A FRAMEWORK FOR CHRISTIAN SOCIAL INVOLVEMENT FROM THE WRITINGS OF DEAN BRACKLEY, SJ: SCRIPTURAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

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The late Jesuit moral theologian Dean Brackley, in his book *Divine Revolution*, sought to clearly establish the links between liberation and salvation. Brackley observed that salvation is traditionally understood mainly as forgiveness of one's own sins.[1] Instead, he argues that Catholic theology "can and should interpret salvation as liberation from all that dehumanizes us and as the fullness of life in communion with God and others."[2] Sobrino remarked that one of the contributions made by Brackley in his book *Divine Revolution* is his "return to Christ" and Jesus' proclamation of the Reign of God.[3] In this article, we will explore the scriptural and theological foundations of Brackley's framework beginning with his study of Jesus and the proclamation of the Reign of God. Then, we will examine the assertions that modern theologians make, which he incorporates into the theological grounding of his framework for Christian social involvement.

[1]Dean Brackley, *Divine Revolution: Salvation & Liberation in Catholic Thought* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 14.

[2]Brackley, *Divine Revolution*, xxi.

[3]Jon Sobrino, foreword to *Divine Revolution: Salvation & Liberation in Catholic Thought,* by Dean Brackley (New York: Orbis, 1996), xii-xiii.

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Jesus and the Reign of God

When Brackley examines the Scriptures to elucidate his thesis, he focuses on Jesus and his proclamation of the Reign of God, a key message in the public ministry of Jesus.[4] We will examine how the expression "Reign of God" points to God's qualities, and then we shall explore how it is used concerning the socio-historical context of the poor during Jesus' time. Before outlining what the Reign of God is all about, Brackley notes how the Reign of God reveals God's characteristics already contained in the Old Testament.[5]

God as King and His Kingly Activity

The expression "Kingdom of God" is better understood not as a place but as a reference to God and His activity as King.[6] Although Jesus Himself spoke about entering it, the space where God's reign and His blessings emerge is not necessarily a geo-political entity.[7] It is better understood as an event as it also refers to a reality unfolding in the present but will find its fulfillment in the future. While this famous translation of *hē basileia tou theou* as the Kingdom of God is misleading, one has to understand the phrase primarily in terms of the ruler and His relationship with those He rules.[8]

Brackley believes God as King reveals God as *hesed wa emet* doing *mishpat* and *sedeqah*. Brackley uses Berkovits' work in elucidating the meaning of these three terms describing

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[4]John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 2, (New York : Doubleday, 1991), 237-238.

[5]Brackley, *Divine Revolution*, 127-28.

[6]Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 240.

[7]Luke 13, 28-29; Matthew 11,11.

[8]Meier, *A Marginal Jew,* 240.

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God and God's rule.[9] Both Brackley and Berkovits use several passages from the Old Testament to describe God's reign. God is revealed in the Old Testament traditions as a liberator king.[10]

Sedeq, mishpat, sedaqah

Sedeq is the "central concept governing all relationships." Brackley would say that it denotes justice for the oppressed. *Sedeq* can be equated with goodness in its totality or its highest form. One has to note, however, that goodness is in terms of morality, not legality. It is also translated as having the right relations and fulfilling what social relationships require.[11] Berkovits points out many other ways in which *sedeq* might be understood and even suggests looking at Isaiah 58: 6-8 and Isaiah 42:6-7. When one looks at the passages, one notes that carrying out *sedeq* is associated with the work of the Messiah. "*Sedeq* would then be all that 'the fast' requires: the crushing of the power of evil, the liberation of the captives, the shattering of all yokes that oppress men, the feeding of the hungry, the clothing of the naked, and the housing of the poor."[12] It speaks of justice, in the broadest sense, for the poor and oppressed.

Mishpat and *sedaqah/s'daqah* are values subsumed under *sedeq*. *Mishpat* and *sedaqah* also have to do with the right relations and the obligations of these relationships. "*Mishpat* is a manifestation of *sedeq*." *Mishpat* assumes a contract between two parties where claims must be balanced.[13] *S'daqah* is a particular way of doing *sedeq* "without paying attention to the

[9]Brackley, *Divine Revolution*,132 and Eliezer Berkovits, *Man and God: studies in Biblical Theology* (Detroit : Wayne State University Press, 1969), 322-6.

[10]Ex 34, 6-7; Ps 33, 4-5; Ps85, 10; Ps 89, 14; Hosea 2, 21-22; Is 46:13; Is 42, 6-7.

[11]Brackley, *Divine Revolution*, 129.

[12]Berkovits, *Man and God*, 324 and 331; Isaiah 42:6-7.

[13]Berkovits, *Man and God*, 331-332.

balancing of one's own claim against the claim of the other party."[14]

There are nuances that can be explored, but the core meaning of these words can be deciphered from how they appear together in Scriptures. These words appear always to speak about "the vindication of the victim, the liberation of the oppressed."[15] Berkovits holds that "*Hesed* is love or loving-kindness; *emeth* is sureness, steadfastness, reliability, enduring strength, lasting faithfulness. *Hesed ve'emeth* would then be lovingkindness that reliable and even may be irrevocable."[16] The latter pair of words qualify the intensity and manner of God's *sedeq*, *mishpat*, and *sedaqah*. When God manifests His justice and righteousness, it indicates his steadfast loving-kindness for the poor and oppressed.

Unlike Berkovits, Brackley does not dwell on the nuances of the abovementioned attributes of God. Rather, he points out their core meaning involving social relations. In the passages where these words occur, we can see how God is concerned with social relations and the institutions that embody them such that these are also attributed to the task of the Messiah and the moral obligations of those who claim to follow God.[17] What is demanded of Israel also reflects God's characteristics. This is a distinctive characteristic of the God of Israel – he is the redeemer and vindicator of the poor. What may seem like a social obligation is also revealed to be religious. Thus, liberation of the poor and oppressed is constitutive of God's reign.[18]

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[14]Ibid.

[15]Brackley, *Divine Revolution,* 130; Psalm 89:15 "*Sedeq* and *mishpat* are the foundation of your throne;" Psalm 99:4 "A powerful king who loves *mishpat* ... you execute *mishpat* and *sedaqah* in Jacob".

[16]Berkovits, *Man and God,* 287-288.

[17]Psalm 40: 10-11.

[18]Brackley, *Divine Revolution*, 130.

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Blessed are the Poor

If Jesus' proclamation of the Reign of God was good news, to whom was it good news? Identifying the addressee helps us understand the meaning of the proclamation. Jesus was aware that his mission entails proclaiming the good news of God's Kingdom to poor people.[19] Sobrino asserts that God's Reign is rightfully for poor people, especially when looking at God's interventions in the Old Testament.[20] The concreteness of poverty and oppression was something God responded to with *sedeq*. Thus, in Jesus' proclamation of God's Reign, we must also be clear with our understanding of who the poor were during Jesus' time.

Brackley notes how Jesus was well-aware of the material poverty in Galilee and how Palestinian standards considered the masses poor.[21] According to Meier, around 90% of the population may have qualified as 'poor.'[22] John Dominic Crossan notes how the Roman Empire was an agrarian society. This automatically entails "marked social inequality" evidenced in gaps in privilege, honor, wealth, and power.[23]

Another aspect of poverty highlighted by Brackley is its ability to underscore social relations. More than the absence of material goods, it also points to social relations where they are considered oppressed, inferior, or held in contempt.[24] "While

[19]Luke 4:18, 7:22, Matt 11:5, Luke 6:20.

[20]Sobrino, *Jesus Christ the Liberator: A Historical Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Paul Burns and Francis McDonagh (Great Briatin: Burns and Oates, 1994), 79-80.

[21]Brackley, *Divine Revolution*, 131.

[22]Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 1048 n2:

[23]John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 45-46.

