

BEYOND RELIGION: LIBERATION THEOLOGY AND THEOLOGY OF THE  
HAMMER IN EL SALVADOR, A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

by

Gabriela Patricia López de Arcia

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Approved by:

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Dr. Carlos Coria-Sánchez

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Dr. Carmen Soliz

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Dr. Eric Hoenes del Pinal

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## ABSTRACT

GABRIELA PATRICIA LOPEZ DE ARCIA. Beyond religion: liberation theology and theology of the hammer in El Salvador, a comparative analysis. (Under the direction of DR. CARLOS CORIA-SANCHEZ

This Master's thesis presents a comparative analysis of the philosophical principles and actions of Liberation theology, started within the Catholic Church in Latin America in the 1960s, and the Theology of the Hammer, the core of Habitat for Humanity derivate from Southern Baptist's denomination in the 1990s. The central argument of the paper reflects on how both faith-based social movements share similarities in the development of democracy and poverty reduction in the country, with an emphasis on Human Rights. In the case of El Salvador, the civil war conflict and following processes of reconstruction and reconciliation were rich contexts for the theologies to work and influence. This research contributes to the current conversation regarding the relevance of Liberation Theology, affecting the religious mobilization of communities and individuals along the continent, and the non-profits role as the complement between the public and private sector, working with particular emphasis in neglected populations.

## DEDICATION

*To David.*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In a way, the completion of this thesis has been a work in progress for the last fourteen years. My interest in Liberation Theology started with my training in Psychology at the Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas, where I understood the transformation of reality from individual and collective perspectives under the writings of Ignacio Martín-Baró. Little did I know that what started as a simple interest, would develop into a career for me, at Habitat for Humanity El Salvador. During my time as a Habitat employee, I became familiar with the Theology of the Hammer and its social implications around the globe. The people that influenced me for over a decade at those two places are too many to mention. However, a group of young, crazy, and remarkable people inspired me deeply with their communitarian commitment and an ever-growing sense of social justice: Luis, Emilio, Hannah, Jesus and Katy.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Religion has been used and misused as an ideological control tool in Latin America since the colonial period. The traditional close connection of the Catholic Church with powerful and wealthy groups perpetuated the status quo. However, the Catholic Church associations in the region changed in the 1960's when Latin American members of the clergy and lay people changed their key emphasis to the less-privileged populations. This paradigm shift required Marxist-based analytical social tools and the Brazilian *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, among others. The ideological and practical transformation of traditional Catholic values in Latin America was addressed as Liberation Theology, and marked a breaking point in the participation of religious ideologies in the social and political sphere. Such as in the case of El Salvador where the multiple influences of Liberation Theology as a faith-based social movement reflect on the development and closure of the civil war period from 1980 to 1992. Catholics in El Salvador represented ninety percent of the population in the 1980s,<sup>1</sup> with over four million adherents, half of them living in poverty along rural areas. There are no official numbers regarding the amount of people engaged in Liberation Theology in El Salvador, but an approximation of people involved before and during the Civil war surpasses the half million, including over 20,000 people trained as catechists and delegates of the word

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<sup>1</sup> Montgomery, Tommie Sue. 1983. "Liberation and Revolution." In *Trouble in Our Backyard, Central America and the United States in the Eighties*. 94



in the 1980s.<sup>2</sup> Today, the influence of Liberation Theology lives worldwide in social movements as Abahlali baseMjondolo in South Africa, Dalit Theology in India, Landless Workers's Movement in Brazil, and Black Liberation Theology in the United States.<sup>3</sup>

While the Catholic Church embraced a new active role in the transformation of Latin America, the Protestant church increased its presence in the continent. The protestant influence included the support of non-profit organizations that addressed concrete needs of the general population. Theology of the Hammer, the ideological background for the NGO (non-governmental organization) Habitat for Humanity, was part of these initiatives. With Christian ecumenical principles and voluntarism as the backbone of the organization, the vision of Habitat for Humanity is "a world where everybody has a decent place to live". The Theology of the Hammer explains the biblical reasons behind the goal of eliminating poverty housing, acknowledging the relevant role of low-income families and other sectors of society in the construction of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. The theology promotes housing as the divine right to have a decent and safe place to live. Since its foundation, the Theology of the Hammer has facilitated access to adequate housing to over 4.8 million people around the world, 21,500 of those just in El Salvador.

At first sight, Liberation Theology and the Theology of the Hammer are different. Nevertheless, both faith-based social movements embody values of progressive Christianity, such as awareness (as the capacity to understand and response to the needs of others), equality, social and political participation, among others, which are influential in social networks consolidation. For El Salvador, the civil war and post-conflict periods

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<sup>2</sup> Montgomery, Tommie Sue. 1995. *Revolution in El Salvador: from Civil Strife to Civil Peace*. 95.

<sup>3</sup> Motta, S. and A. G. Nilsen. 2011. *Social Movements in the Global South*. 13.

required constant support from the third sector (not private, nor public) to fulfill the population's social and political needs that the government was not able to support. Liberation Theology and Theology of the Hammer, along other movements, supported the construction of democracy and reduction of poverty with an emphasis on human rights. The relevance of both theologies transcends the ministerial level with prominence in the social and political discussions.

The main objective of this comparative analysis is to scrutinize the influence of Liberation Theology and Theology of the Hammer in El Salvador, during the civil war and subsequent post-conflict period. The analysis aspires to enlighten the understanding of faith-based social movements as critical integrated components of individual and collective social development. Liberation Theology and Theology of the Hammer represent only two of many faith-based social movements that enrich social practices in El Salvador and Latin America. Nevertheless, Liberation Theology has been reviewed from different perspectives repeatedly, while other ideologies remain unexplored, offering further research opportunities to understand the leverage of religion as a significant and broader component of society.

This research provides a new approach to Latin American, and specifically, Central American religious studies, considering the theological content, but also to sociology and political science. Progressive theologies and social Christianity topics include ideological tools from different social sciences, highlighting ideas of spirituality and shared faith as an important component in the analysis and understanding of Latin American societies, from individual and collective perspectives. In the case of El Salvador, political discussions include religious leaders and their opinions as valuable

input in political analysis and programs, proving the relevant role of faith-based organizations and movements in society.

The influence of non-profit organizations and volunteer mobilization programs are still developing topics that could benefit from new perspectives, especially considering US-based non-profits with links or branches in Latin America. Non-profits and faith-based organizations have a key role in the transformation of communities, completing the gap between the public and private sector, and most of the times working with previously neglected sectors.

The historiography related to Liberation Theology and Theology of the Hammer has contrasting developments. Liberation Theology used to be one of the most researched topics in Latin America and El Salvador until the end of the civil war in 1992, due to its connection with armed conflicts and violations of human rights. With the transition to democracy happening in most of Latin American countries, the movement decreased to the point of being considered either dead or stuck. This research will collaborate with historiography that embraces the long-term legacy of Liberation Theology as a dynamic movement with ongoing influence in the Latin American broad church and collective social identity. On the other hand, most of the books and articles about Theology of the Hammer and organizations such as Habitat for Humanity, have an interest in the central components (fundraising, volunteer management, organizational identity) or in construction (disaster response, green building, material quality and creative construction methods). The traditional approach exalts the results instead of the process. The analysis compiled in this manuscript emphasizes the relevance of principles and values promoted

by both Liberation Theology and Theology of the Hammer, realizing the impact those components have in social and political structures for the last few decades.

For the discussion of Liberation Theology, there are some primary sources that need to be included, such as “*A Theology Of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*”, by Gustavo Gutiérrez. Gutierrez encapsulates the principles and core components of the movement, including a reflection on the role of clergy, *aggiornaminto* and *acompañamiento* conceptualizations in a practical sense. Gutierrez, considered the father of Liberation Theology, suggests a renewed approach to the Church life, with a preferential option for the poor. Other sources that complement Gutierrez’s perspective are the Catholic Church documents related to the Second Vatican Council (1965), and the Latin American Episcopal Conference (CELAM) in Medellin, 1968. These documents include the official perspective of the Church and the Vatican regarding religion in the modern world and a *tropicalized* understanding from the Latin American context.

Phillip Berryman in “*Liberation Theology: Essential Facts About The Revolutionary Movement In Latin America--And Beyond*” and “*Stubborn Hope: Religion, Politics, and Revolution in Central America*”, discusses the participation of liberal clergy in civil wars and revolutions in Latin America. According to Berryman, the involvement of Catholic Church’s members in the rebellion, either as intellectuals, peace negotiators, or actual guerilla elements, impacted the short-term results of the war. Because this research focuses in El Salvador, sources from the Jesuits intellectuals Ignacio Ellacuria, Jon Sobrino, and Ignacio Martin-Baró will also be included in the analysis. Sobrino and Ellacuria had a strong voice regarding political critical analysis and exhorted for a committed theology that walked along the people in suffering. Their

articles and manuscripts discuss the conception of God from the eyes of the poor. In the case of Martin-Baró, Liberation Theology influenced his conceptualization of Liberation Psychology, which includes mental health as an essential component in freedom, and cognitive processes part of education and awareness building for the general population.

For the Theology of the Hammer, most of the documents and arguments are written from a Habitat for Humanity International perspective. The main primary source is “*The Theology of the Hammer*” by Millard Fuller. In this manuscript, Fuller talks about the power of an individual and a simple tool, the hammer, and the influence that one can have when differences are overlooked to work in partnership with others. The main argument in the book explains how an individual putting faith in action builds the Kingdom of God on earth. Other important secondary sources include “*Music Of A Thousand Hammers: Inside Habitat For Humanity*”, by Paul Leonard, former CEO of Habitat for Humanity, and “*Creating A Habitat For Humanity: No Hands But Yours*”, by Jonathan Reckford, current CEO. Both Leonard and Reckford discuss the core Christian principles of the organization, and testimonies about Habitat’s worldwide influence.

Research shows that there is no collective analysis of both Liberation Theology and Theology of the Hammer, even when Habitat for Humanity has a strong presence in Latin American countries where Liberation Theology and the Catholic Church have a strong presence, such as Brazil and Chile. In El Salvador, both theologies have influenced, in different levels, legislative changes in the human rights arena, and contributed to the progressive reduction of poverty levels. This analysis would provide an example of the permanent influence of Liberation Theology in the Salvadoran society but

also, discuss how and why faith-based social movements impact topics beyond theology, promoting social commitment and political awareness.

Other reviewed sources include Diana Villiers Negroponte in *“Seeking Peace In El Salvador: The Struggle To Reconstruct A Nation At The End Of The Cold War”*, and Ellen Moodie in *“El Salvador In The Aftermath Of Peace: Crime, Uncertainty, And The Transition To Democracy”*, to provide context about El Salvador. These two sources discuss the reconstruction of El Salvador and the strengthening of democracy in general terms. Other relevant sources to understand the peculiarities of the Salvadoran society, include *“Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925-2005”* by Paul Almeida, a longitudinal study that analyzes the Salvadoran society in different critical historical moments, based on primary sources. Almeida reflects on the reasons behind the large-scale social movements in El Salvador. Another source, *“Landscapes Of Struggle: Politics, Society, And Community In El Salvador”* edited by Laura Santiago-Aldo includes a multidisciplinary approach to the Salvadoran society pre, during, and post Civil War. Lastly, *“Revolution In El Salvador: From Civil Strife To Civil Peace”*, by Tommie Sue Montgomery, reflects on the Salvadoran society in political, social and economic contexts from the 1960s, the period called the “revolution before the war”.

This thesis contains three main chapters, for the detailed revision of Liberation Theology and Theology of the Hammer, in addition to a joint analysis of their significance in El Salvador. The summary chapters about Liberation Theology and Theology of the Hammer offer background about both faith-based movements, understanding the development of the theologies, core ideological components, key studies, and current circumstances, as sources for the subsequent analysis.

After the general introduction, the first chapter presents a synopsis of the emergence and development of Liberation Theology, with a summary of its main individual and collective values. The section includes a look at Archbishop Oscar Romero's legacy, as an example of the movement's principles, to enhance the appreciation of the values related to Liberation Theology. The last part of the chapter reviews the current challenges and discussions around Liberation Theology, including new approaches from theologians and social science scholars.

The next chapter follows a similar structure for Theology of the Hammer, including a discussion of its origins and the different influences surrounding its materialization. Afterward, the chapter analyzes individual and collective values promoted by the theology, following a review of the key study of former US President Jimmy Carter as an example of the embodiment of the movement's principles. The closure of the chapter covers the current demands faced by Theology of the Hammer to reach its ultimate goal of a world where everybody has a decent home.

The information presented in both chapters supports the third part of the thesis that summarizes the similarities and differences between both faith-based social movements, with particular emphasis on its practice in El Salvador's context. This reflection focuses on democracy building and poverty reduction, to recognize the contributions of the ideologies in the religious, social, and political sphere. The last part of the thesis encloses key findings that detach from the general analysis.

To understand the influence of Liberation Theology and Theology of the Hammer in El Salvador is also important to review the country's history. The next few pages summarize the development of the civil war (1980-1992) and post-war period (1992-

2016) in El Salvador, highlighting circumstances that improve the understanding of both theologies' development in the country.

### El Salvador Historical Context

Since the end of the colonial times, the oligarchy of El Salvador formed by landowners and wealthy merchants, controlled the political and economic institutions promoting changes for their benefit only. According to the collective narrative and scholars,<sup>4</sup> fourteen families ruled the country since the independence from Spain in 1821, (actually, they were more like fifty or sixty family groups), perpetuating their leadership with arranged marriages and manipulating land distribution. In the first half of the twentieth century, only two percent of the population owned more than sixty percent of the arable land<sup>5</sup>. This land monopoly and financial resources facilitated an intimate relationship between the elite families and the army, guaranteeing their safety and population control, in addition to the indulgence of the Catholic Church. The strategic alliance between the economic, military, and religious power, maintained the peasant population content with their immediate context discouraging them to seeking for economic, social, and political advances.

The Catholic Church played a crucial role in the in the subjugation of the population living in poverty. The church included in the catechism the “*Conciencia Mágica*”<sup>6</sup> which explained the misery conditions of life as part of God’s will, and living in extreme poverty as a test of obedience, submission, and faith. Even if the Church supported poverty assistance programs, the financing for those charity relied on the

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<sup>4</sup> Ching, Erik. 2014. *Authoritarian El Salvador: Politics and the Origins of the Military Regimes, 1880-1940*. 80.

<sup>5</sup> Eaton, Helen-May. 1991. “*The Impact of Archbishop Oscar Romero’s Alliance with the Struggle for Liberation of the Salvadoran People*.” 22.

<sup>6</sup> Bakhtiari, Bahman. 1986. “Revolution and the Church in Nicaragua and El Salvador.” *Journal of Church and State*. 39.



economic support of the elite, and eventually, the military high power. Meanwhile, approximately forty percent of Salvadorans lived in poverty.<sup>7</sup> Because of the deplorable circumstances, four major guerrilla organizations were created under the military rule of the *Juntas Revolucionarias de Gobierno* between the 1930s and the 1960s.

During the 1970s, the repressive military government facilitated violent deaths, persecution, and a general sense of insecurity in the smallest yet most densely populated country in Central America. Michael Hayes in “*Truth and Memory: The Church and Human Rights in El Salvador and Guatemala*” discuss the reasons behind the civil war summarize in three topics: “the absolutization of the wealth and private property; the absolutization of national security, and the absolutization of political organizations.”<sup>8</sup> This explanation, taken from the homilies of Archbishop Oscar Romero, summarizes the struggle of the low-income and working class in El Salvador.

Archbishop Romero put Liberation Theology in the top of the elites’ concerns, receiving international attention with statements, homilies, and pastoral letters that promoted the movements’ principles. Romero became archbishop of El Salvador in 1977 under the elites and Catholic Church leadership best interests, but after facing the Country’s painful context, Romero’s vision transformed to a progressive posture, challenging the Church's role. Romero’s assassination on March 24th, 1980, marked the official starting point of the civil war.

From 1980 to 1992, El Salvador lived an armed conflict between the militarized government and guerrilla forces. The results of the war include more than 75,000 casualties and several thousand “*desaparecidos*”, in addition to emotional, economic and

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<sup>7</sup> World Bank. 1994. *El Salvador: The Challenge of Poverty Alleviation*. 3.

<sup>8</sup> Hayes, Michael. 2001. *Truth and Memory: The Church and Human Rights in El Salvador and Guatemala*. 277.

social damage<sup>9</sup> infringed mostly by the army. During the war, persecution affected the civilian population (not related to the military or the guerrilla) as many forms of social groups were labeled as allies or members of the guerilla. The government labeled unions, religious and communitarian associations, university students groups, and any collective, as revolutionary groups and therefore, supporters of the guerrilla, even without proof.

The quick growth of the left in El Salvador benefited from the role of liberationists who organized CEBs, sharing a social conscience (*conscientizar*, in Spanish). Becoming aware of the inequitable social structure inspired some people from the general population, and even the clergy, to join revolutionary organizations. Joining the guerrilla was disrespectful for the church hierarchy, and considered against the vows of obedience that priests take in their ordination, leading to disapproval from the Catholic Church leadership. However, even those clergy members that were working from a peaceful perspective suffered the effects of the war. Numerous priest, seminarians, students, peasants, teachers, workers, professionals, and intellectuals were tortured, arrested, or assassinated because of their faith and commitment to the Salvadoran people, for "inciting the people to revolution".<sup>10</sup>

Liberation Theology, which was present in the country since the 1970s, became more visible after the war began, with an increasing amount of adherents around the northeastern part of the country. With leaders like Jesuit and Maryknoll priest, communities were inspired by a new doctrine to implement social projects and take a prominent role in the transformation of their circumstances.

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<sup>9</sup> Pelton, Robert. 2004. *Monsignor Romero: A Bishop for the Third Millenium*. 67.

<sup>10</sup> Bakhtiari, Bahman. 1986. "Revolution and the Church in Nicaragua and El Salvador." *Journal of Church and State*. 30.

Peace negotiation efforts required the participation of private, public and third sectors. After the guerilla's attack to the urban areas, called the "offensive",<sup>11</sup> and the assassination of the Jesuits Priests<sup>12</sup> in 1989, the United Nations and the United States Government actively encourage negotiations to reach an agreement between the government and the guerilla forces. Although the revolution in El Salvador it is considerate an unsuccessful example from a theoretical approach,<sup>13</sup> the peace accords accomplished some improvements for the Salvadoran population including the reconstruction of a civilian police force, the conformation of the FMLN (former guerrilla group) as a legal and democratic political party, and human rights institutions.

After the peace accords in 1992, El Salvador was governed by the extreme right political party ARENA (Alianza Republicana Nacionalista) for four presidential periods of five years each, twenty years in total. ARENA represented the interests of the economic power as its members belonged to the conservative wing of the military and oligarchical families. The policies implemented by the ARENA governments promoted neoliberal development practices such as adopting the US dollar as national currency in 2001 and pushing the Central American Free Trade Agreement with the United States. To provide stability to the weaken economy, Latin American and international multilateral organizations offered financial support and technical advice on topics such as security, economy, and politics. Regardless the implementation of policies and programs, the

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<sup>11</sup> Ochoa, Ignacio. 2003. "El Salvador 1989: The Two Jesuit Standards and the Final Offensive." 63.

<sup>12</sup> On November 16, 1989, six Jesuits priest – Ignacio Ellacuria, Ignacio Martín-Baró, Segundo Montes, Amando Lopez, Joaquin Lopez y Lopez, and Juan Ramon Moreno - were assassinated by a military squad. The persecution and subsequent elimination of the Jesuits was a result of the intellectual contributions and critical analysis that the group provided during the civil war, along with the accompaniment of religious groups and communities in the northeastern part of the country as supporters of Liberation Theology.

