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Towards a Contextual Theological Education: A Biblical, Theological and Pedagogical Approach.

A Proposal from the Paraguayan Reality.

David Irala

Formal theological education in Paraguay faces a number of challenges: some that are inherent to the broader context and others that emerge from its specific nature and environment. In particular, I argue that three outstanding challenges face Paraguayan theological education in the context of the Mennonite Brethren churches: a restrictive pedagogy, a fragmented vision of theological education and the lack of a contextual educational model. These challenges require the engagement of members of the educational community in the task of reflecting and thinking (or rethinking) theological education from and for the Paraguayan context and the churches served. Therefore, this research aims *To offer reflective resources from a biblical, theological, and pedagogical perspective, fostering theological and pedagogical imagination in the pursuit of developing a contextual theological education.*

Thus, taking into account these three challenges, I will argue for a pedagogy of love and an eclectic methodology inspired and rooted in the divine pedagogical action in the light of two biblical events: Exodus 14:31 and John 6:67-69. This pedagogy of love impels us towards a more humanising pedagogy that promotes transformation in contrast to the restrictive Latin American pedagogy. Then, addressing the challenge of a fragmented vision of theological education, I will argue for a more holistic and integrative vision inspired by the theological thought of St. Bonaventure, with special emphasis on his definition of theology as wisdom. Finally, considering the lack of a contextual educational model, I will advocate for an educational model nourished by the Kingdom of God and Anabaptist values. Thus, from these three approaches, some reflective elements are offered that seek to promote the imagination of new and more contextual ways of doing theological education in Paraguay.

Key words: contextual theological education, Paraguay, restrictive pedagogy, pedagogy of love, fragmentation, contextual educational model, Anabaptist values, theological and pedagogical imagination.

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A Proposal from the Paraguayan Reality.

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PhD in Theology

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List of Abbreviations

- UNA: Universidad Nacional de Asunción; pp. 43, 44, 52.
- UCA: Universidad Católica Nuestra Señora de la Asunción; p. 44.
- CONES: Consejo Nacional de Educación Superior; p. 50.
- ANEAES: Agencia Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación de la Educación Superior; pp. 49, 50.
- UEP: Universidad Evangélica del Paraguay; pp. 53, 68, 72.
- IBA: Instituto Bíblico Asunción; pp. 54, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 76.
- ITE: Instituto Teológico Evangélico; p. 57.
- ICOMB: International Community of Mennonite Brethren; p. 67.

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Dedication

To all those who have embraced and understood theological education as a Spirit-given mission, a labour informed by Christ, and an honourable task within the vast and transcendent reality of God's Kingdom on earth.

Introduction¹

A. The Latin American Context and Theological Education

The social, economic, and political challenges facing the region known as Latin America are extensive and formidable. The reality enveloping us in this part of the world is challenging. In these circumstances, education has served and continues to serve as a path to improve the reality of many Latin Americans. In some cases, individuals have had to leave their cities and even their countries in search of quality education that propels an enhancement in their quality of life.

Paraguay, one of the most backward countries in South America in terms of education, socio-economic, and political indices, is at a turning point, a crisis that also presents an opportunity, which, though an opportunity, can also be squandered.

Nevertheless, behind the region's problems lies the rich history of Latin America, marked by certain tragedies but also victories, characterised by a spirited resistance and rebellion against the powers that sought and seek to oppress it. Thus, 'liberation' has been framed as an objective in the historical struggle, dating back to colonial times, and in the face of repressive dictatorships and government models.

As an integral part of the struggle for liberation, education is an act of rebellion, it is a subversive and revolutionary act against everything that holds back the exercise of freedom in our region. In the context of this struggle, education, in the words of Paulo Freire, 'is an act of

¹ AI has been used to translate from Spanish to English and to correct certain grammatical expressions throughout this section. Another resource used throughout this section is Deepl.com, a translation tool.

love, and therefore, an act of courage. [Education] is praxis, reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it.’²

However, it is not possible to consider the whole picture and the whole horizon without the task of theological education in this part of the world. If the task of educating is an act of rebellion, theological education is also a task that requires courage, because against all odds and against the challenges of educating, many theological institutions offer a space of formation to improve the life of faith, the life of the church, and they do so in a context of pressing needs, of limited resources for the exercise of their mission and of great social challenges.

Educating in Latin America is a challenge, and doing so in the field of theology could intensify this challenge even more. Thus, the act of educating biblically and theologically is a call to courage and subversion, an act of faith that contradicts every discouraging reality, a clinging to grace and inviting others to service and formation in pursuit of the liberation that comes from the Spirit. It is a task that requires divine love as a source to strengthen the love for our nation, our people and our region.

As an integral part of the struggle for liberation, education can and should be an act of rebellion. Educating biblically and theologically can and should be a call to courage and subversion. Theological education can and should be a means to channel and express God's love for this region.

In light of this, and considering that education is a path of development and liberation for many, theological education cannot overlook its task of reflecting on its mission, essence, forms, legacy, and future in the Latin American region. If theological education is to seek

² Marta Liliana Iovanovich, ‘El Pensamiento De Paulo Freire: sus contribuciones para la educación’, in *Lecciones de Paulo Freire, cruzando fronteras: experiencias que se completan*, (CLACSO, Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales, 2003), p. 274.

responses to the current context, its challenges, and the pressing needs of our communities, it needs to understand itself within the surrounding reality.

Some of the work of working out how theological education can respond to current challenges has already been done. So, there have been some victories in theological education. Thereby, I am joining in with an ongoing task.

Nevertheless, a lot remains to be done. So, this research is therefore an attempt to reflect on the challenges ahead for Paraguayan theological education. What is needed to respond to these challenges is not just tinkering at the edges: it requires reinvention. The purpose of such reinvention remains that of serving Christ and his Church.

B. Research Objectives and Key Findings

Consequently, considering this reality and the challenges briefly described in this introduction, I have set the following general objective for this research: *To offer reflective resources from a biblical, theological, and pedagogical perspective, fostering theological and pedagogical imagination in the pursuit of developing a contextual theological education.*

Aware that rethinking theological education involves the commitment of all members of an educational community, this research does not aim to provide answers; they will not be found in one person's proposal, but only in the whole community's intentional reflection and interaction. Instead, it seeks to contribute reflective insights to encourage us to imagine new and more relevant ways of conducting theological education in the Paraguayan context.

Therefore, throughout this research, I offer biblical, theological, and pedagogical resources that can contribute to the conversations and reflections of an educational community aspiring to and actively working towards designing a theological and contextual educational experience. I believe these resources have the potential to challenge our imagination and

accompany us in the process of discerning, in the light of the Spirit, the path forward to promote theological formation relevant to our context.

To fulfil the aforementioned general objective, I have organised this research into five chapters. Chapters one to four contain my proposals, reflections, and suggestions, while Chapter five includes some concluding remarks and final thoughts. Next, I will briefly describe the first four chapters and highlight the key findings.

In Chapter One, the characteristics of formal Paraguayan theological education have been analysed, considering the broader context first and then delving into specifics. In this sense, the Latin American reality, which is the broader context in which Paraguayan theological education is immersed, is considered first, followed by the study of particularities and the consideration of challenges that emerge and are recognised at the end of this analysis.

The analysis of the Paraguayan context is the starting point of my entire thesis. All the other elements of this research are attempts to find resources to help me respond to this context and its needs. Thus, the whole work is contextual and seeks to connect with the reality of Paraguayan theological education.

Following the contextual analysis of Chapter one, the key findings could be summarised in three main challenges facing theological education in Paraguay. Thus, Chapter one will show that Paraguayan theological education suffers from a restrictive pedagogy, a fragmented perspective, and the lack of an educational model.

After recognising some pressing challenges and needs facing theological education in Paraguay, three approaches are proposed in the next chapters to suggest reflective resources that can aid in the development of a relevant or contextual Paraguayan theological education.

The first approach is found in Chapter two of this research. From a biblical perspective, the divine teaching methods in two biblical passages (Exodus 14 and John 6) are analysed to propose contextual responses to methodological and theoretical challenges in the field of theological education in Paraguay.

As I have mentioned throughout this research, my purpose has not been to undertake an exhaustive exploration of the entire Bible in an attempt to provide a comprehensive biblical account of theological education. Instead, in light of my understanding of the Paraguayan context and its needs, I have searched the Scriptures, and focused on two key passages that I believe speak powerfully to that context. My exploration of these passages has helped me to imagine differently what theological education might look like in the Paraguayan context.

The analysis of God's pedagogical action in Exodus 14 and John 6 shows that God's love, his deep understanding of the context and the needs of his people guided his teaching. God's pedagogical action was also characterised by a clear objective and by 'methods' that were varied and in accordance with the reality of the people. Moreover, the outcome of God's educational action was in line with his objectives. The key findings of Chapter two led me to imagine an eclectic methodology and a pedagogy of love, and to say that, in my view, these spoke powerfully to the restrictive pedagogy I identified in Chapter one.

While in my context restrictive pedagogy may lead us to think that our pedagogical approach needs to be transformed and that the solutions lie in a new 'pedagogical theory' that encourages greater participation, divine pedagogical action goes beyond theories. It is born out of God's love for his people, his knowledge of the context, and needs of the followers, connecting deeply with people's lives and realities.

Divine pedagogical action transcends theories by integrating itself into everyday life, addressing the real needs and challenges of people. It is liberating and transformative precisely because it is in tune with people's reality and beats to the rhythm of their heart.

It is worth mentioning that I am not unearthing a model that can be simply imported into the context of Paraguayan theological education. This is not some sort of predefined set of 'steps' that we should follow to improve theological education in our midst. Rather, what we can see is that God's leading of the people of Israel in Exodus and Jesus' teaching of his disciples in John are in many ways very different from anything that could or should happen in a Bible institute in Paraguay - but these passages do reveal something of the deeper purposes of divine pedagogy, in a way that will inspire the vision I set out in this research.

The second approach is found in Chapter three. From a theological perspective, Bonaventurian theological thought is analysed to offer reflective resources guiding the challenge of designing and conceiving an integrated curriculum model in Paraguayan theological education.

It should be noted that I have not attempted to offer a complete historical perspective of Christian thought on theological education. Rather, I explored Christian thinking and history in search of resources that, in my opinion, spoke powerfully to the reality of Paraguayan theological education.

In Chapter three, I explore the definition of theology as wisdom through Bonaventure's concept of sapiential union, the unifying centre of all knowledge, and the supremacy of love as the fundamental intention of theology. From my understanding of Bonaventure's thought, Christ emerges as the epistemological centre, the source, and the ultimate goal of all knowledge. These are the key findings in this chapter, and this vision spoke powerfully to me in my Paraguayan context, facing the fragmentation of theological education.

As I did before, I would like to highlight that I am not suggesting that a Bonaventurian approach can simply be imported or directly applied to the reality of theological education in Paraguay. Instead, I think Bonaventure proves to be a conversation partner who helps me (and helps us) to imagine differently what theological education can be in this part of the world.

Finally, the third approach is found in Chapter four. From a more pedagogical perspective, the nature and foundations of theological education are considered, followed by exploring certain reflections that drive the development of a pedagogical or educational model in line with the needs and characteristics of the context.

In doing so, I have explored the definition of Christian education within the framework of the Kingdom of God, and suggested that theological education finds its own mission in this definition. On the other hand, as I discussed in Chapter four, defining education in the framework of the Kingdom of God is relevant in view of certain historical and theological aspects of this region of the world.

Then, I draw deeply on Anabaptist resources, partly because I work in an Anabaptist context, and these voices hold significant weight in my tradition, and partly because I find in these voices ideas that may be compelling to the reality of Paraguayan theological education, especially in addressing the challenge of the lack of an educational model that I have identified in my context.

The study of some aspects that I consider key in the Anabaptist tradition and relevant to this research could inspire an educational model for theological formation in Paraguay characterised by: the promotion of a community of critical discernment, the promotion of a divergent mission and identity, and the promotion of a Christocentric worldview that leads to assuming certain commitments with the context and the specific challenges of our environment.

Furthermore, in chapter four, I suggest that we need to theologise theological education, and rethink its meaning in the light of a Christology of the Kingdom, a liberating and transformative Christology, as opposed to the suffering and passive Latin American Christ.

Therefore, my approach to the Anabaptist tradition is to highlight some resources that can inspire and challenge us to imagine new ways of doing theological education. There are no ‘five steps’ or ‘templates’ to be directly applied to Paraguayan theological education. However, there are resources that can help and guide us as we embark on a journey of discovery towards a more contextual theological education in our environment.

While the reflections always consider the Paraguayan reality and the broader reality in which it is immersed, I understand that the key findings of this research may be applicable to other similar realities or institutions in the South American or Latin American region or serve as a reference in other locations facing similar challenges.

It is important to highlight that I have deliberately taken a focused approach or that I have been highly selective in this research. Rather than attempting an exhaustive Biblical theology of learning, I have concentrated on a small number of Biblical texts and theological concepts that, in my view, hold the potential to challenge and question our pedagogical imaginations.

I think that this research is also an account produced by someone immersed in a specific context, as a response to and a resource for that context. My attempt was to recognise challenges for theological education in my context, and then I have looked for resources in scripture and tradition to help us imagine how theological education might be carried out differently in Paraguay.

C. My Contribution to Educational Theory and Pedagogical Practice

It is worth noting here the meaning of educational theory and pedagogical practice, and describing how the second is rooted in the first, as well as how, in the context of a Christian institution, educational theory should be founded on theology. In doing so, I will also suggest this research's contribution to educational theory and pedagogical practice in the context of theological education.

First, we should consider that, behind our actions lie ideas, thoughts, and convictions that guide us to act in one way or another. At times, we are aware of these ideas, while at other times we are not. Nevertheless, our experiences and life encounters, what we have seen or heard, have shaped the way we view the world and, consequently, the way we act.

Education does not take place in a vacuum; it is connected to context, to the reality that surrounds us, to our experiences within educational processes, to the idiosyncrasies of a specific region, and to our perception or worldview. According to Miller, Moffit, and Allen:

A worldview is a total set of assumptions that a person holds, either consciously or unconsciously, about the world and how it works. It is sometimes referred to as a “belief system” or “mindset” [...] A worldview determines how we live, how we function in our contexts, how we view our work, and the roles we play in society.³

In this way, the act of educating reflects ideas and visions about the human being, about education, and about modes of learning. All these ideas have been studied across different periods, forming a body of educational theories that analyse ways of teaching and learning.

³ Darrow Miller, Bob Moffitt and Scott Allen, *The Worldview of the Kingdom of God* (YWAM Publishing, 2005), pp. 16, 23.

In this sense, educational or pedagogical practice always reflects a theory or school of thought. Thus, pedagogical practices are rooted in these theories or thoughts.

Consequently, we might distinguish between two dimensions of pedagogy. On the one hand, there is the broader framework, where the teaching-learning process is studied from philosophical, social, or cultural perspectives, and where questions are addressed such as: what is the human being? what does it mean to learn? and what does educating consist of in certain terms? On the other hand, the narrower dimension of pedagogy deals with teaching methods, which reflect some of the theories present in that broader pedagogical framework.

Although various theories or ‘pedagogical convictions’ exist—convictions about what it means to educate—these require, above all, solid foundations connected to reality, which in turn serves as a reference to link theory with practice. In other words, it is not enough to uphold ideas about education; they must be reflected upon in the light of experience and the narrow context in which teaching takes place. In this way, educational practice becomes coherent with theory, and theory is enriched and validated through practice.⁴

Thus, ‘our [pedagogical] decisions must be based on a wise balance between what reality shows us and the categories we use to assess that reality.’⁵

In addition, it is significant to understand that if educational theory approaches the teaching-learning process from a particular perspective, and from anthropological, philosophical, or cultural viewpoints, it can be said that worldview guides the educational vision and, consequently, the pedagogical ideas. In this way, worldview permeates pedagogical theory and is reflected in educational practice.

⁴ Fernando Gil Cantero, ‘Educación con teoría». Revisión pedagógica de las relaciones entre la teoría y la práctica educativa’, *Teoría de la Educación: Revista Interuniversitaria*, volume 23.1 (2011), 19-43 (38), doi: <https://doi.org/10.14201/teri.8575>

⁵ Ibid, p. 35.

Therefore, in the context of Christian and theological education, worldview is understood as that which has been transformed in the light of biblical truths and perceives the world from the reality of Christ and his announced and anticipated Kingdom.

Thus, the Christian worldview—that is, our theology, what we know of God, of humanity, and of the world—constitutes the starting point of all educational theory and, at the same time, the foundation upon which the educational vision rests, as well as the thoughts and practice that flow from it.

William Pinar refers to Durkheim when he suggests that the curriculum represents what older generations aim to transmit to emerging ones. In this sense, education and the curriculum can be seen as reflecting the dynamic interplay between what is known or taught and the societal context. Accordingly, both education and its understanding are shaped by contemporary perspectives or worldviews.⁶

Thus, every Christian institution, from its biblical understanding, its theology, and its Christian worldview, evaluates educational trends and theories in light of its understanding of human beings and the world. It weaves an educational theory that harmonises with its faith and guides its practice, seeking coherence between the doctrine it professes, and the actions expected from it. In this process, human pedagogical theory enters into dialogue with divine pedagogy, recognising that the transformation at which education aims is ultimately realised by the Spirit of God. Our teachings gifts, our theories, and our teaching practices become instruments within God's ongoing work of transformation, allowing Christian education to be both faithful to Scripture and effective in guiding learners towards the intended transformation.

Consequently, in the field of *educational theory*, this research offers resources that promote a contextualised, holistic, and faith-integrated approach, articulating biblical,

⁶ William Pinar, *What is curriculum theory?* (Routledge, 2004), p. 187.

theological, and pedagogical reflection to rethink theological education in Paraguay. In the area of *pedagogical practice*, it proposes a pedagogy of love, an integrative vision grounded in theological wisdom, and a context-sensitive educational model that overcomes restrictive pedagogy and the fragmented view of education. In doing so, it fosters pedagogical imagination, integral formation, and the transformation of both students and educators. In this way, this research contributes to making theological education coherent with the challenges of the churches, attentive to the local reality, and capable of generating meaningful, transformative, and humanising teaching and learning processes.

D. A Journey of Discovery

I must acknowledge that this research process has been, from the beginning, a journey of discovery.⁷ In some way, I have also felt like ‘the people of Israel’, traversing through deserts (though, of course, the scale of my experience is much lower), and many times ‘not knowing where I was going’. Nevertheless, God has allowed me moments of refreshment, joys that arise from learning along the way.

On this journey, I found myself delving deeper into my context and considering the challenges that my country (and specifically theological education) faces. However, throughout this exploration, a new hope emerged in me. I now believe that theological education can be much more fruitful in my country. Therefore, I believe that this journey is nothing other than God's providence, the providence of the God of hope.

This journey did not provide absolute answers, nor was it my expectation to find them. However, it has raised more questions to explore, and this work is an attempt to provide insights that will continue to promote communal thinking regarding our task as theological educators.

⁷ In fact, “discovery” is the best way to express what learning means, in my view.

E. A Brief Description of my Formation

As a Paraguayan, much of my academic and theological training has taken place in my hometown: Asunción. Thus, after finishing my bachelor's degree in theology at the Instituto Bíblico Asunción (IBA), I decided to pursue a master's degree in education. During that time, I was able to delve deeper into the needs and challenges of the educational field in Paraguay and Latin America.

Nevertheless, my passion for theology led me to integrate both fields of knowledge. It was then that I began reflecting on and studying theological education from a contextual, theological, and pedagogical perspective. However, after ten years of being involved in theological education, I still feel that my learning journey has only just begun, and the horizon beckons me to keep thinking/learning about this crucial task of the church everywhere.

Eventually, I began serving at the same biblical institute where I had studied: the IBA, the seminary of the Mennonite Brethren in Paraguay. Thereby, I was able to understand first-hand the challenges of theological education in our region, as well as the service offered to various churches in a context where formal training options in theology or ministry are scarce.

However, I should say that my experience of doctoral studies in the UK has been a great blessing. Sometimes it is helpful to look at one's own reality from the outside; to walk other paths, listen to other experiences, appreciate other victories and be inspired by the efforts of other communities serving the church in different parts of the world. This time of study has been a journey of discovery and comprehensive enrichment.

Although my doctoral research is contextual, the contact with a new culture, with other churches, and with communities that also serve in theological education has allowed me to broaden my vision of what we do in this field, giving me a perspective more in line with the

Kingdom of God, as an extension of efforts to promote service and theological knowledge.⁸

This journey has helped me to understand that we are one body in different spaces, promoting the same values, fighting on the same fronts, with diverse realities, but with common goals that call us to work and serve with the same aspirations.

Strange as it may sound, studying in the UK while reflecting on my own context has helped me a lot to keep learning and to see my reality from another perspective. However, I must say that one does not necessarily have to leave one's own country to think or reflect better, but I do believe that leaving one's own place has an added value in terms of learning.

Therefore, my approach (or epistemology) is developed from a Paraguayan, Latin American, Christian and Anabaptist vision, but enriched by my experiences in the UK, where I have been able to acquire a Kingdom vision of theological education.

F. Conclusion

As a follower of Jesus, I am convinced that making relevant theological education is impossible without the guidance of his Spirit. As educators committed to theological and Christian formation in our communities, we need to learn to be silent and listen to what His Spirit is saying, allowing our institutional programmes to be guided 'in the light of his lamp.'

Nevertheless, I believe that this guidance is discovered primarily in a process of communal discernment, in which together, as a 'body', we listen to the voice of God. In that sense, the aim of this research is not to set out in detail a full programme of reform, but is an attempt to resource an ongoing process of communal discernment from which reform might

⁸ At this point, when I speak of theological knowledge, I am not referring to the discipline of theology itself, but rather to the experience of knowing the God of life.

emerge - an attempt to help those involved in that communal discernment to imagine differently the possibilities for theological education in the Paraguayan context.

Finally, I firmly believe that theology in Latin America must take particular forms, with one of them definitely being that of resistance. This involves opposing and rejecting corruption, resisting the evils of our society, the inequalities, and injustices of our region. A theology that resists and opposes understands God in the light of his self-revelation in connection with the surrounding reality and finds the necessary hope to resist or rebel through lives that diverge, go against the current, and firmly resist the evils of this beautiful region of the planet.

Contextual theological education in this region must embrace the task of forming leaders who diverge, oppose, and resist from their communities, homes, streets, neighbourhoods, from the simplicity of daily life, and are willing to listen to what the Spirit of Jesus is saying. Yes, he is speaking, and his voice is the sound of freedom.

Chapter One⁹

Formal Theological Education in Paraguay: A Contextual Analysis

A. Introduction

Paraguay is a landlocked country in the centre of South America. Its estimated population is 7,359,000.¹⁰ Despite social, economic, and political challenges, Paraguay has maintained macroeconomic growth for the last ten years due to the soybean, maize, and beef industries. Notwithstanding, economic growth has not yet translated into the daily lives of Paraguayans.¹¹

With a history marked by wars, political instability, and a 35-year dictatorship, Paraguay is a young Latin American democracy. Curiously, the country does not have a clear image internationally. In the words of one of the most renowned Paraguayan writers in history, Augusto Roa Bastos, Paraguay is ‘an island surrounded by land’. Understanding this *isolation* requires delving deeper into Paraguay's political, social, and cultural history.¹²

The objectives of this research do not require delving into Paraguayan history to explain the particular characteristics of the country. Rather, I am focused on the current challenges and pressing needs of Paraguayan life, and how these issues specifically affect the theological education sector in particular. However, given the lack of knowledge about Paraguay, in this

⁹ AI has been used to translate from Spanish to English and to correct certain grammatical expressions throughout the chapter. Another resource used throughout this work is Deepl.com, a translation tool.

¹⁰ Mirta Leiva, Mariana Cáceres Ruiz Díaz, Fátima M. Morínigo, Alberto D. Núñez Santacruz and Walter D. Benítez Castelví, *Atlas demográfico del Paraguay*, ed. by Fátima Morínigo (Dirección General de Estadísticas, Encuestas y Censos, 2016), p. 18.

¹¹ Simon Romero, *Boom Times in Paraguay Leave Many Behind* (2013) *The New York Times* <<https://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/25/world/americas/boom-times-in-paraguay-leave-many-behind.html>> [accessed 9 February 2022].

¹² Dasso Saldivar and others, *Oralidad: Rescate de la Tradición Oral y la Memoria De América Latina y el Caribe: 1994-1995*, ed. by Edgar Montiel (Editorial Pueblo y Educación, 1994), p. 56.

brief introduction, I intended to provide some data to gain a very general and primary perspective of the national context on which this research focuses.

On the other hand, the needs and challenges of the theological education sector can't be separated from the wider, historically rooted challenges facing Paraguay: social inequality, corruption, and low investment have deeply affected Paraguayan education, as will be discussed later in this research. The current challenges require the coordinated work of all social and political actors in order to achieve a profound transformation of the Paraguayan education system at all levels. In addition, the different dimensions of the challenges facing education should be considered.¹³

Therefore, understanding formal theological education in Paraguay or other latitudes requires a broader view of reality. In that sense, in this research section, I will carry out the analysis in three stages. First, an overall picture of higher education in Latin America is provided; then, the analysis is focused on the Paraguayan education system. Finally, I provide a study of formal theological education in the specific context of the Paraguayan Mennonite Brethren Churches.

In Chapters two to four, I explore the resources that, in my view, can assist those of us involved in theological education in responding to the contextual challenges addressed in this first chapter. The focus of this research is contextual, so this introductory chapter is not just an introduction or opening; it is a fundamental and key part of the argument presented.

My key claims in this chapter will be that theological education in Paraguay is decontextualised, characterised by a restrictive pedagogy, a fragmented vision, and a lack of a

¹³ María José Ayala and others, *Informe sobre el costo social de la corrupción en educación*, (Centro de Estudios Judiciales, [n.d.]), p. 24-25.

clear and relevant educational model. All of this undermines the ability of theological education to effectively respond to the challenges and opportunities of the context.

B. Higher Education in Latin America

1. The First Universities in Latin America

For almost 470 years, Hispanic America has had universities. The first 26 universities founded in colonial times (between 1538 and 1812) by the Spanish crown and the Catholic church were created following the Spanish university model. It is worth noting that, at that time, no universities were founded in Brazil under the Portuguese crown.¹⁴

The first universities were managed by the crown, the church, and the religious orders, under a ‘shared authority’.¹⁵ The training of the new citizens in the new world consisted of practical skills (trivium) and theoretical knowledge (the quadrivium).¹⁶

Ibero-American university education was provided in the convents of the Order of Preachers, in the colleges of the Society of Jesus, in the conciliar seminaries,¹⁷ and in the public or royal universities. All these institutions had the permission of religious or governmental authorities to issue university degrees. It is worth noting that ‘when there were only about fifty universities in all Europe’, and even before ‘the English colonies of North America established

¹⁴ Andrés Bernasconi, ‘Is there a Latin American Model of University?’, *Comparative Education*, volume 52.1 (2008), 27-52 (27), doi: 10.1086/524305.

Carlos Tünnermann Bernheim, *La Educación superior en el umbral del siglo XXI* (Cresalc, 1996) p. 122.

¹⁵ Maria de Figueiredo-Cowen, ‘Latin American Universities, Academic Freedom and Autonomy: A Long Term Myth?’, *Comparative Education*, volume 38.4 (2002), pp. 471–484 (471), doi: 10.1080/0305006022000030702.

¹⁶ Carlos Tunnerman, *Historia de la Universidad en Latinoamérica: desde la época colonial hasta la reforma de Córdoba*, ed. by Alfredo Aguilar (Editorial Universitaria Centroamericana - Educa, 1991), p. 28.

¹⁷ The conciliar seminaries were “purely clerical institutions, the product of the will of a bishop who founded them.” Leticia Pérez Puente, *Los cimientos de la iglesia en la América española: los seminarios conciliares siglo XVI*, ed. by Martha Irene Díaz Cañas (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones sobre la Universidad y la Educación, 2017), pp. 4, 14.

their first higher educational institution at Cambridge', Spain had already founded the first 13 universities in Latin America.¹⁸

The goal of the first universities in Hispanic America was to train the Europeans, their American children or Creoles, and the Amerindians.¹⁹ In the beginning, universities were closely linked to the religious orders (Dominican, Augustinian, and Franciscan), in order to provide training for missionaries and indigenous clergy, considering that the evangelisation of the Indigenous peoples was a regular task of the Spanish conquistadors from their arrival in America in 1492.²⁰ Later, higher education institutions aimed to train 'the emerging Creole youth.'²¹

In the Hispanic America context, universities were also a way of legitimising 'a discourse centred on conversion to Catholicism as a civilising process for the Indians'. Moreover, educational institutions were 'centres of civil, intellectual, and political training'. They represented, to a greater or lesser extent, 'a mechanism for the development and legitimisation of status, prestige, and power for Creoles and peninsular Spaniards.'²²

The first university founded in America was the *Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos*. The institution was founded by a royal mandate issued by King Carlos I de España y V del Sacro Imperio Romano Germánico on May the 12th 1551.²³ The university was known,

¹⁸ Rafael Patrón Sarti, *La Universidad de Mérida de Yucatán: Relación de los actos y fiestas de fundación en 1624*, (Ediciones de la Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán, 2013), p. 106.

Harold R. W. Benjamin, 'Higher Education in Latin America', *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 45.4 (1964), 178-182 (178).

¹⁹ According to the Collins Dictionary, the term 'Amerindian' is synonymous with American Indian. 'Amerindian', in *Collins Dictionary*, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/amerindian> [Accessed 24 October 2024].

²⁰ Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *Historia verdadera de la Conquista de la Nueva España* (Porrúa, 1955), p. 266.

²¹ Ramón Garza Mercado, *Hacia el primer milenio de las Universidades* ([n.d.]), *Enciclopedia histórica y biográfica de la Universidad de Guadalajara* <<http://enciclopedia.udg.mx/articulos/universidades-en-america>> [accessed 9 February 2022].

²² Adrián Acosta Silva, 'El poder de la universidad en América Latina: historia, sociología y política en la época colonial (1538-1812)', *Revista Mexicana de Sociología*, 81.1 (2019), 179-208 (181) doi.org/10.22201/iis.01882503p.2019.1.58690.

²³ Yovani Soto Villanueva, *Tomás de San Martín* (2018), *Real Academia de la Historia* <<https://dbe.rah.es/biografias/25708/tomas-de-san-martin>> [accessed 6 March 2022].

at that time, as the Royal University of Lima and was the main educational institute in the Viceroyalty of Peru. Although the *Universidad Santo Tomas de Aquino* in the Dominican Republic, founded in 1538, claimed to be the first Latin American university, it was not officially recognised by the Spanish crown until 1558.²⁴

After the foundation of the Royal University of Lima, several institutions were founded throughout Latin America. Some of these new institutions were the *Real y Pontificia Universidad de México*, founded in 1551, the *Real y Pontificia Universidad de Santiago de la Paz y Gorjón* in 1558, the *Universidad del Estudio Dominicano de Nuestra Señora del Rosario* in 1580, and the *Colegio de Santo Tomás de Aquino* in 1586.²⁵

Nevertheless, although the foundation of the Ibero-American universities was a milestone, some 40 years before the Latin American revolutions, higher education institutions went through a crisis caused by the expulsion of some religious orders from the Spanish colonies:

In the first half of the eighteenth century the Society of Jesus became increasingly influential in higher education, as in other spheres of colonial life. When Charles III, the Spanish king, expelled the Society from all his dominions in 1767, as the Portuguese and French monarchs had done eight and three years earlier, respectively, and when Pope Clement XIV followed in 1773 by complete suppression of the order, the higher educational systems of Spanish America received a devastating blow. Dominicans and Franciscans were at first generally rushed into the breach, but political and economic conditions were such that universities did not fare, in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, even as well as they had done earlier. They were singularly undistinguished institutions.²⁶

Given the crucial role of religious orders in higher education in the Spanish colonies, the expulsion of the orders greatly affected the development of educational institutions.

²⁴ Carlos Daniel Valcárcel, *Fundación de la Universidad de Lima: 12 de mayo de 1551*, (Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, 2001), pp. 26-28.

²⁵ Ramón Garza Mercado, *Hacia el primer milenio de las Universidades*.

²⁶ Benjamin, p. 178.

Later, from 1814 onwards, other universities were established within the context of the newly independent states. Although ‘Pope Pius VII re-established the Society of Jesus in 1814’, the Spanish American revolutionists “were generally anti-clerical and rejected religious influences in higher education.”²⁷

2. A Post-revolutionary View

After independence, most Spanish-speaking countries in America began a transformation of their education system. The aim was for the universities to respond to national needs and the interests of the new republics. ‘The university was to be the state’s educational arm for the promotion of national unity and an enlightened citizenry.’²⁸

A clear example of the transformation of colonial universities into national universities is the change in the areas of student training. Colonial universities used to train students in the four traditional liberal fields: medicine, the arts, law, and theology. However, after independence, most universities abolished the faculties of theology. Instead, faculties of law, medicine, philosophy, letters, and politics were strengthened.²⁹

So, the universities “founded in the period 1810 to 1847 were mainly revolutionary products.” Some of these universities were the University of Los Andes in Venezuela (1810), the University of Buenos Aires (1821), and the University of Cartagena (1824). Besides, there were two universities founded in Perú: Trujillo (1824) and San Agustín de Arequipa (1825). The list of universities founded at that time continues with the University of Benito Juárez in Oaxaca (1825), San Luís Potosí (1826), Cauca (1827), and San Andrés de la Paz (1832). Later,

²⁷ Ibid, p. 178.

²⁸ Levy, cited in Bernasconi, ‘Is there a Latin American Model of University?’, *Comparative Education*, volume 52.1 (2008), 27-52 (27), doi: 10.1086/524305.

²⁹ Benjamin, p. 179.

the University of the Republic in Uruguay was founded in 1833. El Salvador, Chile, Costa Rica, and Honduras “established universities in 1841, 1842, 1843, and 1847 respectively.”³⁰

Despite the expansion of higher education in the nineteenth century, universities suffered from the political instability of the time. A common denominator in the new Latin American nations was anarchy and the rise of de facto³¹ and dictatorial powers. According to R. W. Benjamin:

The gaining of independence from Spain was generally followed by dictatorships, wars, and various periods of near-anarchy. From Juan Manuel de Rosas in Argentina, 1829-1852, to Porfirio Diaz in Mexico, 1876-1911, the pattern of limited progress under a dictator was repeated again and again. In most cases, of course, only a would-be Rosas or Diaz was available for leadership. In the first sixty years of El Salvador's independence, for example, 1841-1900, there were sixty presidents or other chiefs of state exercising what the stately Spanish language calls *el poder ejecutivo*. Under such circumstances, it is remarkable that universities developed or survived at all.³²

Despite the foundation of universities in colonial times in Latin America and their subsequent presence within the context of the new republics, higher education does not seem to have affected the social and economic reality of the region to the extent expected or desired. Universities suffered from the political instability of Latin American countries in the post-revolutionary period of independence, and this seems to have limited the transforming work of higher education in this part of the Americas.³³

Later, in the twentieth century, it is worth noting a student-led reform in the context of Latin American universities. This 1918 historic reform, known as a ‘student rebellion against traditional teaching and traditional authorities’ in the Argentinian university of Córdoba, was a “turning point.” The rebellion’s purpose was ‘to democratise universities so that they would become a democratising agent’. That is, its purpose was to establish co-governance in the

³⁰ Ibid, p. 179

³¹ De facto means ‘existing in fact, although perhaps not intended, legal, or accepted’. ‘De facto’, in *Cambridge Dictionary*, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/de-facto> [accessed 23 March 2022].

³² Benjamin, p. 179.

³³ Ibid, p. 178.

university between students and professors, a more participatory and plural university. Soon the rebellion was replicated in other universities across Latin America.³⁴

The results of this reform were a crucial step in the history of the region's universities towards a more pertinent and contextual university model. However, around 1970, with the rise of military governments, the reform was halted. Dictatorships and military governments perceived universities and their reform as enemies of stability, as their aim was to subjugate the people and restrict freedoms. Government's goal was threatened by universities and their desire for freedom and democracy.³⁵

According to Myriam Southwell 'the authoritarian culture permeated all elements of everyday life' at that time, and education was not an exception. Thereby, authoritarian governments focused on the training of teachers, whom they considered 'the guardians' of political and national ideology, who had to reproduce national values in the exercise of their profession and in the framework of dictatorial education systems.³⁶

Soon, waiting and patience in the face of national problems were educational objectives, with a strong sense of resignation in the face of reality.³⁷ So, a new pedagogical perspective emerged: a restrictive pedagogy. From this restrictive pedagogical perspective, students are the recipient of the content, and the teacher/professor is in charge of imparting the knowledge. Therefore, students are passive recipients with no significant role in their educational process; they are not allowed to think differently or to take a leading role in their education.³⁸

³⁴ Rodrigo Arocena and Judith Sutz, 'Latin American Universities: From an Original Revolution to an Uncertain Transition', *Higher Education*, 50 (2005), 573-592 (574), doi 10.1007/s10734-004-6367-8.

³⁵ Ibid, p. 576.

³⁶ Carolina Kaufmann, *Dictadura y educación: Depuraciones y vigilancia en las universidades nacionales argentinas* (FahrenHouse, 2018), pp. 119, 122.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 147.

³⁸ Carlos Pallán Figueroa, *Bases para la Administración de la Educación Superior en América Latina: El caso de México* (Ediciones INAP, 1978), p. 45.

So, divergent thinking posed a threat to the interests of the dictatorial government, a phenomenon not unprecedented in Latin America as the Spanish conquistadors had wielded similar restrictive power during colonial times.³⁹ The restrictive pedagogy prevalent in the region was significantly shaped by the role played by authoritarian governments, predominantly military in nature, which enforced control through coercion, curtailed freedom, and fostered a culture of fear. Regrettably, this political ideology left an indelible mark on the Latin American pedagogical landscape, resulting in an educational model that hindered independent thought for students.⁴⁰

Universities in the post-independence era were founded to serve the government goals. Therefore, the higher education system embodied and expanded the restrictive ideas of the region's dictatorial political ideologies.⁴¹ The universities replicated the control mechanisms of governments, violating human beings' freedoms.⁴²

3. A Contemporary View

Nowadays, it is widely recognised that higher education offers a significant opportunity for individuals. Therefore, there is a broad consensus among actors in the higher education system on the relevance of this sector and the development of public policies to strengthen the education system in a region where economic crises occur frequently and threaten the stability of higher education.⁴³

Pedro Henríquez Guajardo claimed that 'Never before in human history has the welfare of human beings been so closely linked to the quality and scope of their higher education

³⁹ Ibid, p. 45

⁴⁰ Juan Corradi, Patricia Weiss Fagen and Manuel Antonio Garretón, *Fear at the edge: State terror and resistance in Latin America* (University of California Press, 1992), p. 119.

⁴¹ Bernasconi, p. 30.

⁴² Kaufman, p. 122.

⁴³ Martín, Unzué, 'Una mirada sobre la educación superior en América Latina', *Revista de Educación y Derecho*, 19 (2019), (5), doi.org/10.1344/re&d.v0i19.28357.

systems and institutions’ in a UNESCO report about higher education in Latin America.⁴⁴ Many men and women have found an opportunity to improve their realities through higher education in a context of inequality. In fact, higher education in Latin America has experienced expansion and diversification. Enrolment has substantially increased over 40 years, reaching more than 30% in 2000.⁴⁵

However, it is also true that there are challenges for education in Latin America to enhance educational opportunities for people in this region. According to the World Bank:

The quality and relevance of human capital and knowledge generated by higher education institutions is critical to Latin America’s social and economic development. While high-income countries are raising the stakes, Latin America is still dealing with longstanding problems, such as underdeveloped curricula, lack of teaching materials, underqualified faculty, and labour market imbalances.⁴⁶

Clearly, higher education in the region ‘still lags behind leading economies’, particularly when examining postgraduate education indicators. One notable aspect is the production of students with a PhD, where countries in Latin America fall considerably short. In OECD countries, for instance, there is an annual production of one new PhD per 5,000 people. In stark contrast, the ratio in Latin American nations is staggering – one PhD per 70,000 people in Brazil, one per 140,000 in Chile, and one per 700,000 in Colombia.⁴⁷ This stark contrast highlights a significant gap in the advancement and accessibility of postgraduate education, underscoring the need for targeted improvements in the region.

Furthermore, only 7.5% of men and women aged 25-64 (per country) had completed a university study programme in 1992. This percentage increased to 9.7% in 2002 and to 13.5%

⁴⁴ Pedro Henríquez Guajardo, Hugo Juri, *El papel estratégico de la Educación Superior en el desarrollo sostenible de América Latina y el Caribe* (Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, 2018), p. 9.

⁴⁵ Hans de Wit, Isabel Cristiana Jaramillo, Jocelyne Gacel-Ávila and Jane Knight, *Higher Education in Latin America: the International Dimension* (The World Bank, 2005), p. 40.

⁴⁶ Wit, Jaramillo, Gacel-Ávila and Knight, p. 47.

⁴⁷ Wit, Jaramillo, Gacel-Ávila and Knight, pp. 40-41.

in 2012.⁴⁸ These rates show that, despite the expansion, the number of university students remains at very low levels.

A sign of diversification in higher education is the creation of several new universities and non-university tertiary institutions, which implies more learning opportunities for people. However, with this significant diversification, another issue arises:

Diversity of institutional ownership, autonomy, funding, and programmes have contributed to a somewhat disjointed and fragmented system, made up of institutions that are only weakly linked. [This situation] has made it difficult to coordinate efforts and avoid internal inconsistencies.⁴⁹

In other words, expansion and diversification in Latin American higher education have come at a price: lack of quality and uncoordinated work. It is worth noting that this fragmented system is not something new, as universities in the postrevolutionary era were also a set of institutions or faculties characterised by a lack of coordination in the region.⁵⁰ This will be analysed further in the next section of this research.

On the other hand, expansion and diversification were not accompanied by efforts to update curricula with a mix of teaching methods and content. Most countries ‘have yet to fully adopt a pedagogical model’ in which students have relevant participation in their learning process. Thus, teachers are the ones who impart knowledge and students are limited to being recipients of content, with no emphasis on ‘learning to learn’. This situation suggests that the restrictive pedagogy, a legacy of military governments, is still present in Latin American universities.⁵¹

⁴⁸ María Marta Ferreyra, Ciro Avitabile, Javier Botero Álvarez, Francisco Haimovich Paz and Sergio Urzúa, *At a Crossroads: Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean* (The World Bank, 2017), p. 48.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 42.

⁵⁰ Bernasconi, p. 27.

⁵¹ Luis Martín Trujillo Flores, *Teorías Pedagógicas Contemporáneas* (Fondo Editorial Areandina, 2017), p. 9.

This educational model has led the higher education system to depend on content and classroom instruction. Therefore, there are no coordinated efforts to improve research, creativity, reflection, analysis, and entrepreneurship.⁵²

Other issues add to this challenging outlook; 86 percent of teachers in private universities and 60 percent of teachers in public universities work part-time. It means that most of these part-time teachers have two or more jobs. Although holding more than one job could be advantageous, it goes against the efforts of establishing a ‘professional scholar mass’ committed to the purpose of improving research and creating an academic and attractive learning environment at a specific university.⁵³

In addition, other challenges for higher education in Latin America are:

Overcrowded universities, deteriorating physical facilities, lack of equipment, obsolete instruction material, and outdated curricula. Provision of high-quality education is also hampered by weak learning outcomes in primary and secondary education. Universities in Latin America must often devote significant time and resources to upgrading the skills of secondary graduates who are ill-prepared for higher education.⁵⁴

Another concern is staff qualifications. Less than 4% in the region hold a PhD. Considering Latin America as a whole, “less than 26 percent of professors hold master’s degrees”.⁵⁵ Thus, the quality of education is threatened by this regional reality.

Besides, research has shown ‘that higher education in Latin America lags behind high-income nations in terms of relevance for industry’.⁵⁶ According to Hansen and Holm-Nielsen (2002), ‘some fields turn out large numbers of graduates despite the lack of demand in the

⁵² Ibid, pp. 47-48.

⁵³ Wit, Jaramillo, Gacel-Ávila and Knight, p. 48

⁵⁴ Brunner cited in Wit, Jaramillo, Gacel-Ávila and Knight, ‘Higher Education in Latin America: the International Dimension’ (The World Bank, 2005), p. 48.

⁵⁵ García Guadilla, cited in Wit, Jaramillo, Gacel-Ávila and Knight, ‘Higher Education in Latin America: the International Dimension’ (The World Bank, 2005), p. 48.

⁵⁶ Wit, Jaramillo, Gacel-Ávila and Knight, p. 51.

economy'. For example, 'Argentina has more physicians per 1,000 people than the United States. By contrast, other careers, such as engineering, are undersupplied.'⁵⁷

On the other hand, despite the expansion and diversification of higher education, this learning level remains elitist. The absolute number of students from less privileged groups has increased in recent years, but at the same time, the number of overrepresented groups has also increased. Therefore, the proportion of students from less privileged groups in higher education institutions is just the same as before expansion and diversification.⁵⁸

For example, in Brazil, 'students from the richest 20 percent of the population make up more than 70 percent of enrolled students'. Then, in Mexico, 'the least affluent 60 percent of the population accounts for only 18 percent of enrolment in higher education'. Although in other countries in the region the percentage of less privileged students is a little higher, "access to higher education remains highly unequal."⁵⁹

According to Macías (2020), 'the higher social strata' have benefitted the most 'with a growth rate of 77 percent [of students], while the poorest segments of the population have only reached 5 percent'. These rates could be worse during the pandemic.⁶⁰

Another challenge is the production of researchers. For example, 'In 1999 the region had only 0.32 researchers per 1,000 inhabitants, an alarmingly low figure given the OECD average of 5.51. This gap can be explained partly by the low priority given to graduate and postgraduate programmes.'⁶¹

⁵⁷ Thomas Nikolaj Hansen and Lauritz Holm-Nielsen, cited in Hans de Wit, Isabel Cristiana Jaramillo, Jocelyne Gacel-Ávila and Jane Knight, 'Higher Education in Latin America: the International Dimension' (The World Bank, 2005), p. 51.

⁵⁸ Wit, Jaramillo, Gacel-Ávila and Knight, p. 52.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 52

⁶⁰ Gilda Macías Carmignani, *Educación Superior en América Latina y el Caribe* (2020), *Dialoguemos* <<https://dialoguemos.ec/2020/12/educacion-superior-en-america-latina-y-el-caribe/>> [accessed 9 April 2022].

⁶¹ Wit, Jaramillo, Gacel-Ávila and Knight, p. 61.

In an environment of increasing internationalisation and competitiveness of research and training, there is a flight of young talent who pursue academic careers as researchers and lecturers. They often go abroad from Latin America to get better chances or opportunities in their fields.⁶²

In the context of all these challenges, ‘a tangible sign of the priority given to upholding quality standards is the establishment of independent national accreditation agencies and committees’. These new agencies have driven the creation of education quality assurance systems, establishing standards, and institutional assessments. These efforts could be the beginning of a long but crucial process for higher education in Latin America.⁶³

These quality assurance agencies have driven ‘external peer review, quantitative performance indicators, and student assessment’ as methods of evaluation of higher education services. Institutional self-assessment led the universities to analyse their reality from a critical perspective in order to improve it. The purpose is fostering a mechanism and practice of continuous improvement to ensure that these efforts produce the expected results.⁶⁴

Expansion and diversification are not significant phenomena only for higher education in Latin America but also globally. It is usual for expansion to be followed by a search for quality, as has happened in other countries and is now happening in the region. It is worth noting that this process implies changes and challenges for higher education institutions. However, this situation can be a unique opportunity for the transformation of the education system.⁶⁵

⁶² James Mullin, Robert Adam, Janet Halliwell, and Larry Milligan, *Science, Technology and Innovation in Chile*, (International Development Research Centre, 2000), p. 33.

⁶³ Wit, Jaramillo, Gacel-Ávila and Knight, p. 49.

⁶⁴ Robin DePietro-Jurand and Maria-José Lemaitre, *Tertiary Education: Paving the Way for Reform* (World Bank, 2003), 99–120.

⁶⁵ *Documento de política para el cambio y el desarrollo en la Educación Superior* (UNESCO, 1995), p. 16.

Therefore, this crisis could be a turning point for countries in Latin America to enhance educational services and promote appropriate environments for academic training, research, and personal development.

4. The Latin American Curriculum Model

To address the Latin American curricular model is to study the different curricular trends that have influenced higher education in this region since the emergence of the university. This section addresses three clearly recognisable stages of the Latin American curriculum model.

Shortly after the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors in America in the sixteenth century, the first universities were established. In the first stage, during colonial times, the university model in Latin America was a replica of the Spanish model of the universities of Salamanca and Alcalá.⁶⁶

The Spanish-American university was characterised by its subordination to the Spanish Crown and the Church, and by its attempt to copy the mediaeval university model.⁶⁷ Thus, the Latin American university was an ideological result of the region's dependence on Spain and a contributor to the established system.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Figueiredo-Cowen, p. 471.

⁶⁷ Mediaeval universities emerged from Monastic Schools, and were made up of four faculties: arts, law, medicine, and theology. At that time, "it was absolutely necessary for a student to make it through the faculty of arts to proceed to the higher schools of law, medicine, and theology". On the other hand, subjects were not focused on a topic, but on a specific book.

Philip Daileader, *Las universidades medievales de París y Bolonia: estructura y funcionamiento* (2020), *Wondrium Daily* <<https://www.wondriumdaily.com/>> [accessed 11 May 2022].

⁶⁸ Arocena and Sutz, p. 573.

Alfonso IX of León aimed to establish higher education in his kingdom, leading to the creation of the '*scholas Salamanticae*' in 1218, the precursor to the current University of Salamanca, which has over 800 years of uninterrupted history.⁶⁹

Later, although Alcalá had a General Study approved by King Sancho IV since 1293, the University of Alcalá was officially founded by the Regent of Spain, Cardinal Cisneros, in 1499. This institution represented a groundbreaking educational project, merging the best traditional models from Paris and Salamanca with the more innovative ones from Bologna and Leuven.⁷⁰

However, after the Latin American countries' independence from the Spanish crown, no autochthonous model was designed. After the colonial era, in the nineteenth century, a new independent era began. At that time, there were more than 30 universities in the newly independent countries of Latin America. These institutions of higher education were a combination of the colonial university model and the new 'republican university' based on the French 'Napoleonic' model, characterised by independent and disjointed professional schools.⁷¹ It could be called the second stage of the Latin American curriculum model.

According to Bernasconi:

The new design was brought from post-revolutionary France: professorial chairs grouped in loosely articulated faculties, which in turn corresponded to professional fields—typically, law, medicine, and engineering. Prestigious men in the liberal professions and letters were appointed to the chairs. For these reasons of history, mission, and organisation, Latin American universities are frequently characterised as Napoleonic.⁷²

⁶⁹ *Historia de la Universidad de Salamanca* (2023), *Universidad de Salamanca* <<https://www.usal.es/historia>> [accessed 18 April 2022].

⁷⁰ *Historia de la Universidad* (2022), *Universidad de Alcalá* <<https://www.uah.es/es/conoce-la-uah/la-universidad/historia-mision-y-valores/>> [accessed 22 June 2022].

⁷¹ Arocena and Sutz, p. 574.

⁷² Bernasconi, p. 27.

The main objective of French universities was to shape ‘political and moral opinions’, lead the building of a new country, and to form the new French bourgeois elite. ‘Its ideological acquis⁷³ is made up of the new political and social doctrines that had guided the revolution itself.’⁷⁴

French universities were “artificially created” by law by bringing together institutions or schools with no educational tradition, links, or cooperation. This situation led to the emergence of independent schools, all of them with different methods and organisation.⁷⁵

This university model applied in the Latin American context was ‘disfigured and dysfunctional’ since it was designed in a very different reality. Although higher education in Hispanic America experienced structural renewal with this new model, universities retained the old content and teaching styles from the colonial period.⁷⁶

This Napoleonic institutional model was promoted by the new post-revolutionary elite, the political class. As a result, the aims of education were subordinated to the interests of a particular social class. Thus, the reality of Latin American nations had been ignored. This disfigured model was distant from the French Revolution and its ideas of equality, liberty, and fraternity.⁷⁷

Then, in the third stage, Latin American universities were influenced by the U.S. research university model. This model emerged after World War II and has been applied in America and Europe.⁷⁸ According to Philip Altbach (1998):

⁷³ ‘Heritage’

⁷⁴ Darcy Ribeiro, *La universidad latinoamericana* (Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1971), p. 58.

⁷⁵ Paulo Goes, *La reforma de la universidad: el testimonio de Brasil, La Educacion Avanzada y el desarrollo de América Latina* (Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo, 1965), p. 44.

⁷⁶ Pallán Figueroa, p. 46.

⁷⁷ Ibid

⁷⁸ Geiger cited in Bernasconi, ‘Is There a Latin American Model of the University?’, *Comparative Education*, volume 52.1 (2008), 27-52 (41).

The dimensions of the U.S. model of interest abroad are, among others, the departmental organisation, the system of faculty ranking and promotion, a cadre of professional and highly specialised administrators, curriculum flexibility, academic governance by faculty, the organisation structure and rewards for research and publication, and the elastic balance between autonomy and accountability.

However, it should be noted that the U.S. research university model has some characteristics related to the industrial and economic reality of the North. These ‘university-industry relations’ require certain economic conditions, which are ‘rarely found’ in Latin American countries.⁷⁹ Moreover, it seems that Latin American universities are committed to the preservation and transmission of knowledge but not to the production of knowledge, with only a few exceptions.⁸⁰ This situation is not favourable for a research model in higher education.

According to Bernasconi:

Without dynamic economies growing through continuous gains in productivity due to technology and innovation, and without firms constantly demanding the input of new knowledge, it is unclear to what extent the U.S. research university [...] can produce results in Latin America. A dedication to research such as that of the paradigmatic institutions, and a stronger role of science in support of economic growth, would require public resources not only to match proportionally those of the developed countries but also to compensate for the private sector’s meagre contributions. It would additionally require a willingness by the region’s governments to focus funding on very few institutions, instead of spreading them thin, as has been traditional for reasons of political expediency. None of this seems likely in the foreseeable future.⁸¹

While it may be positive to consider aspects of foreign educational models, the question is: why has Latin America not been able to produce a model from and for its own context?

Regarding the educational model in Latin America, Molina Naranjo, Lavandero García, and Hernández Rabell reference Weinberg (1987) by stating the following:

The evolution of educational models has gone through various stages of development in higher education [...] However, many of these models survive

⁷⁹ Bernasconi, p. 41.

⁸⁰ Etzkowitz, Webster, and Healey cited in Bernasconi, ‘Is There a Latin American Model of the University?’, *Comparative Education*, volume 52.1 (2008), 27-52 (47).

⁸¹ Bernasconi, p. 47.

today, having become traditional or institutionalised, while others could not be implemented due to the lack of social forces to support them. In other cases, transplanted "models" that had proved effective in certain regions failed to adapt to other realities, hindering or delaying the envisaged processes of change. All this is amid a constant asynchrony between reality, institutions, legislation, and ideas, especially in education.⁸²

The curriculum mirrors the educational model of a particular context, encompassing the theories, concepts, and overall understanding of what education entails. Therefore, transplanted models might falter when applied with uncritical adaptation rather than a contextual or reflective adaptation, disregarding the distinctive peculiarities of a specific place. Thus, these stages represent adaptations of educational models from other contexts.

When we opt for an uncritical adaptation, or are coerced into it as in colonial times, we miss the chance to think for ourselves, to address our own challenges and needs, to tackle the issues afflicting our communities, and to inspire ourselves to seek creative solutions and envision the society we desire.

Octavio Ianni has said that, 'Latin American nations are historically and constitutively dependent'. They were 'created as colonies by the European metropolises that emerged with the expansion of mercantilism'. Therefore, during the colonial period, every institution created in Spanish-American society was intended to serve the interests and expansion of mercantilist colonialism.⁸³

According to this 'dependence theory', the social, economic and political problems of this region could be understood in the light of colonisation.⁸⁴ Under this colonial structure, Spain determined not only the new rules of coexistence but also who could think and what should be thought. In addition, religious education reinforced colonialism by teaching the

⁸² Weinberg cited in Molina Naranjo, Lavandero García and Hernández Rabell, 'El modelo educativo como fundamento del accionar universitario. Experiencia de la Universidad Técnica de Manabí, Ecuador', *Revista Cubana Educación Superior*, volume 2 (2018), 151-164 (153).

⁸³ Octavio Ianni, *Imperialismo y Cultura de la violencia en América Latina*, (Siglo XXI, 1970), p. 15.

⁸⁴ Ribeiro, p. 32.

submission and respect that every Latin American Indigenous peoples had to possess as the ‘supreme virtue’ in this new society. Thereby, education was a ‘tool’ of Spanish colonialism.⁸⁵

According to this theory, Latin American countries never achieved autonomy and authenticity, not even in times of independence. It also suggests that universities reflect the dependence that colonisation entailed. Thus, universities merely replicated foreign models without considering that these were designed in a very different context.⁸⁶

Juan G. Alpuche claims that the dependence and decontextualization of higher education institutions during colonial times were alarming. The universities founded by the Spanish adhered closely to the models of Salamanca and Alcalá in Spain, to the extent that the same Spanish university regulations were directly applied in the colonial universities. In Mexico, for example, these regulations were ill-suited to the local reality.⁸⁷

On the other hand, there are some features of earlier curricular models that remain in Latin American higher education today. For example, the Napoleonic fragmented model continues to permeate the region's universities.

This fragmentation can be seen in the internal organisation of universities, and the result is uncoordinated and disjointed work. However, the disarticulation is not only internal, as higher education institutions do not connect with the society around them, so there is no coordinated action between universities and society. So, universities ‘disconnected from social environment’ or detached from society do not respond to the needs of the context.⁸⁸

For example, in a time of economic diversification in Paraguay, Paraguayan universities produce a high number of lawyers, most of them with no labour activity, and there are not many

⁸⁵ Pallán Figueroa, p. 45.

⁸⁶ Ribeiro, p. 32.

⁸⁷ Juan González Alpuche, *La universidad en México*, (Asociación Mexicana de Sociología, 1960), p. 26.

⁸⁸ Benjamin, p. 181.

offers in higher education programmes for industry or technology. Argentina also has a lot of students in law or social sciences programmes, more than ‘Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay combined’. In addition, Brazil has a large number of students in economic sciences. However, these countries lack political and social leaders or, in the case of Brazil, its economic policies are inadequate and among the most backward in the world.⁸⁹

The gap between academic offerings and social reality in Latin America is broad. According to this data, universities have not been able to connect with their environment. In addition, the Latin American higher education system is not committed to comprehensive development in this region today. Universities have poor technological development and planning, and their decisions are spontaneous and generally irrelevant. Moreover, research and teaching are not articulated, so there is no creativity in the teaching and learning process. Schools or faculties are still “academic islands” with no articulated work, and there is a lack of investment in planning and administration.⁹⁰

After all this, a question arises: is there a Latin American curriculum model?

I think it is possible to affirm that there is an education system that has inherited traces of the past, and continues to seek models that are alien to its reality. Such a complex panorama leads us to rethink education in terms of our identity, our people, and our environment.