[24]Brackley, *Divine Revolution*, 132.

ptōchos in ancient pagan Greek had solely a socioeconomic sense, the Hebrew adjective *'ānî* carried a double sense. ... The socioeconomic status designated by 'ānî involved not simply the lack of money or possessions, but first of all powerlessness and vulnerability vis-a-vis the powerful members of society."[25] Here, poverty must be understood as a socioeconomic and political reality. Brackley would even highlight how this understanding of poverty and marginalization seeped into the religious sphere.

Jesus understood that the observance of the Torah was not meant to demarcate between the righteous and the sinners. The observance of ritual purity had social implications since the sinner also became an outcast in Israeli society. This would be exacerbated by the overemphasis on ritual observance, which overshadowed the obligation to help one's fellow human being.[26] Brackley notes that God's Kingdom is also conceivable as a community with no outcasts. When Jesus focused on the outcasts of his time, it was also "an attack on self-exaltation and status-stratification," which led to this marginalization of people.[27]

God's reign brings in new social relations, forming a new community. If God's reign is fulfilled, it is not just about the emergence of material blessings as is often depicted by the Psalms or the prophets but also renewed relations. "God comes as king to do *mishpat* and *sedaqah* and to establish *sedeq* and *shalom*."[28] This meant renewed relations with those marginal-

[25]Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 384 n157

[26]Brackley, *Divine Revolution,* 134-135.

[27]Ibid., 135.You may also refer to these passages: Mark 10, 14-15 (Jesus on children); Luke 14, 7-11 (taking seats of honor); Matthew 23, 5-12 and Mark 9, 35.

[28]Brackley, *Divine Revolution*, 132.

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ized.[29] This preferential option for the poor and marginalized indicates what God desires. He opts for the victims of injustice and poverty because He abhors injustice and poverty. Thus, God calls on His followers to also take on this stance.[30]

The Response: Faith and Community

God's intervention always calls for a human response. Many of the Kingdom parables indicate how God calls for collaborators. Jesus' table fellowship indicated the fusion of God's initiative and human response.[31] Brackley notes that the response came in different forms – love, speaking truth to power, healing, and gathering outcasts. However, the most fundamental response had to be faith, distinguishing his disciples from those who simply witnessed Jesus but did not change their lives or commitments.[32]

Brackley notes that "faith points to the transformation of persons' and communities' entire way of being in the world. ... It points to new human beings, a new creation."[33] Lohfink emphasizes the same point that the faith response to Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom entailed a new way of being with others and in a community consistent with the values of the Kingdom as proclaimed and lived out by Christ and exemplified

[29]One may take a look at how Jesus addressed or spoke of particular groups of people in the following passages: Luke 4, 16-22; Luke 6, 20-26; Mt 11, 2-6; Matt 25, 31-46; Mark 2, 13-17; Matt 21, 28-32; Luke 7, 29-30; Luke 15; Luke 7, 11-17; Luke 21, 1-4; John 7, 53-8, 11; Luke 10; 29-37 (Samaritans); Matt 22, 1-10 and Mark 12, 1-12 (Gentiles).

[30]Ibid., 133.

[31]Check Luke 9, 62; Matthew 7, 13-14; Mark 7, 15; 10, 15.

[32]Brackley, *Divine Revolution*, 140.

[33]Brackley, *Divine Revolution*, 142.

by some of the early Christian communities.[34] This response inspired a common living that somehow lessened any want or poverty in the said communities. "There were no poor among them."[35]

Here But Not Yet

One of the common issues related to the proclamation of the Kingdom is its time of fulfillment. Brackley notes that Jesus was well aware of how his ministry signaled the entry of God's reign, which provoked conflict with the anti-reign.[36] It is unclear, however, what exactly this entailed except for what has been revealed in the Gospels. Meier asserts that the following can be concluded from the sayings on the expectation of the Kingdom: God will come as King; we should pray and hope for it; it will bring about reversals of "poverty, sorrow, and hunger;" it would include the gentiles, and Jesus would also experience this reversal even with his looming death. He even adds that Jesus thought the Kingdom would come soon, given the radical choices he and his disciples had to make. One senses urgency in the sayings and parables while there is a kind of continuity with John the Baptist's proclamations.[37] Meier provides a lengthy treatment of various scriptural texts and how they are to be interpreted, considering the passages' eschatological expectations and probable setting. Regardless of the exact time, "Jesus proclaimed the imminent coming of the

[34]Norbert Lohfink, *Option for the Poor: The Basic Principle of Liberation Theology in the Light of the Bible*, trans. Linda M. Maloney, ed. Duane L. Christensen (Berkeley, CA : Bibal Press, 1987), 56.

[35]Acts 4:34.

[36]Brackley, *Divine Revolution*, 136.

[37]Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 337-8.

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kingdom of God as the motivating force for radical conversion in the present moment, for any moment might be too late."[38]

Another concern that Brackley brings up in the understanding of the proclamation of God's Kingdom is the dichotomy between matter and spirit, especially in understanding the resurrection. For Jesus, God's Kingdom is not a city of disembodied spirits. The belief, then, in the resurrection of the dead pertained not to souls only but to the whole person. Brackley notes that "the Gospels know of no anthropological dualism." Even when Paul noted the newness in Christ, he assumed this non-dualistic anthropology. The life that is being referred to in the newness or what will be saved (cf. Mark 8, 35) is the life of the whole person.[39] Thus, any understanding of salvation should work with this kind of anthropology. Yet, Brackley knew the dualisms informing Biblical interpretation. He knows the tendency of some Bible readers to deny that Christ's salvation encompasses the social and political dimension of human life. Thus, he labors to recover how we can better understand Jesus and His proclamation of the Kingdom of God.[40]

In the succeeding sections, we shall explore how Brackley uses the thought of contemporary theologians to develop this understanding of the relationship between salvation and social justice.

Brackley on Rahner

Brackley asserts that the relationship between salvation and social justice is linked to the relationship between nature and grace, spirit to matter, and sociality of humanity. Thus, he explores the theologies developed by Rahner and Gustavo

[38]Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 342. For the discussion of Meier on the scriptural texts, one may take a look at pages 336-342 of his work.

[39]Brackley, *Divine Revolution*, 138.

[40]Ibid., 123.

Gutierrez.[41] We will examine how Brackley uses particular themes and ideas in Rahner's thought to build up his thesis. The themes that we will look at are the supernatural existential, the orders of creation and redemption, and his treatment of the sociopolitical life.

The Reaction to Extrinsicism and the Supernatural Existential

After the Counter-Reformation, the theology of grace was marked by extrinsicism. Extrinsicism distinguished grace from concrete reality as if it were superfluous to human nature. This school of thought argued that grace was "wholly extrinsic to human nature." This led some to think that humanity has another end apart from the supernatural one with God. An opposing school of thought would emerge with the rise of the *nouvelle* theologians. The *nouvelle* theologians asserted that the human condition has an affinity to the divine life. They would debunk hypothetical states such as nature and static essences. "Concrete-existential, personalist, dynamic, historical and explicitly Christological categories would characterize any attempt to explain God's relationship to humanity and creation in general."[42] This approach sought to be more world-affirming, reflecting an appreciation of the Incarnation and the intimacy of the divine with humanity.

Initially, Karl Rahner had been identified with the *nouvelle* theologians, but he distanced himself from them later. The reaction of the *nouvelle* theologians compromised the distinctions between nature and grace. However, Rahner struck a

[41]Ibid., 45.

[42]Ibid., 46.

