

Practical Theology and Decoloniality in Brazil: reflections on a method in process

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If we understand practical theology in Latin America to be the theoretical reflection of religious praxis from the paradigm of decoloniality, what would its method be? Practical theology's method in Latin America has been in close dialogue with liberation theology and its *see-judge-act* method. This means that doing practical theology in this context has always been strongly related to the practice of exclusion and socio-political vulnerability. All theology was seen as a second action, since practice and life, in the context of the poor, was the *locus theologicus par excellence*. What does this mean from a decolonial perspective? From a decolonial perspective, would the *see-judge-method* be the most appropriate? To what extent would the perception of reality be influenced by this paradigm? To what extent would judging from scripture and theological tradition be a way of reinforcing a certain form of coloniality? Likewise, to what extent would action, as religious practice (the ministry of religious forms in the context of culture and society) express decoloniality? On the other hand, Latin America has contributed on an international scale, to research practices in human and social sciences, such as Participatory Research (Carlos Rodrigues Brandão and Paulo Freire) and Participatory Action Research (Orlando Fals Borda). This paper therefore problematizes the question: which method would best serve practical theology in Latin America from a decolonial perspective?

Introduction

In the book *Teologia Prática no Contexto da América Latina*, practical theology is understood as the theoretical reflection of religious praxis (Hoch 2011, 32). Considering this definition, what would practical theology from a decolonial perspective look like, especially if one asks about its method? Reflection on the method of practical theology in Latin America over the last decades has been in close dialogue with liberation theology and its *see-judge-act* method.¹ Practical theology done from a Latin American *liberationist* perspective has challenged practices of exclusion and named issues of socio-political vul-

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1 The *see-judge-act* method of Cardinal Joseph Cardijn, incorporated in 1960 by Pope John XXIII in *Mater et Magistra*, was consecrated as a path to follow by Latin American churches (IHU 2012).

nerability. Theology was seen as the *second step* (Gutiérrez 1979, 24) since practice and life, especially in the context of the poor, was the *locus theologicus par excellence*.

Discussions about decoloniality and practical theology take us to the following question: What does this mean from a decolonial perspective? From a decolonial perspective, would liberation theology's *see-judge-act* method be the most appropriate? To what extent would seeing the reality be influenced by this paradigm? To what extent would judging from scripture and theological tradition be a way of reinforcing a certain coloniality? Likewise, to what extent can action, religious practice, the ministry of religious forms in the context of culture and society, express decoloniality?

The question about the need to decolonize practical theology or theology also points to its methodology. Can liberation theology, often criticized for being a concept of modernity, help us to support the search for a method in practical theology towards a decolonial understanding? How can a decolonial practical theology strengthen the task of finding new democratic dynamics that promote dialogue with and between the diversity of cultures, whilst decolonizing power, knowledge and being.

In the search for methods that helped to influence practices and also research methodologies in theological practices and education that originated in the liberation movement and in the beginnings of the decolonial discussion, two concepts should be considered: Participatory Action Research and Popular Education. This paper therefore poses the question: which method will serve practical theology in Latin America from a decolonial perspective and how is it possible to revisit methods already being used, and articulate them in the decolonial understanding. There is an urgent need for leadership in education, for insertion in small communities as well as in academic reflections and research integrating practical theology into the public sphere, a so-called public theology.

It is important to emphasize that this approach to method and decoloniality in practical theology will be made from the Brazilian context, especially in a Protestant context, of which the authors are part. At the same time, it intends to look at the broader context, both geographic and confessional, something that, despite the great differences in reality, characterizes research in this context (Susin 2012; Estermann 2012).²

In the first part, two methodologies that come out of the liberation movement and are at the source of the decolonial movement will be briefly presented. In the second part we will focus on the methods used in practical theology, analyzing them from the perspective of decoloniality. In the last part, conclusions will be drawn to analyze aspects of a method from a decolonizing perspective that can be used for practical theology.