Thereby, it seems that the Latin American university model has been a sequence of different stages influenced by European and North American models. The challenge for the region is reimagining higher education from a Latin American view, its history, and above all, its present reality.

⁸⁹ Benjamin, p. 181.

⁹⁰ Boris Yopo, ‘Educación y Desarrollo’, *Revista de Educación Superior*, volume 1.3 (1974), 23-76 (34).

Therefore, in the framework of this research, I seek to offer reflections that contribute to the vital task of redefining higher education, and specifically theological training, considering our history, the challenges we face in the region, our people, and our church.

C. An Overall Picture of Higher Education in Paraguay

Understanding Paraguayan higher education requires a historical and socio-political analysis. Compared to other countries in the region, there are some particular characteristics in the evolution of the education system in Paraguay. These characteristics are considered in this section.

1. Higher Education in the Nineteenth Century

The era of Paraguay's independence initiated with the revolution of May 14 and 15, 1811, which marked the country's liberation from the Spanish crown's rule over Paraguayan lands. While several universities in the region had already gained renown, the process of expansion and development of higher education in Paraguay took a somewhat different trajectory.⁹¹

During the colonial period (1524-1811) and the subsequent independent period (1811 onwards), higher education in Paraguay consisted of various non-university educational institutions, which represented the pinnacle of Paraguayan education. Some of these institutions gained renown and played a crucial role in the development of independent Paraguay.⁹²

One of the first institutions of higher education in colonial times in the province of Paraguay was founded in 1585 when Bishop Fray Alonso Guerra promoted the creation of a

⁹¹ Domingo Rivarola, *Informe Nacional sobre Educación Superior en Paraguay* (Asunción, 2002), p. 1.

⁹² Efraín Cardozo, *Breve historia del Paraguay* (Servilibro, 2009), p. 51.

seminary for the training of priests in Asunción. The seminary offered courses in theology, logic, metaphysics, and ethics.⁹³

Then, in 1610, with the support of Governor Hernandarias, the Jesuits founded a college of higher education in Asunción. The curriculum included theology, scholastics, and Latin. However, the college was closed after the expulsion of the Society of Jesus from Paraguay.⁹⁴

Later, in 1783, the Royal Conciliar Seminary of San Carlos was established in Asunción. The seminary's activities began in April with a ceremony in the city's cathedral. The curriculum included the study of grammar and Latin studies, philosophy and the arts, and theology.⁹⁵ However, it should be noted that “education in the colonial era was largely limited to the upper class.”⁹⁶

The structure and management of the seminary were very similar to that of a university. For example, the institution was independent and detached from political authority. Moreover, the rector or vice-rector could not be a political appointee. Professorships were awarded to professors based on a merit-based competition. Nevertheless, with the end of the colonial era, the seminary was closed in 1811. The Royal Conciliar Seminary of San Carlos was the most prestigious Paraguayan institution of higher education in colonial times.⁹⁷

The *Junta Superior Gubernativa del Paraguay* (Superior Governing Board of Paraguay) was the governing body in the early days of independent Paraguay. Despite threats to the stability of the newly independent country and considering the lack of resources, the new government sought to establish opportunities for education at all levels. The Paraguayan vision

⁹³ Rivarola, p. 2.

⁹⁴ Cardozo, p. 125.

⁹⁵ Luis G. Benítez, *Historia de la educación paraguaya*, (Industrial Gráfica Comuneros, 1981), p. 32.

⁹⁶ *Paraguay: a country study*, ed. by Dennis M. Hanratty and Sandra W. Meditz, (Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1990), p. 89.

⁹⁷ Rivarola, p. 3.

of education was shared in a series of national documents; one of them was *La Instrucción del Maestro de Escuela* (Instruction of the school's teachers), published by the *Junta Superior Gubernativa del Paraguay* on 15 February 1812. The document established the profile of teachers and the pedagogical principles of education in Paraguay. The document stated that ‘the splendour of a Republic, its character, and glory derive from its schools.’⁹⁸

It should be noted that *La Instrucción del Maestro de Escuela* constituted a normative body composed of seventy-three articles, whose general purpose was ‘so that our young people [...] may attain, in their civil career, all the instruction they need to become good Christians and citizens useful to God and to the Fatherland.’⁹⁹

The second article referred to moral education, which had two main aims: to form young people according to the principles dictated by reason, and to teach religion with perfection. Its purpose was also to ‘rectify the human spirit according to the rational laws and customs of civil and political upbringing.’ This article also emphasised the importance of example in education: ‘they will never learn this education if they do not see it practised... experience teaches us that civil education is learnt only in childhood and early youth... children always imitate what they see and seldom do what they hear.’

The fourth article addressed the teacher’s responsibility to know and study the inclinations, talents and passions of children, in order to treat them with prudence and to guide them within the limits of reason. It warned that not all children endure strictness; some are intimidated by punishment, and therefore the teacher must act with discernment.

⁹⁸ Benítez, p. 46.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

The eleventh article recommended exercising the pupils' memory, explaining things to them clearly and making them repeat what they had learnt, so that 'it may be better impressed upon them.'

The twelfth article focused on the formation of habits, urging the teacher to prevent children from associating with others who might corrupt them, and to instil virtues such as innocence and the rejection of envy, pride, anger, falsehood and blasphemy.

The forty-eighth article regulated the use of punishment, stating that one must observe 'the motive, the time, and the manner of its execution,' and explicitly disapproved of 'any violence in the education of a tender soul.'

Finally, the sixty-third article stressed the importance of instilling a love of reputation, noting that the teacher's praise can be of great value to the pupil, whereas contempt may cause them deep distress.

These are some of the articles mentioned by the historian Luis G. Benítez in his work *Historia de la educación paraguaya*.¹⁰⁰ This body of suggestions and guidelines for education during the government of Don Carlos Antonio López reveals the State's concern for providing a formation that addresses the different dimensions of the person. I believe this document proposes an education with holistic aspirations, which can still inspire us today as we seek to rethink education in our own context. It would be worthwhile to deepen its analysis from a critical and historically informed perspective.

In addition, higher education initiatives in the first stage of the independent government included the Military Academy, the Patriotic Literary Academy, and the reopening of the

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

Colegio de San Carlos. Unfortunately, these attempts did not have the expected results for several reasons.¹⁰¹

Between 1813 and 1840, the country experienced a setback in education again. During this period, Paraguay was under the perpetual dictatorship of José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia, who did not allow the development of higher education, closed several educational institutions and seminaries dependent on convents, and only allowed primary education. However, he opened the first public library and established free and compulsory primary education.¹⁰²

José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia is considered the ideologue of Paraguay's independence from the Spanish crown, the Argentine provinces and the Portuguese crown. During his mandate, Francia reinforced the idea of an 'independent Paraguay' and isolated the country to remove Europeanism and protect the fledgling independence.¹⁰³

After the death of the perpetual dictator, Carlos Antonio López was appointed as the first constitutional president of the Republic of Paraguay. During his administration, an educational policy was implemented, guiding the government's actions in the field of education. In 1842, the Literary Academy was inaugurated, marking the establishment of the first secular institution of higher education. Subsequently, the School of Mathematics and the Teacher Training College were opened.¹⁰⁴

One of the most crucial measures attributed to the government of Carlos Antonio López was the establishment of the School of Civil and Political Law in 1850. This institution laid the foundations for the eventual emergence of a university in Paraguay. Thus, during López's

¹⁰¹ Rivarola, p. 5

¹⁰² Ibid, p. 6.

¹⁰³ Jaime Collazo Odriozola, 'El dictador Francia y la sociedad paraguaya', *Contribuciones desde Coatepec*, 7 (2004), 81-107 (92-99).

¹⁰⁴ Cardozo, p. 80.

administration (1844-1862), the country advanced in several areas, with a particular emphasis on the promotion of higher education by the government.¹⁰⁵

However, a war slowed down the overall development of the country between 1865 and 1870: 'The War of the Triple Alliance.' Following this war in which Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay fought against Paraguay, 69% of the Paraguayan population died between 1865 and 1870. Only 10% of the men survived, and Paraguayan territory was severely diminished. In this catastrophic scenario, political, economical, and social chaos followed this war in the subsequent years, and stability did not come until 1990 with the end of the dictatorial era.¹⁰⁶ According to the historian Mary López Moreira, Paraguay was a 'devastated and war-torn country after the Triple Alliance'.¹⁰⁷ The process of rebuilding the country was slow and difficult.

Before 1889, several educational institutes were created, but not at the university level. However, academic education was something appropriate only for elites.¹⁰⁸ Thus, the late appearance of the university in Paraguayan society is noteworthy. While universities already existed in other countries in the region around 1580, the *Universidad Nacional de Asunción* was not created by national law until 1889. It is possible to affirm that the war further delayed the emergence of the university in the context of Paraguayan society.¹⁰⁹

The *Universidad Nacional de Asunción*, better known for its Spanish acronym *UNA*, started its functions in 1890. Only ten years later, the *UNA* was characterised by institutional weakness, lack of human resources, and severe financial problems. Its lack of capacity for relevant curriculum development truncated its growth and relevance in society. This situation

¹⁰⁵ Rivarola, p. 7.

¹⁰⁶ Vera Reber, 'The Demographics of Paraguay: A Reinterpretation of the Great War 1864-1870', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 68.2 (1988), 289-319 (290, 317, 319).

¹⁰⁷ María Monte de López Moreira, *Crónica Histórica Ilustrada del Paraguay* (Servilibro, 1997). p. 531.

¹⁰⁸ Rivarola, p. 1

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

did not change until 1920, 30 years later, when new academic training programmes were created.¹¹⁰

2. Higher Education in the Twentieth Century

The subsequent years were a time of political instability and a totalitarian system. The university was under the control of the government, so institutional management did not consider academic issues and the students' specific needs, but rather political power and its interests.¹¹¹

The country's political instability is evident from the post-war period until the mid-twentieth century. During this era of civil wars, several presidents were either forced to resign or unable to complete their terms due to force majeure. Subsequently, the nation experienced a conflict with Bolivia (1932-1935) and endured a 35-year dictatorship (1954-1989) before transitioning into the democratic era.¹¹²

Notwithstanding, in 1960, the Paraguayan Catholic Episcopal Conference established the *Universidad Católica Nuestra Señora de la Asunción*, formerly known as the *Instituto Superior de Teología* or Higher Institute of Theology. The new university, more commonly recognised by its Spanish acronym *UCA*, commenced academic activities in the fields of Law, Politics, Social Sciences, Philosophy, and Educational Sciences. Thus, after 71 years, the monopoly of the UNA came to an end.¹¹³

Between 1960 and 1970, both universities in Paraguay underwent exceptional development. It's noteworthy that the decentralisation process began with the UCA and was later followed by the UNA. The *Universidad Católica Nuestra Señora de la Asunción* expanded

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p. 11-12.

¹¹¹ Ibid, p. 13

¹¹² Victor Natalicio Vasconsellos, *Lecciones de Historia Paraguaya* (Asunción, 1974), pp. 200-205.

¹¹³ Rivarola, pp. 13-14.

by opening new branches in other cities within the country's interior. Furthermore, there was a noticeable increase in demand, accompanied by a surge in enrolment during that time.¹¹⁴

Nevertheless, the longest dictatorship in South America came at a price. Alfredo Stroessner ruled Paraguay under a de facto government from 1954 to 1989. Stroessner was overthrown in a coup d'état on 3 February 1989, bringing an end to his nearly 35 years of rule. His dictatorial era was characterized by violence, torture, repression, and social deterioration. By the end of this period, Paraguayan higher education was lagging, isolated, and far below the quality levels of the region, which were already low compared to the global context.¹¹⁵

In Paraguay, the dictatorial government of Alfredo Stroessner was characterised by 'the persecution of spaces, groups, and institutions that developed activities in the field of social thought, education, and the production of knowledge. Many intellectuals and artists had to go into exile.' Although 'the government so brazenly claimed its supposed commitment to human rights',¹¹⁶ the truth was very different.

During Alfredo Stroessner's military dictatorship in Paraguay, a strategy of repression and terrorism was employed against those aiming to destabilise or overthrow the authoritarian regime. The government targeted and executed individuals who opposed the regime, with the victims numbering over 20,000 Paraguayan citizens, according to the Paraguay Truth and Justice Commission. In 1959, the government's persecution was directed towards the student movement, whose leaders were 'imprisoned, tortured, and exiled.'¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p. 14.

¹¹⁵ Ibid

¹¹⁶ Rodolfo Elías y Elvio Segovia Chaparro, *La Educación en tiempos de Stroessner* (2015), Investigación para el desarrollo <<https://desarrollo.org.py/publicaciones/la-educacion-en-tiempos-de-stroessner/>> [accessed 21 June 2022].

¹¹⁷ Ibid

Furthermore, Rodolfo Elías and Elvio Segovia state that ‘The persecution, whose primary victims were the students, led to the dismantling of organisations and social mobilisation.’ Thus, Stronism reduced the ‘social and political context [...] to that of an authoritarian state,’ consolidating its power and authority through ‘a sustained process of violent, murderous, and paralysing repression.’¹¹⁸

In such a difficult context, Paraguayan higher education ‘was a means to promote and legitimise the political model’. This situation had several consequences:

The legitimisation and internalisation of authoritarianism, the stagnation of scientific-technical and cultural development. Besides, the assumption of a closed, authoritarian, and anti-democratic professional and social practice, the loss of social and historical perspective in the vast majority of students, and the disconnection of knowledge from reality.¹¹⁹

Therefore, Stroessner's long government did not favour research or the production of knowledge in the social and educational sphere; in fact, it prohibited it. However, some ‘intellectual nuclei’ did emerge, but they were oriented towards describing reality, but without ‘political commitment or criticism.’¹²⁰

Order through subordination, unquestioning obedience, and uniformity of thought characterised Stroessner's government. These traits also permeated the Paraguayan education system, so educational institutions contributed to maintaining the status quo. Universities and schools had communication mechanisms to denounce students suspected of being subversive or ‘thinking differently.’¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Ibid

¹¹⁹ Ubaldo Chamorro Lezcano cited in Javier Caballero Merlo and Roberto Luís Céspedes Rufinelli, *Realidad social del Paraguay*, (CIDSEP, 1998), pp. 417 - 435.

¹²⁰ Rodolfo Elías and Elvio Segovia Chaparro, *La Educación en tiempos de Stroessner*.

¹²¹ Alfredo Boccia, Myrian González, and Rosa Palau, *Es mi informe: Los archivos secretos de la policía de Stroessner* (Centro de Documentación y Estudios, 1994), p. 15.

Thus, higher education institutions replicated the control mechanisms of Stroessner's government, restricting thought and violating freedom.¹²²

Moreover, the Paraguayan anti-democratic practices affected the teaching role. During the government of Stroessner, affiliation with the ruling party to obtain a teaching position was required. Teachers were controlled and monitored in all their social and political activities. So, the role of the teaching profession was to perpetuate the image of a submissive citizen to Stroessner's political ideology.¹²³

According to Rivarola, the formidable constraints on the advancement of an emancipatory education were imposed by stringent internal controls, persistent propaganda seeking to justify the authoritarian regime, and pervasive apprehension of repression. Despite concerted propaganda, the stark disparity between rhetoric and tangible initiatives to enhance education remained evident. Throughout the 1980s, mirroring the pattern of the preceding decade, the average allocation to education spending scarcely surpassed 1% of GDP, marking one of the lowest rates globally.¹²⁴

3. Higher Education in the Democratic Era

General elections were held after the ousting of the authoritarian regime in 1989. Prior to this, Paraguayan citizens had not been able to elect their rulers for 54 years, since 1935. Thus, a new era of political transformation commenced in the country. New laws and policies were enacted, and the education system underwent profound and positive changes as a result of these transformations.¹²⁵

¹²² Kaufman, p. 122.

¹²³ Rivarola, p. 11.

¹²⁴ Rivarola, p. 11.

¹²⁵ Ibid, p. 15

A new conviction soon emerged among the population: education and democracy are deeply connected. This idea drove education reform in Paraguay. During the dictatorship, the creation of new universities was restricted. However, in the first ten years of democracy, fourteen private and three public universities were established. Thus, expansion and diversification had begun.¹²⁶

For 70 years, Paraguay had only one university, and for 101 years, only two. In the 1990s, Paraguayan higher education underwent a profound expansion and diversification, while other countries in the region began to emphasise quality. Thus, history helps us to understand why the Paraguayan education system lagged one or two steps behind compared to the region.¹²⁷

While this is not a race or competition, it is crucial to consider the reality of Paraguay in comparison to the broader context to align the Paraguayan education system with regional standards. This broader vision will be necessary to provide an educational service that responds to the needs of the population.

It is worth noting that the proliferation of universities was not initially a concern. After a prolonged period of restrictions on education, it became common to 'open the door' to all new university projects. However, later on, the poor teaching conditions of these new institutions became alarming.¹²⁸

Consequently, the government took certain measures intending to alleviate the situation in the higher education system. One of the first steps was the creation of Law No. 136, which stipulated that all universities should be established by a law authorised by the national

¹²⁶ Ibid, pp. 15-16.

¹²⁷ Ibid, p. 16.

¹²⁸ Rivarola, p. 28.

congress. For the creation law to be enacted, the educational projects had to receive a favourable opinion from the Council of Universities.¹²⁹

However, some old practices of the past dictatorial government were repeated. According to Rivarola, during the Stroessner government (1954 - 1989), decisions related to education were made according to political interests. Unfortunately, Law No. 136 resulted in political interests influencing the establishment/creation of higher education institutions through the national congress, leading to new drawbacks.¹³⁰

The unbridled creation of educational institutions due to political influence and interests allowed the opening of several universities that fell short from both an academic and organisational standpoint. Higher education had become a business. Consequently, between 2006 and 2008, there was a 65% increase in the number of universities. Currently, there are seven public and 38 private universities in Paraguay. However, during such expansion, quality had deteriorated.¹³¹

Nevertheless, in parallel to this process, the Paraguayan Ministry of Education carried out a national education reform process in an attempt to enhance the quality of educational services. Unfortunately, the reform primarily focused on primary education levels, leaving higher education aside. For that reason, new measures were needed to remedy this situation.¹³²

Therefore, in 2003, the *Agencia Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación de la Educación Superior*, better known by its acronym *ANEAES*, was created. The main objective of this new

¹²⁹ *Ley 136* ([n.d]), *Facen* <<https://www.facen.una.py/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Ley-de-Universidades.pdf>> [accessed 13 June 2022].

¹³⁰ Rivarola, p. 28.

¹³¹ Rocío Ríos, *Si la estafa es carrera: varias universidades tienen la licenciatura asegurada* (2017), *ABC Color* <<https://www.abc.com.py/periodismo-joven/si-la-estafa-es-carrera-varias-universidades-tienen-la-licenciatura-asegurada-1597182.html>> [accessed 3 May 2022].

¹³² Rivarola, p. 29.

agency was to develop a quality accreditation system for universities. While further actions and regulations for higher education were necessary at that time, this marked the first step.¹³³

According to law 2072 on the creation of the ‘ANEAES’, the main goal of this regulatory body is to:

Assess and, where appropriate, accredit the academic quality of the higher education institutions subject to its control and draw up technical reports on the academic requirements of higher education degrees and institutions [...] The Agency shall be attached to the Ministry of Education and Culture but shall enjoy technical and academic autonomy in the performance of its functions.¹³⁴

Later, the awareness of the importance of regulation in higher education led to the development of another Law, No. 4995/2013 or ‘The Higher Education Act’. This law was enacted in 2013 and was a crucial step forward for the regulation of university education. Since the previous laws only granted prerogatives to the national congress for the foundation of universities and created the agency for quality assurance without establishing a system of organisation and supervision of higher education, Law No. 4995/2013 was the first Paraguayan law specifically focused on Higher Education.¹³⁵ The new law’s goal was:

To regulate higher education as part of the national education system; to define the types of institutions that comprise it; to establish its regulations and the mechanisms that ensure the quality and relevance of the services provided by the institutions that comprise it, including research.¹³⁶

For 101 years, Paraguay had only two universities. There has never been a need to regulate higher education during a large part of the 19th and 20th centuries, but after expansion and diversification between 1990 and 2013, the need was pressing. With the new law on higher education (4995/2013), the *Consejo Nacional de Educación Superior*, better known for its

¹³³ *Proyecto Alfa: descripción del Sistema de Educación Superior informe país* (Comisión Europea de Cooperación y Desarrollo, 2009), p. 40.

¹³⁴ *Ley 2072: Creation of the ANEAES* (Congreso de la Nación Paraguay, 2003), p.1.

¹³⁵ Lorenzo Meza López, ‘Un nuevo marco legal vela por la calidad en la educación superior’, *El boletín fca*, 32.6 (2013), 2 (2).

¹³⁶ *Ley 4995: Ley de Educación Superior* (Congreso de la Nación Paraguay, 2013), p. 1.

Spanish acronym *CONES*, was created. This council was established as a regulatory body for higher education.

The *CONES* is the ‘responsible [body] for proposing and coordinating higher education policies and programmes’. Some tasks of this organisation are:

- To propose policies for the development and functioning of higher education, following national development plans.
- To give opinions on the creation and closure of universities and institutes of higher education. Guide the foundation of universities and higher education institutes based on the technical report provided by the National Agency for the Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education (ANEAES).
- To establish the basic academic and technical criteria to be met by curricula.¹³⁷

Quickly, with the action of *CONES*, major irregularities in higher education institutions began to come to light. Accusations that the unregulated universities were ‘swindling’ were not long in coming, leading to interventions at some institutions, while others were closed down. On the other hand, in 2016, 86 university degrees in 39 different universities were accredited for the quality assurance national programme.¹³⁸

In summary, several positive developments can be listed that are driving the transformation process of the Paraguayan higher education system.

Firstly, substantial changes have occurred in recent years with the legal modification and the creation of Law 4995, which brought about the regulation of higher education and an increased emphasis on research and quality. Secondly, the current environment has fostered

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ María del Rocío Robledo Yugueros, *Educación Superior en Iberoamérica: informe nacional Paraguay* (Universia, 2016), pp. 23, 39.
 Ríos, *Si la estafa es carrera: varias universidades tienen la licenciatura asegurada*.

dialogue between the Paraguayan Ministry of Education and Science and the universities to establish agreements for the administration of national higher education. Before the enactment of the new national laws regulating higher education, universities had quasi-sovereign status with the autonomy conferred on them by the state.¹³⁹

In addition, the development of the new education regulations has encouraged the association of higher education institutions, due to the need for dialogue and joint reflection on the challenges of the education system. In recent years, associations of private¹⁴⁰ and state universities¹⁴¹ have been founded with the aim of dialogue and cooperation. All these developments contribute to the beginning of an important transformation process, although it is still too early to speak of results.

Despite all these recent and valuable changes, there remain curricular, pedagogical, and didactic issues that need to be addressed. Moreover, there is an ongoing debate between constructivism and behaviourism¹⁴² in some quarters; constructivism is present in the discourse, but practices often remain behaviourist. Additionally, there is widespread ignorance of the idea that the teaching and learning process is dynamic and ever-changing, requiring the integration of different theories and strategies. Therefore, not all the answers can be found solely in one specific pedagogical theory.¹⁴³

¹³⁹ Robledo Yugueros, p. 38.

¹⁴⁰ More information on this association can be found on the following website: *Asociación Paraguaya de Universidades Privadas* <<https://www.apup.org.py/institucional/2-sobre-la-apup>> [Accessed 11 November 2024].

¹⁴¹ More information on this association can be found on the following website: *Asociación de Universidades Públicas del Paraguay* <<https://aupp.edu.py/v2/y>> [Accessed 11 November 2024].

¹⁴² According to the Encyclopedia Britannica: 'behaviourism, a highly influential academic school of psychology that dominated psychological theory between the two world wars. Classical behaviourism, prevalent in the first third of the 20th century, was concerned exclusively with measurable and observable data and excluded ideas, emotions, and the consideration of inner mental experience and activity in general. In behaviourism, the organism is seen as "responding" to conditions (stimuli) set by the outer environment and by inner biological processes.' 'Behaviourism', in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/science/behaviourism-psychology> [Accessed 9 December 2024].

¹⁴³ *Constructivista o Conductista* (2013), *Última Hora* <<https://www.ultimahora.com/constructivistao-conductista-n486394.html>> [Accessed 16 May 2022].

From my point of view, the debate between behaviourism and constructivism reveals how limited our understanding of education still is. These are not the only theoretical approaches that exist, and I believe we have not yet moved beyond this stage due to a narrow view of the pedagogical field and a lack of awareness of other educational schools of thought.

On the one hand, this exposes a curricular issue, since our curricular designs tend to operate within these two spheres of pedagogical thinking without incorporating other perspectives. Moreover, it is also a pedagogical problem, linked to the knowledge of pedagogy itself, as teacher training rarely extends to new proposals and horizons. Finally, it is a didactic issue, as it directly affects teaching methodologies and hinders the overcoming of limited pedagogical practices that persist both in the classroom and in broader interactions with students.

As I will suggest later, this research does not seek to promote rigid or exclusive positions regarding any particular pedagogical current; rather, it serves as an invitation to consider the broad range of ideas and approaches to education that can enrich the teaching and learning process. The convergence of ideas and perspectives can foster a more diverse and dynamic educational experience; however, this requires teachers to be aware of the various existing options, to possess solid contextual knowledge, and to develop a critical capacity to discern among the different currents of pedagogical thought, in order to design varied and contextually grounded learning experiences.

Among the various existing pedagogical currents, we might consider classical or traditional theories, behaviourism, constructivism and its socio-constructivist variant, humanism, critical or liberating theories, and, more recently, connectivism and emerging or holistic approaches. As I have suggested earlier, teachers need to maintain a critical perspective

on these currents and develop the capacity to weave together diverse learning experiences inspired by the principles of these different pedagogical traditions.¹⁴⁴

In addition, the information systems in higher education are inadequate and outdated, making it challenging to analyse the development of this process of change. This lack of information leads to other problems: ‘Furthermore, the study of the relevance of the offer is incipient, a consequence of the lack of information, which does not allow informed decisions to be taken on the academic offer.’¹⁴⁵

This underscores the need to promote a critical and investigative perspective on higher education in Paraguay, one that provides up-to-date data to analyse reality and act consistently when making decisions. Along the same lines, it is worth noting that the institution in question, within the context of this research, has in recent years established a research centre dedicated to studying both the realities of churches in Paraguay and the challenges and outcomes of theological education.¹⁴⁶ This data will be vital for initiating a process of transformation in theological education at the IBA, but it will also be necessary to continue fostering this type of contextual evaluation and research in the service of theological education and the churches.

Although the new regulations and agencies are good signs at this early stage, a social pact is needed to lead to pertinent and profound changes in the education system.

From the point of view of the internal organisation of universities, the challenge is to make administrative processes more transparent. Students have shown concern about this lack of transparency in recent years. For example, in 2015, in one of the many demonstrations of dissatisfaction by the students of the UNA, they had the university rector resign, accusing him

¹⁴⁴ Muhajirah, ‘Basic of Learning Theory (Behaviorism, Cognitivism, Constructivism, and Humanism)’, *International Journal of Asian Education*, 1.1 (2020), 37-42 (39-40), <https://doi.org/10.46966/ijae.v1i1.23>.

¹⁴⁵ Robledo Yugueros, p. 40.

¹⁴⁶ Centro de Investigación Marturía ([nd]), Campus IBA < <https://iba.uep.edu.py/academico/marturia/> > [Accessed 14 October 2025].

of corruption. At the same time, demonstrations over various administrative and academic shortcomings were conducted in private universities.¹⁴⁷

In addition, the Paraguayan higher education system faces other common challenges of the region. Some of these challenges are deteriorated physical facilities, lack of equipment, obsolete instruction material, and weak learning outcomes in primary and secondary education. Besides, there is also a need for well-trained and up-to-date teachers.¹⁴⁸

Another challenge is to create new opportunities for the development of contextualised research linked to the national reality. The purpose should be to build a 'bridge' between the academy and the context.¹⁴⁹

Such a challenging landscape requires commitment, dialogue, and consensus. It will not be possible to overcome this stage of the crisis without the joint action of the whole of society. But as someone said: every crisis is also an opportunity.

D. Formal Theological Education in the Context of the Paraguayan Mennonite Brethren Churches

According to the 'Catalogue of Public and Private Universities' and the 'National Register of Academic Offers', Paraguay hosts three universities that provide Bachelor's and Master's programmes in Theology.¹⁵⁰ Among these, one is Catholic, while the remaining two are Protestant institutions. Notably, one of the Protestant or evangelical universities is the

¹⁴⁷ UNA Note calles: a 5 años de la lucha que fortaleció la lucha de los estudiantes (2020), *Última Hora* <<https://www.ultimahora.com/una-no-te-calles-5-anos-la-lucha-que-fortalecio-la-voz-los-estudiantes-n2905812>> [Accessed 29 July 2022].

¹⁴⁸ Domingo Rivarola, 'La Universidad Paraguaya hoy', *Revista da Avaliação da Educação Superior*, 13.2 (2008), 533-578 (570), doi.org/10.1590/S1414-40772008000200014.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid

¹⁵⁰ *Primer Catálogo de Universidades Públicas y Privadas del Paraguay* <https://issuu.com/agenciamariav/docs/catalogo_universidades> [Accessed 26 August 2022]. *Registro Nacional de Ofertas Académicas* <<https://cones.gov.py/resoluciones/>> [Accessed 26 August 2022].

Universidad Evangélica del Paraguay,¹⁵¹ more commonly recognised by its Spanish acronym, UEP.

The *Universidad Evangélica del Paraguay* (UEP) boasts a Faculty of Theology comprising four distinct campuses: the Presbyterian Seminary, the Baptist Seminary, the Mennonite Seminary, and the *Instituto Bíblico Asunción*. The latter is affiliated with the Spanish and German-speaking Mennonite Brethren Conferences.¹⁵²

While all four campuses collectively form the Faculty of Theology within UEP, this research primarily centres on the contextual analysis of the *Instituto Bíblico Asunción*. It is noteworthy as the biblical seminary of the Mennonite Brethren and serves as the foundational institution that birthed the *Universidad Evangélica del Paraguay*.¹⁵³

The following is a brief history of the foundation and development of the *Instituto Bíblico Asunción*, better known as *IBA*.

1. A Brief History of the IBA

The history of the *IBA* has always been linked to the emergence of the Mennonite Brethren Churches. In the words of Juan Silverio Verón, former professor of the institution: ‘the church needed pastors, and the institute needed students, it was a relationship of mutual enrichment.’¹⁵⁴ In this section, I will explore the history that led to the founding of the *Instituto Bíblico Asunción*, and its own history.

¹⁵¹ More information on this university can be found on the following website: <https://uep.edu.py/>.

¹⁵² More information on the Instituto Bíblico Asunción (Asunción Bible Institute) can be found on the following website: *Nuestra historia* (2024), *Campus IBA* <<https://iba.uep.edu.py/nosotros/nuestra-historia/>> [Accessed 11 November 2024].

¹⁵³ The university was founded within *IBA*, and its facilities housed the university’s main headquarters during the first few years.

¹⁵⁴ *Registro de un Peregrinaje*, ed. by Víctor Wall, Flavio Florentín and Martha Florentín, (Litocolor, 2014), p. 7.

1.1. The First Mennonite Brethren Churches and the First Attempts at Theological Formation

Menno Simons, originally a Catholic priest, adopted the beliefs of Anabaptism within Zwingli's followers. In 1536, he renounced the Catholic Church to live in accordance with his newfound religious convictions. The Anabaptism embraced by Menno was fundamentally characterised by three core values: 'Jesus is the centre of our faith, the community is the centre of our lives, and reconciliation is the centre of our work.' Subsequently, Menno commenced preaching and guiding Bible study groups, leading to the identification of his followers as 'Mennonites.'¹⁵⁵

The Mennonites spread throughout Europe and founded communities where they could live according to their faith, customs, and spiritual values. Later, in the 1760s, Catherine the Great of Russia invited Mennonites from Prussia to settle in an area of Ukraine that she had conquered. In return, Mennonites received religious freedom and exemption from compulsory military service. However, almost 100 years later, Russia made military service mandatory for all, including the Mennonites. This situation threatened Mennonite values and beliefs. Consequently, persecution against the Mennonites began, which eventually led to the fleeing of thousands of Mennonites to Canada, and later to a number of South American countries, including Paraguay.¹⁵⁶

In 1926, with government legal guarantees and high hopes, the first Mennonite immigrant families arrived in Paraguay. Neither the journey nor the arrival on Paraguayan soil was without difficulties, as several people died on the way from diseases, and others returned to Canada out of frustration. However, in April 1928, the first Mennonite immigrant villages

¹⁵⁵ Palmer Becker, *¿Qué es ser un cristiano anabaptista?*, ed. by James R. Krabill, (Mennonite Mission Network, 2008), pp. 2, 5.

¹⁵⁶ Calvin Redekop, Victor Krahn and Samuel Steiner, *Anabaptist/Mennonite Faith and Economics* (University Press of America, 1994), p. 127.

were founded in the Paraguayan Chaco (the northern region of the country), isolated and with pressing problems.¹⁵⁷

The first families to arrive founded the Menno colony. Later, in 1930, the Fernheim colony was founded, followed by the Neuland colony in 1947. All these communities organised themselves socially and economically, always maintaining a 'threefold' commitment to three Anabaptist principles: no resistance, no oaths, and the concept of a church made up of believers.¹⁵⁸

According to Plett (1979), the belief that God had brought the Mennonites to Paraguay permeated the community. They were convinced that the Mennonite community was to be a help and a blessing to Paraguay. So, they embraced the task of service to neighbours and country, and affirmed the importance of being faithful and useful citizens of society. These thoughts, strongly rooted in the mentality of the Mennonites of those years, demonstrated a strong sense of the task and responsibility of evangelism.¹⁵⁹

On 9 June 1930, the first Mennonite Brethren Church in Paraguay was founded in Fernheim Colony. According to Unruh:

Among the first members of the church were some ordained preachers who had completed good theological training in Russia. During the first years, these preachers had to take on the main responsibility of leading the new church. These were challenging times, but with great dedication and determination, they [the first members] undertook the task of building up the church.¹⁶⁰

In the early years, preachers' lectures were offered in German on topics such as theology and homiletics. The young people who attended the lectures had the task of writing a sermon

¹⁵⁷ Rudolf Plett, *Presencia Menonita en el Paraguay* (Instituto Bíblico Asunción, 1979), pp. 72 - 73.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, pp. 76 - 77.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid

¹⁶⁰ Instituto Bíblico Asunción, p. 28.

for further evaluation by all participants. This was the main training method and formation for potential new preachers for the community.¹⁶¹

In addition to lectures, other means of education and study were colloquia.¹⁶² In these meetings, a preacher would present a study on a particular biblical passage, and then the participants could contribute ideas and comments, to discuss the topic presented. It was a means of deepening the study of the Bible and theology.¹⁶³

However, in the late 1930s, the need for new, well-trained leaders for the churches in the Fernheim colony was pressing. So, in an attempt to alleviate this need, Nicolai Siemens, a preacher who had studied at a Russian seminary, taught theology courses in the villages, using the text of John 11:28 as his motto: ‘The Teacher is here, and he calls you’. This first Bible school was called the *Travelling Bible School*. The students came from different villages, and the local people provided them with food and lodging.¹⁶⁴

Later, between 1948 and 1950, new theological schools were founded in Fernheim and Friesland, two other Mennonite colonies. Many young people were enthusiastic about taking part in the courses, as it was still difficult to attend secondary school. According to historical data from the conference of churches:

When the *Konferenz der Mennoniten Brüdergemeinden von Paraguay* was founded in 1961, the Bible schools in Fernheim and Friesland were still of great

¹⁶¹ Peter Wiens, *Die K.f.K. Fernheim: ein geschichtlicher Überblick 1931-1991* (Cromos, 1992), p.26.

¹⁶² Colloquia and lectures were common teaching methods in the early spaces of theological education in those days. Although colloquia incorporated dialogue and a certain degree of participation, they still belonged to a teaching methodology framed within a magister-centred paradigm rather than a participatory and critical teaching-learning process. These methods could be said to remain within what we now understand as traditional education, focused mainly on the transmission of knowledge rather than on participatory or transformative learning. See Mansour Falasi, ‘Innovative pedagogies: A comparative analysis of traditional and modern teaching methods’, *Academy of Educational Leadership Journal*, 28.1 (2024), 1-2 (1).

Nevertheless, these efforts should not be undervalued; on the contrary, they reflected genuine communal attempts in the pursuit of excellence. Such educational endeavours carried distinctive features of the kind of teaching the early Mennonite immigrants had themselves received in their countries of origin. At the same time, they revealed the ongoing need—still present in our days—to rethink theological education in light of new contexts and challenges.

¹⁶³ Wiens, p. 27

¹⁶⁴ Instituto Bíblico Asunción, p. 29.

importance. At the first meeting on 2 and 3 July 1961, a detailed report was presented on the work that had been done in these schools up to that time, and it is impressive how much effort had been made to carry out the theological teaching mentioned above. At the *Elim Bible School* in Fernheim, 21 teachers had taught between 1948 and 1961, and 68 young people had completed their studies. At the *Tabor School* in Friesland, 12 teachers had taught between 1950 and 1961, and 16 students had completed their studies.¹⁶⁵

Later, in January 1958, the South American Conference of Mennonite Brethren met in Filadelfia - Paraguay. One of the most important topics was the need for a Bible institute. Soon after, the decision was made to open the institute in the city of Curitiba, Brazil. The institute was founded in 1961 and received the name *Instituto Teológico Evangélico* (ITE).¹⁶⁶

Thus, the arrival of the first Mennonites in Paraguay and the subsequent founding of churches in the colonies was always linked to the need to train preachers, leaders, and pastors for the extension of the Kingdom of God. The various projects that arose between 1930 and 1961 had served to alleviate this need temporarily. Nevertheless, the time was approaching for a more effective decision.

1.2. The First Churches of Asunción and the Foundation of the IBA

In 1955, the Mennonites initiated their evangelistic efforts in Asunción, the capital of Paraguay. Consequently, the first baptism occurred on July 12, 1956, followed by the establishment of the first Spanish-speaking Mennonite Brethren church in the capital city on July 13, 1958. This marked the beginning of their work, which eventually expanded from Asunción to encompass 22 other towns across the interior of Paraguay.¹⁶⁷

In this context of the growth of the first churches, the desire to train new leaders arose:

¹⁶⁵ Konferenzbuch cited in Instituto Bíblico Asunción, *Registro de un Peregrinaje*, ed. by Víctor Wall, Flavio Florentín and Martha Florentín, (Litocolor, 2014), p. 7. 1961, p. 31.

¹⁶⁶ Instituto Bíblico Asunción, p. 33.

¹⁶⁷ Plett, p. 121.

Rafael Zaracho and David Irala, *Memoria Viva: Historia de las iglesias de la Convención Evangélica de Iglesias Paraguayas Hermanos Menonitas* (Instituto Bíblico Asunción, 2019), p. 5.

The training of workers for the Mennonite Brethren churches in Paraguay came about as a result of the mission work in Asunción. The interest in preparing and training people for Christian ministry accompanied the mission of evangelism and church planting. The first missionaries of the Mennonite Brethren churches in Paraguay, Albert Enns, Hans Wiens, Hans Pankratz, and Rodolfo Plett, soon saw the need to begin formally training future church workers.¹⁶⁸

Thus, in 1964 the *Instituto Bíblico Asunción (IBA)* was founded. The first Mennonite Brethren church in Asunción was the headquarters of the institute in its beginnings. On Sunday 29th March the inauguration was celebrated, and on Monday 30th March, the school year began with evening classes from Monday to Friday.¹⁶⁹

Although the *IBA* had been founded to train Spanish-speaking missionaries, in 1967 the first German-speaking students began their studies at the new bible institute.¹⁷⁰

At its assembly in 1968, the *Konferenz der Mennoniten Brüdergemeinden von Paraguay* decided to disassociate itself from its responsibility for the *Instituto Teológico Evangélico de Curitiba* and, in exchange, support the *IBA*. The decision was made considering that it was easier to send students to the capital city rather than abroad. In 1971, the *Convención Evangélica de Iglesias Paraguayas Hermanos Menonitas* (Evangelical Convention of Paraguayan Mennonite Brethren Churches) was founded, which brought together the new Spanish-speaking churches. Therefore, both conferences, the Spanish-speaking and the German-speaking, became owners of the *IBA*.¹⁷¹

The first students followed a 3-year programme and continued two more years of study at the *Seminario Bautista de Buenos Aires*, an institution with which the *IBA* had an agreement for graduates to complete their degree.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Instituto Bíblico Asunción, p. 26.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 49.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 16.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, p. 14.

¹⁷² Ibid, p. 50.

From 1964 to 1983, the institution developed academic and pedagogical aspects, strengthening the curriculum and its emphasis. The years 1984 to 1994 were characterised by the arrival of the first graduates from postgraduate studies abroad, who immediately joined the teaching staff of the *IBA*. This made possible a renewal of the teaching staff and an increase in the quality of preparation, which, although already characteristic of the institution, was growing and gave it even more prestige. At the same time, applicants to study at the institution began to arrive with a better academic profile, which also raised the academic level.

By the 1990s, its elevation to a Faculty of Theology of the *Universidad Evangélica del Paraguay* allowed it to grow and consolidate as a solid institution for the training of Christian leaders in the field of biblical-theological higher education in Paraguay.¹⁷³

A remarkable feature of the *IBA* (considering the region) is the number of international students it enrolls each year. In recent years, students came from Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Mexico, Germany, Ukraine, Canada, and the United States. This has enriched the training and multicultural coexistence of the students.¹⁷⁴

Since its establishment, community life has been pivotal at *IBA*. Several students, and even families, reside within the institution's premises, fostering a vibrant community and enriching its essence. Coexistence has significantly contributed to character development, notably within a culturally diverse community from its origins. Both students and teachers have actively engaged in communal interactions right from the institution's outset.¹⁷⁵

Another remarkable aspect of the institution is its consistent provision of travel opportunities and experiences for all students, enabling them to apply acquired knowledge

¹⁷³ Ibid, p. 51

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, pp. 51- 53

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, pp. 58, 61.

through cultural interactions across America, Africa, or Europe. Students have had the chance to participate in short-term missionary service, fostering the expansion of their perspectives and knowledge.¹⁷⁶

The *Instituto Bíblico Asunción*, as one of the campuses of the Faculty of Theology of the *Universidad Evangélica del Paraguay*, has been training men and women for service for 60 years. Its long and good history is not only known among the Mennonite Brethren churches, as students from several other denominations have also studied at the *IBA*.

It is worth mentioning that in 2021 the institution moved to new premises, which were officially opened in April 2022.

However, it is crucial to consider that the *IBA* is currently navigating within the challenging landscape of Paraguayan higher education. The institution confronts similar national and regional issues and faces the significant challenge of updating itself to maintain relevance and address contextual needs.

2. Curricular Analysis

2.1. Programme Structure

It is worth noting that the emergence of the *Instituto Bíblico Asunción* 'followed patterns' and drew from experiences in Russia, Canada, and the Bible institutes of the Mennonite Brethren in Hillsboro-Kansas, Winnipeg-Manitoba, and Fresno-California. In the latter, several current teachers were trained. All these experiences and models had a significant impact on the organisational and curricular design of the Faculty of Theology, particularly that of Fresno.¹⁷⁷

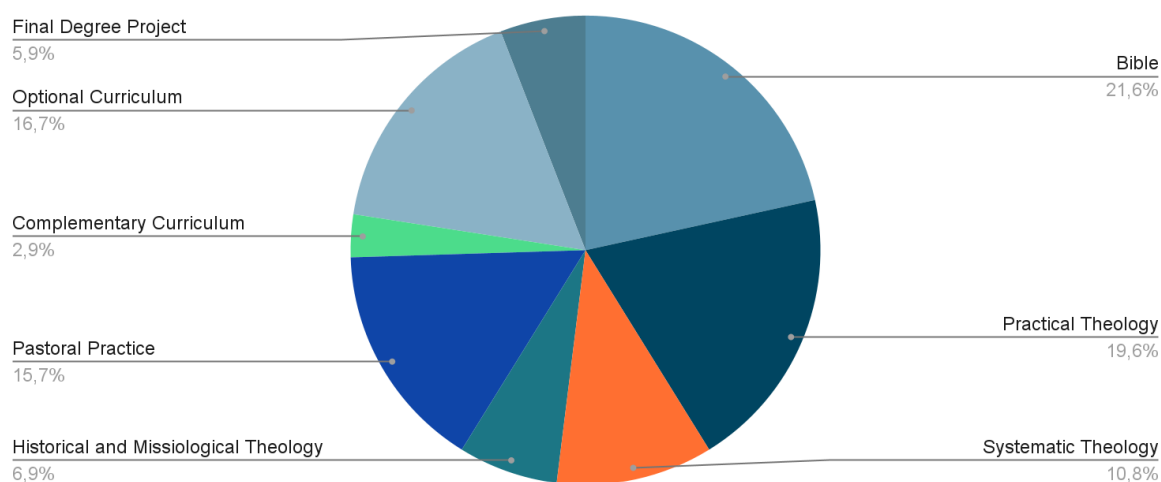
¹⁷⁶ Ibid, pp. 62 - 65

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, pp. 38, 42.

Currently, the *IBA* offers two official programmes: the BA in Theology and the Master in Pastoral Science. Unfortunately, the Master's programme is currently not running due to a lack of students. Programmes dated from 2002 and 2007 respectively.

The BA in Theology is a 4-year programme with a curriculum structured in two main areas: the core curriculum and the optional curriculum. The core curriculum is made up of subjects organised in fields: Bible, Practical Theology, Systematic Theology, Historical and Missiological Theology, Pastoral Practice, Complementary Curriculum, and the Final Degree Project. The optional curriculum is a percentage of subjects that can be chosen according to need. The following graph shows the distribution of curricular areas.

BA in Theology



The programme also includes a supervised practicum in churches or partner institutions of 544 teaching hours.¹⁷⁸ During this practical experience, students are expected to discover and enhance their skills and talents, learn to plan and execute church and community activities,

¹⁷⁸ One teaching hour is equivalent to 45 minutes.

and develop specific skills for working with children and youth. In addition, the Supervised Practicum is a time to develop skills for teaching, evangelism, counselling, and discipleship.¹⁷⁹

Moreover, students have the opportunity to travel to the countryside or abroad for short-term missionary work, experience life in community living at the institute, and take advantage of the opportunity to learn in an intercultural environment.¹⁸⁰

2.2. Objectives, Graduate Profile and Potential Job Opportunities

According to the BA in Theology Educational Project or Curriculum project, which describes the academic, organisational and administrative aspects of the programme, the aims are to provide theological, ethical, methodological, and practical training, and skills that enable students to understand and interpret the Holy Scriptures competently.¹⁸¹

Within this framework, the Bachelor's degree in Theology aims to train students capable of taking on pastoral work in local churches, carrying out missionary work, planting churches, and guiding families. In addition, students are expected to be able to lead Christian education departments, teach in theological seminaries and work as chaplains, among other possible career opportunities.¹⁸²

Furthermore, the graduate of the study programme possesses the following profile: skills to understand and competently interpret the Holy Scriptures; a solid theological, methodological, and practical background; a theological understanding of God's relationship with the human being, self, and fellow human beings; skills in counselling, pastoral leadership

¹⁷⁹ Facultad de Teología de la Universidad Evangélica del Paraguay, *Proyecto Educativo: Actualización 2002 de la Licenciatura en Teología* (UEP, 2002), p. 47.

¹⁸⁰ Instituto Bíblico Asunción, pp. 58, 61.

¹⁸¹ Facultad de Teología de la Universidad Evangélica del Paraguay, p. 10.

¹⁸² Ibid, p. 11.

and teaching; a comprehension of the mission of the church, and a commitment to act towards the fulfilment of that mission.¹⁸³

2.3. Teaching Methodology and Strategies

According to the BA in Theology Educational Project or Curriculum project, the teaching methods and strategies established within the framework of the bachelor's degree programme in theology provide for:

- Lectures, seminars, workshops, talks, presentations, exhibitions, practicals, colloquiums, and other practices.
- Field and bibliographical research, in which the participation of students and professors is essential.
- Didactic strategies and methods will be used at all times, as well as teaching techniques that guarantee the active and constructive participation of the student.
- The teaching methodology will be participative and operative.
- Diagnostic, formative, and summative evaluations will be implemented.
- Use of audiovisual resources and computer technology applied to research.¹⁸⁴

2.4. Assessment

The evaluation's objectives within the framework of the Bachelor's degree programme in Theology are as follows:

- To ascertain the quality and appropriateness of the teaching techniques applied by the lecturer.
- To find out the degree of assimilation, predisposition, responsibility, and vocational aptitude of the student.

¹⁸³ Ibid, p. 9.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 144.

- To stimulate learning and the development of a disciplined attitude towards the demands of the course.
- To highlight achievements and shortcomings in order to correct them and/or promote growth.
- To provide feedback to the teacher and the student.
- To modify and change teaching techniques and methods as necessary.
- To ensure, to provide, and to maintain the highest quality of teaching and student performance.
- To improve the quality of teaching provided in a manner that safeguards and enhances institutional reputation.¹⁸⁵

In 2019, I conducted research on assessments and educational objectives at the *IBA*. For this purpose, I examined 16.6% (9 subjects/9 syllabi) of the 4-year study programme (BA in Theology).

The theory used as a reference in the process of analysing the assessments carried out at the institution was that of Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy, which provides a framework for classifying cognitive processes. Based on Bloom's taxonomy, the first 4 phases of the cognitive process were specifically considered for this purpose: remembering (first level), understanding (second level), applying (third level) and analysing (fourth level).¹⁸⁶

First, the educational objectives of the study programmes were reviewed. According to the Syllabi analysis, 42.8 % of the verbs most frequently used for objectives are on Bloom's first taxonomic level: remembering. 28.6 % of the verbs are on the taxonomic level two: understanding. Similarly, 28.6 % of the verbs are on the taxonomic level four: analysing. Thus,

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, pp. 144-145.

¹⁸⁶ Joaja Ajayi, *Bloom's Taxonomy* (2024), *Research Gate* <<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/380814622>> [Accessed 30 October 2024].

the first two taxonomic levels (remembering and understanding) account for 71.4% of the learning objectives, and there was no evidence of Bloom's third taxonomic level: applying.¹⁸⁷

Secondly, an examination was conducted on the types of assessments utilised. It was found that 44.4% of the assessments applied target taxonomic levels 1 and 2: remembering and understanding. Moreover, 44.4 % of the applied evaluations target taxonomic level 4: analysing. Then, 11.1 % of the applied assessments target taxonomic level 3: applying.

So, the study concludes that there are no references to the assessment of "learning to be" and 'learning to do'. Moreover, the first two taxonomic levels (remembering and understanding) cover most of the learning objectives, and there are no educational objectives on 'analysis.'¹⁸⁸

Finally, one might suspect that there is no coordination or articulation of all levels in the learning process, where in a fluid and intentional way, cognitive processes are sought to encompass at least these 4 basic stages of development or learning.

3. Institutional Analysis

3.1. Introduction to the Strategic Planning

In 2019, an institutional analysis was conducted at the *IBA*. A new General Director was appointed, and the Board of Trustees entrusted him with the responsibility of initiating an institutional reality study. To accomplish this, a task force was assembled to develop a strategic

¹⁸⁷ David Irala, *Marco Referencial para el diseño de competencias y capacidades en la educación bíblico-teológica en el contexto del Instituto Bíblico Asunción*, unpublished document (UNA, 2019), pp. 57-61.

In addition, there is an article summarising the main findings of this research, published in a yearbook of the Universidad Evangélica del Paraguay: David Irala, 'Marco Referencial para el diseño de competencias y capacidades en la educación bíblico-teológica en el contexto del Instituto Bíblico Asunción', *Anuario Académico de la Universidad Evangélica del Paraguay*, 1 (2019), 143-152. The article is available at: <https://ojs.uep.edu.py/index.php/anuarioacademico/article/view/112>

¹⁸⁸ Irala, p. 59.

planning project. The analysis methods included SWOT analysis, interviews, as well as meetings with experts and community members.

The SWOT analysis was carried out in different groups: the board of trustees of the German and Spanish-speaking churches conferences, the faculty of the institution, and some pastors and leaders.

3.2. SWOT Analysis: Conference of the German-speaking Mennonite Brethren in Paraguay

Regarding the SWOT analysis carried out by members of the board of trustees of the German-speaking churches conference, some noteworthy results were:¹⁸⁹

Strengths	Weaknesses
-Good theological foundations -Young students -Well-trained teaching staff -More than 50 years of experience -The <i>IBA</i> is part of the <i>Universidad Evangélica del Paraguay</i>. -Class hours are in the morning; some students may take other courses in parallel -Anabaptist institution	-No short or informal courses -Sponsoring conferences with different expectations -There is no support/counselling for graduates -Members of the education community "live in a bubble" -No own funds are generated. There is extreme financial dependency -Only one official study programme is offered

¹⁸⁹ Marturia, *Análisis FODA del Consejo de la Asociación Hermanos Menonitas de habla alemana*, unpublished document (2019).

	-Arrogance and lack of cooperation with other organisations -Poor rhetorical and homiletical skills of students -Low enrolment of German-speaking students. No strategies to improve this situation
Opportunities	Threats
-With the new infrastructure, more students will be able to enrol -The <i>IBA</i> can open other courses that support pastoral ministry -Distance Learning -Intercultural context, foreign students -The <i>International Community of Mennonite Brethren</i> (ICOMB) considers that <i>IBA</i> could be the training seminary for pastors for the Anabaptist churches in Latin America	-University level is only accessible to some groups -No distance learning programmes -Weak mission focus -Students tend not to return to their churches, especially those in the countryside -Thinking that systematic, academic teaching does not contribute to discipleship

3.3. SWOT Analysis: Conference of the Spanish-speaking Mennonite Brethren in Paraguay

The SWOT analysis noteworthy results of the board of trustees of the Spanish-speaking churches conference were:¹⁹⁰

Strengths	Weaknesses
-Good biblical, theological and academic training. -Good ethical/moral witness of IBA staff throughout its history. -Building infrastructure -Interculturality -Academic standards of teachers	-Isolation from the reality of the churches and the context. -Teachers are not involved in the churches -No emphasis on intercultural mission -Lack of integration of practice and study -Studying at the IBA is not possible for many pastors
Opportunities	Threats
-New campus -Interfaith interest in the <i>IBA</i> -Being part of the <i>UEP</i>	-Getting to the new campus is complicated -Opening of new seminaries because the <i>IBA</i> does not provide what the churches need -Economic crisis of the <i>IBA</i>'s main donors

Moreover, pastors had the opportunity to share thoughts and perspectives about the educational service provided by the *IBA*. Church pastors of the German-speaking churches

¹⁹⁰ Marturia, *Análisis FODA del Consejo de la Convención de Iglesias Paraguayas Hermanos Menonitas*, unpublished document (2019).

claimed that the institution does not provide training in current issues and challenges that the church faces today. Besides, they said there is no training for personal finances and self-management skills.¹⁹¹

Pastors of German-speaking churches also shared a common perspective about lecturers or teachers. They said that the staff of teachers is well prepared. Moreover, pastors highlighted the good institutional history. However, they add that the study programme is too theoretical, so it is necessary to promote practice, research, and critical thinking. Pastors also claimed that the IBA needs more pastors to train future pastors, more contextual knowledge (especially about the countryside reality), and integration of practice and theory.¹⁹²

Moreover, pastors of the Spanish-speaking churches said that the IBA provides reliable biblical education, and proper pastoral training, with excellent teaching staff, prestige, quality, and reputation. In addition, they claimed that the institution needs to strengthen the practice since they considered the training to be “too theoretical”, and include current issues and challenges in the study programme.¹⁹³

Besides, pastors also mentioned some weaknesses such as the ignorance of the contextual reality, high tuition fees, poor practical knowledge of students, and the morning class timetables (taking into account that most students in Paraguay work as they study). Pastors of the Spanish-speaking churches suggest that the IBA should emphasise character building, consider the reality of rural churches, update its curriculum, and think of ways to improve employment opportunities. Finally, a suggestion was to establish a 1-year practical training before graduation.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ Marturia, *Percepción de pastores de la Asociación Hermanos Menonitas*, unpublished document (2019).

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Marturia, *Percepción de pastores de la Convención Evangélica de Iglesias Paraguayas Hermanos Menonitas*, unpublished document (2019).

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

On 26 November 2020, pastors and leaders of both conferences and IBA representatives met in the new institutional campus to evaluate the SWOT results. The results were presented, and there was time to share ideas and opinions.¹⁹⁵

One of the concerns that arose was the ‘spiritual and academic bubble’ in which students are for 4 years. The president of the German-speaking churches conference suggested that students with a pastoral calling should receive special attention/training during the study time, considering complaints focused on the fact that students do not know how to apply theoretical knowledge in their pastoral work. In addition, the president of the Spanish-speaking churches conference suggested a 1-year of pastoral practice for students before graduation should be helpful.¹⁹⁶

Moreover, a member of the board of trustees of the German-speaking churches said it was crucial to consider that 4 years of training is just a part of the education process. The idea behind this claim is that the seminary is not the only institution responsible for pastors' training; this should be a shared task between churches and the bible institute. Other concerns were the need to consider the rural context, the articulation of theory and practice, and the training of new teachers, as several of the current ones face retirement. The meeting finished with a prayer.¹⁹⁷

It is worth noting that the process of strategic planning has not reached the application stage yet, although some measures were taken in 2022 to expand the educational offer.

¹⁹⁵ *Acta de Reunión de Conferencias Patrocinantes del IBA*, unpublished document (November 26, 2020).

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

3.4. SWOT Analysis: IBA Teaching Staff and Students' Perspective

The SWOT analysis was carried out also by the staff of teachers. Some noteworthy results were:¹⁹⁸

Strengths	Weaknesses
-The institutional trajectory -Emphasis on the Bible -Faculty unity -Interaction between teachers and students -Scholarships -The library -Student counselling service	-Lack of understanding of current challenges -Unwillingness to build up a cadre of female teachers. -Weak connection with pastors -Little internal evaluation -Lack of specialised attention to foreign pupils
Opportunities	Threats
-The new campus -The updating of the curriculum -The bibliographic production of the professors -Programmes in English	-High dependence on scholarships -Ignorance of the new generations -Maintaining the ecclesial commitment of teachers and students -Financing of the <i>IBA</i> -Maintaining the identity of a biblical institute but at the same time of a theological faculty (university level) -Tension between the Spirit and the academy. -The general director should delegate more

¹⁹⁸ Marturia, Staff de Profesores del IBA, *Análisis FODA*, unpublished document (2019).

	tasks and supervise them.
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On the other hand, a survey was conducted among students, and the purpose was to get information about their perception of the educational service they receive.

According to the survey results, students have a good perception of teachers/lecturers, the intercultural environment of the educational community, academic rigour, and extracurricular activities. However, they claimed that the general director does not support student activities/events, there are no clear rules on some issues, and the teaching methods are outdated. Students also said that there is no advertising of the institution and its academic offerings; there is an imbalance in the curriculum (too much emphasis on counselling) and no pastoral counselling for men (the counsellors are all women).¹⁹⁹

Students suggest that the *IBA* also has some opportunities to improve the educational service with a better articulation of the contents in the subjects, the digitization of the institution's internal processes, and the offering of alternatives to the final degree research or project.²⁰⁰

In the context of this strategic planning, some interviews with experts were conducted. One of the interviews was with Alfred Neufeld Siemens, former general director of the *IBA* and, at that time, rector of the *Universidad Evangélica del Paraguay - UEP*.