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middle ground with the "supernatural existential" which held that grace and nature are distinct from each other.[43]

The supernatural existential is more than just an affinity to grace. "God's universal saving will creates all human beings with an infinite emptiness or longing – which only God can satisfy – precisely in order to communicate divine life to them." It is better to call it an "ontological alert," a divine help freely given that becomes constitutive of humanity's existence. For Rahner, this affinity could not be something extrinsic to humanity.[44] Duffy explains this idea of Rahner in this manner: "[b]ecause the Creator gives humanity a supernatural end (and this end is primary in the divine intention), human being (and its world) is by that very fact inwardly and structurally other than it would have been had it not been so finalized."[45]

The supernatural existential is a marking of the human condition. It continues to influence the human person even if a rejection of grace has happened or the person is in a state of sin.[46] What influence does it exert? Brackley asserts that this existential's transcendental and supernatural character provides the goal and the condition of the possibility for humans to progress in "freedom, love, and knowledge." That is why Brackley appeals to this idea of Rahner. Salvation, when accepted, encompasses every aspect of human existence, including the social and the political.[47]

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[43]Stephen Duffy, *The Graced Horizon: nature and grace in modern Catholic thought* (Collegeville, MN : Liturgical Press, 1992), 85.

[44]Brackley, *Divine Revolution*, 48.

[45]Duffy, *The Graced Horizon*, 88.

[46]Karl Rahhner and Herbert Vorgrimler, *Concise Theological Dictionary* (London : Burns and Oates,1983), 161.

[47]Brackley, *Divine Revolution,* 48-49.

The Orders of Creation & Redemption: Embodiment, Historicity, & Sociality

Another insight of Rahner that Brackley draws from is the relationship between the order of creation and the order of redemption. This is a different set of ideas compared to Nature and Grace that Rahner explores. Rahner cautions against equating the order of redemption with grace and the order of creation with nature. Unlike Grace and Nature, which are distinguishable from each other, the orders of redemption and creation are not as clearly distinguishable. Thus, one cannot say that the two pairs are equivalents of each other.[48] Nevertheless, this discussion helps push forward Brackley's agenda.[49]

"We speak of the order of redemption within the order of creation."[50] The two orders are "materially co-extensive," and they interpenetrate.[51] This understanding has consequences for Rahner's anthropology, especially as he elaborates on embodiment, sociality, human history, and eschatology. It also relates to Rahner's understanding of human response or action to the world. Rahner suggests that the unifying principle of these two orders is that they are the focus of God's creative power and desire to share the divine life.[52] The two orders are not two totally distinct realities. What God created, God also wants to redeem. "The redemptive order must develop within the created order. ... The created order remains included within the redemptive order in so far as it is a distinct, necessary factory within the redemptive order."[53]

[48]Karl Rahner, *The Christian Commitment: Essays in Pastoral Theology*, trans. Cecily Hastings (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), 40.

[49]Brackley, *Divine Revolution*, 47.

[50]Rahner, *The Christian Commitment*, 38.

[51]Ibid., 52.

[52]Ibid., 52-53.

[53]Ibid.

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Since the redemptive order develops from the created order, Rahner says that unity is something that will "be historically fulfilled, is already eschatologically complete, and yet is to be realized through human beings." [54] Thus, he makes an equivalence between salvation history and the history of this unity. The Christ event serves as the eschatological stage of the history of the unity. The whole Christ event culminating in the Paschal Mystery reveals God's final decision: the natural is "saved, glorified and to be given beatitude through the victory of grace."[55] One notes that as Rahner maintains the primacy and initiative of God's grace, he also leaves room to incorporate the human response that is being fulfilled in history.

Since Rahner asserts that this unfolding happens in history and embraces the whole of created reality, he also affirms how the human spirit is deeply tied to the human body. "Man cannot fulfill his spiritual nor indeed his supernatural life without embodying this fulfillment in material reality." This unity and interdependence correspond to God's will.[56] Brackley even notes that for the human spirit to be spirit, it needs a body. The body is the actualization of the human spirit. He notes that what we consider the more "spiritual" aspects of ourselves correspond to something "material," suggesting that they are dimensions of humans as embodied spirits. Brackley works along this line of thought with Rahner, especially in the former's emphasis on the sociality of human beings. Because the human spirit is linked to its body, the human spirit's expression necessarily happens in a material "public" space within history. Brackley would highlight that "for Rahner, one could never presume to limit the saving action of grace to some interior sphere clearly

[54]Ibid., 53.

[55]Ibid., 54-55.

[56]Ibid., 46-47.

demarcated from the external world."[57] Brackley affirms what McCool would say of Rahner's thought on the human spirit and historicity, namely, that a person "goes up towards God only by going out into the world."[58] Brackley then notes Rahner's response to the critique of his student Johann Baptist Metz. Metz claims that Rahner's theology does not open itself up to socio-political life.[59] Rahner himself responds to the criticism and shows that his work on transcendental theology can serve as a foundation for political theology.[60]

How Rahner's transcendental theology opens up to a political theology can be seen in his thought involving transcendence, intersubjectivity, and human sociality. As explored by Rahner, the link between transcendence and intersubjectivity is an important concept that Brackley uses to assert a theological anthropology highlighting humans as social beings. For Rahner, transcendence happens when the spirit moves "toward history, toward the fulfillment of freedom, toward fellow men and women." Thus, intersubjectivity is very much linked to transcendence since the world towards which one transcends is a world filled with people.[61] In another instance, Rahner asserts that the "actualization of human transcendence" takes

[57]Brackley, *The Divine Revolution*, 50.

[58]Gerard McCool, *A Rahner Reader* (New York : Seabury Press, 1975), 56 quoted in Brackley, *The Divine Revolution,* 51.

[59]Brackley, *The Divine Revolution*, 53.

[60]: "[E]very concrete mystagogy must obviously from the very beginning consider the societal situation and the Christian praxis to which it addresses itself. ... For it has always been clear in my theology that a 'transcendental experience' (of God and of grace) is always mediated through a categorical experience in history, in interpersonal relations, and in society," (Karl Rahner, Introduction to *Apologetics and the Eclipse of Mystery: Mystagogy according to Karl Rahner* by James J. Bacik (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), quoted in *Divine Revolution* by Dean Brackley).

[61]Brackley, *Divine Revolution*, 53.

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place "in the concrete and practical knowledge and freedom of 'everyday life,' and this is what is meant by interpersonal relationships."[62]

Human relationality is integral to human nature. The sociality of human beings is not just one of its many dimensions. For Rahner, it is at the heart of humanity, for it is through such relations that humanity transcends toward God. Thus, he relates it to the unity of the two love commandments. "The two dimensions of human love 'correspond to the two aspects of God's self-communication:' self-communication in the Spirit which justifies sinners and in the Logos who unifies history."[63]

When one puts all these ideas of Rahner together, one sees the social character of salvation. God's self-communication, which is salvific, happens in all areas and aspects of human existence. Brackley notes that "the social character of salvation transcends interpersonal intimacy to include social, cultural, economic and political life."[64] God's self-communication is "aimed at mankind as a unity, a unity which is always historically and socially constituted." Most of our biblical concepts affirm this interconnectedness.[65] Rahner connects grace to society and the whole of human history. For him, salvation history and human history are "co-existent and co-extensive" just as the orders of creation and redemption are unified.[66]

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[62]Rahner, *Foundations of Christian faith : an introduction to the idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 456.

[63]Brackley, *Divine Revolution*, 54.

[64]Brackley, *Divine Revolution*, 55.

[65]Karl Rahner, "The Function of the Church as a Critic of Society", trans. David Bourke, vol. 12 of *Theological Investigations* (Baltimore: Helicon Press, c1961-1979), 238 quoted in Brackley, *Divine Revolution,* 54.

[66]Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 153.