<sup>13</sup> Based on Alan Knight's argument in "*The Myth of the Mexican Revolution*", for a revolution to be successful, there has to be a major and significant change in the immediate context of the country.

economy deteriorated fast impacting other issues such as underemployment, insecurity, unemployment, and forced migration.

The necessities of the country after the civil war were many and the government was neither ready nor interested in investing in reconstruction. But multiple sectors, such as non-governmental organizations and multilateral development institutions interpreted the political transition as an opportunity to support change. The amount of non-profits registered in the country increased in five hundred percent after the end of the civil war.<sup>14</sup> NGOs promoted the inclusion of previously marginalized sectors of society in fundamental democratic practices. In 1994, new elections under international observers and without the military coercion expanded the range of actors involved in the political spectrum. These spaces for political participation fomented freedom of speech and an overall rectification of human rights' protection. International institutions and local non-profits worked along the general population, developing a sense of ownership regarding social issues, and strengthen of communitarian development. USAID and Peace Corps, for example, have multiple areas of influence in the country along the years,<sup>15</sup> besides numerous non-profit organizations such as Habitat for Humanity, that aim to support the enhancement of domestic policies with a human rights perspective.

After the end of the Civil War, the government promoted an Amnesty Law, intended to “forgive and forget” crimes and human rights violations performed during the conflict.<sup>16</sup> The original objective of the Amnesty Law was to support collective healing processes after a violent period. Nevertheless, the initiative had a different result.

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<sup>14</sup> IDHUCA. 2007. *El Salvador, Quince Años Después - Otra Lectura*. 15.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 18.

<sup>16</sup> Moodie, Ellen. 2010. *El Salvador in the Aftermath of Peace Crime, Uncertainty, and the Transition to Democracy*. 163.

Because of the lack of legal prosecution in assassinations and disappearances cases, the Salvadoran society develop a polarized politics sphere and a feeling of being stuck in the past without moving forward in unity and reconciliation.<sup>17</sup>

Additionally, between the late 1990s and early 2000s violence and crime increase exponentially because of gangs.<sup>18</sup> To try to control the issue, the government implemented repressive and controlling mechanisms such as *Plan Mano Dura* and *Mano Super Dura* with minimal components of prevention or reinsertion,. Since then, public security became one of the main contents in election campaigns and governmental policies, including international support with technical advising, funding, and training.

In the 2009 elections, the FMLN won for the first time the presidential administration. The candidate, Mauricio Funes earned fifty-one percent of the votes.<sup>19</sup>

This testimony summarizes the general reactions to this historic event:

“You’re talking about ending not just the ARENA party’s rule, but you’re talking about one hundred and thirty years of oligarchy and military dictatorship, by and large, that’s just ended last night. You’re talking about \$6 billion that the United States used to defeat the FMLN. You’re talking about] the utter failure of not just the ARENA party but of somebody in particular, too, who has a special place in many of our hearts: Ronald Reagan. This is the defeat of Ronald Reagan, nothing less!”<sup>20</sup>

The evaluation of Funes’ administration includes mixed reviews with high expectations and under-delivery.<sup>21</sup> One of the most controversial decisions under Funes’ administration was the truce between the government and the gangs, mediated by several religious leaders, journalists, and politicians. The highly criticized truce was a limited,

<sup>17</sup> Studemeister, Margarita. 2001. “*El Salvador: Implementation of the Peace Accords.*” 52.

<sup>18</sup> Almeida, Paul. 2008. *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925-2005.* 179.

<sup>19</sup> Moodie, Ellen. 2010. *El Salvador in the Aftermath of Peace Crime, Uncertainty, and the Transition to Democracy.* 206.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 207.

<sup>21</sup> IDHUCA. 2007. *El Salvador, Quince Años Después - Otra Lectura.* 128.

short-term solution to the gangs issue and marked a legitimatization of the criminal groups as a powerful entity.<sup>22</sup> However, the homicides rates decreased for the first time since the end of the civil war. In 2014, the FMLN won the presidential election again, with Sanchez Ceren, a former guerrilla commander. Under Ceren's administration, the truce fell apart, generating new, unprecedented heights of violence rates.

The policies and programs implemented by the FMLN governments to manage violence still lack acknowledgement and approach to the roots of violence, dragged since the incomplete closure of the civil war. A weakened judicial system, generalized poverty, and a highly unequal society promote higher violence rates as the current ones.<sup>23</sup> The internal distress within El Salvador is affected by the Latin American crisis regarding organized crime and drug trafficking,<sup>24</sup> turning a domestic problem into a global situation that requires a multidisciplinary approach in addition to increased funding.

Another issue that escalated quickly in the last decade is the migration of undocumented Salvadorans to the United States. El Salvador represents the third biggest group of Latinos in the North American country, increased by the unaccompanied minors crisis created by significant amounts of children fleeing from violence and aiming to reunite with family. This situation represents a major issue from the United States perspective, but for the Salvadoran government remittances sent by over 2 million Salvadorans living abroad represent sixteen percent of the Gross Domestic Product and sixty-seven percent of all the foreign earnings for the country.

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<sup>22</sup> Ricardo Vaquerano, "Biografía No Autorizada de la Tregua", *El Faro.net*. August 27<sup>th</sup>, 2013. <http://www.especiales.elfaro.net/es/todosobrelatregua/>

<sup>23</sup> "Violencia en El Salvador creció 117.6%", *El Diario de Hoy*, March 5<sup>th</sup> 2016. <http://www.elsalvador.com/articulo/nacional/violencia-salvador-crecio-1176-103782>.

<sup>24</sup> Weeks, Gregory. 2015. *U.S. and Latin American Relations*. 293.

Currently, El Salvador is considered the most violent country in the world.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, elites manipulate the generation of instability with the narrative in print's own primary media. There is still a long way for governmental, private and non-profits to build a democratic society in El Salvador.

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<sup>25</sup> Aaron Daugherty, El Salvador is Most Violent Nation in Western Hemisphere. *Insightcrime.org*. January 4, 2016. <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/el-salvador-is-most-violent-nation-in-western-hemisphere>

## CHAPTER 2: LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Besides military and economic power, religion represents the third critical component of the systemic structures in Latin America. And more than religion in general, the Catholic Church. The internal transformation of the Church in the 1960s after the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) allowed the Catholic Church's power to relocate its loyalty from few oligarchical members to numerous impoverished communities. In Latin America, the internal renewal aimed to reach those living in poverty with a different Pastoral work in permanent connection with the community and committed to the historical context, and eventually expanded to a worldwide faith-based movement. The Peruvian priest Gustavo Gutierrez called this movement Liberation Theology. Since its development in the 1960s, Liberation Theology persuaded clergy members, laypeople, and even non-believers, to work together for the construction of a just, equal, and overall better society, spiritually and physically.

In El Salvador, the emergence and expansion of Liberation Theology happened in a crucial time of social transformation and political awaken, turning religion into an essential part of the development and closure of the civil war. The assassination of Archbishop Romero, an icon of popular Liberation Theology, in 1980 has been considered one of the breaking points for the official beginning of the conflict,<sup>26</sup> and the assassination of six intellectual Jesuits priests in 1989 prompted international pressure to engage in peace negotiations and end the war, including threats from the United States

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<sup>26</sup> Sobrino, Jon. 1990. *Archbishop Romero: Memories and Reflections*. 9.



government to hold the financial and training military support sustaining the Civil War.<sup>27</sup> This strategy from the Bush administration triggered the conversation regarding the peace accords, signed by the guerrilla group FMLN and the government of El Salvador.

Faith-based social movements such as Liberation Theology influence the socio-political sphere, beyond a moralistic religious perspective. As an opportunity to promote democracy in the militarized Salvadoran society, Liberation Theology facilitated the early construction stages of a healthier social fabric with a human rights approach and the further influence of other society improvement initiatives.

This chapter explores the development of Liberation Theology in El Salvador, understanding the essence of the movement and how its influence impacts the Salvadoran society from a socio-political perspective. The summary includes the review of multiple primary and secondary sources, with a particular focus on the collection and analysis of the values attributed to the movement. The discussion explains the development of Liberation Theology and the Catholic Church circumstances that stimulated its social materialization and formulation as an ideology. The second part of the chapter analyzes values and principles promoted by the theology, explaining how the ideological formulation converts to physical demonstrations. The third section explores an example of the personification of Liberation Theology's values in Archbishop Romero. And the final part reviews the current situation of the movement, including the multiple perspectives about its influence and further challenges

#### Gutierrez and Liberation

For years, the Catholic Church was linked to the economic and military powers in the Latin American region, as the third component in a social structure that perpetuate

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<sup>27</sup> Sikkink, Kathryn. 2004. *Mixed Signals: U.S. Human Rights Policy and Latin America*. 147.

repression and misery for most of the population. The Church preserved and reproduced conservative values to maintain the status quo while quietly or actively supporting oligarchy actions. The Church's message preached conformity to the will of God, appreciation for scarce resources, and an interpretation of the Beatitudes to exalt impoverished conditions as an easier or blessed way to reach heaven, under the “*Conciencia Mágica*” doctrine's influence.<sup>28</sup>

It was not until 1962 when the Church engaged in significant structural change through the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Led by Pope John XXIII,<sup>29</sup> over 2,000 bishops, laypeople, and auditors reflected on the Church practices, to reconcile the Church with the modern world, reconsidering the interpretation of the central theological concepts. One of the main themes was reconciliation, allowing Catholics to pray with other Christian denominations, approving the celebration of mass in other languages besides Latin, and acknowledging the primacy of people's needs over capitalism principles.<sup>30</sup> The dogmatic limits of faith were shattered with the new guidelines, acknowledging the Church's role as a pilgrim walking along its people with a transition from hierarchical to horizontal structures at the local parishes, and promoting a wider level of commitment from the congregation,<sup>31</sup> among others. The concept of *aggiornamento* (translated as waking up or becoming aware of) meant to bring the Church closer to its adherents and their immediate historical circumstances, while “delivering collective salvation and an evangelization message in permanent dialogue

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<sup>28</sup> Eaton, Helen-May. 1991. “*The Impact of Archbishop Oscar Romero's Alliance with the Struggle for Liberation of the Salvadoran People.*” 64.

<sup>29</sup> Gutiérrez, Gustavo. 1973. *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*. 9.

<sup>30</sup> Levi, Werner. 1989. *From Alms to Liberation: The Catholic Church, the Theologians, Poverty, and Politics*. 29.

<sup>31</sup> Chaouch, Malik Tahar. 2007. “La Compañía de Jesús y la Teología de la Liberación: Convergencias y Divisiones Sociopolíticas del Catolicismo Contemporáneo en América Latina.” *Historia y Grafía* 29: 101.

with the world.”<sup>32</sup> It also meant a change in the Catholic Church’s emphasis on wealthy elites and powerful groups to the impoverished population; this action increased the relevance and training of the laity, to reach those low-income areas where it was hard to maintain full-time clergy members.

In El Salvador, Archbishop Luis Chavez y Gonzalez, who served as the third Archbishop of San Salvador from 1938 until 1977, was enthusiastic about the progressive opportunities that the Vatican Council II offered. Chavez y Gonzalez was concerned about impoverished communities who have been victims of the country’s military systematic repression for decades. Due to the long term of his role, Archbishop Chavez y Gonzalez witnessed the Salvadoran evolution of social distress and political turmoil.

The transition to a contemporary Church was welcomed in the rest of Latin America as well. The American continent peculiar cultural expressions and revolutionary momentum in the 1960s, along with Vatican II inspired the Peruvian priest Gustavo Gutierrez to propose a radical theological posture to react to internal institutional violence against the majority, under the light of faith. The repressive and violent governmental regimes in addition to economic inequality transcended any previous theological approaches to deal with socio-historical issues, mostly conceived from a European perspective. Gutierrez reflected on the powerful and relevant role of the Latin American Catholic Church and how the institution could support the construction of a fraternal society, with dignity and justice for the general population.

"Much contemporary theology seems to start from the challenge of the non-believer. He questions our religious world and faces it with a demand for profound purification and renewal... This challenge in a continent like Latin America does not come primarily from the man who does not

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<sup>32</sup> CELAM. 1968. “Peace.” <http://www.shc.edu/theolibrary/resources/medpeace.htm>. Accessed on April 17, 2016.

believe, but from the man who is not a man, who is not recognized as such by the existing social order: he is in the ranks of the poor, the exploited; he is the man who is systematically and legally despoiled of his being as a man, who scarcely knows that he is a man. His challenge is not aimed at our religious world, but at our economic, social, political and cultural world."<sup>33</sup>

In 1968, the Latin American Episcopal Conference at Medellin, Colombia, (CELAM for its initials in Spanish, *Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano*) embraced the changes of Vatican Council II, including the Base Ecclesiastic Communities (CEB, for its initials in Spanish, *Comunidades Eclesiales de Base*). This meeting turned to be vital for the emergence of Liberation Theology as a faith-based social movement.

The acknowledgment of generalized poverty in the Latin American region as an urgent matter to address,<sup>34</sup> systematic injustice, and violence were some of the central topics of the CELAM meeting. During the discussion of the social, economic and political issues in the Latin American Region, the bishops reflected how the Catholic Church role as an institution, and the clergy as members of society should react to the circumstances. This reflection led into a new way of doing theology in Latin America,<sup>35</sup> considering historical background, political context, and social conflicts in the proclamation of the gospel. Religion crossed the line to the social and political issues that has been inherent previously but poorly managed.<sup>36</sup> With this change, the Catholic Church in the region became aware of its mission, placing the human development as a priority in the transformation of society.

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<sup>33</sup> Gutiérrez, Gustavo. 1973. *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*. 69.

<sup>34</sup> According to the Inter-American Development Bank, in 1970, 51.4% of the Latin American population lived in extreme or relative poverty. Also, 92% of the population was Catholic.

<sup>35</sup> Piar, Carlos. 1994. *Jesus and Liberation: A Critical Analysis of the Christology of Latin American Liberation Theology*. 14.

<sup>36</sup> Hassett, John. 1991. *Towards a Society That Serves Its People: The Intellectual Contribution of El Salvador's Murdered Jesuits*. 12.

After the 1968 Medellín conference, Liberation Theology developed considerably in Latin America, nourished from the disruptive social and economic conditions of the region. According to Bahman Bakhtiari, the development of Liberation Theology facilitated social and political transformation through evangelization and a reinterpretation of the Christian faith from the eyes of those living in poverty.<sup>37</sup> Impoverished populations became the major players within Liberation Theology, as poverty overtakes dignity, a divine right inherited in all human beings as Children of God and represents a remarkable obstacle for peace. For the Catholic doctrine, poverty can also reference a weak spiritual life, but that approach perpetuated fatalism uplifting the lack of resources on the earthly level as a guarantee of richness in eternity. For Liberation Theology, however, poverty should also be addressed as a physical lack of resources and opportunities.<sup>38</sup> Poverty became a primary concern, but also the economic and political systems that promoted marginalization and misery.

“An essential clue to the understanding of poverty in liberation theology is the distinction, made in the Medellín document *"Poverty of the Church,"* between three meanings of the term "poverty": real poverty as an evil—that is something that God does not want; spiritual poverty, in the sense of a readiness to do God's will; and solidarity with the poor, along with protest against the conditions under which they suffer.”<sup>39</sup>

The renewed Catholic Church in Latin America embraced Liberation Theology as a movement for social change in a spiritual and physical level to address both earthly and eternal life. In *"Mysterium Liberationist: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology"*, Ignacio Ellacuría states that, spiritually, the relevance of sacraments shifted

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<sup>37</sup> Bakhtiari, Bahman. 1986. "Revolution and the Church in Nicaragua and El Salvador." *Journal of Church and State* 39.

<sup>38</sup> Gutiérrez, Gustavo. 1973. *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*. 56.

<sup>39</sup> Gutiérrez, Gustavo. 1973. *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*. 232.

from the conservative, formal, and individual procedures to a progressive, warm, and collective celebration of “God’s people” as a shared identity. Eternal life was a gift of faith, but faith needed to be completed with *praxis* to create a new, real Christian.<sup>40</sup> Ellacuria argues that evangelization alone cannot transform society. To serve the poor, Liberation Theology conceived pastoral action as the tangible accompaniment of the congregation and the prophetic denunciation of the oppressive system, minimizing concrete social problems. The intellectual formulation of ideologies is valuable, but the practical experience is primordial. Liberation Theology takes the construct of *Praxis*, as a result of incarnated ministry along impoverished communities, generating subsequent theological discussion. *Praxis* meant to find faith in action and become part of the social influence through peaceful debate, dialogue, and negotiation.<sup>41</sup> Carlos Piar explains, “Liberative praxis is the essence of following Jesus.”<sup>42</sup>

The search for social justice on both heavenly and earthly planes required education as an essential component, and the Base Ecclesiastic Communities (CEBs) offered the ideal system to educate the masses. The small groups had a leader that oriented the discussion and reflection of Bible passages including implications of the daily life.<sup>43</sup> The conception of CEBs inferred communitarian participation (*Comunidades*) related to the doctrine of the Catholic Church (from Ecclesial) with members from low-income communities (traditionally, impoverished communities are

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<sup>40</sup> Ellacuría, Ignacio, and Jon Sobrino. 1993. *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*. 238.

<sup>41</sup> Petrella, Ivan, ed. 2005. *Latin American Liberation Theology: Next Generation*. 12.

<sup>42</sup> Piar, Carlos. 1994. *Jesus and Liberation: A Critical Analysis of the Christology of Latin American Liberation Theology*. 24.

<sup>43</sup> Berryman, Phillip. 1987. *Liberation Theology: Essential Facts about The Revolutionary Movement in Latin America--and Beyond*. 64.

considered at the bottom or *base* of the pyramid).<sup>44</sup> In El Salvador, the first CEB was founded in 1969, led by laymen and Jesuits priests.<sup>45</sup> Since then, the *Centros de Formacion Campesina* in the capital promoted progressive pastoral and social ideas. Jesuits, Franciscans, and Maryknoll priests run the center in San Salvador training laypeople from the interior of the country, from areas without regular pastoral care.<sup>46</sup> The educational system at the *Centros* included discussion of political situations and training in organizational skills, following the teachings of Paulo Freire.

In Brazil, Paulo Freire developed the “*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*”<sup>47</sup> during the 1960s in his role as a communitarian educator. Freire challenged the traditional education paradigm from a “banking model” to Liberation education. According to Freire, education needed to evolve from the mechanical transmission of knowledge between a wise teacher and an ignorant student, to a mutual exchange of information with an emphasis on intellectual cultivation and development of *conscientization* (explained as becoming conscious about circumstances). Liberation Education aims for a perception and recognition restructure in the student, increasing its capacity to analyze their surroundings and historical context critically.<sup>48</sup> After the process of *conscientization*, people can identify the causes between the dehumanizing structure that perpetuates marginality and misery, transforming the way people interacts with each other, and cultivating progressive values of solidarity and participation. The construction of a sense of community empowers the members and ignites a dynamic process of transformation

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<sup>44</sup> Levine, Daniel. 2014. *Popular Voices in Latin American Catholicism*. 45.

<sup>45</sup> Peterson, Anna. 1997. *Martyrdom and the Politics of Religion: Progressive Catholicism in El Salvador's Civil War*. 50.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 59

<sup>47</sup> Freire, Paulo. 1993. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 37.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 41.

within society to overcome oppressive structures. According to Freire, education is the essential component for the liberation and humanization of the historically oppressed.

Freire's methodology influenced the conception and expansion of CEBs. The small groups facilitated the socialization of the renewed Catholic doctrine while the structure supported one of the main changes after Vatican II, regarding the involvement of congregation, emulating the original Christian communities. Carol Drogus in "*The Rise and Decline of Liberation Theology: Churches, Faith and Political Change in Latin America*" states that CEBs' members shared faith and social commitment in their daily life,<sup>49</sup> as the education component included the development of awareness about social issues and stimulated debate within its members. Discussions promoted comprehension of the Gospel and political *conscientization* as a unified process. Liberation Theology, conceived CEBs as an integral part of a collaborative structure and active involvement, and as a powerful exercise of democracy, especially for marginalized populations.