Neufeld remarked on some challenges for theological education in the Paraguayan context. He said that the leadership and pastoral support model is not yet defined; the financial support of the *IBA* is always challenging, and new donors for the scholarship fund are required. Neufeld also claimed that the critical thinking and self-learning skills of students are weak. In

¹⁹⁹ Marturia, *Percepción del estudiantado del IBA*, unpublished document (2019).

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

addition, he said that the practical dimension of education and the student's transition to the world of work need to be strengthened.²⁰¹

3.5. Characteristics of the IBA Student Body

On the other hand, there is some research on IBA graduates worth mentioning in this section.

According to Zaracho (2014), 54% of students who graduated between 1968 and 2010 were doing church-related work (pastoral ministry 27%, youth ministry 10%, chaplaincy 12%, counselling 4%, intercultural missions 1%).²⁰²

Moreover, other research indicates that between 1998 and 2014 436 students were enrolled, 81% of whom completed two years of the programme. So, only 31% of students enrolled between 1998 and 2014 completed the 4-year programme.²⁰³

All this information provides an overview of the institution under study within the context of this research. Additionally, to gain a current perspective of IBA students, I conducted a questionnaire among 49 students.²⁰⁴ The results are presented below.

Of the responses received, 34.69% were from women and 65.31% from men. Additionally, 32.65% of the responses came from students in rural areas, with 67.35% from urban areas. Moreover, 38.78% of the students are from German-speaking Mennonite Brethren churches, 34.69% from churches other than Mennonite, and 26.53% from Spanish-speaking Mennonite Brethren churches.

²⁰¹ Marturia, *Neufeld on theological education in Paraguay and the IBA*, unpublished document (2019).

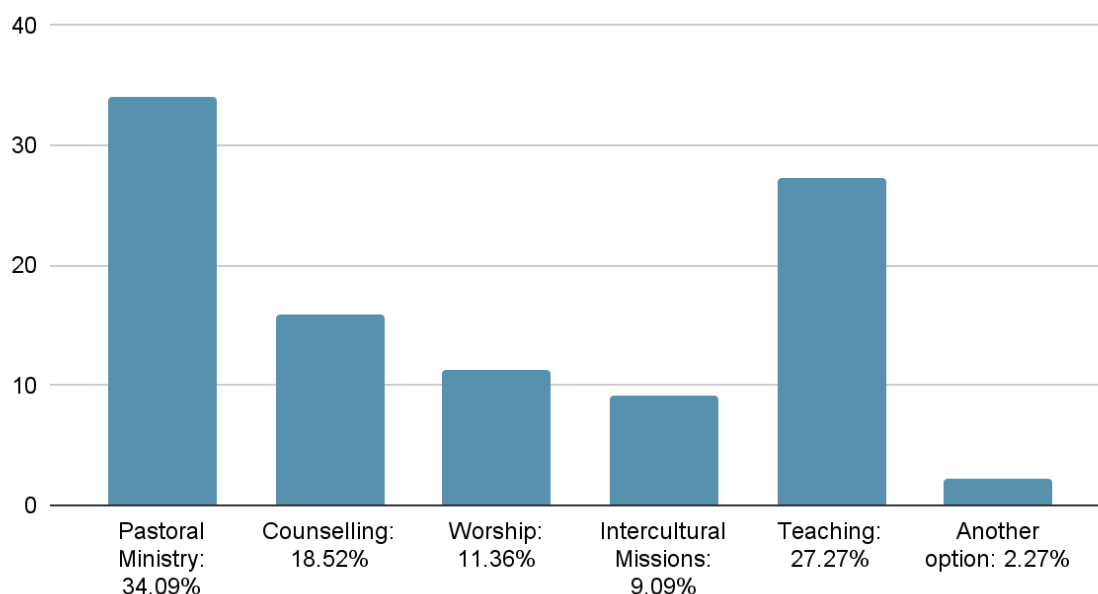
²⁰² Rafael Zaracho, 'Egresados/as 1968-2010', *Revista Enlace*, 2.1 (2014).

²⁰³ Rafael Zaracho, Karen Rodrigues and David Irala, 'Matriculación y culminación de la carrera de Teología de la UEP del período 1998-2014, sede Instituto Bíblico Asunción', *Anuario Académico de la UEP*, 1.1 (2019), 153-161 (161).

²⁰⁴ The instrument used to collect the data has been evaluated by the university and has therefore obtained ethical clearance. In addition, the instrument used is included in the appendix.

One of the questions asked of the students was: 'What ministry do you hope to serve after graduating from university?' The results were as follows:

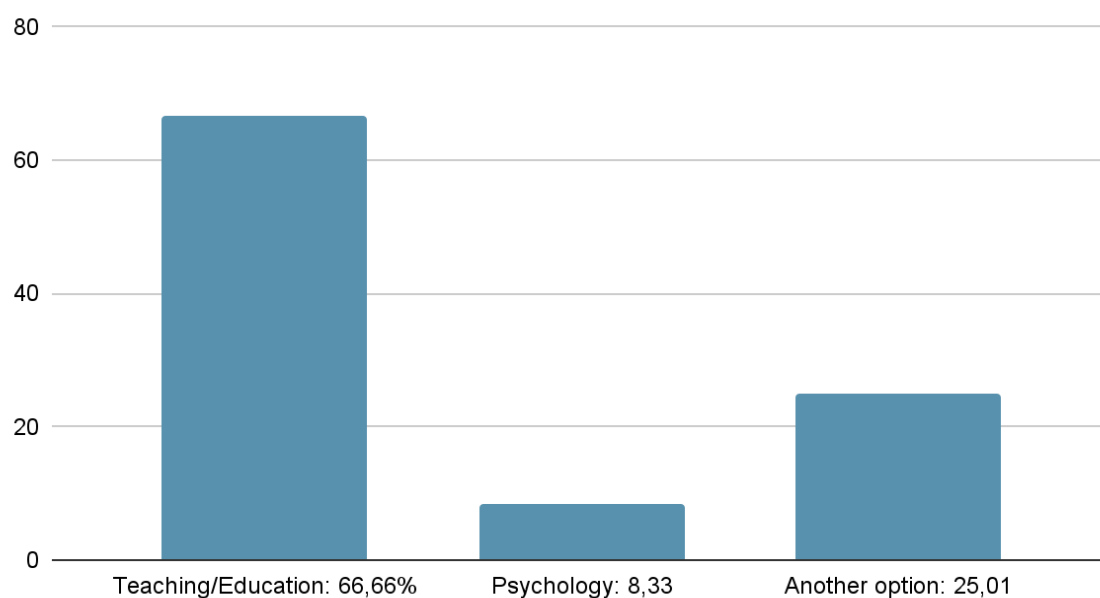
Ministry Option



Another question was: 'Do you intend to pursue a bi-vocational ministry?' 88.89% answered yes, while 11.11% said they would only engage in church or ministry work.

Regarding professional fields other than ministry, the responses were as follows:

Professional Fields (Bi-vocational Ministry)



Students also mentioned other professional fields such as agricultural work, business, pharmacy, auto mechanics, bakery, and law.

E. Concluding Remarks and Final Thoughts on the Contextual Analysis

The first Chapter's objective was *to analyse formal theological education in Paraguay, starting with a broad overview and then delving into specific realities, aiming to identify challenges and contextual issues*. For this purpose, a study has been carried out from three different aspects:

- Higher education in Latin America.
- Higher education in Paraguay.
- Formal theological education in the context of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Paraguay.

In this way, main features of the broader and closer context in which theological education is immersed have been considered.

The challenges confronting Latin American higher education, and thereby formal theological education within the context of Paraguay, can be summarised in the following points: a decontextualised curriculum model, a restrictive pedagogy, and a lack of educational service quality stemming from broader systemic issues within the education system. These challenges are both regional and national in scope.

Regarding the 'decontextualised curriculum,' it has been observed that the educational curriculum in Latin America has progressed through three major stages: the Hispano-Medieval model stage, the Colonial-Napoleonic model stage, and the research model stage based on the North American model. This situation suggests the need for a redesign of the Latin American higher education curriculum, one that is tailored to and for the region.

Furthermore, concerning ‘the restrictive pedagogy’, it has been seen how the restriction of knowledge in colonial times continued to be a feature in the post-revolutionary period due to the influence of military governments. However, due to a pedagogy that does not allow students to get a more active role in their learning, the restriction of knowledge is still present in Latin American higher education.

Then, we have seen that the lack of quality of service in higher education has at least three aspects: educational policies, which have been remedied to some extent through new laws (in the case of Paraguay), but with some challenges still remaining; the lack of educational offerings that respond to the training needs of society; and finally, the teaching staff, who are often outdated and not well qualified to meet the challenges of today's education.

It should be noted, however, that national and regional challenges affect to a greater or lesser extent the institutional reality under study in this research or sometimes take on different nuances. But even so, it is clear that it is necessary to consider the broader context in which the formal theological education of Mennonite Brethren churches in Paraguay is embedded.

On the other hand, there are internal challenges, such as institutional issues and those inherent in the nature of theological education. These challenges can be summarised as follows: an outdated educational curriculum, inadequate articulation or a lack of connection between theory and practice, and the tension between academia and spirituality. These last two challenges result from a fragmented perspective within theological education, which manifests in tensions between theory/practice and academia/spirituality.

Regarding the outdated educational offer, there are two aspects to consider. Firstly, the result of the research conducted in the *IBA* community. The community members expressed that future pastors and leaders do not receive training on current challenges for the church. Secondly, there was a need to update the educational project or curriculum considering the

context and the fact that the project dates back to 2002. Besides, pastors and leaders claimed that the institution does not offer pertinent training for their students.²⁰⁵

Moreover, concerning the lack of integration/dialectics between theory and practice, the SWOT analysis highlighted pastors' concerns regarding the performance of graduates in pastoral duties within Mennonite Brethren Churches. Additionally, the ongoing tension between academia and spirituality is a common aspect within any institution of theological education. The challenge lies in effectively managing this tension and perceiving the academy as an embodiment of spirituality. These issues will be further examined later in this research as a manifestation of a fragmented vision of theological education.

This challenging landscape necessitates profound and clear-sighted reflection, encompassing a broader perspective to provide relevant answers. Undoubtedly, a question arises from this brief contextual description: How should theological education be approached within such a challenging context?

The aim of this research is not to propose a specific curricular model or to update the theological education curriculum. These are matters that demand collective engagement within the community and should not be approached unilaterally. Instead, my intention is to encourage stakeholders in theological education to envision innovative approaches within the Paraguayan context, particularly within the framework of the Mennonite Brethren Churches.

The reflective resources and the analysis presented in the subsequent chapters will tackle certain challenges highlighted in this initial section of the research, namely:

- A restrictive pedagogy.
- A fragmented perspective of theological education.

²⁰⁵ It should be noted that, at the time of this research, the IBA is promoting a project to update the curriculum.

- The absence of a pertinent or contextual educational model for theological education.

While there are many more challenges and issues in higher education and theological education in Paraguay, I have been selective in choosing the specific themes on which this research will focus. So, the following chapters will offer reflections or premises from three different approaches: a biblical approach, a theological approach, and a pedagogical approach.

From a biblical perspective, I will provide insights into ‘restrictive pedagogy’, from a theological standpoint, I will offer reflections on the ‘fragmented perspective of theological education’, and from a more pedagogical approach, I will delve into the absence of a ‘contextual educational model for theological education.’

It is worth noting that theological analysis and the consideration of contextual features in theological education in Paraguay are overarching elements throughout the entire research.

As we have seen, higher education, and thus formal theological education, needs to configure a pedagogical model that guides educational practices towards an enriching and transformative experience.

We might consider different pedagogical theories to renew the educational perspective in Latin America. Nevertheless, in the following chapter, the focus of the proposal shifts to the divine teaching methodologies evident in God's and Jesus' pedagogical actions in the Old and New Testaments, respectively.

The biblical analysis objective is to consider the implications of divine teaching methodologies in the development of contextual theological education, and how divine methodology can guide us to imagine new ways and forms of teaching.

Chapter Two²⁰⁶

Divine Teaching Methodology and its Implications for the Development of a More Humanising Pedagogy

A. Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, there are several challenges facing formal theological education in Paraguay. In this research section, I intend to focus on one of these challenges: the restrictive Latin American pedagogy.

According to Darcy Ribeiro, university institutions can be understood from a historical perspective, considering them as ‘residual products’ of a country's life, ‘only intelligible as the result of particular historical sequences.’ This suggests that comprehending the dynamics of universities in Latin America and their restrictive pedagogy requires a retrospective overview. Therefore, it will be necessary to examine at least two specific stages in Latin American history: colonial times and the dictatorial era in the twentieth century.²⁰⁷

As it was mentioned in the previous chapter, the first appearance of restrictive education was during colonial times, since Spain determined who could think and what should be thought.²⁰⁸ Therefore, ‘Juan Ruíz de Alarcón, (a Spanish-Mexican writer of the Golden Age) or Sor Juana de Inés de la Cruz (a Mexican writer, philosopher, composer, and poet of the Baroque period) are ‘Spaniards acculturated’ in the colonial higher education system. So,

²⁰⁶ AI has been used to translate from Spanish to English and to correct certain grammatical expressions throughout the chapter. Another resource used throughout this work is DeepL.com, a translation tool.

²⁰⁷ Ribeiro, 27.

²⁰⁸ Pallán Figueroa, p. 44.

universities at that time were ‘an ideological or cultural product of structural dependence on Spain’ to preserve the bonds of colonial dependence.²⁰⁹

Later, in the twentieth century, dictatorial governments began to emerge in independent America. In this authoritarian era, restrictive pedagogy was consolidated through political-military power in different ways. There was no freedom to think outside the ideological mainstream imposed by the military government. In some universities, books were burned, and access enrolment was restricted in others.²¹⁰ Thus, ‘autonomous scientific thought was dismantled’.²¹¹ These were some signs of repression in higher education at that time.

This scenario was perfect for establishing a traditional²¹² or ‘factory’ education. In this model, ‘pupils are the raw material, [and teachers] are conceived as the workers in charge of the production and processing of the raw material’. In this educational model, there is no shared responsibility, as pupils must only wait ‘to be processed.’²¹³

Nowadays, it seems that students continue to be passive recipients of content without a significant role in their education process.²¹⁴ This educational model focused on content transmission does not promote reflection, creativity, or freedom; but reminds us of the restrictive practices of Paraguayan education during the dictatorship.²¹⁵

²⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 45.

²¹⁰ Hugo Storani y Eduardo Barbagelata, *La Universidad Normalizada* (UNER, 1986) p. 11.

²¹¹ Emilio Mignone, *Política y universidad: El estado legislador* (Instituto de Estudios y Acción Social, 1998), pp. 54-55.

²¹² Traditional education has been characterised as an encyclopaedic or rote education, in which the teacher is a central part of the educational process. According to Marlene Enns, this type of education has valued ‘discourse over dialogue, information over training, words over action, obedience over reflection, mechanical repetition over creativity.’

cfr. Ana Patricia Galván-Cardoso and Elizabeth Siado-Ramos, ‘Educación Tradicional’, *Cienciamatria: Revista Interdisciplinaria de Humanidades, Educación, Ciencia y Tecnología*, 7.12 (2021), 962-975 (965-966), doi: 10.35381/cm.v7i12.457.

Marlene Enns in *Comentario Bíblico Contemporáneo*, ed. by René Padilla, Milton Acosta and Rosalee Velloso (Certeza, 2019), p. 805.

²¹³ Marlene Enns, *Introducción a la Pedagogía Cristiana*, unpublished document (2014), p. 29.

²¹⁴ Luis Trujillo, *Teorías Pedagógicas Contemporáneas*, ed. by Fondo editorial Areandino (AREANDINA, 2017), p. 9.

²¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 47-48

It is worth noting that in the Paraguayan democratic era, the government promoted education reform, which involved new educational laws enactment and the creation of new governmental agencies, as has been discussed in the previous chapter. These initiatives emerged from a genuine desire of the Paraguayan people to democratise education and use it for the formation of new citizenship after the fall of the dictatorial government of Alfredo Stroessner.²¹⁶

However, unlike other countries in the region, which had democratic institutions before their dictatorial governments, Paraguay always had an authoritarian tradition in its institutions. Therefore, the education reform in Paraguay was an attempt to establish or build democracy in education, without previous national democratic culture, but combating restrictive and anti-democratic practices impregnated in Paraguayan thought and culture.²¹⁷

The challenge was to fight anti-democratic practices and traditions, and there was an awareness of the need for change in the country. Nevertheless, ‘frontal instruction, encyclopaedic tendencies and the bias towards memorisation’ are deeply rooted in Paraguayan education. Unfortunately, there is very little that the education system has been able to correct or change in the more strictly pedagogical order.²¹⁸

According to Cummings, secondary education mirrors university education in Paraguay.²¹⁹ The enrolment rate in secondary education in Paraguay in the 1990s was the lowest in Latin America. According to Rivarola, this continued at least during the first years of the

²¹⁶ Domingo Rivarola, *La reforma educativa en el Paraguay* (Cepal, 2000) p.7.

²¹⁷ Ibid, p.8.

²¹⁸ Ibid, p.10.

²¹⁹ William Cummings, Luis Galeano and Diomedes Rivelli, *Análisis del sistema educativo en el Paraguay. Sugerencias de política y estrategia para su reforma* (Centro Paraguayo de Estudios Sociológicos, 1993), pp. 249-304.

new millennium. The low retention rate (50%) and pedagogical practices in secondary education are, in turn, preliminary diagnoses of Paraguayan university education.²²⁰

For all the above, in the 90s, the Paraguayan education system was the least developed in the region, and ‘lacked a minimum base of critical culture to initiate its transformation.’²²¹

In the current scenario, challenges persist, and it is disheartening. According to recent reports, Paraguay ranks among the three worst in education in Latin America, which the Inter-American Development Bank has labelled as a severe learning crisis in the region.²²²

On the other hand, it is worth noting that during Paraguay’s educational reform, the government adopted social constructivism as its psychological and pedagogical framework.²²³ According to this theory, learning is constructed through constant cooperation with others. Nawaz states that, ‘The constructivist theory asserts that learning occurs when learners actively construct or create basic information by themselves, as they do through inquiry and discovery’, while social constructivism emphasises ‘the importance of contact, collaboration, and group work to achieve effective learning outcomes.’²²⁴

However, it seems that even when Social constructivism was present in the ‘speech’, the practice was like that of traditional education.²²⁵ Thus, attempts to reform pedagogical thinking and to transform educational practices remained at the theoretical level, failing to

²²⁰ Rivarola, p. 9.

²²¹ Rivarola, p. 12.

²²² *Crisis de aprendizaje: Paraguay entre los peores puntuados de Latinoamérica* (2024), *ABC Color* <<https://www.abc.com.py/internacionales/2024/03/07/crisis-de-aprendizaje-paraguay-entre-los-peores-puntuados-de-latinoamerica/>> [Accessed 22 July 2024].

²²³ *Constructivista o Conductista* (2013), *Última Hora*.

²²⁴ Allah Nawaz cited in Amna Saleem, Huma Kausar and Farah Deeba, ‘Social Constructivism: A New Paradigm in Teaching and Learning Environment’, *Perennial Journal of History*, 2 (2021), 403-421 (404), doi: 10.52700/pjh.v2i2.8.

²²⁵ Jesús Montero Tirado, ‘Educación, lejos de la realidad’, *ABC Color* <<https://www.abc.com.py/edicion-impresa/opinion/educacion-lejos-de-la-realidad-1568630.html>> [Accessed 12 August 2022].

permeate practical applications throughout the entire education system, including higher education.

As mentioned in the preceding chapter, in 2019, I conducted research analysing assessment features in several subjects of the BA in Theology programme at the Bible institute under consideration in this study. The results revealed that the majority of practice assessments primarily evaluated the first level of the cognitive system (*memorisation*). This situation suggests that students lacked the opportunity to engage in a more active and enriching learning experience within certain study fields.

I am not suggesting that theological education in Paraguay is dictatorial, but certain practices in our educational culture belong to a historical epoch marked by the repression of thought. Nevertheless, rather than rushing to adopt an alternative pedagogical theory in an effort to address this issue, there is prior work to be done to expand our understanding of what theological pedagogy is for—what the deep nature of theological pedagogy truly entails.

In the face of these challenges, we should let ourselves be enlightened by the Scriptures, by God's action with his people, guiding humanity along the path of faith and learning. My proposal is to begin a journey stripped of our previous concepts and to let ourselves be guided by God on a path of exploration and transformation.

To put it another way, there is an education that transcends us—the divine pedagogy. At the same time, this education is immanent, because it is a process where God is leading us on a path of transformation. Therefore, we need to situate our pedagogy within and in relation to that divine pedagogy and begin an exploration of Scripture to uncover what it reveals about this divine pedagogy.²²⁶

²²⁶ In other words, the relationship between human educational theory and divine pedagogy is not about setting one aside in favour of the other but about entering into a genuine dialogue. There is an education that transcends

The purpose is not to shape some pedagogical theory based on the Bible but to consider biblical events that could lead us to imagine new ways of learning and teaching.

For that reason, in this chapter, I intend to focus on two specific biblical events that have the potential to challenge and question our educational practices and invite us to reflect. The objective of this chapter is *to explore the divine teaching methodology as depicted in Exodus 14:31 and John 6:67-69, aiming to offer reflections that could guide us towards the development of a more humanising pedagogy and to imagine new ways/forms of teaching.*

To achieve this goal, I have been highly selective because I am not aiming to create a comprehensive Biblical theology of learning. Instead, my focus centres on a very small number of texts that, in my opinion, have the potential to challenge and question our pedagogical imaginations. Although I considered and explored various other texts, I found these to be the most relevant for my purposes. Ultimately, the justification for this choice lies in the richness

us—the divine pedagogy—but it is also immanent, unfolding as a process in which God guides us along a path of transformation. This means that, rather than leaving our own understanding of teaching and learning aside when we approach Scripture, we place our pedagogy within and in relation to this divine framework.

By doing so, we can explore how God's actions with Israel and Jesus' teaching strategies shed light on principles of learning and transformation. All Christian education aims at transformation, yet this approach directs us to consider the specific transformation intended by the God of Israel and by Jesus, and the ways in which it is brought about. Practically, this involves a careful dialogue between our human concepts of teaching and learning and the insights we gain from Scripture, allowing us to learn from both human theory and divine action.

Thus, this perspective calls for a twofold attentiveness: to the human dimensions of teaching and learning, and to the divine model revealed in Scripture. These are not separate or opposed; rather, they are engaged in a continual dialogue, enabling a richer and more compelling understanding of Christian education and the ways in which God seeks to effect transformation in learners.

Regarding this dialogue between human and divine pedagogy, contemporary research emphasises the importance for educators to name and reflect upon the pedagogical strategies they employ. By recognising and articulating the approaches they favour—whether lecture, discussion, role-playing, or case study—educators develop a heightened sense of intentionality, understanding not only what they do in the classroom but why they do it. Such reflection allows them to align their teaching methods with the broader purposes of Christian education, situating their human pedagogy within the transformative framework of divine guidance.

In this process, the gifts, knowledge, and teaching practices of educators are seen not merely as human tools, but as instruments through which the Spirit of God enacts transformation. When educators intentionally engage with their pedagogical choices, considering both the epistemological assumptions and the practical outcomes of their strategies, they participate in God's ongoing work of transformation. This integration of human reflection and divine inspiration ensures that education remains faithful to Scripture while effectively guiding learners towards the transformation that only God can bring about.

See Deborah Gin and Mark Chung Hearn, 'Why you do what you do: The power in knowing and naming pedagogies', *Teach Theol Relig*, 22.1 (2019), 30-51 (30, 46), <<https://doi.org/10.1111/teth.12467>>, [Accessed 19 October 2025].

that emerges when I reflect closely on these texts. Therefore, I understand that these texts are pertinent to the theological and contextual reflection that I propose in this chapter.

Hence, in the following sections, I concentrate the study on Exodus 14:31 and John 6. 67-69, wherein we witness God guiding his people through the wilderness and Jesus teaching his disciples.

B. Exodus 14:31

Israel saw the great work that the Lord did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the Lord and believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.
Exodus 14:31.²²⁷

1. General Context

The Hebrew title of Exodus is ‘we'elleh shemot’ or ‘these are the names of’, which is the first phrase of the book. According to Youngblood:

The Hebrew title of the Book of Exodus, therefore, was to remind us that Exodus is the sequel to Genesis and that one of its purposes is to continue the history of God's people as well as elaborate further on the great themes so nobly introduced in Genesis.²²⁸

The exodus, one of the most significant historical and theological events in the Bible context, is narrated in the book of the same name.²²⁹ It describes a process in which God, through a variety of forms of divine intervention, liberates the people of Israel, guiding and teaching Moses and Israel through numerous events.²³⁰ The book covers the period from Jacob's arrival in Egypt to the tabernacle on Mount Sinai.²³¹

²²⁷ All the biblical references in this research are from the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition (NRSVUE). If that is not the case, it will be noted in a footnote.

²²⁸ Ronald F. Youngblood, *Exodus* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000), pp. 9-10.

²²⁹ Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel* (Baker Academic, 2008), p. 57.

²³⁰ Thomas Constable, *Expository Notes* (2005), *Internet Archive* <<https://archive.org/details/BibleExodusOldTestament/mode/2up?view=theater>> [accessed 16 November 2024].

²³¹ *Ibid*

Exodus is the key element of the Pentateuch's broader narrative, and of its legal material. According to Wolfgang Oswald:

In terms of narrative logic, the story that begins in the book of Exodus seems to continue into (at least) the book of Joshua, as the exodus from Egypt finds its logical completion in the *eisodos* into the promised land as presented in the book of Joshua.²³²

Considering the relationship between Exodus and Leviticus, 'there are texts in the book of Exodus that pave the way for specific regulations' found in Leviticus. Examples include Exodus 24:16 and Leviticus 1:1; Exodus 25-40 and Leviticus 1-9; Exodus 12:14-20 and Leviticus 23:5-8, among other connections.²³³ Additionally, when examining the relationship between Exodus and Numbers, 'the legal sections of Numbers seem especially to include laws that constitute, in diachronic terms, additions to the laws given at Sinai.'²³⁴

It is possible to make other connections from a contextual literary perspective of the Exodus. However, the aim is not to offer an exhaustive analysis but to indicate some of the more notable literary connections.

Exodus not only records the historical events of those days but also narrates from a theological perspective 'the meaning of the history of the Israelites.' The book of Exodus is 'an invitation to the captive people to return to look at the stars with the same eyes with which the patriarchs had looked at them, believing that the Lord would fulfil his word by performing great wonders before their eyes'. Thus, we are invited to read the book considering this theological task as an exercise of faith.²³⁵

²³² Wolfgang Oswald, "Die Exodus-Gottesberg-Erzählung als Gründungsurkunde der jüdischen Bürgergemeinde," in *Law and Narrative in the Bible and in Neighbouring Ancient Cultures* (ed. Klaus-Peter Adam, Friedrich Avemarie, and Nili Wazana; fat 2.54; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 35-51.

²³³ Konrad Schmid, *The book of Exodus: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, ed. by Thomas B. Dozeman, Craig A. Evans and Joel N. Lohr (Brill, 2014), p. 38.

²³⁴ Konrad Schmid cited in Reinhard Achenbach and Martin Arneith, *Gerechtigkeit und Recht zu üben (Gen 18,19): Studien zur altorientalischen und biblischen Rechtsgeschichte, zur Religionsgeschichte Israels und zur Religionssoziologie* (Harrassowitz, 2009), 114-127.

²³⁵ *Comentario Bíblico Contemporáneo*, p. 94.

Additionally, from a theological standpoint, 'Exodus contains some of the richest foundational theology in the OT. Preeminently, it lays the foundations for a theology of God's revelation of his person, his redemption, his law, and his worship.'²³⁶

For the purpose of liberation, Moses and the people of Israel had to go through a learning and transformation process where God guided them through different events. God revealed himself to his people, making known his name, and thereby his nature, in a patient process marked by ups and downs, great acts of salvation, doubts and fears, faith, and reverent awe. Thereby, Exodus is also, in some ways, a story of a learning journey of Moses and Israel learning/knowing about God. This experience in Exodus was educative for the people of Israel 'not simply because they are the beneficiaries of divine action, but because they have come into an ongoing relationship with God who stands behind that action.'²³⁷

Hence, I believe that the book of Exodus, particularly the portion examined in this research, has the potential to challenge our imagination and prompt us to reflect and envisage new ways of approaching education.

In the following, I will focus the study on a significant verse of Exodus chapter 14, where we can see the first results of this learning process that the people of Israel had undertaken with God's guidance, direction, and teachings. Firstly, in the next section, I begin the study providing a synopsis of Exodus, with some of the significant events of the book.

²³⁶ Walter Kaiser, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Exodus*, ed. by Tremper Longman and David Garland (Zondervan Academic, 2017), p. 50.

²³⁷ Bruce Birch, 'Divine Character and the Formation of Moral Community in the Book of Exodus', in *The Bible in Ethics: The second Sheffield Colloquium*, ed. by John Rogerson, Margaret Davies and Daniel Carroll (Bloomsbury Publishing, 1995), p. 124.

2. Synopsis

Although, Jacob's people were Pharaoh's guests at the time that Joseph was the governor of Egypt, this situation changed later:

After an unspecified time, perhaps some three centuries, the Egyptians grow alarmed at the Hebrews' proliferation. A new Pharaoh first enslaves them and then plots to kill all male newborns. Through an unusual sequence of events, one child is spared and raised in Pharaoh's own palace. This is Moses.²³⁸

After a life in the royal palace of Egypt, Moses 'flees into the desert, weds a Midianite, and becomes a father'. Afterward, Moses is called by God, receiving both instruction and support before returning to Egypt 'to liberate the Israelites and to bring them to the desert to the land long promised to their ancestors: Canaan.'²³⁹

In the middle of the desert, God dialogues with Moses from the burning bush and presents himself as Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Thus, Moses meets and begins learning from (and about) the God of his ancestors, with whom he will have a profound relationship.²⁴⁰ So Moses returns to Egypt and introduces himself to the people of Israel saying: 'I AM has sent me to you'.²⁴¹

In Egypt, Moses 'confronts yet another Pharaoh, who only mocks and increases Israel's suffering.'²⁴² As Pharaoh resisted liberating the people, God worked signs and wonders through Moses against the people of Egypt to teach them who they were dealing with, and whose people they were oppressing. Finally, after the death of Pharaoh's firstborn, the Egyptians, appearing to have learnt their lesson, allowed the Israelites to go to the desert to worship God.²⁴³

²³⁸ William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1-18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible, 1999). p.31.

²³⁹ Propp, p. 31.

²⁴⁰ *Comentario Bíblico Contemporáneo*, p. 100.

²⁴¹ Exodus 3:14 NRSVUE

²⁴² Propp, p. 31.

²⁴³ Ibid.

After releasing the Israelites, Pharaoh regretted his decision. It was an unexpected reaction, considering that ‘he had just been so severely taught the power of Israel’s God in the ten plagues.’²⁴⁴ But God told Moses that he will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them [...], and the Egyptians shall know that [He is] the Lord.’ But Yahweh, who is intent upon leading his people further, and teaching them his law, parts the waters, so ‘the Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left’.²⁴⁵ This is the climax of Israel’s liberation history in Exodus 14 and the specific event on which I focus in this research section.

On their way to the Sinai, the trust of Israelites in Moses and Yahweh ‘is repeatedly tested’,²⁴⁶ but God teaches them how trustworthy he will be if they will only trust in him. So, He provides the manna, water, and victory against the Amalekites. Then, with Jethro’s help, Moses organises a new judiciary system delegating authority to various leaders of the people of Israel.²⁴⁷

Then God manifests himself at Sinai and establishes the terms of his covenant with Israel, teaching them what their lives must be if they are to remain his people. But while Moses receives the tablets of the law, the people of Israel corrupt themselves by worshipping a golden calf. After breaking the tablets, Moses intercedes for the people before God, and a new copy of the covenant is provided.²⁴⁸

The last chapters of Exodus narrate the building of the Ark of the Covenant, the Tabernacle, and when divine glory fills it.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁴ Douglas K. Stuart, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, ed. by Ray Clendenen, Kenneth Matthews and David Dockery (B&H Publishing Group, 2006), p. 330.

²⁴⁵ Exodus 14:22 NRSVUE

²⁴⁶ Propp, p. 31.

²⁴⁷ Exodus 16:17-18 NRSVUE

²⁴⁸ Exodus 19:32, 34 NRSVUE

²⁴⁹ Exodus 37 and 40 NRSVUE

The people of Israel went to Goshen as the family of the prime minister of the Egyptian Kingdom but came out as slaves. They went into Goshen as the people of God, with ‘some remembrance of his covenant.’ However, they came out as a new generation that needed to recover the awareness of the covenant.²⁵⁰

Therefore, the book of Exodus is also the narrative of how God invited the people of Israel to recover their true identity as the people of the covenant by revealing who the God of their ancestors was. For this purpose, they embarked on a journey of learning and discovery, where they learnt of and about God through signs and wonders on their way to freedom. God sought to liberate them not only as a nation but also in their hearts. Thus, every sign and wonder, every divine action, had the clear purpose of revealing I AM to the people of Israel, guiding them towards holistic liberation and eventually establishing themselves as the covenant people of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

3. Chapter Structure

The following is a basic and general structure of Exodus 14. I suggest an organisation into four sections.

3.1. God Provides Instructions to Moses and the People: 14:1-4

Chapter 14 begins with God instructing Moses where the people of Israel must camp: ‘between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon; you shall camp opposite it, by the sea’. God says that Pharaoh and his army will think Israel is lost, but divine intervention will be present once again: ‘I will harden Pharaoh’s heart’. God's purpose is to ‘gain glory [...] over Pharaoh and all his army’ so ‘the Egyptians shall know’ that God is the Lord.²⁵¹

²⁵⁰ James. G. Murphy, *A Critical And Exegetical Commentary On The Book Of Exodus*, (I. K. Funk & Co. Publishers, 1997), p. 11.

²⁵¹ Exodus 14:1-4 NRSVUE

3.2. Pharaoh Persecutes the Israelites: 14:5-10

As Pharaoh thought it was a mistake to let the Israelites go, ‘he took six hundred elite chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them’. Verse 8 indicates that ‘the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the Israelites, who were going out boldly’. In verse 10, the situation becomes desperate. The people of Israel find themselves with no way out, between the sea and Pharaoh's army approaching, so ‘in great fear the Israelites cried out to the Lord’.²⁵²

3.3. The People of Israel Fear and Question Moses: 14:11-18

In verse 11 people of Israel question Moses: ‘what have you done to us? [...] it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness’. But Moses replied, ‘do not be afraid [because] the Lord will fight for you’. Then, God told Moses not to cry out to him but to tell the people to go forward. God also provided specific instructions to Moses: ‘lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it’ and ‘then the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord’.²⁵³

3.4. The People of Israel Cross the Sea: 14:19-31

The angel of God and the pillar of cloud and fire were between Israel and the Egyptian army. After Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, the people of Israel ‘went into the sea on dry ground’. As the Egyptians pursued them, God told Moses to stretch out his hand over the sea one more time, for the sea to return to its usual depth, and the Egyptians were ‘buried’ under the sea. According to verse 28, ‘the waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them

²⁵² Exodus 14:5-10 NRSVUE

²⁵³ Exodus 14:15-18 NRSVUE

remained'. After this divine event, the people of Israel 'feared the Lord and believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.'²⁵⁴

4. Keywords, Etymology, and Different Translations

Israel saw the great work²⁵⁵ that the Lord did against the Egyptians. So the people feared²⁵⁶ the Lord and believed²⁵⁷ in the Lord and in his servant Moses.²⁵⁸

The following are the keywords in Exodus 14:31 under study and their meanings.

4.1. (אָר) *yaw-ray*

The meaning is 'to fear, to revere, to be afraid, dread or fear'.²⁵⁹ The NRSV translates it as 'fear' in Exodus 14:31: '[...] the people feared the Lord'.²⁶⁰ *Yaw-ray* is mainly translated as 'afraid' in the NRSV in the book of Genesis (3:10; 15:1; 18:15; 19:30; 26:24; 28:17; 42:18), and it is in relation to God except in 20:8; 21:17; 26:7; 31:31; 32:17; 43:18; 43:23; 46:3; 50:19 and 50:21. Other exceptions are Genesis 42:35 where the NRSV translates it as 'dismayed', and 28:17 where the word is mentioned twice, and the second one is translated as 'awesome.'

In Exodus, the NRSV translated as 'fear' in 1:17,21; 9:20,30; 14:10,13; 'afraid' in 2:14; 3:6; 20:20; 34:30; and 'awesome' in 15:11; 34:10. Then, in Leviticus we find the word 'revere' in 19:3 and 30; 'fear' 19:14,32; 25:17; 25:36; 25:43; and 'reverence' in 26:2. In Numbers we find the word 'afraid' in 12:8 and 21:34; and 'fear' in 14:9.

²⁵⁴ Exodus 14:19-31 NRSVUE

²⁵⁵ (אָר) *yawd*

²⁵⁶ (אָר) *yaw-ray*

²⁵⁷ (אָר) *aw-man*

²⁵⁸ Exodus 14:31 NRSVUE.

²⁵⁹ *Strong's Hebrew Lexicon, Elijah Ministries* <<https://www.eliyah.com/cgi-bin/strongs.cgi?file=hebrewlexicon&isindex=3372>> [Accessed 12 September 2022].

²⁶⁰ Exodus 14:31 NRSVUE

In Deuteronomy the NRSV translates the word (אָרָא) *yaw-ray* as ‘terrible’ in 1:19 and 8:15; ‘fear’ in 1:21,29; 3:2,22; 4:10; 5:29; 6:2; 6:13,24; 8:6; 10:12,20; 13:4; 14:23; 17:19; 20:1; 28:58; 31:6,8,12,13; ‘afraid’ in 2:4; 5:5; 7:18; 13:11; 17:13; 19:20; 20:3; 21:21; 28:10; ‘awesome’ in 7:21; 10:17; 10:21; 28:58. In all other cases in the OT, the word (אָרָא) *yaw-ray* is translated mainly as fear or afraid.²⁶¹

4.2. (יָד) *yawd*

It is a primitive word whose meaning is ‘a hand (open) indicating power, means, direction’. It could be a noun or adverb. ‘In a great variety of applications, both literally and figuratively, [it could also be translated as] dominion, force, [...] labour, power, terror, [and] work.’²⁶²

The NRSV translates the word (יָד) *yawd* in Genesis mainly as ‘hands’ (3:22; 4:11; 5:29; 8:9; 9:2). Then we found the word ‘power’ in 16:6 and 31:29; ‘care’ in 39:23, ‘authority’ in 41:35 and ‘possession’ in 44:16,17. In Exodus, ‘hand’ in 3:19,20; 4:2,4; 6:1 and in most of the book; some exceptions are ‘beside’ in 2:5; ‘work’ 31:14; and ‘possession’ in 21:16.

The translation is also ‘hand’ in NRSV in some verses of Leviticus (1:4; 3:2,8,13; 4:4 and 7:30), and Numbers (5:18,25 and 8:10). Some other translations are ‘position’ (Numbers 2:17), ‘oversight’ (Numbers 4:28), and ‘direction’ (Numbers 7:8).²⁶³

²⁶¹ *Strong's Hebrew Lexicon*

²⁶² Ibid

²⁶³ Ibid

4.3. (אמנ) *aw-man*

According to Strong, the meaning could be ‘to build up or support; to foster as a parent or nurse; figuratively to render (or be) firm or faithful, to trust or believe, to be permanent or quiet; morally to be true or certain.’²⁶⁴

The translation ‘trusted in the God’ (LXX) [in Exodus 14:31] is difficult given the presence of ‘Yahweh’ earlier in the verse, and the NRSV translates it as ‘believed in the Lord.’²⁶⁵

The word (אמנ) *aw-man* in the NRSV is ‘believe’ (Genesis 15:6; Exodus 4:1,5), ‘trust’ (Exodus 19:9), ‘verified’ (Genesis 42:20), ‘faithful’ (Numbers 12:7), and ‘assurance’ (Deuteronomy 28:66).²⁶⁶

5. Pedagogical Reflections on Exodus 14:31

In the following, I offer some reflections on the text, considering the role of God, Moses, and the people of Israel in this process of discovery, learning, and transformation narrated in the book of Exodus. This reflection is focused on chapter 14:31 and its literary context.

5.1. *The Divine Educational Objective in Exodus*

In Exodus 3, verses 4 and 5, God calls Moses from the bush and says: ‘come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground’. Then, after these instructions, God introduces himself in verse 6 saying: ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’²⁶⁷

²⁶⁴ Ibid

²⁶⁵ Propp, p. 470.

²⁶⁶ *Strong's Hebrew Lexicon*.

²⁶⁷ Exodus 3:6 NRSVUE

Thereby, in Exodus 3 and also in chapter 4, we find that God calls to Moses in the middle of the desert, before the burning bush, and before ‘identifying himself, God began to teach Moses about the holy nature of his presence’ telling him to remove his sandals on holy ground. So ‘Moses now began to learn [about God directly] from God.’²⁶⁸

Chapters 3 and 4 also narrate how patiently God instructed Moses in the face of his doubts and questions.²⁶⁹ According to Stuart, ‘What God's people would eventually have to learn from God through him, Moses now began to learn from God.’²⁷⁰

Later, God reveals his learning purpose for Moses and Israel. Exodus 6:7-8 indicates an educative objective of God’s actions: ‘then you will **know** that I am the Lord your God... I am the Lord’. The learning goal is for Israel to know God, and ‘the only way to know who or what God will be is to wait for God to make Godself known.’²⁷¹

Such knowledge requires God's action and self-revelation, which we can find in the Exodus journey, beginning with Moses in chapter 3. For Israel to ‘obey and be benefited’ by God, they should deepen their understanding of who God is. Thus, the genuine knowledge of God is one of the theological themes of the book of Exodus, and it entails an educative purpose.²⁷²

It is clear that this knowledge is an outcome of experience and requires the Israelites to do something, so it is active knowledge instead of passive one. We see Israel going into the wilderness to worship God, and crossing the Red Sea, but we also see them hesitating, fearful, and complaining about their situation. However, it cannot be ignored that the Israelites had to

²⁶⁸ Stuart, p. 114.

²⁶⁹ *Comentario Bíblico Contemporáneo*, pp. 100-102.

²⁷⁰ Stuart, p. 114.

²⁷¹ Mike Higon, *Christian Doctrine*, 2nd edn (SCM Press, 2024). p. 8.

²⁷² Stuart, pp. 35-36.

mobilise and abandon certain comforts to undertake this journey. Therefore, it cannot be passive knowledge but one that involves action and movement.

I don't want to suggest that this is God's primary objective in the whole book of Exodus, but certainly, it is central in the first 15 chapters of the book, and the events seem to be organised around this objective. Besides, these first experiences of Exodus (1-15) are the basis for the subsequent knowledge about God and his plans with his people, which they will progressively understand later.

It is worth noting that Moses and the people of Israel were not in total ignorance about the Lord. The elders and all the people were 'convinced that the Lord had sent Moses and Aaron', so there was a certain degree of awareness of the God of their ancestors.²⁷³ However, although Moses and Israel had some knowledge about the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, after four centuries, it was necessary to deepen the knowledge of the promise and covenant God had made to their ancestors.²⁷⁴

Although the knowledge of the promise had to be deepened, it seems that the primary learning purpose in the first 15 chapters of Exodus is not the promise itself, but knowing the God who made it. However, knowing God will entail deepening the awareness of the promise. 'I am the God of your father', said God, and such affirmation 'also implies a connection with the experience of the Israelites' parents with God and the promise they received from him.²⁷⁵

Therefore, beyond the promise, the people of Israel need to become acquainted with the One who made the promise, to trust in him, and to confide that He will fulfil it. This knowledge is evidently relational and experiential.

²⁷³ Exodus 4:29-31 NRSVUE

²⁷⁴ Murphy, p. 11.

²⁷⁵ Exodus 3:6 NRSVUE

Nevertheless, the promise was coming true; the Israelites ‘went into that land a family’, but ‘they came out a people’.²⁷⁶ This reality reminds us of God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:2: ‘I will make of you a great nation.’²⁷⁷

Later, in Exodus 19:4 we see that the Israelites reached Mount Sinai. There, God told them: ‘you have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself’. Until then, God saved them from the Egyptians, provided food and water, and gave them victory over the Amalekites.

So, after all these great divine deeds, God told the people of Israel: ‘now, therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my *covenant*²⁷⁸, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples [...] you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation’.²⁷⁹ Thus, the people of Israel became the people of the covenant after experiencing the care and love of the God of their ancestors. So, Israel knew that ‘Yahweh is a God who remembers and keeps commitments.’²⁸⁰

The knowledge of God for Israelites was not just a cognitive matter but a relational and experiential knowledge required to become the people of the covenant. Israel could not have been the people of the covenant without being the people of God, and for that purpose, they had to develop experiential and relational knowledge of Yahweh. God's plans for His people required and involved an experiential relationship, experiences that enriched Israel's faith and empowered them to bear witness to the true God as the covenant people.

On the other hand, God's educational purpose also applies to the Egyptians. In Exodus 14,1 God tells Moses that the people of Israel should camp ‘between Migdol and the sea’. Then

²⁷⁶ Murphy, p. 11.

²⁷⁷ Genesis 12:2 NRSVUE

²⁷⁸ Emphasis added by the author.

²⁷⁹ Exodus 19:5-6 NRSVUE

²⁸⁰ *The Bible in Ethics: The second Sheffield Colloquium*, p.128

God said in verse 4 ‘I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them, so that I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army, and *the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord*’.²⁸¹ This statement is also mentioned in Exodus 7:5.

So the purpose was also for Pharaoh and the whole of Egypt to know the God of Israel, even though this knowledge might have certain nuances different from what Israel had received from the same divine events.

In addition to the knowledge of God, the breadth and complexity of the Exodus events harbour rich theological themes such as ‘salvation, the covenant people, the promised land, the limited presence of God in Israel’s midst, the invisible God and his visible symbols, the necessity of the law, the need to follow God, and the only powerful God,’ among other themes.²⁸²

Therefore, I don't suggest that the book of Exodus is simply the narration of a pedagogical experience. Stating this would be to reduce all the theological richness of the book. But what I do suggest is that we can also see the people of Israel experiencing, learning, and discovering the true God on a journey that is also educational and which learning objective was introduced to Moses and Israel from the beginning of the journey.

5.2. The Divine Teaching Methodology

It is worth noting that from the beginning, God did not provide a complete understanding of himself to Moses and Israel. In chapter 3:14 God said to Moses: ‘I AM WHO

²⁸¹ Exodus 14:4 NRSVUE

²⁸² Stuart, pp. 35-49.

I AM. He said further, thus you shall say to the Israelites, I AM has sent me to you.'²⁸³ So, God called 'Himself the great 'I AM,' and leaves a blank'. There was a gap to fill in.²⁸⁴

This implies that there is something Moses and Israel must discover. It also means that this learning situation will be active for the Israelites; they will not be merely passive recipients. Additionally, it implies progressive learning about who 'I AM' is. 'I AM WHO I AM' is not a withholding of information but a process of discovery that will take place through relationship and experience with God.

According to Mike Higton:

You could say that God's answer to the Israelites is deliberately incomplete. The stories that this God tells to identify Godself are not stories that are over and done with. Moses is to speak to the Israelites of a drama that is about to catch them up and carry them forward into a transformed future.²⁸⁵

In the following chapters, God reveals His power in favour of the Israelites. Later, they become the people of the covenant and progressively begin to discover who 'I AM' is, eventually striving to live according to that transformative revelation.

Returning to chapter 14, we can see God 'creating' a learning experience for his people. Thus, God hardens Pharaoh's heart, and the angel of God leads the people of Israel; God divides the water so the Israelites can walk on dry ground, he confuses the Egyptian army, and finally, he sweeps the Egyptians into the sea.²⁸⁶ So, the divine teaching methodology in Exodus is progressive and also experiential.

Besides, Moses and the Israelites knew about the God of their ancestors. Thus, progressively, the Israelites were increasing their knowledge of God based on some previous

²⁸³ Exodus 3:14 NRSVUE

²⁸⁴ Charles Henry Mackintosh, *Notes on the book of Exodus* (G. Morrish, 1880), p. 50.

²⁸⁵ Higton, *Christian Doctrine*, p. 4.

²⁸⁶ Exodus 14:1, 19, 21, 24, 27 NRSVUE.

perspectives. Nevertheless, God's role was central to the whole process, guiding Moses and the Israelites in the progression of learning and discovery.

Regarding this *progressive learning*, it should be noted that everything begins with Moses in the desert and continues with the covenant when God reveals himself at Sinai from chapter 19 onwards. We could suggest that God followed a progressive upward path.

In fact, knowing God takes a life and is a constant progress where what we know transcends the cognitive to materialise in actions and attitudes of the heart. This journey involves trial and error, adjustment and change, rechannelling and correction, and it takes time. I also might say that learning through divine methodology lasts a *lifetime*.

Regarding this progressive learning Mike Higton says:

We never finish this kind of learning. This journey into the knowledge of God is endless. In knowing God, Christians are knowing something unplumbable. They know a reality that they can never finish exploring, and so a reality of which there can be no final map.²⁸⁷

Above all, God's divine teaching methodology is also based on the relationship he wants to establish with his people. The people of Israel are called to know God through a relationship with him. The emphasis here is to know God and not to know about God.

Regarding the definition of 'to know' in the context of Exodus, Bruce C. Birch says:

The Hebrew verb 'to know' is not limited in meaning to cognitive knowing. Its meaning is much broader than the English verb. It indicates an experiencing of and entering into that which is known. It establishes ongoing relationship. It indicates God's suffering with or participation in Israel's suffering.²⁸⁸

This divine desire for relationship arises from the love God has for Israel. 'God sees, God hears, and God knows'. According to Birch, 'these same three verbs appeared in 2:24-25', and each verb 'has as its object Israel's hurt. God sees afflictions. God hears cries. God knows

²⁸⁷ Higton, *Christian Doctrine*, p. 9.

²⁸⁸ Bruce C. Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down: The Old Testament, Ethics and Christian Life* (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), p. 119.

suffering'. So, God acts according to his love and compassion for his people.²⁸⁹ God is near and not far away, God knows, and he heard the cry of the people of Israel.

Along the same lines, Jon Sobrino states the following:

God is a God-of, a God-for, a God-in, never a God-in-himself. So, in Exodus, God is the one who listens to the cry of the people in order to set them free and form them into a nation and make them God's people. [...] God is the one who defends the oppressed, denouncing oppressors and proclaiming a new covenant with God's people.²⁹⁰

God's response to his people is motivated by the need and suffering of Israel. 'God is one whose regard, care, and eventual saving action can be mobilised by human cries of pain, and from slaves at that'. Thus, God's love for the Israelites is at the centre of the Exodus events, and it is the base for God's methodology and pedagogical action.²⁹¹ So the Israelites knew God through a relationship with him based on divine love.

God is also teaching through his great deeds, miracles, or works. God is active and invites the Israelites to interact through faith and actions. God is teaching them who is 'I AM', and this prompts God's people to respond in some way, but not to remain static.

As it was mentioned before, this learning process was active for the Israelites. A relationship implies interaction, and we can see Israel being invited by God to believe and to move on through the desert towards its freedom.

Nevertheless, it is possible to assume a different pedagogical perspective on God's action in the book of Exodus. There could be a vision of a kind of 'factory' education, where Israelites are 'the raw material' and God is the one 'in charge of the processing of the raw

²⁸⁹ *The Bible in Ethics: The second Sheffield Colloquium*, p. 119.

²⁹⁰ Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. by Paul Burns and Francis McDonagh (Burns & Oates, 1993), p. 69.

²⁹¹ *Ibid*, p. 125

material'. Therefore, this pedagogical vision implies that Israelites did not share responsibility in their learning process since they only waited 'to be processed.'²⁹²

According to Eslinger:

Israel and Egypt are pawns in the hands of the divine player who plays both sides of the board [...] In reward for the part they play in this divine comedy, both Israel and Egypt are rewarded with the knowledge, 'I am Yahweh' [...] For the reader whose knowledge is, rather, of God's educative intent, and of the contrivances he uses to teach his lessons [...] it becomes difficult to applaud the divine pedagogy of the exodus.²⁹³

Furthermore, according to Eslinger, the Apostle Paul recognised the ethical questions arising from the teaching methods depicted in this story (Rom. 9:16-23). However, deeper insights into whether God's overarching intentions validate these methods might be gleaned from other biblical contexts, notably the book of Genesis and its 'prehistory' (Gen. 1-11). It is within this broader context that we can gain a clearer comprehension and resolution of the unsettling implications of Exodus 1-15.²⁹⁴

However, it is remarkable that God, in his sovereign acts, invites human beings to be part of his plan and work on earth. The Lord did not need human help for his purpose, but he decided to involve Moses and Israel.

God told Moses and Israel to move on (Exodus 14:2), and this movement was not simply a walk around. 'God was asking for a breaking of camp, rounding up of animals, packing of belongings, an orderly departure by ranks'. It is also important to remember that among them were children of different ages, and organising their departure required responsibility and order. 'All this would take many hours, and, indeed, the remainder of that day and almost the entire

²⁹² Enns, p. 29.

²⁹³ Lyle Eslinger, 'Freedom or Knowledge? Perspective and Purpose in the Exodus Narrative (Exodus 1-15)', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 16.52 (1991), 43-60 (57-58), doi: doi.org/10.1177/0309089291016052.

²⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 58.

evening were used in the process of getting the Israelites out of their encampment and into and across the sea.’²⁹⁵

The Israelites had ‘to take the direction they had assumed was the most impossible, away from Egyptians, right into the ocean’. Moreover, ‘it may not have been easy to walk between those walls of water, knowing what would happen if they collapsed’. The actions of Israel and Moses required dedication, faith, and courage. ‘The people of Israel are thus not passive; it is an act of faith to walk through such a sea canyon’, they learnt to trust by having to trust.²⁹⁶ This is something that cannot be minimised.²⁹⁷

5.3. The Outcome of the Divine Pedagogical Action

The verse under study in this section expresses the result of a divine and liberating experience for the people of Israel: ‘Israel saw the great work that the Lord did against the Egyptians. So the people *feared* the Lord and *believed* in the Lord and his servant Moses.’²⁹⁸

First, according to the previous analysis, the word (אָרַי) *yaw-ray* is translated as ‘fear’ in verse 10, ‘afraid’ in verse 13, and also as ‘fear’ in verse 31 in the NRSVUE.²⁹⁹

In verses 10 and 13 (אָרַי) *yaw-ray* express the Israelites’ fear of the dangerous situation around them. However, in verse 31, at the end of the liberation experience, (אָרַי) *yaw-ray* is focused on ‘the Lord’. Probably, the most accurate word to express (אָרַי) *yaw-ray* is “fear”, since such a divine triggered event could not inspire any other feeling than afraid. But, it is significant to consider that (אָרַי) *yaw-ray* is also ‘to revere’, so it could be understood as a

²⁹⁵ Stuart, p. 338.

²⁹⁶ Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus: Interpretation. A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (John Knox Press, 1991), pp. 159-160.

²⁹⁷ Stuart, pp. 339, 344.

²⁹⁸ Exodus 14:31 NRSVUE.

²⁹⁹ Exodus 14:10,13 NRSVUE.

reverential fear. As Casutto says, ‘They feared, that is, they were filled with reverence towards God’.³⁰⁰

Second, the word (𐤓𐤕) *yawd* is used in Exodus 14 in verses 8 as ‘boldly’ (high hand in the KJV), ‘hand’ in verses 16, 21, 26, and 27; finally, as ‘work’ in 31 in the NRSV. Thus, (𐤓𐤕) *yawd* in Exodus 14:31 expresses the ‘great work’ or the great liberation God has done. According to Casutto, ‘the Bible uses the word hand here in antithesis to the hand of the Egyptians in the preceding verse.’³⁰¹

Finally, regarding the word (𐤕𐤌𐤎) *aw-man*, which is only used once in chapter 14, verse 31, is translated as ‘believe’. So, the Israelites ‘believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses’, as a result of the work of God.³⁰²

In my view and in the light of Exodus, divine teaching methodology is based on the relationship between God and his people. In the context of this relationship, God works in favour of his people, guides them, protects them, and transforms them. God is the one who draws near and reveals himself to his people progressively and patiently.

God’s pedagogical action in Exodus does not promote passive learning. Knowing who God is entails a meaningful experience under God’s guidance and instruction. Thus, God’s pedagogical action leads to reverential fear and trust in God, a transformation of worldview, a change in affections and emotions, and a renewed faith in God. In this way, God was laying the foundations of his future plans for Israel; he was forming the covenant people.³⁰³

³⁰⁰ Umberto Cassuto, *A commentary on the book of Exodus*, trans. by Israel Abrahams (The Magnes Press, 1967), p. 172.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Carol Meyers, *Exodus* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 115.

³⁰³ Murphy, p. 11.

Such a wonderful experience should lead to a change or transformation. According to T. Desmond Alexander, ‘As a result of what happens, the attitude of the Israelites changes from unbelief and fear in the face of the Egyptian threat to faith and trust in the light of YHWH’s deliverance’.³⁰⁴ So, verse 31 provides a view of the significant impact of God’s salvation actions in favour of his people: ‘The destruction of the Egyptian army is not simply another plague. It is an event of salvation, as Moses predicted in the war oracle: ‘You will see the salvation of Yahweh.’³⁰⁵

This learning experience goes far beyond being a blip in history. This experience of transformation marked the life of Israel. God’s pedagogical action went far beyond since the Lord’s actions permeated history and continued to be a testimony and teaching about who God is throughout Israel's history, in Deuteronomy, the Psalms or in the New Testament. God's pedagogical actions transcend time and are a living testimony to the love and nature of God.³⁰⁶

According to Douglas:

Verse 31 addresses this most important implication of all events with attention to faith: the resultant faith of God’s people in the Lord and their willingness to place their trust in him and in his representative, Moses. [...] What was important for Israel was not merely that they were safe and the Egyptians were not; what mattered was that faith saves, and God had shown them how faith in him could pay off to their lasting benefit. [...] Many of them at this point understood very little of who Yahweh was and what he expected of them. But they had now seen one final, awesome act of deliverance from Egypt, and it prompted their fear and trust.³⁰⁷

Thus, verse 31 is the climax of the divine deliverance events. It meant the outcome of God's pedagogical action. ‘Personal witness and experience’ were crucial for their response, so

³⁰⁴ T. Desmond Alexander, *Exodus*, ed. by David Baker and Gordon Wenham (Apollos, 2017), p. 83.

³⁰⁵ Thomas B. Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus* (Eerdmans Publishing, 2009), p. 318.

³⁰⁶ There are several biblical passages that refer to the Exodus, which is a central event in Israel's history and Salvation history. The following passages from both the Old and New Testaments highlight this theme: Psalms 78, 105, and 136; Isaiah 51; Amos 2; Hosea 11; Acts 7; Hebrews 11; 1 Corinthians 10, and Revelation 15.

