim, wandering as a transplanted Puerto Rican in Texas, and living in the context of the United States. Puerto Rico (P.R.) is a territory in the United States whose residents do not have the right to vote for the President of the United States despite being United States citizens. However, they (I should say we) must comply with all the United States Federal laws. Puerto Ricans, or any United States citizen living in Puerto Rico, cannot participate as full citizens in the Electoral College because Puerto Rico is not a state. Thus, Puerto Rican residents do not vote for the United States President or have any state senators in the United States Senate, and they only elect a Resident Commissioner (congressperson) to the House of Representatives, who cannot vote in Congress. Once elected, the Resident Commissioner can voice concerns without real impact. Those who defend the present *status quo* of P.R. may say that they live in the best of the two worlds. However, the lack of definition perpetuates that *liminality* for those who advocate for Puerto Rico's independence or statehood. Puerto Rico's official name in Spanish is *Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico*. However, it is an inaccurate English translation of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. The literal translation would be Free Associated State of Puerto Rico. However, it is not free, associated, or a state; it is an unincorporated territory or a "sophisticated colony."⁷

Puerto Rico's *liminal* stage has existed for too long (Four hundred five years under Spain's Sovereignty and another 125 years under the United States). The facts are

⁷ For more information, see Juan González, "Puerto Ricans: Citizens Yet Foreigners," in *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America*, 2nd Ed., (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2022), 91-107.

traceable in history to November 19, 1493, when Christopher Columbus discovered Puerto Rico on his second voyage, when it ultimately became a Spanish Colony, until July 25, 1898. In 1898, during the change of sovereignty, Puerto Rico became part of the United States. That change of sovereignty from Spain to the United States triggered a massive shift into a new reality.

However, early in that process, on April 10, 1899, Theodore Roosevelt, then Governor of New York, recognized the difficulties of those transformations. Even before his presidency, he contemplated and described the relationship of several territories with the mainland, including Puerto Rico, as complex, reason he said:

In the West Indies and the Philippines alike, we are confronted by most difficult problems. It is cowardly to shrink from solving them in the proper way; for solved they must be, if not by us, then by some stronger and more manful race. If we are too weak, too selfish, or too foolish to solve them, some bolder and abler people must undertake the solution. Personally, I am far too firm a believer in the greatness of my country and the power of my countrymen to admit for one moment that we shall ever be driven to the ignoble alternative. The problems are different for the different islands. Porto Rico is not large enough to stand alone.⁸

The beauty of understanding this reality is that we, like Roosevelt, might succeed with strenuous efforts. As a Puerto Rican and pilgrim, I constantly move in spatial and temporal dimensions. It is a sequential *liminal* stage, which allows me to keep searching for the best within myself and my *communitas*. Thus, I invite those who dare to do the same to accept the challenges of that transitional journey within that community. This *communitas* provides space for dreams, companionship, and possibilities for a more straightforward path to a brighter future.

⁸ Theodore Roosevelt, The Strenuous Life Speech Before the Hamilton Club, Chicago, IL April 10, 1899. <https://www.usmceu.edu/Portals/218/Strenuous%20Life%2C%20Theodore%20Roosevelt.pdf>. Accessed February 22, 2024.

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