Education, Evangelization and awareness as a demonstration of the radical choice for the spiritual and physical liberation of those living in poverty had a political impact. Once Liberation Theology became popular, critiques questioned the relation between politics and religion, especially from those in control of political power that perceived no relation between the two levels. According to Gutierrez, the Catholic Church was manipulated as a source of heavenly salvation for the elites, but politics were a matter of earthly issues to guarantee hegemonic control.<sup>50</sup> Another prominent Liberation theologian Juan Luis Segundo, states in "*Liberation of Theology*" that religion must be interested in politics while providing constructive criticism, as the political sphere influences theology

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<sup>49</sup> Drogus, Carol Ann. 1995. "The Rise and Decline of Liberation Theology: Churches, Faith and Political Change in Latin America." 472,

<sup>50</sup> Gutiérrez, Gustavo. 1973. *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*. 45.



historical context.<sup>51</sup> For Gutierrez, the liberating proclamation of the Gospel requires a connection to politics, as the transformation of an individual and communities need the evangelization of the structures surrounding them to be successful.<sup>52</sup> This position required courage and wisdom within the movement to step away from the traditionally established order while reflecting on pastoral activity.

Recognizing the relevance of politics in structural poverty also required an understanding of the historical and social circumstances that maintained the institutionalized poverty and inequality. In the 1970s, intellectuals explained those structural deficiencies under the Dependency Theory.<sup>53</sup> Andre Gunder Frank, in “*The Development of Underdevelopment*”<sup>54</sup> explains the reasons behind the underdevelopment of Latin America as a result of previous historical domination from advanced economies and their systems of capitalism and neocolonialism, from European rule to a United States hegemonic regional power. According to Frank, capitalism has been the leading economic system implemented since the colonial period, developing markets in American countries to satisfy the demand of raw products in developed societies. The success of some south cone countries in the economic sphere relies on the shift of the existing global, national, and local structure to promote their development instead of the old world countries. Under this theory, foreign policy focuses on the interdependency of third world countries and industrialized nations, as an exchange of goods and benefits oriented to economic development and weakening younger democracies autonomy. Because of the model used to explain poverty, solutions include a redistribution of power,

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<sup>51</sup> Segundo, Juan Luis. 1985. *Liberation of Theology*. 74-75.

<sup>52</sup> Gutiérrez, Gustavo. 1973. *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*. 198.

<sup>53</sup> Weeks, Gregory. 2015. *U.S. and Latin American Relations*. 21.

<sup>54</sup> Frank, Andre Gunder, Sing C. Chew, and Robert Allen Denemark. 1996. *The underdevelopment of development: essays in honor of Andre Gunder Frank*.

with a balance between capitalist and socialist systems. Liberation Theology aligns with Dependence Theory in the debate of all levels of society demanding reforms for the benefit of the majority, and with an active denouncing of local oppression and international interventions.

The political approach of Liberation Theology undertakes part of the Marxist ideology as a method of understanding the marginalization and misery in the Latin American region.<sup>55</sup> According to Daniel Levine, Marxist and other ideologies from the social sciences influenced the ideological conception of Liberation Theology and its vocabulary, used mostly as methodological instruments of social analysis.<sup>56</sup> For example, CEBs represent a combination of people that share a Christian faith and social awareness, but also contain a powerful political potential related to revolutionary participation as an organized cluster. This collateral condition of the CEBs has been criticized as a reduction of the experience of God and the celebration of the Gospel, replaced with political content. Nevertheless, Liberation Theology supposes that the abstract religious concepts are intimately related concrete historical contexts;<sup>57</sup> hence the need of social science tools such as Marxism to complete Christian praxis.

The methodology and ideology behind Liberation Theology quickly became accessible in multiple locations across Latin America. In 1979, CELAM had another meeting, this time in Puebla, Mexico. The participants, including Archbishop and future martyr Oscar Romero from El Salvador, insisted on the benefits of congregation-centered approaches such as Liberation Theology. However, the positive results were

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<sup>55</sup> Berryman, Phillip. 1987. *Liberation Theology: Essential Facts about The Revolutionary Movement in Latin America--and Beyond*. 64.

<sup>56</sup> Levine, Daniel. 1990. "The Impact and Lasting Influence of Medellin and Puebla". 66.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. 85.

overshadowed by the political collateral implications of the radical practice, including political persecution, repression, and murder of clergy members and laymen by militarized governments. The Vatican disapproved the political turmoil generated by Liberation Theology and influenced the vocabulary of the meeting, including the final conclusions about relevance of pastoral perspectives on the Latin American context, the practice of evangelization, the option for the poor,<sup>58</sup> and the communion and participation of the church in the world.<sup>59</sup> The Puebla meeting was not as controversial as Medellin, but a continuation of the pastoral work, regardless the lack of support from the Vatican.

John Paul II became the new pope in late 1978, after the sudden death of John Paul I. The new Pope was considered progressive in some topics, compared to previous leaders, but Liberation Theology was one of the issues that generated strong opposition from him and his advisors. According to Werner Levi, the Vatican conceived Liberation Theology as a “Communist doctrine” that promoted unnecessary violence and impeded the real evangelization objective of the Catholic Church by focusing on a temporal kind of liberation.<sup>60</sup> By 1984, Cardinal Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) wrote the manuscript “Instruction on Certain Aspects of ‘Theology of Liberation,’”<sup>61</sup> including some principles of Liberation Theology explained from a conservative Bible-based Christian liberation perspective, without the Marxist analysis. Ratzinger insisted on the validity of the preferential option for the poor and the work among impoverished

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<sup>58</sup> The “option for the poor” was a radical conception for Liberation Theology, but for the convenience of both conservative and progressive participants, the Puebla conference defined the concept “poor” both in an economic and spiritual way.

<sup>59</sup> McGrath, Marcos. 1990. “The Medellin and Puebla Conferences and Their Impact on the Latin American Church” in *Born of the Poor: The Latin American Church Since Medellin*, ed. by Edward Cleary. 83.

<sup>60</sup> Berryman, Phillip. 1994. *Stubborn Hope: Religion, Politics, and Revolution in Central America*. 29.

<sup>61</sup> Ratzinger, Cardinal Joseph. 1984. “Instruction on Certain Aspects of ‘Theology of Liberation.’” [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19840806\\_theology-liberation\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19840806_theology-liberation_en.html).

communities but condemned the physical and spiritual implications of the strong emphasis of Liberation Theology in socio-political negotiations:

“Liberation is first and foremost liberation from the radical slavery of sin. Its end and its goal is the freedom of the children of God, which is the gift of grace. As a logical consequence, it calls for freedom from many different kinds of slavery in the cultural, economic, social, and political spheres, all of which derive ultimately from sin, and so often prevent people from living in a manner befitting their dignity. To discern clearly what is fundamental to this issue and what is a by-product of it, is an indispensable condition for any theological reflection on liberation... The warning against the serious deviations of some "theologies of liberation" must not be taken as some kind of approval, even indirect, of those who keep the poor in misery, who profit from that misery, who notice it while doing nothing about it, or who remain indifferent to it. The Church, guided by the Gospel of mercy and by the love for mankind, hears the cry for justice [28] and intends to respond to it with all her might.”<sup>62</sup>

Regardless of the Vatican's opposition, Liberation Theology grew strong across Latin America and specifically in El Salvador. After the assassination of Archbishop Romero in March 1980, other clergy members were murdered due to their commitment to social change, including four United States' nuns from the Maryknoll order in 1977, and seven Jesuits priests, from the Universidad Centroamericana Jose Simeon Cañas, in 1989. In *“La Compañía de Jesus y la Teologia de la Liberacion: Convergencias y Divisiones Sociopoliticas del Catolicismo Contemporaneo en America Latina”*, Malik Tahat Chaouch states that the loss of brothers and sisters, continuous death threats, and systematic oppression did not stop the commitment of CEBs with social change but only increased the necessity to denounce the violations of Human Rights and to share a message of hope from the new Gospel.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Chaouch, Malik Tahar. 2007. “La Compañía de Jesus y la Teologia de la Liberacion: Convergencias y Divisiones Sociopoliticas del Catolicismo Contemporaneo en America Latina.” *Historia y Grafia* 29: 109.

Phillip Berryman, in *“Liberation Theology: Essential Facts about The Revolutionary Movement in Latin America--and Beyond”* explains that most of those members of the clergy and committed Catholics that survived persecution and exile, became intellectuals with an academic commitment to explain the reasons behind internal conflict in El Salvador, inspiring the next generation to engage in social justice.<sup>64</sup> However, this persistence in questioning the structural system after the civil war segmented the Catholic Church in El Salvador once again, between conservatives who wanted to promote general pardon and embrace the proclaimed Amnesty Law, and progressive members who aimed to preserve the legacy and lessons learned from the conflict. In the end, because of the leadership at the Vatican and in the Catholic Church in El Salvador, progressive intellectuals abandoned the Church or found their socio-political activity reduced.

After the peace accords in 1992, the tense environment changed from social-political turmoil to a generalized focus on economic development and social reconstruction, leaving reduced opportunities for further development of Liberation Theology in El Salvador. The derogatory stigma of “communist” doctrine followed Liberation Theology lessen the amount of Catholic congregation, generating critiques from the conservative political party, and pressure from the Vatican to move on to reconciliation and reconstruction. In addition to the arrival of Evangelical and Protestant churches, Liberation Theology lost more adherents after the civil war than during the armed conflict.

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<sup>64</sup> Berryman, Phillip. 1987. *Liberation Theology: Essential Facts about The Revolutionary Movement in Latin America--and Beyond*. 117.

Nevertheless, some non-profits, organized communities, and institutions such as the Universidad Centroamericana Jose Simeon Cañas (UCA) preserved the lessons learned from the Liberation Theology's experience, in particular for the future generations to understand the conflict.<sup>65</sup> The UCA remained as an example of the academic, social, and religious legacy of its martyrs, as they celebrate their lives and influence every year on the anniversary of their martyrdom.<sup>66</sup> Now, Scholars from all over the world use the intellectual production of Liberation Theology to question other unexplored topics related to oppressive structure, such as sexuality, migration, gender roles, and racism.

#### Main Principles of Liberation Theology

Even when the Vatican opposed Liberation Theology grew strong in Latin America. Specifically in El Salvador, other religious institutions such as the Lutheran and Baptist Churches embraced the movement. Even if El Salvador was mainly Catholic during the Civil War (1980-1992), the adaptation of other denominations turned out to be a strong support for the theology in the years after the end of the conflict.

In 1989, Martin-Baró proposed four essential characteristics of the liberation experience. First, it had to embrace and responded to a historical process. Second, it has to be conflictive as liberation entails the transformation and sanctification of social structures. Third, liberation has to be collective and include a material and a spiritual level, showing improvement on both. Finally, liberation needs to construct a social identity of critical thinking and communitarian activity.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Bernie, Charles. 2013. *Jesuit Education and Social Change in El Salvador*. 9.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. 11.

<sup>67</sup> Martín-Baró, Ignacio. 1994. *Writings for Liberation Psychology*. Edited by Adrianne Aron and Shawn Corne. 211.

Liberation Theology was popular because it relied on the radical values that it promoted, as a renovated way of learning and internalizing the Gospel, from a spiritual and a practical way. Liberation Theology challenged the historical conception of individual salvation based on sacraments and traditional values, as explained by Ellacuria. Participation and organization were integral components of the renewed conception of faith, where a communitarian dimension of Christianity transcends individualism. Catholics were invited to celebrate a collective identity based on faith and open to discussion, mutual learning, and fraternal living.

Base Ecclesiastic Communities (CEB for its initials in Spanish) embraced the traditional system of the first Christians communities, where cooperation and integration were part of the daily living of the Gospel. Those communities also faced repression and political persecution from the militarized government because of the labels of communism and rebellion that their activism received. CEBs embraced the responsibility of turning individuals into unified groups to share an experience of awareness and evangelization. Participation transformed people from passive recipients of the Catholic doctrine to active learners, educators, preachers, and listeners, all at the same time, and in a horizontal system of mutual exchange. The small group's structure is still predominant within Catholic Churches in El Salvador, as a pastoral model to reproduce the Catholic Church doctrine but also as an experience to share personal and spiritual growth. Some traditional CEBs with Liberation Theology components remain functioning in the northeastern part of El Salvador.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Gomez, Ileana. 2001. "Rebuilding Community in the Wake of War: Church and Civil Society in Morazán." In *Christianity, Social Change, and Globalization in the Americas*, ed. by Anna Peterson, Manuel Vasquez, and Philip Williams. 143..

Another relevant value in the promotion of Liberation Theology is Equality. The movement's ideology implies that social justice would be achieved only when available for all the members of society, regardless of their economic status or other differences. The promotion of CEBs includes the conception of uniformity among Catholics as children of God, without earthly separations. To call everybody "equal" in the eyes of God represents a powerful democratic exercise, as it challenges standardized social levels. In the case of El Salvador, the differences were mostly economic and social.<sup>69</sup>

The value of equality was included in the critiques of Liberation Theology from the Vatican. Embracing equality supports the search for social justice and the acknowledgment of the impoverished communities relevance. However, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger stated in "Instruction on Certain Aspects of 'Theology of Liberation'" that highlighting the poverty circumstances of a particular group of society creates a difference from populations based on socio-economic levels, generating forced frictions and discrepancies instead of similarities. Also, promoting equality is a direct threat to the status quo, therefore, rejected by the established power groups.

Participation and Equality explain the methodologies and beliefs behind the CEBs, but Awareness justifies part of the discussion and education content. Awareness, or *conscientización* in Spanish, uses the liberation component of education discussed by Freire in the 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' as ways to humanize impoverished communities

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<sup>69</sup> The Salvadoran indigenous population was almost eliminated during the peasants' revolts in 1932 under the rule of the military government of Gral. Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez, same dictatorship that banned the presence of African and Asians descendants in the country. Since then, the official narrative for the population embraces a mestizo population, with the elites having a European background. Discussed in Pérez Brignoli, Héctor. "Indians, communists, and peasants: the 1932 rebellion in El Salvador" in *Coffee, society, and power in Latin America*, ed. by William Roseberry, Lowell Gudmundson, and Mario Samper. 236.



immersed in misery.<sup>70</sup> Being conscious of the reasons behind poverty, the system, and one's humanity means empowerment. Berryman explains that a critical consciousness implies a transformation, not in a revolutionary way,<sup>71</sup> but understanding that being aware of the context influences one's selection of a political approach. An individual, who is aware, would become involved in matters of social justice, inspired by a renovated structure of thinking.

Martin-Baró states that to develop a social consciousness is necessary first to disassociate from the imposed ideology. This process in Liberation Psychology is called *desideologizar* (understood as the deconstruction of ideology, replacing it with social awareness).<sup>72</sup> Ideologies support the preservation of the dominant system, by generating a false conscience and a distortion of reality, disconnected from the historical circumstances. *Desideologizar* required the understanding of 'reality' from the eyes of the poor, developing a systematic research about the socio-historical context beyond the subjective media, and using that knowledge to commit with transformation.

Engaging in a process of education and empowerment, such as the one described by Martin-Baró, has political implications. But faith has a political role, based on the example of the gospel.<sup>73</sup> A radical commitment to social justice might require a revolution, peaceful or not, to overcome oppression and replace the status quo, to guarantee freedom for the general masses.

But the educational component of Liberation Theology also relates to Evangelization. To build social consciousness without the light of the Gospel would

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<sup>70</sup> Freire, Paulo. 1993. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 168.

<sup>71</sup> Berryman, Phillip. 1987. *Liberation Theology: Essential Facts about The Revolutionary Movement in Latin America--and Beyond*. 117.

<sup>72</sup> Martín-Baró, Ignacio. 1985. "La desideologización como aporte de la psicología social al desarrollo de la democracia en Latinoamérica." 102.

<sup>73</sup> Gutiérrez, Gustavo. 1973. *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*. 232.

mean faith and worship were based only on the socio-political constructs,<sup>74</sup> which has been a critique of Liberation Theology. Evangelization remains as the ultimate goal for Liberation Theology, but in a different perspective than the traditional Catholic Church doctrine. According to Liberation Theology, the proclamation of the good news of the reign of God should stimulate and inspire a new Catholic, inspired by a new Christology, explained in detail by Sobrino and Gutierrez.<sup>75</sup> Gutierrez states that the transformation of the doctrine starts with understanding the Gospel from the suffering and struggle of those living in poverty, and comprehending the universality of the Church.

The progressive doctrine of Liberation Theology explains the figure of Jesus as a defiant icon in its historical context. To really understand Jesus genuine divinity, one must also understand His real humanity.<sup>76</sup> Before Vatican II, the population living in poverty represented an opportunity to embrace charity, or bliss related to the Beatitudes, because of the “light” materialistic burden the chance to live spiritual richness as the only alternative to the lack of physical resources. However, Liberation Theology challenges this conception of conformism and explains poverty and oppression as the contrary to God’s will. Lastly, Liberation Theology embraces its liberating praxis as the essence of following Jesus,<sup>77</sup> separating what people think about Jesus from what people do in the name of becoming a disciple of Jesus. Understanding the historical relevance of Jesus, His commitment to the less fortunate, and the radical attitudes and values that Christians should emulate as Jesus’s followers transform the role of Catholics to active members of the society.

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<sup>74</sup> Schall, James. 1982. *Liberation Theology in Latin America*. 32.

<sup>75</sup> Gutiérrez, Gustavo. 1973. *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*. 198

<sup>76</sup> Hennelly, Alfred. 1990. “The Influence of Liberation Theology”. In *Born of the Poor: The Latin American Church Since Medellin*, ed. by Edward Cleary. 34.

<sup>77</sup> Bombonato, Vera Ivanise. 2008. “The Commitment to Taking the Poor down from the Cross.” 7.

For Liberation Theology, the social implications of following Jesus are condensed in Incarnation. When the commitment to others generates the denouncing of repression and announcement of the Gospel, the lessons learned in evangelization turned into *praxis*. Liberation Theology's transformational process included an active presence in society to understand the afterlife; therefore, *praxis* is a required process for reaching eternal grace. This conception challenges the traditional understanding of sacraments as a way to achieve sainthood, addressing the relevance of actions related to faith. *Praxis* is the engine behind the Christian experience of Liberation Theology, putting together the intellectual renovation with a physical transformation.

The values of Liberation Theology are part of a bigger goal, oriented to the achievement of peace. Peace is a gift from the liberation process of the renew doctrine, fruit of love, justice, and dignity. As a result, peace not only means the absence of violence or war but a transformation in systematic structures of poverty and marginalization. Building peace is achievable when a just and fraternal society becomes a reality, empowering people to live with dignity and being agents of their destiny.<sup>78</sup>

Key Figure: Archbishop Oscar Romero

The figure of Archbishop Oscar Romero is relevant to understand the expansion of Liberation Theology and its values in El Salvador. Romero was the fourth Archbishop of San Salvador, and one of the numerous clergy members who made the ultimate sacrifice for the people of El Salvador. Romero's assassination is also considered one of the triggers for the official start of the Civil War, which lasted from 1980 until 1992.

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<sup>78</sup> Gutiérrez, Gustavo. 1973. *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*. 264.