³⁰⁷ Stuart, p. 346

verse 31 expresses the outcome of God's guidance and deliverance.³⁰⁸ Fear and belief are the signs of transformation. God's educational action leads to change, worship and joy:

When the people see the great work that God has done, they respond in a number of ways: they revere Yahweh; they believe in Yahweh; they believe in Yahweh's servant Moses; and they sing a song of praise to God for the life and blessing that had become theirs this day.³⁰⁹

Given the deliverance act of God, there are more than socio-political consequences. According to Terence Fretheim, 'the cosmic character of the event means that its effects are much more comprehensive. Given the pervasive effect of oppression, salvation will affect not only who they are as human beings but the entire world of which they are part.'³¹⁰

In addition, according to Terence, in chapter 15:

God's liberation action leads to hymns of praise before all the earth. The language of praise always entails both language to God (adoration) and language about God (witness). Praise is a public activity. Initially the praise comes from the Egyptians themselves: "The Lord fights for them" (14,25). Ironically, the Egyptian praise becomes a theme for Israel's praise. In turn, Israel's praise in public honour of God leads to the realisation of the divine objective in all of these events, so that my name may be declared throughout all the earth (9,16).³¹¹

God is teaching Israel who is 'I AM' through a relationship, through great divine works. Such a divine self-revelation to the people promotes transformation, so the children of Israel shall love the Lord 'with all [their] heart and with all [their] soul and with all [their] might'.³¹² This kind of love is not possible without a comprehensive transformation that comes from an interaction with the Lord that promotes relational and experiential knowledge of God, and this love moves the hearts of the people to worship.

³⁰⁸ William Johnstone, *Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary: Exodus 1 al 19* (Smyth and Helwys Publishing, 2014), p. 286.

³⁰⁹ Fretheim. p, 160.

³¹⁰ Ibid, p. 157.

³¹¹ Ibid, pp. 154-155.

³¹² Deuteronomy 6:5 NRSVUE

However, it should be noted that this faith or trust in God, with its 'lights and shadows', will need to be refined. 'Numbers 21:5 is the polar opposite of Exodus 14:31'. There, Israel 'has gone from 'believe in' God, to 'speak against' God and Moses'. So God is leading his people in a transformation process that also entails crises and challenges.³¹³

Exodus is a journey of transformation of hearts. God was liberating his people from Egypt, but this liberation was not just physical but spiritual and internal. The people of Israel could have been just free from the political and military power of Egypt, but God knew they also needed to be free in their hearts, from the fear of the Egyptians' power, to be free to love God and become the people of the covenant. It is what a relationship with God promotes, comprehensive deliverance. It takes time, it takes life, and God's love and patience for the nation. That's the outcome of divine pedagogical actions, the transformation of Israel's heart.

God revealed himself to the people of Israel by approaching them, guiding them in the wilderness, teaching them patiently and showing his care and setting them free. God revealed himself through a love that transforms and leads people to change and respond to that love but not to remain indifferent. In the words of Mike Higton:

God makes Godself known by addressing people, by challenging them and by blessing them. God makes Godself known by guiding and teaching them. Like the wind becoming visible in its effects, God becomes visible in the lives of those he addresses and transforms.³¹⁴

Such knowledge of the divine transforms. The people of Israel begin a journey of transformation, since 'knowledge of God [...] illuminates the soul that is, transforms it to be adequate to the truth that is known.'³¹⁵

³¹³ Victor Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Baker Academic, 2011), p. 220.

³¹⁴ Higton, *Christian Doctrine*, p. 3.

³¹⁵ Robert Jenson, 'Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses', *Theology Today*, 62.4 (2006), 533-537 (535), doi: doi.org/10.1177/004057360606200409.

In light of Exodus 14:31 and the biblical/contextual analysis of these events, I suggest that God's actions had clear educational objectives for both His people and Egypt. These divine actions followed a progressive, active, experiential, and ascending methodology, driven by love and fostered through a relationship between God and His people. Consequently, God's pedagogical approach led to the gradual transformation of the people of Israel. After witnessing great acts of salvation, they came to trust in God and worship His name.

C. John 6:67-69

So Jesus asked the twelve, ‘Do you also wish to go away?’ Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.’
John 6:67-69.³¹⁶

1. General Context

The Gospel of John is a unique book among the gospels considering its distinctive structure and style. In contrast to the other three gospels, John does not include parables but seven different miracles or ‘signs’; five of these signs are not mentioned in other gospels.³¹⁷

Another distinctive feature of John’s Gospel is the relationship between Jesus and individuals. Although there are mentions of crowds, the focus is on Jesus’ relationships with individuals. Besides, from a theological perspective, the gospel addresses ‘the nature of Christ and the meaning of faith in him’.³¹⁸ According to Secundino Castro Sánchez:

John's Jesus reveals more of his glory. He appears as a risen Christ who floods everything he touches with radiance, but he does not appear as a God who walks on earth untouched by it. He is moved by the sorrows of men. He even weeps (11,35).³¹⁹

³¹⁶ John 6:67-69 NRSVUE.

³¹⁷ Merrill Tenney, *Nuestro Nuevo Testamento: Estudio Panorámico del Nuevo Testamento*, (Portavoz, 1973), p. 228.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Secundino Castro Sánchez, *Evangelio de Juan* (Editorial de Espiritualidad, 2014), p. 26.

In addition, some elements of John's theology are the revelation of Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, and the giver of life. It is also worth noting that 'God's kingdom is not at the centre of Jesus' preaching in the book of John, but Christ himself, the Revealer', and he is the incarnate Word who reveals the mysteries of God to mankind. 'I AM' takes on different nuances that reveal God through Christ, and reminds us about 'I AM WHO I AM' in the Old Testament. Other elements of John's theology are faith as a human response to the revelation, and the role of the Holy Spirit in understanding and remembering revelation.³²⁰

Thus, the Gospel of John is, among many other things, a narrative about teaching (revealing) and learning—a journey of discovery. The disciples come to know God through Jesus, who teaches (reveals) to them about divinity through a series of divine acts or signs, relationally and closely. Moreover, John is also a book of hope, demonstrating that it is possible to know God. It shows us that we can learn about his plans for us, follow him, and enjoy his blessings both now and in the future.

The encounter with Jesus brings, among many other things, knowledge about God to human beings. This knowledge goes beyond the cognitive; it is the knowledge that transforms people, so they believe and follow Christ the Messiah.

It is also worth noting Johannine eschatology. Eschatology involves the sharing of future blessings. In the book of John, we see that it is possible to partake in these blessings in this life, while also looking forward to eternal life, such as immortality. John states, 'From his fullness we have all received,' indicating this present sharing.³²¹

The Gospel of John is essentially a Christological one, revealing who Christ is. The fourth Gospel is an invitation to know and trust Jesus. In the opening hymn, John shows us that

³²⁰ Sjeff van Tilborg, *Comentario al Evangelio de Juan* (Editorial Verbo Divino, 2005), pp. 10-11.

³²¹ José Luis Espinel Marcos, *Evangelio según San Juan: introducción, traducción y comentario* (Editorial San Esteban, 1998), p. 31.

Jesus is the Word. He is also presented as the Son of God, the Son of Man, and the prophesied Messiah-King. Furthermore, Christ holds seven titles that manifest his salvific functions. The Gospel also explores his intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit and his status as the Lamb of God.³²²

In the following, I will focus the study on three significant verses of John chapter 6, where we can see some of the first results of a learning journey for the disciples, and Christ leading, teaching and guiding them to knowledge and faith. First, in the next section, I provide a synopsis of the gospel of John, with some of the significant events of the book.

2. Synopsis

The prologue of John's Gospel (1:1-18) begins by 'scrutinising the origin of Jesus to the divine depths from eternity. 'Who Jesus is and where he comes from is not explained biographically, but theologically'. In the light of John's gospel, Jesus is the Word, and the Word not only comes from God, but is God.³²³

The Word became flesh to draw near to human beings, reveal himself, show his glory 'as of a father's only son', and teaches by signs and wonders, speeches and individual conversations, so those who believe in him will receive the 'power to become children of God'.³²⁴ Thus, this knowledge produced by the advent of Christ was not an end in itself but a life-transforming one.

After the prologue, the public ministry of Jesus is narrated. In chapter 1:19-51, we can find the first 'testimonies' from John the Baptist and the first disciples. Then, the first miracle or 'sign' in the wedding at Cana is narrated in chapter 2, followed by the narration when Jesus

³²² Salvador Carrillo Alday, *El Evangelio según San Juan: El evangelio del camino, de la verdad y de la vida* (Verbo Divino, 2010), p. 31.

³²³ Johannes Beutler, *Comentario al evangelio de Juan* (Verbo Divino, 2016), pp. 14-15.

³²⁴ John 1:14 NRSVUE

clears the temple. In these first chapters, we can find the first confessions of faith of Jesus' disciples.³²⁵

The public ministry of Jesus continues with some personal encounters with Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, and the lame man. We can see Jesus confronting, guiding, teaching and loving people in these encounters. A distinctive feature of the gospel of John is Jesus interacting with individuals, guiding and teaching them patiently.

Due to his encounters and some first signs or miracles, the crowds began to follow Jesus. Then, Jesus feeds five thousand people, and uses this event to counteract the wrong motivations and perspectives about his person, introducing himself as the Bread of life. The teachings of Jesus about his flesh as 'true food', and his blood as 'true drink' provoked arguments and desertions among those who followed him. After Jesus' teachings to the crowds, he turns to his inner circle, the twelve, in a way to 'crystallise' his teachings in a more intimate environment.

Later, Christ is teaching at the temple, and his teachings provoke mixed reactions and divided opinions. Nevertheless, Jesus continues his public ministry teaching and making some signs or miracles as the raised of Lazarus, introducing himself as the good Shepherd, and being anointed in Bethany before his triumphant entry.

After these public events, we can find Jesus in a more private circle celebrating the final Passover with his disciples in chapter 13. This chapter introduces us to the second part of the book. In this second part, Jesus 'prepares his disciples for his departure, performing a supreme act of love and service: the washing of the feet'.³²⁶ Then, Jesus announces the betrayer and also

³²⁵ *Comentario Bíblico Contemporáneo*, pp. 1337-1343.

³²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 1366.

Peter's denial. So, Chapter 13 tells us that Christ loved His own until the end, but we also see that Christ served and taught His disciples until the end of His ministry on earth.³²⁷

Chapters 14 to 16 continue with the final instructions and teachings Jesus gave his disciples. Jesus says that he is the way to the Father and the true Vine, and he announces that he will ask the Father to send the Holy Spirit, 'the Spirit of truth' that 'abides with you, and he will be in you.'³²⁸

After these teachings and instructions, Jesus prays his priestly prayer in John chapter 17. This prayer shows the humanity and divinity of Jesus in a perfect balance, where Jesus embraces his Father's will at his final stage in the world. According to Carson:

In some respects the prayer is a summary of the entire Fourth Gospel to this point. Its principal themes include Jesus' obedience to his Father, the glorification of his Father through his death/exaltation, the revelation of God in Christ Jesus, the choosing of the disciples out of the world, their mission to the world, their unity modelled on the unity of the Father and the Son, and their final destiny in the presence of the Father and the Son. To cast this summary in the form of a prayer is not only to anticipate Jesus' being 'lifted up' on the cross, but to contribute to the climax of the movement that brings Christ back to God—one of the central themes of the farewell discourse.³²⁹

Then, Jesus is betrayed and arrested on his final way to the cross. Before his death sentence, he goes through interrogations and punishments. In chapter 19, we find the crucifixion and death of Jesus, and finally, in chapter 20, the resurrection and his appearance to Mary Magdalene, his disciples, and Thomas.

In the last chapter of the fourth gospel, Jesus appears to seven disciples and prepares breakfast for them. John's gospel finishes with the narration of the conversation between Jesus and Peter, and the mention of the beloved disciple.

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ John 14:17 NRSVUE

³²⁹ Donald Arthur Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Eerdmans Publishing, 1991), p. 551.

Thus, the fourth gospel is also the narrative of how Jesus invited men and women on a journey of learning, discovery, and transformation. This journey involved personal and public encounters, speeches to crowds, personal conversations, and acts of service. Jesus' signs and miracles had a clear purpose, so every word and deed revealed himself and the Father.

Christ invited on a journey with a clear purpose, that his disciples, those who were given to him by the Father, would trust and believe in the Son of God and the Father who had sent him for salvation and transformation.

Those who understood the message, those who grasped the true meaning of the signs, not only followed Jesus but went further and invited others to embrace the same faith, follow the same path, love the same God, and proclaim or teach the same message. For these reasons, John's Gospel is also, among other things, an account of the learning and transformation journey of Jesus' followers.

Thus, after this journey, many took John's words to heart: 'and the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth'.³³⁰ Such learning and experience cannot stop there but generates further changes and influences the environment.

3. Chapter Structure

The following is a basic and general structure of John 6. I suggest an organisation into seven sections.

³³⁰ John 1:14 NRSVUE

3.1. Jesus Tests His Disciples: 6:1-9

Chapter 6 begins by providing some geographic information about the location of the events narrated in this chapter. Jesus was on a mountain with his disciples, and the crowd was also there. Then, Jesus ‘tests’ Philip and his other disciples by asking for food for the people. After this, Andrew let Jesus know that there is a boy with ‘five barley loaves and two fish.’³³¹

3.2. Jesus Feeds the Crowd: 6:10-15

In verses 10 to 15, Jesus feeds the crowd. First, Jesus gives some instructions. Then, he gave thanks for the food, and the people started to receive their meal. Once the people were satisfied, the disciples gathered the rest of the food in twelve baskets. After this sign, Jesus realised the wrong intentions of the people, so he withdrew to the mountain.

According to verse 15, the crowd wanted ‘to take him by force to make him king’. According to Hendriksen, ‘this does not mean that they saw in him the Saviour who would deliver them from their sins, but that they had been impressed by a miracle worker. These miracles were signs (cf. 2:11), but the crowd did not understand this.’³³²

The people did not understand the real purpose of the signs, that they would trust and believe in Jesus. The crowd understood Jesus' ministry as political deliverance or earthly government, but Jesus offered them eternal life and deliverance from the condemnation of sin and death. ‘But he, whose kingdom is not of this world (18:36), returned to the mountain.’³³³

³³¹ John 6:9 NRSVUE

³³² William Hendriksen, *Comentario al Nuevo Testamento: el evangelio según San Juan*, trans. by José María Blanch (Libros Desafío, 1981), p. 232.

³³³ Ibid, p. 238.

3.3. Jesus Walks on the Water: 6:16-21

Later, Jesus' disciples 'went down the sea'.³³⁴ On their way to Capernaum, the sea became rough due to a strong wind, and suddenly, the disciples were terrified seeing Jesus walking on the sea. So Jesus told his disciples: 'it is I; do not be afraid';³³⁵ so the disciples were happy to receive Jesus on their boat.

3.4. Jesus Reveals the True Motivations of the Crowd: 6:22-27

On the next day, the crowd followed and found Jesus in Capernaum. When the people ask Jesus when he has come to Capernaum, Jesus answers them, letting them know that he is aware of their wrong motivation to approach him, and he invites them to work 'for the food that endures for eternal life' instead of the 'food that perishes.'³³⁶

3.5. Jesus Teaches the Crowd that He is the Bread of Heaven: 6:28-59

In verses 28 to 59, we find Jesus answering questions and teaching patiently. Jesus told the crowd that he is the bread that came down from heaven, which made the Jews complain as they knew Jesus and his family background. Jesus, completely aware of their complaints, reactions, and motivations, reinforced his idea by proclaiming that his flesh is true food and his blood is true drink, and by eating his flesh and drinking his blood, they will have eternal life. Verse 59 provides information about the location of this narration: "he was teaching in a synagogue at Capernaum."³³⁷

According to Burge:

In his teaching in the synagogue, Jesus wishes to lift his listeners above a material/physical understanding of his miracle. Jesus argues that they should not

³³⁴ John 6:16 NRSVUE

³³⁵ John 6:20 NRSVUE

³³⁶ John 6:27 NRSVUE

³³⁷ John 6:59 NRSVUE

direct their efforts to obtain loaves and fishes, but to obtain the higher food that nourishes forever (6:26-27).³³⁸

So there is the possibility of teaching and learning on the surface, but Christ wants to go further. Patiently, Jesus invites the crowd to a broader understanding of his miracle as a sign and goes beyond the physical meaning of the ‘bread’. However, the people did not get the message, so they did not recognise the One sent by God, his work of salvation, and the gift of eternal life.

Staying on the surface meant that the crowd of John 6 failed to understand the sign in a wider context, failed to grasp a deeper understanding of Christ and his saving work, and ultimately were prevented from trusting and knowing the Son of God, the bread of life who came from heaven.

3.6. Many Disciples Turn Back: 6:60-66

After Jesus’ teachings, many disciples claimed that these teachings were difficult to accept. One more time, Jesus, knowing all things by his omniscience, replied in verses 61 and 62: ‘Does this offend you? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?’³³⁹ Jesus also let the crowd know that he was aware that many of them did not believe, so many disciples left Jesus due to his teachings.

3.7. Peter Confesses on Behalf of the Twelve: 6:67-71

After many disciples turned back, Jesus asked the twelve if they wanted to leave too, and Peter, on behalf of the twelve, answered: ‘Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.’³⁴⁰ Then

³³⁸ Gary Burge, *Juan: Del texto bíblico a una aplicación contemporánea*, ed. by Terry Muck (Vida, 2021), p. 236.

³³⁹ John 6:61-62 NRSVUE

³⁴⁰ John 6:68-69 NRSVUE

Jesus told the twelve that he had chosen them, even though one of them was going to betray him.

4. Keywords, Etymology, and Different Translations

So Jesus asked the twelve, ‘Do you also wish to go away?’³⁴¹ Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom can we go?’³⁴² You have the words³⁴³ of eternal life.³⁴⁴ We have come to believe³⁴⁵ and know³⁴⁶ that you are the Holy³⁴⁷ One of God.

John 6:67-69.

The following are the keywords in John 6:67-69 under study and their meanings.

4.1. ὑπάγειν (*hypagein*)

The meaning is ‘to lead or bring under, to lead on slowly, to depart’.³⁴⁸ The NRSV translates it as ‘go away’ in John 6:67. According to Strong:

Particularly, ὑπάγω is used to denote the final departure of one who ceases to be another's companion or attendant, John 6:67; euphemistically, of one who departs from life, Matthew 26:24; Mark 14:21.³⁴⁹

4.2. ἀπελευσόμεθα (*apeleusometha*)

The meaning is to go away or go after. Usage in the New Testament context includes the following expressions: ‘I come or go away from, depart, return, arrive, go after, follow’. It is also translated as ‘spread’ in Matthew 4:24 in the NASB 1995.³⁵⁰ According to Strong:

Hebraistically (cf. אָפּוּרְיָ הָלַךְ) ἀπερχεσθαι ὀπίσω τίνος, to go away in order to follow anyone, go after him figuratively, i. e. to follow his party, follow him as

³⁴¹ ὑπάγειν (*hypagein*)

³⁴² ἀπελευσόμεθα (*apeleusometha*)

³⁴³ ῥήματα (*rhēmata*)

³⁴⁴ ζωῆς (*zōēs*)

³⁴⁵ πεπιστεύκαμεν (*pepisteukamen*)

³⁴⁶ ἐγνώκαμεν (*egnōkamen*)

³⁴⁷ Ἅγιος (*Hagios*)

³⁴⁸ *Strong's Greek Lexicon, Bible Hub* <<https://biblehub.com/greek/5217.htm>> [Accessed 18 October 2022].

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

a leader: Mark 1:20; John 12:19; in the same sense, ἀπέρχεσθαι πρὸς τινα, John 6:68.³⁵¹

4.3. ῥήματα (*rhēmata*)

Ῥήματα means declaration or word, and its usage in the New Testament includes the following expressions: ‘a thing spoken, a word or saying of any kind, as command, report, promise, a thing, matter, business’. In Matthew 18:16 the NASB 1995 translates it as ‘fact’, ‘statement’ in Mark 9:32, ‘matters’ in Luke 1:65. It is ‘commonly used in the NT (and in LXX) for the Lord speaking His dynamic, living word in a believer to inbirth faith’.³⁵²

It is also suggested that in John 6:68 ῥήματα could be translated as teachings: ‘thy teaching begets eternal life’; in Acts 5:20 it might also be understood as doctrine, ‘to deliver the whole doctrine concerning this life, i. e. the life eternal.’³⁵³

4.4. ζωῆς (*zōēs*)

The meaning of ζωῆς is ‘life (literally or figuratively)’, and it is translated as life in the four gospels generally. The King James Version translates it as ‘lifetime’ in Luke 16:25.³⁵⁴ Usage includes the following expressions: ‘life, both of physical (present) and of spiritual (particularly future) existence.’³⁵⁵

We can find some writers in the Old Testament that ‘have anticipated the conception [...] by employing בִּרְיָא’. This word means or expresses a ‘happy life and every kind of blessing’. Some examples are found in Deuteronomy 30:15,19; Malachi 2:5; Psalm 33:13; Proverbs 8:35; Proverbs 12:28.³⁵⁶

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

4.5. *πεπιστεύκαμεν (pepisteukamen)*

The original word is πιστεύω, and it means to believe or entrust. Usage includes the following expressions: ‘I believe, have faith in, trust in; pass: I am entrusted with.’³⁵⁷

We can find *πεπιστεύκαμεν* only in John 6:69 and in 1 John 4:16.³⁵⁸ The NASB 1995 translates it as entrusted in: Romans 3:2; 1 Corinthians 9:17; Galatians 2:7; 1 Thessalonians 2:4 and 1 Timothy 1:11 among others. The KJV translates it as committed in John 2:24; Titus 1:3; Romans 3:2; 1 Corinthians 9:17; Galatians 2:7 and Timothy 1:11.³⁵⁹

4.6. *ἐγνώκαμεν (egnōkamen)*

The original word is γινώσκω and it is a ‘prolonged form of a primary verb; to 'know' (absolutely) in a great variety of applications’. Usage includes the following expressions: “allow, be aware (of), feel, (have) know(-ledge), perceived, be resolved, can speak, be sure, understand”. The usage also includes: ‘I am taking in knowledge, come to know, learn, I ascertained, realised.’³⁶⁰

According to Strong, γινώσκω means ‘properly, to know, especially through personal experience (first-hand acquaintance).’³⁶¹

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

³⁶¹ Ibid.

4.7. *Ἅγιος (Hagios)*

The meaning is ‘sacred, holy’.³⁶² Usage includes the following: ‘set apart by (or for) God, holy, sacred (physically, pure, morally blameless or religious, ceremonially, consecrated):--(most) holy (one, thing), saint’.³⁶³

5. Pedagogical Reflections on John 6:67-69

In the following, I offer some reflections on the text, considering the role of Jesus and his disciples in this process of discovery, learning, and transformation we find in the fourth gospel. This reflection is focused on chapter 6:67-69 and its literary context.

5.1. *The Divine Educational Objective in John*

The writer of the fourth gospel is precise about the objective or purpose of his writing:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.³⁶⁴

According to John, there were many other signs that Jesus did, but ‘he did not intend to record all of Jesus’ miracles (see 21:25)’.³⁶⁵ Nevertheless, those he recorded have the purpose of making the people believe in the Son of God, and as a result of that faith get eternal life. So the evangelist ‘first mentions the incompleteness of his gospel; secondly, the benefits it will give (v. 31).’³⁶⁶

About the gospel’s purpose, Elizabeth Sendek says that John 20:31 expresses a triple purpose: evangelistic, apologetic and didactic.³⁶⁷ This purpose permeates the whole book, the

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ John 20:30-31 NRSVUE

³⁶⁵ David Pratte, *Commentary on the Gospel of John: Bible Study Notes and Comments* (2013), p. 349.

³⁶⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John: Chapters 13-21*, trans. by Fabian Larcher and James Weisheipl (The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), p. 280.

³⁶⁷ *Comentario Bíblico Contemporáneo*, p. 1336.

teachings of Jesus, the stories, and the confessions of the disciples or followers. Thus, the purpose of the fourth Gospel is rooted in the educational objective of Jesus' pedagogical actions. In fact, we can see this pattern in the whole book: people see the signs, people understand miracles as signs and believe in Jesus, and finally they receive the certain hope of salvation.

The first expression of trust and testimony we find in chapter 1 is when John the Baptist declares that 'here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world [...] I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him.'³⁶⁸

Moreover, in the same chapter, Jesus was recognised as 'Rabbi' or Teacher. Then, Andrew stated: 'we have found the Messiah'. Later, Philip said to Nathanael: 'we have found him about whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth'. The Christological claim about the Davidic Messiah of Philip is a profound, sweeping, and even difficult proclamation for Nathanael to believe.³⁶⁹ This confession, among others, is an indication of what Jesus' teachings evoked. In addition, Nathanael confessed: 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!'³⁷⁰

Then, Jesus revealed his glory at Cana, which was the first sign, 'and his disciples believed in him'.³⁷¹ Confessions and expressions of trust in Jesus continued in a Samaritan village, so after hearing Christ's message and the testimony of the Samaritan woman, many people confessed: 'we know that this is truly the Savior of the world'.³⁷² Later, we can find the second sign in Galilee healing an official's son, so the official 'believed, along with his whole household.'³⁷³

³⁶⁸ John 1:29,32 NRSVUE

³⁶⁹ Jeffrey Tripp, 'Jesus' Special Knowledge in the Gospel of John', *Novum Testamentum*, 61.3 (2019), 269-288 (273), doi: <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685365-12341635>.

³⁷⁰ John 1:41,45,49 NRSVUE

³⁷¹ John 2:11 NRSVUE

³⁷² John 4:42 NRSVUE

³⁷³ John 4:53 NRSVUE

In chapter 6, we find Peter's confession on behalf of the twelve, which is one of the highlights of John's Gospel. Peter said: 'we have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.'³⁷⁴

All these confessions are deep and compelling; they are not flat words but words that harbour clear connections to the Old Testament, to the hope of the people, to the prophecies of the messiah, to the divine promises, to the history of a nation. These are confessions of faith that grew out from encounters with the Son of God. These are also indications/signs prompted by Jesus' teachings.

'To believe' (πιστεύω) and 'to know' (γινώσκω) are often mentioned together in the gospel of John.³⁷⁵ 'John unites πιστεύειν and γινώσκειν, at one time putting πιστεύειν first' in John chapter 6 verse 69, 'but at another time γινώσκειν' like in John 17:8 and 1 John 4:16.³⁷⁶

So, after knowing and believing/trusting in Christ (πιστεύειν-γινώσκειν), Peter answered Jesus: we are not going to leave you; where could we go? After you have known and believed him, it is not possible to remain indifferent. Curiously, the word 'go' (ἀπελευσόμεθα) used in verse 68 (Lord, to whom can we go?) 'is the same one that appears when Judas goes to the priests to betray Jesus in Mark 14:10.'³⁷⁷

The disciples have known and believed, and 'for the first time they are here called the Twelve',³⁷⁸ the same twelve that have been invited to follow Jesus and to become 'fishers of people'. This knowledge and trust triggered a series of events, actions, attitudes, and scenarios that seemed improbable but transformed the lives of the multitudes that made up the early

³⁷⁴ John 6:69 NRSVUE

³⁷⁵ Carson, p. 235.

³⁷⁶ *Strong's Greek Lexicon*.

³⁷⁷ Leon Morris, *El Evangelio según San Juan*, trans. by Dorcas González Bataller (Clie, 1995), p. 440.

³⁷⁸ Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: a Theological Commentary*, trans. by John Vriend (Eerdmans Publishing, 1997), p. 248.

Church. This faith in Jesus ‘is not an end in itself’; it leads to salvation and implies transformation.³⁷⁹

Therefore, in the light of the gospel of John, Jesus was revealing his glory and making himself known, so those who were given to him by the Father became believers and bearers of an active living faith that transforms and restores. Thus, the divine educational objective in John is dual: to know and to believe in Jesus, the Son of God.

Throughout John's gospel, we see that people know and believe. Jesus himself openly invites people to trust and to know/understand through the signs he performed.³⁸⁰ Knowing and believing/trusting are linked in John's gospel and indicate to us the educational goal or purpose of Christ in the Johannine vision.

5.2. The Divine Teaching Methodology

Throughout John's gospel, we see Jesus teaching and sharing with individuals and crowds about himself. In a process of discovery and knowledge, Christ reveals himself so that those given to him by the Father will know and believe the Son of God.

In a particularly masterful way, in John 6, we encounter a series of events where Jesus challenges people's thinking with his actions and teachings. His actions and teachings harmoniously intertwine, inviting us to trust and experience the transformation that comes through the gospel.

First, Jesus “tested” his disciples. In John 6:5-6 we find that Jesus asked Philip: ‘Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?’³⁸¹ According to Ridderbos, the question was ‘to see whether, as a follower and confessor of the Messiah, he understood the challenge inherent

³⁷⁹ Carson, p. 522

³⁸⁰ John 10:38 NRSVUE

³⁸¹ John 6:5-6 NRSVUE

in this situation and how he would react to it'.³⁸² In my view, Jesus was also setting the scene for the next stage of the revelation of his glory.

Then, Jesus provided the sign of feeding the five thousand, and through this sign he was showing his glory and revealing himself as the bread of heaven and the bread of life.³⁸³

In this progressive learning, 'the Word became flesh'³⁸⁴ is revealed through different signs. John states in 1:14: 'We have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son'. Then, in 1,18: 'No one has ever seen God. It is the only Son, himself God, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known'. So, God's glory is revealed through Christ in seven different situations by 'signs.'

The seven signs are found in 2:1-12 (the wedding at Cana); 4:46-54 (Jesus heals an official's son); 5:1-11 (Jesus heals on the Sabbath); 6:1-15 (Jesus feeds the five thousand); 6:16-21 (Jesus walks on the water); 9:1-12 (a man born blind receives sight); 11:38-44 (Jesus raises Lazarus to life).

According to Ridderbos, the gospel of John:

Firmly rejects a sensationalist desire for miracles and a superficial faith in miracles (cf. 2:23ff.; 4:48; 6:14, 15). However, "miracles as media of revelation very clearly belong to the essential content of the Johannine message of salvation, not only "spiritually" interpreted, as they often are, but also as signs that Jesus was sent by the Father."³⁸⁵

Jesus did the signs 'before' his disciples and the crowds, but when many of them saw the miracles they were not able to see the 'sign'. These signs were not merely 'miracles', but the 'symbol of an eternal truth', the signs of the Son of God. Thus, Jesus used the signs to reveal himself to the world, as a symbol of his divinity, and as a way to show people his glory.³⁸⁶ Jesus

³⁸² Ridderbos, p. 210.

³⁸³ John 6:35 NRSVUE.

³⁸⁴ John 1:14 NRSVUE.

³⁸⁵ W. Nicol in Ridderbos, p. 464.

³⁸⁶ Morris, p. 411.

was teaching about a concept that could be abstract, but these signs were a materialisation of that abstraction.

So the signs didn't have an end in themselves, but the purpose was to make the people know and believe. The signs, at the same time, were a way to teach about divinity, a concept that could be abstract, in a tangential manner.

In reference to John chapter 6, it is inevitable thinking that the phrase 'everything that the Father gives me will come to me' refers to determinism or the doctrine of election.³⁸⁷ We find that Jesus refers to this at least three times in chapter 6. Later, he mentions it again in John chapter 17, in the context of his priestly prayer or when he prays for his disciples. We also find a reference in chapter 12:37-43.

Nevertheless, the main idea in these references is God's sovereignty. It is God's will that all should believe in the Son and come to the Father, but those who have come to believe will not be lost. Evil will not be able to stop the plan of salvation that has been set in motion, this is God's sovereign act.³⁸⁸ Thus, Jesus' audience was divided into two groups: those who got the message and believed, and those who didn't.

Although further discussion about determinism in relation to this part of the Gospel of John is possible, this diverges from the purposes of this research; hence, this particular topic, as well as others, will not be delved into.

In the gospel of John, the revelation of the Son of God also takes a new perspective as he is revealing progressively who is 'I AM'. The seven 'I AM' sayings in John lead us to the Old Testament, when 'I AM' revealed himself to the people of Israel. Here, again, progressively and patiently, Jesus helped us to know the great 'I AM' through him. 'I AM is a very solemn

³⁸⁷ John 6:37 NRSVUE

³⁸⁸ Burge, p. 239.

statement' in John 6, and 'it has a connotation of divinity'. So Jesus used the previous knowledge ('I AM', manna) to expand understanding, and produce faith.³⁸⁹

According to Burge, Jesus teaches considering previous knowledge through reinterpretation. In his teachings, Jesus takes a common topic for Judaism 'and reinterprets it by applying it to himself'. So, 'water' or 'bread' were common elements for Jews and his religious history. 'Just as in chapter four, Jesus' water quenches thirst, so now the bread he offers quenches hunger. The people longed for heavenly bread, and Jesus is that precious gift they desired.'³⁹⁰

In addition, in chapter 6, another sign is when Jesus walks on the waters. In the face of the disciples' fear, Jesus lets them know that it is him. According to Ridderbos:

That is where the emphasis lies in this self revelation — that should convince them that, in virtue of the glory given him by God, no darkness was too deep, waves too high, or sea too wide for him to find them and be with them in the midst of that tumult.³⁹¹

Later, we also see Jesus teaching in the synagogue of Capernaum in 6:59. This 'didactic dialogue'³⁹² is another method Jesus used in the context of the chapter under study. This dialogue, centred in some elements of the Exodus, is connected with the context and the Passover at that time.³⁹³

In this dialogue, Jesus teaches that his flesh is true food and his blood is true drink. According to Calvin 'there is nothing said here that is not figured and presented to believers in the Lord's Supper. Indeed, we might say that Christ intended the holy Supper to be a seal of this

³⁸⁹ Morris, p. 415

³⁹⁰ Burge, p. 238

³⁹¹ Ridderbos, p. 217.

³⁹² Wim Beuken, Marieke Den Hartog, Jaap Van Der Meij, Marcel Poorthuis and Wim Weren, *Brood uit de hemel: Lijnen van Exodus 16 naar Johannes 6 tegende achtergrond van derabbijnse litteratuur* (Meinema, 1985), p. 45.

³⁹³ Ridderbos, p. 168.

discourse'.³⁹⁴ Again we can see Jesus making connections, going step by step with his disciples, and crystallising his teachings to them.

However, there are others who suggest that there is no such connection between Jesus' teaching on true drinking and eating and the Lord's Supper.³⁹⁵ Nevertheless, we find in Jesus' discourse and in his conversations with his listener's elements that connect with Israel's history. Regardless of the theological significance of the 'bread and wine' in this context, Jesus invites his listeners to go beyond the surfaces of understanding and deepen their knowledge of the truths taught.

It is worth noting some details of the broader context of 'the sign' in John 6, which also suggest that Jesus used historical and OT experiences from Israel's past as part of his methodology for teaching and revealing:

But Andrew, Peter's brother, locates a young man (*paidarion*) who might be able to help them: he has five barley loaves and two salted fish. Only John mentions that the bread is barley bread, a detail that shows the poverty of that crowd. Barley bread was considered the bread of the poor [...] Luke 11:5 implies that, at a usual meal, three of these loaves would be needed per person. These details are significant, for in 2 Kings 4:42-44, we find another OT miracle in which Elisha feeds a hundred men with twenty barley loaves with the help of a *paidarion* or young servant. Elisha also had bread left over, as happened after Jesus' miracle.³⁹⁶

Thus, Jesus is designing a learning process in John 6. He tested Philip, but then he gave the initiative to feed the people. The feeding of the five thousand gradually prepared the disciples to understand the main message: He is the bread from heaven, the bread of eternal life, the true food. Jesus was preparing the way of gradual learning, with its climax when Jesus asks his disciples in John 6:66: Do you also want to go away?

³⁹⁴ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Gospel according to John*, vol. I, trans. William Pringle (Calvin Translation Society, 1847–1848), p. 170 in Ridderbos, p. 237.

³⁹⁵ Burge, p. 242.

³⁹⁶ Burge, p. 232.

Until then, the disciples were not ‘the twelve’, but after this event, the group of the twelve was formed. In John 6 the disciples are called ‘the twelve’ for the first time. Those who had seen his glory and who would have the great task of proclaiming that glory beyond the borders of Galilee and Jerusalem.³⁹⁷

The faith and knowledge the twelve got are not passive, but active, transforming people and leading them to salvation. Indeed, it could not be otherwise. The living Word only produces life in those who receive him. It is not only ‘content’, it is a life that promotes freedom that brings improbable and divine situations.

Although the teachings were progressive, Jesus confronted their audience with the truth. Some of their learners did not get the message at all; in fact, some of them turned back after Jesus’ words.³⁹⁸

Jesus’ teachings and the figures he used to express the truths he wanted to communicate challenged the crowd. The main problem was that many people had understood Jesus’ message literally and had acquired a material vision of the kingdom of God: healing and food (6:2,12). However, the intentions of the people did not determine God’s purposes. ‘Jesus is not the political leader they want, he is the Son of God, approved by the Father.’³⁹⁹

So, Jesus invites the crowd to understand that they should not look for a new Moses to give them manna but for God, who gives bread better than manna. Thus, Jesus makes it clear that what he offers is not bread but that he is the offering, as he ‘fulfils the messianic expectations of provision’ (Isaiah 55:1).⁴⁰⁰ Jesus does not accommodate or adjust his teaching

³⁹⁷ Ridderbos, p. 248.

³⁹⁸ John 6:66 NRSVUE

³⁹⁹ *Comentario Bíblico Contemporáneo*, p. 1351.

⁴⁰⁰ *Comentario Bíblico Contemporáneo*, pp. 1351-1352.

to the crowd but seeks to challenge the erroneous views and superficial perspectives on life that he offers them.⁴⁰¹

To follow Jesus is to ‘believe and persevere in the way’.⁴⁰² Eternal life ‘is a present experience of a reality whose fullness corresponds to the resurrection at the end of time’.⁴⁰³ Thereby, Christ does not adapt his message to give the crowd what they want but invites them to go beyond the surface of learning to understand the mysterious truth that emerges from the signs and teachings of Jesus.

So, we can see Jesus teaching progressively, and patiently, considering the context at that time and previous knowledge. Jesus also tested or diagnosed the attitudes and perceived intentions. Jesus also taught abstract concepts using visible or tangible elements. He revealed himself through signs to make the people know and trust in the Son of God. The audience does not dictate the course of Jesus' teachings; by contrast, he invites people to discover the mystery of his teachings from a deeper and renewed view.

5.3. The Outcome of the Divine Pedagogical Action

It is worthwhile in this section to consider an account of the events of chapter 6 verses 67-69.

In chapter 6 verse 66, many disciples left Jesus because of his teachings: ‘this teaching is difficult; who can accept it?’⁴⁰⁴ So after these events, Jesus asked the twelve: ‘Do you also wish to go away?’⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Ibid.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ John 6:60 NRSVUE.

⁴⁰⁵ John 6:67 NRSVUE.

The word ὑπάγειν (*hypagein*) means ‘to depart’, and euphemistically, it expresses the idea of someone ‘who departs from life’.⁴⁰⁶ To Jesus’ question, Peter answered on behalf of the twelve: ‘Κύριε (*Kyrie*) πρὸς (*pros*) τίνα (*tina*) ἀπελευσόμεθα (*apeleusometha*)’ or ‘Lord, to whom can we go?’⁴⁰⁷ The word ἀπελευσόμεθα could mean ‘go away’ but also ‘go after’ or follow. Not least, Peter referred to Jesus as ‘Lord’, which denotes the recognition of Christ's lordship through the experiences of the twelve up to that point.

Peter’s answer continues with the next statement: ‘ἔχεις (*echeis*) ῥήματα (*rhēmata*) αἰωνίου (*aiōniou*) ζωῆς (*zōēs*)’⁴⁰⁸ or ‘you have the words of eternal life’.⁴⁰⁹ The word ῥήματα, which means ‘word’ or ‘teachings’, ζωῆς (*zōēs*) or life, and αἰωνίου (*aiōniou*) or eternal, are not randomly chosen words, since Peter was using Jesus’ words, making them his own. Then, Peter said ἡμεῖς (*hēmeis*) πεπιστεύκαμεν (*pepisteukamen*) καὶ (*kai*) ἐγνώκαμεν (*egnōkamen*) ὅτι (*hoti*) σὺ (*sy*) εἶ (*ei*) ὁ (*ho*) Ἅγιος (*Hagios*) Θεοῦ (*Theou*), or ‘we have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.’⁴¹⁰

The twelve have come to believe and know, and their trust is markedly different from that of the crowd. According to Richards and Richards:

But the belief of the people was shallow; so shallow that "Jesus would not entrust [or commit] Himself" to the crowds as He had to the Twelve. What is a shallow faith? Perhaps it is best to think of it as a faith that exists only as long as its object fits our expectations. These people, who "believed" in Jesus superficially, turned away from Him when He did not speak and act as they expected (see John 6:60-66). They "believed," but not enough to abandon their own notions and submit themselves fully to Jesus' fresh revelation of God.⁴¹¹

Thus, at this stage, the twelve’s faith and knowledge have been strengthened by the experiences, words or ‘teachings’, and signs they have witnessed. So they decided to stay with

⁴⁰⁶ *Strong's Greek Lexicon.*

⁴⁰⁷ John 6:68 NRSVUE.

⁴⁰⁸ *Strong's Greek Lexicon.*

⁴⁰⁹ John 6:68 NRSVUE.

⁴¹⁰ John 6:69 NRSVUE.

⁴¹¹ Lawrence Richards and Larry Richards, *Teacher's Commentary* (Victor Books, 1987).

Christ, since the disciples were not ‘nominal believers’ who accepted Jesus as a ‘powerful miracle worker,’ but knew and believe in the Lord (Κύριε), and recognised that there is no one whom they will follow (ἀπελευσόμεθα), since the Lord has living and eternal words.⁴¹² So instead of a transitory faith, the outcome of Jesus’ pedagogical action was an enduring faith and knowledge for those who allow themselves to be guided by Jesus and his teachings, and not by their own ideas of God, their own pretensions and expectations.

This enduring faith and knowledge transformed the life of the twelve. The process of learning continues with the public ministry of Jesus. The twelve saw Jesus teaching, healing, and resurrecting Lazarus. They saw Jesus revealing his glory, and also weeping. This God was not distant but full of truth, mercy, and love. Then, in chapter 12, Jesus summarised his teachings saying that his Father’s commandments, those he has taught ‘is eternal life’,⁴¹³ and these eternal life/words were the content of his teachings.

Finally, in chapter 13, at this supper, Christ shares the table with his disciples and announces to them his betrayal by one of them. But the sublime part of this scene is when Christ himself washes the feet of his disciples and commands them to do the same. This faith and this knowledge must be translated into action, into the same action that they have seen the master do. Thus, these twelve are precisely the protagonists of the book of Acts under the guidance of the Spirit. This knowledge and this faith had transformed them, so much so that they went ‘beyond Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth.’⁴¹⁴

All the teachings and experiences were connected and led them to progressively discover the truths and mysterious God's mysterious plan through Jesus. This living and active knowledge led them to cross the boundaries that others in the crowd could not. The twelve

⁴¹² Edward Dobson, Charles Feinberg, Woodrow Kroll and Harold Wilmington, *King James Bible Commentary* (Nelson, 2000).

⁴¹³ John 12:50 NRSVUE

⁴¹⁴ Acts 1:8 NRSVUE

transcended the surfaces and came to know and believe in Jesus. Hence, Peter's words of faith on behalf of the twelve were also an expression of worship to God.

According to Heil:

When Jesus asked the twelve remaining disciples if they wanted to go away like those who do not believe (6:67), Simon Peter, as spokesman for the believing disciples, answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words [ῥήματα] of life eternal” (6:68). And then, with emphatic personal pronouns, he pronounced a confession of faith, a climactic act of worship: “And we ourselves [ἡμεῖς] have come to believe and have come to know that you [σύ] are the Holy One of God!” (6:69). Peter’s answer was in direct correspondence to Jesus’ pronouncement that “the words [ῥήματα] that I myself have spoken are Spirit and are life” (6:63). Peter’s confession that “you [σύ] are the Holy One of God” appropriately responded to Jesus’ revelation that “I myself [ἐγώ] am” the one they saw performing the uniquely divine and life-giving action of walking on the sea (6:20). To Nathanael’s climatic confession of worship, “You [σύ] are the Son of God; you [σύ] are the King of Israel!” (1:49), Peter’s confession adds yet another divine designation by which the audience may worship Jesus.⁴¹⁵

Thus, the renewed vision of life, of themselves, of God, and the change that had begun in the twelve led them to confess and worship Christ, recognising him as the Holy One sent by God. The twelve had left the surfaces and had just begun a transforming journey.

When Jesus returned to God's glory, the twelve continued to ‘connect the dots’, remembering Jesus’s messages and understanding many of his teachings (2,21). The eternal and living word of God that was sown like a seed by the Master, it kept on bearing its fruits. They have come to know and believe in the Holy One and their journey has just begun.

Once Jesus had finished his ministry on earth, his deeds continued through the twelve. In Acts we can see a series of events that sparked the beginning of a wider community of followers. Those who have seen the Master, the twelve who were witness of Jesus’ signs and heard his teachings, now would teach to the crowds about the Word who had transformed them.

⁴¹⁵ John Paul Heil, *The Gospel of John: Worship for Divine Life Eternal* (Cascade Books, 2015), p. 56.

Now it was the turn of the twelve to invite others to know and believe in the one who had transformed their vision of life, of themselves and of God.

Now the twelve had invited others to eat the bread of the heaven, the true meal provided for Jesus ‘for divine life eternal through his sacrificial death as the Passover Lamb’, but this bread of eternal life ‘transcends the miraculous but non life-giving food of the Exodus event commemorated in the meal of the Passover feast of the Jews’. The twelve have got the message, they didn’t stay at the surface, so now they can share with others this ‘eucharistic meal.’⁴¹⁶

D. Concluding Remarks and Final Thoughts on the Development of Contextual Theological Education in the Light of Exodus 14:31 and John 6:67-69: a Comparative Analysis

At the beginning of this section, it is worth noting that my purpose in the analysis carried out in the present chapter was not to produce a comprehensive Biblical theology of learning. On the contrary, I focused the study on two texts that have the potential to challenge our pedagogical imagination and practice in theological education, so these texts may lead us to new questions, to imagine new ways of learning and teaching, and to embrace theological education as a contextual task.

Shaping a pedagogical theory or developing a curriculum is not an individual task but a community one, considering a curriculum is a social contract.⁴¹⁷ So, I do not intend to produce a curriculum or shape a pedagogical theory but to let the Scriptures inspire and challenge us.

Therefore, in this final section of Chapter two, I would like to conduct a comparative analysis of both divine methodologies in Exodus 14:31 and John 6:67-69 to provide some

⁴¹⁶ Heil, p. 55.

⁴¹⁷ Philip Stabback, *Qué hace un currículo de calidad* (Unesco, 2016), p. 6.

reflective resources, suggestions, and final remarks for the development of contextual learning methodology in theological education.

1. An Eclectic Methodology and a Pedagogy of Love

In both biblical events discussed in Chapter two, we find the divine learning objective is clear. God's pedagogical actions are addressed towards the people of Israel fearing, knowing, and believing in God, just as Christ's educational actions lead his disciples to know and believe in the Son of God, the Holy One.

As already noted, the events of Exodus chapter 14, like those of John 6, have different nuances; so, I do not intend to reduce these events to their pedagogical dimension, but I would like to suggest that these events are also learning experiences. Thus, God brings his people to know him through significant experiences such as those of the Exodus and the signs Christ performed among his followers in the light of the fourth gospel.

In Exodus 14, God makes himself known to his people through a great act of salvation. The saving God is also the Lord of creation who works on behalf of his people, with the ultimate goal of transforming Israel and freeing them not only from physical slavery but also from the slavery of the heart. God delivers his people through a great act so that Israel will turn their fear of God and put their trust in him. Thus, Exodus 14 is the beginning of a journey of discovery and transformation.

It is clear that after the great salvation event in Exodus, God didn't need Moses' help in the process of liberation, and he didn't need to delay the freedom of his people by hardening Pharaoh's heart either. Nevertheless, the sovereign God invites human beings to participate in his actions, to learn of his power and love, and to embrace faith in the only one God.

Around four centuries of slavery had taken its toll. Israel was not prepared for war either physically or emotionally.⁴¹⁸ Israel was not only enslaved to Egypt for forced labour, nor had it lost its freedoms as an independent citizen only, but also the freedoms of the heart. Beyond the deliverance of a nation, God invites Israel to embark on a learning journey whose purpose is to know the true God, who also desires to liberate their hearts towards trust and hope.

Such a purpose required more than a quick-fix solution. It required an encounter with the God of Israel, in which trust in him would be reinforced. Israel was not invited to believe and jump into the void. Israel was invited to recognise, attend to, and trust in the God of their salvation, and in that sense to believe in him. In the God who called them on a journey of transformation. In the God of promise who wanted to make them the people of the covenant.

After the incredible and great wonders God had done in Egypt through the ten plagues, the people of Israel were released to go and worship God in the wilderness. Their ‘bodies’ were free, but their hearts were not yet free. After all the wonders they had witnessed, they were still bound in bondage in their hearts:

They said to Moses, “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, ‘Let us alone so that we can serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.”⁴¹⁹

So, God set his plan in motion, and his actions (which were also educational) were guided by his eternal love for his people, the promises he had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the physical and spiritual needs of the people of Israel. In that sense, Rogerson et al state the following:

God is one whose regard, care and eventual saving action can be mobilised by human cries of pain, and from slaves at that. God is one who can allow the human experience of suffering to set the agenda and take the role of respondent

⁴¹⁸ Pablo Hoff, *El Pentateuco* (Editorial Vida, 1978), p. 129.

⁴¹⁹ Exodus 14:11-12 NRSVUE

[...] God chooses to enter into and participate in Israel's suffering. God chooses to establish a relationship with Israel at the point of their greatest need.⁴²⁰

Thus, God unfolded a favourable scenario to invite Israel to trust, to restore freedom as a nation, and to restore freedom of heart. He designed a meaningful experience that would lead Israel to connect the events of the Exodus with the promises of the God of Jacob. Consequently, at the end of the events in chapter 14, Israel can trust, fear, and love the Lord with all their hearts, soul and might.⁴²¹

On the other hand, in John 6:67-69, Jesus revealed himself through signs and invited his disciples to know and believe in him. Jesus challenges the audience to leave the surface and deepen their knowledge so they can understand the true meaning of the signs he performed.

The Son of God knew his audience, people's true intentions, and motivations. It would have been easier to believe in Jesus if he would have been seduced by the requests of his audience. But his methods did not obey the pretensions of some, and Jesus' "programme" did not change because of the intentions of the audience.

Jesus was inviting people through the mystery to believe in him, to enter into the way of faith. He did not invite them to jump into the void; he performed the signs and invited them to abandon their wrong intentions, but pointed the way to a journey of discovery, a journey that required them to go deeper and leave the surface.

In both biblical events, learning is progressive, considers previous knowledge, and is also a discovery and transformation journey. Neither faith nor knowledge has an end in itself, but leads to transformation and promotes freedom for those who believe and know, and for their environment.

⁴²⁰ *The Bible in Ethics: The second Sheffield Colloquium*, pp. 125-126.

⁴²¹ Deuteronomy 6:5 NRSVUE.

So God taught through a great act of salvation, and Jesus through signs and teachings. God created a meaningful experience for Israel to fear and believe, and Jesus invited/stimulated his followers to believe through signs and teachings. But, is divine pedagogical action always based on the same methodologies? Why did God or Jesus use these ways of learning?

In both biblical events, the divine pedagogical action had well-defined purposes. Moreover, God in Exodus and Jesus in John understood their audience and its real needs. Thus, we see divine pedagogical action unfold in pursuit of the liberation of the people, taking into account the characteristics of the context.

In Deuteronomy 6 we can see God letting his people know in a more traditional way. ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone’, said Moses. Then, Moses added, ‘Keep these words that I am commanding you today [...] Recite them to your children [...] Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.’⁴²²

In these statements, there is no space to think or add something. Here, Moses is clear: ‘the Lord alone’. Recite it, bind them, and keep these commandments. It is what you have to know. But why? What is the difference here? Why are there no signs or wonders?

In the Deuteronomic context, these teachings were part of the sermons that Moses addressed to the people shortly before entering the Promised Land. A new generation that had not experienced the historical events of the Exodus was now rising to take possession of the Promised Land.

These people were surrounded by several nations who did not know God and whom they probably had to destroy in order to take possession of Canaan. The surrounding peoples

⁴²² Deuteronomy 6:6-9 NRSVUE.

were far away from the monotheistic religiosity of Israel. Thus God, through Moses, takes care to establish a clear principle: 'I, Yahweh, am one'. There is no room here for imagination, for creative teaching. It is something to know, memorise, recite, to share with your 'sons and daughters'. Here God is being very directive and considering the contextual reality/need of Israel.

Thus, God does not always use the same methods, He does not always invite us to learn in the same way or with the same methodologies. God is not guided by a 'particular pedagogical theory', but by the contextual and surrounding reality of his people, by their real needs, and by his love for those he has called to believe.

So, if we want to refer to this in pedagogical terms, divine methodology is eclectic. These texts don't suggest that there is a specific method, but they do suggest that there is a context to respond to, consider, and transform. God's love for his people, and his knowledge of contextual reality (well, he is God), led him to invite Israel to trust through signs, miracles, great acts of salvation, and sometimes also through what we would call "traditional education." So if divine methodology is eclectic, then God's pedagogy is a pedagogy of love.

The love of God is the catalyst for all His pedagogical actions. His work among the people generates renewing and transformative actions that are not fixed patterns but dynamic responses connected to the realities and needs of God's people.

2. Implications for Contextual Theological Education

As discussed before, theological education in Paraguay is currently influenced by a restrictive pedagogy, where passive learning of content remains central. While there are certainly texts that depict God straightforwardly instructing His people and them simply

learning the content, the texts analysed in this research do not prioritise that kind of pedagogy. Instead, they point to something much more engaging and transformative.

However, these texts do not suggest a single alternative pedagogical model that should be adopted. They do not produce a singular scriptural pedagogical method. Rather, they show God teaching and His people learning in a wide variety of ways. For all the difficulties in moving from descriptions of God's pedagogy to prescriptions for our pedagogy (we're not going to teach by sending plagues or drowning charioteers), this at least indicates that we may need to envision a future for theological education that is methodologically eclectic.

What the texts do strongly suggest, however, is that instead of a restrictive pedagogy, we need a pedagogy of love—one that may not be unified by methods or educational theories, but is rooted in the love of teachers for their students, in the love shared between teachers and students for their churches and contexts, and in the desire to journey together deeper into the love of God, which can deepen all of these loves.

This means that theological educators are invited to embrace their context, to know their people, and to consider their true needs. Instead of following a pedagogical theory, and beyond the administrative tasks of education, bible institutes are invited to design teaching/learning experiences based on love and knowledge of the context and with an eclectic pedagogical perspective/teaching methodologies, where the priority is not to follow a pedagogical trend, but consider the real needs of the context in which we serve God and his people.

The design of a contextual learning experience should start from the history of its people, and from the challenges and needs of a particular place. A contextual learning experience is born out of a deep understanding of people, out of a pedagogy grounded in love for God and the people he has called us to serve.

A contextual theological education promotes freedom and authenticity, restores hope, and invites us to take a leading role, as did the disciples in the book of Acts, and the people of Israel in sharing the covenant with generations to come.

I do not want to suggest that pedagogy or theories are not significant for learning and teaching, but they are tools for our purpose, and what should lead us and guide us in the educational task transcends theories, embraces realities, commits itself to the context and educates from the love of God, his people and the mission entrusted to us. A specific pedagogical theory cannot provide all the answers for our context.

Our mission is to teach for life, providing knowledge that does not have an end in itself but that provokes something, transcends individuals and affects communities, generates improbable situations, transforms and promotes continuous action that does not end in someone or something, but continues until God's purpose is fulfilled.

If theological education in Paraguay will be contextual, then the challenge is to acquire a deepened understanding of our people and their needs. We should adopt an eclectic pedagogical perspective and design a curriculum from and for our context. All this to fulfil our task: to invite others to embark on a journey of discovery and learning, freedom and audacity, trusting and stepping out of the surface.

As Mike Higon states: 'In one sense, then, the *only* thing that Christian theology should say about God is that God is love. Everything else we say – and there is a lot more to say – is commentary on that one claim.'⁴²³ Then, if this divine love is at the core of the teachings we provide and seek to impart, then the only way to teach it is by loving and immersing ourselves in the reality of those receiving our teachings.

⁴²³ Higon, *Christian Doctrine*, p. 16.

Following Higton's reflection, he also states, 'Knowledge of God can't be separated from involvement in the love of God, because God *is* love. Knowledge of God can't be separated from involvement in justice, because God *is* justice.'⁴²⁴

God led the people of Israel through the desert, teaching them patiently. Christ guided his disciples on a journey of learning and discovery. The people/the disciples learned about interpersonal relationships, handling their possessions and finances, justice, and organising the community. They learned about love and were called 'to undertake a journey into justice and mercy with others, wrestling along the way with the demands and the blessings of the one who calls'. If knowing God encompasses all of this (and more), theological education cannot be anything other than closely connected to this reality.⁴²⁵

Theological education is, and should be, an active experience of participation and sharing in the love of God. There is no other way to teach and convey what arises from the understanding of divine love.

Therefore, as educators, institutions, and all those involved in theological education, we are called to embrace the divine pedagogy of love; a pedagogy that urges us to actively engage in this love. We are encouraged to involve ourselves in justice, to resist corruption and the evils in our communities. We must embrace the task of education as a mission based on the knowledge of a God who is love, transferring it to others and fostering transformation born from this love. His love has been and is capable of transforming everything. There is no knowledge more experiential and heartfelt than this.

Let us set aside our concepts and theories, allowing ourselves to be humbly illuminated by "His lamp" on this journey, and, like the prayer of the poor, let us cry out:

⁴²⁴ Ibid, p. 14.

⁴²⁵ Higton, *Christian Doctrine*, p. 5.

*I come before you, Lord, acknowledging my guilt,
with faith placed in your love that you gave me as a child.
I open my heart to you and offer you my misery,
stripped of 'my belongings', I want to be filled with you.*⁴²⁶

⁴²⁶ 'La oración del Pobre' or 'The prayer of the poor' is a song recorded by the group Kairoi (Spain) in 1979 for the record label "Discoteca Pax."

Chapter Three⁴²⁷

Theological Resources for the Development of a Unifying View of Theological Education

A. Introduction

As discussed in the first chapter, there are several challenges facing higher education and formal theological education in Paraguay. However, within the scope of this research, I have chosen three specific challenges that I address throughout this investigative work. Therefore, in this research section, I intend to focus on the second of these challenges: the fragmented view of theological education.

A clear symptom of this fragmented perspective is the increased tension between academia and spirituality, and the lack of articulation between theory and practice. These tensions are likely not the only ones and underscore the need to envision theological formation as a dynamic entity composed of various elements that must be integrated to achieve the goals of the education or training provided by biblical or theological seminaries.