Brackley's Assessment of Rahner

Rahner's theology emerges from a tradition of reflections on nature and grace that is rarely concerned about social relations. His theology is ambiguous in explaining how grace operates in society. The theology that Rahner expounds makes it possible for us to understand the social meaning of God's activity. Brackley summarizes this when he says:

> [b]ecause God grounds human transcendence and because finite spirit realizes itself via interaction with the world in all its material, interpersonal, and institutional complexity, salvation encompasses human reality as a whole – material and spiritual, personal, social, political, economic, and cultural – and includes acts of love and the justice and peace they produce, even when salvation in this sense is manifested partially, ambiguously, and in fragile form.[67]

Another observation that Brackley picks up from Rahner is that when human acts are inspired by grace, they can be salvific. Rahner appreciates the fusion of the divine initiative and the human response and how this plays out in the unfolding of the reign of God in history. Brackley refers to these as blessings of salvation, which can be understood in three senses: "first as justification and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the church and the individual; second, moral acts (ultimately acts of love); and third, the fruits of such action." The manifestation of the first sense is found in the second and third senses. These produce blessings that bring about "community, justice, peace, food and drink shared."[68]

Brackley's third observation is that Rahner optimally appraises the individual as his starting point for theological

[67]Brackley, *Divine Revolution,* 61-62.

[68]Ibid., 52.

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anthropology. For Brackley, Rahner fails to consider how there is suffering and social sin and how God's salvific actions relate to these two realities. Brackley even cites Moltmann's criticism of such optimistic theologies, which tend "to understate suffering and the power of sin." While it presents God's grace as present and abounding in the world, Rahner's first-world theology neglects how sin and suffering abound and are also incarnate in relations and structures in society. Brackley suspects that Rahner does not account for how grace relates to social relations and institutions since he only relates it directly to persons. While God's self-communication reveals a way of being together and thus can serve as a starting point for locating grace in social relations, Brackley feels that this yields only a partial link. A more comprehensive account can be provided by a political theology that can spell out how grace operates on the level of social institutions.[69]

Brackley on Gustavo Gutierrez

When Church communities in Latin America reflected on their faith from the perspective of the victims of injustice, liberation theology emerged. One of its important pillars is the Dominican theologian Gustavo Gutierrez. His seminal work, *The Theology of Liberation*, answers this question: "What relation is there between salvation and the historical process of human liberation?"[70]

Gutierrez is cognizant of the grace debates and agrees with and uses Rahner's thought. He affirms that one cannot clearly "indicate the boundaries between grace and human nature."[71]

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[69]Ibid., 63.

[70]Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, trans. and ed. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988), 29.

[71]Brackley, *Divine Revolution*, 70.

Gutierrez, however, affirms the "independence" of the secular world and does not want to espouse an old Christendom model where the Church is the only means of salvation and that she needs to intervene directly in political affairs in the world for the interest of the Church.[72] Gutierrez's non-ecclesiocentric move affirms that the offer of salvation is available to those outside the Church.[73] This leads Gutierrez to hold that the criterion for salvation cuts across religions and occurs within the Church and human history. Furthermore, the context of misery and oppression he witnessed in Latin America grounds his exploration of how liberation is related to salvation.[74]

The Three Approaches of Liberation

Gutierrez examines the relationship between salvation and liberation while identifying three levels of liberation. There are three distinct levels of meaning, but all are interpenetrating: "political liberation, human liberation throughout history, liberation from sin and admission to communion with God."[75] For this present study, first, we will explore briefly what these three levels are, and then later, we will explore how these relate to the question of salvation, Christ's work, and the Church's mission.

The first approach of liberation reveals how development is a political problem, and poverty is seen as "a function of oppression." Brackley notes how Gutierrez understands and interprets his time's economic and political realities betrays

[72]Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 34-5.

[73]Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Churc (Lumen Gentium)*, 21 November 1964, Vatican Archive, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

[74]Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 83 and 24.

[75]Brackley, *Divine Revolution*, 72.

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his links to dependency theory and Marxism. This level underscores the necessity of institutional transformation and political liberation.[76] At this level, liberation is understood as the people's collective desire to be freed from economic, political, and social oppression. It assumes a conflictual stance in understanding society where there are oppressors and the oppressed. Gutierrez takes such a stance when he argues that some countries develop at the expense of others, especially those with a history of colonization.[77] This notion of liberation clearly articulates what one should be freed from but not what one should be freed for.

The second approach to liberation elaborates on the historical self-realization of humanity. Here, the goal of liberation is human fulfillment. Gutierrez describes it as "assuming conscious responsibility for [humanity's] own destiny."[78] Structural change is just part of humanity's self-realization. Brackley notes how Gutierrez uses Hegel and Marx in understanding the development of human consciousness, freedom, and social coexistence as history unfolds. Gutierrez also emphasizes personal and material transformation as integral to this development process. Furthermore, this development accounts for humanity's interaction with nature.[79]

Brackley and Gutierrez emphasize that any liberation necessarily involves transforming the whole human person, including human relations. In other words, the transformation of humanity should lead to the change of social relations, even with nature.[80] However, one may ask: What does this trans-

[76]Brackley, *Divine Revolution*, 73.

[77]Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 24 and 51.

[78] Ibid, 25.

[79]Brackley, *Divine Revolution*, 74

[80]Ibid, 75.

formation look like? Although Gutierrez steers away from ideological fundamentalism, he appropriates how Christian charity can operate when class or power struggle is evident. He suggests that the Christian should acknowledge this reality formed by oppressors and oppressed and love in such a way that both oppressor and oppressed are liberated from their inhuman conditions. This provides a nuanced understanding of the preferential love for the poor, often focused only on the oppressed and marginalized. Gutierrez goes on to say that in our choosing to love and liberate the oppressed, we also seek to liberate the oppressors from the inhumanity that binds them as oppressors.[81] One is then led to ask: how is this love lived out? What is the norm for this process of liberation? This leads to the third approach offered by Gutierrez.

The third level that Gutierrez proposes is also the goal of the entire liberation process – salvation which is "the gift of complete communion with God and other human beings."[82] This level acknowledges how sin blocks communion and how Jesus Christ saves us by freeing us from sin for communion with God and others. Here, Gutierrez explores God's liberating and salvific work in history as well as the sociality of the human person. Doing so allows him to theologize on social sin.[83]

These interdependent approaches are "three levels of meaning of a single, complex process, which finds its deepest sense and its full realization in the saving work of Christ."[84] How, then, do these play out in human history? Gutierrez employs Rahner's idea of the unity of history and tackles it from a Christological perspective. When Christ assumed our

[81]Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 274-276.

[82]Brackley, *Divine Revolution*, 76.

[83]Ibid, 76-77.

[84]Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 26.

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humanity, the history of salvation then became part of our own history, which already includes the history of our fulfillment and becoming.[85] Brackley notes that "Gutierrez's argument boils down to this: The goal of the liberation process is human fulfillment. A sound theology of grace recognizes only one human destiny. Therefore, communion with God and others – salvation – is occurring in the liberation process."[86]

Human Historicity and Sociality: Sin and Salvation

For Gutierrez, the goal of salvation is communion with God and with others. If this is the case, then humans are inherently social beings. This is presupposed even in the threefold liberation approach.[87] Theology has to deal with this communitarian aspect of the human person to break out of its individualistic tendency.[88] Thus, Gutierrez elaborates on a theology for social and structural sin, how salvation manifests, and the role Christ plays.

Sin impedes human development. Sinfulness makes enslavement and oppression present in history. Sin manifests itself in situations of injustice and alienation in the same manner that salvation also occurs with such historicity.[89] Gutierrez elaborates that "sin is regarded as a social, historical fact, the absence of fellowship and love in relationships among persons." Sin ruptures our communion with God and others. This appeal to sin is not some form of spiritualism but is an acknowledgment of what motivates humans who engage in

[85]Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 86.

[86]Brackley, *Divine Revolution*, 77.

[87]Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 45.

[88]Brackley, *Divine Revolution*, 77.

[89]Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 102-3.

structures and practices of oppression.[90] Sin occurs within a concrete historical context, which produces situations where there are "unjust structures and social systems." Thus, for Gutierrez, salvation is about more than being liberated from sin. It also entails being liberated from the oppression and injustice that it perpetuates.[91] This understanding of sin and salvation is reflected in Church teaching.