Scholars such as James Brockman,<sup>79</sup> Robert Pelton,<sup>80</sup> and Jon Sobrino<sup>81</sup> have reflected on the life and legacy of Romero, including his early years and formation in a traditional and modest family in the eastern city of El Salvador, San Miguel. Since twenty years old, Romero was clear about his career path in seminary. When Romero was ordained a priest in 1942, by the age of 24, he traveled to complete his studies at the Vatican. After returning to El Salvador, Romero became Secretary-General of the national Bishops' conference and executive secretary of the Central American Bishops' Secretariat, besides a pastoral commission in a local Parish. The administrative positions within the different Bishop's organizations reflect the conservative and gothic concept that his superiors had of Romero, and supported his development as a great speaker. By 1974, Romero was named bishop of the Archdiocese of Santiago de Maria, Usulután, in the Eastern part of El Salvador. His time as the Bishop of Santiago de Maria, one of the poorest municipalities of El Salvador, put Romero in contact with extreme poverty and the misery of low-income families, contrasting with the traditional interactions Romero had with elites families in San Salvador.

"The world of the poor teaches us that liberation will arrive only when the poor are not simply on the receiving end of handouts from government or churches but when they are the masters and protagonists of their struggle for liberation."<sup>82</sup>

Romero's development as an intellectual priest, passion for the Gospel, and preservation of traditional conservative values of Church earned him the role of Archbishop of San Salvador early in 1977, the maximum leadership role within the

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<sup>79</sup> Brockman, James. 1989. *Romero: A Life*. 124.

<sup>80</sup> Pelton, Robert. 2004. *Monsignor Romero: A Bishop for the Third Millennium*. 61.

<sup>81</sup> Sobrino, Jon. 2001. "Monseñor Romero, a Salvadoran and a Christian." *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality*. 148.

<sup>82</sup> Quote from Romero's homily, 1974. From Pelton, Robert. 2004. *Monsignor Romero: A Bishop for the Third Millennium*. 7.

national Catholic Church institution. Romero was replacing Archbishop Chavez y Gonzalez, who previously committed to the changes within the Catholic Church after Vatican II. The ruling military and economic oligarchy perceived Romero as an ally, due to his disapproval of radical pastoral practices, in the opposite spectrum of Chavez y Gonzalez.<sup>83</sup> Progressive clergy members that believed that the immediate local context required a more aggressive presence from the Catholic Church, incarnated in the repressed and persecuted community, disapproved this strategic change in the Church's leadership that benefited the elites.

After a few weeks as Archbishop, Romero faced the results of the daily repression and persecution that the Salvadoran population experienced daily, when one of his friends Father Rutilio Grande, was assassinated by army elements.<sup>84</sup> Grande was part of the priests who believed in a Marxist approach to the communitarian pastoral work with accompaniment and awareness building. Grande was assassinated on the way to celebrate Mass with a community in the north part of San Salvador, accused of being a communist disturbing the established system. As the head of the Church, Romero called for a moment of unity in suffering and remembrance, and requested to have a single national mass at the National Cathedral in San Salvador. This gesture disturbed the elites because it forced them to decide between omit their traditional weekly mass (still considered a sin by the older generations), or celebrating the sacraments with the "masses"; but neither of the options was well received. Romero faced opposition from business owners, wealthy families, and clergy members, but finally, only one mass was celebrated on March 20th,

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<sup>83</sup> Wright, Scott. 2009. *Oscar Romero and the Communion of the Saints*. 75.

<sup>84</sup> Sobrino, Jon. 1990. *Archbishop Romero: Memories and Reflections*. 9.

1977.<sup>85</sup> This event marked the starting point for the radicalization of Romero's role as Archbishop, in addition to the hundreds of assassinations and disappearances that were reported to him every day. Not in vain the motto for his archbishopric was "*Sentir con la Iglesia*" (To Feel with the Church).

As Archbishop, Romero used his personal charisma and communication skills as a tool to reach all levels of society, from conceiving an idea, to communicate it, and move forward towards it. Romero's homilies, speeches, and pastoral letters highlighted the values of dignity, justice, and activism to articulate reforms for the necessities of those living in poverty.<sup>86</sup> The four pastoral letters that Romero produced as an Archbishop reflected on the particular historical moment of its publication, including political, social, and economic analyses oriented to enlighten the understanding of the Gospel and the practice of faith.<sup>87</sup> Romero's messages, from the pulpit or paper, included criticism of the government, the oligarchy, the military groups, and even the popular organizations.<sup>88</sup> The last part might sound contradictory, but Romero was against all kinds of violent rebellions or demonstrations, as those could develop into other forms of oppression against most vulnerable populations. Romero's prophetic homilies also included a call for the conversion of all Salvadorans, proclaiming the wrath to come without the conversion, and the permanent hope for Liberation come as a gift. The consistent denouncing of violation of Human Rights and announcing of the Gospel earned Romero the title of "The Voice of the Voiceless."<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid. 11.

<sup>86</sup> Eaton, Helen-May. 1991. "*The Impact of Archbishop Oscar Romero's Alliance with the Struggle for Liberation of the Salvadoran People*". 31.

<sup>87</sup> Sobrino, Jon. 1990. *Archbishop Romero: Memories and Reflections*. 16.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. 81.

<sup>89</sup> Swedish, Margaret. 1995. *Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero: Prophet to the Americas*. 24.

Another part of Romero's work focused on the construction and strengthening of the CEBs as a key strategy to promote participation and evangelization. Catholics were the biggest religious group in the country, but coverage was limited and sporadic in the countryside, where the poorest communities lived, and where most of the human rights violations happened. The evangelization part had three specific objectives: first, sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ, regardless of the social status; second, the evangelization of social structures compromised in corruption and injustice; and third, the understanding of the ecclesiastic need of small groups to celebrate the Gospel as a community.<sup>90</sup>

For Romero, the incarnation among the poor represented his role as a servant of God,<sup>91</sup> especially when the institutionalized violence and injustice in the country affected as those living in poverty the most. The especial attention for the poor inspired some of the support activities that the archbishopric implemented under his leadership, with an emphasis on humanitarian and legal protection. These values were also present in Romero's participation at the CELAM (for its initials in Spanish, *Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano*) meeting, at Puebla in 1979, where the conclusions included a pastoral view of the reality of Latin America, practice of evangelization, and the option for the poor, with the goal of "liberating evangelization toward communion and participation in the church and world."<sup>92</sup> All these activities started to build Romero's legacy and also impacted in his future. When Romero began to receive death threats, he stated, "Love of the poor is a crime in Central America."<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Sobrino, Jon. 1990. *Archbishop Romero: Memories and Reflections*. 167.

<sup>91</sup> Brockman, James. 1989. *Romero: A Life*. 20.

<sup>92</sup> Gutierrez, Gustavo. 1990. "Church of the Poor" in *Born of the Poor: The Latin American Church Since Medellin*, ed. by Edward Cleary. 16.

<sup>93</sup> Pelton, Robert. 2004. *Monsignor Romero: A Bishop for the Third Millenium*. 64.

The defense of those living in poverty also included being politically active in several areas using Romero's power and authority. Romero understood early that his role as the Archbishop of San Salvador had responsibilities but also multiple opportunities to influence the high spheres of the government. Through diplomatic moves such as being absent from official public events, Romero put pressure on the government for responses, investigations, and justice for crimes against the Church and its members. Records show that Romero had constant meetings with different government leaders to present demands,<sup>94</sup> but that also the government looked in Romero for an ally in particular circumstances that required talking with the population about patience or for Romero's involvement in the implementation of governmental programs. Romero maintained a constant dialogue with different parts of the society, aiming for a middle ground that could bring social justice and peace to the country.

Discussion with all actors included the international interest based in El Salvador. During his time as an Archbishop, Romero had a close relation with several ambassadors residing in El Salvador, as they tried to find an honest source of information and opinions regarding the reality in the country.<sup>95</sup> Romero also believed that those relationships could support opportunities to reach peace, even if he did not believe in intervention,<sup>96</sup> but in empowering people to be masters and protagonists of their struggle. This feeling of sovereignty in addition to the achievement of social justice and dignity inspired Romero to send a letter to President Jimmy Carter, on February 17, 1980. The letter included remarks about the financial and mentoring support that the United States was providing to the repressive military governments in El Salvador, and a request for President Carter

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<sup>94</sup> Keogh, Dermot. 1981. *Romero: El Salvador's Martyr: A Study of the Tragedy of El Salvador*. 71.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. 75.

<sup>96</sup> Swedish, Margaret. 1995. *Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero: Prophet to the Americas*. 24.



to stop, alluding to his personal Christian values and Foreign Policy of Human Rights defense.<sup>97</sup> It is clear that the systemic problems of the Salvadoran society depended on more issues than the United States foreign policy, but Romero was willing to take his role to the next level of commitment and to denounce even against one of the most powerful governments of the world.

Romero's commitment to prophetic denunciation and incarnation of the Gospel also affected his relationship with the Vatican. At the beginning of his role as an Archbishop, Pope Paul VI had a cordial relationship with Romero, supporting his ministry for those less fortunate. In the upcoming years of Romero as an archbishop, Paul VI passed away, John Paul I had a one-month Papacy before his sudden death, and on October 1978, John Paul II became the new Pope. John Paul II and his advisors were disappointed with the tumultuous expansion of Liberation Theology in Latin America and its threat to status quo, showing no support to Romero's requests to condemn the violations of Human Rights and the Catholic Church in El Salvador. Even in the years to come, the Vatican maintained an unpleasant attitude towards the Liberation Theology movement in the region, regardless of the assassinations of clergy members.<sup>98</sup>

On March 24<sup>th</sup>, 1980, a member of the extreme right death squads assassinated Romero while celebrating mass in a local chapel of San Salvador.<sup>99</sup> The event influenced the beginning of the civil war due to the relevance that Romero had for the general population, but also because of the vulnerability that Romero's assassination meant for the rest of the population: if the military groups were willing to kill the Archbishop of San Salvador in a public place, what else would they do to a regular person? Even

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<sup>97</sup> Brockman, James. 1989. *Romero: A Life*. 7.

<sup>98</sup> Wright, Scott. 2009. *Oscar Romero and the Communion of the Saints*. 93.

<sup>99</sup> Keogh, Dermot. 1981. *Romero: El Salvador's Martyr: A Study of the Tragedy of El Salvador*. 12.

Romero's funeral turned into a massacre. On March 30<sup>th</sup>, 1980, over 250,000 people gathered in the main Cathedral in San Salvador to participate in Romero's funeral Mass, including the Catholic Church's leadership and international clergy. According to witnesses, the sound of gunfire started during the sermon, turning the mass into chaos. Under smoke bombs and rifle shots, almost 50 people died.<sup>100</sup>

Romero's spirit remains in his legacy,<sup>101</sup> represented in martyrdom, solidarity, and dialogue, influencing the social, political, and legal spheres. Romero's became an iconic figure embraced by multiple denominations and communities around the world, from both theological and human rights perceptions. Regarding solidarity, Romero embraced and promoted a message of hope and celebration for the individual and collective living from a popular theology example, addressing masses and delivering the message in a simple way, easily understood by the general and mostly uneducated population. This preaching style explains why Romero is outside of the group of intellectual theologians that shaped Liberation Theology from an academic perspective.<sup>102</sup> However, Romero lived the values of the movement, supporting the conception of praxis over theory, understanding that living among and with the poor is more relevant than discussing it in an academic manuscript.

The conservative part of the Catholic Church in El Salvador still considers his message to be communist doctrine and influence on the rise of the guerrilla.<sup>103</sup> However, Romero's popular approach to Liberation Theology in his homilies have been reviewed

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid. 105.

<sup>101</sup> Pelton, Robert. 2004. *Monsignor Romero: A Bishop for the Third Millenium*. 10.

<sup>102</sup> Eaton, Helen-May. 1991. "The Impact of Archbishop Oscar Romero's Alliance with the Struggle for Liberation of the Salvadoran People." 56.

<sup>103</sup> Keogh, Dermot. 1981. *Romero: El Salvador's Martyr: A Study of the Tragedy of El Salvador*. 23.

by numerous scholars, to establish the universality of his message and its emphasis on the defense of Human Rights beyond political preferences.

After the death of John Paul II in 2005, former Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger became the new pope, Benedict XVI. His role as the head of the Catholic Church lasted eight years, with particular support to the Opus Dei and other conservative initiatives within the Church. During Benedict XVI Papal period, no statements discussed Liberation Theology or any issues related to the movement.

Nevertheless, under the new leadership of Pope Francis I (Pope since March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2013), the Vatican recognized the international relevance of Romero's legacy on May 2015 with a beatification, highlighting Romero's intense faith but also the commitment to social change, especially when using his prophetic and pastoral ministries roles at the service of those less privileged.<sup>104</sup> Romero's beatification represents the Vatican's official acknowledgment of Liberation Theology influence, the pastoral work inspired by it, and the multiple manifestations of faith related to the movement in Latin America.

#### Current Situation

During the 1980s, Liberation Theology was popular in the northeastern part of the country, in the departments of Chalatenango, Morazán, Usulután and San Miguel,<sup>105</sup> where most of the low-income families lived in the countryside, in rural households. The faith-based movement had a few adherents in the city of San Salvador and the metropolitan area but in smaller dimensions. Even if 90% of the population was Catholic, not all the parishes embraced the doctrine, but the estimated average of Liberation

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<sup>104</sup> Pelton, Robert. 2004. *Monsignor Romero: A Bishop for the Third Millenium*. 31.

<sup>105</sup> Gomez, Ileana. 2001. "Rebuilding Community in the Wake of War: Church and Civil Society in Morazán." 122.

Theology's supporters oscillates between 250,000 to 300,000 people.<sup>106</sup> According to the Catholic Church's reports, until 1983 15,000 catechists and delegates of the word were trained to lead CEBs and other liturgical activities.<sup>107</sup>

After fifty years of Vatican II and the subsequent emergence of Liberation Theology, its relevance is questioned on two different levels: the development of a deeper social awareness of the Catholic Church and the influence of a new pastoral paradigm in the transformation of the Salvadoran society.<sup>108</sup> Are those intellectual and practical products still relevant? Increasing violence indexes in El Salvador with 104 homicides per 100,000 people (the highest ratio in the world),<sup>109</sup> and small changes in topics such as poverty, unemployment, and economic inequalities support those doubts.<sup>110</sup>

Some critiques for Liberation Theology affirm that its relevance decreased drastically due to the rise of Evangelical-Protestant groups in the area. Chapman discusses part of this phenomenon as a "competition for souls."<sup>111</sup> The Evangelical churches offered a different theological approach to individual religious experiences in addition to concrete opportunities to live the faith. When persecution affected clergy and laymen due to their involvement in social and political issues under the influence of Liberation Theology, some people found in evangelical churches the "religion of

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<sup>106</sup> Montgomery, Tommie Sue. 1983. "Liberation and Revolution." In *Trouble in Our Backyard, Central America and the United States in the Eighties*. 82.

<sup>107</sup> Montgomery, Tommie Sue. 1995. *Revolution in El Salvador: from Civil Strife to Civil Peace*. 132.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. 7.

<sup>109</sup> Daugherty, Aaron. El Salvador is Most Violent Nation in Western Hemisphere. *Insightcrime.org*. January 4, 2016. <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/el-salvador-is-most-violent-nation-in-western-hemisphere>

<sup>110</sup> Gomez, Ileana. 2001. "Rebuilding Community in the Wake of War: Church and Civil Society in Morazán." 125.

<sup>111</sup> Chapman, Richard. 2012. "Still Looking for Liberation? Lutherans in El Salvador and Nicaragua." *Journal of Latin American Studies*. 41.

survival”,<sup>112</sup> with a conservative socio-political involvement. However, some Protestant groups, such as the Lutheran and Baptist Churches also embraced some Liberation Theology principles in their doctrine, also facing persecution, but the majority of evangelical churches maintained a conservative position. In a way, Liberation Theology supported the transition for some Catholics to the evangelical churches, slowly affecting the Catholic Church position as the main religion in the area.

Another critique of the current relevance of Liberation Theology relies on the minimal book sales of manuscripts that discuss its ideology. Ivan Petrella in “*Latin American Liberation Theology: Next Generation*” acknowledges this issue but also states that Liberation Theology has always placed the supremacy of praxis over theory formulation, fomenting the ideology’s practical and real side instead of the intellectual reflection that precedes a publication. The popularity of the academic production does not necessarily reflect on the communitarian dimensions and impact of the doctrine. However, young theologians with different social sciences backgrounds are developing new academic approaches to what “liberation” should mean in the twentieth century, including issues related to migration, sexuality, gender and ethnicity bias, besides the traditional poverty reduction focus.

However, the scholarly approach that questions the future of Liberation Theology also reviews a permanent critique related to the movement and its current relevance: how conservative or progressive it is. During the last decades of the previous century, Liberation Theology offered a tangible opportunity to defy the status quo and aim for social justice in a faithful fashion, but those who still consider themselves part of the

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<sup>112</sup> Green, Linda. 1993. “Shifting Affiliations: Mayan Widows and Evangélicos in Guatemala.” In *Rethinking Protestantism in Latin America*. 161.

movement show a conservative position regarding the new pool of political issues that affect repressed or minority groups, such as homosexuality, reproductive rights, and illegal immigration. It is clear that Liberation Theology is permeated by the main guidelines of the Catholic Church and the Vatican, even when the high ranks of the Vatican had a strong opposition against Liberation Theology. The documents and statements from the Vatican show disapproval in the delivery and execution methods of Liberation Theology, but agreement on the central issue of minimizing poverty and defend human rights, which could explain why Liberation Theology as a movement have not engaged in other “modern” causes beyond poverty.<sup>113</sup>

The change in the socio-political environment of Latin America affected the relevance and further development of Liberation Theology in the region. During the 1960s and 1970s, the circumstances of repression, human rights abuse, and generalized misery within El Salvador and in the rest of Latin America facilitated the emergence and expansion of the movement, as the general population was in need of social and political participation spaces, such as the experience offered by the CEBs, and the political distress was a novelty easier to navigate in groups and with an educational component. Now, government's still face challenges such as poverty, insecurity, and underdevelopment, the use of repression and political persecution has been eliminated or at least minimized, allowing freedom of speech and democratic political representation. The production of local intellectuals regarding human rights and social sciences in general, in addition to the former guerrilla political party (FMLN) in power for the second presidential period now, are examples of the change that Liberation Theology

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid. 134.

accompanied. The different historical and social circumstances should affect a potential new mobilization based on Liberation Theology values.

Berryman<sup>114</sup> and Levine<sup>115</sup> argue that the effects of Liberation Theology are still alive. The feelings and thoughts generated by the change in the paradigm are present in the commitment of Base Christian Communities and general people in the construction of a better society. Challenging the traditional Catholic Church structure facilitated evangelization and outreach even in less developed areas. Some CEBs have endured the civil war, the repopulation of abandoned areas due to military persecution, side effects from economic and social governmental policies, and internal migrations. The construction of healthy connections and a sense of community are still relevant in those communities.<sup>116</sup>

However, these good intentions crash when violence, lack of opportunities, and corruption saturate the Salvadoran society, explaining another gap in Liberation Theology. It might be dangerous to establish a direct relation between religious faith experience and economic and political situations,<sup>117</sup> because of the voluble characteristics of the latest, but faith without social commitment is an empty promise, according to liberal clergy. Liberation Theology is locked in a permanent pull between the internal embracing of faith and the public manifestation of the Gospel, with social and political implications.

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<sup>114</sup> Berryman, Phillip. 1994. *Stubborn Hope: Religion, Politics, and Revolution in Central America*. 201.

<sup>115</sup> Levine, Daniel. 1988. "Assesing the Impact of Liberation Theolovy in Latin America." *The Review of Politics*. 249.

<sup>116</sup> Gomez, Ileana. 2001. "Rebuilding Community in the Wake of War: Church and Civil Society in Morazán." In *Christianity, Social Change, and Globalization in the Americas*, ed. by Anna Peterson, Manuel Vasquez, and Philip Williams. 142.