According to Hough and Cobb: ‘theological education is torn between academic norms, defined chiefly as excellence in the historical disciplines, and modern professional norms defined in terms of excellence in performing the functions church leaders are expected to perform’.⁴²⁸ In this way, theological education takes place in the midst of several tensions and expectations as it seeks to maintain balance.

⁴²⁷ AI has been used to translate from Spanish to English and to correct certain grammatical expressions throughout the chapter. Another resource used throughout this work is Deepl.com, a translation tool.

⁴²⁸ Joseph C. Hough and John B. Cobb, *Christian Identity and Theological Education* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1985), pp. 16-17.

According to an institutional analysis conducted at the IBA, church pastors and leaders expressed concerns that the curriculum lacks relevant training for leaders. They suggested that graduates acquire excessive theoretical knowledge without developing practical skills for ministerial practice.⁴²⁹

At the same time, this issue suggests that students are detached from the reality of their churches and therefore unable to integrate theory with the practice needed for the context. Regarding this ‘detaching from reality’, Hiebert says:

When confronted with conflicts and challenges, many graduates respond in the only way they know – through the uncritical application of standard cultural patterns. Rather than acting as agents of the Kingdom of God through careful critical contextualization.⁴³⁰

According to Shaw, ‘in the traditional approach to theological education, students are trained through a relatively *fragmented curriculum*, the assumption being that it is the students’ responsibility to bring the pieces together once they graduate’.⁴³¹ Farley adds that ‘Education in the theological school is not so much a matter of the study of theology as a plurality of specific disciplines, each with its own method.’ So, ‘theological school did not adequately prepare [students] for the nitty-gritty problems and activities of churchly life, that the academic and practical were never really linked.’⁴³²

It is worth noting what Perry Shaw states in his book ‘Transforming Theological Education’, as this ‘tension’ is also present among the teaching staff:

Most faculty members in higher education have done little if any serious study in educational theory. Frequently, the dominant voices in our theological schools are faculty who are more comfortable in the academy than they are in the local church, and who are theoreticians more than practitioners. As the old adage goes, “Those who can do, do. Those who can’t, teach”. Many academics are fearful of approaches that require them to move outside their specialist areas or that

⁴²⁹ All this information was provided in chapter 1, section D.3, ‘Institutional analysis’, of this research.

⁴³⁰ Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Baker Books, 1994), pp. 75-92.

⁴³¹ Perry Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education: A Practical Handbook for Integrative Learning* (Langham Global Library, 2014), p. 4.

⁴³² Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), p. 4.

challenge them to emphasise the practice of ministry as well as academic excellence.⁴³³

It is important to highlight that the teaching staff at the institution under consideration in this research possess the highest level of academic training.

It appears that facing the tensions between theory and practice, along with the skill of connecting ‘the pieces’ (in Shaw's terms), represents a major challenge for students. Additionally, educators face the challenge of striking a delicate balance between academy and practical application.

Here is a quote from Linda Cannell, referring to the fragmentation present in the practice of theological education:

First, [...] the meaning of theology has been distorted [...] the unifying principle in theological education has been lost. [Second,] the seminary's curriculum devolves into a collection of specialised subjects due to a non-adequate definition of the nature and purpose of theology. The third issue derives from specialisation: a fragmented curriculum organised generally into theory and practice sections leads to a distorted understanding of that which theological education addresses.⁴³⁴

So, according to Cannell the issue goes beyond the tension itself, but affects the understanding of “true” theology, which is clearly seen in a fragmented curriculum.

On the other hand, analysing the Latin American theology, Carolina Bacher Martínez states the following:

Therefore, in my opinion, it is possible to affirm that [...] Latin American theology [needs] to integrate pastoral reflection with academic theology, along with the need to integrate academic theological-pastoral reflection with pastoral work, and both with discernment.⁴³⁵

⁴³³ Shaw, p. 18

⁴³⁴ Linda Cannell, *Theological Education Matters: Leadership Education for the Church* (Ecot Press, 2006), p. 36.

⁴³⁵ Carolina Bacher Martínez, ‘Hacer Teología en clave sinodal: Aportes del enfoque investigación-acción participativa al método ver, juzgar y actuar’, *Cuestiones teológicas*, 49.111 (2022), 1-19 (6), doi: <http://doi.org/10.18566/cueteo.v49n111.a08>.

Thereby, according to Carolina Bacher, there are tensions between theological-pastoral reflection and pastoral action, she highlights the need to establish closer connections and relationships among different aspects of theology. This conclusion arises from examining theology in Latin America, where academic theology and practical pastoral work within church contexts each follow their own distinct paths.⁴³⁶

Thus, articulation and contextualisation are tasks that theologians, bible institutes, and the Paraguayan (or Latin American) church should embrace. Such a task aims to join the pieces towards a more contextual and holistic theological education.

For all the above, Theological education in Paraguay (or Latin America) ‘needs to reorient itself according to the demands of a context characterised by diversity, poverty and hope.’ Moreover, ‘theological education must maintain a balance between orthodoxy and orthopraxis. They must complement and correct each other in the light of the values of the Kingdom of God.’⁴³⁷

Therefore, in the following section, I would like to offer some theological resources, which have the potential to challenge our contextual pedagogical practices. According to Rapinchuk, ‘many years of higher education’s movement toward disciplinary isolation has proven less fruitful than its more integrated past.’⁴³⁸ So, it would be worth it to look ‘behind’, and consider the resources for theological education integration we might find.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

⁴³⁷ *Palabra, espíritu y misión: el testimonio evangélico hacia el tercer milenio*, ed. by Congreso Latinoamericano de Evangelización (CLADE IV) (Editorial Kairós, 2001), p. 179.

⁴³⁸ Kyle David Rapinchuk, ‘Saint Bonaventure and the future of Christian education’, *International Journal of Christianity & Education*, 26.2 (2022), 135-148 (135), doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/20569971221086>.

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

The objective of this chapter is *to offer some theological resources that could help to promote a unifying view of theological education in Paraguay*. This reflection will keep its focus on the Paraguayan reality, but these resources might be helpful for other contexts.

For this purpose, I propose to explore certain aspects of the thinking of a Franciscan bishop, cardinal and scholastic theologian: St Bonaventure.

My goal is not to provide a comprehensive history of integrated approaches to theological education. Rather, I have explored a wide variety of historical voices and found that Bonaventure speaks powerfully to my concerns. The justification for choosing him lies in the fruitfulness of the ideas I discovered in his work.

First of all, I suggest taking a brief look at the characteristics of theological education in a particular period of the Middle Ages. In my opinion, this will provide a general understanding of the context or environment in which St Bonaventure developed his theological thought.

B. Theological Education in the Middle Ages: A Brief Description

In the early Middle Ages, there were two main institutions where religious education was imparted: monastic and cathedral schools.

Monastic schools were crucial for medieval education. The schools founded in Ireland, in particular, played an important role. The barbarian invasions didn't reach Ireland as other countries in Europe, considering that this country was isolated from the rest of the continent. For that reason, the Irish monastic schools were crucial for religious training and literature production in the seventh century.⁴⁴⁰

⁴⁴⁰ Justo González, *Breve historia de la preparación ministerial*, (Clie, 2013), p. 49.

Then, during the government of Charlemagne, several monastic and cathedral schools were founded. Thus, Charlemagne and Alcuin of York were responsible for a significant educational reform in the Carolingian empire in the eighth century. Later, universities were heirs of the practices and traditions of monastic and cathedral schools.⁴⁴¹

As important as the crucial alliance between Charlemagne and Alcuin of York, was the one between Otto the Great and Bruno of Cologne in the Holy Roman Empire. According to Stephen Jaeger, Bruno combined ‘ecclesiastical duties with obligations to the state’. The main goal of education at that time was ‘to exercise a powerful transforming influence on European society and culture [...] The bearers of this new education were the cathedral schools in alliance with the royal/imperial court’. All of this would be carried out through the training of an educated elite who could serve in the imperial court, the wider imperial administration, and the church hierarchy.⁴⁴²

In that sense, the ‘imperial church’ was at the service of the crown. Otto and Bruno were just a perfect union, considering they were brothers, pursuing the same goal. This alliance empowered the church and gave clergy an increasingly important status under Bruno's rule. Under these circumstances, cathedral schools became compulsory for ecclesiastical work, while the monastic schools and their values lost influence.⁴⁴³

Later, with Scholasticism, the first universities were founded. Scholastic academic rigour was a significant feature of studies at that time. Thus, the most important cathedral schools became important universities, such as the university of Paris in the field of Theology. Then, other universities were founded with different fields of emphasis.⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴¹ González, pp. 52, 62.

⁴⁴² Stephen Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe, 950-1200*, ed. by Ruth Mazo Karras (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), pp. 44-46.

⁴⁴³ Jaeger, p. 47.

⁴⁴⁴ González, p. 62

However, even with all these important changes in the academic sphere in the high Middle Ages, the monastic schools remained as the places for pastoral training. These schools didn't have all the academic rigour and long study time of universities.⁴⁴⁵ So, as the universities were growing in structure, most members of the clergy opted for studies at monastic schools. According to González, as university studies became more formalised, they moved away from parish life and the true interests of the leaders at that time.⁴⁴⁶

It is worth noting the Mendicant Orders, which were born in the context of the Middle Ages. These movements promoted a spiritual renewal in educational institutions. With their distinctive features, the Mendicant Orders 'were a kind of reaction against the customs of the feudal Church and, in this sense, the religious face of an incipient democracy'. The thirteenth century was a time of 'innovation in the Church, which gave rise to a diversity regarding traditional monasticism.'⁴⁴⁷

According to Augustine Thompson:

In place of cloistered contemplation, the Mendicants pursued an active apostolate; in place of stability of life in a single monastery, they were itinerant. Mendicants were part of an international organisation under the papacy—an "order." Most importantly, they practised a radical form of poverty that included religious begging, the practice from which they received the name "mendicant."⁴⁴⁸

Dominicans and Franciscans (the two most representative mendicant orders) were born in the thirteenth century as a pertinent response to contemporary needs. These orders helped the church to pay attention to the parishioners, considering the significant growth of the church at that time. Both orders were able to make a crucial combination, in which lay its success:

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 67.

⁴⁴⁷ Louis Gillet in Gerald Cresta, 'Valor y sentido del conocimiento en las órdenes mendicantes del siglo XIII', *Acta Scientiarum*, 32.2 (2010), 141-151 (142), doi: 10.4025/actascieduc.v32i2.9775.

⁴⁴⁸ Augustine Thompson in *The Origin, Development, and Refinement of Medieval Religious Mendicancies*, ed. by Donald Prudlo (BRILL, 2011), p. 3.

‘devotion and action, and poverty with service to the poor.’⁴⁴⁹ Saint Thomas Aquinas and Saint Bonaventure were the most important representatives of Dominicans and Franciscans respectively.

It seems that the mendicant orders helped universities to be closer to the church’s ‘real life’ and alleviate the tension between the academy and the church. However, the mendicant orders didn’t put away the academy since studies were crucial for these movements in order to refute the heresies of that time. For that reason, the convents of these orders were learning and theological training centres.⁴⁵⁰

The entry of the mendicant orders into university teaching in the thirteenth century took place in the context of a strike. At that time, in order to reactivate teaching, ‘the bishop of Paris asked the chancellor of the University to open a chair for the Dominicans, whose first occupant was Roland of Cremona’. At the same time, the secular master John of St Egidio joined the Dominican order in 1230. Later, Alexander of Hales, a professor of theology, ‘joined the Franciscan order in 1231, thus establishing the first Franciscan chair in Paris.’⁴⁵¹

According to Gerald Cresta:

At Oxford, meanwhile, Robert Grosseteste, who was not a Franciscan, taught from 1214, whose teaching would have a profound influence on the direction of insular Franciscan thought and would come to determine the later positions of Duns Scotus and William of Ockham.⁴⁵²

Soon, the reputation and respect of the mendicant masters were such that students stopped attending several classes of secular professors. This, of course, provoked disputes and jealousy on the part of the secular professors.⁴⁵³

⁴⁴⁹ González, p. 68.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹ Cresta, pp. 142-143.

⁴⁵² Ibid, p. 143.

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

Later, the Dominican St. Thomas Aquinas, who, along with St. Albert the Great, would succeed John of St. Egidio, and the Franciscan St. Bonaventure, the distinguished successor of Alexander of Hales, joined as masters.⁴⁵⁴

According to Poiron:

The foundation of the mendicant orders had as one of its objectives the realisation of this link between intellectual competence and religious demand. The translations of Aristotle in the 12th century initiated the gradual insertion of a whole corpus of philosophical knowledge that deserved attention, partly because of its novelty compared to the Platonic-Augustinian conception, and partly because it was precisely this novelty, together with the Arabic reading and interpretations of the original texts, that threatened the unity of Christian wisdom.⁴⁵⁵

All these intellectual challenges in philosophy and doctrine provided a field of service for the mendicant orders. They were able to develop their theological thought to try to preserve faith amidst intellectual competition and religious demands.

However, the presence of members of these mendicant orders among the university teachers was resisted. In part because teaching was always an exclusive task of an elite, but mostly because these orders bothered and threatened the status quo. Teachers didn't take vows of poverty as the Franciscans and Dominicans, so this was seen as a threat to their lifestyle.

As the monastic schools were losing importance and the cathedral schools and universities strengthened, community life emphasis as part of the curriculum was left behind. For Dominicans and Franciscans community life 'was the context and main goal of study'. In this study environment, students and teachers shared resources, and this was central to the dynamic in the community life. But soon this practice was forgotten. The result was that the

⁴⁵⁴ Saranyana in Gerald Cresta, 'Valor y sentido del conocimiento en las órdenes mendicantes del siglo XIII', *Acta Scientiarum*, 32.2 (2010), 141-151 (143), doi: 10.4025/actascieduc.v32i2.9775.

⁴⁵⁵ Poiron and Libera in Gerald Cresta, 'Valor y sentido del conocimiento en las órdenes mendicantes del siglo XIII', *Acta Scientiarum*, 32.2 (2010), 141-151 (143), doi: 10.4025/actascieduc.v32i2.9775.

study in the context of universities and the produced literature were not directly relevant for church life at that time.⁴⁵⁶

It doesn't mean that the theological thought of earlier ages lacks value. Great theologians as Augustine and others, wrote because of the love they have for God and his truth. These were crucial for the formal study of Theology at that time and today. These theologians taught the church about loving God with all the mind.

On the other hand, these practices, virtues, and characteristics of education in the Middle Ages, were eventually crucial for theological education in the modern era, for both the formal and professional education of theologians, and the pastoral and leader training in seminaries. Bible schools today maintain the value of community life like the mendicant orders in the Middle Ages.

Moreover, the academic rigour of scholasticism remained in the context of academic training, offering to the church professional academic and pastoral training in theological education. Seminaries, Bible institutes, and schools of theology can bring together these characteristics and values of that stage and offer a unique and enriching educational experience.

Nevertheless, it seems that the outcomes of theological seminaries and biblical institutions are not what churches expected. Churches often express dissatisfaction with the training their students receive at these institutions. The most common complaint is that theological institutions do not provide relevant instruction for future pastors and leaders. It appears that the more formalised the biblical studies are, the more dissatisfied leaders and churches become. This situation has called into question the effectiveness of the curriculum.⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵⁶ González, p. 73.

⁴⁵⁷ Shaw, p. 35.

So, in the following, I will analyse some relevant aspects of Bonaventurian theological thought that could provide valuable resources for the purposes of this research.

C. Highlights of St Bonaventure's Theological Thought

In this journey, as I paused and took a look at the Middle Ages, I found that the theological thinking of Saint Bonaventure is a contribution from the past with present relevance. This can be an enriching and meaningful resource in shaping a more integrated vision of theological education. For this reason, I would like to briefly explore the life of St Bonaventure and then delve into some aspects of his theological thought.

St Bonaventure or *Giovanni Di Fidanza* was born in 1217 in Bagnoregio, and died on July 15 in 1274 in Lyon. He was a 'leading mediaeval theologian, minister general of the Franciscan order, and cardinal bishop of Albano'. Bonaventure was the author of 'several works on spiritual life and recodified the constitution of his order' in 1260. 'He was declared a doctor (teacher) of the church in 1587.'⁴⁵⁸

In those days, Bonaventure 'was particularly noted [...] as a man with the rare ability to reconcile diverse traditions in theology and philosophy.'⁴⁵⁹ Some of his works are: *An Outline of his Theology (Breviloquium)*, *On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology (De Reductione Artium ad Theologiam)*, *The Journey of the Mind to God (Itinerarium Mentis in Deum)*, *Collations on the Hexaemeron (Collationes in Hexaemeron)*, *The Tree of Life (Lignum vitae)*, and *The Triple Way or Love Enkindled (De Triplici Via alias Incendium Amoris)*.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁸ John Francis Quinn, *Saint Bonaventure* ([n.d.]), *Britannica* <<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Bonaventure>> [Accessed 29 January 2023].

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁰ Rapinchuk, p. 136.

As I mentioned before, I have been highly selective in the course of this research. So, I do not attempt a comprehensive Biblical theology of learning, but I focused the study on a very small number of theological, biblical, and pedagogical resources that have the potential to challenge and question our pedagogical imaginations.

For that reason, in this section, I do not intend to consider all the main aspects of the theological thinking of St Bonaventure, but some specific thoughts that might provide light on one of the challenges of theological education in Paraguay: fragmentation.

St. Bonaventure's thought, situated within the framework of scholasticism, is a multifaceted contribution. Among his various insights, he significantly advances the understanding of theology as wisdom, contributing to a unified vision of theological education and addressing other crucial aspects of theological discourse.

Thus, in the following, I highlight some principles drawn from St Bonaventure's theological thought, which we find in some of his writings.

1. The Sapiential Union

To commence this section, it might be useful to initially delineate the contrast between Bonaventurian and Thomistic thought regarding the practical and theoretical nature of theology.

According to Ratzinger, for Thomas Aquinas or the *Doctor Angelicus*:

Theology is a reflection on faith and the purpose of faith is that the human being become good and live in accordance with God's will. Hence the aim of theology would be to guide people on the right, good road; thus it is basically a practical science.⁴⁶¹

Furthermore, according to Ratzinger, Aquinas identifies a second dimension of theology: '[theology] seeks to know God. We are the work of God; God is above our action.

⁴⁶¹ Benedict XVI, *General Audience* (2010), *Vatican* <https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/es/audiences/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20100317.html> [12 January 2023].

God works right action in us; so it essentially concerns not our own doing but knowing God'. Therefore, for the *Doctor Angelicus*, theology involves theory since 'it tries to know God more and more', and practice because 'it tries to direct our life towards the good.'⁴⁶²

Nevertheless, Ratzinger adds that for Aquinas knowledge is supreme, since it comes before action: 'Above all we must know God and then continue to act in accordance with God.' So, this supremacy of knowledge over praxis is 'significant' to the fundamental orientation of St. Thomas.⁴⁶³

In contrast, for Bonaventure, there is a third aspect of theology in addition to practice and theory. He states that 'wisdom embraces both aspects', theory and practice, and this union is what he calls *sapiential* or wisdom:

If we consider the intellect in a way falling between these two [knowledge and deeds/speculative science and practical or moral science], as it applies to our affections, it is perfected by a habit that lies between the purely speculative and the purely practical, but one that embraces both. This habit is called wisdom and it involves knowledge and affection together: "For the wisdom of doctrine is like her name." Consequently, this habit is for the sake of contemplation and also for our becoming good, but principally for the sake of our becoming good.⁴⁶⁴

For Bonaventure, knowledge, or 'speculative science', isn't detached from 'practical or moral' aspects; rather, they intertwine and complement each other within a broader concept called wisdom. In my view, wisdom, or *sapientia*, embodies a unified and cohesive perspective of theory and practice, moving away from the typical division between these two elements in the process of learning and teaching. Indeed, this Franciscan thinker invites us to embrace a more integrated perspective.

St Bonaventure provides an example of this articulation of both aspects of *sapientia*. He said that wisdom 'seeks contemplation (as the highest form of knowledge) and has as its

⁴⁶² Ibid.

⁴⁶³ Summa Theologiae, 1a, q. 1, art. 4 in Benedict XVI.

⁴⁶⁴ Bonaventure, *Commentary on the Sentences: Philosophy of God*, trans. by R. E. Houser and Timothy B (The Franciscan Institute, 2013), p. 12.

intention *ut boni fiamus* - that we become good⁴⁶⁵ [...] Faith is in the intellect in such a way that it provokes affection. the knowledge that Christ died 'for us' does not remain knowledge but necessarily becomes affection, love.⁴⁶⁶

Therefore, Bonaventurian thinking is clearly Franciscan since Francis could not have considered theological thinking as a mere 'speculation' without the 'corresponding praxis'. For the Franciscans, theological knowledge is understood as a 'practical wisdom, since it serves to attain salvation.'⁴⁶⁷

So, the Bonaventurian concept of theology provides a unifying vision where theology could be understood 'in a thoroughly scientific way that is also, and for the very same reason, thoroughly sapiential', and this thinking has Franciscan roots.⁴⁶⁸

Nevertheless, St Bonaventure goes further and deeper into the concept of wisdom. According to him, wisdom is fourfold. In the *Hexaemeron*, he states the following:

That beauty [of Wisdom] is wondrous, for at times it is uniform and at others manifold [multiform]; at times it assumes every form [omniform], and at others none [nulliform]. Light clothes itself in four different ways. For it is seen as uniform in the rules of divine Law, as manifold in the mysteries of divine Scriptures, as assuming every form in the traces of the divine works, and as without any form in the elevations of divine raptures [transports].⁴⁶⁹

According to LaNave, wisdom is uniform since it 'is [...] present to all, even those without grace, and that forms the basis of all sure knowledge and judgement.'⁴⁷⁰ In the words

⁴⁶⁵ Breviloquium, Prologus, 5 in Benedict XVI.

⁴⁶⁶ Proemium in I Sent., q. 3. In Benedict XVI.

⁴⁶⁷ Cresta, p. 144.

⁴⁶⁸ Gregory F. LaNave, 'Prospects for a Sapiential Theology: Bonaventure on Theological Wisdom', *Nova et Vetera*, 15.4 (2017), 1037-1064 (1042), doi: <https://doi.org/10.1353/nov.2017.0061>.

⁴⁶⁹ Bonaventure, *Collations in Hexaemeron* ([n.d.]), 2.8 - p. 15.

The english version of the *Collations in Hexaemeron* was found at the following link: john114.org/Docs/SB_HEX.htm#Hex02n01. However, limited information about the translators and other bibliographical details is provided.

⁴⁷⁰ LaNave, p. 1049.

of Bonaventure: ‘these rules filling the rational mind with splendid light are all the ways by which the mind knows and judges that which could not be otherwise.’⁴⁷¹

Then, wisdom is also manifold (multiform) ‘in the mysteries of divine Scriptures [...] because there are many ways of expressing it. Hence it was necessary that wisdom be shown under many figures, many sacraments, many signs, in order also that it be hidden to the proud and revealed to the humble.’⁴⁷² Bonaventure described this kind of wisdom based on the book of Ephesians (3:8-10). As Bonaventure states, this wisdom is received by faith:

This wisdom results from many mysteries of the Scriptures, as out of many mirrors there results a multiplication of light rays and fires [...] this wisdom is given according to the measure of faith, according as God has apportioned to each one the measure of faith.⁴⁷³

Bonaventure further develops the meaning of multiform wisdom, which has a threefold manifestation. The following table indicates the three manifestations or definitions of multiform wisdom.

Virtues	Knowledge	Learnings
<i>Faith</i>	Allegory: it teaches us what we should believe, ‘the doctrine of the church as the mystical body of christ’ ⁴⁷⁴	Learning to Know
<i>Hope</i>	Anagogy: it shows us ‘what we should expect’ ⁴⁷⁵	Learning to be
<i>Charity</i>	Tropology: ‘it teaches us what to do’ ⁴⁷⁶	Learning to do Learning to live together

⁴⁷¹ Bonaventure, *Collations in Hexaameron*, 2.9 - p. 15.

⁴⁷² Ibid, 2.11, 2.12, p. 16.

⁴⁷³ Ibid, 2.19, p. 18.

⁴⁷⁴ Francisco Javier Rubio, ‘La sabiduría en el pensamiento de san Buenaventura y sus dimensiones filosófica y teológica’, *Teología y Vida*, 64.1 (2023), 61-83(75), doi: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0859-7852>.

⁴⁷⁵ Bonaventure, *Collations in Hexaameron*, 2.16, p. 17.

⁴⁷⁶ Bonaventure, *Collations in Hexaameron*, 2.17, p. 17.

This multiform wisdom is manifested in three different virtues that entail three knowledge, and *I suggest* that this knowledge leads to different learnings. Although we can see these learnings regarding one specific kind of knowledge, it is difficult to split them because they are combined, united, following the Bonaventurian unifying understanding.

Thus, we could say that the virtues point to the whole of life, to all that we are, know, do and how we live together. These virtues are manifestations of the manifold wisdom, and are clearly visible in the life of those who have received it through the mysteries of the Holy Scriptures.

It should be noted that all this has to do with the interpretation of the mysteries of Holy Scripture, which, for Bonaventure, are to be exploited for the multiple meanings they offer, that is, for the multiple ways in which they enable us to learn. It is not, therefore, a reading of the Scriptures to acquire knowledge which is then applied in practice, but a reading which forms faith, hope and charity.

What we see here is the combination of theological virtues and knowledge that lead us to know, to be, to do, and to live wisely in multiple ways. This wisdom is given 'according to the measure of faith',⁴⁷⁷ and cannot be achieved in any other way than with a humble approach to the Holy Scriptures.

According to Rubio:

All this knowledge, which is manifested in Holy Scripture, reveals God in a more excellent way than uniform wisdom. Its multiplicity is due to the fact that it reverberates in many mirrors which cause the original light to multiply into a multitude of rays and fires, so that in all this light we can discover the true face of God and tend towards Him, "from glory to glory" (*a claritate in claritatem*): from allegory to tropology via anagogy. In this way, the believer can come closer to glimpsing the beauty of God's face through the wisdom that can only be found in the humble reading of Sacred Scripture.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁷ Bonaventure, *Collations in Hexaemeron*, 2.19, p. 18.

⁴⁷⁸ Rubio, p. 76.

So, as I understand it, St Bonaventure offers us a classification of wisdom that, in a sense, follows an upward trajectory towards ‘Him’. This ‘ascent’ isn’t an end in itself but rather a journey towards ‘Him’, and it’s not something we can attain on our own, but rather by God’s grace through humble reading of the Sacred Scriptures. While wisdom may take on many forms, the underlying sense of integration and coherence is ever-present; the diversity merely reflects the radiance of the ‘original light’.

Following the description of wisdom made by Bonaventure in the *Hexaameron*, he says that wisdom is also omniform: ‘This wisdom is spread out among all things. For everything possesses a rule of wisdom and displays divine wisdom by reason of some characteristic; and the man who would know all characteristics would clearly see this wisdom,’⁴⁷⁹ So, this wisdom entails that the creation is ‘an open book where its Creator can be read.’⁴⁸⁰

In the following, Bonaventure explain more about this ‘open book:’

Every created substance has matter, form, and composition: the original principle or foundation, the formal complement, and the bond [...] and in these the mystery of the Trinity is represented: the Father as the origin, the Son as the image, and the Holy Spirit as the bond.⁴⁸¹

Thus, God the Creator has left His mark on everything around us, and in all of creation we can find the signs of His wisdom. Bonaventure states that “[...] the creature is made in God’s likeness. This may be according to a likeness of nature or a likeness of grace. The former is memory, intelligence, and will in which the Trinity shines forth.”⁴⁸²

Saint Bonaventure’s concept of omniform wisdom encapsulates the idea that divine wisdom manifests itself in multiple forms throughout all of creation. Every creature and every aspect of the universe reflects this wisdom, acting as a mirror that shows the truth and beauty

⁴⁷⁹ Bonaventure, *Collations in Hexaameron*, 2.21, p. 19.

⁴⁸⁰ Rubio, p. 77.

⁴⁸¹ Bonaventure, *Collations in Hexaameron*, 2.23, p. 19.

⁴⁸² Bonaventure, *Collations in Hexaameron*, 2.23, 2.27, pp. 19-20.

of God. This idea emphasises not only the omnipresence of God's wisdom, but also the possibility of accessing it through contemplation and enlightenment. In the words of St Bonaventure: 'and so it appears that the whole world is like a single mirror, full of luminaries that stand before divine Wisdom, shedding light as would live coals.'⁴⁸³

Finally, wisdom is nulliform or without any form. Bonaventure states the following in the Collations on the *Hexaemeron*:

The fourth face of wisdom is the most difficult, for it is without form. Thus would it seem to destroy the preceding faces, and yet it does not [...] This wisdom is veiled in mystery, but how? Note that this is the highest state of achievement of Christian wisdom.⁴⁸⁴

Bonaventure continues to describe the "highest state" of Christian wisdom, asserting that 'The one I want to love is above any substance or knowledge'. Therefore, the highest wisdom is beyond our ability to comprehend.⁴⁸⁵

The Seraphic Doctor further contends, 'For in the soul, there are several apprehensive powers: the sensitive, the imaginative, the estimative, the intellective, and all must be rejected'. Once again, he asserts that all our abilities or skills fall short of attaining this wisdom; it transcends all our 'apprehensive powers'.⁴⁸⁶

At this juncture, only the *Giver* of wisdom, *Wisdom* itself, can take us by the hand to lead us to a knowledge that surpasses our cognitive capacities.

Bonaventure proceeds to explain the journey, stating that 'at the summit, there is a union of love that transcends them all. Such love surpasses every intellect and every science. But if it transcends every science, how can this wisdom be seen?' The Seraphic Doctor emphasises once again that this surpasses us, concluding, 'for it does not belong to anyone but to the man to

⁴⁸³ Ibid., 2.27, p. 20.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., 2.28, 2.29, 2.30, pp. 20-21.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid.

whom God reveals it. Hence the same Apostle writes: But to us, God has revealed them through His Spirit.⁴⁸⁷

According to Ratzinger: '[In this wisdom] the mystic, who enters into the night of understanding, whose torch at this point is slowly extinguished, advances in silence towards the mystery of the eternal God'.⁴⁸⁸ So, the nulliform wisdom goes beyond 'the epistemological limits of philosophy but even transcends the intellectual capacity of the human being', since this wisdom is given by grace.⁴⁸⁹

Thus, here we have a paradoxical situation. Christian wisdom has one form, but at the same time, it is manifold. Then, wisdom has every form (omniform), and at the same time, it does not have any. What did Bonaventure mean? How do we solve it? However, we must bear in mind that Bonaventure is trying to explain something that defies our intellect. It is not a simple task.

If Christian wisdom is a glimmer of divine wisdom, and proceeds from the grace of Christ and the work of His Holy Spirit in an ascending way, then it must reflect in itself the uniform, multiform, omniform, and nulliform richness of which the apostle Paul speaks in the letter to the Romans: 'O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!'⁴⁹⁰

When Paul tried to understand God's work to save his people in Romans 11, he marvelled at God's wisdom and knowledge. In the same way, we can worship God for his gracious work, for Christian wisdom is a gift of divine providence through the work of the Holy Spirit.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St Bonaventure*, trans. by Zachary Hayes (Cluny, 2020), p. 112.

⁴⁸⁹ Rubio, p. 80.

⁴⁹⁰ Romans 11:33 NRSVUE.

The gift of Christian wisdom manifests itself in various shades and forms, bearing the stamp of the One who, by grace, grants it to us so that we may ascend along this path towards perfect love.

So, God has been magnificently gracious in extending His grace and wisdom to us. Otherwise, how could we understand this God that exceeds our capacity for knowledge? Therefore, in His infinite grace, God has provided us with wisdom to know him.

This is how I see it. First, God has provided wisdom to us all, and this is, at the same time, an invitation to all human beings to know him. He is the reason we can know and judge things; God is the reason we can reason. This is the ‘basic’ wisdom God has given to us, and necessary to live as thinking beings and to be able to move to the next level of wisdom.

So, God goes further and paves the way for us to approach the One who is a mystery. Thus, God invites us to discover his mysteries through the Holy Scriptures, which make ‘the simple wise’,⁴⁹¹ and God chooses to reveal himself through them. This is an all-encompassing wisdom; it transforms our knowledge so we can act according to the virtues that emanate from it.

But being wise does not stop there; it is also to find God in the world He created, since the Creator left his traces in his creation, which is also ‘an open book where its Creator can be read’.⁴⁹² However, it does not stop there, God wants us to go deeper, and because human knowledge cannot go beyond, He takes us further, and the union with him transcends all our knowledge; so, wisdom is at the same time the union with God, a union of love.

Therefore, human beings could find themselves in a paradoxical situation again because it is the end, or it could also be the beginning, since ‘when a man hath done, then he

⁴⁹¹ Psalm 19. 7 NRSVUE.

⁴⁹² Rubio, p. 77.

beginneth'.⁴⁹³ So, we must start again, and thus continue a path of learning and unlearning, of discovering and understanding through divine grace towards the summit of knowledge, which is always above, towards God. Thus, wisdom is a life journey. Because we need a lifetime to know, or perhaps I should say, to become *wise*.

2. The Unifying Centre

According to Cullen, for Bonaventure, 'wisdom is a person who calls us and beckons us to a journey of the mind to God'.⁴⁹⁴ This thought instantly might remind us of the wisdom personified in Proverbs. So, from the Bonaventurian view, if wisdom is someone, then this 'someone' should be the source of all illumination and knowledge.

The following is a part of St Bonaventure's *On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology*:

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the God of Lights, writes James in the first chapter of his epistle. This text speaks of the source of all illumination; but at the same time, it suggests that there are many lights which flow generously from that fontal source of light.⁴⁹⁵

So, based on James, Bonaventure states that God, through the Word, is the source from which flows different lights, gifts, or knowledge. Bonaventure continues explaining these 'lights' by arranging some kind of catalogue of knowledge, practices, or competences.⁴⁹⁶ Below, I will explain the components of this catalogue briefly.

First, in this 'catalogue' or classification, he mentions 'the light of mechanical art' or the first light, which includes 'seven mechanical arts listed by Hugh in his *Didascalicon*,

⁴⁹³ Omnium art., 26. Cf. Augustine, Epistula 137, para. 3. in Randal B. Smith, *Bonaventure: The Scholastic with the Soul of a Poet* (2021), *Cambridge Core* <<https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/aquinas-bonaventure-and-the-scholastic-culture-of-medieval-paris/bonaventure/D633CD12B5CDB36DA01A77ED7756CAE4>> [Accessed 12 February 2022].

⁴⁹⁴ Bonaventure, Itin. I, 9 (V, 298a–b) in Christopher M. Cullen, *Bonaventure* (Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 36.

⁴⁹⁵ Bonaventure, *On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology*, ed. and trans. by Zachary Hayes (Franciscan Institute Publications, 1996), p. 37.

⁴⁹⁶ Rapinchuk, p. 136.

namely, weaving, armour-making, agriculture, hunting, navigation, medicine, and the dramatic art'. According to Bonaventure, 'every mechanical art is intended either for our consolation or for our comfort; its purpose, therefore, is to banish either sorrow or need; it is either useful or enjoyable'. Then he adds that 'if its purpose is to afford consolation and delight, it is dramatic art, or the art of producing plays. This embraces every form of entertainment, including song, instrumental music, poetry, or pantomime.'⁴⁹⁷

The catalogue continues with the second light, which is 'the light of sense knowledge, [and] it has five divisions corresponding to the five senses.'⁴⁹⁸ Then, there is the third light, of which Bonaventure says the following:

[The third light] enlightens the human person in the investigation of intelligible truths, is the light of philosophical knowledge. It is called interior because it inquires into inner and hidden causes through principles of learning and natural truth, which are connatural to the human mind. There is a threefold division of this light into rational, natural, and moral philosophy.⁴⁹⁹

The Seraphic Doctor continues explaining the fourth light, 'which provides illumination with respect to saving truth, is the light of sacred Scripture. This light is called superior because it leads to higher things by revealing truths which transcend reason, and also because it is not acquired by human research, but comes down from the God of Lights by inspiration'. Then, Bonaventure states that this light is one, but from a spiritual perspective it is threefold: 'the allegorical, by which we are taught what to believe concerning the divinity and humanity; the moral, by which we are taught how to live; and the anagogical, by which we are taught how to cling to God.'⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁷ Bonaventure, *On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology*, p. 37.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 39.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 4.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid, pp. 44-45.

This threefold perspective of the fourth light reminds us of the ‘multiform wisdom’ that Bonaventure mentions in his *Hexaameron*. It should be noted the links between his writings, and the progressive development of his ideas on these topics.

After this catalogue of lights, Bonaventure adds another differentiation between these four lights ‘coming down from above’ and the six illuminations, which are the light of sacred Scripture, the light of sense perception, the light of the mechanical arts, the light of rational philosophy, the light of natural philosophy, and the light of moral philosophy.⁵⁰¹

Then, Bonaventure states the following, which will guide us to understand his perspective on the source and centre of these lights:

And as all those lights had their origin in a single light, so too all these branches of knowledge are ordered to the knowledge of sacred Scripture; they are contained in it; they are perfected by it; and they are ordered to the eternal illumination by means of it. Therefore all our knowledge should come to rest in the knowledge of sacred Scripture, and particularly in the anagogical understanding of Scripture through which any illumination is traced back to God from whom it took its origin. And there the circle is completed; the pattern of six is complete, and consequently there is rest.⁵⁰²

According to Rapinchuk, ‘Bonaventure places the telos of education in the arts in the person of the Eternal Son/Word (Logos) of God’. Rapinchuk continues and refers to Zachary Hayes, who writes: ‘In terms of the trinity, he [Bonaventure] concludes that the supreme beauty is to be found in the Son because the Son is equal with the Father. Simply put, the Son is the *Ars Patris*. Hence, [Christ] is the basis for all other beauty.’⁵⁰³

The last paragraphs of Bonaventure’s *On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology* highlight the presence of God’s wisdom in every knowledge, in Sacred Scriptures, and the outcome of all fields of knowledge.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid, p. 46.

⁵⁰² Ibid, p. 46-47.

⁵⁰³ Rapinchuk, p. 137.

Bonaventure states the following:

It is evident how the manifold wisdom of God, which is clearly revealed in sacred Scripture, lies hidden in all knowledge and in all nature. It is clear also how all divisions of knowledge are servants of theology, and it is for this reason that theology makes use of illustrations and terms pertaining to every branch of knowledge. It is likewise clear how wide the illuminative way may be, and how the divine reality itself lies hidden within everything which is perceived or known.⁵⁰⁴

Therefore, the Seraphic Doctor possesses a comprehensive understanding of wisdom. Initially, he asserts that wisdom is revealed in God's word, yet it extends (or permeates) throughout all domains of knowledge and the natural environment that envelops us. It is significant to highlight that each realm of knowledge, or 'illuminations' as Hayes states, for Bonaventure are directed towards the knowledge of Sacred Scripture; 'they are contained in it'; they are refined by it; and they are guided towards eternal enlightenment through it.⁵⁰⁵

Wisdom manifests itself everywhere; so, its signs must be recognised. God's imprint envelops us, reflecting a comprehensive and all-encompassing view of divine wisdom, which manifests in various forms.⁵⁰⁶

It is worth noting that these signs of wisdom are 'hidden in all knowledge and in all nature.' Thus, we are invited to uncover these signals and recognise God's imprint in our surroundings and in creation. As we progress in our understanding, we are called to discover the divine glimpses along our journey. The 'illuminative path' can be broad, meaning there are various opportunities to uncover and find the Creator's signs, His glimpses. We are surrounded by fragrances, colours, and sounds of '*wisdom*'. It seems that *Wisdom* is calling out to those with awakened senses to see and feel beyond the surface.⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰⁴ Bonaventure, *On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology*, p. 61.

⁵⁰⁵ Bonaventure, *On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology*, p. 45.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid.

On the other hand, simultaneously, Bonaventure possesses a focused comprehension of wisdom. He consistently examines the breadth of various subjects, subsequently unifying them and identifying central themes within his theological thought.

So, according to Bonaventure, all these fields of knowledge that bear the glimpses of wisdom are united, as they lead to theology, to the knowledge of God. This God who is both the origin and the culmination of all knowledge. Everything originates from him, and everything returns to him.

Now, I'll turn my attention back to this other final part of *On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology*:

And this is the fruit of all sciences, that in all, faith may be strengthened, God may be honoured, character may be formed, and consolation may be derived from union of the Spouse with the beloved, a union which takes place through charity: a charity in which the whole purpose of sacred Scripture, and thus of every illumination descending from above, comes to rest - a charity without which all knowledge is vain because no one comes to the Son except through the Holy Spirit who teaches us all the truth, who is blessed forever. Amen.⁵⁰⁸

Thereby, Bonaventure commences with a broad perspective on wisdom, gradually narrowing down to a more specific understanding. Ultimately, the essence of all sciences, the ultimate aim of knowledge, is unity with God through charity. This unity holds comprehensive significance in our lives, as it serves to strengthen faith, honour God, shape character, and provide consolation through selfless and virtuous love towards both God and others. Charity is perceived as the cornerstone of spiritual union with God and as the conduit through which knowledge and faith become meaningful and transformative in individuals' lives.

In this way, the Word is the origin, the reason, and the source of all knowledge. All science has the task to promote a comprehensive formation of human beings, leading them to

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 61.

the source, to the centre, the unifying principle of all knowledge. For Bonaventure, ‘the purpose of education [...] is union with God and charity expressed to one another.’⁵⁰⁹

According to Hayes, God’s creation ‘is drenched with the presence of the divine mystery’, and it is our privilege ‘to learn how to detect the symptoms of that mysterious, divine presence’ through study and research.⁵¹⁰

In the *Hexaëmeron*, Bonaventure states that Christ is the centre of all illumination, based on John 1,1-3: ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.’⁵¹¹ Then, he states that ‘therefore, it is impossible to understand a creature except through that by which it was made, it is necessary that the true Word go before thee.’⁵¹²

Following with the *Hexaëmeron*, the Seraphic Doctor says that Christ ‘expresses’ God’s creation, and God himself; the Word unites us to the Father. Moreover, the Word is ‘the tree of life’ since through Christ ‘we return to the Father and are vivified in the very fountain of life’. So, all knowledge should lead us to the fountain, to the resource of illumination, ‘Christ, [the] centre [...] that produces knowledge, it is the Truth, that is, the Tree of Life’.⁵¹³

Regarding Bonaventurian thinking of the centre of knowledge, Kevin Hughes states ‘that all forms of human knowing, rightly understood, are, or are potentially, a kind of *imitatio Christi*. Christ himself, the Incarnate One, is the source, model, and end of all our knowledge, and his human life gives us the proper form of our life.’⁵¹⁴

⁵⁰⁹ Rapinchuk, p. 138.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹¹ John 1. 1-3 NRSVUE.

⁵¹² Bonaventure, *Collations in Hexaëmeron*, 1.10, pp. 3-4.

⁵¹³ Bonaventure, *Collations in Hexaëmeron*, 1.17, p. 6.

⁵¹⁴ Hughes in Rapinchuk, p. 140.

From the Bonaventurian view, 'all knowledge must be 'reduced' to the one truth of Christ. Indeed, there can be no truth apart from Christ, the Metaphysical Centre'.⁵¹⁵ This, then, is the point on which Bonaventure differs widely from his scholastic colleagues, because, from his perspective, all knowledge is strengthened by faith in Christ Jesus. Thus, the Word is the unifying principle of all knowledge.⁵¹⁶

This is just a perfect example of a challenging task embraced by Bonaventure, 'the attempt to unify knowledge'.⁵¹⁷ In Bonaventurian thinking, there is no other way to do it than considering the source of all knowledge, the centre of all illumination. This is one of the most significant contributions of the Seraphic Doctor.⁵¹⁸ For the same reason, he is always focused on a second task, which is *De Reductione*. This task entails to reduce everything to the Word, to the One. Everything begins and finishes in Christ.

Therefore, Bonaventure integrates all knowledge towards the same end: back to the source of all enlightenment. This back is a pilgrimage of human beings to the Father of Lights. As Hayes suggests, for Bonaventure, 'spirituality and theology do not have to by-pass or bracket the so-called secular disciplines in order to find God elsewhere; for the entire world is drenched with the presence of the divine mystery'. In consequence, our task is to discover and find God in our journey through the multiple 'divine vestiges' around us. We can find these 'vestiges' throughout life, through every science or knowledge, through the whole creation.⁵¹⁹

For Smith, what Hayes suggests is 'a beautiful summary of Bonaventure's accomplishment'. Then, he adds the following:

⁵¹⁵ Cullen, p. 32.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.

⁵¹⁷ Cresta, p. 148.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid.

⁵¹⁹ Hayes in Randall B. Smith, *Aquinas, Bonaventure, and the Scholastic Culture of Medieval Paris: Preaching, Prologues, and Biblical Commentary* (2021), Cambridge Core <<https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/aquinas-bonaventure-and-the-scholastic-culture-of-medieval-paris/bonaventure/D633CD12B5CDB36DA01A77ED7756CAE4#chapter>> [Accessed, 19 August 2022].

For Bonaventure, learning how to detect “the symptoms of that mysterious divine presence” in the world in its various manifestations involved mastering the methods appropriate to each discipline. This was not a mysticism of the mountaintops; it was, rather, a very Franciscan reaffirmation of the truth and holiness to be sought and achieved in everyday life, study, and work.⁵²⁰

So, Christ is the source, the centre, and the unifying principle of all knowledge because He is the reason for all existence. The Father of lights, creator of everything through the Word who is his ‘reflection and exact imprint [...] sustains all things’⁵²¹ is the reason for all existence and, at the same time, the reason for which human beings can know. God, the Father of lights is the reason for all illumination.

As I see it, from the Bonaventurian epistemology, Christ is the beginning, and the end of all knowledge since knowledge is because of Christ and it should end (return) to him.

3. The Supremacy of Love

So far, I have considered the concept of ‘all-embracing’ wisdom and Christ as the unifying principle, the source, and the centre of all knowledge in the light of St Bonaventure's thought. In this section, to close the circle (at least the one I am trying to draw), I will consider a third aspect of St Bonaventure's thought: the supremacy of love.

It is worth noting that, at that time, there were some arguments against the study of theology that would have emerged among the Franciscan friars: ‘Reason would empty faith, that it would be an aggressive attitude to the word of God, [...] we should listen and not analyse the word of God.’⁵²²

As mentioned before, the work of St Bonaventure and one of his main tasks was to unify and integrate the parts of a fragmented whole towards an all-encompassing theology that embraces the fullness of life. Thus, for the Seraphic Doctor, everything is united towards a

⁵²⁰ Smith, *Aquinas, Bonaventure, and the Scholastic Culture of Medieval Paris*.

⁵²¹ Hebrews 1:3 NRSVUE.

⁵²² Letter of St Francis of Assisi to St Anthony of Padua in Benedict XVI.

unifying centre that embraces knowledge and ‘different lights’ and, in addition, with an ultimate purpose, which I want to consider in this section.

St Bonaventure responds to these arguments against theology as follows:

There is indeed an arrogant way of doing theology, a pride of reason, which puts itself above the Word of God. But true theology, the rational work of true and good theology has another origin, not the arrogance of reason. He who loves wants to know the beloved better and better; true theology does not engage reason and its search moved by pride, but *-propter amorem eius cui assentit-* it is moved by the love of Him to whom it has given its consensus.⁵²³

In contrast, Thomas Aquinas states that ‘knowledge is supreme; first of all, we must know God, then comes action according to God’. Ratzinger says that ‘this supremacy of knowledge over praxis is significant for the fundamental orientation of St Thomas’.⁵²⁴ Thus, whereas knowledge is supreme for Aquinas, for Bonaventure is love.

In addition, it is worth mentioning that the ideas of *Dionysius the Areopagite* framed some perspectives of St Bonaventure. For Dionysius: ‘One can reach a point where reason can no longer see. But in the night of the intellect, love continues to see; [love continues] to see what remains inaccessible to reason. Love extends beyond reason; [love] sees more [and] enters more deeply into the mystery of God.’⁵²⁵

Bonaventure states the following in the light of the thoughts of the Areopagite: ‘If now you long to know how this happens (i.e. the ascension to God), question grace, not doctrine; desire, not intellect; the groaning of prayer, not the study of the letter; [...] not the light, but the fire which inflames and carries all things to God.’⁵²⁶

⁵²³ Proemium in I Sent., q. 2 in Benedict XVI, *General Audience*.

⁵²⁴ Summa Theologiae Ia, q. 1, art. 4. In Benedict XVI, *General Audience*.

⁵²⁵ Benedict XVI, *General Audience*.

⁵²⁶ Ibid.

In the framework of its integrative task and based on 1 Peter chapter 3,⁵²⁷ Bonaventure states that “[given] there are many who impugn our faith, not just calling us to account for it, it seems useful and right to strengthen it through arguments and to proceed in the methods of examination and inquiry.”⁵²⁸

Moreover, the *Doctor Seraphicus* says that study and examination strengthen faith since ‘the method of inquiry works to bring delight to those whose faith is complete. For in a wonderful way the soul delights in understanding what it already believes with complete faith’. Then, Bonaventure refers to Bernard: ‘There is nothing we understand with more pleasure than what we already believe through faith.’⁵²⁹

According to Joseph Ratzinger

All this is neither anti-intellectual nor anti-rational: it implies the process of reason but transcends it in the love of the Crucified Christ. With this transformation of the mysticism of Pseudo-Dionysius, St Bonaventure is placed at the source of a great mystical current which has greatly raised and purified the human mind: it is a lofty peak in the history of the human spirit.

Ratzinger adds that:

For St Bonaventure the whole of our life is a "journey", a pilgrimage, an ascent to God. But with our own strength alone we are incapable of climbing to the loftiness of God. God himself must help us, must "pull" us up. Thus prayer is necessary. Prayer, says the Saint, is the mother and the origin of the upward movement - ‘sursum actio’, an action that lifts us up, Bonaventure says.⁵³⁰

Following with the analysis of some parts of the *Commentary on the Sentences*, Bonaventure highlights the difference of Christian wisdom, which is its outcome: ‘For this knowledge aids faith, and faith resides in the intellect in such a way that, in accord with its very

⁵²⁷ [...] but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you, [...]. 1 Peter 3. 15 NRSVUE.

⁵²⁸ *Commentary on the sentences. Topic 1: Philosophy, Faith, and Theology*, ed. by Robert J. Karris (Franciscan Institute Publications, 2014), p. 7.

⁵²⁹ Ibid, pp. 8-9.

⁵³⁰ Benedict XVI, *General Audience*.

nature, it moves our affections. This is clear; for the knowledge that Christ died for us, and other such truths, move us to love.⁵³¹

In the light of St Bonaventure's thought, therefore, the supremacy of love is ultimately decisive, and it is the fundamental intention of theology. Rational work is at the service of the common good and is an expression of humility. Thus, knowledge should move us to love.⁵³²

I cannot end this section without referring to Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:

I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being *rooted and grounded in love*. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is *the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge*, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, *to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever*. Amen.⁵³³

Thereby, Paul prays for God's people to be strengthened by the Holy Spirit and for Christ to 'dwell' in the hearts of the followers through faith in Jesus. God's people are those who are 'rooted and grounded in love' and those who are, in fact, the result of the greatest work of love. Paul then prays that these people will understand the love of God in different aspects, 'the breadth and length, and height and depth', and adds 'the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge'. This is the greatest paradox of Christian knowledge, to know the love that surpasses our knowledge.

But how do we understand what is beyond our comprehension? To know what surpasses our knowledge can be nothing other than a way of life, it means what we are, what we think, what we do, and how we live in order to know the breadth, the length, the height, and the depth. In other words, it takes a lifetime to learn to love.

⁵³¹ *Commentary on the Sentences*, p. 12.

⁵³² Benedict XVI, *General Audience*.

⁵³³ Ephesians 3:16-21 NRSVUE.

This is ultimately the purpose of knowledge, and this is the primary goal in the Christian life, and all education that is Christian/theological should embrace it as the primary goal of formation.

D. Concluding Remarks and Final Thoughts on the Development of Contextual Theological Education in the Light of St Bonaventure's Theological Thought

In his article 'Saint Bonaventure and the future of Christian education', Kyle David Rapinchuk refers to the issue of fragmentation in theological education:

Many years of higher education's movement toward disciplinary isolation has proven less fruitful than its more integrated past. The modern university no longer possesses any transcendent truth that can unify the various colleges, schools, and departments into a single whole. Many Christian institutions suffer from this same fragmentation, despite acknowledging the One who unifies all things.⁵³⁴

In the face of such fragmentation, Bonaventure invites us from the past to fix our gaze on the definition, on the centre, and the ultimate goal of theological education. So first, what I suggest is that 'joining the pieces' in the Paraguayan theological education context entails *a redefinition of theology*.

It seems that for Bonaventure, theology goes beyond the formal definitions of it. As I understand, Bonaventure sees theology as an 'umbrella'. The knowledge of God that we can achieve by God's grace is not a detached understanding, separated from other forms of knowledge. Theology is an umbrella that "covers" (includes) all other knowledge and perfects all knowledge in the light of Christ.

From the Bonaventurian epistemology, knowledge of God is possible because God revealed himself to us through the Sacred Scriptures. This Christian knowledge is more appropriately called *sapientia*, as it embraces the whole life. This knowledge of God, or

⁵³⁴ Rapinchuk, pp. 135-136.

theology, is this umbrella, not only as a science, or as a study programme, but as a gift of divine grace.

This ‘umbrella’ encompasses all knowledge, so all science ‘can be reduced to the Scriptures in which they find their ultimate source and summit’, it is the Father of all lights, the pinnacle of all human learning, the knowledge of God. This knowledge illuminates ‘all other studies and the summit or ultimate end to which all their searching should lead’.⁵³⁵ Randal Smith explains this Bonaventurian perspective in the following:

When the objects of the other sciences are “illuminated” by the light and wisdom shining forth from the sacred Scriptures, it is only then that we finally see them in their full truth and beauty, and our hearts should be drawn to the Source of all Truth, Beauty, and Goodness – the First Cause, Highest Principle, and Complete Good of all things. When studied properly, all the sciences should lead us back to the Creator who has revealed Himself in and through the sacred Scriptures.⁵³⁶

Thus, all sciences are not only included under this great ‘umbrella’, but it is there that they acquire true meaning and where the ultimate beauty and wisdom of divinity are revealed.

It is worth noting that the existence of this umbrella, along with the gathering of all other knowledge under it, does not imply (from a Bonaventurian perspective) that those who study theology are somehow granted mastery of all other disciplines or are positioned to lord it over other knowers; that would be an umbrella that consisted in arrogant human possession, not love. Rather, the kind of “gathering” involved is much more about delighting in truth wherever it is to be found, thanking the God who is the source of all truth, and of being drawn to discover how to live in that love which is the deep purpose of all creation, all divine revelation, all wisdom.

⁵³⁵ Smith, *Aquinas, Bonaventure, and the Scholastic Culture of Medieval Paris*.

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

So theology, the knowledge of God, is about life, and for that reason, theological education is a formation that embraces (or should) the fullness of life and leads to wisdom. But how did Bonaventure come to this definition of theology?

What I see here is an all-encompassing theological vision and spirituality that understands all things as originating from God and, in a sense, on their way back to God. In Bonaventure's theology, which is fundamentally Franciscan, the entirety of life—its experiences, paths, relationships, and ways of knowledge illuminated by divine grace—constitutes the spiritual pilgrimage of the Christian life.

So, there is no room in the 'home of life' where the light of Christ will not shine. In this ascendant journey, we go back to God, we go back to the origin of all lights, and eventually, all we are, all we do, and all we know is transformed for the Father of lights.

Therefore, from this theological perspective, there is no room for fragmentation, and this theological vision is the reason Bonaventure can invite us to a broader view of life. Thus, mere speculation does not fit into wisdom, and for the same reason, theological education is an invitation to become aware of the richness of life in its entirety. So, all life's paths become learning experiences that deepen our bonds with the God of life.

In my view, we need to embrace a more integrating theological view that could help us to keep theological education on track. At the same time, this theological view should be a backbone and a common thread that unifies all the components of an educational experience, forming a life held together by love for one another and for all those around us. Ultimately, all our pedagogical actions should be oriented towards this comprehensive life formation, fostering connections and community. Consequently, fragmentation and the tensions that arise from it should lead us to reflect on our concepts of theology and the practices (or lack thereof) that result from it.

Bonaventurian theological thought is a call to look at the whole of life, in which God acts and transforms, and thus all of life is a true spiritual pilgrimage. From this expansive view, we should comprehend everything we do. So, our God becomes the God of life. Not that He has not been before, but the vision of the ‘whole’ changes when we become aware of God's sovereignty, knowing that He is the reason and, therefore, the end of all things.

Second, the task of ‘joining the pieces’ in the Paraguayan theological education context entails *a rediscovery of the Christian epistemological centre par excellence*.

There were different approaches in epistemology throughout history. According to the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy:

Plato’s epistemology was an attempt to understand what it was to know, and how knowledge [...] is good for the knower [...] Kant’s epistemology was an attempt to understand the conditions of the possibility of human understanding, and Russell’s epistemology was an attempt to understand how modern science could be justified by appeal to sensory experience.⁵³⁷

So, according to the above and with some different approaches throughout history, epistemology has as its study object the human knowledge and the possibility and way we could get it. In my view, Bonaventure helps us to embrace the Christian epistemological principle: Christ, the visible image of the Father of lights.

In the following, considering all the analysis carried out in this chapter, I sum up the keys of Bonaventurian Epistemology:

- All knowledge is possible because God gave us the ability to reason.
- Knowing God is possible because God has revealed himself through the Sacred Scriptures.

⁵³⁷ ‘Epistemology’, in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/cgi-bin/encyclopedia/archinfo.cgi?entry=epistemology> [accessed 25 November 2024].

- Although there is knowledge ‘outside’ of God, knowledge of God perfects/illuminates all other knowledge.
- Thus, all knowledge begins in God (He is the reason why we can know), and ends in God, for all knowledge must lead us to Him.
- The deepest form of knowing God transcends mere intellectual comprehension of His being or ways. Instead, it involves resting in God's love for us, actively participating in that love towards others, and gazing with love upon the ungraspable, unpossessable source from which that love flows.

In other words, for Bonaventure, knowledge is possible because God has given us reason (*uniform wisdom*), and we can know God through his self-revelation, the Holy Scriptures (*multiform wisdom*). Then, we can find the vestiges of God everywhere, in the whole creation (*omniform wisdom*). Finally, when human knowledge can no longer reach it, then God himself leads us to know the unknowable in a perfect union with him (*nulliform wisdom*).

If the Father of Lights, who revealed himself through Christ, the Word, is the reason we can reason, then the Christian epistemological centre par excellence is Christ, the Word. But what are the implications of this for theological education?

It seems clear that theology will have God as the centre. However, I believe we must constantly remind ourselves that theological education has an epistemological centre par excellence. If theological education is centred on Christ, the *Alpha* and *Omega* of all knowledge, then theological education will be more like discipleship. A theological education focused on Christ, will be more like a journey of discovery than a race, where the centre (Christ) is also the goal.