In *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis,* John Paul II takes up social and structural sin.

> If the present situation can be attributed to difficulties of various kinds, it is not out of place to speak of 'structures of sin,' which, ..., are rooted in personal sin, and thus always linked to the concrete acts of individuals who introduce these structures, consolidate them and make them difficult to remove. And thus they grow stronger, spread, and become the source of other sins, and so influence people's behavior. ... However, one cannot easily gain a profound understanding of the reality that confronts us unless we give a name to the root of the evils which afflict us.[92]

He identified it as the root of evil, like how Gutierrez characterizes sin as the "fundamental alienation" breeding abuses of power, poverty, and the continued exploitation of humans and the rest of creation.[93]

Working with this logic, Gutierrez emphasizes how salvation takes on a historical and social character but is not necessarily reducible to such aspects. This paradigm is best captured in the Old Testament by the Exodus story. Gutierrez notes that

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[90]Ibid., 103.

[91]Brackley, *Divine Revolution*, 80.

[92]John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 30 December 1987, Vatican Archive, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html, no.36.

[93]Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 103.

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the Exodus depicts how salvation frees a people from a sinful and oppressive situation so they may be free for "covenanted communion with God and others." This revealed to the Israelites who God was and what He did.[94] However, Gutierrez elaborates and deepens this when he speaks of Christ and His saving work.

Jesus' Incarnation is a key element in how Gutierrez elaborates salvation's historical, social, and political character. Embodiment, history, and sociality are part of salvation history. A disembodied, purely spiritual view of salvation betrays a particular non-scriptural dichotomy between "matter and spirit and a failure to understand biblical eschatology."[95] Thus, the whole human being as an embodied spirit in history in relation to others is saved. Gutierrez uses the Chalcedonian principle, which "affirms the distinction without separation of Christ's divinity and his humanity."[96] Thus, the historical, material, and relational aspects of humanity are embraced by Christ's salvific work.

Gutierrez pushes his thought further: how does Christ's salvific work continue within history and how does it relate to the growth of the Kingdom? Gutierrez points out that there are partial fulfillments of God's promise even after the Christ event, yet Christ's Spirit drives and inspires such events, which also point to God's action at the end of time.[97] Thus, any temporal progress or liberating historical event becomes part of salvation history, no matter what the scale. The liberating historical events, while they participate in God's work and manifest the growth of the Kingdom, cannot be equated and

[94]Brackley, *Divine Revolution*, 79.

[95]Ibid., 82.

[96]Ibid., 83.

[97]Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 95.

fully identified with the fullness of God's Kingdom. This shows how Gutierrez's thought is not reductionist.[98]

In another work, Gutierrez explains that while we often emphasize the eschatological aspect of the Kingdom of God, which "gives history its final meaning," it is incorrect to infer that everything will happen at the end of time as though our current reality were devoid of any activity related to the Kingdom. He makes this important note because this nuance allows the ethical dimension of the Kingdom to surface. The Christian who accedes to the demands of the Kingdom must live these out within one's immediate historical context. Gutierrez asserts it in this manner:

> "[A]ccepting the Kingdom of God means refusing to accept a world that instigates or tolerates the premature and unjust deaths of the poor. It means rejecting the hypocrisy of a society that claims to be democratic but violates the most elementary rights of the poor."[99]

Brackley's Appraisal of Gutierrez

Brackley notes that most criticisms against liberation theology do not apply to Gutierrez. While maintaining the transcendence of God's reign, Brackley emphasizes how Gutierrez relates God's reign to concrete historical realities, including sin, conflict, and injustice.[100] Gutierrez's theology, then, serves to correct what Western theology leaves out.[101] Equally important is that Gutierrez's theology builds a theological anthropology emphasizing how humans are inherently social beings

[98]Ibid., 104.

[99]Gutierrez, *The God of Life*, trans. Matthew J. Connell (London: SCM, 1991), 102-103.

[100] Thomas Louis Schubeck, "Divine Revolution: Salvation and Liberation in Catholic Thought," *Theological Studies* 58, no. 2 (June 1997): 395–96.

[101]Brackley, *Divine Revolution*, 90.

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and how politics is an important element in human life. In line with this, Gutierrez emphasizes the role of politics, but he does not reduce the Gospel or the salvific act to it.[102]

One criticism that Brackley raises against Gutierrez's theology is its problematic account of the relationship between divine initiative and human response. Gutierrez notes that human work for justice is necessary to establish the Reign of God, and without such work, God's reign cannot grow. Brackley observes that this Pelagian tendency in Gutierrez's writings are from a time in his life marked with much activism. The "later Gutierrez" would move into a more contemplative stance and begin writing about a spirituality of liberation. His thought and works later paved the way for the role of spirituality in deepening his theology. Brackley notes that Gutierrez eventually highlights the importance of an encounter with God that motivates a genuine and disinterested love of neighbor. Brackley would say that "[f]aith does not add to reason in social analysis, much less substitute for it, but it illuminates social analysis; it steers it." It grounds one's engagement in the fact that the Christian is simply participating in God's work.[103]

Elements of Brackley's Framework for Christian Social Involvement

At this point, the scriptural and theological foundations of Brackley's framework of social involvement have already been presented. The basic elements of his framework will be presented as they are culled from his various writings.

Brackley notes three poles of experience through which we encounter the truth and reality.[104] These three poles are the world around us, our inner life, and the cultural word about

[102] Ibid., 86.

[103] Ibid., 89.

[104] Dean Brackley, *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2004), 160.

the world. We need to note that Brackley does not usurp the pastoral cycle as a tool for social engagement, but his framework can supplement the pastoral cycle. He focuses on certain epistemological, scriptural, theological, and spiritual themes that provide a way of proceeding with regard to social involvement.[105]

Entering the World of the Poor

Together with moral theologians Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, Brackley draws inspiration from liberation theology, which made the perspective of the poor and their experience a privileged starting point for theologizing and discernment of action.[106] Brackley points out that most theology emerges from a context alien to the experience and the world of poor people. Unless appropriated, most theology would not reflect the experience of the masses. Brackley speaks of "anthropological, cosmological and moral myths" that frame our scope of knowing, yet most of them are a function of our personal history, socioeconomic status, educational background, and other factors.[107]

Regular encounters with the poor and marginalized can broaden our horizons. Brackley cites how the students he accompanied changed because of the encounters with the poor of El Salvador and the relationship that they had formed with them. After those encounters, the students' own concerns and problems, which had preoccupied them, became peripheral relative to the concerns and problems they saw among

[105] Dean Brackley, "Searching for Truth and the Right Thing to Do," in *The Pastoral Circle Revisited* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 216.

[106] Ibid.

[107] Dean Brackley, "Theology and Solidarity: Learning from Sobrino's Method," *Hope & Solidarity*: *Jon Sobrino's Challenge to Christian Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 5.

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the poor people of El Salvador. They began to realize that the poor were just like them but were also different because of the injustices they suffered, which the students now recognized as cruel and inhumane. Yet, the students also witnessed how the people lived with so much hope and goodness despite their situation.[108]

The abovementioned process illustrates Brackley's description of conscientization, an important process in this element. One does not engage poor communities for its own sake. Brackley emphasizes the need to reflect on such encounters and note one's emotional reactions and thought processes that emerge from the encounters. He goes on to assert that conscientization asks us to face and articulate our prejudices, particularly "the 'original prejudice' that some people are important and others (most) don't count."[109] This process is a form of cognitive liberation. The use of reason transcends thought experiments, inferencing from statistics and theories, but involves actual experiences and praxis. If we reach this point, then we can answer the following questions about the situations of injustice we see: how did we get here? What keeps us from moving forward? Who benefits from the *status quo*? What enables this current situation?[110]

While entering the world of the poor allows us to experience what they experience and see things from their perspective, it is equally important to know what can be done or how we can move forward. That is why Brackley asserts the need for a

[108] Brackley, "Searching for the Truth and the Right Thing to Do," 216-7.