<sup>117</sup> Schall, James. 1982. *Liberation Theology in Latin America*. 298.

An example of this dichotomy relies on the figure of Romero. After his assassination his legacy has been both as a religious and political figure, an inspiration for Catholics, atheists, and multiple denominations around the world. The Vatican and Pope Francis exalted Romero's testimony in March 2015, with his beatification. Pope Francis' letter to Jose Luis Escobar Alas, President of the Episcopal Conference of El Salvador,<sup>118</sup> quotes the religious characteristics of Romero as a leader of the church, including his "particular attention to the poorest and marginalized", but it is also a political statement. The Vatican opposed the pastoral changes that Romero executed and denied his request for support in the defense of Human Rights in El Salvador, but twenty-five years later acknowledges Romero's role in denouncing and defending the poor and marginalized. The leadership renovation from inside the Vatican with the first Latin American Pope is also promising for the long-term influence of Liberation Theology, starting with Romero's beatification. Despite the critiques from the Salvadoran elites, this honor recognizes Romero's socio-political commitment and his influences in the current political sphere. Romero is the incarnation of both sides of Liberation Theology: the rich internal life and the active external voice, and its beatification embraces this practice as an example of piety and Christians morals according to the doctrine of the Catholic Church.

Liberation Theology is undeniably one of the most relevant faith-based socio-political movements in the region. Current mobilization under its original values might be minimal, but its influence remains in the construction of individual and collective identities in several sectors around El Salvador.

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<sup>118</sup> Watkins, Devin Sean. "Pope Francis sends Letter for the Beatification of Oscar Romero" [http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/05/23/pope\\_franis\\_letter\\_for\\_the\\_beatification\\_of\\_óscar\\_romero/1146203](http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/05/23/pope_franis_letter_for_the_beatification_of_óscar_romero/1146203)



### CHAPTER 3: THEOLOGY OF THE HAMMER

After twelve years of violence between the government and revolutionary movements, El Salvador reached an agreement that aimed for the improvement of the general population, with a particular focus on the democratization of the country and the respect of human rights. The literal and figurative reconstruction of the country required resources (financial, intellectual, human, and material) that the Salvadoran government did not have. The lack of resources created a stream of support in the shape of non-profit organizations, multilateral and international development cooperation agencies inserted in the Salvadoran society. Between 1980 and 1998, the amount of non-profits in El Salvador increased in five hundred percent compared to decades before,<sup>119</sup> responding to the general population necessities, especially vulnerable and impoverished sectors.<sup>120</sup> Such was the case of Habitat for Humanity under the ideology of the Theology of the Hammer, with the objective of providing decent housing to low-income populations.

Developed in the deep south of the United States in the 1970s, Theology of the Hammer had the ambitious goal of providing decent but affordable housing to impoverished populations. The general conception of the Theology implies joint work for the redistribution of resources, facilitating the accomplishment of the basic human right of access to housing. This faith-based social movement embraces a collective call for action that suited El Salvador's context after the civil war period.

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<sup>119</sup> IDHUCA. 2007. *El Salvador, Quince Años Después - Otra Lectura*. 15.

<sup>120</sup> Almeida, Paul. 2008. *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925-2005*. 187.

Since its foundation in the smallest country in Central America in 1992, the Theology of the Hammer through Habitat for Humanity improved the living conditions of over 100,000 Salvadorans, which represent less than two percent of the population.<sup>121</sup> However, Theology of the Hammer's individual and collective principles call for a larger task than the construction of homes as part of building the kingdom of God on earth, but to advocate for national policies or international cooperation that benefits impoverished communities. For the movement, mobilization of volunteers and advocacy are also core characteristics and part of the influence the theology has within the Salvadoran society.

The organization of this chapter includes four sections. The first part reviews the history and development of Theology of the Hammer, from its general origins to its presence in El Salvador in the post-civil war period. The second section includes an analysis of the individual and collective values promoted by the movement, explaining its general influence in society. The third part reviews the figure of former United States President Jimmy Carter as an embodiment of the Theology of the Hammer's values, and also mentioning the controversial role of Carter's administration in the civil war in El Salvador. The last section explores the challenges ahead for the Theology of the Hammer, taking into consideration its ambitious goal of eradicating substandard housing around the world, especially in El Salvador, where a significant part of the population still live in substandard conditions.

#### Fuller and a Hammer

Theology of the Hammer originally started in the town of Americus, Georgia, as the backbone of the international non-profit Habitat for Humanity. In 1976, young lawyer Millard Fuller acknowledged the need for decent and affordable housing in the area.

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<sup>121</sup> El Salvador, <http://data.worldbank.org/country/el-salvador>. Accessed on April 17, 2016.

What Fuller called “the “crazy idea that worked,” developed into an international ecumenical ministry with the mission of making “substandard housing and homelessness socially, politically, and morally unacceptable.”<sup>122</sup>

Fuller’s spiritual inspiration for the challenging mission behind Habitat for Humanity and the Theology of the Hammer came from the Southern Baptist pastor Clarence Jordan. Since 1942, Jordan lead an interracial cooperative community called *Koinonia*, in Southwest Georgia, with the goal of supporting local low-income families depending on sharecropping (mostly African-American) to become economically independent. The community shared work, worship, and education, challenging the race-based segregation happening in the rest of the south. To facilitate the shared spirituality, Jordan wrote the Cotton Patch Gospel,<sup>123</sup> an adaptation of the scriptures for the locals to understand Jesus’ message based on their immediate context. Extremists local groups who opposed to the interracial life-style harassed *Koinonia* repeatedly with physical violence, economic boycott, and accusations of having a communist ideology.<sup>124</sup> Regardless of the multiple attacks, Jordan became a respected religious figure in the civil rights movement in Georgia, as his pastoral ministry believed in a faith based in equality, being *Koinonia* the material consolidation of Jordan’s spiritual preaching.<sup>125</sup>

Fuller and his family were part of *Koinonia* since 1965, developing a close friendship with Jordan. For Fuller, the *Koinonia* experience opened his eyes to the necessities of low-income families, being housing one of the most visible and urgent

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<sup>122</sup> Stevens, Robert, and David Rowe. 1984. *Kingdom Building: Essays from the Grassroots of Habitat*. 11.

<sup>123</sup> Fuller, Millard. 1980. *Love in the Mortar Joints*. 59.

<sup>124</sup> K’Meyer, Tracy E. 1997. “What Koinonia Was All about”: The Role of Memory in a Changing Community.” *The Oral History Review*. 3.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. 3.

matters. In 1968, *Koinonia* started a partnership-housing program,<sup>126</sup> with the idea of building decent but simple housing for families living in poverty, with the labor of volunteer and the future owner families, whom would repay for the cost of the materials at zero-percent interest.<sup>127</sup> Once the program grew, Fuller realized the need for decent housing in other places besides Americus, hence the creation of Habitat for Humanity in 1976, with the Theology of the Hammer as its core.

Since then, Habitat for Humanity has facilitated access to decent housing to over 4.8 million people worldwide, with a presence in over seventy countries.<sup>128</sup> The organization has headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia and four more area offices around the world: Latin America, Africa, Europe and Central Asia and Asia Pacific. Each area office oversees the mission work of the Habitat offices in their area related to housing and advocacy and coordinates joint activities that benefit of the region. The Habitat's country offices, or affiliates, have a local board of directors and are semi-autonomous in decisions regarding construction materials or procedures related to the particularities of each country, as long as they follow general guidelines for decent and affordable housing. Each affiliate also promotes particular promotional events and engages partners individually.<sup>129</sup> With this relative freedom, different country offices explore several kinds of housing interventions that are adequate to their cultural environment and population characteristics, following the organization's general guidelines.

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<sup>126</sup> Fuller, Millard. 1995. *A Simple, Decent Place to Live: The Building Realization of Habitat for Humanity*. 63.

<sup>127</sup> Reckford, Jonathan T. M. 2007. *Creating a Habitat for Humanity: No Hands but Yours*. 8.

<sup>128</sup> Habitat for Humanity International Inc. 2015. "Habitat for Humanity International Annual Report FY2015."

<sup>129</sup> Habitat for Humanity International, Inc. 1997. *Habitat for Humanity's Christian Principles*. 12.

Habitat's ministry believes in the need for decent housing, as it is stipulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948,<sup>130</sup> but also as a key instrument to reduce poverty. Housing as a human right implies the positive impact of decent shelter in the family development with reduced gastric and respiratory diseases, improved economic conditions, improved scholarly performance, and stronger kin.<sup>131</sup> The Theology of the Hammer states that decent housing represents an essential means for defying poverty, and understands the eradication of substandard shelter as an urgent matter of social justice.

The cause behind the Theology of the Hammer is tangible – housing. Fuller explains the practical identity of the ideology as a key component not only of the movement but also as a remarkable part of the Christian identity; a fundamental commitment inherited from the Gospel:

“...The idea or concept of the Theology of the Hammer is that our Christian faith (indeed, our entire Judeo-Christian tradition) mandates that we do more than just talk about faith and sing about love. We must put faith and love into action to make them real, to make them come alive for people. Faith must be incarnated; that is to say, it must become more than a verbal proclamation or an intellectual assent. True faith must be acted out.”<sup>132</sup>

Including the word hammer in the theology's name explains the proposed practical approach to Christian faith. Fuller explains that a hammer embodies two components of the movement, as it calls for a particular action and tangible results summarized in the construction of a house for a family in need. But also, the hammer

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<sup>130</sup> UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 10 December 1948, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3712c.html>. Accessed on April 17, 2016.

<sup>131</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2010. *The Right to Adequate Housing*. United Nations.

<sup>132</sup> Fuller, Millard. 1994. *The Theology of the Hammer*. 42.

represents the ecumenical approach to communitarian work regardless of denominations or general beliefs.

The Theology of the Hammer contemplates the richness in joint work but also approaches poverty from an economic perspective. The concept of the Economics of Jesus<sup>133</sup> under the Theology of the Hammer proposes an interpretation of teachings of the Bible to guide how to manage financial resources. According to Fuller, the Economics of Jesus acknowledge the existence of enough resources in the world for every person to have a high quality of life. However, current society difficulty the equal distribution of resources, therefore, organizations like Habitat for Humanity offer the opportunity to connect those with resources, most of them in developed countries, with communities and individuals in need of resources. This exchange of resources includes but is not limited to economic support. The catalyst role embraced by the Theology of the Hammer also involves the responsibility of good stewardship,<sup>134</sup> meaning a transparent administration and use of resources, avoiding fraud, and understanding that Habitat for Humanity should use available funds in the best way possible, optimizing every dollar.

Theology of the Hammer also promotes good stewardship in the partner families to support the improvement of the revolving fund for Humanity. The theology states that the solution to poverty does not rely on assistance-based programs but in the active promotion of human dignity and empowerment.<sup>135</sup> For the Economics of Jesus, capital is needed to overcome poverty, not charity, and capital comes from donors and other families' mortgages repayments.

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<sup>133</sup> Fuller, Millard. 1980. *Love in the Mortar Joints*. 85.

<sup>134</sup> Fuller, Millard. 1994. *The Theology of the Hammer*. 43.

<sup>135</sup> Fuller, Millard. 1986. *No More Shacks: The Daring Vision of Habitat for Humanity*. 172.

Because of the open invitation to all sectors of society to get involved in the construction of the kingdom of God on earth, the Theology of the Hammer has three key audiences in the partner families, volunteers, and partners. The first group includes the partner families, the main reason for the construction of homes. Fuller makes emphasis in the term partner instead of a beneficiary, as the families have a fundamental role in the transformation of their own circumstances. The partner families usually live in relative poverty,<sup>136</sup> which means that they do have a monthly income, but it is not enough to cover their basic needs, and therefore, they need subsidized opportunities to access to several services, such as housing. According to Habitat's methodology, families engage in mortgage repayments of the house<sup>137</sup> because a payment reinforces the control that families have in their development while promoting dignity. Repayments also support the construction of other homes, as all financial resources are part of the Fund for Humanity, one of the primary sources of funding for the operational part of Theology of the Hammer. Fuller explains that permanent revolving funds guarantee sustainability while creating a sense of community and network within the partner families.

In the case of volunteers, Theology of the Hammer encourages the involvement of all sectors of society. Based on the different programs from Habitat for Humanity, volunteers can engage in activities inside and outside the construction site, from pro-bono professional services in law or architecture and international mission trips, to clerical services and support the board of directors or fundraising activities. However, according to Jerome Baggett, even with a significant amount of activities available, most of the

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<sup>136</sup> According to the United Nations, relative poverty compares individual social and economic status compared to the rest of society, often based on estimates of the cost of basic food needs (i.e., the cost a nutritional basket considered minimal for the healthy survival of a typical family).

<sup>137</sup> Fuller, Millard. 1995. *A Simple, Decent Place to Live: The Building Realization of Habitat for Humanity*. 21.

volunteers belong to middle class and are still in school or retired.<sup>138</sup> Nevertheless, the Theology of the Hammer's model of volunteer engagement starts as a single individual participation; if the volunteer learns about the cause of decent housing, the commitment can evolve into a sense of responsibility in the eradication of poverty housing. According to the theology, individual awareness influences the collective promotion of political advocacy and social activism.

For partners of the Theology of the Hammer, the role has transcended to a different levels of involvement. Partners can be donors or key advocates that represent an important sector or audience, with no restrictions:

“We work with Catholic and Protestant, Christian and other faith groups, black and white, sacred and secular, liberal and conservative, rich and poor, urban and rural, inner-city and suburban, government and private, business and civic, and innumerable other creative alliances. These wide-ranging partnerships are central to the Theology of the Hammer.”<sup>139</sup>

According to Fuller, partnerships are based on the commitment to the cause and can include individuals, companies, churches, schools, and organizations. The Theology of the Hammer does not mention funding as a requirement to become a partner, but the movement needs economic contributions to reach its goal of building homes, hope, reconciliation, and peace.<sup>140</sup>

The ecumenical approach of Theology of the Hammer requires engaging all kinds of faiths, including no faith, in concrete actions. Preaching the gospel is not a standard part of the activities within the Theology of the Hammer, but the mission requires the support of churches. Fuller explains that churches are natural partners of organizations

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<sup>138</sup> Baggett, Jerome. 2000. *Habitat for Humanity: Building Private Homes, Building Public Religion*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. 5.

<sup>139</sup> Fuller, Millard. 1994. *Theology of the Hammer*, 45.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid. 46.



facilitating the active embrace of faith, such as Habitat for Humanity. For Theology of the Hammer, the internalized lessons from the gospel encourage an individual or a group to commit as volunteers or partners with Habitat for Humanity. To cultivate this sense of para-denominational practice, Habitat for Humanity has a Faith Relations department (previously known as Church Relations department)<sup>141</sup> that aims to engage churches in the mission of the Theology of the Hammer. The department promotes events, such as a Blitz Build<sup>142</sup> called Building in Faith and Inter-Faith building, that happens all over the world. In El Salvador, the Building on Faith event occurs annually, during the first week in August, promoting the participation of Salvadoran and international churches building and celebrating together the lessons of Theology of the Hammer and the Gospel.

The Faith Relations department within Habitat for Humanity facilitates devotionals for home dedications and cultivates special projects where the primary partners – donors and volunteers – come from a church.<sup>143</sup> Such is the case of the project Partners in Faith,<sup>144</sup> where multiple Lutheran churches in the Midwest of the United States sponsored the construction of a new temple for a Salvadoran underfunded Lutheran church, and twenty-five homes for the same amount of low-income families that are part of the church in the department of Santa Ana, in the west of the country. Habitat for Humanity El Salvador implemented the project in three years, with an investment of almost one million dollars. According to Habitat's annual report, different churches from the Midwest provided funds and engaged about twenty-five short mission trips to support the construction of homes and the temple. The Theology of the Hammer

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<sup>141</sup> Habitat for Humanity International, <http://www.habitat.org/cr>. Accessed on April 17, 2016.

<sup>142</sup> Blitz Build refers to a special event hosted by Habitat for Humanity, where a usually bigger amount of volunteers participate in the construction of a house for a week, in order to finish it or make progress in the construction.

<sup>143</sup> Habitat for Humanity International, <http://www.habitat.org/cr>. Accessed on April 17, 2016.

<sup>144</sup> Habitat for Humanity El Salvador. 2015. "*Memoria de Labores 2014*." 34.

conceives this kind of project as a strategy from the Faith Relations department to foster exchange experiences for partner families, volunteers, and partners.<sup>145</sup>

For the Theology of the Hammer, Triangles of Faith represent a partnership between Habitat for Humanity, a local church (in this case, Salvadoran) and an international church. This mechanism supports the Economics of Jesus with the exchange of resources between “those who have and those who does not.”<sup>146</sup> In the case of the Partners in Faith project, the Economics of Jesus explain the reasons why a small church, part of a religious denomination that engages fewer than one percent of the Salvadoran population<sup>147</sup> becomes part of a project with the mentioned characteristics for the direct benefit of fewer than five hundred people.

Besides the tangible results of the construction of a home and exchange of financial resources, the Theology of the Hammer also facilitates relations that generate an emotional response. Leslie Cove explains how the people that participate in projects or individual builds establishes connections beyond language, cultures, or economic levels.<sup>148</sup> As described by Fuller, the hammer becomes a symbol of unity regardless of differences; the opportunity to interact in a para-denominational environment promotes long-term relations and transformational processes. With the program Global Village, Habitat for Humanity intends to cultivate cultural sensibility through the mobilization of thousands of volunteers per year, to build in various locations all over the world. This initiative embraces Theology of the Hammer’s role as a catalyzer for cultural exchange

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<sup>145</sup> Fuller, Millard. 2000. *More Than Houses: How Habitat for Humanity is Transforming Lives and Neighborhoods*. 68.

<sup>146</sup> Fuller, Millard. 1994. *The Theology of the Hammer*. 31.

<sup>147</sup> According to the Salvadoran Lutheran Synod, their membership includes 15,000 people, with emphasis in the central and eastern part of the country. From <http://sls.org.sv/index.php/en/> Accessed on April 17, 2016.

<sup>148</sup> Cove, Leslie. 2013. “*Volunteerism in Context: A Comparison of Habitat for Humanity Canada Programs*”. 207.

within emphasis on the cause of decent housing, and the promotion of conscious global citizens advocating for understanding and unity.<sup>149</sup>

Habitat for Humanity, under the Theology of the Hammer, influenced international initiatives and domestic policies. According to Fuller, multiple activities oriented to the promotion of the cause of decent housing stimulate popular awareness about the housing deficit, fomenting lobbying to influence foreign and public policies.<sup>150</sup> Besides the support of former President Jimmy Carter, other regional and national leaders have included housing in their political agendas or electoral campaigns, besides volunteering with Habitat for media coverage. In El Salvador, the political value of the Theology of the Hammer is still in development, with limited participation in multi-organizational dialogue tables and supporting initiatives from other non-profits.<sup>151</sup>

Jerome Baggett, in *Habitat for Humanity: Building Private Homes, Building Public Religion*, states that Theology of the Hammer puts more emphasis in solving the poverty housing issue with the practical activity of building homes than influencing the reasons behind institutionalized poverty.<sup>152</sup> Even if the action of building a home has a long-term impact on the life of the particular family that receives the home and marks an improvement in their living conditions,<sup>153</sup> as Fuller states, it does not change the systemic causes of poverty and inequality.

Another critique from Jerome Baggett states that the Theology of the Hammer promotes a paternalistic and protective attitude towards the partner families<sup>154</sup> while

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid. 210.

<sup>150</sup> Fuller, Millard. 1994. *The Theology of the Hammer*. 48.

<sup>151</sup> Habitat for Humanity El Salvador. 2015. “*Memoria de Labores 2014*.” 32.

<sup>152</sup> Baggett, Jerome. 2000. *Habitat for Humanity: Building Private Homes, Building Public Religion*. 2010.