Revisiting the origins of a proposal of decolonial methodology in Latin America

The 1950s and 60s were marked by a variety of social movements in the world, such as Woodstock, the civil rights movements and the Prague Spring. Likewise, in Brazil and in Latin America many groups were organizing and there was an effervescence of calling for social justice. Among these progressive political leaders, we also find a cry for justice in the churches, especially in the Catholic Church. This movement generated a strong theological reflection with a focus on practice and was called Liberation Theology. Latin American theologians like Leonardo Boff, Ivone Gebara, Paulo Evaristo Arns, Gustavo Gutiérrez, Helder Câmara, Hugo Assmann and many others from the Catholic Church; Richard Shaull, Ruben Alves, José Miguez Bonino, Marcella Althaus-Reid and others from the Protestant Churches made a significant contribution in terms of reflection and publication, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. In the field of Popular Education, we have Paulo Freire and Carlos Rodrigues Brandão in Brazil and Orlando Fals Borda in Colombia.

The methodologies of popular education and participatory action research (PAR) have been widely used in the social sciences, among which we include theology, especially practical and pastoral theology developed in connection with popular education and PAR, often in the contexts of social movements. It is important to mention that Helder Câmara, since the beginnings of the *base communities* in Recife, used Freire's concept of conscientization associated with the method of *see-act-judge* (Condini 2014). It was a time of social struggles and resistance throughout the world, but in particular in

2 Liberation theology in Latin America had an ecumenical character among Christian churches from its beginnings, while the decolonial movements goes further in-

cluding larger cultural/religious movements in the continent, as for example the Andean theology.



the Global South, in search of transformation and social inclusion.

Paulo Freire is the most widely known and cited Brazilian educator. His best known work is *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). Influenced by Franz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (Fanon 2008), Freire understands that the oppressed incorporates the oppressor in his thinking and in their conception of the world. "The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete existential situation by which they were shaped" (Freire 1972, 30). Paulo Freire understood that it is through liberating education that it is possible to construct an alternative way of thinking. He denounced social exclusion, and worked with popular classes in mobilizing, organizing and empowering them for social inclusion. His work provides the basis for popular education that became a strong pedagogical movement in Latin America.

For him, the whole pedagogical process is intimately connected with culture and history, and thus represents a rupture from colonial pedagogies that were deeply rooted in the Latin American continent. It can be said that Freire breaks with the old model of education where the educator was always right and gives the student a voice. This means that the learner is seen as the subject of his story and not as an object. The valuation of popular wisdom is another mark of this pedagogical conception and offers the possibility for the construction of ancestral worldviews from the histories of the subjects' ancestors. Eurocentrism is questioned, as remembered by Dussel's criticism that in Latin America, history and the episteme were concealed by the Europeans (Dussel 1998). As a result, popular cultures are empowered and the culture of popular groups is valued. In this way, Freire understands that people begin to mobilize for citizen participation by restoring their subjectivity and questioning the coloniality of power.

Paulo Freire repeatedly denounced "banking" education, the culture of silence, cultural invasion, violence, the patriarchy, racism, the exploitation of poor and developing countries by rich countries of the Global North. He argued that scientific dependence on developed countries renders the people of underdeveloped countries impotent in their capacity to build knowledge (Freire 1972).

It can be said that the beginning of popular education and of social movements linked to the academic world took place in the 60s, germinating a Latin American thought that opposes Eurocentrism

and coloniality. Paulo Freire did not use the term decolonial but is considered one of the movement's precursors (Mota Neto 2016, 119). He developed his theory and praxis among theologians, politicians, workers, artists who were articulating the ideas and experiences of resistance against dictatorships and repression, across the Latin American continent.

Paulo Freire's methodological approach was developed and spread across the continent as an expression of hope for a better world. According to Streck it is becoming a "pedagogy in movement, not only because being dynamic it does not allow itself to be fitted into narrow schemes, but also because it is umbilically linked to popular social movements, increasingly becoming an indigenous pedagogy, a feminist pedagogy, a black pedagogy, a pedagogy of the landless and homeless" (Streck 2013, 361). Theology too, from the 70s onwards, has been greatly influenced by Paulo Freire and his method of popular education. His Pedagogy of Conscientization through generative words and generative themes was also adopted by grassroots communities and, according to Susin "it is a method in which one not only learns to take the word, but that by taking the word it implies becoming a subject and a social actor" (Susin 2012, 201).