When theological education embraces its epistemological centre par excellence, then all pedagogical practices are transformed and oriented towards the centre, which is, in turn, the

ultimate goal of theological education. According to Hughes, ‘All forms of knowledge, are, or are potentially, a kind of *imitatio Christi*’. Therefore, Christ is ‘the source, model, and end’ of theological education. So, the Christian epistemological centre ‘gives us the proper form of our life.’⁵³⁸

Therefore, from the Bonaventurian perspective, this conviction should lead us as we study and know in any field: ‘We can find God’ in different disciplines, and this is a ‘conviction borne of the faith that God, out of His love, has revealed Himself to us, and that we are creatures He made capable of both knowing and loving Him.’⁵³⁹

But, I wonder again. How did Bonaventure come to this definition of the epistemological centre of all knowledge?

As was mentioned, Bonaventure came to this definition based on James 1,17 ‘[...] every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights’.⁵⁴⁰ Nevertheless, this task involved in addition distinguishing to unite. As Cullen states, ‘a distinction, however, is not the same as a separation’, since the goal is ‘to distinguish in order to ultimately unite.’⁵⁴¹

Therefore, Bonaventure starts from the biblical principle in James, then he considers the different lights and suggests a kind of catalogue of four lights. So finally, in the light of the biblical principle and distinguishing he comes to the centre, Christ, who unifies all knowledge, gifts, or forms of illumination. For Bonaventure, there could be no other outcome, for all his reflective work on wisdom begins and culminates in the epistemological centre par excellence.

As educators in theological education, we are called to glorify Christ, the centre of all knowledge and epistemological principle par excellence. This centre perfects everything and

⁵³⁸ Hughes in Rapinchuk, p. 140.

⁵³⁹ Smith, *Aquinas, Bonaventure, and the Scholastic Culture of Medieval Paris*.

⁵⁴⁰ James 1. 17 NRSVUE.

⁵⁴¹ Cullen, p. 28.

gives meaning to all forms of knowledge. The Bonaventurian epistemology, an epistemology of integration, invites us to focus the theological formation on the centre, Christ, which is, at the same time, the ultimate goal of all Christian formation/Theological training, it means *imitatio Christi*.

Finally, the task of ‘joining the pieces’ in the Paraguayan theological education context entails *a refocusing of the ultimate goal of theology*.

For Bonaventure, love is supreme. Thus, theology or the knowledge of God is not a mere rational task in itself but a task arising from the love for God.

Our faith in Jesus ‘resides’ in our intellects, but ‘moves our affections’. So as we know Christ by faith and his salvific work, this knowledge ‘moves us to love’ him and consequently to love people around us.⁵⁴² Therefore, to imitate Christ is to imitate his life of love, which was expressed through his self-giving and service.

Thus, theology cannot be mere speculation but rather the experience of sanctification. As Bonaventure states, ‘without holiness, a man cannot be wise’,⁵⁴³ and wisdom integrates all we are and all we do, the whole of life. Rubio states that ‘the path of true wisdom - even in its most philosophical first steps - necessarily involves a participation in or openness to sanctifying grace.’⁵⁴⁴

This holiness is nothing more than a life transformed by the Holy Spirit, which can/must now imitate Christ, his self-giving, and his love. So, wisdom, or I should say theology, is moved by love as ‘the efficient, formal and final cause.’⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴² Bonaventure, *Commentary on the Sentences*, p. 12.

⁵⁴³ Bonaventure, *Collationes in Hexaemeron*, 2.6, p. .2.

⁵⁴⁴ Rubio, p. 70.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 71.

According to Cullen, 'Theology is a whole way of life and its goal is nothing less than union with God.' As lovers of wisdom (or theology), we are 'on a journey back to God himself, for wisdom is one with God. In fact, in the end, wisdom is the most proper name of God.'⁵⁴⁶

On the other hand, Mike Higton states that theology's ultimate goal is orientated to the 'common good', translated into 'a form of cohabitation in the world with the reality that we know, characterised by obedience to Christ's proclamation of love and justice.'⁵⁴⁷

So, 'Learning [knowledge/theology] is a spiritual discipline, and to grow in learning is to become more transparent to the working of the Spirit, who conforms people to Christ on the way to the Father. Learning is a form of piety [...] There is no other kind of knowing worthy of the name; learning and holiness are inseparable.'⁵⁴⁸

Therefore, if the goal of theological education is to love, then the challenge is to integrate love into the experience of learning. Considering that love is not a subject in the curricula, but a way of life, that only can be achieved in the light of Christ, following his example through the work of the Holy Spirit, understanding theology as a form of piety.

Hence, the essence of theological education is to learn to love, a knowledge that transcends intellectualism and transforms the affections, all we are, all we do, and how we live.

The challenge is to go beyond our pedagogical and institutional structures, to transcend our established formats of education, to embrace the higher goal of Christian and theological education, the transformation of the self, a continuing education that does not stop at the university or the seminary, but goes beyond so that human beings learn to learn, learn to be, learn to do, learn to live together and thus learn to love God more.

⁵⁴⁶ Cullen, p. 23.

⁵⁴⁷ Mike Higton, *A Theology Higher Education* (Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 163.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid.

Chapter Four⁵⁴⁹

Theological and Contextual Coordinates for an Educational Model in Theological Education

A. Introduction

So far, in Chapter two, I have suggested that God's educational action is characterised by what I call an *Eclectic Methodology* and a *Pedagogy of Love*. God's love for His people drives His pedagogical action, which is eminently linked to the context. Then, in Chapter three, I proposed that Christ is the unifying principle for a fragmented education, as He is the centre, the ultimate goal, and the reason for all knowledge in the light of Bonaventurian theological thought.

Therefore, in this chapter, I intend to offer some theological and contextual guidelines or coordinates that can help us to inform the development of an educational model in theological education. Nevertheless, I would like to underline that an educational model should be the outcome of a community reflection, so I am not proposing to lay out a model in full. Rather, I intend to offer resources that can help in that process – and, specifically, theological resources, that are the result of theological reflection.

Following Bonaventure's call to keep Christ at the centre, I will begin by asking how Christ is seen and understood from our region's perspective, how the Latin American Christology has prevented us from overcoming certain challenges, and in what ways our Christology needs renewal in the light of the Kingdom of God to face these challenges.

⁵⁴⁹ AI has been used to translate from Spanish to English and to correct certain grammatical expressions throughout the chapter. Another resource used throughout this work is DeepL.com, a translation tool.

For that reason, I will reflect on a Christology of the Kingdom of God, asking what it has to say to theological education. Additionally, I will reflect in light of Anabaptist theological thought to explore what a Christ-centred vision of theological education in Paraguay entails.

First, however, as I will be developing an explicit vision for theological education – an educational model, of sorts – I will begin by introducing and explaining that concept.

B. Defining the Educational Model: A Brief Overview

According to Stabback, the curriculum (and an educational model) is a social contract or agreement, so it mirrors a community's comprehension of the needs, challenges, and envisaged strategies in an educational context.⁵⁵⁰

This task demands a clear grasp of the context, which can only be attained by tapping into the diverse perspectives of our community members. Designing relevant education is synonymous with understanding the real needs of our people, our history, our challenges, and our potential or opportunities.

First, I would like to refer to the definition of an educational model to begin this section in Chapter four. This is especially significant considering that some concepts in education are *polysemic*, so I would like to clarify what I mean by this concept within the framework of this research.⁵⁵¹

According to Díaz Flores and Osorio García, an educational model is a synthetic vision that draws upon various educational philosophies or theories, and that allows us clearly to analyse and plan the parts and elements of a curriculum.⁵⁵² Moreover, an educational model

⁵⁵⁰ Stabback, p. 6.

⁵⁵¹ Pablo Emilio Cruz Picón and Lady Jazmmin Hernández Correa, 'La relación dialógica entre el currículo y modelo pedagógico', *Revista Educación*, 19.19 (2021), 182-201 (197), doi: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=8071930>.

⁵⁵² Martha Díaz Flores and Enrique Osorio, 'Nuevo modelo educativo ¿Mismos docentes?', *Tiempo de Educar*, 12.23 (2011), 29-46 (30), doi: <https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/311/31121090003.pdf>.

gives a distinctive stamp to an educational institution and establishes the ontological, anthropological, sociological, pedagogical, epistemological, and other notions that define education in a particular place and time.⁵⁵³

In other words, an educational model ‘is a set of assumptions (theories) that guide the training of learners’. Given that pedagogy is considered a multidisciplinary science, designing an educational model involves approaching it from different perspectives, such as anthropological, psychological, sociological, or epistemological.⁵⁵⁴

In other words, an educational model is ‘a set of assumptions (theories) that guide the training of learners’.⁵⁵⁵ Pedagogy can be understood in two complementary dimensions.⁵⁵⁶ In its broader sense, it involves the reflective and theoretical study of the teaching–learning process from philosophical, social, cultural, and epistemological perspectives, addressing questions such as: what does it mean to be human? what does learning entail? and what does educating consist of in these terms? In its narrower sense, pedagogy refers to the practical design and facilitation of learning experiences, which are guided and informed by the broader pedagogical framework. In this way, situating an educational model within the broader understanding of pedagogy ensures that its practical application—teaching methods, classroom strategies, and learning event design—remains coherent, intentional, and aligned with both educational theory and the transformative purposes revealed in Scripture.

⁵⁵³ Jacqueline Mara Molina Naranjo, José Lavandero García and Lourdes María Hernández Rabell, ‘El modelo educativo como fundamento del accionar universitario. Experiencia de la Universidad Técnica de Manabí, Ecuador’, *Revista Cubana Educación Superior*, 57.2 (2018), 151-164 (153).

⁵⁵⁴ Jose-Vicente Merino Fernandez, ‘Fundamentos y alcance de la interdisciplinariedad en la investigación pedagógica’, *Revista Española de Pedagogía*, 40.155 (1982), 47-65 (48), doi: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23764306>.

⁵⁵⁵ José de Jesús Bazán Levy, *Un acercamiento a la definición de modelo educativo* ([n.d]), UNAM <http://memoria.cch.unam.mx/tmp/pdfarticulo/122/JosededeJesus_Bazan_Levy_1414778440.pdf> [Accessed 25 November 2024].

⁵⁵⁶ For further discussion, see p. 10 of this research.

Consequently, educational models, as ‘conceptual patterns’, make it possible to outline a curriculum following the educative ideals of a context.⁵⁵⁷

As I see it, an educational model represents a contextual understanding of education, expressing our views on the subject. While there is a general understanding of what education entails, an educational model allows us to contextualise and define the specific forms education will take in our environment.

So, educational models provide a framework that contextualises education according to specific environments, needs, and perspectives. They help shape the structure, goals, and methods of education for particular contexts, reflecting the values and priorities of the society or institution that creates them. We also could say that they are tools to adapt and define education within specific contexts.

As observed in the first chapter of this research, the implementation of the Salamanca and Alcalá university models in Mexican higher education institutions during the colonial period proved to be entirely ineffective and out of context.⁵⁵⁸ The Mexican experience during the colonial period serves as an example of what can happen when we do not conceive the meaning of education in and for our own context. This also poses a threat to education when we merely perform an uncritical or unreflective adaptation rather than a contextual adaptation of curriculum and educational practices.

When we adapt a curriculum, study material, or methodology uncritically, we also accept the educational model underlying it. Although this approach might be easier and could work, education will only have the desired impact when we embrace the task of thinking and reflecting on what it means to educate within our own environment.

⁵⁵⁷ Díaz Flores and Osorio García, p. 30.

⁵⁵⁸ Juan González Alpuche, *La universidad en México* (Asociación Mexicana de Sociología, 1960), p. 26.

It is now worth considering the reality of Christian, and therefore theological, education in Latin America. In this regard, Daniel Schipani says that it is possible to find several deficiencies when examining Christian education in Latin America and the Caribbean. Firstly, Christian education reflects the problems of the education system in the region, one example being the pronounced ‘banking’ approach, as Freire would call it. Moreover, pedagogical materials and methodologies from the northern hemisphere are uncritically accepted.⁵⁵⁹

To clarify the definition of banking education, it is essential to consider what Freire himself explains in his work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*:

Education is suffering from narration sickness. The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable. [...] His task is to ‘fill’ the students with the contents of his narration—contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance. [...] The student records, memorizes, and repeats these phrases without perceiving what they really mean. [...] Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. This is the ‘banking’ concept of education.⁵⁶⁰

In addition, many of the problems of Christian education in Latin America are common since ‘we have inherited the same ecclesial structures transplanted by missionaries from the same countries.’⁵⁶¹

Schipani refers to Gerson Meyer, who suggests that many curricula were imported, even though they were designed ‘to fit’ in other settings and social contexts. This importation included not only the transplantation of content but also of organisation and methodology.⁵⁶² What Meyer says connects with Weinberg's point: these ‘transplanted’ educational models failed in the Latin American context, as they could not adapt to the region's reality.⁵⁶³

⁵⁵⁹ Daniel Schipani, *El Reino de Dios y el ministerio educativo: fundamentos y principios de educación cristiana* (Editorial Caribe, 1983), p. 17.

⁵⁶⁰ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Continuum, 2005), pp. 71-72.

⁵⁶¹ Schipani, p. 18.

⁵⁶² Meyer, Gerson A, *Patterns of Church Education in the Third World: Foundations for Christian Education in an Era of Change*, ed. by Marvin J. Taylor (Abingdon, 1976), pp. 231-241.

⁵⁶³ Weinberg in Jacqueline Mara Molina Naranjo, José Lavandero García and Lourdes María Hernández Rabell.

Meyer goes on to describe the Latin American educational model stating that these ‘transplanted’ programmes are characterised by ‘a fundamentalist approach, a detachment from the social reality’ of the Latin American church, an isolated worldview or what Meyer calls ‘ghetto mentality’, a lack of holistic educational objectives that consider the human being and all their dimensions, and a fragmented curriculum.⁵⁶⁴

In addition, despite translations of many foreign resources in South America to be used, they are still decontextualised and do not respond to regional realities. Moreover, educational objectives are biased towards the church (inside) and not outside the church.⁵⁶⁵

Furthermore, the organisational structures of Christian educational institutions are top-down, and decisions are always made ‘at the top’ without taking into account all members of an educative community. Regarding the methodology, it revolves around speeches and presentations, with a strong emphasis on ‘lectures.’⁵⁶⁶

This gives the impression that we might be echoing colonial history in the field of theological education.

In addition, as I also observed in Chapter one, this poses a challenge for the institution under consideration in this research, as the curriculum model has been inspired by northern models. While there is no inherent issue with drawing inspiration from various sources, we need to undertake the task of developing our own educational model. This will enable us to design more relevant frameworks for our context and consider models that might help or inspire us.

⁵⁶⁴ Meyer, pp. 231-241.

⁵⁶⁵ Schipani, p. 19.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 20.

The deficiencies in theoretical grounding call for a special effort to integrate a robust theory (educational model) of Christian/theological education. This effort should not only address theoretical gaps but also integrate a profound understanding of contextual reality. By addressing contextual reality, the aim is not only to enhance the effectiveness of Christian education but also to ensure that it is relevant and meaningful for individuals within their particular context. This is essential to build a solid foundation and framework for effective and holistic educational practice.⁵⁶⁷

Therefore, I suggest that it is urgent to design an educational model that responds to our reality, envisioning education from and for Paraguay/Latin America.

Imagining and designing a contextual educational model for theological education might be challenging. The natural question that emerges first is: where should we begin?

I suggest that such a crucial task involves starting from the foundations of theological education, considering its essence and purpose. We need to begin from this broader perspective, considering theological education in general terms, so we can then understand its unique shape and features in our reality.

In the previous chapters, we have already considered these foundations; however, in this chapter, I aim to present a broader perspective on *the world of Christian education* and its key components. We often struggle to connect the elements or components of Christian education and tend to “separate” them. For this reason, I believe it is necessary to reconsider the complex and broad nature of the educational ministry within the context of the Christian faith.

So, in the following sections, I would like to reflect firstly on theological education as part of Christian Education, considering it from this broader perspective. Then, from a more

⁵⁶⁷ Schipani, p. 21.

specific and contextual view, I will reflect on theological education within the framework of the Kingdom of God, making connections with particular historical and theological characteristics of the Latin American, and therefore Paraguayan, context. This methodology in Chapter four attempts to follow the stages for the design of an educational model, moving from a broader to a more specific understanding of education.

C. The Starting Point: A Broader View of Theological Education

1. Theological Education in the ‘World’ of Christian Education

According to Matthias Preiswerk, theological education should be comprehended within the broader scope of Christian education. He emphasises the misconception of viewing theological education separately from the field of Christian education.⁵⁶⁸

For Preiswerk, Christian Education encompasses a variety of practices and settings, and in each of these, theological education has a particular expression and role. For example, he states that family is a ‘significant space of Christian Education’, where the values and principles of the Gospel are passed on to other generations, and when parents ‘explain how and why they give meaning to life by drawing on the Christian faith’, they become theological educators. Similarly, Sunday School serves as a space for Christian Education, and when teachers ‘research, systematise the biblical, theological, doctrinal and social bases of their practice of Christian education’, they venture into the realm of theological education.⁵⁶⁹

Preiswerk states the following:

[...] Theological Education (TE) should be considered as a particular case within Christian Education, directly linked to the reflective and critical task of Christian theology: a more specialised endeavour. This doesn't imply that it is socially, ecclesiastically, or academically restricted or elitist. TE intersects with CE; it exists in its various manifestations with its own identity and function. Therefore,

⁵⁶⁸ Matthias Preiswerk, *Tramas teológicas*, ed. by Christoph Stückelberger (Globethics.net, 2015), p. 22.

⁵⁶⁹ Preiswerk, pp. 24-25.

we suggest that theology is practised, learned, and taught among both ordinary believers, pastoral agents (laypeople as well as clergy), and those who identify with the theological profession itself. TE considers the entire ecclesial community as its subject and actor, sometimes extending beyond it in certain circumstances.⁵⁷⁰

Thus, theology should be considered a non-elitist task, and the specific training for theologians (theological education) should be integrated within the broader context of Christian education, though as a ‘particular case’, as Preiswerk suggests. This is significant because theological education is often viewed as an independent training rather than being understood within the framework of Christian education.

Nevertheless, according to Preiswerk, the challenge is to make theology/theological education free, since in the Latin American region we still think it ‘is confined to a particular and limited territory.’⁵⁷¹ This implies broadening our understanding of what it means to do theology and recognising that theology and theological education are not restricted to a few.

As theology can manifest in various domains such as academia, community-church settings, or in popular and pastoral contexts, theological education forms an integral part of a larger whole or the realm of Christian education.

The challenge lies in helping our communities recognise that we are all called to engage in theology from various realities, contexts, and experiences, and to embrace it as a task, a gift, and a privilege.

On the other hand, from this broader view of theological education, it is significant to consider its purpose.

Giesbrecht, based on Ott, suggests the specific function or purpose of TE in the light of the New Testament, which is ‘to know and preserve biblical doctrine, and to contextualise the

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 25.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid, p. 9.

missionary message'.⁵⁷² In addition, Giesbrecht refers to Neufeld, who summarises the purpose of the Church in the light of the New Testament, and considers that these church purposes also help us to deepen the understanding of the mission of TE.⁵⁷³

According to Neufeld, the purposes of the Church are five: worship, communion, training, service, and testimony.⁵⁷⁴ In his own reading of Neufeld, Giesbrecht express these five purposes as the following: 'The church exists to worship and surrender to God (worship), to fellowship and grow (communion), to train [workers] and work (training), to serve and to promote reconciliation (service), to communicate and testify (testimony)'. So, according to Giesbrecht, these purposes should also be manifested in theological education, if theological institutions and seminaries want to serve the church in the fulfilment of its purposes.⁵⁷⁵

2. Theology and Theological Education as a Gift of the Spirit

I suggest that considering theology and theological education as gifts given to the church by the Holy Spirit could help promote theology as a privilege for the entire church.

In this regard, we should consider that Jesus assigns to the Spirit an interpretive role, viewing the Spirit as the one who guides believers to grasp the complete truth.⁵⁷⁶ From a 'pneumatic' perspective, according to Espinosa Arce, 'theological vocation is given by the Spirit to the entirety of the church.' So the church's mission is also theological and hermeneutical.⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷² Dieter Giesbrecht, 'La visión y misión de la educación teológica en el cumplimiento de los propósitos de la iglesia', *Espacio Teológico*, 4.1 (2019), 19-32 (27), doi: <file:///C:/Users/DELL/Downloads/130-Texto%20del%20art%C3%ADculo-201-2-10-20220729.pdf>.

⁵⁷³ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 29.

⁵⁷⁶ Cf. John 14. 15; 14. 26; 16. 13-14.

⁵⁷⁷ Juan Pablo Espinosa Arce, 'La eclesialidad de la teología. Aportes a partir de la teología política de Johann Baptist Metz', *Revista Teología*, 4.125 (2018), 54-70 (63), doi: <https://repositorio.uca.edu.ar/bitstream/123456789/7191/1/eclesialidad-teologia-aportes-espinosa.pdf>.

According to Hans Urs Von Balthasar:

Those led by the Spirit to attain faith and through it come to know God experience what can be called "theology." This inseparable dualism of faith and understanding serves as the foundation for both Christian ethics and what is strictly termed theology.⁵⁷⁸

Espinosa Arce refers to Gustavo Gutiérrez, who suggests that 'spiritual experience is the ground (foundation) where reflective theology deepens its roots'.⁵⁷⁹ So, for Gutiérrez, theology is spirituality and spirituality is theology.⁵⁸⁰

Hence, it can be asserted that the community of followers is summoned to contemplate their faith, for the one who possesses faith 'aspires to comprehend' that faith, and delve into what underpins it. It could be argued that there is no faith without theology, and that 'by reflecting on faith, one is already engaging in theology'. Thus, 'the subject of faith' is also 'the subject of theology'. Consequently, faith and theology are collective experiences nurtured in the environment of mutual interaction among one another.⁵⁸¹

Viewing Christian theology as a collective effort for all who follow Jesus in faith, this 'theologising of all Christians' aligns with the analogous principle of the 'universal priesthood' (1 Peter 2:9-10), rediscovered during the Protestant Reformation. Rather than being an isolated task for individuals, universal theologising or this universal theological endeavour involves engaging in a shared theology that recognises the various gifts of the Holy Spirit. This perspective does not suggest an exclusive focus within the church; on the contrary, motivated

⁵⁷⁸ Hans Urs Von Balthasar in Espinosa Arce, p. 63.

⁵⁷⁹ Gustavo Gutierrez in Espinosa Arce, p. 63.

⁵⁸⁰ Wicks adds that 'theological thought offers a horizon for life and prayer, for thought and decision [...] theology also aims to influence the way we understand our way of living and to draw our hearts and feelings towards a fuller life in Christ.' Jared Wicks, *Introducción al método teológico* (Editorial Verbo Divino, 1998), pp. 149-150.

⁵⁸¹ Clodovis Boff in Espinosa Arce, p. 7.

by love for the kingdom of God and divine justice, Christian theology transforms into a public theology.⁵⁸²

On the other hand, the mission of theological education involves mutually empowering those who identify as followers of Jesus. This empowerment enables us to consciously integrate the implications of such discipleship in the context and time in which we live. It consistently encompasses the discovery of the valuable contributions of all members of the *communio sanctorum* (communion or community of saints) from both the past and the present. This requires paying attention to biblical tradition, church history, and theology. It carries a pneumatic nature, implying the continual contextual reading of Jesus' message through the work of the Spirit. This presupposes the development of a liberating hermeneutic that allows the gospel message to unfold more expansively.⁵⁸³

To sum up, theological education is part of the broader reality we call 'Christian Education.' Since theology is a non-elitist privilege given by the Spirit, theological education should take different forms, as all members of the *communio sanctorum* are called to contribute to this 'theologising of all Christians.'

D. References for a Contextual Educational Model

For the purpose of this section, I consider that it is necessary to first develop a brief analysis of Latin American Christology. This preliminary study will allow us to contrast certain Latin American theological ideas and theological thoughts with the Christ who announced the arrival of the Kingdom of God. With this brief explanation, I then present an analysis of Latin American Christology.

⁵⁸² Nancy Bedford in *Otra Educación teológica es posible*, ed. by Nicolas Panotto and Matthias Preiswerk (2017), p. 27.

⁵⁸³ Ibid.

1. The Christ of the Colonial Empire: A Brief Analysis of Latin American Christology

In his reflection on Spanish/Latin American Christology, Saúl Trinidad refers to José Míguez Bonino, who states that in the south we do not have any ‘systematic Christological treatise’. So, in order to interpret Latin American Christology, there is the need to analyse mostly church history, given that ‘Christology [...] is implicit in the Latin American ecclesiastical process.’⁵⁸⁴

So, in order to infer this implicit Christology, Trinidad reflects on history. He states that ‘[...] Eight centuries of continual agony [...] with the Arabs produced a tragic concept of life, a terror of extinction, and a sin-tormented conscience’ for Spaniards. This situation influenced Spanish Christianity and, ultimately, Christology. So, the Jesus who eventually went to Latin America, emerged from eight centuries of sorrow and oppression.⁵⁸⁵

Trinidad continues his argument stating that ‘any representation or image [...] is the product of a synthesis of ideas, feelings, and historical situation’. So, he refers to the centuries leading up to and including the colonial period in his analysis. Therefore, Trinidad suggests that there are ‘images’ of Spanish Christology in which we need to look at in order to infer and comprehend Spanish Christology and, ultimately, Latin American Christology. Thus, if we look at the images of Christ in the Spanish context, we see a ‘Dolorous and Defeated’ Messiah. This Christ appears as someone who is dying, looking down, weak, and tortured. Therefore, there is no room for the Christ of victory, who defeated death and offers eternal deliverance.⁵⁸⁶

⁵⁸⁴ *Faces of Jesus: Latin American Christologies*, ed by. José Míguez Bonino (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), p. 50.

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 49.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid*

These images also show us ‘the Christ of the mysteries’ or ‘the Christ of magical power’. This Christ is seen ‘in the liturgy of Spanish piety’. This particular messiah is evident in widespread Spanish eucharistic piety at the time. In Trinidad’s view, the goal is ‘not to experience Christ’s nourishment’ but to follow ‘a magic recipe prescribed by the Church’ aimed at living forever.⁵⁸⁷

On the other hand, these images also depict Christ as a Celestial Monarch, who has transferred his authority to the pope, who, as the vicar of Christ, has the power to ‘make donations’, meaning he can authorise the taking of new territories. Therefore, the New World, seen as new lands to expand the church, was conferred on the king and queen of Spain. Thus, the Spanish monarchs were honoured as the ‘lady and mistress and lord and master of the New World.’⁵⁸⁸

Trinidad adds that ‘it was in the monarch of this earth that Christ, as a heavenly monarch, was considered to be manifested and revealed’. According to Casalis: ‘Thus, whoever prays before or venerates these images [of Christ and the Blessed Virgin] honours and accepts as well the power of the earthly representatives of these glorified beings.’⁵⁸⁹

Another image we encounter is ‘a Christ in His Mother’s Lap’, depicting a baby as an inoffensive, ‘helpless and harmless child’. The primary depictions of Christ are as an infant and as ‘the humiliated defeated victim. He was born, he died. But he never lived.’⁵⁹⁰

According to Saúl Trinidad, these are some images of Spanish Christology that have influenced Christology in Latin America.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁹ Casalis in Trinidad, p. 52.

⁵⁹⁰ Trinidad, p. 51.

On the other hand, Jon Sobrino also suggests that Latin America has not had significant discussions around Christology, and he states that there is no specific Christology in this region. However, it is important to consider that the indigenous peoples of Latin America developed a Christological meditation fundamentally focused on the ‘body of Christ.’⁵⁹¹

Jon Sobrino refers to Guamán Poma who states that ‘by faith we know clearly that where there is a poor person, there is Jesus Christ himself’, and in the same vein, Bartolomé de las Casas said that ‘in the Indies, I leave Jesus Christ, our God, being whipped and afflicted, and buffeted and crucified, not once but thousands of times, as often as the Spaniards assault and destroy those people.’⁵⁹²

Sobrino highlights that, despite the lack of a developed Christology in Latin America, there are images of Christ that suggest a connection with what Saúl Trinidad proposes. For Sobrino, the indigenous people accepted Jesus ‘in a particular way’. From the Christ who came with the conquistadors, they accepted what most resembled themselves: ‘a Christ who had himself been annihilated and conquered. In this suffering Christ, they recognized themselves, and from him, they learned patience and resignation to enable them to survive with a minimum of suffering on the cross that was laid on them.’⁵⁹³

According to John Mackay, the ‘Spanish Christ’, introduced by the Catholic Church during the colonial era had particular characteristics. It is worth emphasising that this analysis of Christology does not refer to contemporary theological perspectives in Spain, but rather to the Christology that arrived in Latin America with the Spanish colonisers. In this regard, Mackay claims the following:

In South America, there came a Christ who has made men content with life, who has told them to accept it as it is, and things as they are, and the truth as it seems

⁵⁹¹ Sobrino, p. 11.

⁵⁹² Ibid.

⁵⁹³ Ibid.

to be. But what about the other one? The one who makes men discontented with life as it is, with things as they are, who tells them that, through Him, life will be transformed, the world will be overcome, and His followers will be brought into agreement with reality, with God, and with truth. This other Christ wanted to come but was prevented.⁵⁹⁴

According to Schipani, the Spanish Christ, the one described by Mackay, ‘showed the people how to die, but not how to live’. He adds that religious ideology at that time was ‘functional to maintain [...] the status quo, and [its] vision of the world, and the human being and their destiny promotes an inevitably [...] alienating education’. Thus, this Spanish Christ was essential for expansion and domination, and religious education served as an ally to disseminate his ideas.⁵⁹⁵

In this way, the Christ of Hispanic religiosity promoted passivity and stillness in the face of colonisation and the conquest of their lands, cultures, and thoughts. This Christology promoted a Latin American Christ of resignation, as the indigenous peoples saw themselves in this agonising and defeated Christ. This Christology of oppression aimed to “sacralize the conquest,” leading the indigenous peoples to accept colonisation in the name of this messiah and to embrace the Christ who invited them to suffer as an expression of communion with the crucified Christ.⁵⁹⁶

Mackay mentions a prayer said by Miguel de Unamuno, which could help us to deepen the understanding of this Christ and the spirituality in Hispanic America:

The death of the terrible Christ who will not awake upon earth. For he, the Christ of my land is only earth, earth, earth, earth [...] flesh, which does not palpitate, earth, earth, earth, earth... clots of blood which does not flow, earth, earth, earth, earth, [...] and Thou, Christ of Heaven, redeem us from the Christ of earth.⁵⁹⁷

⁵⁹⁴ John Mackay, *The other Spanish Christ: A Study in the Spiritual History of Spain and South America* (Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2001), p. 129.

⁵⁹⁵ Schipani, pp. 126, 132.

⁵⁹⁶ Trinidad, pp. 58, 59

⁵⁹⁷ Mackay, p. 98.

Considering all these perspectives on Spanish colonising Christology, it is possible to suggest that the Spanish Christian Catholic religion, as it was received in the colonial context, was centred on this particular messiah and his tragedy, his death. This tragedy reinforces their faith and their hope for immortality. One day, they believe they will be better off in heaven, where they will continue their earthly life, including pilgrimages and religious festivals.⁵⁹⁸

In reference to the colonial period, Mackay states that ‘Spain is primarily and tenaciously of flesh and earth. Its deepest aspiration is to be flesh and to live a full, concrete existence rather than the sublimated life of the spirit.’⁵⁹⁹ This same religiosity came to South America, imposed by the sword, where the Indigenous peoples were forced to accept the cross and death. Not to embrace the cross of this Christ would mean hell, but to receive it would mean to die, and then a better life in heaven would await them.⁶⁰⁰

In this religious mindset, there is no room for a Christ who liberates but only for one who both conquers and is conquered – that is, one who is on the side of the conquerors and whose power is reflected in their power, and one who is resigned to suffering and whose passive acceptance the conquered should emulate.

Thus, the conquerors extended the empire in his name, converting the Indigenous peoples to this conquering Christ. Consequently, contemplating life is overshadowed by thoughts of death. Bowing down and embracing this new reality became the only option.

In addition, the conquest in Paraguay had a key religious ally: the Jesuits. Mackay refers to the words of Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus: ‘Let us be like a corpse

⁵⁹⁸ Mackay, pp. 103-104.

⁵⁹⁹ Mackay, p. 20-47.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid.

unable to move by itself, or like the staff of a blind man'. His ideal, as he put it, was 'to rule in a cemetery.'⁶⁰¹

Members of the Society of Jesus arrived in Paraguay in 1588. At first, their work was purely evangelical, but they soon created a food production and sales business that generated wealth and power for the order. The Guaraní people worked under the directives of the Jesuits, who ruled in a kind of theocracy. For this purpose, Loyola's passivity and stillness took on a particular social meaning, becoming helpful and necessary for sustaining this theocracy.⁶⁰²

It is significant to note that Jesuit theology and thought have evolved in many ways throughout history. However, this perspective specifically pertains to the time of colonisation in Paraguay and does not represent the entire Jesuit tradition.

So, the distinctive features of the Jesuits' evangelising work served the empire and its expansionist aims, at least for a time.

In my opinion, the conquest of Spain and the subsequent 8 centuries of subjugation under Muslim rule were characterised by difficult periods for the Spanish, as well as by periods of relative tranquillity. However, the Spaniards' desire for freedom was constant throughout the centuries, a desire that was also suffering and anxiety to once again achieve self-determination as a people. Thus, the Spanish Christ 'embodied' in that context that suffering, that desire for freedom, but it stopped there, depicting that reality but lacking the dimension of hope and freedom that also come from Christ.

⁶⁰¹ Joaquim Pedro de Oliveira Martins, *Historia de la Civilización Ibérica*, ed. by Luciano Taxonera (Editorial Algazara, 1993), p. 346.

⁶⁰² Mackay, p. 68.

Therefore, the figure of the suffering Christ was an element of common expression by the people of their pain and misfortunes, but to the detriment of the glory of the Christ of the Bible, of his victory and of his transforming and liberating love.

This Christ followed the conquerors to America and found a place among the Amerindian peoples, embraced the pain of the conquered and taught them to be silent in the face of suffering and to accept life as it is. Thus, this Christology was functional to the conquering powers and useful to subjugate the peoples.

So, the colonisation of Latin America had a significant impact on the religious and spiritual beliefs of the population in that region. During that time, colonisation also brought this particular Christology to Latin American soil.

2. The Christ of the Kingdom: A Brief Analysis of Christology in the Light of the Kingdom of Heaven

But, *in contrast*, there is a kingdom that has nothing to do with the expansionist pretensions of earthly empires. It is a different government, an upside-down kingdom.

Jon Sobrino reflects on Jesus' message in the Gospels, emphasising that Christ focused on two key aspects: the Kingdom of Heaven and his Father.⁶⁰³ Thus, we understand that Christ within the Kingdom is synonymous with the Kingdom itself; He embodied the Kingdom alongside all its eternal values and transformative message. Therefore, one cannot engage in Christology without grasping this inherent reality of Jesus' person: in order to talk about Jesus well we need to talk about the kingdom.

⁶⁰³ Sobrino, p. 67.

The Kingdom of God is among us,⁶⁰⁴ and its King, Jesus, as ‘the paradigm of the new humanity, [...] proclaims a message of radical liberation from all alienation.’ Schipani refers to the definition of Leonardo Boff on this kingdom: ‘The kingdom of God is a total, global and structural transfiguration and revolution of the reality of the human being’. The kingdom of God is also ‘the totality of the physical world that is brought into God's new order. The kingdom of God is not for another world, it is for this one.’⁶⁰⁵

So, ‘the utopia (that which does not exist anywhere) is transformed into topia (something that exists in a certain place).’⁶⁰⁶

In a similar vein, regarding the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven, Jon Sobrino underscores that this concept is ‘all-embracing, since by Kingdom of God Jesus expresses the whole of reality and of what is to be done.’⁶⁰⁷

Before delving into Jesus' own definition of the Kingdom of God, which is crucial for the purpose of this section, it is important to highlight certain aspects of the tradition from which Christ comes, as mentioned by Jon Sobrino in his book *Jesus the Liberator*.

Sobrino emphasises that Christ ‘came following a tradition of hope for oppressed history.’ Thus, Jesus propagated the hope of that tradition throughout his life, ministry, and message. According to Sobrino, this tradition is often overlooked in Christology. In his own words:

The fact of the existence of this tradition is something not much alluded to in christology, even somewhat disdained, since the object seems to be first and foremost to find something specific to Jesus that will show his difference from other human beings so as to emphasise his unrepeatability. That is, we look for

⁶⁰⁴ Luke 17:21 NRSVUE

⁶⁰⁵ Leonardo Boff, *Jesús Cristo Libertador* (Petrópolis, 1972), pp. 66-68 in Schipani, pp. 81, 86.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 86.

⁶⁰⁷ Sobrino, p. 67.

those things in Jesus that show him in discontinuity with the rest of the human race. Let me say that there is something very strange in this procedure.⁶⁰⁸

Thus, christologies often fail to give adequate consideration to those aspects of Jesus' life that are shared with humanity. However, Jesus revealed God to humanity through what 'is least esoteric and most common: love. If we seek discontinuity, it is found not in the 'beyond,' but in this very love (a boundless love), exemplified to the point of the cross.'⁶⁰⁹

Jesus shared the message of the Kingdom of God, embraced that hope, and perpetuated a tradition of hope. He believed in and spread the message of hope and liberation. This Jesus does not distance himself from humanity but draws near to it through the continuity of the people's hope tradition, thereby demonstrating the true humanity of Jesus. In the words of Sobrino:

[...] Jesus appears tied into humanity in a specific manner: he is one of those who believe that it is possible to overcome the suffering of history. He belongs, then, to the current of those who hope in history, in the midst of oppression, who again and again formulate a Utopia, who believe that justice is possible. And in this way we can say (in faith) that Jesus' humanity is true humanity.⁶¹⁰

So, the Kingdom of God represents the fulfilment of all hope for humanity, where utopia ceases to be merely a dream and becomes a reality of living hope.

Now, it is highly significant to consider Jesus' own concept of the Kingdom of God, as he was the one who announced its arrival. First it is possible to affirm that Jesus announced the Kingdom as being 'at hand'. Jesus' message was that 'the kingdom of heaven has come near'.⁶¹¹ Therefore, Jesus not only proclaimed it and nurtured hope but also declared that the Kingdom is here, bringing with it the assurance of transformation and liberation.⁶¹²

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 74.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid, p. 75.

⁶¹¹ Matthew 4:17 NRSVUE.

⁶¹² Sobrino, p. 76.

From Jesus' concept, the Kingdom of Heaven is also 'purely God's initiative, gift, and grace'. For that reason, no activity can force the Kingdom to come. If the Kingdom is among us, it is purely by God's grace. Nevertheless, the 'free gift of the Kingdom' is not opposed to human activity, because the reality of the Kingdom entails actions to spread its truth. Jesus himself is an example of this, as he actively served the 'Kingdom of God and its righteousness.'⁶¹³

So, the Kingdom is here by grace, and it produces a series of improbable and transformative events that lead to a transformation of all reality. Those who receive this Kingdom cannot remain static, as it invites conversion or metanoia, thus fulfilling 'the demands made on all to live a life worthy of the Kingdom.'⁶¹⁴

According to Sobrino, 'The coming of the Kingdom of God is something that, on the one hand, can only be asked for, not forced; but on the other, the will of God has to be put into effect now on this earth'. He also asserts that it is evident 'that this gratuitous love of God's is what generates the need and the possibility of a loving human response'. Therefore, 'Gratuitousness and action are not opposed.'⁶¹⁵

Then, the third aspect of the Kingdom of God from Jesus' perspective is that the Kingdom is good news. In some traditions preceding Jesus, the Kingdom is seen as judgement "on the world and history." However, this is not the central message of the Kingdom when considering Jesus' ministry. The Kingdom requires radical conversion, and the central idea is that the Kingdom among us is good news. 'This is the vital core of Jesus' message: God is coming close; God is coming close because God is good, and it is good for us that God should

⁶¹³ Ibid.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 76-77.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid, p. 77.

come close'. So, the 'good news of the Kingdom of God means the Kingdom of God as good news.'⁶¹⁶

The good news of the Kingdom spreads joy among us. As Leonardo Boff states, 'Jesus articulates a radical aspect of human nature, its hope-principle, and its utopian dimension. And he promises that it will now not be Utopia, the object of anxious awaiting (cf. Luke 3:14), but topia, an object of joy for all people (cf. Luke 2:9).'⁶¹⁷

Therefore, if the Kingdom is near (at hand), an initiative of God's grace, and good news of salvation and hope. Thus, Christ, the King of this Kingdom, is near, has come among us, and he himself is God's grace and eternal gift to humanity, undeserved yet received by grace. In receiving him, we receive the living hope that what we see can be transformed by his love, and he himself is the εὐαγγέλιον, the good news of salvation for our world.

So, paraphrasing Leonardo Boff, Christ among us means '[...] a total, global and structural transfiguration and revolution of the reality of the human being'. Christ's kingship, 'is not for another world, it is for this one'.⁶¹⁸ This is our living hope.

Although this Kingdom is here, it is also yet to come. So, with this tension, we are called to live in this Kingdom in advance. Thus, the Sermon on the Mount describes the values and principles ruling the life of the citizens/disciples of the Kingdom. The citizens are those who have been transformed by the power of the Spirit of Jesus.⁶¹⁹

The Sermon on the Mount is a summary of the rules and principles that rule this kingdom, though it is not absolutely everything, nor is it the whole gospel. The Sermon on the

⁶¹⁶ Ibid, pp. 77-78.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid, p. 78.

⁶¹⁸ Schipani, pp. 81, 86.

⁶¹⁹ John Driver, *Siguiendo a Jesús: comentario sobre el sermón del monte, Mateo 5-7* (Ediciones Semilla, 1998), p. 29.

Mount shows us the instructions for the new life of the disciples. Although we may feel overwhelmed by these values that may seem impossible to apply, the Spirit of Jesus empowers us to live in this kingdom and gives us the creativity/wisdom to express these values in daily life. This life ‘requires more than human efforts. It needs the Spirit of the King.’⁶²⁰

So, ‘at the heart of the Sermon on the Mount is the declaration that love, service, and truth are the only power that can truly anticipate the Kingdom’.⁶²¹ This Kingdom [this King] has come to free us from all alienation and to lead us to a redeemed human model of life, towards total reconciliation with the Creator, the God of life.

3. Theological Education in the Framework of the Kingdom of God

According to Perry Shaw, ‘the missionary-ecclesiastical commission of theological schools demands a holistic transformation of students and teachers, including their head (knowing), their heart (being) and their hands (doing).’⁶²²

Therefore, if integrally transformed persons are necessary for the fulfilment of the commission of theological education, and if the Kingdom of God has come to liberate us from all alienation and to transform all aspects of human life, then those who serve in Christian/theological education must unfailingly regard their task as a commission in the light of the eternal values and purposes of this upside-down kingdom.

Considering the Kingdom of God brings us absolute freedom or freedom of all dimensions of human life, I suggest, understand, and define Christian education as ‘*formation for the liberation/transformation of our particular and communal realities*’. Within the

⁶²⁰ Driver, pp. 39, 106, 107.

⁶²¹ Schipani, p. 90.

⁶²² Shaw, p. 69; Giesbrecht, p. 20.

expansive scope of the Kingdom of God, theological education should define its specific functions and tasks.

Along the same lines Shaw states that:

For theological education, we must seek a theological response to the question of purpose: good theology should inform and shape our pedagogy. Scripture makes it clear that the ultimate goal of all we are and do—as individuals and as the Church—is to participate in the *Missio Dei*: more specifically, to work and serve for the expansion of the Kingdom of God and to proclaim, in both word and deed, Christ as Lord.⁶²³

In addition, Shaw adds that according to the Lausanne Movement's Cape Town Commitment, 'The mission of the church on earth is to serve the mission of God, and the mission of theological education is to strengthen and accompany the mission of the Church'.⁶²⁴

So, theological education exists to 'prepare men and women who are capable of guiding the church to be effective in fulfilling the mission of having Christ acknowledge as Lord throughout the earth'.⁶²⁵ According to Fernández, the training of men and women is not the ultimate purpose but rather a significant means 'towards the accomplishment of the greater goal'.⁶²⁶

Paulo Freire states that 'education is an act of love, and therefore, an act of courage. It cannot fear the debate. The analysis of reality cannot avoid creative discussion, under penalty of betraying its role as an instrument of freedom.'⁶²⁷

If our mission is to renew the educational or pedagogical model of Christian education in Latin America,⁶²⁸ then we must embrace the Christ of the Kingdom, who stands in contrast

⁶²³ Shaw, p. 19.

⁶²⁴ Ibid, p. 20.

⁶²⁵ Ibid.

⁶²⁶ Fernández in Shaw, p. 20.

⁶²⁷ Marta Liliana Iovanovich, 'El Pensamiento De Paulo Freire: Sus Contribuciones Para La Educación', in *Lecciones de Paulo Freire, cruzando fronteras: experiencias que se completan* (Clacso, 2003), pp. 259-324 (274).

⁶²⁸ Moreover, Perry Shaw outlines nine questions in his book *Transforming Theological Education* in chapters 1-3, which are as follows: 1) What is the ideal Church in our context? 2) What are the contextual challenges? 3)

to the Christ of the colonising empire. It is from this powerful and absolute reality of the Kingdom that we find our liberating and transformative mission, as education is fundamentally about change, transformation, and freedom.

If Latin American Christology has been alienating and colonising, then we require the Christ of the Kingdom, who transforms everything. We need a revitalised Christology in Latin America that mirrors the Jesus of the Bible and inspires our lives as disciples. If Latin American Christology has sometimes promoted passivity, we need the dynamic truth of the Christ of the Kingdom to lead us towards complete transfiguration and liberation in His truth.

We need the Christ of the Kingdom to define our role as theological educators within this context. Faced with alienating Christology, the task of Christian education, and therefore theological education, is to promote liberating education rooted in the Christ of the Kingdom.

Theological education in the light of the Kingdom of God parallels Israel's journey across the Red Sea, a journey of liberation. This liberation of the heart leads us toward a new humanity modelled by Christ, who represents the paradigm of the new humanity.⁶²⁹

What might an ideal Christian leader look like? 4) Who are the learners? 5) Where do the students go? 6) When? The time frame. 7) Where? The learning environment. 8) Who will facilitate the learning? 9) What and how? All these questions serve as a set of community-based reflective guides that encourage critical engagement with the contextual reality and aim towards the development of a renewed curriculum that connects meaningfully with its surrounding context. Although the purpose of this research is not to design an updated curriculum—acknowledging that such a task belongs to the wider academic community and requires collective reflection—some elements have been provided here that may assist in responding to the questions Shaw proposes as key in the process of rethinking theological education.

However, Chapter 1 identifies the contextual challenges of theological education, which are addressed in the subsequent chapters. Furthermore, an analysis of the curriculum of the institution in question is provided within the framework of this research. Additionally, biblical and theological elements are presented that may prove useful in the process of rethinking theological education and in addressing some of the key questions suggested by Shaw. Finally, Chapter 4 tackles central issues, such as the lack of development of critical thinking, which specifically pertain to the educational challenges of our context.

It is therefore suggested that this research provides a framework that can guide discussions aimed at responding to Shaw's questions. This aligns with what I have already proposed in the introduction of this study, on page 3: 'Aware that rethinking theological education involves the commitment of all members of an educational community, this research does not aim to provide answers; they will not be found in one person's proposal, but only in the whole community's intentional reflection and interaction. Instead, it seeks to contribute reflective insights to encourage us to imagine new and more relevant ways of conducting theological education in the Paraguayan context.'

⁶²⁹ Schipani, pp. 81, 86.

Theological education in the light of the Kingdom of God is inherently Christ-centred; otherwise, it would not be aligned with the Kingdom's principles. As theological education aims at transformation, it necessarily originates from Jesus and finds its culmination in him as the epistemological centre par excellence. The Christ of the Kingdom is the catalyst for liberating theological education.

Education that is liberating inevitably arises from the love of God. It is impossible to foster noble and transformative education without the inspiring and motivating love of Christ. This love, which guided His people with patience, is the essence behind the divine pedagogical action that embodies a pedagogy of love.

Therefore, this liberating Kingdom is also the Kingdom of love, which inspires our pedagogical actions and within whose framework of reality we need to discover and define our role as theological educators. The model of theological education should draw inspiration from the liberating reality of the Kingdom, focusing on its epistemological centre and the pedagogy of love that emanates from the King who catalyses liberating theological education.

In the intricate tapestry of South America and across all of Latin America, there has never been a more pressing need for change or transformation. The challenges facing this region are urgent and overwhelming. In this complex scenario, Christian education and, as an integral part, theological education, can stand as allies to disseminate the truths of a Kingdom that has arrived to revolutionise everything.

In a region marked by inequalities, significant political, economic, and social challenges, and a spirituality affected by the remnants of past Christologies, it becomes imperative to grasp our educational and theological mission from the reality of the Upside-Down Kingdom.

4. Theological Education in the Light of the Anabaptist Values

Throughout this research, I have tried to engage in conversations that might be relevant to my context. Voices that speak to me (and to us) about the challenges I have addressed in this research. They may not address these issues directly, but their experience and their theological and historical richness have something to say to me, and to us.

In a sense, I have been selective because I have not considered a broad historical period, nor a large list of biblical texts to help shape a broad biblical vision of Christian and theological education. Instead, I have opened my mind and heart to explore the theology of St Bonaventure, as a fellow traveller, albeit in different settings and times, but with common causes. In addition, I have fixed my attention on two specific biblical events that have much to say to the challenges of my time and context.

These voices may seem far distant from our time, but, in my opinion, they have something fruitful to offer to my context.

My conviction that God's eternal Word continues to speak so powerfully to us and my openness to explore voices of friends from the past have led me to establish these valuable conversations with these voices.

Moreover, in the previous section I have relied heavily on listening to certain Latin American voices or voices that directly describe my context and certain challenges that are of interest in the framework of this research. In this sense, I have tried to keep an open mind when engaging in these conversations, and I believe that we are enriched by this diversity. I can speak with European and Latin American voices, with voices from the present and from the past. I think all of them have had and have something to say to us.

In the same vein, I draw on another voice from the past, the voice of the Anabaptist tradition. This voice has a more complex relationship to my work: they do and do not belong to my context. They do not belong insofar as, for the most part, they are not voices from Paraguay or Latin America in general; in fact, some of the key voices come from Europe at the time of colonisation. But they do belong to my context insofar as I live and teach in a Mennonite context, so these voices have a special relevance and resonate there. In any case, I believe that these voices can be of great help in my attempt to respond to the challenges facing my Paraguayan context, and ultimately they earn their place in this research because of that fruitfulness.

So, in this section, I seek to reflect more specifically on a contextual educational model inspired by Anabaptism. Drawing from the principles, foundations, and values of this Christian tradition, I aim to offer initial thoughts that could inform an educational model tailored for theological education in Paraguay.

In my view, the Anabaptist tradition could assist us in promoting a theological education that is relevant to our context. I believe it can also foster a Christ-centred and Kingdom-oriented theological education. As an Anabaptist institution, our task is to rediscover these values and reinterpret them within our own reality and environment.

4.1. The Promotion of a Community of Critical Discernment

Hermeneutics is defined as the art of interpreting texts. As Antonio González states, it was associated with the god Hermes in ancient times, who was considered the messenger of the gods. Therefore, the interpreter (in this instance Hermes) possesses the knowledge and skills to understand the message and convey it to others.⁶³⁰

⁶³⁰ Antonio González, *Hermenéutica Anabaptista y Educación Teológica* (2009), *Cristianismo Anabautista* <https://www.menonitas.org/n3/hermeneutica_anabaptista.html> [Accessed 16 October 2023].

In the same vein, biblical hermeneutics could also be considered a restricted activity for a chosen few, where theologians are seen as ‘gods’ with an exclusive task. In fact, ‘it is not surprising that Hermes, the messenger of the gods, was also a god’. However, this view could be dangerous, as it would lead to consequences such as a decontextualised language of interpretation and a dissociation with the surrounding reality.⁶³¹

In contrast, the sixteenth-century Anabaptists understood the whole community of disciples as a community of the Spirit. For this group of Christians at that time, interpretation was a ‘spiritual event’ guided by the Holy Spirit. In this event, Christians can approach ‘the original meaning of the message’ and its ‘contemporary application through the work of the Spirit of Jesus’. So, the community of the Spirit was also a hermeneutical community of discernment and understanding of the Word of God.⁶³²

While these ideas of the community of the Spirit, of the Holy Spirit as a guide for biblical interpretation, and of the priesthood of all believers were not exclusively Anabaptist, Antonio González states that ‘in the sixteenth century Anabaptist context [...] preaching included a participation of the whole group as interpreters of the Word of God, so that the monologue of the priest or pastor was replaced by a true dialogue among all believers’. So, at that time, this was a distinctive feature of Anabaptist faith.⁶³³

The background to this interpretation is the Christocentrism of the Anabaptist faith. Again, it is significant to note that Christocentrism is not an exclusively Anabaptist idea. All reformers understood the centrality of Jesus for the salvation of humanity. However, the distinction here can be explained by what can be called the ‘hermeneutical circle’ of Hans Denck, who stated that ‘no one can truly know Christ unless one follows him, and no one may

⁶³¹ Ibid.

⁶³² Ibid.

⁶³³ Ibid.

follow him unless one has first known him. This knowledge arises when the believer is born again by the power of the Holy Spirit.’⁶³⁴

For Anabaptists, the community of the Spirit is not only a community where the gifts of the Spirit are manifested but a community of followers of Jesus since ‘the work of the Spirit is [also] to enable us to follow Jesus. It is precisely the following of Jesus that forms a community that gathers around him. The community of the Spirit is thus a community of followers who walk with Jesus, [...] and this has hermeneutical consequences.’⁶³⁵

Therefore, interpretation became the task of a community guided by the Holy Spirit, the community of followers. As they follow him, this community also grows in its knowledge of Christ and enhances its practice of faith. In this regard, Palmer Becker states the following:

Through communal discernment, people of faith come to corporate understandings of God’s will for a particular situation [...] Anabaptists believe that Spirit-directed persons who are acquainted with each other’s life and work can best understand and interpret a Scripture for their situation.⁶³⁶

Similarly, taking into account this characteristic of sixteenth-century Anabaptists, I suggest that the current educational model for theological education might envision the educational community as a hermeneutical community for discerning both the leading of the Spirit and the signs of the times. This educational community would engage in critical reflection on society, both historically and in its present reality, serving as a catalyst for critical thinking and contextualised reflection in the light of God’s eternal word.

This community, guided by the Holy Spirit, is entrusted with critical reflection and discernment to develop a contextual theological perspective. This community is humble and dependent on the Spirit. The resulting perspective of its task and mission should guide the

⁶³⁴ Hans Denk in *Textos escogidos de la Reforma Radical*, ed. by John Howard Yoder (Asociación Editorial La Aurora, 2006), p. 224.

⁶³⁵ González, p.3.

⁶³⁶ Palmer Becker, *Anabaptist Essentials: Ten Signs of a Unique Christian Faith* (Herald Press, 2017), p. 84.

church in understanding and defining what it means to follow Jesus in our specific time and setting, recognising that following Jesus is also a liberating and transformative journey with unique characteristics in our different realities or contexts.

Furthermore, the practical dimension of this discernment involves promoting an embodiment of God's love that is relevant to the surrounding reality. Thus, discernment involves understanding the signs around us and acting accordingly.⁶³⁷

In this way, the community's discernment is Christ-centred, as its purpose is to focus on Christ and to understand/experience His love in a contextual and relevant manner. Christ himself is the reason for this discernment, as He gave us His Spirit to understand and discern. As 1 Corinthians 2:9-10, 16b says:

But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him”— God has revealed to us through the Spirit, for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God [...] “For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” but we have the mind of Christ.

The Anabaptist tradition embraced by the institution under consideration in this research should inspire a contextual educational model that promotes the collective pursuit of scientific thought within a community, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in service to the Church and the nation.

As an educational community of critical discernment, the members and disciples of this group have the potential to read the Holy Scriptures together in the illumination of the Spirit of Jesus, approaching the text to promote and suggest practical applications that reflect an understanding of the challenges underlying the social, political, and economic manifestations of Paraguayan society.

⁶³⁷ Bacher-Martínez, pp. 4, 7. See also the following biblical passages: Matthew 16:3 and Luke 12:56.

To some extent, this is the objective we are somehow pursuing as Christians: applying the truths of Christ in our reality. However, I suggest that, as theologians, we should be more intentional in connecting theology with the history of Paraguay, the social reality of South America, the customs of our people, and their idiosyncrasy. If our models of theological education have been directly imported, as already mentioned, the contextualization of our theological and educational task may not be entirely accurate and may, as a friend of mine puts it, be ‘scratching where it doesn’t itch’ (doing what is not really necessary).

Building on the account of the Mennonite tradition of a community of critical discernment, it is important to highlight the practices through which such a community is formed. These include communal reading of Scripture, guided reflection in the light of the Spirit, mutual discussion, and accountability among members. Implicit in these practices is a vision of learning as a relational, participatory, and spiritually guided process, where understanding emerges collectively rather than individually, as has been analysed by Antonio González.

At the same time, it is instructive to consider how this tradition resonates with experiences in Latin America. The practices of base communities and as well as Paulo Freire’s concept of ‘conscientization’ through liberation education, similarly emphasise collective reflection and critical engagement with social realities. While the Mennonite model focuses on discernment guided by the Spirit and Christocentric hermeneutics, base communities and Freirean pedagogy centre on social and political realities. This comparison helps distinguish the traditions while also revealing points of convergence, particularly the emphasis on communal participation, critical reflection, and the transformative potential of learning.

Freire emphasises that:

[...] True dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking—thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather

than as a static entity—thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved. Critical thinking contrasts with naive thinking, which sees ‘historical time as a weight, a stratification of the acquisitions and experiences of the past’ [...] For the critic, the important thing is the continuing transformation of reality, in behalf of the continuing humanization of men.⁶³⁸

He also notes that:

[...] in its desire to create an ideal model of the ‘good man,’ a naively conceived humanism often overlooks the concrete, existential, present situation of real people. Authentic humanism, in Pierre Furter’s words, ‘consists in permitting the emergence of the awareness of our full humanity, as a condition and as an obligation, as a situation and as a project’.⁶³⁹

In this light, a contextualised model of theological education in Paraguay might draw inspiration from the Mennonite hermeneutical approach, while also remaining attentive to the realities highlighted by liberation pedagogy. Such a model would aim to foster both spiritual discernment and socially engaged critical thinking within an educational community.

Aligned with this perspective, it's crucial to address specific challenges confronting critical thinking in Paraguay. The outlook for critical, reflective, and abstract thinking in Paraguay is sad and challenging.

It is worth noting that linguistic skills, including reading comprehension, are important for the transmission and development of critical thinking. Language is the medium in which corporate discernment (even that discernment guided by the Spirit) takes place. And if we want discernment that is shaped by engagement with others beyond our own local circle, written language is going to be a crucial medium. To promote a vision in which all can be engaged together in critical discernment is therefore inseparable from promoting the linguistic tools and aptitudes that can make the mutual engagement involved possible.

⁶³⁸ Freire, p. 92.