<sup>153</sup> Fuller, Millard. 1994. *The Theology of the Hammer*. 23.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid. 240.

providing volunteers and donors a moral superiority feeling. According to Baggett, sometimes the Theology of the Hammer highlights to the involvement of volunteers and partners more than the involvement of the families, creating this dynamic of superiority.

#### Main Principles of Theology of the Hammer

Theology of the Hammer works through Habitat for Humanity in over seventy countries around the world, including countries where the Evangelical or Protestant denomination is a minority. That is why the Theology of the Hammer promotes an ecumenical spirituality and faith in action components that transcends religions *per se*. The para-denominational values embraced by the theology invite all faiths, and even non-believers, to become part of the construction of the kingdom of God on earth.

One of the central values promoted by the Theology of the Hammer is Equality, based on the premise that God is one and, therefore, all of His children deserve the same treatment. Equality has been meaningful since the foundation of Habitat for Humanity in the deep south of the United States, where race segregation was still an issue in the 1970s. According to Fuller, the Theology of the Hammer aims to build equality beyond race, social status or economic differences, bringing hope in the shape of safe and decent shelter to families in need.<sup>155</sup> Equality is visible in the dynamics at a construction site, where all participants are considered the same, with the shared condition of “humanity.”<sup>156</sup> The no discrimination emphasis part of the Theology of the Hammer also impacts outside the construction site, in the general approach to housing as a human rights issue. After all, the use of a hammer is universal and inclusive.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Fuller, Millard. 1980. *Love in the Mortar Joints*. 13.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid. 15.

<sup>157</sup> Fuller, Millard. 1994. *The Theology of the Hammer*. 5.

Participation is another value related to the Theology of the Hammer, challenging the established system regarding housing policies, and embracing connectivity as a catalyzer between religious, political, and cultural differences from the partner families, volunteers and/or partners. According to Baggett, participation is especially relevant in the relationship between partner families with the rest of actors, as a reminder of the interconnectivity of society and the richness that relies on diversity.<sup>158</sup>

Volunteerism, as a vital part of the organization, is an expression of participation. The Theology of the Hammer conceives volunteerism as an opportunity to express personal values publicly while connecting with others that share the same beliefs.<sup>159</sup> Based on the theology premises, volunteers represent love in action, as an example of what a ‘good Christian’ or a ‘good human being’ should do. Regardless of the activity, volunteers sharing a sense of responsibility for the community from individual and collective perspectives. Voluntarism itself is a political statement of the important issues that are not being addressed properly by governmental structures, providing spaces for democratic participation and social connectivity for those involved.

According to Fuller, when participation from equal members of society becomes a regular activity, partnership emerges.<sup>160</sup> The most important partnership for the Theology of the Hammer is the connection with God, asking for His blessing in the concrete actions that the organization promotes. After God, the natural allies of the Theology of the Hammer are Churches, regardless of the denomination, perceived as the “total church following a total gospel.”<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Baggett, Jerome. 2000. *Habitat for Humanity: Building Private Homes, Building Public Religion*. 47.

<sup>159</sup> Stevens, Robert, and David Rowe. 1984. *Kingdom Building: Essays from the Grassroots of Habitat*. 2.

<sup>160</sup> Fuller, Millard. 1994. *The Theology of the Hammer*. 20.

<sup>161</sup> Fuller, Millard. 1980. *Love in the Mortar Joints*. Association Press. 143.

For Fuller, the rest of partnerships provide a space to connect general civic participation with a cause in need to support (decent housing). A relevant part of partnership as a value rests on the fundraising aspect of Theology of the Hammer. Explained as the “*Economics of Jesus*”, Theology of the Hammer embraces three main ideas regarding financial resources’ management: first, there are enough resources in the world to end with poverty and therefore, poverty housing, but there must be a bridge between those individuals or groups with funds and those populations in need of capital; second, God provides an individual or a group with resources expecting for good stewardship; and finally, the guidance to lend money to people living in poverty is in the scriptures. The Economics of Jesus sums a Gospel-inspired administration of resources for Habitat for Humanity, inviting partners to share their resources as a way to connect with those who are in need of funds and as a faithful way to appreciate the financial resources facilitated by God.<sup>162</sup>

Theology of the Hammer requires human and financial resources to achieve its goal of the construction of the Kingdom of God on earth and eventual eradication of poverty housing around the world. This ambitious goal relates to a physical issue within the immediate context. Theology of the Hammer believes that building is an expression of faith and an opportunity to manifest God in action.<sup>163</sup> For Fuller, the construction of a house, then, is not only a long-term solution to an earthly issue but also a symbol of a covenant with God.<sup>164</sup> In the case of the partner families, the house facilitated by Habitat for Humanity represents a sanctuary for its protection and development; for the

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<sup>162</sup> Fuller, Millard. 2000. *More Than Houses: How Habitat for Humanity is Transforming Lives and Neighborhoods*. 156.

<sup>163</sup> Fuller, Millard. 1994. *The Theology of the Hammer*. 68.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid. 68.

volunteers and donors, it accounts for a concrete representation of their faith. A house built by the Theology of the Hammer, then, turns from an ordinary structure to a tangible demonstration of the teachings of the Gospel.

This concrete demonstration of faith into action represents the core of Theology of the Hammer. For Churches and believers in general, the theology offers an example of the transition from religious values internalized in rituals and scriptures to tangible actions oriented to change families live while promoting democratic participation. Theology of the Hammer highlights the relevance of a practical side of faith, where the Gospel teachings can turn into practice. According to Baggett, this means that faith requires a practical living to be complete.<sup>165</sup> Spirituality finds a complement in a communitarian practice.

For the Theology of the Hammer, a Christian must serve with his or her hands, purse and mouth.<sup>166</sup> The purse references to the donation of financial resources, as explained in the Economics of Jesus, and hands are needed to use a hammer, therefore, are required for the construction of homes while putting faith in action. But the use of one's mouth or voice relates to awareness and advocacy. Advocacy emerges from awareness and critical thinking and requires political mobilization. An advocate put its skills, willing, and participation in the service of social change.<sup>167</sup>

The Theology of the Hammer understands awareness as the ability to connect to another person's needs, and engage in an activity oriented to relief those needs.<sup>168</sup> As a value, awareness includes developing a sense of social capital and identifying situations

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<sup>165</sup> Baggett, Jerome. 2000. *Habitat for Humanity: Building Private Homes, Building Public Religion*. 107.

<sup>166</sup> Fuller, Millard. 1994. *The Theology of the Hammer*. 59.

<sup>167</sup> Cove, Leslie. 2013. "Volunteerism in Context: A Comparison of Habitat for Humanity Canada Programs". 29.

<sup>168</sup> Fuller, Millard. 1986. *No More Shacks: The Daring Vision of Habitat for Humanity*. 37.

of injustice, inequality, and marginalization within society. Fuller states that this process might be uncomfortable, to generate a sense of obligation to transform reality. The personal transformation as a result of awareness turns a regular participant or partner into an Advocate.<sup>169</sup>

For the Theology of the Hammer, advocates raise awareness about the housing situation within their circles and in the political sphere. The call for action includes involvement in requesting structural changes in budgeting or governmental institutions related to economic, social, and political connotations of housing. For Theology of the Hammer, the ultimate goal for social mobilization is to increase societal resources for those living in poverty.<sup>170</sup>

From a Marxist ideology perspective, religion has been conceived as the opiate of the people. However, the awareness and subsequent advocacy promoted from Theology of the Hammer, along other Christian values, prove how spirituality, or the development of critical consciousness through a religious doctrine, supports the development of social capital. Theology of the Hammer inspires social transformation and also offers the opportunity to work among different doctrines to focus on service the similarities and social change. The promotion of participation, partnership, advocacy, and volunteerism are important signs of activism and mobilization.<sup>171</sup>

Theology of the Hammer also promotes empowerment as a value. According to Baggett, partner families are encouraged to transform their roles from victims to protagonists of their development, considering that Habitat for Humanity is a “hand-up,

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<sup>169</sup> Baggett, Jerome. 2000. *Habitat for Humanity: Building Private Homes, Building Public Religion*. 189.

<sup>170</sup> Reckford, Jonathan T. M. 2007. *Creating a Habitat for Humanity: No Hands but Yours*. 35.

<sup>171</sup> Smith, Christian. 1996. *Disruptive Religion: The Force of Faith in Social Movements Activism*. 8.



not a handout.”<sup>172</sup> With monthly mortgages repayments into the revolving fund for humanity, families that are living in poverty contribute to other members of society to have access to decent housing. This way, partner families can support the transformation of other families as well. Empowerment also influences volunteers and donors. The commitment to participation and eventual awareness of local and global issues related to housing can promote remarkable individual and collective mobilization, including awareness and advocacy.

The values promoted by the Theology of the Hammer are diverse and progressive. However, those same values have been criticized for offering temporary solutions to structural issues behind poverty. However, with awareness and advocacy as values, the Theology of the Hammer could support a sustainable long-term change.<sup>173</sup>

Another critique of Theology of the Hammer relates to the emphasis on volunteers and donors, instead of a focalized attention to the transformation and improvement of the partner families.<sup>174</sup> Most of the activities promoted by Theology of the Hammer have a bigger impact in the cultivation of the service experience itself, setting aside the necessities of the partner families, beyond the physical construction of decent housing. Because of this limiting situation, Habitat for Humanity has invested more intellectual and financial resources in recent years, towards education components such as financial literacy, construction methods, communitarian development, and micro-finance,<sup>175</sup> as an opportunity for families to improve their quality of life beyond housing.

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<sup>172</sup> Baggett, Jerome. 2000. *Habitat for Humanity: Building Private Homes, Building Public Religion*. 79.

<sup>173</sup> Reckford, Jonathan. 2009. “How Far Will They Go Among So Many? A Lot of Work Ahead”

<sup>174</sup> Baggett, Jerome. 2002. “The Irony of Parachurch Organizations: The Case of Habitat for Humanity.” *New Directions for Philanthropic Fundraising*. 75.

<sup>175</sup> Leonard, Paul. 2006. *Music of a Thousand Hammers: Inside Habitat for Humanity*. 20.

### Key Figure: Jimmy Carter

One of the most famous public supporters of the Theology of the Hammer is the thirty-ninth US President, Jimmy Carter. Since the end of his presidential period in 1984, Carter and his wife Rosalyn became supporters of the Theology of the Hammer as donors, volunteers, and advocates of the cause for decent housing around the world. “Immeasurable” was the word used by Fuller to describe the Carters support to the organization and its mission.<sup>176</sup>

Carter was born in 1924 in the semi-urban area of Plains, Georgia.<sup>177</sup> His family lived in the heart of a segregated South, but Carter had constant interaction with the African American population in the area due to Carter’s father role in the community as a merchant. Carter’s mother promoted the traditional Southern Baptist religious values in the household, including a sense of social responsibility and care for others.<sup>178</sup>

Carter had no interest in politics during his younger years. After high school, Carter served in the Navy, but his army career ended abruptly with his father’s death. After this, Carter returned to Plains. Once in his hometown, Carter became involved with social and political organizations aiming to improve the quality of life of the local population. Eventually, Carter’s leadership developed into a campaign for senator and then governor,<sup>179</sup> when Carter became an appealing candidate for the Democratic Party in the 1976 elections, against Gerald Ford (Republican).

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<sup>176</sup> Fuller, Millard. 2000. *More Than Houses: How Habitat for Humanity is Transforming Lives and Neighborhoods*. 107.

<sup>177</sup> Ariail, Daniel, and Cheryld Heckler-Feltz. 1996. *The Carpenter’s Apprentice: The Spiritual Biography of Jimmy Carter*. 36.

<sup>178</sup> Carter, Jimmy. 1982. *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President*. 17.

<sup>179</sup> Bourne, Peter. 1997. *Jimmy Carter: A Comprehensive Biography from Plains to Postpresidency*. 46.

Carter's political campaign was successful as his Southern Christian values and charm appealed to a broad audience,<sup>180</sup> especially after Nixon's Watergate scandal and aggressive foreign policies in the early 1970s. According to Peter Bourne in *Jimmy Carter: A Comprehensive Biography from Plains to Post presidency*, the emphasis of the campaign relied on Carter's religious background and personal faith, as well as his previous achievements as a local politician in Georgia. The fact that religion was a prominent part of Carter's political campaign highlighted the transformation of the American society regarding spirituality, shortly after the peak of the civil rights movement, and the growing relevance of evangelical Christians.<sup>181</sup> Carter aimed to provide a new face for politics, but the difficulties of his presidential period tested his Christian principles, especially regarding Human Rights violations in Latin America.

According to Carter himself, once his presidential period started in 1977, the primary emphasis of the administration focused on human rights and a simpler family lifestyle in the White House, compared to previous presidents.<sup>182</sup> However, the media portrayed Carter as naïve and ignorant, a stereotypical Southerner.<sup>183</sup> Within the United States, the economy was going through difficult times, and political turmoil was affecting several countries around the world. Because of those circumstances, the defense of human rights dropped in priorities for the administration and the rest of the governmental institutions,<sup>184</sup> therefore the reach of the Carter's influence in Human Rights was, besides highly criticized, limited or opposed.

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid. 87.

<sup>181</sup> Fuller, Millard. 2000. *More Than Houses: How Habitat for Humanity is Transforming Lives and Neighborhoods*. 63.

<sup>182</sup> Carter, Jimmy. 1982. *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President*. 25.

<sup>183</sup> Ariail, Daniel, and Cheryld Heckler-Feltz. 1996. *The Carpenter's Apprentice: The Spiritual Biography of Jimmy Carter*. 72.

<sup>184</sup> Bourne, Peter. 1997. *Jimmy Carter: A Comprehensive Biography from Plains to Postpresidency*. 102.

During the first two years of the presidential term, Carter's the topic of human rights was present sporadically and only in some external circumstances.<sup>185</sup> Domestic anti-communism policies related to the Cold War and a growing sense of anti-imperialism from the rest of countries in Latin America influenced the Carter administration's approach to Foreign Policy.<sup>186</sup> Carter lacked foreign policy experience but had the idea of replacing the previous political interventions and imposed military force with democratic ways to support local and global stability, with an emphasis on democracy.<sup>187</sup> Limited achievements fulfilled this vision, such as signing the Panama Canal Treaty in 1977 and the Camp David accords in 1979, the consolidation of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) as an agreement with the Soviet Union regarding armament control, denouncing apartheid in South Africa, reestablishing unofficial relations with the People's Republic of China, and signing the Treaty of Tlatelolco for a Latin American free of nuclear weapons.<sup>188</sup> Most of these achievements were ratifications from previous administrations or starting points for further development, but it marked a different leadership style. Nevertheless, not all the Carter initiatives had a positive impact.

By the last half of his presidential period, Carter faced a complicated situation regarding the United States support of the repressive regimes in Central America, specifically in El Salvador and Nicaragua. The most violent period previous to the civil war in El Salvador was between 1977 and 1978, but the case of political turmoil

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<sup>185</sup> Ariail, Daniel, and Cheryld Heckler-Feltz. 1996. *The Carpenter's Apprentice: The Spiritual Biography of Jimmy Carter*. 72.

<sup>186</sup> Weeks, Gregory. 2015. *U.S. and Latin American Relations*. 158.

<sup>187</sup> Brinkley, Douglas. 1998. *The Unfinished Presidency: Jimmy Carter's Journey Beyond the White House*. 98.

<sup>188</sup> Ariail, Daniel, and Cheryld Heckler-Feltz. 1996. *The Carpenter's Apprentice: The Spiritual Biography of Jimmy Carter*. 127.

development in El Salvador was a low priority until late 1979. Archbishop Romero sent a personal letter to Carter on February 17, 1980 addressing the multiple violations to human rights happening in the country, supported by the United States government and its relation with the military regime in El Salvador. Romero referred to Carter's Christian identity and statements defending human rights as his request for support and intervention to end the violent governmental repression affecting Salvadorans. Romero did not receive an answer from Carter, but from the Secretary of State, and his requests were monitored with a few meetings with the U.S. Embassy. However, Romero was assassinated only a few weeks after sending the letter. Later that year, four U.S. churchwomen were assassinated in El Salvador, provoking a punishment to El Salvador's government from the U.S. government decreasing military aid (including financial resources, weapons, and training) for the rest of 1980, but this changed dramatically with the start of Reagan administration in January 1981 and official start of the civil war. The subtle response from the Carter administration and lack of support to social movements that aimed to end the warlike circumstances in El Salvador and Nicaragua represented Carter's unsuccessful approach to foreign policy in Central America, and a double standard regarding the defense of human rights.<sup>189</sup>

After the end of his presidential period in 1980, Carter remained politically and publicly active as an iconic figure. In 1983, Jimmy and Rosalyn Carter founded the Carter Center, supporting leaders and organizations in peacebuilding processes, political stability, and economic development.<sup>190</sup> The objectives of the Carter Center offer an opportunity to connect personal convictions about world improvement with tangible

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<sup>189</sup> Sikkink, Kathryn. 2004. *Mixed Signals: U.S. Human Rights Policy and Latin America*. 124.

<sup>190</sup> Carter, Jimmy. 1982. *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President*. 82.

actions. For Carter, to avoid future political distress worldwide, it is imperative to address essential issues of access to food, health, democracy, and shelter.<sup>191</sup> Carter remains an international figure regarding human rights and peace building, regardless of the results and circumstances around his presidential administration.

The Theology of the Hammer had the Carters' support since 1984. Habitat's founder, Millard Fuller, approached the couple after the end of Carter's presidential period, as their hometown Plains is only a few miles from Habitat for Humanity's former headquarters in Americus, Georgia. Fuller requested Carter's support in specific ways, as a donor, as a volunteer, and as an advocate.<sup>192</sup>

Carter got involved with Habitat due to his commitment to being a leader, beyond the White House, on issues related to eradicating marginalization.<sup>193</sup> According to Fuller, Carter found in the Theology of the Hammer an opportunity to join other people of prayer and faith, acting together to the best of their abilities to make things better for people everywhere.<sup>194</sup> The Theology of the Hammer facilitates a commitment between following the principles from the scriptures and support of an actual social cause. For Carter, "housing is a matter of mercy, humility, justice and a foundation for peace",<sup>195</sup> therefore, the construction of homes is also related to the transformation of communities and collective improvement.

The main event that the Carter's promote with Habitat for Humanity is the Jimmy & Rosalynn Carter Work Project (JRCWP). Since 1984, over 89,000 volunteers have built along the Carter's in over fifteenth countries around the world. The project includes

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<sup>191</sup> Carter, Jimmy. 1993. *Talking Peace: A Vision For the Next Generation*. 180.

<sup>192</sup> Fuller, Millard. 1986. *No More Shacks: The Daring Vision of Habitat for Humanity*. 129.

<sup>193</sup> Bourne, Peter. 1997. *Jimmy Carter: A Comprehensive Biography from Plains to Postpresidency*. 8.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid. 130.

<sup>195</sup> Foreword by Jimmy Carter in *Creating a Habitat for Humanity: No Hands but Yours*, by Jonathan Reckford. 1.

the construction of a relatively large amount of homes, with the Carter's as volunteers but also as spiritual leaders of devotionals, and leading the media coverage of the event and promoting fundraising as a unifying force for the organization.<sup>196</sup>

According to Baggett, Carter embodies his commitment with the Theology of the Hammer living its principles as one of the leading supporters of the organization, inside the United States and overseas. Rosalyn and Jimmy Carter support Habitat for Humanity as volunteers, first and foremost.<sup>197</sup> During the JRCWP, participation is encouraged through the representation of different sectors and countries in one location, for a particular activity that usually lasts a week. The Theology of the Hammer benefits from Carter's prominent status as the former president of the United States, as Carter summons leaders and personalities to the cause of decent housing.