Oppression and liberation are key concepts in Freire's theological and religious understanding and praxis. Enrique Dussel, Leonardo Boff, Ruben Alves, Juan Luis Segundo and other theologians have analyzed Freire's concepts and have integrated them into their reflections. Freire's work as consultant for education at the Word Council of Churches had certainly influenced the development of his theological perspective, as well as having influenced the development of his theological perspective and the acceptance of his ideas in theological circles.

Orlando Fals Borda worked with Richard Shaull as well as Camilo Torres³, in Colombia, who together introduced him to liberation theology. He studied Sociology in Bogotá and in the United States and dedicated himself to working and researching with

3 It should be mentioned that Fals Borda was influenced theologically and ethically by the ideas of John Mackay's Spanish Christ, Camilo Torres with the "efficacious love" and Richard Shaull's liberation theology. It was a time of convergence of Protestant and Catholic theologians as well as a convergence of theology and social sciences with the understanding that Christian life signified solidarity with the oppressed and the need to change unjust situations.

popular classes as a professor of sociology. He recognized the importance of popular culture, the feelings behind actions and how everything is connected to people's daily lives⁴. He understood the vastly different experiences of different groups, and the importance of dialogue in order to learn about their experiences. He understood that a university must participate, and not hold itself separate from these experiences and the knowledge of the local population. He advocated for the overcoming of Eurocentrism and said that education in universities must be in terms of everyday life, bringing together academic disciplines as well as non-academic knowledge and ways of knowing (Fals Borda, 2009).

In a similar way to Paulo Freire, Fals Borda used PAR (Investigación Acción Participativa – IAP) to produce knowledge with and for marginalized communities. He helped organize and foster social movements. For him, PAR is a political pedagogical project, not simply a method for investigation. It is a strategy of knowledge production that educates the popular classes towards a more just and solidary society (Fals Borda 2010, 205).

In the text *El problema de la autonomia cultural in Colombia*, Fals Borda says that the following paths to overcoming colonialism should be taken into account:

- The creation of a science of its own on the scale of the people and at their service, reducing the adoption of a sophisticated science of consumption, designed for the privileged classes;
- The creation of an interdisciplinary science starting with the incubation of research projects and using interdisciplinary techniques; the formation of scientific and cultural reference groups in Colombia and Latin America;
- The development of a science that reveals existing mechanisms of exploitation and domination, nationally and internationally, as well as contradictions inherent in our current economic and social system;

The formation of an intellectual committed to the revolutionary autonomist effort, to produce science and culture as a natural emanation of his social conscience and not as a simple wage earner (Fals Borda 2010, 132).

4 Fals Borda's commitment to social problems comes from the influence of his friend Camilo Torres. Camilo Torres and Gustavo Gutiérrez studied together in Louvain. Both influenced Fals Borda with their ideological convictions and social praxis alongside local people, and a commitment to working with people who are excluded became very important to him.

Fals Borda considered Paulo Freire a predecessor of this method and indeed, both point out ways for subaltern groups to reflect on their situation and find ways to escape the situation of coloniality. Today, both are considered references to a decolonial pedagogy, identifying ways for marginalized groups to be empowered and to reflect on their situation of oppression.

According to Catherine Walsh, Fanon, Freire, and Fals Borda are key pedagogues in this search for an epistemological policy (Walsh 2013, 62). In this framework, the social educator moves forward with the oppressed, together, as an actor of resistance, facing adverse situations via a critical reading of the world.

Looking to theology, especially practical theology, we understand that the method proposed by Freire and Fals Borda helps, as an "instance of the interrelationships within and among the different components of educational or theological activity: the social structure, the actors, the aims, the contents, the strategies" (Preiswerk 1995, 283). Indeed, "In the field of theology, the question of method is a profoundly pedagogical question: how to learn is not an instrumental question, since the object of theology escapes apprehension, empirical verification and manipulation; how to learn God, how to learn faith is not, in the first place, a question of Christian education or catechesis, but of fundamental theology" (Preiswerk 1995, 283).

The method of Practical Theology in question.

Paulo Freire and Fals Borda's reflections on decolonial methods in education, theology and practical theology are fundamental. Even though the authors did not develop their propositions specifically for practical theology, their investigations focus on the liberating and transformative practices of education and sociology in this context. For this reason, they are of vital importance for our question regarding a decolonial method in practical theology in the Latin American and Brazilian context. These assumptions will be summarized at the end of this study.