[109] Ibid., 217.

[110] The questions I listed here are just elaborations of the initial questions proposed by Brackley in page 217 of the aforementioned article.

"utopian prophetic imagination."[111] Gustavo Gutierrez notices two complementary movements in this utopian prophetic mindset: denunciation and annunciation. One denounces an existing structure or reality because of the injustices present. Yet, the utopian imagination also announces an alternative reality grounded in values contrary to the values embodied in the reality being denounced.[112] For Brackley, the norm for the values of this utopian prophetic imagination is grounded in Jesus Christ and the Reign of God. Our social ethics and involvement should be patterned after Christ, who denounced the injustices of his time while announcing the arrival of the Kingdom. It is no wonder then that Brackley dubs the Reign of God as "the *summum bonum* of Christian social ethics."[113]

Personal Transformation and Discipleship

Whenever Brackley promotes encounters, he refers to encounters with the marginalized and encounters with God, which may occur in one's encounter with the poor. Both types of encounters can transform us in a way that reshapes our values and perceptions. William Spohn writes, "[t]ransformation of the person down to her most important values, therefore, is necessary to correct the vision of the heart."[114] This transformation occurs in the life of a disciple.

In the Greek New Testament, one finds two words related to discipleship: μαθητής and ἀκολουθέω. [115] *Mathétés* (μαθητής) is

[111]Ibid., 218

[112]Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 136.

[113]Brackley, "Christian Social Ethics – in Three Not-so-Easy Lessons," *New Catholic World*, vol. 226, Jan. 1983, 23.

[114]William Spohn, *Go and do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 1999), 86.

[115]BibleHub, Strong's Greek: 3101. μαθητής (*mathétés*) – a disciple, accessed 2 February 2022, https://biblehub.com/greek/3101.htm.

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usually translated into English as disciple. The second related Greek word is *akoloutheó* (ἀκολουθέω), which means "I follow."[116] Both Greek words referring to discipleship must be understood within the context of a teacher who is the *didaskalos*.[117] Common among the Jews, discipleship was heavily teacher-centered. Yet there were common features that all the Rabbis adhered to, except for Jesus. Rausch notes discontinuities in Jesus' brand of discipleship with the discipleship in the Jewish Rabbinic tradition. Unlike the Jewish rabbis of His time, Jesus invited his disciples. Jesus would call even the ritually impure (Mk 2:15, Luke 8:2). He called disciples to a radical reorientation. One had to "leave their past behind" (Mk 10:21; Lk 9:57-62). His disciples "shared in his ministry." This also meant sharing His commitment to service and love (Jn 15: 12-13).[118]

Gerhard Lohfink notes another important difference between the kind of discipleship espoused by Jesus *vis-à-vis* the rabbinic tradition. Rabbinic students studied the Torah, its precepts, and various interpretations, while Jesus' disciples were called not just to learn the Torah or know what it means to live out the Torah, but also to follow a person – Jesus Himself.[119] Discipleship in the mold of following a person has significant implications for the quality of commitment both as embodied by Jesus the teacher and as demanded by his disciples.

Such a commitment is something that Brackley identifies as necessary in one's social and ethical involvement. It provides

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[116]BibleHub, Strong's Greek: 190. ἀκολουθέω (*akoloutheó*) – to follow, accessed 2 February 2022, https://biblehub.com/greek/3101.htm. Cf. Mark 1:18

[117]Thomas P. Rausch, *Who is Jesus? An Introduction to Christology* (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2003), 71.

[118]Ibid., 72-73.

[119]Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus of Nazareth: What He Wanted, Who He Was* (Diliman, Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 201), 73-74.

head knowledge of principles and values to be used in one's decision-making. But such a commitment also entails a transformation that corrects one's perspective and shapes one's affectivity.[120] Brackley highlights the need to discern interior movements and one's vocation when one senses a desire to respond to the injustices and suffering that one witnesses in the world. Thus, bringing one's encounter with the marginalized to bear on one's encounter with God in prayer is expected to evoke a call and make one question one's values. One would then need to discern interior movements and eventually act and move toward the good one is called to do.[121]

For Brackley, this gradual character development culminates in the assimilation of the person of Jesus Christ. Following Christ, the disciple seeks to love in the way Jesus did. The disciple seeks to love the very people Jesus loved. He exercised solidarity and God's preferential option for the poor and marginalized. Thus, any faithful disciple of Christ ought also to exercise the same preferential option.[122] The hope is that the prophetic utopian imagination mentioned earlier is informed by a *sensus Christi*. For Brackley, this *sensus Christi* can be fostered when one is schooled in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola. It is no wonder that Brackley integrates it into his framework. Thus, this prophetic imagination is deeply rooted not in some ideology but in God's self-revelation in Christ in Scriptures.[123]

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[120]Brackley, "Christian Social Ethics – in Three Not-so-Easy Lessons," 32.

[121]Brackley, "Searching for the Truth and the Right Thing to Do," 220.

[122]Brackley, "Christian Social Ethics – in Three Not-so-Easy Lessons," 32.

[123]Ibid., 34.

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Up to this point, one can see how Brackley's framework leans on experience, spirituality, scriptures, and theology. However, this is insufficient. Working from these elements alone risks operating on a relativistic framework. It lacks a reliable way by which the principles from these elements can be articulated and adapted to times and situations. This is where the need for a community arises. The third pole by which reality comes to us as the cultural word about the world is through a discerning community.[124]

Community

Brackley is critical of how liberal individualism undermines commitment and our sense of solidarity. Its premium on freedom is often at the expense of realizing the need to identify and collaborate with other people, especially those outside our circles. It often equates autonomy with self-sufficiency.[125] This thinking rejects the relational nature of the human person. Brackley believes that personal autonomy is necessary for one's maturity, but such autonomy is about more than self-sufficiency.[126] This is essential in understanding Brackley's agenda of discovering what facilitates a commitment to solidarity with the poor and marginalized in our society.

Brackley identifies the Church as one wisdom-bearing community that helps members discover their vocation and the commitment it calls for. It provides and nourishes "an experience of transcendence and an alternative vision and praxis."[127] How so? She offers the Divine Revelation that has been handed to her and engages other communities and

[124]Brackley, *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times,* 160.

[125]Ibid., 64-65.

[126]Brackley, "Searching for the Truth and the Right Thing to Do," 220.

[127]Ibid., 221.

trends in history that have emerged so that she may appropriate, update, and clarify her teachings in light of different contexts.[128] Consequently, the Church dialogues with other communities and wisdom traditions. This process enriches her self-understanding and refines the principles she shares with her members to use in their discernment and engagement. Brackley calls this a "mutual corrective and deepening."[129] Brackley notes that the community he refers to can be any community.

One's commitment to one's vocation can be fostered by more particular communities like one's family, peer group, community organization, etc. Brackley asserts that community membership is necessary for one's maturation. "What needs stressing today is that, unless we identify critically and creatively with such a community, we flounder about, shaped as much by markets and mass media as anything else."[130]

Our communities help shape and form the values and inclinations that affect our decision-making. Consciously or unconsciously, it is through these communities that we learn what or who is important (and what or who is not important). Brackley reminds us that our communities, through their traditions, embody simultaneously prejudice and truth. Even the Church is not spared from this.[131] Brackley points out that a healthy community will always have room for dissent, self-criticism, and reform. Brackley, however, is aware that communities are imperfect. As time goes by, community traditions seek to preserve what is good, but they also accumulate negative

[128]Brackley, "Christian Social Ethics – in Three Not-so-Easy Lessons," 34-35.

[129]Ibid., 35.

[130]Brackley, "Searching for the Truth and the Right Thing to Do," 221.

[131]Brackley, *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times,* 167.