Based on the Economics of Jesus and the Theology of the Hammer, the world has enough resources to alleviate poverty.<sup>198</sup> According to Habitat International, the Carter's practice this principle sharing their part of funds as donors but also inviting others to do the same.<sup>199</sup> The JRCWP includes a component of international fundraising and an opportunity to demonstrate good stewardship and thanksgiving.

Locally, Carter contributes to his local Baptist church in Plains Georgia as a facilitator of Sunday school classes when he is in the area. For the Theology of the Hammer, the faith promoted in the Sunday school classes transforms into action when the Carters support a construction site, in the United States or a remote location. Since the presidential campaign in 1976, the Carters publicized faith as a vital part of their identity.

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<sup>196</sup> Habitat for Humanity International, <http://www.habitat.org/cwp>. Accessed on April 17, 2016.

<sup>197</sup> Baggett, Jerome. 2002. "The Irony of Parachurch Organizations: The Case of Habitat for Humanity." *New Directions for Philanthropic Fundraising*. 85.

<sup>198</sup> Fuller, Millard. 1994. *The Theology of the Hammer*. Smith & Helwys Publishing, Inc. 128.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid. 128.

According to the teachings of the Theology of the Hammer, the Carter's are also advocates of the cause of decent housing around the world.<sup>200</sup> Becoming an advocate includes the personal conviction that housing is a human right, and the public denounces of lack of adequate housing as part of social injustice. In the case of Carter, the personal conviction became a public statement with the JRCWP, where Carter participates as a volunteer. However, the general promotion of the cause transcends to the World Project to the rest of media spaces where Carter participates as a former president. In his public appearances, Carter establishes shelter as one of the minimum requirements for social development and peace.<sup>201</sup>

Even if Carter's administration from 1977 to 1981 was not the most politically advantageous period, his legacy in the defense of human rights transcends Carter's presidency. The embrace of Theology of the Hammer and a personal commitment to peacebuilding turns Carter into an iconic figure regarding global relations and reconciliation. Carter uses his social relevance as a former president, acknowledging his positive influence beyond a public service position.<sup>202</sup>

### Current Situation

For the Theology of the Hammer, an active manifestation of faith is represented in the construction of a home for a family living in poverty, until the eradication of substandard housing worldwide. This challenging goal considers the 1.6 billion people worldwide lives in substandard conditions, according to the United Nations.<sup>203</sup> Half of the people live in impoverished urban settlements. The issue of inadequate housing increases

<sup>200</sup> Fuller, Millard. 1994. *The Theology of the Hammer*. Smith & Helwys Publishing, Inc. 129.

<sup>201</sup> Baggett, Jerome. 2000. *Habitat for Humanity: Building Private Homes, Building Public Religion*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. 86.

<sup>202</sup> Sikkink, Kathryn. 2004. *Mixed Signals: U.S. Human Rights Policy and Latin America*. 98.

<sup>203</sup> Jonash, Ronald, Kristen Anderson, and Hitendra Patel. 2012. "HFHI: Revolutionizing the Way to Make Housing Affordable for Everyone." 3.



with population growth, disproportioned continuous urbanization, unequal land ownership, and increased wealth disparity.<sup>204</sup>

To respond to the global demand, Habitat for Humanity has provided or facilitated access to decent housing for 4.8 million<sup>205</sup> people in forty years with new homes, home improvement projects, and indirect services related to education and advocacy. The Theology of the Hammer is now present in more than seventy countries around the world with diversified services that aim to transform the world “one house at a time”. For example, the area of Disaster Response has served in the United States after the Gulf Coast hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and most recently after the Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, and the 2015 Earthquakes in Nepal.<sup>206</sup>

In El Salvador, Habitat for Humanity has built over 21,500 housing solutions<sup>207</sup> since its foundation in 1992. However, the country’s housing deficit has been estimated at 944,000 units,<sup>208</sup> with over fifty percent of the qualitative deficit.<sup>209</sup> The results include construction of new homes, rehabilitations and renovations, secure land tenure, and purchase of used homes. By diversifying services, Habitat for Humanity addresses one of the historical issues in El Salvador related to land tenure.

The partnership with Habitat for Humanity and Thrivent Financial exemplifies the relation between the values of Theology of the Hammer and access to land tenure. The relationship between the non-profit and the faith-based financial entity started in 2005,

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid. 5.

<sup>205</sup> Habitat for Humanity International Inc. 2015. “Habitat for Humanity International Annual Report FY2015.”

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Habitat for Humanity El Salvador. 2015. “Memoria de Labores 2014.” 6.

<sup>208</sup> Inter-American Bank of Development, 2012. “Housing Finance in Central America”. <http://idbdocs.iadb.org/wsdocs/getdocument.aspx?docnum=36623624>. 19.

<sup>209</sup> According to CEPAL, quantitative housing deficit is defined as the difference between the number of households and the number of permanent dwellings. The qualitative deficit refers to the number of dwellings which are not satisfactory because they lack certain services.

turning into a multi-million and multi-year partnership with the construction of over 4,800 housing solutions in forty-three countries around the world.<sup>210</sup> In El Salvador, Thrivent Financial supported the construction of seventy-five homes for the same amount of landless families between 2008 and 2010, to build the Villa Esperanza community.<sup>211</sup> The 1.7 million investment included education components in financial literacy and communitarian development besides secure land tenure.<sup>212</sup> The resemblance between Thrivent Financial and Habitat for Humanity El Salvador's values facilitated the construction of "Villa Esperanza", achieving a development model for other non-profit organizations and the central government. This community became a catalyzer for future development of Habitat for Humanity holistic projects in El Salvador.

An important component of the partnership between Habitat for Humanity El Salvador and Thrivent Financial for Lutherans relies on volunteers, embracing individual mobilization and collective social activism values. Every year, Habitat for Humanity International mobilized over 2 million volunteers to join their cause in communities and the world. Habitat for Humanity El Salvador hosted over 3,000 of those volunteers in 2014,<sup>213</sup> including people from El Salvador, the United States, Canada and Northern Ireland participated at individual or collective constructions.<sup>214</sup> Almost one-quarter of the volunteers belong to a Thrivent Financial or Church-based short-term missions, most of them Lutherans (from the United States) or evangelical-protestants (from El Salvador). The role of the Church, regardless of the denomination, as a leading supporter of Habitat for Humanity El Salvador is challenged by the involvement of educative organizations

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<sup>210</sup> Thrivent Builds, <http://www.thriventbuilds.com>, Accessed on April 17, 2016.

<sup>211</sup> Habitat for Humanity El Salvador. 2011. "Memoria de Labores 2010." 23.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Habitat for Humanity El Salvador. 2015. "Memoria de Labores 2014." 18.

<sup>214</sup> Habitat for Humanity El Salvador. 2011. "Memoria de Labores 2010." 11.

that representing the largest source of volunteers in El Salvador (more than half), for both domestic and international volunteers.

Nevertheless, the supporting role from Churches is not limited to volunteerism. According to the Faith Engagement office of Habitat for Humanity International,<sup>215</sup> Churches have the opportunity to engage with the values of Theology of the Hammer in four different ways: Prayer, financial support, volunteer, or communitarian engagement. One of the activities organized worldwide to celebrate faith engagement is the annual Building on Faith construction event. According to Habitat for Humanity International, the event happens during the third week in September in the United States. In El Salvador, the building event is hosted during the first week in August.<sup>216</sup> Following the Theology of the Hammer's principles, the event aims to provide churches with the opportunity to celebrate together their beliefs in the construction of a house as a demonstration of the love of God.<sup>217</sup>

However, Habitat for Humanity serves to the total population, non-faith included, because its ultimate mission needs general support. The advocacy and awareness department of Habitat for Humanity International has reached some milestones, such as the participation of the organization in "*Transforming Our World: The 2013 Agenda for Sustainable Development*" by the United Nations General Assembly.<sup>218</sup> This dialogue includes advocating for access to land, gender empowerment housing solutions, urban economic development and reaches governmental support with efficient Housing National Policies. For El Salvador, one of the recent achievements in advocacy includes

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<sup>215</sup> Habitat for Humanity International, <http://www.habitat.org/cr>. Accessed on April 17, 2016.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Habitat for Humanity International, <http://www.habitat.org/advocate/publications-resources/statements/sustainable-development-goals-address-urbanization>. Accessed on April 17, 2016.

Habitat for Humanity's participation in the creation of the National Housing and Habitat Policy, along with the Vice-Ministry of Housing and Urban Development and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme.<sup>219</sup> The role of Habitat for Humanity includes its participation in a multi-organizational dialogue table to advise the government's future decisions related to housing. This achievement represents a significant influence of the non-profit organizations in domestic policymaking.

The diversification of Habitat for Humanity International services' aims to provide positive results to the fight against inadequate housing, with emphasis on topics as educations, health, and economic development of partner families.<sup>220</sup> However, the more non-denominational and broader Habitat for Humanity International's action becomes the organization's Christian identity declines. Baggett discusses that two of the biggest issues within the organization regarding its Christian identity are professionalism and commercialization.<sup>221</sup> Professionalism explains the technification of the organization, hiring professional and experienced elements to perform better and with more efficiency, regardless of their Christian values or commitment to the cause. Technification generates good results in the short term but without a genuine engagement and identification with the cause, it produces long-term issues such as high rotation and disconnection with the core values. Another problem is commercialization, which explains the influence of the market on Habitat for Humanity International. The organization might compromise its financial principles embedded in the Economics of Jesus, or disregard the Christian values at the core of organization to gain revenue, to be faster or compete with private builders. Some long-term volunteers and supporters felt this disconnection between

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<sup>219</sup> Habitat for Humanity El Salvador. 2015. "Memoria de Labores 2014." 10

<sup>220</sup> World Health Organization, <http://www.who.int/ceh/risks/cehousing/en/>. Accessed on April 17, 2016.

<sup>221</sup> Baggett, Jerome. 2000. *Habitat for Humanity: Building Private Homes, Building Public Religion*. 189.

implementation and ideology in 1986 when the organization allowed local and international affiliates to charge an inflation percentage in the mortgages repayments.<sup>222</sup> Habitat for Humanity International remained as a non-profit but the change in the repayment system aimed to protect the revolving fund for humanity from undercapitalization. Professionalism and commercialization represent struggling areas for Habitat for Humanity regarding its Christian identity and organizational productivity. Those concepts should not be exclusive but intertwine.

In the future, Habitat for Humanity faces the challenge of maintaining its Christian identity, while adapting to the necessities of the ever growing impoverished and marginalized populations, establishing connections with different publics. Eventually, the Theology of the Hammer might have to adjust from the actual construction of a house to a facilitator to adequate housing. According to Jonathan Reckford, Habitat for Humanity CEO's its time to raise voices not only hammers."<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid. 210.

<sup>223</sup> Reckford, Jonathan. 2009. "*How Far Will They Go Among So Many? A Lot of Work Ahead*" Addressed at the Biennial U.S. Affiliates Conference, Atlanta, Georgia, January 23, 2009.

## CHAPTER 4: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Liberation Theology and Theology of the Hammer have been present in El Salvador during different periods of time, influencing different context aspects of the Salvadoran's society development. However, both faith-based social movements embody values related to progressive Christianity and represent how religious ideologies can support the construction of democracy with an emphasis on human rights. The relevance of both theologies transcends the spiritual level with prominence in the social and political discussions, promoting participation and dialogue from all sectors of society.

The comparative analysis included in this chapter focuses on the differences and similarities that both Liberation Theology and Theology of the Hammer share, with emphasis on the socio-political influences that both faith-based movements have in El Salvador. The objective of this analysis is to increase the understanding of faith-based social movements as critical integrated components of individual and collective social development, beyond a theological approach. Liberation Theology and Theology of the Hammer represent two of many different initiatives that improve social practices in El Salvador and Latin America. Religion plays a critical role in every day's people experience in El Salvador.

Although Liberation Theology and Theology of the Hammer are two of other faith manifestations in the country, both have influenced almost 500,000 people around El Salvador. These movements represent one of the multiples polarization examples of

the Salvadoran society – Liberation Theology born in the Catholic Church while a Protestant denomination inspired the Theology of the Hammer. Nevertheless, the movements also represent the unification in differences that the third sector (neither private nor public) offers to build a cohesive and understanding society. In El Salvador, both theologies helped in the creation of spaces for democratic socio-political participation, and providing education to the general population about social justice through religious/ethical values. Liberation Theology and Theology of the Hammer represent an ideological component of education and social capital development missing in the repressive and violent governmental policies historically implemented in El Salvador, especially during the last twenty-seven years of “democratic” government.

Based on the history and development of Liberation Theology and Theology of the Hammer, both faith-based ideologies share similarities and differences in the theological, political, and social dimensions of the Salvadoran society. The theologies’ impact in El Salvador represents the relevance of social movements, and the repercussions of mass mobilization in the construction of a plural and just society, with an emphasis on human rights. Liberation Theology and Theology of the Hammer embrace values and actions oriented to the economic and political stabilization of the country, supporting transformational and peace building processes.

To understand the role of Liberation Theology and Theology of the Hammer in El Salvador it is important to understand the historical frame and political context in which both ideologies rose up. The former started influencing the Salvadoran Catholic Church starting in the 1960s under the leadership of Archbishop Chavez y Gonzalez when the religious institution aimed to reach the low-income part of the population with inclusion

and celebration in CEBs in conjunction with an increased presence of clergy. In the context of increasing governmental repression and people's discontent, the majority of the Catholic Church in El Salvador remained in the conservative spectrum while others engaged in a process of awareness and accompaniment with communities at social and physical risk. The figure of Archbishop Romero emerged in a decisive moment for clergy members and laypeople in the preface of the civil war, defining two types of engagement in the libertarian group of the Church: the intellectual contributors and democratic negotiators, and the radical supporters of guerrilla movements. Romero belonged to the first group developing a popular Theology that event today are a reference for the analysis of the civil war and subsequent building of peace. Both clusters experienced loss during the conflict in the country in the 1980s. Eventually, the political persecution of the Catholic Church by the military regime and extreme engagement of some clergy members had negative repercussions in the political implications of the Church and minimizing the devotees of Liberation Theology.

Theology of the Hammer arrived in El Salvador in the early 1990s, after the end of the civil war. Even without an official conflict going on, the physical and emotional reconstruction of the country and its population after twelve years of war represented a complicated context. The government had limited resources to support or create appropriate intuitions oriented to solve the multiple necessities of the impoverished population; therefore, non-profits supported specific needs with knowledge and financial resources. As part of this alternative to governmental aid, the slowly but steady evolution of Habitat for Humanity in El Salvador has required a substantial mobilization of resources from United States' religious and non-profit organizations, in addition to a



smaller but representative amount of partnerships along the country with companies, private schools, and churches, including delegates from the Catholic Church. Currently, response to solving the housing crisis in El Salvador<sup>224</sup> is insufficient compared to the demand. Therefore, organizations such as Habitat for Humanity provide limited housing solutions to low-income populations contributing to five percent of the total housing stock of the country.<sup>225</sup> According to this case, Theology of the Hammer and the Economics of Jesus still have a long way to go to provide directly or at least facilitate decent housing for the masses, even in a technically-peaceful environment.

The historical context behind Liberation Theology and Theology of the Hammer exemplified the changing moments in the construction of democracy in El Salvador, and the use of different political tools to influence the context. During the civil war, which David Ortiz called the pre-democracy period,<sup>226</sup> political representation was limited, therefore, low-income and working class sectors had limited spaces for participation in a dialogue with the military regime. Liberation Theology facilitated the development of leadership and collective activism, with particular focus on marginalized areas and the implementation of CEBs empowering impoverished sectors of society to become politically and socially active. This methodology challenged the traditional Marxist ideology conception of religion as the “*opiate of the masses*”, expressed by philosopher and economist Karl Marx. In this case, Liberation Theology became a catalyzer for the socio-political presence of the masses.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Sancho, Francisco, Luis Rivera and Julio Gonzalez. 2012. “*Housing Finance in Central America*.” 19.

<sup>225</sup> UN-HABITAT. 2013. *Perfil del Sector Vivienda de El Salvador*. 2.

<sup>226</sup> Ortiz, David. 2015. “State Repression and Mobilization in Latin America” in *Handbook of Social Movements Across Latin America*, ed. By Paul Almeida and Allen Cordero. 74.

<sup>227</sup> Stoll, David. 1990. *Is Latin America Turning Protestant? The Politics of Evangelical Growth*. University of California Press. 137.

Theology of the Hammer benefited from the post-democracy period when the civil war ended in the early 1990s. Habitat for Humanity El Salvador joined the housing reconstruction efforts and the promotion of land ownership after the Civil War, challenging the elite ownership of private property denounced by Romero more than a decade before. Habitat El Salvador, under the Theology of the Hammer ideology, became one of the leaders in innovative projects, using an educational component in financial literacy, self-construction, entrepreneurship, and leadership. Non-profits such as Habitat for Humanity became the third force after public and private sectors, functioning as facilitators of peace-building and community development. Non-profits also turned into lobby activists, advocating for causes that required governmental support, using a pro-democratic process beyond traditional rebellion. Secular activism provided opportunities to have made political statements beyond guerilla groups, oppressive regimes, or particular religious denominations. This was possible due to the improved governmental reaction to freedom of speech and space for political participation. Currently, NGOs can use democratic tools such as public demonstrations, unions and associations, multilateral and multi-organizational lobbying groups, and policies proposals from the civil society.

Along with the construction of democracy, the theologies also exemplify the development and transition of religion tendencies in El Salvador. Catholicism has represented the population's majority denomination, but numbers have changed quite dramatically in three decades.<sup>228</sup> During the Civil War, the renewed Catholic ideology became too radical for the right wing and conservatives parts of the Catholic population, urging some adherents to transition to Protestant evangelical churches, which were

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<sup>228</sup> In 1980, about 91% of the population were baptized as Roman Catholics in El Salvador. By 2013, only 54% of the population is Catholics. From Erwin Fahlbusch, *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, and IUDOP. *La Religión para las y los Salvadoreños*,

offering concrete resources and an individual approach to salvation. Most of the time the Protestant churches had connections to congregations in the United States and non-profit organizations (such as Habitat for Humanity), giving additional benefits to the converted communities. According to 2013 data, around half of the population of El Salvador still identifies as Catholics, however not all the self-defined believers are actively involved in the Church. Meanwhile, Protestant and Evangelical churches grow exponentially, offering solutions to social issues from a conservative perspective that includes prayer and a strong connection with their religious identity.

These connections with the United States also explain the different kinds of mobilization that both theologies promote. Both theologies foster social capital, but Liberation Theology aims for grassroots organizations, mostly from the lower income classes. Because of this specific interest, Liberation Theology found wide-open support from low-income communities in El Salvador. However, middle and upper class sectors found their ideology too radical, and the Vatican put pressure on a conservative approach. After Archbishop Rivera y Damas, who replaced Romero, the Vatican appointed an Opus Dei supporter, Saenz LaCalle, as the new Archbishop of San Salvador. Saenz LaCalle strengthened the Opus Dei groups and left unattended CEBs in the low-income urban and rural areas. In the case of Theology of the Hammer, it aims for the partner families' empowerment, but also develops social capital in volunteers and partners. Volunteerism comes mostly from middle-class people who aim to become involved in service opportunities beyond religious groups, and young people required to do community service as part of their academic formation. In the case of El Salvador, for many years the majority of Volunteers from Habitat for Humanity came from the United States,

representing Protestant churches with global missions. Currently, over 2,000 Salvadorans support the mission of Habitat for Humanity as volunteers,<sup>229</sup> representing a positive influence in the development of solidarity.