Not much has been written about a method in practical theology in Brazil and Latin America. In this study, we are considering two specific texts on method: the text by Lothar Hoch, "Reflections on the Method of Practical Theology" (Hoch 1998, 63ff), but focused on the Brazilian Protestant sphere,



and the much more recent text by Olvani Sánchez and Alex Vigueras, “La cuestión del metodo en Teología Práctica” (Sánchez and Vigueras 2019, 155ff), which is more focused on the Catholic context of the Grupo de Santiago.

A certain method is also required to reflect on these selfsame methods used by practical theology (Hoch 1998; Sánchez and Vigueras 2019) and to analyze the methods from the paradigm of decoloniality) A necessary first step is to understand the context of the church, theology and practical theology from which we speak, and then to think about the role of the method used in practical theology. In other words, Latin American theological work is marked by understanding reality as the first methodological step.

As a first approach to understanding the theological and ecclesial context, we can say that the church is marked by practice and action, as discussed above. From the beginning of the mid-twentieth century, we witness a rather pragmatic church and theology: from popular Catholicism influenced by the Vatican II, through to the social advances of historical Protestantism, all the way to Pentecostalism, the churches and their theologies, which are concerned with accounting for its context and communicating with its people. Practices and pastoral work are developed as a way of dealing with social demands, human and relational crises, spiritual effervescence or resistance against abuses of power. This practical emphasis of the church is essential to theology, especially practical theology, and its method. On the other hand, this concern with the context leads to certain tendency to reduce practical theology only to practices, to pastoral work, to ministry techniques (Libânio 1998).

In theology, the methods and methodologies adopted were often a set of techniques used in practical work, ministry and social service of the church than they were a critical and theological reflection on practice. It should be mentioned that sometimes practical theology has allowed itself to be understood as the area and discipline responsible for accounting for pastoral practices, and that alone. Human and social demands, vulnerabilities and political and economic atrocities often required immediate action. At other times, neither pastoral practice nor reflection were concerned with method but were merely satisfied to adapt their methodologies while developing the work, improvising and justifying their way of doing theology as something only linked to that particular situation. The line of

the Spanish poet Antonio Machado, “Caminante no hay camino, el camino se hace al andar” [Walker there is no path, the path is made while walking] is an apt illustration of the way in which practical theology has its own practical way-of-doing (Preiswerk 1995, 291). All this points to the importance of reflecting on the method of practical theology.

A major text concerning the method is that written by Lothar Hoch at the end of the 90s, arguing for the importance of a method for practical theology as a way to counteract its spontaneity and to ensure research and theoretical reflection in the field. In this chapter, the author reinforces the definition of practical theology as the hermeneutic of Christian practice whose double objective is to examine the practice of the Church and the lived reality of faith, thus promoting communication between Christian tradition, the Church and the world, as we saw earlier (Hoch 1998, 63).

In his text, Hoch discusses the difficulties in the conception of a method for practical theology, due to difficulties in the definition of practical theology; limitations in the reflection on the relationship between practical theology and other theological disciplines; the importance of the distinction between practical theology and pastoral work; and the distinction between the methods of the other sciences and the specificity of the methods of practical theology. This has been another trend of the method of practical theology: to adopt methods from other sciences, especially those of sociology.

Regarding the relationship with pastoral work, one question that Hoch addresses is whether we can follow Floristan’s proposition⁵ to use the method of pastoral practices in liberation theology, the *see-judge-act* method (Catholic Action) as an “inductive” method of practical theology. According to Hoch, this method leads to a certain narrowing of liberation theology itself, restricting it to its political dimension and not contemplating religious and cultural experience more broadly (Hoch 1998, 66). It would be even more complicated to adopt this method for practical theology, since it is, as an academic discipline, the *theory* of Christian praxis and not just Christian praxis itself.

5 As a critical reflection on the practice and the experience of faith in the Church and in society, practical theology re-emphasizes the importance of reflecting on its method, both for theological reflection and for concrete practice.