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elements.[132] Nevertheless, owing to its prophetic tradition, the Church or any other group within it must engage in "self-critique and "purification". [133] Brackley believes this is possible through a process of dialogue with marginalized sectors in communities since they may raise valid concerns that are neglected by mainstream community members.[134] This is the process the Church is going through as it prepares for the Synod on Synodality. Several groups within the Church have deliberately been reaching out and listening to the concerns of marginalized sectors while discerning how these concerns are integral to the Church's own growth and fidelity to Her mission.[135]

Throughout his writings, Brackley always appeals to the influence of a community in an individual's life. Appreciating the significance of communities requires seeing them as more than a static collection of individuals. We can better understand and, perhaps, resolve a good number of our issues when we have this in mind. Brackley asserts that our society is better understood as a system where individual elements have some kind of autonomy yet manifest interdependence with various parts of the system. Within this intricately interconnected society, the necessary virtue to be espoused is solidarity as

[132]Brackley, "Searching for the Truth and the Right Thing to Do," 220.

[133]David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 236-37. In Brackley, "Searching for the Truth and the Right Thing to Do."

[134]Brackley, "Searching for the Truth and the Right Thing to Do," 221.

[135]Sarah MacDonald, "Synod Process Must Recognise the Marginalised Say Religious," *The Tablet* (February 2022), https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/14956/synod-process-must-recognise-the-marginalised-say-religious.

a response to those who suffer.[136] This understanding should reshape our ethics. Such an ethics would emphasize

> (1) the objective requirements of the historical situation, (2) the institutional context of moral problems and the need to address their root causes, and (3) the need for "conscientization" in the formation of conscience.[137]

This is Brackley's reaction to a morality that is traditionally heteronomous. Brackley notes that traditional heteronomous ethics works with an external authority imposing norms regardless of context and may be oblivious to the needs on the ground.[138] In contrast, the kind of ethics that Brackley proposes is contextual and participatory. The commitment and engagement with marginalized communities make it possible for people to identify with their cause.[139] As it aims to recognize peoples' varying contexts and social systems, especially those living in the margins, it seeks not to relativize moral principles. Rather, it operationalizes the values of solidarity and subsidiarity into an ethical decision-making process. Such a process integrates Catholic moral principles, principles of Catholic Social Teaching, Scriptures, as well as structural analysis and appeals to cultural values.[140]

For Brackley, this stress on solidarity and community over liberal individualist claims can help us rally faster toward a society that can heal its wounds of inequality, violence, and injustice. It is a participatory ethos where we hope to

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[136]Brackley, "A Radical Ethos," *Horizons* 24, no. 1 (Spr 1997): 30-33.

[137]Ibid., 33.

[138]Ibid., 17.

[139]Ibid., 33.

[140]Brackley and Thomas Louis Schubeck, "Moral Theology in Latin America," *Theological Studies* 63, no. 1 (March 2002): 159-60.

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accompany each other, especially with those who have been left behind.[141]

Points of Discontinuity

Certainly, Brackley is not the only one who offers a framework for Christian social involvement. Several other frameworks are present within the Church, and each of them fits a particular spirituality, a certain set of assumptions for theological anthropology, and a different type of hermeneutic in reading the Scriptures. To better understand the framework of Brackley, we will explore in this section how two other frameworks differ from Brackley. The first one is the framework espoused by Jacques Maritian. The second framework is from liberation theologian Juan Luis Segundo.

Overcoming Extrinsicism in Jacques Maritain's Paradigm

Jacques Maritain was a French philosopher who lived from 1882-1973. He had a passion for social justice and was a known Thomist.[142] Brackley notes that for Maritain, the Renaissance and the Reformation brought about a glorification of humanity by distancing itself from divinity. Even if Maritain valued the technical and social progress humanity achieved during the 19th century, he identified anthropocentric humanism as a flaw of the Western World.[143] Because humanity sought to move forward in the world without God, Maritain believed there ought to be a "total recasting of our cultural and temporal structures," which gave rise to what he proposed as a New

[141]Ibid., 35.

[142]Gerald A McCool, "Jacques Maritain: A Neo-Thomist Classic," *The Journal of Religion* 58, No. 4 (Oct., 1978): 381.

[143]Brackley, *Divine Revolution*, 25.

Christendom. In his work entitled Integral Humanism, Maritain was convinced that Thomism could make this happen.[144]

One of the key theological presuppositions of Maritain is the clear distinction between the temporal and spiritual orders. The socio-political affairs of the world, material reality, and nature were part of the temporal order. The spiritual order included the human spirit, the virtues, and anything that aids in the participation of human life with the divine life. For Maritain, the two orders may be inseparable but are so distinct that they do not interpenetrate or overlap. "What is temporal cannot be eternal; the imperishable cannot perish."[145] Such a distinction would have consequences in understanding salvation, eschatology, and the relationship between culture and the person of Jesus Christ.[146]

Brackley raises one objection against Maritain in this regard: he does not entirely overcome extrinsicism, which distinguishes grace from concrete reality as if it were superfluous to human nature.[147] Maritain believes that "salvation remains extrinsic to the temporal good of the social order." The common good, which Maritain claims to be the end goal of the temporal order, is entirely distinct from salvation, which is the end goal of the spiritual order. This is because Maritain believes in two destinies for humanity – one that is temporal and the other spiritual – even if he debunks the idea of a purely human nature apart from grace.[148] This leads Brackley to his most crucial objections.

Maritain's Thomism is Aristotelian. Thus, there are clear lines of distinction between matter and spirit. Since it is

[144]Ibid., 25-26.

[145]Ibid., 27.

[146]Ibid., 28-31.

[147]Ibid., 45.

[148]Ibid., 32-33.

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through the human spirit that we participate in the spiritual order, Maritain believes grace works mostly within the interior dimension of the human person. For Maritain, the realms of culture, society, and politics do not directly participate in the spiritual order since the temporal good is subordinate to the spiritual good.[149] Brackley strongly rejects the dissociation of the internal life from the external life, especially in the realms Maritain associates with the temporal order.[150]

Despite how Maritain advocates for social justice and the good that politics can achieve, Maritain espouses a kind of individualism since he believes that people are already constituted before any social interaction or engagement.[151] His understanding of the end times and the progress of the temporal order in history betrays this belief. For him, "individual persons, personal virtue, and the church endure in glory." Our struggle for justice and the building up of a more humane society is merely an effect of God's saving action and a means to prepare us for the "posthistorical reign of God." Maritain acknowledges that political and social elements can be enlightened when humanity possesses and exercises virtues, but he does not consider this as some sort of social salvation, nor does he link it to God's salvific work.[152] Maritain asserts this disjunction: "[t]here is no continuity between the social good, as such, in history and the city of the blessed."[153]

At this point, we recall the assertions related to theological anthropology that Brackley presented earlier. His adherence to Rahner's transcendental theology marks a clear break with

[149]Ibid., 28-29.

[150]Ibid., 34.

[151]Ibid., 41.

[152]Ibid., 36.

[153]Ibid., 39.

the extrinsicism that Maritain did not overcome.[154] Brackley's appeal to other philosophers and anthropologists leads him to believe that human beings constitute themselves in societal interactions. Thus, sociality is an inherent part of human nature. [155] This also means that such social relations are governed by what Rahner would call the order of redemption. Consequently, what Maritain speculates will be excluded from glorification Brackley insists will be integrated.[156]

Brackley asserts that the relationship between salvation and social justice are linked to the relationship between nature and grace, spirit, and matter, sociality and humanity. In the next section, we shall explore how Brackley deviates from a strand of liberation theology that is secularizing and reductionist.[157]

Veering Away from a Secularizing Hermeneutic

Andrew Prevot believes that Brackley's framework and account of liberation theology, and his use of the Spiritual Exercises are comparable with what other Jesuits do in the same field. Prevot compares Brackley's work with Juan Luis Segundo, Ignacio Ellacuria, and Segundo Galilea, who are known liberation theologians and spiritual writers. Each of them has written their own commentary on the Exercises and has made significant contributions to liberation theology. Comparing Brackley to these other Jesuits, Prevot notes an

[154]Ibid., 61.