⁶³⁹ Pierre Furter in Freire, p. 93

In fact, the low reading comprehension capacity is a cause of concern, as a 2023 PISA report indicates that only three out of ten students in Paraguay understand what they read.⁶⁴⁰ But what are the causes of this phenomenon in education and scientific thinking?

According to Sarubbi, poor critical and scientific thinking in Paraguay is due to their bilingual condition and the lack of writing in *Guaraní* (the Guaraní language of Paraguay). He states the following:

Modern, scientific, and critical thinking will be possible in the country the day when Guaraní-speaking children can switch to writing without trauma [...] because [...] they will be able to exercise a discourse and a linear logic, of before and after, of cause and effect, proper to scientific and technological rationality in their language [Guaraní]. [Only] a small group of people can efficiently use abstract thinking in our country. Often, not even university students [...] can do so comfortably.⁶⁴¹

According to Makaran, during the first Paraguayan independent and constitutional government, it was ‘forbidden to speak Guaraní’, and whoever did so received ‘a quarter to five lashes.’⁶⁴²

In the nineteenth century, and even today, Guaraní was considered a language of the people, and Spanish a language of the upper classes. The idea behind the prohibition of the Guaraní language was that the rulers thought that Western civilisations were superior and that Spanish, the ‘superior language’, would allow them to leave barbarism and backwardness behind and thus achieve further development.⁶⁴³

⁶⁴⁰ PISA: revelan que 7 de cada 10 estudiantes no comprenden lo que leen (2023), *ABC Color* <<https://www.abc.com.py/nacionales/2023/12/05/educacion-revelan-que-7-de-cada-10-estudiantes-paraguayos-no-comprenden-lo-que-leen/>> (accessed 12 March 2024).

⁶⁴¹ Vicente Sarubbi Zaldivar, ‘El sistema de educación formal y el sentido de su reforma’, in *Realidad Social del Paraguay*, ed. by Javier Caballero Merlo and Roberto Céspedes Ruffinelli (CEADUC y CIDSEP, 1998), pp. 455-486 (465).

⁶⁴² Bartomeu Meliá, ‘Diglosia en el Paraguay o la comunicación desequilibrada’, *Suplemento Antropológico*, 8.1 (1973), 133-140.

⁶⁴³ Gaya Makaran, ‘El mito del bilingüismo y la colonización lingüística en Paraguay’, *De Raíz Diversa*, 1.2 (2014), 183-211 (190), doi: <http://biblioteca.clacso.edu.ar/Mexico/ppel-unam/20160614052035/Makaran.pdf>.

According to Gómez, ‘paradoxically, those who dominate need the dominated language to exercise domination’.⁶⁴⁴ But when they have achieved their goal, the language of the people is replaced ‘by the language of the coloniser’. Spanish was the language of the elites in colonial times in Paraguay and the region, and the idea of the superiority of one language over the other prevailed beyond the colony and into the independent period.⁶⁴⁵

Saro Vera, a Paraguayan Catholic priest known for his insightful reflections on the characteristic features of the Paraguayan population, has received widespread appreciation for his work in Paraguay. He suggests that Paraguayans struggle to engage in abstract and critical thinking. He also said that, while this does not mean that Paraguayans are incapable of such thought, it remains a significant challenge for the country's educational system.⁶⁴⁶

Thus, one can at least suspect that poor critical and abstract thinking in Paraguay is due to the lack of literacy of those whose first language is Guaraní. In turn, this lack of literacy relates to the historical colonisation of the region, which imposed the idea of the superiority of the language of the colonising empire.

So, I suggest that we can draw inspiration from the Anabaptist hermeneutic model to design an educational model that promotes and provides the space for critical and reflective thinking as an expression of freedom.

Nevertheless, this will involve providing the linguistic tools necessary for the members of this educational community to explore this freedom together, taking into account, as far as possible, the reality of the whole nation. This is a specific task that will entail the revision of

⁶⁴⁴ Gérard Gómez, *El plurilingüismo paraguayo: Un fenómeno que enlaza y separa. Evolución de la lengua guaraní y proceso de jerarquización lingüística* (Servilibro, 2006), p. 133.

⁶⁴⁵ Makaran, p. 193.

⁶⁴⁶ Saro Vera, *El paraguayo: un hombre fuera de su mundo* (Editorial Litocolor, 1996) pp. 196-197.

curricula with a view to a contextualisation of the educational offer, an offer that addresses these basic and specific needs of the environment.

Thus, as a community of disciples, we can discern under the guidance of the Spirit and in the light of Holy Scripture, God's will for our lives and communities in line with the reality around us.

This requires a community steeped and immersed in the reality of its nation, in the daily challenges of 'ordinary people', and finding inspiration in the ministry of Jesus, who 'spoke of legislation, economics, nationalism and imperialism, immigration, sociology, and leadership', and saw no limits to his influence and his task of transforming human life as a whole.⁶⁴⁷

Furthermore, there is an urgent need for an educational paradigm in accordance with our cultural characteristics, our language and our social reality. This urgent need highlights the need for a community committed to discernment in accordance with the context.

I am not suggesting that theology professors and students should be experts on all current issues of concern to society, but understand that as disciples of Jesus, we have his Spirit to comprehend the signs of the times and to guide our communities towards biblical and contextual reflection in order to understand God's will for our specific time and place.

The proposal involves fostering a more intentional and communal contextualization of theology, including theological education. Jesus urged us to observe and analyse the events around us, discerning the signs that reveal divine purposes in the world. Jesus's call to 'interpret the signs of the times' and 'discern the present time' resonates in this perspective or proposal.⁶⁴⁸

⁶⁴⁷ Lucas Leys, *El mejor líder de la historia*, ed. by Carlos Peña (Editorial Vida, 2012), p. 18.

⁶⁴⁸ Bacher-Martínez, pp. 4, 7. See also the following biblical passages: Matthew 16:3 and Luke 12:56.

The Anabaptist tradition emphasises the possibility of collective discernment, as everyone has the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We can reflect on social, political, and cultural reality from the standpoint of faith in Christ and within the collective and communal context. The Spirit of Jesus enables us to contemplate the challenges and contemporary realities from a Christian perspective based on His teachings.⁶⁴⁹

All education that is contextual situates and values the culture and indigenous characteristics of an educational community. Without embracing our reality, our potential, and without recognising our weaknesses, we cannot be a community of discernment, which, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, promotes projects that enhance life as a whole. All theological education that is contextual will foster the emergence of Christian ministries that operate within the framework of this contextual reality.

4.2. The Promotion of a Divergent Mission and Identity

Palmer Becker states in his book *Anabaptist Essentials*, that while ‘some [Christians] say evangelism is at the centre of our work, others say peacebuilding is most important’.⁶⁵⁰ Carlos Martínez García claims that ‘the dichotomisation of the Gospel, i.e. the emphasis on spiritual regeneration alone on the one hand, and the mainstream of social justice activism on the other, jeopardises the integrity of the biblical/gospel message.’⁶⁵¹

Nevertheless, the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century distinguished themselves by embracing the gospel considering the ministry of Jesus, who responded ‘compassionately to heal spiritually and physically’ those in need.⁶⁵²

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁰ Becker, *Anabaptist Essentials*, p. 111.

⁶⁵¹ Carlos Martínez García, *Esencia del anabautismo* (2018), *Protestante Digital* <<https://protestantedigital.com/kairos-y-cronos/44640/la-esencia-del-anabautismo-i>> [accessed 14 February 2024].

⁶⁵² Ibid.

A portion of the writings of Menno Simons, one of the leading Anabaptist pacifists of the sixteenth century, expresses the Anabaptists' understanding of their holistic mission:

For true evangelical faith is of such a nature that it cannot lay dormant; but manifests itself in all righteousness and works of love; it dies unto flesh and blood; destroys all forbidden lusts and desires; cordially seeks, serves and fears God; clothes the naked; feeds the hungry; consoles the afflicted; shelters the miserable; aids and consoles all the oppressed; returns good for evil; serves those that injure it; prays for those that persecute it; teaches, admonishes and reproves with the Word of the Lord; seeks that which is lost; binds up that which is wounded; heals that which is diseased and saves that which is sound. The persecution, suffering and anxiety which befalls it for the sake of the truth of the Lord, is to it a glorious joy and consolation.⁶⁵³

For Arnold Snyder, 'the heart and soul of the Anabaptist movement is found in its understanding of salvation.'⁶⁵⁴ So, considering that Anabaptists understand 'salvation in terms of reconciliation and transformation, [...] to be saved means to be reconciled to God and God's family. As we are reconciled to God, as known in Christ's body, we are transformed in how we think, feel, and act.'⁶⁵⁵

When God transforms us, He 'changes us into what we are meant to be'. This transformation is 'good news' for us and for our communities because a 'true relationship with God results in works of love'.⁶⁵⁶ So, through the transformative power of the Holy Spirit, believers are empowered to lead a distinct life, one that I often refer to as a divergent life.

Salvation through Christ cannot be reduced to certain aspects, such as the forgiveness of sins, ignoring 'the personal ethical transformation' that Jesus' disciples undergo to engage 'in the task of forging a new humanity.'⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁵³ Menno Simons, *The complete work of Menno Simons*, trans. by Daniel Rupp (John F. Funk & Brother, 1871), p. 246.

⁶⁵⁴ Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology* (Pandora Press, 1997) p. 419.

⁶⁵⁵ Becker, *Anabaptist Essentials*, p. 113.

⁶⁵⁶ Snyder, p. 419.

⁶⁵⁷ Martínez García.

According to 2 Corinthians 5:17-18 ‘So if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything is new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.’⁶⁵⁸

Becker refers to this part of Corinthians ‘to support the missional task of sowing reconciliation in all areas of human life’. So, for Anabaptists, the mission is holistic and transformative. It is reconciliation and liberation ‘of all alienating bonds that bind human dignity.’⁶⁵⁹

The salvation/transformation by the work of the Holy Spirit of the sons and daughters of God must be clearly visible and tangible in their lives. Those who have been reconciled to God in Christ Jesus also work for the reconciliation of others to God, promoting and fostering ‘communities of reconciliation,’⁶⁶⁰ peace, and works of practical justice as a symbol of the coming of the Kingdom of God among human beings. So, from the Anabaptist perspective, the core of the mission or task is to reconcile.

These works of reconciliation that promote peace and justice are inspired by the meaning of *Shalom* (Old Testament) and *Eirene* (New Testament), given that peace or *Shalom* ‘refers to a pervasive sense of well-being in personal, social, economic, and political spheres’, *shalom* is thus a state that includes all areas of life.⁶⁶¹

In many ways, the Exodus serves as an example of salvation understood as reconciliation and transformation. The salvation experienced by God's people was holistic, encompassing not just physical and political liberation but also an invitation to embark on a journey of transfiguration. In this journey, God transforms His people in every aspect. God

⁶⁵⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:17-18 NRSVUE.

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁶¹ Kraybill, p. 200.

‘works’ with Israel to align their hearts with the divine will of love, peace, and true liberation. Later, He provides them with His laws so that the covenant people can live in direct and reconciled relationship with the God of life.

On the other hand, in the Sermon on the Mount, Christ refers to his disciples as *the salt of the earth* and *the light of the world* (Matthew 5:13-16). In the challenging context in which they lived, Jesus' disciples were called to respond to their reality with divergent actions, which contradicted the persecution, insults, and slander they might receive. Jesus' disciples were called to a ‘service to the world grounded in their bond with Jesus Christ; an ethical and social vocation that in no sense could be characterised by insipidity and obscurity.’⁶⁶²

According to Sidney de Moraes Sanches, it should be noted that salt was also ‘the salt of God's covenant’, which was used to salt the grain offerings presented to God in the Old Testament. In the OT framework, salt in regarding ‘to the portions of the Israelites that belonged to the Levites’ referred to loyalty to ‘God's covenant’. Thus, it can be suggested that Jesus Christ declared to his disciples that they were to live seasoned, sacrificial lives committed to the ethical values of the kingdom of God referred to in the Beatitudes.’⁶⁶³

The earth is the setting in which to ‘act’ (5:13) and where the disciples ‘long for the Father's will to be done as it is done in heaven’ (6:10). Therefore, “the ethical vocation, to which the beatitudes point, identifies believers as the salt of the earth,” the children of God and followers of Christ who commit themselves to work in the plan of transformation that God has set in motion in the world.⁶⁶⁴

But the followers of Jesus are also the light of the world. In the biblical vision, the light is God and his son Jesus Christ, and this quality also applies to Jesus' disciples. With this

⁶⁶² *Comentario Bíblico Contemporáneo*, p. 1204.

⁶⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid.

reference, Matthew underlines ‘the irrevocable character of the Christian vocation by using two other metaphorical figures’ in Matthew 5:14-15:

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. People do not light a lamp and put it under the bushel basket; rather, they put it on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.⁶⁶⁵

The disciples of Jesus are invited to be part of the divine project in the world, a project of transformation in which Christ's followers conduct divergent actions as part of acts of proclamation and anticipation of God's kingdom on earth. These divergent actions are joint efforts of the community of followers in the service of God and their nations. Therefore, Jesus gives them an imperative: ‘Let your light shine before others.’⁶⁶⁶

Salt and light refer, therefore, not only to the mission that the followers of Jesus embrace but also to their own identity. From this new identity, the followers of Jesus also understand their mission. The coherence between who they are and what they do is reflected in the identity they have received from Christ and in their commitment to the transforming mission of the kingdom of God. They are salt and must salt; they are light and must shine.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ also calls peacemakers ‘blessed’ who will be called children of God. Just as the early Anabaptists embraced the task of peacemakers and reconcilers, theological education today can design a divergent model that promotes a transformative mission in our communities.

On the other hand, it is relevant to consider certain distinctive features of Paraguayan thought that could pose a challenge when promoting a divergent educational model.

Along the same lines, Alfred Neufeld analyses the fatalistic mentality of the Paraguayan society in his book *Contra la Sagrada Resignación* (Against Sacred Resignation). According

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid. Matthew 5:14-15 NRSVUE.

⁶⁶⁶ Matthew 5:16 NRSVUE.

to Neufeld, Nerbstein defines fatalism as follows: 'It is the thesis that everything that happens must necessarily happen.'⁶⁶⁷

In addition, Herbert Wackerzapp defines fatalism as follows:

Fatalism maintains the existence of a blind and omnipotent destiny, which displaces or modifies the idea of God. It subjects human beings to predestination, disregarding their freedom [...] Behind fatalism hide pessimism and nihilism [...] because of an arbitrary destiny and a meaningless determinism, faith in an absolute meaning and a supreme personal being are lacking.⁶⁶⁸

The typical Paraguayan Guaraní phrase 'peicha guarãntema', which means 'this is the way it is, and it will not change', is one of the most striking signs of fatalism. In addition, the 'Spanish Christ' who came into the region through colonisation seems not to be against this fatalist feeling.⁶⁶⁹

According to Neufeld, major national disappointments, wars, corrupt politics, dictatorships, certain traits of popular religiosity and poverty have fed Paraguay's fatalistic mentality.

Moreover, Alfred Neudeld suggests that the fatalistic mindset entails various consequences⁶⁷⁰ outlined below.

- Distant Deity: Fatalistic worldviews distort the perception of God, portraying him as arbitrary, distant, unknown, impersonal, and unpredictable.
- Blame on Others: Avoidance of personal responsibility and blame-shifting is prevalent, attributing faults to external forces such as 'force majeure,' the 'devil,' one's own 'flesh,' or spells.
- Feelings of Shame and Inferiority: Despite external attribution of guilt, the consequences are experienced shamefully, generating feelings of inferiority.

⁶⁶⁷ Alfred Neufeld, *Contra la Sagra Resignación* (El Lector, 1998), p. 32.

⁶⁶⁸ Wackerzapp in Neufeld, p. 32.

⁶⁶⁹ Mackay, p. 129.

⁶⁷⁰ Neufeld, pp. 38-39.

- Low Valuation of Planning and Labor: The deterministic view of reality diminishes faith in the utility of planning and labour.
- Resignation and Endurance: Experiences of powerlessness strengthen the ability to endure hardships. Revolution is often seen as the sole means of escaping oppression.
- Dependence on Power and Luck: Emphasis is placed on cultivating relationships with determining powers, often through magic, opportunism, or flattery. Access to power is frequently associated with abuse.
- History Repeats Itself: The cyclic conception of time and history prevails, avoiding the perception of history as a project with a purpose.
- Class and Social Status Determined by Birth: Wealth, poverty, and opportunities are largely dictated by birth conditions, affecting job prospects, trust in God, and communal solidarity.
- Individual as Victim, Not Protagonist: Perceiving determinant forces as external leads to a tendency to endure rather than shape one's own life.
- Limited View of Human Potential: Despite a grand vision of God's sovereignty, fatalistic cultures often diminish the possibilities and potential of the human being.

Faced with such a reality, the educational model in this context has the challenge of promoting hope, awakening imagination towards the unknown, and envisioning a different path—an alternative to the observable reality.

Applying the definition of pedagogy presented earlier in this research, it is possible to address the fatalism present in Paraguayan culture through contextualised theological education. According to this definition, all educational practice reflects underlying ideas, theories, and convictions, and these must be attentive to the context and reality of the learners. Therefore, a pedagogical approach that seeks to transform fatalistic attitudes should combine critical reflection with methods that engage students in analysing their social, historical, and

cultural reality. As Freire notes, '[...] true dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking, thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity [...]' and '[...] in its desire to create an ideal model of the good man, a naively conceived humanism often overlooks the concrete, existential, present situation of real people [...]'.⁶⁷¹

In this way, pedagogical practice becomes a space where students not only learn theological content but also develop the ability to critically discern their context and act accordingly. In this regard, Shaw emphasises that theological education should cultivate the knowledge, thinking skills, and character traits that enable learners to connect text and context, embody the gospel message, and engage in lifelong reflective learning. Such formation nurtures leaders capable of resisting fatalism and participating actively in God's transforming work within their communities.⁶⁷²

This contextual educational model should empower and nurture Christian leaders with the expertise needed to stimulate reflection and pave the way for the development of community projects. The objective is to improve the community's quality of life and effectively tackle diverse needs. The holistic mission of the church should manifest in the deeds of Jesus' disciples, promoting hope through acts of reconciliation and incarnating God's love in practical and relevant ways. Therefore, theological education becomes a means to strengthen the church's commitment to integral projects by providing tools and training to this end.

This contextual model of education, founded on the values that characterise the mission and identity of the followers of Christ, opposes structures of injustice and acts that steal peace

⁶⁷¹ Freire, p. 93-94.

⁶⁷² Shaw, pp. 23-24.

that does not recognise human dignity. As a divergent model, it promotes the characteristics of a more redeemed human life.

This educational model should inspire the design of a curriculum/study programme that aims to equip students with the tools to design projects that stimulate justice and peace based on the identity and mission of 'salt' and 'light'. This contextual educational model is distinguished by its insightful interpretation of the national, regional, and global context, empowering followers to contribute within the framework of God's mission in the world.

This contextual educational model promotes the awareness that the identity of Jesus' disciples is linked to their all-encompassing, not limiting, liberating, and not alienating mission. This educational model can emerge from no other powerful reality than that of the kingdom of God that has come, that transforms, and that opposes all existing alienation. This upside-down kingdom inspires a counter-current model, a divergent model.

This divergent mission and identity can only emerge from the example of Christ. He is the source from which this mission and identity flow, and He is the highest example of a life in coherence and harmony between actions and identity. Thus, this mission is Christ-centred, nourished by the ministry of Jesus, His life, and His Spirit, which empowers us to live in contrast to the surrounding reality.

The action of those who, out of Christian conviction, offer hopeful and liberating alternatives has never been so necessary in a country accustomed to repression, wide disparities, concentration of power in selective groups, social injustices, and profound inaction or passivity.⁶⁷³

⁶⁷³ Ana Rojas Viñales, 'Crecimiento, pobreza y protección social en Paraguay', *Población y Desarrollo*, 24.47 (2018), 7-102 (96), doi: 10.18004/pdfce/2076-054x/2018.024(47)087-102.

Therefore, theological education that seeks to be contextual in this region of South America has the challenge but also the opportunity to equip pastors and servant leaders who, aware of their identity and mission, shepherd, accompany, counsel, serve, and work designing projects that diverge from social reality inspired by the transformative power of God and the values of his eternal kingdom. I suggest an educational model based on the Anabaptist holistic mission that enhances a divergent and not limited ministry.

In his reflection on the Kingdom of God in the context of the Old Testament, Jon Sobrino states that God's work and actions involve 'the transformation of the whole of society'. The 'Kingdom of God [...] formally designates the Utopia of God for a whole people'. Therefore, the evils of our society turn into good, following a path of transformation towards the utopia of the Kingdom. Sobrino emphasises, 'our response to the Kingdom of God, then, has to be not just hope, but hope as a people, of a whole people and for a whole people.'⁶⁷⁴

Sobrino also claims that the Kingdom of Heaven is also 'good news' in the face of a challenging and unjust reality. The Kingdom is also a 'dialectical and conflictual reality, excluding and opposing the anti-Kingdom'. Thus, we are not called to embrace hope naively; rather, as Paul expresses in Romans 4:18, we must have 'Hoping against hope', which is 'an active and fighting hope against the anti-Kingdom.'⁶⁷⁵

In the words of Jon Sobrino:

[...] The Kingdom of God is a Utopia that answers the age-old hope of a people in the midst of historical calamities; it is, then, what is good and wholly good. But it is also something liberating since it arrives in the midst of and in opposition to the oppression of the anti-Kingdom. It needs and generates a hope that is also liberating, from the understandable despair built up in history from the evidence that what triumphs in history is the anti-Kingdom.⁶⁷⁶

⁶⁷⁴ Sobrino, p. 71.

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 72.

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid.

So, theological education in our context must embrace the national reality, immerse itself in history and current challenges, and empower pastors and leaders to design a comprehensive ministry capable of driving transformative actions and projects that dignify the members of our community, awakening hope and inviting others to renew their vision of reality through faith in Christ. Thus, when the context permeates the curriculum, theological education is able to generate divergent leaders who respond with transformative actions for their communities.

4.3. The Promotion of a Christ-centred Worldview

According to Becker, 'The Apostles' Creed, which gained prominence during the time of Augustine of Hippo, makes no mention of the teaching and ministry of Jesus.'⁶⁷⁷

An overemphasis on the death of Christ does not help to have a complete vision of faith, thus neglecting the practical and transformative dimension of it. All of this can lead to the mistaken conclusion that Christianity is merely a belief, but cannot be seen as a behaviour. While this may be a characteristic of our religious environment, it is not the essence of true Christianity, nor is it the message of the Christ in the Holy Scriptures.⁶⁷⁸

In the following, we can read a portion of the Apostle's creed:

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.⁶⁷⁹

In the sixteenth century, Anabaptists similarly adhered to the Apostle's Creed, but they emphasised the concept of salvation as a transformative new birth. This new birth should be

⁶⁷⁷ Becker, *¿Qué es un cristiano anabautista?*, p. 4.

⁶⁷⁸ Carlos Martínez García, *Del protestantismo imaginado al realmente existente: de la persuasión a la tentación impositiva, un acercamiento anabautista*, unpublished document ([n.d.]), p. 6.

⁶⁷⁹ *Apostles' Creed, Christian Reformed Church* <<https://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/creeds/apostles-creed>> [accessed 6 February 2024].

clearly evidenced by a 'personal change.'⁶⁸⁰ While recognizing that salvation was a result of Christ's grace, they, like many other reformers of their time, emphasised the necessity of responding to that grace with obedience. For the Anabaptists, Christianity was fundamentally understood as discipleship, where Jesus must be followed. According to their beliefs, the Spirit of Jesus empowered Christians to lead distinctive lives, undergoing transformation in all aspects.⁶⁸¹

However, as a radical expression within the framework of the Reformation, some Anabaptists expressed their faith in extreme ways. It is important to recognise that some of these expressions were unhealthy, both for those who expressed them and for the movement as a whole. Nevertheless, with new leadership emerging among the Anabaptists after the Münster rebellion, the movement evolved into a more ascetic and peaceful community.⁶⁸²

Eventually, Anabaptists faced torture and persecution, perpetuated by their reputation as a revolutionary and disruptive movement following the events in Münster. However, their response to oppression made a significant impact. In this regard, Carter Lindberg asserts:

Their faithfulness and perseverance under dreadful tortures and oppression contributed to the gradual development of the idea of religious toleration and liberty. And their insistence upon a voluntary, separate church contributed to the modern development of religious pluralism and constitutional separation of church and state.⁶⁸³

Later, these events led the movement to coexist harmoniously with the surrounding reality, particularly with other expressions of faith. This also guided them to recognise common ground with other Protestant expressions and eventually even with Catholicism. Furthermore, as a Protestant Christian faith, they adhered to the Apostles' Creed, with certain emphases that set them apart, as mentioned before.

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁸¹ Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations* (Blackwell Pub, 2010), pp. 208-209.

⁶⁸² Ibid, p. 224.

⁶⁸³ Ibid, p. 225

As it was discussed, the Anabaptists did not discredit the Apostles' Creed, but sought to place particular emphasis on the practical dimension of the Christian faith inspired by the life and ministry of Jesus.

According to the Anabaptist understanding, salvation goes beyond merely securing oneself from condemnation or escaping eternal punishment, which would be merely a comforting feeling and relief. Instead, it involves living in a 'novelty of life'; in other words, it entails a transformation towards a new reality where Christ's character becomes increasingly evident in the life of the believer.⁶⁸⁴

Salvation, rooted in faith in Jesus Christ, goes beyond justification or being declared righteous before God through Christ. The Anabaptists emphasised that salvation is explicitly revealed in a life that mirrors Christ through discipleship, turning away from sin by the power of the Holy Spirit within us. In this context, the Anabaptist emphasis on salvation centres on how we live and embody Christ in every aspect of life.⁶⁸⁵

This doesn't mean that Anabaptists don't value justification by grace through Christ Jesus, but they seek to emphasise the practical dimension of salvation. It's not just about being justified but living as those who have been saved through justification in Christ Jesus. The focus of Anabaptists regarding salvation lies in actively applying faith in daily life, demonstrating their commitment to living in accordance with the received grace.⁶⁸⁶

John Roth refers to the Anabaptist perspective on salvation in his book *Transforming Teaching*, stating the following:

The primary emphasis within the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition has not been focused so much on the blood sacrifice of Jesus' death as it has been on his life, teachings, death, and resurrection. Above all, the Anabaptist focus has been on the incarnation: Jesus is God incarnate, which means "in the flesh." Jesus is the

⁶⁸⁴ Harold S. Bender in Robert Friedman, *Teología del Anabautismo* (Semilla, 1998), p. 63.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid.

Word made flesh. Jesus is the bridge that unites creation with its Creator. In Jesus, the world has been given the fullest revelation of God's purposes and intention for creation. In Jesus, we have an authoritative model for how to live. In Jesus, we find our salvation.⁶⁸⁷

Roth adds that we always want to avoid the 'incarnation', it seems impossible that God is related to a 'body', he should be some kind of 'cosmic saviour' but certainly with no body. But, 'the reality of incarnation forces us to live with the paradox that an infinite God is revealed to humanity within the finite form of a physical body.'⁶⁸⁸

At this point it is essential to connect with the Latin American reality and its history of religious thought. According to Báez-Camargo, in Latin America, the preached message has been 'a better world after death, patience to endure injustices and suffering without protest or a desire for improvement' to those desperately longing for a more just society. Báez-Camargo adds that:

The Church interpreted the Kingdom of Heaven as a state of bliss in the hereafter, and not as the reign of charity, fraternity, and justice in this very earthly world we live in. While preaching resignation and hope to the unhappy and oppressed, it forgot to preach justice and love [to those who oppress] and did nothing effective to improve the social situation or to guide a wise evolution towards the liberation of the enslaved masses.⁶⁸⁹

It appears that the Spanish Christ still finds a place in our current context, perpetuating fatalism and passivity in the face of injustices and oppression. The Spanish [or Latin American] Christ has guided us toward death rather than life. While this may have been a useful tool for evangelising and conquering in the past, it remains a distinctive feature of Latin American religiosity and thought today. As mentioned earlier, in Paraguay, it has manifested as passivity and fatalism, extinguishing hopes and immersing us in a reality that seems impossible to change.

⁶⁸⁷ John Roth, *Teaching that transforms* (Herald Press, 2011), pp. 77-78.

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 82.

⁶⁸⁹ Gonzalo Báez-Camargo, *Hacia la renovación religiosa de Hispano-América. Resumen e interpretación del Congreso Evangélico Hispano-Americano de la Habana* (Casa Unida de Publicaciones, 1930), p. 14.

In this setting, grasping salvation through the lens of incarnation might present a challenge. Given the circumstances, it might be more approachable (and consoling) to perceive salvation as a way out from the harsh realities of life, which, paradoxically, stand as a form of condemnation.

In this way, the concept of discipleship loses its essence entirely, as walking in the footsteps of Jesus in a life devoid of all hope lacks coherence. Thus, emphasising death over the life of Christ doesn't seem inappropriate from this standpoint. Nevertheless, it is crucial to bear in mind that Christ died so that we may live, and in dying to sin, we may rise to a new life.⁶⁹⁰

Considering the Christocentric emphasis of the Anabaptist tradition, and consequently, its special attention to the incarnation of Christ, John Roth suggests some implications of the incarnation in the Anabaptist context and Christian education, which I propose could permeate any theological educational model aiming to be Christocentric.

So, below, I draw upon the implications Roth suggests in the following points to propose some "commitments" that can serve as thematic axes or cross-cutting emphases for an educational model in theological education.

4.3.1. A Commitment to Creation

Everything created (including ourselves) has the potential to be bad, but it also has the potential to be a revelation of God's glory. Thus, what exists is 'not inherently bad'. For this reason, Christians should take on the task of caring for and safeguarding creation, with an awareness that what is created is the work of God. The incarnation shows us that God desires to reconcile his creation to himself, and he demonstrated this by sending his only son to dwell

⁶⁹⁰ Romans 6:4 NRSVUE.

among us not in apparitions or intangible visions, but in the form of a human being, modelling the new humanity reconciled with the creation.⁶⁹¹

In practical terms, the incarnation, along with various other facets, facilitates our reconciliation with God's creation and engenders commitments toward it. In the words of Johanna Harader, a Mennonite pastor:

Among the many, many reasons to care about our planet is our Christian belief in the incarnation. Our claim that this baby in a manger in Bethlehem was the embodiment of the divine in a unique and incomprehensible way. God, in Jesus, has been a real, physical part of creation; somehow creator and created; made of the stuff of earth; interconnected with all other living things from the past through this very moment.... And this one.⁶⁹²

In the same vein as John Roth, but from the perspective of resurrection, Oliver O'Donovan says that the resurrection of Christ is the proclamation of the resurrection of humankind in Christ, and at the same time, the renewal of all creation with him. O'Donovan affirms that 'the resurrection of Christ in isolation from mankind would not be a gospel message'. On the other hand, 'the resurrection of mankind apart from creation would be a gospel of a sort, but of a purely gnostic and world-denying sort', and contrary to the biblical message.⁶⁹³

Rebeca Artinian-Kaiser highlights O'Donovan's emphasis on the resurrection in two key aspects. Firstly, it serves as a strong affirmation of the inherent goodness present within creation. Secondly, the resurrection holds the promise that 'all shall be made alive' in the future. This transformative event not only restores but fundamentally changes creation. O'Donovan argues against a mere cyclical return to the original state, pushing creation towards fulfilment

⁶⁹¹ Roth, p. 82.

⁶⁹² Johanna Harader, *Creation care and incarnation* (2015), *Anabaptist World* <<https://anabaptistworld.org/creation-care-and-incarnation/#:~:text=The%20incarnation%20means%20that%20in,rain%20and%20scorched%20by%20sun>> [accessed 18 April 2024].

⁶⁹³ Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), p. 46.

and revitalization in entirely new and positive dimensions. So, the resurrection offers a profound affirmation of the intrinsic goodness embedded within creation.⁶⁹⁴

On the other hand, according to Denis Edwards, ‘at least since the Reformation, there has been an almost exclusive focus on humans and God, and on human redemption in Christ, in both Catholic and Protestant preaching and theology’. For this reason, some early studies in ecological theology initially focused on creation as a response to this limited perspective. Nevertheless, a truly Christian approach should encompass both creation and salvation in Christ.⁶⁹⁵

However, the issue with Western church's ecological emphasis is not its concern for salvation in Christ but its limitation on ‘human salvation’. A robust Christian ecological theology requires an expanded understanding of salvation, aligning with the biblical promise of a new heaven and a new earth, involving the entirety of creation.⁶⁹⁶

Athanasius I of Alexandria, also known as Athanasius the Great, was a Christian theologian and patriarch of Alexandria. According to Denis Edwards, his theology on creation could offer a broader perspective on this matter or issue.⁶⁹⁷

Athanasius refers to the incarnation in his writings on ‘Creation and the fall’. He says the following:

He (Christ) has been manifested in a human body for this reason only, out of love and goodness of His Father, for the salvation of us men. We will begin, then, with creation of the world and with God its Maker, for the first fact that you must grasp is this: the renewal of creation has been wrought by the Self-same Word Who made it in the beginning. There is thus no inconsistency between creation and salvation; for the One Father has employed the same Agent

⁶⁹⁴ *Theology and Ecology Across the Disciplines: On Care for Our Common Home*, ed. by Celia Dreane-Drummond and Rebecca Artinian-Kaiser (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2018), p. 173.

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 66.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid.

for both works, effecting the salvation of the world through the same Word Who made it in the beginning.⁶⁹⁸

So this comprehensive perspective has its roots in the Agent (Christ) for salvation and for creation. The proposal of Athanasius could serve as a theological key to guide us in building a commitment to creation, reconciling our theological perspective on salvation with the rest of the created order.

In the following, there is another contribution from Athanasius, this time in the form of a musical metaphor.

Like a musician who has tuned his lyre, and by the artistic blending of low and high and medium tones produces a single melody, so the Wisdom of God, holding the universe like a lyre, adapting things heavenly to things earthly, and earthly things to heavenly, harmonises them all, and leading them by His will, makes one world and one world order in beauty and harmony.⁶⁹⁹

In His wisdom, God orchestrates and blends all aspects of our existence toward beauty and order. Despite living in an eschatological tension, where we experience the reality of ‘already’ but not entirely, as followers of Jesus, we are called to engage with creation with a vision of attaining the harmony and order that God established from the outset. This order is restored in us (though in an eschatological tension) through the redemptive work of Jesus.

From a theological view, adopting a broader perspective on salvation, and incorporating the Anabaptist emphasis on the doctrine of incarnation, can inform a more comprehensive view of ecology. This approach aims to enhance awareness and foster commitment to the stewardship of creation.

⁶⁹⁸ St Athanasius, *On the Incarnation: The Treatise De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*, trans. by Penelope Lawson (St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1998), p. 25.

⁶⁹⁹ Athanasius in George Maloney, *The Cosmic Christ: From Paul to Teilhard* (Sheed and Ward, 1968), p. 261.

Given the climate crisis and the region's,⁷⁰⁰ especially Paraguay's inability to address environmental challenges adequately, Anabaptism emerges as a guiding voice in promoting a conscious commitment to creation and the common home bestowed upon us by God.

Some of the environmental issues in Paraguay include the high rate of deforestation, water pollution, air pollution caused by forest fires (which are the result of human activity and a lack of awareness), and inadequate waste management. Regarding air quality, health institutions have recently issued alerts across the country, as the forest fires are affecting much of the northern region. In addition to this, there are no effective governmental programs or systematic actions that have made a difference in addressing these challenges, which are some of the key environmental issues Paraguay faces.⁷⁰¹

As mentioned in Chapter 3, from Bonaventurian epistemology, theology is an umbrella that encompasses all other knowledge and perfects it in the light of Christ. Knowledge of God is possible because he revealed himself to us through the Sacred Scriptures. This Christian knowledge is more aptly called sapientia, as it embraces the entirety of life. This knowledge of God, or theology, serves as this umbrella not only as a science or a study programme but as a gift of divine grace.⁷⁰²

Bonaventure's holistic approach is fitting for developing a comprehensive and all-encompassing educational model. Bonaventurian epistemology provides us with this broad vision of theology, or sapientia, which as wisdom derived from the knowledge of God,

⁷⁰⁰ Alicia Bárcena, José Luis Samaniego, Wilson Peres and José Eduardo Alatorre, *La emergencia del cambio climático en América Latina y el Caribe: ¿Seguimos esperando la catástrofe o pasamos a la acción?* (CEPAL, 2020), pp. 16-18.

⁷⁰¹ Germán Portillo, *Problemas ambientales de Paraguay* (2023), *Ecología Verde* <https://www.ecologiaverde.com/problemas-ambientales-de-paraguay-4521.html#anchor_5> [accessed 6 May 2024]. *¿Qué cuidados debemos tomar ante el Humo existente en el ambiente?* ([n.d]), *Instituto de Previsión Social* <<https://portal.ips.gov.py/sistemas/ipsportal/noticia.php?cod=1098>> [accessed 6 May 2024].

⁷⁰² Smith, *Aquinas, Bonaventure, and the Scholastic Culture of Medieval Paris*.

encompasses all of life.⁷⁰³ So, this wisdom involves appreciating and acting coherently and wisely toward the created environment (our common home), and the entire ecology of creatures and ecosystems with which we coexist.

4.3.2. A Commitment to History

The incarnation shows us that God is present ‘in creation, or in space’, which is why we also believe that God ‘reveals himself to humanity in history’. The Holy Scriptures record how God actively intervened in the history of humanity to reveal himself and invite us to live a new life, a new story. Even though our individual stories may be traumatic, we are invited to understand our existence within the broader framework of history and God's plans for all that exists. In this new story, is where we can find our place and purpose, and rewrite our own new story. Furthermore, in this expansive view of reality, we can understand not only our own history but also that of our communities and nations, receiving the hope provided by the history of salvation.⁷⁰⁴

God’s revelation to humanity throughout history has been profoundly transformative. His kingdom came to the earth to disrupt and transform everything. Under the new order of this Kingdom the wholeness of life ‘is inverted, or upside down’, the Kingdom’s way of life ‘contrasts with the prevailing social order’. The activities of the Kingdom, which are God's transformative actions in the world, do not happen beyond the reach of our knowledge and experience. Instead, in society, through the streets, in homes, in every place, the Kingdom is proclaimed. With this proclamation, its 'upside-down' actions permeate human life, permeate

⁷⁰³ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁴ Roth, pp. 84-85.

history.⁷⁰⁵ Thus, history bears witness to God's redemptive and transformative intervention on behalf of humanity.

Within the vast tapestry of history, our individual, communal, and national experiences are also woven. As followers of Jesus, it is incumbent upon us to engage with history, with our own narratives, in order to discern the signs of that Kingdom which continues to transform and act in our midst. We are called to participate in that work, in God's project in the world.

According to Jon Sobrino, the Kingdom of God has an 'incidence on human history', meaning it is not 'a trans-historical reality'. So, this is why we see 'historical hope' running throughout the Old Testament. Thus, hope is not merely an ideal or eschatological; it is a hope that breaks into our historical reality. As Sobrino states, 'Israel holds to the fact that God can change bad and unjust reality into good and just reality as essential to its faith. Therefore, the Kingdom of God corresponds to a hope in history.'⁷⁰⁶

According to Kraybill, the values of the Kingdom of Heaven 'address the issues and dilemmas' of history, our time, and society. As followers of Christ, our commitment is to engage actively and be mindful of the divine work in our surroundings.⁷⁰⁷

God has consistently moved throughout history to fulfil His redemptive plan for humanity. The signs of His work surround us and occur all the time. Today is no exception; the God of history continues to transform and act.

⁷⁰⁵ Donald Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Herald Press, 2011), p. 19.

⁷⁰⁶ Sobrino, p. 70.

⁷⁰⁷ Kraybill, pp. 19-20.

In the words of José Miguez Bonino, ‘The God of the Trinity is not eternal in the timelessness of an ideal principle or an indeterminate constant. It is the God who makes history: to believe in the triune God is to enter into that history.’⁷⁰⁸

The contextual theological education model advocates for engagement with the nation, the local community, and the entire country, understanding its history, progress, and challenges. The aim is to foster an education that is connected and mindful of the local context, promoting its values, and addressing contemporary challenges from a faith perspective. In this way, theological education is tasked with encouraging ‘following the historical Jesus within our own historical context.’⁷⁰⁹

The ultimate purpose is for our individual stories to be conceived and continue weaving into the vast tapestry of God's story, where the Kingdom of Heaven, which has arrived, transforms everything, and that includes us.

4.3.3. A Commitment to the Community of Followers and to Oneself

According to Pilgram Marpeck, a sixteenth-century Anabaptist, ‘the church is a prolongation of the incarnation’, which means that the incarnation was not just a one-time event in history, since Christ ‘remains alive in the world today wherever faithful believers embody his teachings in their relationships with each other’. The early Anabaptists promoted the teaching that Christ has a plan for His creation: redemption. This redemption is for all without distinction, removing all existing barriers and uniting us in one body, the body of Christ. This new community of redeemed believers, who follow Jesus in their daily lives, continue to be the incarnate and visible sign of the living Christ.⁷¹⁰

⁷⁰⁸ José Miguez Bonino, *Rostros del protestantismo latinoamericano* (Eerdmans Pub Co, 1995), p. 111.

⁷⁰⁹ John Driver, *Life together in the Spirit*, (Plough Publishing House, 2016), p. 16.

⁷¹⁰ Roth, p. 87.

According to Torrance:

The church has no independent existence, as if it were anything at all or had any life or power of its own, apart from what is unceasingly communicated to it through its union and communion with Christ who dwells in it by the power of the Spirit and fills it with the eternal life and love of God himself.⁷¹¹

This union or communion with Christ through the Holy Spirit carries practical implications, allowing us to participate “in who He is and what He does.”⁷¹²

For Anabaptists, salvation entails more than just a personal connection with God. So, salvation involves actively belonging to the community of believers and engaging in *koinonia* or fellowship. Authentic discipleship of Jesus takes place genuinely within the fellowship of Jesus' followers. Being part of the body of Christ means committing to the journey of faith alongside brothers and sisters, a responsibility embraced as active members of the Christian community.⁷¹³

Jeff Wright claims that ‘the actual practice of Christian faith is a journey lived in the balance between a transcultural global expression of God’s redemptive intent, and a grounded, local incarnation of God’s redemptive action.’⁷¹⁴

Sunoko Lin, a Christian Anabaptist pastor says that as the body of Christ ‘we must live incarnationally in our community. The church should have an important role in shaping and influencing the life of the community’. He suggests that that is the ‘incarnational message’. Lin refers to John 15,1-11 in the following:

Anabaptism reminds me that we are to bear fruit. In John 15:1-11 the words “abide in me” appear four times and they mean more than just an imitation of Christ’s life and teaching. They point to our active engagement with the One

⁷¹¹ Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1996), p. 205.

⁷¹² Marcus Johnson, *Incarnation and the Gospel* (2020), *Center for Pastor Theologians* <<https://www.pastortheologians.com/articles/2020/12/17/incarnation-and-the-gospel>> [accessed 11 May 2024].

⁷¹³ Driver, p. 37.

⁷¹⁴ *Missio Dei*, ed. by Matthew Krabill and David Stutzman (Mennonite Mission Network, 2012), p. 3.

who lives in us by the Holy Spirit. Christ is telling us that fruit-bearing is inevitable when we are connected to him.⁷¹⁵

According to John Driver, after his death and resurrection, Jesus bestowed his Spirit upon his disciples. Since then, Jesus Christ continues to be present in his body through his Spirit. The Holy Spirit, present in the church, is the same Spirit with which Jesus was anointed for his messianic mission. Therefore, Christian spirituality involves not only following Jesus ('who is the Way') but also sharing in the life of Christ ('who is the Life') through his Spirit.⁷¹⁶

On the other hand, the reconciliation of God and His creation that we clearly see in the incarnation is also God's intention to call us to a reconciliation with ourselves, as children of God and created in His image and likeness. Living in community or being part of the body of Christ doesn't mean we have to forsake our individualities or personal aspects of our lives.

Often, the dichotomous or trichotomous views of body, soul, and spirit lead us away from appreciating ourselves as a whole. Historically, the intangible has been more highly valued than the tangible; many perspectives have defined the tangible as evil. However, 'the incarnation invites us to live deeply in the reality that each of us is a unique child of God, a wondrously complex fusion of a living body, an active mind, and a sensitive spirit', and any Christocentric theological education should lead us to appreciate this truth.⁷¹⁷

4.3.4. A Commitment to my Broader Context

Given all that has been stated above, it is only consistent to extend this reconciliation to the world. In the Bible, Christians are called to proclaim the virtues of the One who called us out of darkness. Therefore, theological education should promote training for 'a life of ministry in the world'. Christians are called to commit themselves to service for the world, throughout

⁷¹⁵ Sunoko Lin in *Missio Dei*, p. 17.

⁷¹⁶ Driver, p. 30.

⁷¹⁷ Roth, p. 89.

their entire lives. Roth adds that 'our world is filled with broken, divided, lonely, and alienated people. [But] Jesus has come to break down the 'dividing walls of hostility' (cf. Eph 2:14). Christians are called to bear witness to the incarnation [inviting] those who are broken [...] into the joy of new life.'⁷¹⁸

Our commitment to the broader context is nourished by the 'love of God for humanity has taken its clearest form in the mission of Jesus in the world.' We have perceived this love more distinctly not just in how Jesus existed but also in how he embodied his life for others, particularly for the marginalised, the alienated, and the adversaries of God. In this very embodiment, God's love is meant to be incarnated in the community of faith (1 John 3,16-17). This is exactly the tangible way we are summoned to 'embody God as cherished children' that we are (Ephesians 5:1-2).⁷¹⁹

As John Driver suggests, our commitment in the world is to embody our spirituality in practical ways. The spirituality of the people of God is to be embodied in every dimension of life. Imitating God, following Jesus, and living radically in the Spirit should be realised in our 'personal and collective history. The Lord continues to make himself present in the world through the church. The spirituality of the Christian community is [...] essentially missionary'. The same spirituality that contributes to the fullness of the body of Christ is also a fundamental aspect of its testimony in the world.⁷²⁰

John Driver also says that:

The missionary spirituality of the church in the world essentially involves following Jesus. He is the sole model for the church's mission. Jesus' call to discipleship is a summons to participate with him in the mission entrusted to him by the Father. Following Jesus, the "sent one of the Father," is to embody his spirituality in the same mission.⁷²¹

⁷¹⁸ Ibid, p. 92.

⁷¹⁹ Driver, p. 36.

⁷²⁰ Driver, pp. 37-38.

⁷²¹ Ibid.

Evangelical spirituality involves solidarity with the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Just as Jesus lived and died, ‘the righteous for the unrighteous’, so too will the salvation of oppressors come through the actions and suffering of the oppressed. The experience of the messianic community has been that salvation only comes through the vicarious suffering of Jesus. While we acknowledge that the death and resurrection of Jesus are unique in their salvific virtue, they are not exclusive: disciples of Jesus continue to endure ‘what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ for his body (Col 1:24).’⁷²²

The practical and theoretical training in the field of theology needs to awaken the missional commitment that students/followers of Jesus are called to embrace in the world. Our South American society urgently needs the solidarity of the cross, that solidarity which embodies the church and allows hope to be seen in a context of inequalities, suffering, and injustices. Theological education has the opportunity to promote and embody this solidarity as an extension of the church, conceiving its mission in the world and expanding the boundaries of education "beyond the university campus," or connected to the surrounding reality that calls us to embody Jesus in the world, as a church in which His Spirit dwells.

E. Concluding Remarks and Final Thoughts on the Development of an Educational Model for Contextual Theological Education

This chapter began by exploring the meaning of theological education within the broader context of Christian Education. Then, some references were provided for the development of a Contextual Educational Model. Firstly, it was suggested that considering the particularities of our context, defining theological education within the framework of the Kingdom of God would be relevant. The Kingdom is a dynamic reality that transforms

⁷²² Driver, p. 18.

everything and liberates humankind from all forms of alienation. This perspective is especially pertinent given the history of colonisation and oppression in Latin America.

Furthermore, considering the Anabaptist tradition, it is proposed that the contextual educational model can be enhanced by this tradition, fostering the establishment of a Community of Critical Discernment in a context marked by limited critical reflection and abstract thinking. This enriches a mission and identity that deviates in response to the surrounding reality, cultivating a Christ-centred worldview in theological education grounded in commitments stemming from an Anabaptist understanding of the incarnation.

What I have suggested thus far may seem somewhat simplistic — to draw upon another model (Anabaptism) that wasn't originally conceived in our context. So, could this be interpreted as merely perpetuating the status quo?

In light of this, I would like to emphasise that in decolonising education practices, the goal is not necessarily to omit current structures, what already exists, existing methods or perspectives, but rather to include other perspectives and enrich them with a broader worldview of reality. At the same time, it should be considered that the curriculum, as a social contract, should be designed from the breadth of ideas and richness of perceptions of the members of a particular educational community.⁷²³

Thus, other traditions and perspectives can inspire us, but it is our task, as we draw upon that inspiration, to design a theological education model from and for our context.

As Anabaptists, it is our task to live faithful to the foundations of our faith, considering the principles that have historically characterised us, but with a reflective, critical and

⁷²³ Stabback, p. 6.

contextual adaptation, an authentic and particular approach, finding creative ways to live out and express our Christian faith and tradition.

According to Paul Tillich, ‘theology moves back and forth between two poles, the eternal truth of its foundation and the temporal situation in which the eternal truth must be received.’⁷²⁴

Anabaptism is not a theological system in itself, nor could it provide a systematic theology.⁷²⁵ For this reason, we understand that Anabaptism is a way of living or expressing Christianity.⁷²⁶ Throughout history, what Anabaptists were able to do is find central common principles for the expression of their faith. These principles are what continue to inspire various Anabaptist Christians around the world to this day.

Tillich adds that:

Not many theological systems have been able to balance these two demands perfectly. Most of them either sacrifice elements of the truth or are not able to speak to the situation. Some of them combine both shortcomings. Afraid of missing the eternal truth, they identify it with some previous theological work, with traditional concepts and solutions, and try to impose these on a new, different situation. They confuse eternal truth with a temporal expression of this truth.⁷²⁷

However, the challenge is to strike a balance between the truth as it is and the interpretation or application that this truth takes on in a specific time and place. Our task is not to impose established models, but to embrace our tradition from a conscious and reflective perspective, understanding it in our context and moving away from simplistic approaches that do not call for a critical vision of the practice of our faith.

⁷²⁴ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (The University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 5.

⁷²⁵ According to Carlos Martínez García, some scholars propose that the Anabaptist movement refrained from developing a Systematic Theology due to persecution and a shortage of scholars among Anabaptist Christians. Carlos Martínez García, *Esencia del Anabautismo* (2017), *Red Cristiana Radical* <<https://www.redcristianaradical.org/esencia-del-anabautismo.html>> [accessed 12 July 2023].

⁷²⁶ Becker, *¿Qué es ser un cristiano anabautista?*, p. 1.

⁷²⁷ Tillich, p. 5.

As scholars and educators, we have the calling to rethink education from our context. However, we need to be aware that we cannot plan everything, and we cannot have control over everything that happens in an educational environment. There is learning happening in our institutions, but there are no explanations or academic processes involved directly in these situations. I think we can try to approach this situation from two different perspectives.

According to Michael Polanyi, ‘we can know more than we can tell’. So, we have knowledge ‘that we cannot put into words.’⁷²⁸ This knowledge is disjointed and often unconscious; it happens, we acquire it, but we're not entirely sure how it happens.

In the same way, in theological education, certain aspects of formation occur within the practice of the designed curriculum that we cannot explain, that we have not planned, but that happens in the hallways, in conversations, in prayer groups, in worship services at a Bible institute, in community interactions, and during practical experiences. There is something that takes place, and we cannot explain it. This is tacit learning, that part of the curriculum that is in the ‘shadows’, but it occurs and is necessary.

Education is a complex experience, where various elements and dynamics come together to enable formation, and there are elements that are not completely perceptible or describable.

On the other hand, there is another perception of this unconscious learning that occurs, and we do not know how.

⁷²⁸ Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (Anchor Books, 1967), p. 4.

In John 3,8 we find the following word of Jesus: ‘The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.’⁷²⁹

In the context of John 3, Jesus explains to Nicodemus how the new birth occurs through the work of the Spirit. Just as the wind blows, and even though you can hear its sound, you do not know where it comes from or where it is going. In this sense, it is something that happens even though we may not be able to put it into words or explain it.

I believe that the ‘tacit’ formation that takes place in our educational institutions is the work of that same Spirit, who acts, and we cannot explain it. God, in His sovereignty and providence, uses the whole range of significant experiences to accomplish His will in the lives of students who desire to be trained to serve him and his church.

Every conversation, every encounter, activities in and out of class, the Holy Spirit of God weaves these situations and activities together to shape us holistically, to change us. The Spirit of Jesus permeates the entire curriculum, permeates our lives. His power and His work are the true cross-cutting element of every theological teaching curriculum.

While we may not be absolutely clear how it happens, it undeniably does happen. Consequently, all those engaged in theological education should anchor their confidence not only in their own efforts but, above all, in the sovereignty and action of the Spirit of Jesus.

A third way to approach this subject is from a curricular perspective. For that purpose, it is important to note what Perry Shaw suggests regarding the hidden curriculum. While it is not possible to plan everything, it is worth reflecting intentionally on what, as an institution, we wish to communicate and foster in the institutional environment. Shaw defines the hidden

⁷²⁹ John 3. 8 NRSVUE.

curriculum as ‘the potent sociological and psychological dimensions of education, which are usually caught rather than intentionally taught.’⁷³⁰

Beyond the explicit content of courses, one of the most subtle yet influential dimensions of the hidden curriculum are the culture and structure of the institution. According to Shaw, the relationship between administration, faculty, staff, and students conveys powerful messages about the nature of Christian leadership and community life. For instance, when administrators are distant and authoritarian, students tend to reproduce this model, ignoring classroom instruction about collaborative leadership. Likewise, if unresolved interpersonal conflicts exist within the institution, students will not take seriously lessons emphasising reconciliation and peace-making as central to faith-based leadership.⁷³¹

Even the physical layout of a campus communicates lessons to students: plush offices for senior administrators versus minimal space for junior faculty or staff quickly teach about privilege and hierarchy, undermining explicitly taught principles such as servant leadership. Similarly, the working conditions of staff implicitly model how future leaders may treat those serving in churches.⁷³²

Shaw proposes that any program seeking to address potential negative effects of the hidden curriculum must consider fundamental questions about institutional power and culture: Who holds power? How is it exercised? Is it centralized or distributed? Is communication open and bidirectional, or largely unilateral? Are decisions made arbitrarily, or through careful analysis and consultation?

Finally, the design and implementation of institutional policies represent a particularly significant element of organizational culture that impacts students’ implicit learning. Rigid and

⁷³⁰ Shaw, p. 79.

⁷³¹ Ibid, p. 88.

⁷³² Ibid

impersonal policies may communicate values of legalism and conformity, whereas informal or favour-based application of policies models immature leadership. Effective educational institutions recognize the importance of balancing order and relationships in policy design and implementation, understanding that this profoundly shapes students' understanding of Christian ministry.

This way, the proposal is to design a theological education based on a Christ-centred educational model, aligned with the context, and dependent on the work of the Spirit of Christ. This dependence implies that we should be attentive and open to the unpredictable and unplannable work of that Spirit, which can speak through any body - any creature - in our context, through any encounter or event or discovery.

However, this path might be challenging, and it involves freeing ourselves from our theological lenses, which may be tainted by the shortcomings of the Spanish Christ, or should I say the *Latin American Christ*.

The Christ portrayed in colonial Spanish Christology cannot address the diverse challenges outlined in Chapter one. This Christ does not align with the God of Exodus and his comprehensive journey of learning described in Chapter two — the God who lovingly shapes a liberated community. It also deviates from the Christ of Bonaventure, whose vision of learning is more holistic and transformative.

As there are alienated and hegemonic Christologies that require deconstruction, the question arises: *who, then, is the Christ that will be the focal point of a transformative educational model? Who is the authentic Christ?* The immediate response is 'the Christ of the Bible'. Although, on this 'journey of the quest', some have encountered an entirely different Christ.

There are various aspects of the person of Jesus Christ that we can mention, but I would like to focus now on Christ and His proclamation of the *Kingdom of God* or the *Kingdom of Heaven*. So, I aim to concentrate on the *Christ of the Kingdom*.

The Christ of the Bible is the one who proclaimed *the Kingdom of God*. It is significant to recognise that this proclamation was more than mere announcement shared with those who were present then (and are present now). As the King of this Kingdom, not only announced it but also embodied its essence throughout His entire life.⁷³³

Mike Higton refers to this “embodiment” of the Kingdom we can see in Jesus’ life, and quotes Origen, who said the following:

The Son of God is king of heaven. And just as he is wisdom itself and righteousness itself and truth itself, so too is he also the kingdom itself... [H]e is the kingdom itself, ruling as king over every thought of those who are no longer ruled by sin.⁷³⁴

Higton adds that ‘Jesus is the kingdom itself’: he is the kingdom drawn near, the kingdom’s embodiment, the kingdom made flesh’. As such, Christ anticipated the Kingdom through his actions, his words, and works, through his entire pattern of life.⁷³⁵

The Kingdom of God is nothing compared to the kingdoms we have known. Mary’s Magnificat depicts some nuances of this Kingdom as follows:

For the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name; indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.⁷³⁶

⁷³³ Higton, *Christian Doctrine*, p. 46.

⁷³⁴ Origen, Commentary on Matthew, Bk XIV, §7. Translation in Hans Urs von Balthasar, 1984, Origen: Spirit and Fire: A Thematic Anthology of His Writings, trans. Robert J. Daly, Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, p. 362. in Mike Higton, *Christian Doctrine*, p. 46.

⁷³⁵ Higton, *Christian Doctrine*, p. 46.

⁷³⁶ Luke 1:49-53 NRSVUE.

According to Kraybill, in this Upside-down Kingdom, Mary's Magnificat shows us that 'Those at the top of the social pyramid-the proud, the rich, and the mighty-topple.' The people at the top are 'stripped of their prestigious seats', but 'the poor and hungry, those at the bottom of the social hill, take a surprising ride to the top'. So, Mary's Magnificat contains 'words of hope and judgement'. Kraybill adds that 'a poor Galilean peasant girl, Mary, expects the messianic kingdom to flip her social world upside down.'⁷³⁷

There are numerous words we can use to characterise this Kingdom, but undoubtedly, one of them is 'transformation'. This new order has arrived to alter the social structure. Those who have undergone transformation are united under a new governance, under the rule of the King of kings. The Christ depicted in the Bible is the Christ of the Kingdom, and for that very reason, the Christ who transforms.

Jürgen Moltmann in his book *Theology of Hope* refers to Christian eschatology, emphasising that it has led us to understand there is a certain future well-being, the hope for something better ahead, setting aside the truth that this eschatological future is today, and the present is a call to 'anticipate' and live that hope.⁷³⁸

José Míguez Bonino refers to this, indicating that Moltmann's hope 'far from leading to an easy accommodation to the status quo, is a constant disturbance of reality as it is and a provocation to move towards the future.'⁷³⁹

Moltmann adds that this hope is inspired by the cross of Christ, where God 'totally identifies' with human suffering and endures the death of a 'blasphemer' and 'subversive'. On this cross, we are also 'crucified with Christ' to suffer with the dispossessed, the abandoned,

⁷³⁷ Kraybill, p. 17.