On the specificity of the method in practical theology, Hoch suggests that there are at least two methodological perspectives: one that is more general regarding theory and practice, which ensures the proper identity of practical theology in relation to other disciplines, but also a more particular perspective that has to do with the different subdisciplines of practical theology. Hoch suggests that there are at least two methodological axes in practical theology, one of a more general nature that relates theory and practice, which guarantees the proper identity of practical theology vis-à-vis other disciplines, and another of a more particular nature that has to do with the different subdisciplines of practical theology. The author draws attention to the effectiveness of the methods adopted by other sciences, which can allow us to perceive the practice of faith and reality. In short, he states that “the method of practical theology serves the operationalization of theology insofar as it promotes interdisciplinary transit: between practical theology and the other theological disciplines; between the subdisciplines of practical theology among themselves; and between practical theology and the other sciences” (Hoch 1998, 70).

To finalize his considerations on the method in practical theology, Hoch proposes a method for the discipline that considers theory and practice dialectically as interdependent terms. This interdependence is still a challenge in theology, since rational and intellectual theory and exercise still emerge as being of greater importance. According to Hoch, “Practical theology is the discipline that keeps alive the awareness that it is precisely this dialectic between theory and practice, spirit and body, between faith and action that engenders a legitimate Christian methodology and praxis that participates in God’s action in history in the deployment of his Kingdom” (Hoch 1998, 73). In view of this, Hoch presents mediations with which the method of practical theology will have to deal: the mediation in gender relations; the mediation between reason and experience of faith; the mediation between Christian tradition and new forms of religiosity; and the mediation of alternative values to those that govern this century, such as globalization, human stratification, the commodification of relationships and life, the weakening of institutions; the very loss of the notion of viable alternatives to the current models.

From the above-mentioned tendencies about the “methods” adopted in the doing of theology, often

the theological method of practical theology was equated with the method of liberation theology, *see-judge-act*, something Hoch himself questions when referring to Floristan’s proposal, as we have seen above. We consider it important to reinforce this differentiation and also to reflect on the *see-judge-act* method itself. In the early 1990s, in a critical study about liberation theology and its method, Vitor Westhelle already drew attention to the limits of the method itself as part of the crisis of liberation theology.

Although not always explicit, I believe that this method has been used in a more generalized way than is normally supposed. We find fundamental elements of the method in liberal theology of the last century [...]. It is the distinction between observation and interpretive theory. [...] I think that the basic problem of this method lies in the overstretching of the relationship between the reality to be analyzed and the domain of faith, between seeing and judging, observation and interpretation, situation and message, divided into two distinct methodological steps: socio-analytical mediation and hermeneutical mediation (Westhelle 1990, 17).⁶

Specifying the problem, Westhelle writes:

In the first methodological step, in the socio-analytic mediation, the analysis of faith is dispensed with and reality is reduced to social, economic and political factors recognized as the ultimate determinants of the production and reproduction of life. As assumption it is tacitly assumed that faith does not have a social texture, that is, it is not a conditioning factor (Westhelle 1990, 18).

In the mid-1990s, Matthias Preiswerk published an article, the result of a lecture at the Faculdades EST, about method in liberation theology and Popular Education (Preiswerk 1995). The author’s criticism is not specifically about the *see-judge-act* method, but the theological methods themselves. According to the author, the question of method leads to the real questioning of people in Latin America in the face of the different demands of concrete life, and this should not be the work of intellectuals, something that resonates with the ideas of Fals Borda and Paulo Freire. For him, the only relevant question is about human beings, not only about political-economic dimensions. In his article, Preiswerk asks whom do the theological and educational methods serve in Latin America. The author will also ques-

6 His criticism of the method is also found in the chapter on the pastoral of the land.



tion the magical use of the of the *see-judge-act* triad, which risks being diluted into pragmatic moralism.

His understanding of method is rather pragmatic: “Method is connected to the way things are done to achieve what is expected” (Preiswerk 1995, 282). Deploying this definition, the author proposes that it is necessary “to speak of method as a system of relations, as a structure of thought and of action, as inspiration that assumes ruptures, disconnections, the distances between the subjects with their own desires and needs, the goals they intend to achieve, the processes to achieve those goals, the obstacles offered by the context” (Preiswerk 1995, 283).