The emphasis of Liberation Theology in grassroots groups explains, in part, the success of its ideology in the northeastern part of the country, in the departments of Chalatenango, Morazán, Usulután and San Miguel. Those areas suffered the biggest impact of the civil war from 1980 to 1992, with multiple ousting or *guindas*, collective massacres performed by the army, guerrilla recruitment, and support of insurgent groups. Some communities are still influenced by the teachings from the 1980s liberal clergy members and believe in the liberation message of the Gospel. The amount of people that followed Liberation Theology in El Salvador has not been confirmed due to internal and international displacement, massacres, and persecution, but the estimated average oscillates between 250,000 to 300,000 people, with a strong representation in the northeastern area in El Salvador<sup>230</sup>. With more than ninety percent of the population being Catholics, the audience for Liberation Theology was close to four million people, but only some sectors became involved. Liberation Theology had a broad influence spectrum, highly controversial because of the opposition to the status quo, but with a top to bottom system that ensured at least knowledge about the ideology for ninety percent of the population, because of their Catholic affiliation. However, because the Theology of the Hammer does not belong to a particular religious denomination, a smaller percentage of the population knows about its ideology and goals. A permanent challenge of the Theology of the Hammer is to reach more and more people, generally using a bottom-up

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<sup>229</sup> Habitat for Humanity El Salvador. 2015. "Memoria de Labores 2014." 8.

<sup>230</sup> Montgomery, Tommie Sue. 1983. "Liberation and Revolution." In *Trouble in Our Backyard, Central America and the United States in the Eighties*. 82.

approach (taking into consideration the ideology coming from non-official or non-governmental institutions). Also, the main area of influence for the Theology of the Hammer is the western part of the country, in Santa Ana and Ahuachapán. These departments have the largest amount of homes built, in individual and collective projects, and are also the location for the first twenty-nine homes completed in 1992. Both theologies have limited presence in the rest of the country with services and connections for impoverished communities, but the focalization of impact is remarkably different, almost resembling a complementary effort.

Even if the geographical expansion of Liberation Theology and Theology of the Hammer differ, the social justice oriented content established in the core of the ideologies is concurrent. Both theologies challenge traditional theological conceptions, adapting them to the specific context of El Salvador. Liberation Theology, even if influenced by the Vatican, represented a Latin American portrayal of the constant, systematic repression of impoverished populations offering a Liberation experience though one of the most important pillars of Latin identity: religion. The transformation of the Catholic Church in Latin America, and in El Salvador, ensured the comprehension of a Messiah that lives and understands the sometimes cruel and painful reality of the people. The previously imported European schools of thought could not grasp the cultural component of Latin-American *mestizo* religious identity, a concept developed by Gustavo Gutierrez, and made Salvadoran in the populist sermons and homilies of Archbishop Romero and the intellectual contribution of the Jesuit martyrs.

Theology of the Hammer emerged in Americus, Georgia in the 1970s. The influence of the Baptist Pastor Clarence Jordan and the Cotton Patch Gospel put in

evidence the necessity of overcoming the segregation of the South in The United States and address more pertinent issues such as decent housing. Jordan's influence in the Theology of the Hammer encourages a practice of equality and universality, treating everybody as worthy children of God with concrete actions. The Theology of the Hammer, and especially its application to El Salvador, empowers partner families with home repayments, transforming them from powerless recipients of help to active protagonists of their emergence as partners. Both theologies challenged the conservative conception of the Gospel, and renovate the understanding of individual commitment and social participation, as they have done in El Salvador.

From a theological perspective, the reasons behind poverty are explained and addressed differently by Liberation Theology and Theology of the Hammer. Liberation Theology, using Marxist tools, explains the immediate context as the result of a repressive and isolative system promoted by Capitalism. Liberation Theology believes that to overcome poverty and exclusion it is important to *desideologizar* (understood as the process of deconstruct a point of view or ideology to build a new one based on education and awareness) and promote a new understanding of the Gospel that calls for a human approach to coexistence and development. In this case, God's will relies on the teachings of the Gospel and the acknowledgement of the inherent dignity of all God's children. On the other hand, Theology of the Hammer does not question the system, but instead provides practical solutions to poverty with a particular task: the construction of homes. For this theology, God's will explains itself in an active response to poverty and in the redistribution of resources around the globe to solve everybody's needs. The understanding of God's will differs in Liberation Theology and the Theology of the

Hammer, but if put together, they complement each other with a critical analysis of reality and tangible solutions to real problems.

Despite their different approaches, both theologies have addresses the questions of poverty as a social justice issue at the center of their agendas. Both ideologies vigorously supported action and community involvement as a precedent to verbal proclamation. In the case of El Salvador, this can be inferred by the relatively small amount of local intellectual production regarding Liberation Theology's legacy in the theological level and the limited scholarship analyzing the impact of one of the largest non-profits in the country such as Habitat for Humanity. As both theologies rely on an international structure, foreign scholars have discussed the ideologies impact more than local intellectuals.

Also, Liberation Theology and Theology of the Hammer had an influence in the poverty reduction indexes in El Salvador. When the civil war started in 1980, 68.1% of the Salvadoran population<sup>231</sup> was living in poverty (with less than \$2.00 per day). By 1992, after twelve years of armed conflict, the number reduced to 60%, and in 2014, the percentage of the population living in poverty is now 31.8%.<sup>232</sup> Even if the proportion of the population living in poverty reduced in the last two decades, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grown slowly. During the 1980s decade, the GDP increased an average of 0.5 per year. By 1992, GDP grew to 1.94, fluctuating during the 1990s and 2000s, to an actual growth of 1.55 in 2015.<sup>233</sup> Besides the general economic growth of the country, other indicators improved significantly between 1980 (the beginning of the civil war) and 2014. According to the UNPD, life expectancy at birth increased from 56.4 in 1980 to

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<sup>231</sup> Goodwin, Jeffrey. 2011. *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945-1991*. 151.

<sup>232</sup> Bell, Olivia. 2013. *Poverty and Gender Inequality in Post-War El Salvador*. 32.

<sup>233</sup> World Bank, *Operationalizing Pro-Poor Growth, The Case of El Salvador*. 9.

73.00 in 2014. Also, the mean of education years increased from 3.0 (1980) to 6.5 (2014), and the Gross National Income (GNI) grown in a 45%, from US\$5,069.00 in 1980 to US\$7,349.00 in 2014.<sup>234</sup> Regarding poverty housing, by the end of the civil war, about 48% of the population lived in substandard housing.<sup>235</sup> By 2009, (date of the last population and housing census), the housing deficit included 33% of the population, with 4% of quantitative deficit and 29% with qualitative deficit. Out of a housing stock of 1.58 million units, 6% of the homes were built by non-profits such as Habitat for Humanity, and 22% by the private construction sector.<sup>236</sup>

On other issues, the estimated of Salvadoran migrating daily to the United States is of 276, adding to the close to 2.5 million Salvadorans living in the country, 94% of the diaspora.<sup>237</sup> This daily influx of people represents 16.3% of the GDP in remittances received by 21.5% of the population.<sup>238</sup> Remittances, governmental policies, and the intervention of non-governmental institutions have reduced general poverty in El Salvador in one-third, almost twenty-five years after the end of the civil war.

Qualitative indicators of the poverty reduction in El Salvador since the end of the civil war show an overall increase in access to services in households (electricity, sewer services, and running water), reduction in newborn mortality rates, and improvement in national education coverage. However, the population growth steadily decreased in the decade following the Civil War.<sup>239</sup> Liberation Theology influenced the processes that ignited and ended the Civil War period, becoming part responsible for the results of it.

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<sup>234</sup> UNDP. 2015. Human Development Report 2015. 3.

<sup>235</sup> World Bank. 1994. El Salvador, The Challenge of Poverty Alleviation. 10.

<sup>236</sup> ONU-HABITAT, 2013. Perfil del Sector Vivienda El Salvador. 18.

<sup>237</sup> UNDP. 2013. Human Development Report 2013. 12.

<sup>238</sup> World Bank, Operationalizing Pro-Poor Growth, The Case of El Salvador. 8.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid. 9.



Meanwhile, Theology of the Hammer supported the reduction of poverty housing in five percent, along other non-profits related to the housing issue.

Liberation Theology and Theology of the Hammer shared individual and collective values, both looked to promote collective action to address needs within low-income communities. Also, both encouraged the participation of the people, regardless of gender, or economic status, highlighting the dignity of all human beings as children of God. Liberation Theology and Theology of the Hammer also promote an active manifestation of faith that transcends the traditional religious symbols, as it has happened in El Salvador with CEBs and volunteer groups. Both theologies call their believers to practice their faith in their everyday actions outside of the walls of a temple, accompanying church, understood as the body of Christ, sharing sometimes-difficult circumstances. Shared lives, especially in the accompaniment of impoverished communities, promote cultural and social knowledge regarding issues related to the defense of human rights in topics such as gender equality, housing, and poverty reduction. Both ideologies believe that individual awareness is the first step to understanding what every person can do to become part of a changing society that demands a positive change for those living in poverty.

In addition to values, the theologies also shared the particular interest for marginalized populations understanding poverty as an urgent issue that requires the collaboration of all societal sectors. Liberation Theology had a clear goal to turn the Catholic Church into the Church of the poor, offering a multidimensional explanation of poverty, which addressed people's political exclusion, the lack of economic resources, and the need for education about the systemic structures that promoted marginalization.

Theology of the Hammer uses housing as a holistic concept including infrastructure, access to basic services, health and education, and a safe environment. Nevertheless, one can argue that, due to the mortgage repayments that partner families engage in after the completion of their homes, Habitat for Humanity, and therefore the Theology of the Hammer does not work with families in extreme poverty,<sup>240</sup> but the majority of families that lack adequate housing represent low economic levels (relative poverty) segregated from funding opportunities to improve their conditions. For both theologies, poverty transcends a philosophical and ethereal conception, becoming a social construct that requires a physical and practical response. In El Salvador, the understanding of poverty reflects the segregated communities that Liberation Theology and Theology of the Hammer engage with, having development and empowerment as goals.

Both theologies have a larger understanding of poverty that goes beyond the biblical scriptures and addresses the social implications of it in people's daily lives. Liberation Theology promotes evangelization and the internalization of the scriptures by transforming challenging inequality. Evangelization then is a goal itself part of the theology, as the confirmation of faith in Jesus means growing fond of the social implications of those teachings. Theology of the Hammer does not include evangelization as a goal itself, but as the path to serve those in need of decent housing. This theology does not engage in active evangelization beyond devotionals and public acceptance of a Christian identity, but it believes that the knowledge and active nature of the Gospel's teachings mobilize Salvadoran volunteers and partners to support the cause. For

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<sup>240</sup> For the United Nations, extreme or absolute poverty is defined as average daily consumption of \$1.88 or less per household, a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. It depends not only on income but also on access to services. From <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/conf166/aconf166-9.htm>. Accessed on April 17, 2016.

Theology of the Hammer, evangelization explains the means, not the end. Regardless of the application of the Gospel teachings, a manifestation of faith immersed in reality and justice mobilized hearts and minds, liberates instead of repressing.

Liberation Theology and Theology of the Hammer promoted coincidental values in El Salvador but with particular actions, such as community mobilization, education, and political participation. Under Archbishop Romero, the Salvadoran Archbishopric had several social programs that aimed to support spiritual, physical, and emotional needs of the impoverished communities. Unfortunately, conservative members of the clergy with leadership roles diminished the work of those programs after Romero. Liberation Theology's most significant influence in the shape of social programs remains in the Universidad Centroamericana Jose Simeón Cañas (UCA), with a broad social service program, and the multiple professional institutions within the University that provide intellectual support to the defense of Human Rights, such as the Instituto Universitario de Opinion Publica (IUDOP) and the Instituto de Derechos Humanos (IDHUCA). These offices promote transparency, democracy, and popular participation related to governmental and private initiatives, from an objective perspective. For Theology of the Hammer, the programs shared by Habitat for Humanity El Salvador include in-situ home construction, collective projects, home improvements, financial literacy, and community development. The original initiatives by the Salvadoran branch acknowledged the relevance of empowering beyond a physical structure of a house, with educational components that guarantee an improved lifestyle for low-income families. Even if the Theology of the Hammer programs has a more practical approach compared to the democracy construction from the institutions influenced by Liberation Theology, both

appreciations come together with an agreement between the UCA and Habitat for Humanity El Salvador, that commits students from the educational intuition to contribute with physical labor and intellectual research to the cause of decent housing in the country. This is another example of the relevance of praxis over theological production.

Faith-based movements actively promote the development of multidisciplinary work in social sciences, with emphasis on practical components beyond theological reflections, as an end in itself. The objective behind involving other disciplines is to explain reality and formulate actions oriented to transform unjust structures for the general benefit. Awareness and advocacy values shared by Liberation Theology and Theology of the Hammer, among other movements, promote inter-disciplinary research and joint activities to alleviate different needs, increasing the relevance from a quasi-limited theological discussion to a relevant voice in social science.

The broader impact of Liberation Theology and Theology of the Hammer outside of the religious field highlight the shared value of universality. The influence of the theologies should not be limited to the religious sphere but also serve as a different analytical viewpoint for the transformation of the Salvadoran individual identity and general context. The universality of a faith-based social message relies on the capacity to relate to the general population, regardless of differences

Lastly, Liberation Theology has influenced the perception of the Theology of the Hammer in El Salvador. In 2010, 30 years after the assassination of Archbishop Romero, Habitat for Humanity celebrated the construction of 30 homes in one of the most impoverished areas of the country. During Lent, local and international volunteers celebrated the legacy of social justice and equality preached by Romero, including

participation at the Cathedral's global celebration, on March 24th. Habitat's participation represents the Salvadoran identity of the Theology of the Hammer, embracing values of Liberation Theology in real practice. However, the activities implemented by Habitat for Humanity might seem conservative and aim to palliate isolated results of poverty instead of aiming for the structural causes behind it. Also, the advocate role of Habitat for Humanity El Salvador as part of the National Housing and Habitat Policy reinforces its commitment to the democratic improvement of living conditions of the Salvadoran society in general, and low-income communities in particular.

In El Salvador, these two faith-based social movements represent the relevance of religion as a pivotal role in the development of El Salvador. Religion has always been political, either supporting radical changes or the permanence of the status quo. Faith-based movements represent a powerful and relevant political influence, from progressive and popular representations to conservative but democratic actions. Also, Liberation Theology and Theology of the Hammer provide a wider context for people from all economic levels to engage in socio-political change. The theologies provide transcendent motivation, organized resources, and opportunity to become part of a shared identity in collective actions.

Now, the challenge lies in the active role of faith-based movements in the current context of El Salvador, including widespread poverty and increasing violence. How can faith-based movements influence in a positive way the quasi-failed state of El Salvador? Beyond the unsuccessful truce and limited reach, how can the legacy of Liberation Theology and Theology of the Hammer support the construction of healthier social fabric? El Salvador's quest to answer those questions has yet to be completed.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

Liberation Theology and Theology of the Hammer represent a few of the multiple manifestations of faith that influence the development of El Salvador. The intellectual and theological contributions of both faith-based social movements transcend the moral and spiritual level to social and political topics. However, it is the identification with Gospel-based values and principles what contributes to the positive influence of society. Faith-based social movements generate constructive contributions that can be interpreted from a global perspective, not limiting its influence to particular denominations but embracing an ecumenical message of social justice and dignity.

Both theologies share a few core ideological constructs and therefore, similar aspects of their communitarian approach. Liberation Theology and Theology of the Hammer recognize the scripture teachings and its internalization as an instrument to promote change, and simultaneously use political tools inspired by social sciences to foster social justice. To achieve this goal, both theologies rely on human, financial, and intellectual mobilization with an ecumenical perspective that does not require a particular affiliation to be part of the movement, but to share a sense of commitment to the transformation of the immediate context, with emphasis in marginalized populations. All the activities implemented by both theologies showcase the fundamental priority of actions before verbal proclamations, as the urgent necessities of impoverished populations should be addressed promptly and the intellectual production depends on the

*praxis*. Shared values such as partnership, equality, awareness, and advocacy play a fundamental role in the development of the ideologies behind Liberation Theology and Theology of the Hammer, promoting unification and engagement of diverse individuals and groups, highlighting its similarities instead of the differences. Lastly, Liberation Theology and Theology of the Hammer support active social participation, transforming the traditional theological approach of religion to a wider influence of social sciences and humanities, to understand processes related to human rights and peacebuilding under faith-based values.

Nevertheless, is also important to acknowledge the differences between Liberation Theology and Theology of the Hammer. The theologies have different starting points, geographically and ideologically speaking, one in Latin America within the Catholic Church, and the other one in the United States under a Southern Baptist influence. Also, their peak of influence in the Salvadoran history responses to different moments as Liberation Theology was prominent before and during the civil war, while Theology of the Hammer arrived in El Salvador until the post-war period. These various historical periods determined specific circumstances related to the democratic atmosphere and governmental influence tools used by the movements. During the civil war, Liberation Theology promoted core groups of political and social influence, with revolutionary potential, in an environment with little democratic institutions; meanwhile the Theology of the Hammer benefited from the post-democratic time, with democratic participation platforms and an improved freedom of speech to denounce and support different causes, such as in the case of decent housing for this theology.

The different historical periods represent diverse trends regarding Salvadoran population's religious denominations. Liberation Theology emerged in a mostly Catholic society while the Theology of the Hammer arrived along Protestant and Evangelical churches that now include over thirty-five percent of Salvadorans. Regardless of the denomination, both theologies share core values shared with different parts of the population. Liberation Theology works mostly with grassroots and low-income communities to develop an empowering social and political conscience. Because of this emphasis, there are limited perceived opportunities for the involvement from middle and upper Salvadoran classes. The Theology of the Hammer relies on middle and upper classes in volunteerism and partnerships, leaving low-income populations in a quasi-limited role as partner families. The discrepant strategies to reach and work with the Salvadoran population also created opposed but almost complementally geographical areas of influence for both theologies. Liberation Theology had a wider impact in the northeastern part of the country, in two of the three most impoverished departments of the country (Chalatenango, Cabañas, and Morazán) and other scattered areas affected by the Civil War. On the other hand, Theology of the Hammer has more influence in the Western part of the country (Santa Ana and Ahuachapán) with limited presence across the country due to the in-progress promotion of Habitat for Humanity in El Salvador.

Also, both movements have different theological conceptions of poverty. Liberation Theology uses Marxist ideological tools to understand society, conceiving poverty as the result of systemic structures that need to be deconstructed and rebuilt based on education about equality and justice. Nevertheless, Theology of the Hammer looks beyond the causes of poverty proposing concrete solutions related to guarantee the



human right to housing. Regardless, the commitment of Liberation Theology and Theology of the Hammer to low-income communities influences poverty levels in the country, highlighting the practical results of faith-based movements.

In El Salvador, the influence of Liberation Theology is tangible in the work of Theology of the Hammer. Habitat for Humanity has embraced the Salvadoran manifestation of Liberation Theology in the celebration of Archbishop Romero's legacy on the thirtieth anniversary of his martyrdom. Also, institutions influenced by Liberation Theology have cooperation agreements with Habitat for Humanity El Salvador, supporting the implementation and planning of programs aimed to improve the quality of life of the low-income population, inside and outside the construction sites. Liberation Theology finds a concrete way to continue its gift to the Salvadoran population now in the shape of decent housing, with the Theology of the Hammer.

The reflections and analyses presented in this research are just a small contribution to the broad scholarship around Liberation Theology in El Salvador, but represent an innovative approach to the limited academic production related to Theology of the Hammer. Nevertheless, there are still many questions in need of answers regarding the influence of these faith-based social movements, and the general transcendence of theology in social sciences. In the case of El Salvador, the contribution of faith-based social movements could benefit the current situation of increasing violence and a weakened political class, however, the implementation, methodologies, and theoretical approaches to achieve it, might be part of a further and more elaborate research.

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