[155]Ibid., 100-109. These pages also include the survey of various philosophers and anthropologists that tackle the sociality of human beings.

[156]Ibid., 57-9.

[157]Andrew L. Prevot, "Ignatian Spirituality, Political Effectiveness, and Spiritual Discernment: Dean Brackley's Account of Liberation Theology," *Political Theology* 18, no. 4 (June 2017): 310.

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interesting divergence between Brackley and Segundo's work. For Prevot, Brackley "does not adopt Segundo's secularizing hermeneutic."[158]

What does Prevot mean by a "secularizing hermeneutic"? Prevot recognizes that many, if not all, Catholic theologians use philosophical frameworks in building up their thought. A plurality of such frameworks have likewise been integrated into developing Church doctrines. However, Prevot notes that some Catholic theologians cannot resist the "secularizing pull" of such frameworks, especially in the practice of critical theology.[159]

In the case of Juan Luis Segundo, Prevot identifies that he uses Marx's philosophical framework in his writings and falls into the trap of diminishing theology. Segundo does employ a Marxist philosophical method to determine what can and cannot be salvaged from Christianity, and the results are quite theologically meagre: only Jesus's humanity, not his divinity, and only certain aspects of this humanity that seem conducive to historical projects of liberation can be rescued on such Marxist grounds.[160]

Prevot observes that Segundo's manner of using a critical philosophy like that of Marx is incompatible with Catholic liberation theology. In fact, Prevot cites several other liberation theologians who use Marx's critical framework but remain consistent with the articles of faith, communal ethics, and the value of Christian worship. There is even one who integrates Marx's framework into a Christian critique of capitalism and,

[158]Ibid.

[159]Prevot, "The Use of Philosophy in Critical Catholic Theology," *The Catholic Reception of Continental Philosophy in North America*, eds. Gregory P. Floyd and Stephanie Rumpza (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020), 183-184.

[160]Ibid., 184.

ironically, "Soviet-style communism." Another theologian who uses a Marxist framework is the Dominican Gustavo Gutierrez. Prevot notes that Gutierrez diverges from the path set out by Marx that ends up secularizing theology.[161] Interestingly, Brackley uses the liberation framework of Gustavo Gutierrez and integrates it into his own framework.

As presented earlier, Brackley supplements Rahner's transcendental theology with the liberation paradigm of Gutierrez. Gutierrez highlighted the social nature of humans and thereby challenged theology to be less individualistic and to recover for the Christian that sense of being called into a community, as noted in Scriptures.[162] "He does not collapse transcendence into creation." Gutierrez emphasizes the role of politics, but he does not reduce the Gospel or the salvific act to politics.[163] By adopting the paradigm of Gutierrez in his framework, Brackley severs himself from a strand of liberation theology that earned the censorship of the Church who continues to be wary of such a theology.[164]

According to Prevot, Brackley's approach is able to respond to the criticisms and concerns raised against liberation theology, whether these come from the Church itself or from camps that believe only in secular politics of involvement. Brackley's use of Ignatian spirituality allows for a richer appropriation of theology to inform one's discernment for socio-political engagement. Comparing Brackley's approach to secular approaches and other types of liberation theology, Prevot observes that

[161]Ibid., 184-185.

[162]Brackley, *Divine Revolution*, 77.

[163]Ibid., 86.

[164]Ole Jakob Løland, "The Solved Conflict: Pope Francis and Liberation Theology," *International Journal of Latin American Religions* no. 5 (2021): 303-304.

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[T]he spirituality-based model of liberation theology that Brackley advocates is not only similarly effective; it also bears certain practical benefits that are largely lacking in secular and other less robustly spiritual alternatives.[165]

At the same time, Prevot is convinced that Brackley's approach provides something that is politically effective. This means it allows individuals and communities who use the framework to come together, pray, discern, engage the world, and work against unjust structures and practices. Brackley's import of Ignatian spirituality sets him apart from proponents of a secular approach or even those from a traditional liberation theology mindset. His appropriation of Ignatian spirituality colors the lens of the social analysis he employs, informs his theology, and shapes his discerned course of action.[166]

Conclusion: A Politically Effective Christian Framework

It would be good to unpack what Prevot means that Brackley's account of liberation theology found in *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times* is politically effective and then apply this to Brackley's other writings.[167]

Judging political effectiveness of a framework for social action implies identifying "what political ideas and actions are most effective at bringing about liberation."[168] Among these elements are institutions, structures, processes, laws, protocols, and policies in society. But on top of these, an essential element to consider are the agents. Thus, Prevot believes that virtues, character formation, and the formation of a harmonious community are also components of political effective-

[165]Ibid., 311.

[166]Prevot, "Ignatian Spirituality, Political Effectiveness, and Spiritual Discernment," 310.

[167]Ibid., 316.

[168]Ibid., 313.

ness.[169] Brackley's unique contribution is his integration of Ignatian spirituality. While spirituality, or any theology for that matter, is not required for a framework for socio-political engagement, Prevot recognizes that integrating spirituality and theology enriches such a framework and offers alternatives, especially for formation that would not be available in a secular framework.[170]

Brackley's emphasis on encounters and forming relationships with the communities of poor and marginalized people promotes arriving at grounded and level-headed judgments for social engagement. Such encounters allow for an interior knowledge of systems, relations, and peoples on the ground. Stories of his own encounters always enrich Brackley's presentation of social research.[171] Thus, one's sociological, political, and theological knowledge must not remain theoretical and speculative. Instead, it must flow into one's decisions and actions and inform and enrich one's social analysis and theological reflection.[172] Such commitment and praxis will then have the potential for political effectiveness.

The spiritual import of Brackley does not dampen his practical and political thinking. The framework involving discernment allows one to enter into dialogue with other sources of knowledge and makes the entire process interdisciplinary. Brackley's framework draws from revelation, scriptures, and theology and integrates the works of economists, sociologists,

[169]Ibid., 314.

170Ibid., 315.

[171]Brackley, *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times*, 254-5. See Brackley, Devastation, Faith, and Resilience and Beyond Elections in El Salvador.

[172]Brackley, "Theology and Solidarity: Learning from Sobrino's Method," 9.

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philosophers, and scientists.[173] Yet, his use of theology and Ignatian spirituality provides criteria for evaluating these other sources of knowledge. Such criteria spring from theological reflection enriched by the contemplative prayers of the Exercises.[174]

By adapting and appropriating the Exercises, Brackley provides persons and communities engaged in the struggle for justice an opportunity to deepen their self-awareness and ground their commitments in faith inspired by God's vision for His people – the Reign of God. The prayers in the Exercises give people the chance to know better not only their God but also themselves, weaknesses and all, and in so doing, to discover how God calls them to be co-laborers in His vineyard.[175] By integrating spirituality, Brackley's framework attends to that aspect of political effectiveness related to the formation of virtues and character in the very agents who can change and direct the laws, policies, structures, and communities. Prevot believes that Brackley walked his talk.

> Brackley's text – together with the example of his courageous, committed life – gives us reason to believe that a sustained practice of spiritual discernment such as this can empower a form of liberative politics more effectively than the mere idea of liberation theology alone (that is, in the absence of such spirituality) and more effectively than any secular transposition of this idea.[176]

[173]Prevot, "Ignatian Spirituality, Political Effectiveness, and Spiritual Discernment," 317-8. See Brackley, *Divine Revolution*, 96-122 and *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times*, 9, 26, 91.

[174]Ibid., 318.

[175]Ibid., 319-20.

[176]Ibid., 21.