Thus, we see that early on, in the more specific reflection on the method used in theology and more specifically in practical theology, there was a concern to find a method that would in fact contribute to a theological doing involving theory and practice (Hoch) and contribute to the processes of liberation and transformation (Westhelle and Preiswerk). The *see-judge-act* method, innovative as it was, especially considering practical action as a starting point and a point of arrival, was still seen as limited, within a decolonial framework. We agree with this criticism. As relevant as the *see-judge-act* method has been to theological practice, its simple adoption as a method of practical theology does not solve the lack of a specific method for the discipline and does not contribute to reflections on decoloniality.

We believe that from Freire and Fals Borda, we have the basis to think about ways to establish a decolonial method for practical theology. Both authors start with the concrete context of oppression (Freire) and with the popular classes (Fals Borda). In addition, both are concerned with the concrete lives of people and groups, with daily life and with individual experience in the processes of awareness and liberation, whether through liberating education or through participatory action research (PAR). The methodological proposal for theological education based on the intercultural paradigm of Preiswerk corroborates our proposal (Preiswerk 2011, 399ff).

The reflection on the method in practical theology by Sánchez and Viguera (Sánchez and Viguera 2019) corroborates the assumptions of Freire and Fals Borda. For Sánchez and Viguera, the community of faith and the people who belong to it are the subject of practical theology and consequently protagonists in the development of a method.

Indeed, when time comes to discuss the procedural dynamics of practical theology, one assigns a different value to a method that intends to resort to the communities

in order to investigate them, from one that seeks to work with them to carry out the investigative projects. Likewise, one proceeds distinctly when looking at the community as an addressee of the already elaborated theological elaborations than when one recognizes in it and in its practices, the fertile soil to construct new theological knowledge (Sánchez, Viguera 2019, 160)⁷.

In their methodological proposition, the authors value what is unique, the concrete individual in a precise situation, the *kairós*, to the detriment of the objective and generalized readings of the human being and the context; narrativity appears as the most suitable way of approaching reality and its unique character; corporeality is considered as a key to meaning, uniqueness and experience and therefore must be considered in the method of practical theology (Sánchez and Viguera 2019, 160–162). In addition, the authors, like Fals Borda, consider interdisciplinarity as fundamental for interaction with the reality with which one wants to theologize (Sánchez, Viguera 2019, 162ff).

Conclusions: Decolonizing methods in Practical Theology

Within the theme of the 2019 IAPT conference “Decoloniality and religious practices: liberating hope”, in São Leopoldo, Brazil, we propose broadening reflections and criticisms of the methods of practical theology, based on the paradigm of decoloniality. Decoloniality sharpens reflection and intensifies criticism of the methods adopted. Our main question is: What are the consequences when we reflect on the method of practical theology from the decolonial paradigm? Or, how to decolonize our academic methods, their distance from experiential and practical questions, epistemological ties, etc.? What would a decolonial method in practical theology look like?

7 En efecto, a la hora de discutir sobre las dinámicas procedimentales de la teología práctica, se valora de forma diferente un método que pretenda recurrir a las comunidades para investigar sobre ellas, a uno que busque trabajar con ellas en la realización de los proyectos investigativos. De igual manera, se procede de forma distinta cuando se mira a la comunidad como destinataria de las elaboraciones teológicas ya elaboradas, que cuando se reconoce en ella y en sus prácticas el suelo nutricional para construir nuevo conocimiento teológico. (Sánchez, Viguera 2019, 160).

More than a concept, decolonial studies are a new way of perceiving local (and global) reality through its differences, subtleties, diversities, fragments, alterities, disruptions and social, cultural, corporal, sexual, political and religious alternatives, not just what is established and standardized.

[...] to talk about postcoloniality means to question and deconstruct the dynamics of identification that inspire the colonial forces, exposing their own weaknesses through the heterogeneities inscribed in such a Subject, with the intention of making visible the intrinsic bifurcations that characterize the global context, which allow its constant malleability, transformation and opening towards new forms of sociocultural construction (Pannotto 2016, 34).