⁷³⁸ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, (SCM Press, 2002), pp. 19-44.

⁷³⁹ Jose Miguez Bonino, *La fe en búsqueda de eficacia* (Ediciones Sígueme, 1977) p. 174.

and the forgotten. But this cross is also the symbol of resurrection; it is empty and is hope in the present as well as in the future.⁷⁴⁰

José Míguez Bonino adds that:

God builds His kingdom from and within human history as a whole; His action is a challenge and a constant call to humanity. The human response takes place in the arena of history with its economic, political, and ideological choices. Faith does not transport us to a different history but operates as a dynamic, motivation, and - in the eschatological horizon - as a transformative invitation."⁷⁴¹

Therefore, our historical actions are expressions of hope for both the present and the future. We are called to experience and anticipate liberation and transformation. We live in advance within the justice and freedom of the Kingdom of God, which, announced by Christ, gave us hope here and now.

The Kingdom of God 'has a place in history', and the Christian faith encourages and challenges us to embrace a commitment to 'transformative action [...] in terms of justice, solidarity, [and] liberation [...] in order to create a new community through work and love, as a space for rejoicing and worship'. Thus, our eschatological faith, which involves the present, fosters a commitment to building 'a provisional and imperfect order', aware that our efforts as a church within the context of the Kingdom of God are not meaningless or lack significance but are signs of a collective that celebrates Christ's victory, the triumph of God's love, and divine solidarity with humanity. It involves embracing the responsibility to care for creation and neighbour, engaging actively in the struggle against the evil that afflicts our societies everywhere.⁷⁴²

So, the Kingdom of God 'is a collectivity-a network of persons who have yielded their hearts and relationships to the reign of God. The kingdom is actualised when God rules in hearts

⁷⁴⁰ Bonino, p. 175.

⁷⁴¹ Bonino, p. 167.

⁷⁴² Bonino, p. 182.

and social relationships' and it is spread through the actions of those who work for transformation and liberation.⁷⁴³

Therefore, the Christ of the Bible, the Christ of the Kingdom, might be often far from our theological pretensions or assumptions sometimes. While theology is an 'attempt', we depend on the Spirit of Jesus for that attempt to lead us to know him more, not the Spanish or European Christ, or the Christ we 'want to know,' but the son of a carpenter who shone light on the 'land beyond the Jordan, in Galilee of the Gentiles'.⁷⁴⁴

The Christ of the Bible is far from fitting into the selfish little perceptions of some. This Jesus is too vast to be confined in human ideas. And though He is too vast to fully comprehend, I make the words of the apostle Paul's prayer my own, which give me hope in this journey to know him: 'May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.'⁷⁴⁵

Christ, the Messiah, was not (nor is) anything that people expected. Jesus distanced himself from the religiosity of His time to connect with His people, with the common folk, with those forgotten and ostracised by society. Jesus did not take any position from a human perspective, but thousands followed him and could find the true Christ, not the one of their pretensions.

This Jesus had not come to fulfil the desires of the masses, but to fulfil the will of the Father.⁷⁴⁶ This Jesus had not come to give people what they wanted, but to give them what they needed. While His people expected him with a sword, He offered them a higher way: the liberation of their souls, a path of surrender and humility, a path of love and simplicity.

⁷⁴³ Kraybill, p. 21.

⁷⁴⁴ Isaiah 9:1 NRSVUE.

⁷⁴⁵ Ephesians 3:19 New Living Translation.

⁷⁴⁶ John 6:38 NRSVUE.

This Messiah, who healed thousands, who washed the feet of simple men, who loved and called many to know him as he walked through the villages, embraced his cross, embraced suffering, and with what seemed ‘weak’,⁷⁴⁷ He triumphed eternally to offer us a living hope.

Instead of revealing himself to the powerful, and those in positions of authority, Jesus revealed himself to children, revealed himself to humble women, revealed himself to simple shepherds on a cold night in Bethlehem. Because to know this Christ, the true one, there is no other way than through humility and simplicity of heart.

This Jesus, who being a servant was also a king, who being powerful also died, who had died also rose, and having risen also appeared to several, to those simple followers, announced His victory, invited them to follow him, and to transform the world.

Jesus is not what we think, He is not what we expect, He is not what we desire. This servant and king announced His kingdom, an upside-down kingdom. The paradoxes and dualities of His essence invite us to look at life from a divergent and transformative perspective.

And that Jesus, the one on the cross, is the same Jesus who calls us to know him, challenging every religious view of himself, for religions offer ways to reach God, but this Christ became human to approach human beings. He stripped himself of his glory to express his love, offer us hope, and invite us to follow him.

Thus, during his time in the ancient Roman Empire, Christ showed us a new way, and He shaped for us a new humanity, he shaped for us love, values, and principles that revive us and bring us closer to him, making us more human.

This is the Christ that all theological education must embrace, immerse itself in his presence, and encourage others to go out into their communities and communicate this truth.

⁷⁴⁷ 1 Corinthians 1:25 NRSVUE.

However, we cannot achieve this with mistaken perceptions, but by the grace of his Spirit that reveals to us the Lord of Lords, the One who came to transform everything.

Our South American communities (and communities worldwide) desperately need this Christ, the one from the Bible. Theological education is called to train those who will lead others to the true Lord.

If the purpose of theological education is formation for transformation, then that formation must be steeped in the model of humanity that the teacher from Galilee showed us. If theological education is transformative, it must facilitate spaces for reflection and learning about this new model of humanity that Christ has shown us.

An educational model that promotes the new and true humanity that Christ exemplified for us, with the values and principles that will free our society from its ailments. A countercultural educational model, nourished by the truth of *the Christ of the Kingdom* and aware of its particular history and context.

The educational model centred on the *Christ of the Kingdom* will shape a community of followers who learn on the journey, instruct one another, and engage collectively in the educational process. Paulo Freire identifies three types of churches in Latin America, and one of these might capture the characteristics of the *educational community* that emerges around these references for an educational model.

The first one is the traditional church. According to Freire, this church holds influence over the masses and views the world as a ‘place of sin’, which Cheryl Bridges Johns refers to as ‘a dichotomising rejection of the world’.⁷⁴⁸ According to Freire, this church is composed of

⁷⁴⁸ Cheryl Bridges Johns, *Pentecostal Formation: A Pedagogy among the Oppressed*, ed. by John Christopher Thomas, Rick D. Moore and Steven J. Land (Wipf & Stock, 2010), p. 17.

those ‘seeking to reach Transcendence without going through worldliness, they want the Meta-historical without experiencing History; they want salvation without liberation.’⁷⁴⁹

The traditional church is characterised by providing an alienating, alienated, and paralysing education without transformative praxis, or in Freire's words, 'a banking education.'⁷⁵⁰

The second church recognised by Freire is the modernising church, which he describes as having moved away from tradition and, ‘in popular environments, experienced a conversion of both theological and pedagogical forms and structures’.⁷⁵¹ Consequently, it is a populist church but does not actually bring about social change. This church is focused on numbers rather than individual stories or people. Therefore, ‘while traditionalist Churches alienate the dominated social classes by presenting the world as antagonistic, the modernising Church alienates them differently by supporting reformisms that preserve the status quo.’⁷⁵²

The education of the modernising church is a ‘banking education’, where everything necessary is provided to the oppressed classes, but there is no interaction or dialogue with them, as the purpose is to keep them where they are and not raise awareness.⁷⁵³

Faced with such a reality, Paulo Freire recognises the need for a third church (*educational community*), the prophetic church. According to Freire, this church is ‘prophetic, utopian, and hopeful’.⁷⁵⁴ This church ‘rejects all those palliative welfare measures or reforms

⁷⁴⁹ Freire, 1972, p. 15.

⁷⁵⁰ Bridges Johns, p. 17

⁷⁵¹ Juan Pablo Espinosa Arce, ‘Paulo Freire y la teología latinoamericana de la liberación’, *RAM*, 8.1 (2017), 135-149 (145).

⁷⁵² Paulo Freire, *La misión educativa de las Iglesias en América Latina* (Fundación Obispo Manuel Larraín, 1972), p. 19.

⁷⁵³ Espinosa Arce, p. 146.

⁷⁵⁴ Freire, p. 22.

that do not call communities together, which in Freire's terms constitute the foundation of banking education, alienating and systematic.'⁷⁵⁵

The mission of this prophetic church is to create awareness through a 'dialogic and progressive' education. The characteristic of the educator in this prophetic church context also changes, as 'the educator is no longer merely the one who educates but the one who, while educating, is being educated through dialogue with the educated, who, as they are educated, also educate. Thus, both become subjects of the process in which they grow together.'⁷⁵⁶

Thus, Freire calls upon us to embrace a 'humanistic and humanising pedagogy that, conscious of the creative potential of the learners, extracts in a Socratic manner (through dialogue) those conditions that will enable the emergence of better living conditions and bring about the birth of the utopian and hopeful Church.'⁷⁵⁷

Through this Socratic method, arises this conscientising dialogue that provides hope and has the potential to be revolutionary, transformative, as it recognises the world and history 'as a pedagogical place, as a space of encounter and permanent conflict' where a different path is possible, and we provoke it through an education that liberates, an education that transforms.⁷⁵⁸

Hence, the educational spaces emerge as 'a believing community that testifies how the Kingdom of God also signifies a revolution, as it comes to dismantle those logics of slavery and settlement that prevent the pedagogical subject from becoming a builder of a new society'. And thus, in community, as a body, 'it becomes Easter, a journey of exodus, liberation, and interpersonal engagement.'⁷⁵⁹

⁷⁵⁵ Espinosa Arce, 146.

⁷⁵⁶ Freire, p. 92.

⁷⁵⁷ Espinosa Arce, p. 147.

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid.

In this *educational community*, King Jesus inspires us to educate for transformation because those who have been transformed by the king can then propagate the transformative values of this kingdom that can generate revolutions altering the established order in our communities.

It is crucial to consider that the transformation of the Spirit is comprehensive, affecting our consciousness, our inner being, and is evident in the revolutionary, liberating, and transformative actions in which we engage as sons and daughters of God, as citizens of His kingdom, and as educators. It is an undivided whole, generated by the liberating truth of this Kingdom that has arrived among us.

Therefore, as a church, as an *educational community* we are called to embrace God's *holistic and liberating* mission.

René Padilla refers to this mission as follows:

When the church [educational community] commits to the comprehensive mission and aims to communicate the gospel through all that it 'is,' 'does,' and 'says,' it understands that its purpose is not to become large in number, materially rich, or politically powerful. Its purpose is to embody the values of the Kingdom of God and bear witness to the love and justice revealed in Jesus Christ, in the power of the Spirit, for the transformation of human life in all its dimensions, both at a personal and community level.⁷⁶⁰

Moreover, we have been equipped for this task by receiving gifts as members of the body of Christ, to exercise our priesthood to which we have been 'ordained' through baptism. Thus, as priests, our mission is to be 'in the service of God and his justice', where no sphere of human life 'escapes the orbit of the sovereignty of Jesus Christ'. According to Padilla, this mission is comprehensive and is the means appointed by God to carry out, through the church,

⁷⁶⁰ René Padilla, *¿Qué es la misión integral?*, (Ediciones Kairós, 2006) pp. 15-16.

in the power of the Spirit, His purpose of love and justice revealed in Jesus Christ throughout history.⁷⁶¹

In this holistic mission, ‘the proclamation of the gospel is inseparable from the concrete manifestation of God's love’,⁷⁶² and as Christians, we share with God the concern ‘for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of people from all forms of oppression’.⁷⁶³

I believe that the comprehensive mission to which we have been called is possible, as possible as Christ announced the kingdom among us and anticipated it throughout His entire life. According to Báez Camargo, the task that remains for us is to raise awareness of our revolutionary vocation and to understand this comprehensive/holistic mission as achievable and possible, as a foretaste of the Kingdom, embodying the values and life of the Kingdom through works that transform our entire reality.⁷⁶⁴

David Bosch defines the comprehensive mission of the church as follows:

The mission is carried out where the church, in its entire comprehensive commitment to the world and the full scope of its message, bears witness in word and action, in the form of a servant, concerning unbelief and exploitation, discrimination and violence, but also regarding salvation, healing, liberation, reconciliation, and righteousness.⁷⁶⁵

This same commitment, this same awareness, must be embraced by all theological education, with a prophetic pedagogy in line with the surrounding reality, yet subversive, disrupting the status quo through peace, fellowship, community sense, liberating actions, and grounded in the power of Christ's love.

⁷⁶¹ Ibid, p. 17-18.

⁷⁶² Ibid, p. 32.

⁷⁶³ *The Lausanne Covenant* (1974), *Lausanne Movement* <<https://lausanne.org/statement/lausanne-covenant>> [accessed 30 November 2024].

⁷⁶⁴ Gonzalo Báez Camargo, *El comunismo, el cristianismo y los cristianos* (Casa Unida de Publicaciones, 1960), p. 100.

⁷⁶⁵ Bosch in Padilla, p. 47.

All contextual and Christ-centred theological education should seek this awareness of the Kingdom, dispelling doubts about our revolutionary nature and shaping leaders who accompany the transformation that comes from the power of the Spirit in communities, in the unknown, in the peripheries, as transformative, historical actions in line with the signs of the times.

Any theological education that fails to awaken consciousness of the reality that surrounds us, the political, social, and economic challenges of its time, is an education that shies away from commitments, does not awaken wills, and does not inspire to take a stand, consciousness, and action towards our surroundings.

It's also a fragmented education that fails to consider comprehensive transformation and its holistic mission in delivering the message of the Kingdom, this Kingdom that transforms everything, this King who invites us to disrupt the order through daily actions, in the power of His strength and under the guidance of His Spirit.

Contextual theological education views reality with an 'eschatology' of hope, awakens consciousness, promotes integral/holistic mission, and sends forth men and women who can, in turn, break the cycle, rousing communities from lethargy in a society that has come from years of excessive passivity and constant conformity. This is the true contextual theological education, a promoter of hope, life, and transformation inspired and focused on the Christ of the Kingdom.

As a Christian of Anabaptist tradition, I embrace the cause of liberation in Latin America, distancing myself from narratives steeped in resentment for the history of colonisation and from discourses of hatred or anti-imperialism. Instead, the driving force behind my desire to serve for freedom is the truth of the Kingdom of God, which has come to transform everything.

Chapter Five⁷⁶⁶

General Concluding Remarks

A. Introduction

This chapter has attempted to summarise the key points of this research. In a sense, this section implicitly captures the ideas of the authors considered throughout the research, even though they have not been directly stated. This synthesis is my attempt to condense the key points and offer my final reading of the issues addressed in this research. I try to make my own voice heard in section ‘E. Final reflections and suggestions’ of this chapter.

To begin with, I would like to refer to Preiswerk, who suggests that navigating ‘the waters’ of ministerial formation in Latin America means navigating waters that are ‘somewhat rough’:

We navigate between improvisations and sometimes authoritarian structures or methods. In the formulations of our faith, we are torn between the search for what is our own and the impositions of theological systems and codes that are sometimes foreign. Our multiple identities [...] cultural, ecclesial or confessional [...] impose on us contradictory loyalties. It is difficult for us to move away from the reproduction of old models, from the somewhat deteriorated paths, to look for new ways. [We long for] effective planning. We are dizzyed by the gaps in our theologies as well as by the pedagogical gullies of our teaching-learning practices. Our pilgrimage yearns for innovative proposals and paths.⁷⁶⁷

In my view, Preiswerk’s quote accurately portrays the current situation and highlights several of the major challenges that theological education faces in this region. Some of these challenges were addressed in the contextual analysis of this research.

⁷⁶⁶ AI has been used to translate from Spanish to English and to correct certain grammatical expressions throughout the chapter. Another resource used throughout this work is Deepl.com, a translation tool.

⁷⁶⁷ Preiswerk, p. 15.

In such a challenging context, theological education is carried out, and by God's grace, we have seen the formation of leaders and pastors who have served the Latin American church with love and wisdom.

These challenges are extensive and demand that Latin American educational communities, as a collective and as members of the body of Christ, encourage one another to envision new and creative ways to address these issues in order to provide theological education that is relevant to the context in which we serve.

My goal with this research is to provide resources that could help us imagine new ways of doing theological education in Paraguay, which might also benefit other educational communities in Latin America. I am confident that under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and as a 'body', we will be able to find 'our way.'

Having presented these brief introductory ideas, I would like to state that my specific objective in this final chapter is *to provide general concluding remarks through a summary of the findings of this research, along with some final suggestions and comments.*

Therefore, in the following section, I will provide a summary of the challenges addressed in this research and the resources suggested across three different approaches.

It is worth noting that the challenges discussed in this research are analysed in Chapter one. Subsequently, each of the three challenges is addressed in Chapters two, three, and four, corresponding to the three distinct approaches: biblical, theological, and pedagogical, respectively.⁷⁶⁸

⁷⁶⁸ Clarification Note: In Chapter 1 of this research, several key (though not all) existing challenges are mentioned, and three of these challenges were selected for exploration. I consider these three challenges particularly significant. The arrangement of challenges and the provision of resources establish a structured framework for the reflections presented in this research, but there is no other logic in the order or presentation of the challenges and the approaches used to address them.

B. The First Challenge: A Restrictive Pedagogy

1. The Key Characteristics of the First Challenge

As mentioned in the first chapter of this research, among the various challenges faced by Latin American/Paraguayan theological education today is a pedagogy that restricts freedom of thought and does not consider learners in all their abilities and faculties as human beings who can think, imagine, and create. It should be noted that this pedagogy does not necessarily mean that theological education is dictatorial. However, as suggested in previous chapters, certain practices evoke past eras characterised by limiting and alienating pedagogical methods.

In the context of Paraguay, restrictive education is fundamentally seen as a ‘factory education’, which considers students as raw material that needs to be processed and as receptacles to be filled with knowledge, which Freire would call ‘banking education.’ This approach fails to encourage students to take a more active role in their learning process. Additionally, Paraguayan education is encyclopaedic, covering multiple disciplines and topics, but often lacks depth, specialisation, connection with reality, and fosters excessive memorisation.

Along the same lines, an investigation conducted in certain subjects of the study programme at the institution under consideration in this research has shown a lack of emphasis on assessing ‘knowing how to be’ and ‘knowing how to do’. The majority of educational objectives are confined to levels of ‘remembering’ and ‘understanding’ (the first two levels of Bloom's taxonomy as it was presented in Chapter one), with few objectives focused on ‘analysing’ and ‘applying.’

These aspects, discussed in Chapter one of this research, reveal that some of these challenges are not unique to Paraguay but are prevalent throughout the region. Formal

theological education at the higher level is thus immersed in the challenging reality of the region and the country.

To comprehend the emergence of restrictive pedagogy, it is essential to adopt a retrospective or historical perspective. Restrictive practices of thought and an alienating education, one that disregards human faculties and abilities, began to take shape during the colonial era. Colonisers in Latin America determined what should be learned and by whom. While education is meant to empower individuals, under a colonising regime that suppresses freedoms, controlling education becomes imperative to achieve expansionist goals.

Furthermore, higher and religious education played pivotal roles in the objectives of colonisation. Education in Latin America, though decontextualised, served the interests of imperial powers by moulding citizens useful for political objectives of the era. Subsequently, Latin American dictatorships continued this practice to some extent, using education to shape compliant citizens respectful of the status quo, while repressing critical thought and freedoms.

Thus, freedom of thought and critical thinking has consistently been perceived as threats by empires and regimes intent on maintaining control and pursuing alienating and dictatorial objectives.

2. Biblical Approach to Address a Restrictive Pedagogy

My response to the challenge of restrictive pedagogy is to draw on a biblical approach, analysing two significant events (Exodus 14 and John 6), in order to be inspired by divine pedagogical action.

In Exodus 14, God reveals himself through a monumental act of salvation, liberating Israel from slavery in Egypt. With this event, God seeks not only physical freedom, but also spiritual freedom, transforming the hearts of the people so that they trust and believe in God.

Thus begins a journey of discovery and transformation, in which the initial fear of their oppressors is replaced by a reverent fear of God, paving the way for trust to develop in this God who had initiated the liberation of his people.

In the same way, in John 6, Jesus reveals himself to his disciples through signs and teachings, inviting them to a deeper faith and to go beyond superficiality. Jesus challenges his audience to look beyond the signs and understand their true meaning. It is an invitation to embark on a journey of progressive discovery and understanding. At the end of this journey, the result will be to know ‘the Word.’

So, the disciples of Jesus, the twelve, come out of the ‘surface’ to deepen their vision of the ‘miracles’ that Jesus was performing, and discover that these were ‘signs’ through which the Messiah was revealing himself to them. Finally, they express through Peter an expression of faith and praise to the Christ who has words of eternal life.

Both cases illustrate a progressive learning process that builds on prior knowledge and leads to personal and communal transformation. Divine teaching adapts to the specific needs and contexts of the people rather than adhering to a rigid methodology. The cause of this is a ‘pedagogy of love’, in which God's love is the catalyst for all his pedagogical actions. His love is the reason why the path of formation, under the guidance of the Spirit, takes us through ‘stations and places’ that touch the point of the matter, and lead us to encounter who we really are.

Additionally, it's noted that divine pedagogical action does not always follow the same pattern, direction or approach. For example, in Deuteronomy 6, God uses a more traditional method to teach a new generation of Israelites before entering the Promised Land. Here, the teachings are clear and direct, establishing fundamental principles to be memorised and passed down through generations. This method responds to a specific context where the people are

surrounded by nations that do not know God, necessitating a firm affirmation of Israel's identity and beliefs.

We can then see that Jesus often taught through parables. Although these stories are fictional, they contained elements that were very familiar to people in that specific cultural context. Thus, the parables served as a teaching method that incorporated elements of socio-cultural and contextual learning.

Thereby, we could go on describing various approaches that God adopted to guide his people and individuals on the pilgrimage of faith. They are diverse stories and experiences, sometimes with some common elements, but diverse and dynamic. Therefore, divine pedagogical action is eclectic, diverse, dynamic, and profoundly linked to the context and needs of the people.

Regarding the implications for contextual theological education, I suggest that theological educators should embrace their context, understand their people, and consider their real needs. Rather than blindly following a pedagogical theory, theological institutions should design teaching and learning experiences based on love and an understanding of the context. Education cannot happen without loving the context and knowing its history and struggles.

Contextual theological education should start with the history of its people, their specific challenges, and needs.

The community to which we offer an educational service brings with them a wealth of rich stories, struggles and victories, challenges and lessons learned along the way. Their life experiences with God, in the church, their awareness of a calling to serve and continue learning, are invaluable elements that already enrich the educational experience in themselves and should, without a doubt, influence the development of an educational programme or curriculum.

In the same way, we see that God's pedagogical action was in line with the heart of the people, their experiences, ideas, and challenges. God included the history of His people, the promises of the past, their memories, images, and common elements of their daily reality. God spoke their language, became human, and embraced our reality to teach us His love.

God moved and acted out of love for his people, responding to the pain and suffering caused by injustice, as well as to the needs and faith of those who came to his call, appreciating that this God went out to meet them on a journey of discovery and transformation. Divine pedagogy is nothing other than that which springs from love for his people and the desire to liberate and transform the oppressed and unprotected, seeking to offer a better life, a life lived with wisdom.

What I'm pointing out is that our God immersed Himself in our reality to start from it and lead us toward those eternal truths He wanted to convey. In the same way, the characteristics of our environment should inspire and shape our programmes in order to achieve the essential contextual relevance for any curriculum.

This approach promotes freedom, authenticity, and hope, inviting students to actively engage in their community, much like the disciples did in the book of Acts.

While the importance of pedagogical theories is acknowledged, it is emphasised that these are tools to serve the purpose of transformative and contextual education. The educational mission should go beyond imparting knowledge, aiming to provoke changes that impact both individuals and communities, generating continuous and transformative actions.

It is important to acknowledge that these educational principles (building on prior knowledge, choosing methods that are contextually appropriate, and discerning the tools that promote holistic formation) are all widely recognised features of good practice in adult learning. However, within theological education they acquire a deeper and more integral meaning when

understood in the light of a sound theological foundation. Learning is not merely a cognitive or methodological process but also a spiritual, relational, and communal journey in which knowledge and transformation are inseparable.

Therefore, while educational theory benefits from the contributions of the human sciences, it must ultimately be grounded in theology, allowing pedagogy to reflect God's purposes in forming people for His mission. In this sense, Christian education cannot be detached from the reality of faith or from the context in which it takes place. Theories and methods need to engage both the lived experiences of learners and the theological convictions that sustain the educational vision.

When pedagogy is rooted in theological wisdom and contextually aware, it becomes a means of grace, an expression of God's love that nurtures holistic formation and fosters faithful discipleship. Thus, educational practice moves beyond mere technique, becoming participation in divine pedagogy, where teaching and learning reflect the transforming work of the Spirit. In this way, educational theory and theological reflection are woven together to shape an approach that is both contextually grounded and faith-integrated, promoting meaningful and transformative learning within theological education.

Theological education in Paraguay, for instance, faces the challenge of deeply understanding its people and their needs. This requires an eclectic methodological perspective and the design of a curriculum that responds to and draws from the local context. The goal is to invite others on a journey of discovery and learning, fostering freedom and creativity.

Therefore, the theological education curriculum must chart the course to guide students to embrace their context, to appreciate their history, to face their challenges, and to adopt a broader perspective of their reality. Thus, as theological education institutions, we will need to

discern which tools, experiences, and affections will be necessary to carry out the task of awakening awareness of context in those we lead through a process of holistic formation.

Just as God led the people of Israel and Christ led His disciples through a journey of learning and discovery, theological education should be an active experience of participating in God's love. This approach should be adopted by educators, institutions, and all those involved in theological education, committing to justice and resisting corruption and evil in their communities.

There are some questions that can lead our analysis of the reality and the challenges we face: How can we cultivate in students, through theological education, an awareness that they, and we ourselves, are active participants in God's love and His work within our community? How do we ensure that our engagement in the educational process is deeply meaningful, recognising that our journey unfolds within the context of God's Kingdom and His transformative power? How can we nurture this transcendent perspective within institutional frameworks, across diverse disciplines, and throughout the entire educational and theological experience?

It seems that this task surpasses mere educational duties; it is here (or at this point) that the truth of the Kingdom and the guidance of the Spirit of Jesus direct us towards the pathways leading to our desired destination.

We are called to embrace a pedagogy of love and an eclectic methodology, which urges us to actively engage in this love and educate from a perspective of justice and transformation. Theological education should reflect the transformative love of God, capable of changing everything. Educators should allow God's 'lamp' to illuminate their path, always seeking to transmit and live out that divine love that transforms hearts and communities.

The proposal is to let ourselves be inspired by divine pedagogy, and to create experiences of discovery and learning guided by God's love, a love that leads us to love the context, to embrace the cause of liberation and transformation of our communities, to consider pedagogical and didactic tools along the way, but centred on our active participation in the love for God and human beings. Thus, there are no thought-restricting pedagogies, but a living and powerful, transformative and liberating love that leads us to focus education on people, their needs and the freedoms God has already given them to create and recreate projects that enhance all of life. Theological education is about the whole of life and should be a way of fostering this active participation in God's project.

C. The Second Challenge: A Fragmented View of Theological Education

1. The Key Characteristics of the Second Challenge

Another challenge facing theological education in Paraguay is its fragmented perspective.

This fragmented view of theological education has been addressed in existing research, notably by Edward Farley in 1983 and more recently by Perry Shaw. Thus, this issue appears to be somewhat common in theological education.

The fragmentation of theological education is evident through various tensions. These tensions manifest in different forms, such as the spirituality vs. academia perspective, the poor integration of theory and practice, and the existing tensions among different branches of theology that sometimes seem to operate independently without integration or articulation in their actions.

In addition, some conceive theology as a discipline rooted in historical perspectives, while others approach it more from a contemporary and professional formation standpoint. The

church, theological seminaries, and universities all have their own visions of theological education, which might contribute to a fragmented perspective of this discipline.

I do not intend to assert whether any vision is correct or not, or whether seminaries or the church should dominate. Rather, I am suggesting that this fragmentation is a reality that requires wisdom from God to navigate these diverse currents within theology and theological education.

Furthermore, this situation suggests a need to redefine theological education and find a path towards unifying our vision of this service and ministry from an integrated perspective.

It's also worth noting that research conducted at the institution under study in this research framework has revealed dissatisfaction among pastors of associated churches with the training of their potential leaders. They perceive the training provided as irrelevant and lacking practical formation. In other words, students possess knowledge but struggle to apply it or contextualise what they know.

All of this indicates that the curriculum in Paraguayan theological education seems fragmented and lacks necessary articulation. It's essential to recognise that theological formation is complex and involves not only the training institution and students but also churches and other organisations. Often, these institutions fail to coordinate efforts effectively to improve theological education.

Thus, articulation and contextualisation are tasks that theologians, bible institutes, and the Paraguayan (or Latin American) church should undertake. These efforts aim to integrate components towards a more contextual and holistic theological education.

Therefore, theological education in Paraguay urgently needs to reclaim its unifying principle and holistic vision of what it means to educate theologically.

2. Theological Approach to Address a Fragmented View of Theological Education

My response to the challenge of a fragmented vision in theological education is from a theological perspective, inviting an examination of the thought of Saint Bonaventure. His theological proposal can serve as a significant resource against fragmentation by urging us to refocus on the source, centre, and ultimate goal of theological education.

Saint Bonaventure sees theology not merely as a field of study, but, as I understand it, as an ‘umbrella’ that encompasses and perfects all other knowledge through the light of Christ. According to Bonaventure, theology (or the knowledge of God) should illuminate all other disciplines, providing them with true meaning and leading us to the Source of all truth, beauty, and goodness. This does not imply that theology is the mother of all sciences, but rather that the knowledge of God enlightens our journey of learning and discovery.

Bonaventure's theology perceives all of life as originating from God and returning to him, transforming every aspect of existence through divine grace. This holistic vision rejects fragmentation, suggesting that knowledge or learning should embrace the fullness of life and lead to wisdom. His theology, deeply rooted in the Franciscan tradition, views life as a spiritual pilgrimage illuminated by Christ.

Central to Bonaventure's theology is the belief that all knowledge is possible because the Father of lights is the source of all light. Knowledge begins and ends in God, and the study of theology should always lead us back to him. In my understanding of Bonaventure's thought, Christ is the epistemological centre, the source, and the ultimate goal of all knowledge.

Bonaventure's integration of different forms of knowledge underscores the need for a unified vision in theological education. Christ, as the epistemological centre, perfects all forms of knowledge, offering an integrative framework for understanding and teaching. This

integrated approach challenges the fragmentation seen in many Christian institutions, calling for a holistic vision of education.

For Bonaventure, the ultimate goal of theology is love. The knowledge of God should move us to love him and others, reflecting the self-giving and service of Christ. Theology, therefore, is not mere speculation but a transformative experience leading to sanctification. Wisdom, or theology, is deeply intertwined with holiness, and true learning involves a spiritual discipline that moulds us into the image of Christ. Therefore, learning is a form of piety.⁷⁶⁹

If Christ is the source, centre, and ultimate end of all knowledge, then theological education needs to rediscover its meaning, its epistemological centre, and its ultimate purpose. This Bonaventurian vision can inspire our pedagogical and institutional structures, encouraging us to transcend established educational formats and adopt a transformative approach that fosters continuous learning, personal growth, and a deeper love for God and the world He created.

By embracing Bonaventure's integrative theological vision, we as educators have valuable resources to address fragmentation and create a more holistic and transformative educational experience that truly reflects the unity and love of God.

At the end of this section, we might consider some questions: How can theological education become a Christ-centred experience? In what ways could theological education be an expression of worship/love to Christ? How can this worship guide and illuminate the entire educational process? How can we foster a holistic view of all the educational experiences we offer, so that both students and teachers can 'connect the dots' throughout the process?⁷⁷⁰ How can we promote the vision of theological education as a form of piety? How can there be integration between the formational and pastoral aspects of learning and more formal learning?

⁷⁶⁹ Higon, *A Theology of Higher Education*, p. 163.

⁷⁷⁰ In other words: How can students be enabled to reflect on how all the different parts of their studies go together?

These are some questions, though certainly not all, that could help us to rethink and enrich our educational endeavour. Part of our task is to continue to ask good questions that lead us, as a discerning community, to answer them in the light of God's wisdom.

These questions invite reflection on how theological convictions shape the teaching–learning process and how educational methods can faithfully embody a Christian understanding of formation. As discussed in the Introduction of this research, theology provides the foundation upon which educational theory is built, and educational theory, in turn, gives rise to pedagogical practice. This interrelationship is vital, since teaching within theological education cannot be separated from the theological vision that sustains it.

The answers to these “how” questions, therefore, do not lie merely in methodological adjustments but in the development of a pedagogy shaped by theology, one that integrates faith and learning, grounds educational theory in theological wisdom, and orients pedagogical practice toward holistic transformation in the light of God’s purposes. This kind of practice recognises that true formation extends beyond the acquisition of knowledge to the shaping of character and the nurturing of spiritual maturity.

In this sense, theological education must seek coherence between what it believes, what it teaches, and how it teaches. Pedagogical practice becomes an expression of theological conviction, and theology, in turn, offers the framework that gives meaning and direction to education. Thus, a theologically informed pedagogy becomes a bridge between theory and practice, between faith and context, and between reflection and action. In continuity with the argument developed throughout this research, such a pedagogy contributes to a contextualised, holistic, and faith-integrated vision of theological education, one that enables both educators and learners to participate in God’s ongoing work of transformation within their own contexts.

D. The Third Challenge: The Lack of a Contextual Educational Model for Theological Education

1. The Key Characteristics of the Third Challenge

In the contextual analysis at the beginning of this research, a brief study of the historical phases of the curriculum in Latin American higher education was conducted. It was found that these phases consist of three models: the Spanish-mediaeval model, the French-Napoleonic model, and the American research model. In other words, the Latin American curriculum has historically drawn inspiration from these three examples.

It should be noted that there are examples of university models from other regions that were applied ‘directly’ in Latin America during the colonial period. These models proved to be ineffective and completely out of context at that time.

Given this historical perspective on the phases of curriculum transformation in Latin America, the question arises: is there a genuinely Latin American curriculum?

On the other hand, considering the findings of this research, the study curriculum of the institution in question has been inspired by North American models. It is important to note that drawing inspiration from models outside our context is not necessarily negative. This can be very helpful, but it is crucial to distinguish between an uncritical adoption and a critical/contextual adaptation of these models.

Decolonising education does not mean eliminating current structures but rather including those that have not been considered. In other words, we do not seek to eliminate existing perspectives but to enrich them with our own, contextual, and relevant perspectives that may emerge from our communities.

Furthermore, it is important to define what an educational model is, which is essentially the conceptualisation of education in a specific context. In other words, the educational model expresses the understanding and definition of education in a particular setting. Thus, the educational model guides the development of a curriculum towards contextual forms and methods that respond to the needs and aspirations of a specific environment.

Therefore, when we adapt a curriculum uncritically, we are also adopting an educational model that responds to contexts different from our own. This could lead to offering an education that is irrelevant and disconnected from our context, depriving us of the opportunity to think about education from and for our environment.

Thus, the question could be expanded to: is there an educational model and, therefore, a curriculum in Paraguayan theological education that is contextual?

All this highlights the decontextualisation of theological education, not only in Paraguay but throughout Latin America, and the need to invite us to think and imagine theological education from our region.

2. Pedagogical Approach to Address the Lack of a Contextual Educational Model

My response to the lack of a contextual educational model is a pedagogical approach.⁷⁷¹ However, it is important to clarify that while my approach is pedagogical, the proposal itself is a theological resource rooted in a Christology understood through the Kingdom of God. This theological insight can enrich a relevant educational model for theological education.

Chapter four explores the meaning of theological education within the broader context of Christian education. It is suggested that, given the peculiarities of our context, defining

⁷⁷¹ The approach is pedagogical, considering that the fourth chapter of this research addresses the 'educational model' as a crucial element underlying the curriculum. The educational model, as a pedagogical element, is discussed from various theories or pedagogical perspectives as it was mentioned in Chapter four.

theological education within the framework of the Kingdom of God might be pertinent. The Kingdom transforms everything and liberates humanity from all forms of alienation, which is particularly relevant considering the history of colonisation and oppression in Latin America. Thus, this understanding of theological education should be the first element to inform an educational model for theological education in the Paraguayan/Latin American context.

In consideration of the Anabaptist tradition, it is proposed that the contextual educational model can be enriched by this tradition, fostering the creation of a *Community of Critical Discernment* in a context marked by limited critical reflection and abstract thinking.

The Anabaptist tradition emphasises the possibility of collective discernment, as all individuals are guided by the Holy Spirit. This allows us to reflect on social, political, and cultural realities from a faith-based perspective in Christ, within a collective and communal context. The Spirit of Jesus empowers us to view contemporary challenges and realities through a Christian lens, grounded in His teachings.

In this way, theological education is also committed to the surrounding reality, addressing the needs and challenges of the context, and fostering critical discernment to envision projects and paths through which the Church can help promote freedom and God's salvation.

In light of the Anabaptist tradition, we can also promote a *divergent mission and identity* that foster projects of contextual transformation.

This divergent mission and identity can only emerge from the example of Christ, who is the source from which they flow and the ultimate model of coherence and harmony between actions and identity. Thus, this mission is Christ-centred, nourished by Jesus' ministry, His life, and His Spirit, which empowers us to live in contrast to the surrounding reality.

When the context permeates the curriculum, theological education can produce divergent leaders who respond with transformative actions for their communities.

Additionally, an educational model grounded in commitments arising from an Anabaptist understanding of the Incarnation is suggested. The commitments that emerge from this understanding and a *Christ-centred worldview* include those to creation, history, the community of followers, oneself, and the broader context.

One of the emphases of Anabaptism has been on the incarnation of Christ. The Word made flesh has shown us how to live. This life that imitates Christ recognises that the Son of God came to dignify human life and to model a new humanity committed to the world around it, a world that is a gift from God.

On the other hand, the Kingdom of God is characterised by transformation. This new order alters social structure, and those who have been transformed unite under a new government, that of the King of kings. Jesus anticipated the Kingdom through his actions, words, and works, throughout his entire pattern of life.

Theological education should be designed based on an educational model centred on Christ, aligned with the context, and dependent on the work of the Spirit of Christ. This path involves freeing oneself from theological lenses that may be tainted by the deficiencies of the Spanish or Latin American Christ and allowing oneself to be enlightened by the Christ of the Kingdom.

Theology is an 'attempt', and we depend on the Spirit of Jesus for this attempt to lead us to know him better, not other Christ, but the son of a carpenter who illuminated the "land beyond the Jordan, in Galilee of the Gentiles." This Christ distanced himself from the religiosity of his time to connect with his people, with the forgotten and marginalised by society. He did

not come to fulfil the desires of the masses, but to offer liberation to their souls, a path of surrender and humility, of love and simplicity.

The holistic mission to which we have been called is possible, as Christ announced the Kingdom among us and anticipated it throughout his life. This same awareness must be adopted by all theological education, with a prophetic pedagogy aligned with the surrounding reality, yet subversive, altering the status quo through peace, fraternity, communal sense, and liberating actions, grounded in the power of Christ's love.

We are called to embrace a humanistic and humanising pedagogy, recognising the world and history as a pedagogical space of perpetual conflict, where a different path is possible through education that liberates and transforms.

Contextual theological education must awaken awareness of the surrounding reality, the political, social, and economic challenges of its time. It must inspire us to take a stance, consciousness, and action towards our environment. This education, centred on the Christ of the Kingdom, seeks holistic transformation, promoting hope, life, and transformation inspired and focused on the Christ of the Bible.

This educational model will form a community of followers who learn on the journey, instruct each other, and collectively participate in the educational process, reflecting the values of the Kingdom of God in all dimensions of human life.

Finally, there are some questions that might help us continue analysing our reality and considering the challenges we might face: How can we foster a Kingdom perspective among students and staff in theological education? How will this Kingdom vision 'converse' with the reality of our community members and their vision or understanding of the Kingdom of God? How can we maintain a Kingdom vision amidst the daily challenges of theological education

and routine administrative and academic activities? How can our Kingdom vision engage with the reality of our nation and our broader community?

E. Final Thoughts and Suggestions

Reflecting on the entire journey of this research, I propose that the following statement captures its essence and highlights the significant finding:

'Theological education that seeks to be relevant in the Paraguayan/Latin American context is fundamentally nourished, defined, and shaped by a biblical, liberating, non-alienating, and transformative Christology of the Kingdom of God.'

This statement also provides a structure for my final reflections and recommendations, as each aspect (nurtured, defined and shaped) will be developed in more detail below.

Firstly, I want to emphasise that relevant theological education is **nourished** by this Christology of the Kingdom of God.

Chapter two examines how Exodus 14 and John 6 are also narratives where, in addition to other themes and situations, God's people or Jesus' disciples engage in both learning and unlearning. I do not interpret these passages strictly from a pedagogical perspective, nor do I read them 'pedagogically.' Rather, I propose that these stories guide, inspire, and invite us to shape a pedagogy of love and adopt an eclectic methodology.

My analysis of these biblical passages has been conducted from a biblical-exegetical perspective, with pedagogical aims, seeking to draw inspiration for imagining new ways of doing theological education in this region.

These passages show us that God teaches and guides His people with patience and love. Similarly, Christ teaches and crystallises His teachings while guiding a journey of learning and discovery. Both Exodus 14 and John 6 eventually culminate in an expression of worship. In

Exodus, this is seen in Chapter 15 when Moses sings a triumphant song of praise to God after the cosmic events narrated in the previous chapter, culminating in the Israelites' proclamation of faith and fear in God. In John 6, we find Peter's declaration of faith on behalf of the twelve, which is also an expression and climax of worship to the Christ who has the words of eternal life.

The doubts, fears, and failures of God's people in these biblical passages stand in stark contrast to the expressions of praise and worship, faith, and trust in God at the climaxes of these stories. Thus, divine pedagogical action transfigures the particular realities of God's people, turning fear and doubt into expressions of praise and faith. These events also demonstrate how God patiently and progressively guides us on the path of discovery, forming or shaping us in life, exodus, and worship.

I understand that divine pedagogical action is a transversal element of the life of God's people. It transcends realities, pains, sufferings, and needs, going deeper and inviting us to move beyond the surface and immerse ourselves in true theology, in wisdom, in the knowledge of God and his transformative love. Thus, the God of life sets the table, invites his people, and breaks into their particular and historical realities to awaken their minds and souls to know him and themselves.

God's love for his people, for his followers, leads him to act and guide them towards true freedom, to the knowledge of his plans for them, and to the transformation that only divine love can bring about.

The love that nurtures this formation is far from abstract. God has provided the highest and most sublime example for us to understand his love: Christ, the image of the living God, the only begotten Son of God, who came near, humbled himself, and took our place. He became flesh and embraced our pain, became blood, and embraced our shame.

This love surpasses us. This love, with a name and a body, with grace and justice, is revealed to us as the highest expression of love. God has gone beyond; He demonstrated His love by giving it a body and a name, a name above all names.

Therefore, all education that aspires to contextual relevance, that seeks to arise and serve from the reality of the people, is nourished by this transformative love; it is sustained, strengthened, and invigorated in this love.

God's love for His people and His awareness of their real needs are intrinsically connected to His pedagogical actions. Although there is no 'formal pedagogy' guiding His actions, there is a context to address, and a loving God who desires to intervene and act. God's love precedes any pedagogy, and the pedagogy that emerges will be nourished and connected to the surrounding reality by that love which underpins it.

If it is the Son of God, His eternal love, and His person that inspire us to shape a contextual pedagogy, and consequently an eclectic methodology functional to this transformative and humanising purpose, then it is our task as theological educators to understand theological education within the framework of the Christology of the Kingdom of God.

So, we need to theologise Theological Education, reflecting theologically on the meaning of our pedagogical action, but to do so in Latin America, we need a biblical, liberating, non-alienating, and transformative Christology rooted in the Kingdom of God.

Furthermore, I refer to the second aspect of my statement made at the beginning of this section: theological education that aspires to relevant action is also *defined* by this Christology of the Kingdom of God.

In Chapter three of this research, I approached theology from a Bonaventurian perspective, understanding theology as wisdom or sapientia. In my reading of Saint Bonaventure, I understand that the Father of lights is the source, the epistemological centre, and the ultimate goal of all knowledge.

This contribution from Saint Bonaventure invites us to redefine theology, to rediscover its greatness. Nevertheless, I would like to point out that by 'greatness', I do not mean placing theology above other sciences or disciplines but referring to the fact of 'knowing God.'

From an epistemological perspective, we can know God through Christ. The Father has revealed himself to us through his only begotten Son. It is possible to know God because he took the first step to make himself known to us; he drew near and called us to know him.

In John 8:12, Christ said, "I am the light of the world." Thus, the Father of all lights (or all knowledge) has revealed himself through his Son, who is the light of the world. This light perfects all knowledge. In the light of Christ, all knowledge finds its purpose and meaning, so the paradox is that everything both begins and ends in him. All knowledge is given by the Father of lights and culminates in returning to its source, for what we know is by him, for him, and through him.

The Father of lights, who glorified his Son, the light of the world, is the highest and ultimate reason we can know, and through whom we can know God. In other words, no fruitful, liberating, or transformative knowledge exists outside this epistemological centre: Christ.

If knowledge acquires its true meaning and purpose in the light of the world, then it will not be possible to truly know without a Christology shaped in the light of the Kingdom of God.

Finally, as per my initial declaration, relevant theological education is *shaped* by a biblical, liberating, non-alienating, and transformative Christology of the Kingdom of God.

The forms that theological education might take are always a central concern in any institution. We constantly seek approved forms, patterns, templates, and models to apply in education.

This is not inherently negative. However, considering the purposes of this research, I have not aimed to provide a specific curriculum or format to follow but sought to provide biblical, theological, and pedagogical elements that have potential to encourage and challenge us to imagine new horizons for relevant or contextual theological education.

So, Chapter four tackles the challenge of developing an educational model for theological education that responds to our context. Therefore, the forms and models can vary and respond specifically to each environment, developing in accordance with the surrounding reality and aiming to meet the needs and challenges of a community.

While I have not provided a pattern for establishing this educational model, I have suggested traits that this model can acquire to be relevant. These traits arise from considering the theological heritage, the historical vision of the region, and both examined in light of a Christology of the Kingdom.

This leads us to examine the historical context in Latin America, where we see a distorted and repressive Christology. In contrast, I have also explored the transformative and liberating nature of the Christology of the Kingdom of God.

Centuries of repression in Paraguay/Latin America have stifled critical thinking and personal reasoning, suppressing a fundamental aspect of human nature: the ability to think and critique. As beings created in God's image, every person is capable of thought and decision-making. However, political powers and empires have historically sought to suppress these abilities through education, creating a compliant and obedient populace.

In contrast to these kingdoms, the Christ of the Kingdom came to transform and liberate, to lead human beings to recover their true identity. Thus, Christ, as the paradigm of the new humanity, invites us to be freed from all alienation and to be transfigured into that new humanity shaped by him.⁷⁷²

Only the Christ of the Kingdom can establish a community of critical discernment, with divergent identity and mission, and a renewed worldview based on a Christ-centred vision.

Therefore, the significant finding of this research is that the Christ of the Kingdom nourishes, defines, and shapes any theological education that aims to be contextually relevant.

This Christology is liberating, non-alienating, and transformative because it is rooted in the Bible and framed within the reality of the Kingdom of God. Being grounded in the eternal truth of this Kingdom, it liberates, does not alienate, and transforms.

It liberates by removing all forms of oppression, injustice, sin, and power structures. It does not alienate us because it invites us to live out our true humanity. It transforms because Christ, in His eternal love, refuses to leave us unchanged. He guides, teaches, and shapes us with patience and love, leading us on a journey of self or personal discovery in the grace and love of our Creator.

Through the Christology of the Kingdom, we can envision a theological education that is liberating, non-alienating, and transformative. Theologising theological education through the lens of Christ's Kingdom is life-giving, dynamic, and freedom-promoting. Such education, framed and understood in the reality of the Kingdom, promotes a true pedagogy of the Kingdom, where the Sermon on the Mount might be considered the ultimate curriculum.

⁷⁷² Schipani, pp. 81, 86.

In this way, contextual theological education, centred on the person of Christ, becomes a formation in love. The highest level of learning is reached in and through that love, which is reflected in how we love the members of our community, how we love our nation, how we love ourselves and who we are, and how we love Christ, extending that love to all those around us.

Contextual theological education, rooted in the love of Christ, promotes that love through all its actions and embraces the surrounding reality with love and hope, driven by the power of the Holy Spirit. The banner of Christ, His cause of love and liberation, also becomes the cause that theological education will embrace, fostering a liberating and transformative learning experience, inspired by the person of Jesus, the Christ of the Kingdom.

When theological education is inspired by Christ, it will undoubtedly lead to exodus, liberation, and transformation. Therefore, contextual theological education is an invitation to our communities to participate in God's love, to spread that love, and to promote freedom.

So, the significant finding of this research is none other than Christ, the Christ of the Kingdom. While some may argue that this is not a 'new revelation', it is an inescapable truth. As the head of the church, the firstborn from the dead, He has supremacy in everything, and in this research is no exception. Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Appendix

This section includes the questionnaire with respondents' answers provided by the IBA.

Cuestionario a Estudiantes del IBA

1. Page 1

1. Favor indicar el sexo:				
Answer Choices			Porcentaje de respuesta	Respuesta total
1	Femenino		34.69%	17
2	Masculino		65.31%	32
			respondido	49
			pasado por alto	0

2. Escoge la opción que te describe:				
Answer Choices			Porcentaje de respuesta	Respuesta total
1	Proengo de una zona rural		32.65%	16
2	Proengo de una zona urbana		67.35%	33
			respondido	49
			pasado por alto	0

3. Soy un/una estudiante del:				
Answer Choices			Porcentaje de respuesta	Respuesta total
1	Primer Curso		44.90%	22
2	Segundo Curso		22.45%	11
3	Tercer Curso		16.33%	8
4	Cuarto Curso		16.33%	8
			respondido	49
			pasado por alto	0

4. Mi objetivo es:

Answer Choices			Porcentaje de respuesta	Respuesta total
1	Terminar solo el primer año de estudios		0.00%	0
2	Terminar hasta el segundo año de estudios (Diplomado en Pastoral Juvenil)	☐	10.20%	5
3	Terminar la carrera completa (recibirme de licenciado en Teología)	☐	83.67%	41
4	Otro	☐	6.12%	3
			respondido	49
			pasado por alto	0

5. Favor escoger una de las siguientes opciones:

Answer Choices			Porcentaje de respuesta	Respuesta total
1	Provengo de una iglesia perteneciente a la Convención de Iglesias Paraguayas Hermanos Menonitas	☐	8.16%	4
2	Provengo de una iglesia perteneciente a la Asociación Hermanos Menonitas "donde se habla español"	☐	18.37%	9
3	Provengo de una iglesia perteneciente a la Asociación Hermanos Menonitas "donde se habla alemán o dialecto"	☐	38.78%	19
4	Provengo de una iglesia perteneciente a otra denominación/convención	☐	34.69%	17
			respondido	49
			pasado por alto	0

4, 8:38

Resumen de resultados

6. En caso de que provengas de otra denominación/convención de iglesias no mencionada en el punto anterior ¿Podrías indicar a que denominación perteneces? Favor escribir en el siguiente cuadro:			
Answer Choices			Porcentaje de respuesta
1			Respuesta total
1	Pregunta abierta		100.00%
1	26/04/2022 4:34 PM ID: 190099198	Hermanidad Evangélica Menonita	
2	26/04/2022 4:50 PM ID: 190100901	Hermanidad Evangelica Menonita de Filadelfia Chaco Paraguay	
3	26/04/2022 6:17 PM ID: 190107865	Convención Bautista	
4	27/04/2022 3:45 PM ID: 190180585	Iglesia evangélica menonita	
5	27/04/2022 3:56 PM ID: 190181900	Centro Familiar de Adoración	
6	27/04/2022 3:56 PM ID: 190181996	Emb Filadelfia	
7	30/04/2022 3:24 PM ID: 190393878	Denom. Pentecostal	
8	04/05/2022 5:19 PM ID: 190638585	Hermanos Menonitas en Colombia	
9	04/05/2022 5:20 PM ID: 190638742	Hermanos Menonitas de Colombia	
10	04/05/2022 5:41 PM ID: 190641100	.	
11	04/05/2022 5:42 PM ID: 190641105	.	
12	09/05/2022 5:39 PM ID: 190950603	Comunidad Cristiana de Asuncion	
13	09/05/2022 6:03 PM ID: 190952682	IGLESIA ANGLICANA PARAGUAYA	
14	09/05/2022 6:03 PM ID: 190952685	IGLESIA ANGLICANA PARAGUAYA	
15	09/05/2022 6:07 PM ID: 190953006	IGLESIA ANGLICANA PARAGUAYA	
16	09/05/2022 6:07 PM ID: 190953011	IGLESIA ANGLICANA PARAGUAYA	
17	09/05/2022 6:07 PM ID: 190953062	IGLESIA ANGLICANA PARAGUAYA	
18	09/05/2022 6:08 PM ID: 190953104	IGLESIA ANGLICANA PARAGUAYA	
19	09/05/2022 6:20 PM ID: 190954109	Metodista libre del Paraguay	
20	09/05/2022 8:39 PM ID: 190964443	Iglesia Evangelica Biblica	
21	09/05/2022 8:44 PM ID: 190964807	Iglesia Evangelica Menonita el sembrador	
			respondido
			21
			pasado por alto
			28

24, 8:38

Resumen de resultados

7. ¿En cuál ministerio esperas/deseas servir al culminar tus estudios?				
Answer Choices			Porcentaje de respuesta	Respuesta total
1	Ministerio Pastoral		40.82%	20
2	Consejería		14.29%	7
3	Alabanza y Adoración		10.20%	5
4	Misiones Interculturales		8.16%	4
5	Ministerio de la Enseñanza		24.49%	12
6	Otro		2.04%	1
			respondido	49
			pasado por alto	0

8. ¿Tienes planificado desarrollar un ministerio bivocacional? *Un ministerio bivocacional es servir en el contexto de la iglesia (ejemplo: pastor), pero también tener otra ocupación profesional (ejemplo: docente de colegios o universidades)				
Answer Choices			Porcentaje de respuesta	Respuesta total
1	Si		73.47%	36
2	No		26.53%	13
			respondido	49
			pasado por alto	0

9. Si tu respuesta a la pregunta 7 fue "Si", por favor, indica el área de tu otra vocación o profesión. Ejemplo: docencia universitaria, mecánica automotriz, enfermería, otros.

Answer Choices			Porcentaje de respuesta	Respuesta total
1	Pregunta abierta		100.00%	41
1	26/04/2022 4:34 PM ID: 190099198	Trabajo en el campo, administrar empresas del sector agro		
2	26/04/2022 4:35 PM ID: 190099385	Docencia en educación media/ Espacio de entrenamiento integral		
3	26/04/2022 4:39 PM ID: 190099866	En una empresa		
4	26/04/2022 4:40 PM ID: 190099919	Docente/capellania de colegios/universidades		
5	26/04/2022 4:50 PM ID: 190100901	Docencia primaria, secundaria y si se da el caso universitaria		
6	26/04/2022 4:52 PM ID: 190101149	Docente en el colegio filadelfia		
7	26/04/2022 5:33 PM ID: 190104814	Docencia universitaria		
8	26/04/2022 5:47 PM ID: 190105870	Farmaceutica		
9	26/04/2022 6:04 PM ID: 190107016	Psicología		
10	26/04/2022 6:17 PM ID: 190107865	Mecánica		
11	27/04/2022 3:42 PM ID: 190180204	Panadero, o ideas serían trabajar en la óptica (vender lentes)		
12	27/04/2022 3:45 PM ID: 190180585	Docencia universitaria o fisioterapia		
13	27/04/2022 3:48 PM ID: 190181005	Docencia primaria o cuidado a ancianos		
14	27/04/2022 3:53 PM ID: 190181598	Psicólogo		
15	27/04/2022 3:55 PM ID: 190181790	Docencia		
16	27/04/2022 3:56 PM ID: 190181900	Docencia, derecho, técnico ambientales, seguridad ocupacional, capellania		
17	27/04/2022 3:56 PM ID: 190181996	Docencia		
18	27/04/2022 4:14 PM ID: 190184712	Docencia		
19	27/04/2022 4:16 PM ID: 190185027	Docente del colegio y pastor de mi iglesia.		
20	27/04/2022 5:09 PM ID: 190192440	Profesor en el colegio		
21	27/04/2022 5:32 PM ID: 190194944	Márketing		
22	27/04/2022 6:20 PM ID: 190199179	Docencia		
23	28/04/2022 5:46 PM ID: 190284865	Asistencia Legal		
24	29/04/2022 12:32 PM ID: 190331547	Docencia primaria		
			respondido	41
			pasado por alto	8

9. Si tu respuesta a la pregunta 7 fue "Si", por favor, indica el área de tu otra vocación o profesión. Ejemplo: docencia universitaria, mecánica automotriz, enfermería, otros.

25	30/04/2022 3:24 PM ID: 190393878	periodismo, docencia		
26	04/05/2022 3:51 PM ID: 190625375	Periodista o Diseñador gráfico		
27	04/05/2022 3:54 PM ID: 190625880	Profesor, Informática.		
28	04/05/2022 5:19 PM ID: 190638585	Ingeniería y docencia		
29	04/05/2022 5:41 PM ID: 190641100	Trabajar en el campo con ganadería y agricultura		
30	04/05/2022 5:42 PM ID: 190641105	Trabajar en el campo con ganadería y agricultura		
31	09/05/2022 5:29 PM ID: 190949656	Docente en colegio, Alabanza y adoración, ministerio de adolescentes y jóvenes.		
32	09/05/2022 5:39 PM ID: 190950603	Licenciatura en Diseño Grafico		
33	09/05/2022 6:07 PM ID: 190953006	Otros / alabanza y Adoracion		
34	09/05/2022 6:07 PM ID: 190953011	Otros / alabanza y Adoracion		
35	09/05/2022 6:07 PM ID: 190953062	Otros / alabanza y Adoracion		
36	09/05/2022 6:08 PM ID: 190953104	Otros / alabanza y Adoracion		
37	09/05/2022 6:12 PM ID: 190953439	Docencia universitaria		
38	09/05/2022 6:20 PM ID: 190954109	Mecánica automotriz		
39	09/05/2022 8:36 PM ID: 190964275	Colegio		
40	09/05/2022 8:44 PM ID: 190964807	Capellania		
41	18/05/2022 12:40 AM ID: 191588420	Mecánica automotriz		
			respondido	41
			pasado por alto	8

10. ¿Te ha ofrecido tu iglesia/convención un trabajo formal que puedes asumir una vez culminados tus estudios? *Un trabajo formal implica ser un trabajador con los beneficios (ejemplo: salario, vacaciones, etc.) y las responsabilidades requeridas.

Answer Choices			Porcentaje de respuesta	Respuesta total
1	Si		28.57%	14
2	No		71.43%	35
			respondido	49
			pasado por alto	0

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