The decolonial paradigm intensifies the examination of culture, daily life, body and person, emphasizing in particular, difference: those aspects that do not fit into homogeneous patterns of systems and absolute truths and that are therefore seen as weak, fragile and vulnerable. Within this paradigm, liberation theology itself and its method can be questioned. Based on various postcolonial and decolonial studies, Nogueira Baptista notes criticisms of liberation theology. One criticism relates to Western categories as a means of liberating the victims of the neo-colonial Western system itself. Based on Simón P. Arnold's writing, the author points out three serious problems in liberation theology such as not questioning the continent's Christianity, its historical legitimacy and its ecclesiocentrism and clericalism; its difficulty regarding original cultures and religious expressions; and its lack of foresight regarding the failure of the left and the advent of postmodernity. This criticism is also related to the adopted method, as pointed out above (Baptista 2016, 503f). Westhelle summarizes his criticism by pointing out the dependence of liberation theology and its methods on the Enlightenment.

Even though Westhelle and Preiswerk's critiques of the method of liberation theology (and popular education), do not use the concept of "decoloniality" or "postcoloniality,"⁸ they point to questions that

are now in tune with the decolonial paradigm. Hoch, in his chapter, also pointed to questions that practical theology would have to address: mediation in gender relations; the mediation between reason and experience of faith; the mediation between Christian tradition and new forms of religiosity; and the mediation of alternative values other than those that govern this century, such as globalization, human stratification, the commodification of relationships and life, the weakening of institutions; the very loss of the notion of viable alternatives to current models. Convergently, the methodological proposal of Sánchez and Viguera, seeks to overcome academic and conceptual analyses distanced from the concrete reality of life, with their experiences, narratives and corporealities, taking into account the *kairós* of the life and faith of concrete communities and people (Sánchez and Viguera 2019, 166ff). All these aspects are part of the decolonial paradigm.

Further questions could be added, such as the hermeneutics of lived religion, everyday spiritualities and religiosities, the force of narratives present in life, in literature, in the movies (Adam, 2018); the relations of practical theology with the arts and popular expressions, with other knowledge and utopias of indigenous traditions (such as *Buen Vivir*) and ancestral traditions (Adam, Schmiedt Streck and Streck 2018). Considering these questions, the method of practical theology will have to be rethought, reinforcing the relationship between theory and practice, practical wisdom (*phronesis*) (Miller McLemore 2016, 56), but mainly broadening and deepening the vision we want to have of practices, taking into account people – in their lives, bodies, relations, struggles, beliefs, hopes and dreams.

In 2018, 13.5 million people in Brazil were living on US\$1.9 a day, according to the World Bank (World Bank 2020). This number is equivalent to the entire population of Bolivia, Cuba, Belgium, Greece and Portugal. It affects mainly black people and mulattos, especially black women and children. There has been a record rise in poverty in the last seven years, due particularly to neoliberal policies implemented by governments.

Furthermore, evangelical Neo Pentecostal Churches have grown immensely throughout the Continent and have moved into politics. In some cases, they have even supplanted the state, challenging democracies and supporting corruption. The Roman Catholic Church and the historical Protestant Churches were also affected by Pentecostalism,

8 In the entire book *Teologia Prática no Contexto da América Latina*, including the reissue of 2011, the terms "decoloniality" and "postcoloniality" do not appear, similar to what Kwok Pui-Lan and Stephen Burns (Pui-Lan and Burns 2016) also observed when they analyzed the book edited by David Ford, *The Modern Theologians* (Ford 1989; 1997).



resulting in taking on similar positions to the Evangelical concept of morality, political understanding, racial discrimination, etc. Perhaps then, the rich legacy of the liberation movement of the past and the decolonial ideas in a search for a method can be likened to Ariadne's thread: called upon to find a way out of the labyrinth.

We understand that popular education (Freire 1970) can help deconstruct a Europe-centered or Eurocentric theology and support communities in their formative process, recognizing them as subjects of their own history. At the same time, the interaction with the academy, especially in theology courses on dialogue with social movements and communities can find major inspiration in the work of Fals Borda. Decoloniality challenges theology to take part in dialogue and to articulate actions with other cultures and theologies without judging and condemning them. The task is to find new ways of conceptualizing the conflictful realities and to sustain a critical reflection that brings hope to human beings and to the natural world, for a just and sustainable future.

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